

Why not restore the maniple too?

By Father Richard P. McBrien
Syndicated columnist

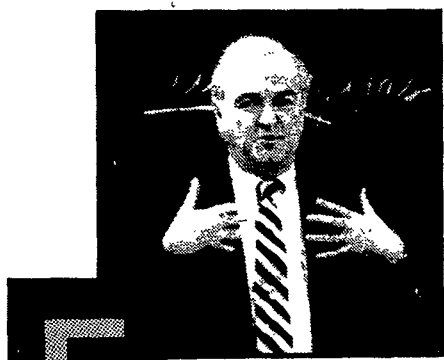
In a recent interview with the Italian weekly *Il Sabato*, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, head of the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, said he would like to see the altar turned around again, away from the people.

He registers at least two complaints about the change mandated by the Second Vatican Council: (1) the congregation "must always be looking at (the priest)," and so he "has become too important;" (2) as a result, women want to become priests, too.

If the cardinal's first complaint has any empirical validity, it surely suggests a failure in catechesis, because the General Instruction of the Roman Missal is utterly clear about the matter. The purpose of turning the altar around was to make the altar, not the priest, the center of attention (n.262).

It is at the altar that "the sacrifice of the cross is made present under sacramental signs. It is also at table of the Lord and the people of God are called together to share in it. The altar is, as well, the center of the thanksgiving that the eucharist accomplishes" (n.259).

Cardinal Ratzinger correctly points out that the church's ancient custom was to worship facing east. And that's



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why both the priest and the congregation were faced in the same direction at Mass.

But that custom was never uniform — not even in Rome, as Joseph Jungmann reminds us in his definitive two-volume work, *The Mass of the Roman Rite: Its Origins and Development* (1950). "History indicates that both practices were in use from the very start, at least in the vicinity of Rome" (vol. I, p. 255).

He points out that even in the old *Missale Romanum*, in use before Vatican II, both practices were "countenanced."

The cardinal's second complaint is even more intriguing. If the altar's turning has stimulated women's desire to become priests, why has it not had the same effect on young men?

Whatever one thinks of the cardinal's proposal, he himself has made it clear that he's not advocating an immediate reversal of the change. He believes that we've already had "so much restlessness" in the church that we need "some liturgical peace for the moment." Accordingly, he is willing to "leave (it) to providence" to determine when a "reform of the reform" should occur. Although some may wonder if the cardinal means to imply that "providence" was somehow nodding when the church adopted the original reform, his is a prudent pastoral posture, to be sure.

Cardinal Ratzinger's musings about the altar may encourage similar ruminations about other council-inspired changes in the liturgy.

Why, for example, could we not at least think about bringing back the maniple?

For the benefit of young readers, the maniple is a now-defunct vestment that the priest, deacon, and subdeacon (no time to explain that one) wore over the left forearm. It had originally served a very practical purpose as a handkerchief or napkin.

When one recalls that the Eucharist

is not only a sacrifice but a meal, one begins to appreciate the maniple's potential importance.

One of the first things people notice when they are seated in a restaurant — even if it's at the counter — is the absence of a napkin. They immediately alert the waitress or waiter.

And one of the first things we check as we dash off for work or school or an appointment is the presence of a clean handkerchief in the pocket or pocketbook.

We sneeze, we reach for our handkerchief, and it's not there. The sensation is almost as disorienting as reaching for one's car or house keys, and not finding them at first grope.

Why wouldn't the maniple's absence at Mass be as distracting for the priest-presider as the absence of a napkin at a meal or of a handkerchief away from home are for the rest of us?

But the maniple's disappearance at Mass creates more than practical problems. It also sets a bad example.

Many older readers will recall that, following President John F. Kennedy's bare-headed style, men stopped wearing hats. Does anyone really want to see the sleeve replace the napkin and the handkerchief in polite society?

If "providence" should follow Cardinal Ratzinger's lead and eventually turn the altar around again, one hopes it won't forget the maniple.

Two Chicago priests have inspired many

By Gregory F. Augustine Pierce
Syndicated columnist

I was privileged and inspired this year to be invited to the 50th anniversary of ordination celebrations by not one, but two priests who exemplify the spirituality of that important work and vocation.

Monsignor Jack Egan and Father Gerry Weber were both ordained by the Chicago archdiocese in 1943 — during the middle of World War II (and a few years before I was even born). They were ordained into a much different church than that of today, yet their separate careers demonstrate the underlying continuity of the best the church has to offer.

Faithfulness. Both Fathers Weber and Egan have remained true not only to the letter of their priestly vows but to their spirit as well. Both, for example, were obedient to their pope and bishop, even though they



FAITH AND WORK

disagreed at times with them. Both viewed their vow of celibacy not as a great burden to be borne but rather as an opportunity to be of service to a

wide variety of people.

Commitment. Despite taking very different paths, both Fathers Egan and Weber remained committed to the basic values that had attracted them to the priesthood in the first place. Both served for years in inner-city parishes, worked with marriage preparation and the Christian Family Movement, and remain involved to this day in ministry to families and individuals.

Monsignor Egan is well-known for his involvement with a number of organizations and causes, including the labor movement; the Industrial Areas Foundation community organizing network; the *National Catholic Reporter* newspaper; and Notre Dame and DePaul universities.

Father Weber's interests and talents took him more into the writing and publishing field. He is the author of more than 100 books and numerous articles, as well as an influential editor

of religious education materials for Benzinger Publishers and the Foundation for Adult Catechetical Teaching Aids.

Holiness. Throughout their 50 years, these two priests — like so many of their fellow golden jubilarians — have maintained a belief and a trust and a love of God that shines through everything they do. They have recognized that the priest's primary role is to help people get in touch with the transcendent, the eternal, the divine in their lives. They have done this by showing how God is found in — not apart from — this world.

The affection and gratitude shown these two priests on their anniversaries proved once again how important the priesthood is to lay people. The faithfulness, commitment and holiness they have brought to their works are exactly the virtues we all need in our own.

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