



Come alive! This is the age of adventure, when our zest for living can know untold possibilities, and when others are anxious to "catch" the life that's in us. (NC Photo, by Bob Smith)

Change Never Again?

By Fr. Joseph M. Champlin

At the announcement last year of further revisions in the liturgy and during the painful first occasions of actual use, some Catholics cried out in words adapted from those Pope Paul spoke at the United Nations. "Change no more, change never again."

These people asked: Is this the end of liturgical reform? Will we have something standard, permanent, unchanging now? Can we expect no more tampering with the Mass?

In his Apostolic Constitution introducing the renewed Roman Missal, our Holy Father supplied a yes and no answer. The new rite, he said, hopefully "will be received by the faithful as a help and witness to the common unity of all." It should serve as a basis or norm for the Church throughout the world.

At the same time, Paul IV insisted that "there is room in the Missal according to the decree of the Second Vatican Council, for legitimate variations and adaptations." He was referring to articles 37-40 of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy which gives episcopal conferences in individual nations both the freedom and the obligation to adapt this Roman liturgy to local needs. In effect, Pope Paul did not end experimentation when he authorized the revised Mass, but, quite the contrary, opened a way for approved experimental efforts in every country.

A few hierarchies have already taken modest steps along this road of liturgical adaptation.

The Catholic Bishops' Conference of India proposed last

Worship and The World

spring certain modifications which they hope will bring worship into better conformity with the mentality and customs of their people. They sought (and Rome granted) permission for bows instead of genuflections, oil lamps rather than candles, trays in place of corporals. They petitioned for a greater use of incense, simpler vestments and eucharistic prayers composed locally and in the Indian idiom.

The Japanese bishops moved in similar fashion. Since many Catholics of Japan accept baptism at an adult age, liturgists there felt replacement of the Nicene Creed at Mass with the profession of faith found in the new baptismal ceremony would be effective. It contains in simpler form the basic truths of our faith, can be memorized more easily and, located in a eucharistic context, shows the true nature of this rite as a sacrament of Christian initiation.

They also substituted for "Lord, I am not worthy . . ." (Matthew 8:8) at Communion time the biblical words (John 6:68-69), "Lord to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. You are Christ the Son of God." Translators have not been able to capture successfully in Japanese the meaning of the former.

What about the United States? The American bishops in recent years have petitioned the Holy See for several items, with some granted (e.g., Thanksgiving Day Mass, Litur-

gy for Sacred Missions), others deferred (e.g., more frequent use of Communion under both species and permission for laity to receive the Eucharist more than once a day). These, however, represent only minimal efforts toward the tailoring of the Roman liturgy to American needs. Up to this point precious little research has gone into our worship requirements and the form of public prayer which will satisfy those needs.

We look for substantial future progress both in theory and practice. The U.S. Bishops' Committee on the Liturgy has sent letters of encouragement to several research centers (notably St. John's University in Collegeville, Minn., Notre Dame University and the Woodstock Center for Religion and Worship). Such scholastic institutions working hand in hand with diocesan bishops, local parishes and specific worshipping communities could come to grips with fundamental problems in our liturgy and attempt to resolve them from a scientific and pastoral point of view.

To illustrate. One pastor from the Toledo diocese raised this question: Does "Amen" on the part of a communicant really express "I believe, I trust, I wish to receive you, Lord"? It should convey the individual's personal faith-response to this offer of "The Body of Christ." But does it? That Ohio priest thinks not. Then what words or gestures or signs would?

Future research and experimentation will no doubt consider such obviously minor points, but should go far beyond and examine the more acute and radical problems of man's worship in a modern world.

Is It Reasonable to Believe?

By FR. JOHN T. BYRNE

A significant change of approach to the "God question" and the "Jesus problem" as they are called has come about as a result of the development of modern Catechetics. Simply "put the emphasis on experience rather than on reason," many teachers say.

Salvation history is the theme and it represents those ways in which Israel experienced its God in the events of its history. They were saving events in the sense that they showed God's election of them, His providence in watching over them and finally His advent or coming to them in the person of Jesus Christ.

Israel first experienced its God in the events of the Exodus by which they were saved or liberated from slavery in Egypt and destined to become a chosen people of God. This is the core message of the Old Testament — election and covenant and it is contained in the Exodus experience.

It was not at the beginning of

its history that Israel speculated over the origin of things and the nature of its God. This took place, scripture scholars tell us, only as late as the time of the Babylonian captivity.

Then it became necessary for scribes to monothesize the early pagan creation myths and Genesis with its God of Creation came into existence. First came the experience of God — then the rational explanation of His existence as creator and first cause.

The New Testament writers approached the events of the life of Jesus in the same way. They proclaimed their experiences and those of other eyewitnesses. They did not bother to prove.

Even with regard to the Resurrection of Christ — while insisting on its importance to the truth of their message — they were content to cite witnesses who had experienced the presence of the living Christ.

But what about today? How does man come to Faith in God and in Jesus Christ? Undoubtedly some do come through ex-

perience of God in their lives, but still it would seem that reasoning after the manner of what used to be called Apologetics or Natural Theology can play an important role in preparing the way for Faith.

It does not beget Faith of course; it merely disposes one for it, makes one naturally receptive to the action of God in one's life.

Although not popular in theological circles today, some of the five proofs of St. Thomas for the existence of God may have meaning for the properly disposed inquirer. This is not to question or even discuss the philosophical validity of these proofs. That is not the question. The question is whether they are relevant or have meaning for the inquirer of today. They probably are meaningful for a large number.

There are still some thoughtful, rather than primarily emotional, men. But even the existentialist can decide by a process of reason that God is the only meaningful answer to the riddle of man's existence.

KNOW YOUR FAITH

Q. and A.

By FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

Q. What is the renewal of religious communities all about? Is it just a matter of changing styles of dress or the method of electing superiors? Isn't it possible that some communities should go out of business entirely?

A. The council's Decree on the Appropriate Renewal of the Religious Life suggests that such renewal involves two simultaneous processes:

- (1) a continuous return to the sources of all Christian life and to the community's original inspiration;
- (2) an adjustment of the community to the changed conditions of modern times.

It is true: for some communities the best form of renewal would be dissolution. This would apply to all those communities which find it impossible to adapt to changing conditions or which have outlived the original purpose for which they were founded.

However, it takes a rare kind of courage for both the leadership and the rank-and-file of a particular community to acknowledge that kind of evidence. The self-preservation instinct is as strong for an organization as it is for an individual person.

For those communities which do, in fact, have reason to continue in existence, the council provides several guidelines for reform and renewal:

- (1) They must adopt the Gospel itself as the supreme law of community life, higher even than the "holy rule."
- (2) Each community must exploit those distinctive features which give the community its own special character and purpose (without such distinctive qualities, of course, the community tends to lose its reason for being).
- (3) Each community must participate more fully in the life of the whole Church. It must foster, not thwart, the various developments in the scriptural, liturgical, doctrinal, pastoral, ecumenical, missionary, and social fields.
- (4) Each community must instill in its own members a suitable awareness of contemporary human conditions and of the needs of the Church.
- (5) Without interior renewal, structural renewal is without long-term value. Unless the membership of a particular religious community is deeply committed to the Gospel and increasingly sensitive to the presence of God in human life, then religious renewal becomes a kind of ecclesiastical furniture-shuffling.

Q. Are you suggesting that the Church can just as easily do without religious communities?

A. Not at all. There must be room for as many options as possible within the Church. There is no single, uniform way of living the Gospel. Those Christians who are convinced that they can best serve the Kingdom of God within a relatively stable, organized community should be allowed and encouraged to do so insofar as these communities promote the general work of the Church and the spiritual welfare of their members, they are an asset to the Church.

Ideally, religious communities do for the Church what the Church is supposed to do for the world, i.e., serve as a prophetic reminder of the gap that inevitably exists between rhetoric and reality, between the Kingdom-promised and the Kingdom-realized.

Each community was established to meet some need that the Church itself was not meeting effectively enough. When the original need no longer exists, the community in question must either change its charter or go out of existence.

The problem for many such communities is not whether they should continue to exist, but whether they can fulfill their distinctive function more fruitfully.