

COLUMNISTS

Two rites cause confusion

Milwaukee's Archbishop Rembert Weakland has produced one of the most important articles to appear since the close of the Second Vatican Council in December 1965.

His "Liturgical Renewal: Two Latin Rites?" published by *America* magazine June 7, frankly characterizes the decision of Pope John Paul II in 1984 to allow a second, parallel Latin rite Mass in the Roman Catholic Church as the act that "totally derailed the liturgical renewal" promoted by the council and approved and implemented by Pope Paul VI.

Archbishop Weakland suggests, however, that the restoration of the Latin Tridentine Mass was not only disruptive of liturgical unity in the Roman Catholic Church. More ominously, it served as a signal to a vocal, disgruntled minority of Catholics who have never fully accepted the reforms of Vatican II. The indult's implicit message to them was that, "with enough noise and criticism, the council could be reversed, or at least re-interpreted."

In 1988, four years after the publication of the indult, another papal document, known as a *motu proprio*, established a special office in the Vatican, Ecclesia Dei ("Church of God"), in order to insure that "a wider and more liberal use of the indult of 1984 be granted by local bishops." While it has never



essays in theology

By FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

been clear whether the Roman Catholic Church was now to have two distinct Latin rites or whether this permission for the Tridentine usage was to be only temporary, those Catholic groups that joyously embraced the indult have, according to Archbishop Weakland, "strongly voiced the opinion that both rites stand now on an equal plane."

Thus, the archbishop writes, an "encouraging signal was sent to those groups who wanted to reject all or most of the liturgical reforms of Vatican Council II." Indeed, they have now "increased their efforts to undermine and reverse the liturgical reforms of that council and especially the implementation approved by Pope Paul VI immediately following the council."

Through the publication of the indult, however, not only was the liturgical renewal promoted by Vatican II called into question, but also "the im-

pression was created that, with sufficient protest, the whole of Vatican Council II could be reversed."

Archbishop Weakland believes that we have now entered a truly "cafeteria" period in Catholicism, in which "one can pick and choose from Vatican Council II what one likes and what one dislikes." Ironically, the adjective "cafeteria" (as in "cafeteria Catholicism") has been a preferred term of those Catholics who tend to be less enthusiastic about some of the council's reforms. But as the archbishop implies, every kind of Catholic is now in the "cafeteria" line, not just the so-called liberals or progressives.

When the 1984 indult permitting the Tridentine Mass is coupled with various uncontradicted, semi-official statements from Roman officials, including the observations of Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger in his newly published autobiography, calling into question the entire liturgical reform of the council, it is not so difficult to understand why there is confusion and disunity in the church today.

Liturgists and theologians have not caused it. The church's central administration in the Vatican has caused it by implying that what was agreed upon at the council, after long and prayerful discussion, and what was subsequently implemented with the authority and ap-

proval of Pope Paul VI is open once again for review, with the real possibility of reversal.

On the surface (and particularly if one has not actually read the full text of Archbishop Weakland's article in *America*), it may appear to some as if the archbishop has delivered himself of a reckless and idiosyncratic broadside against the teaching authority of the pope, and even against his very person.

Two points need to be made about that: (1) Why is it that it is somehow acceptable, even for high ranking churchmen, to criticize severely a dead pope (like Paul VI), but not a living pope? Every living pope eventually becomes a dead pope. If his actions can be disparaged after his death, why cannot they be criticized while he is still alive? On what doctrinal principle is such a distinction based? (2) Archbishop Weakland, in fact, has not expressed a reckless and idiosyncratic opinion. More than a hundred of his fellow bishops have written to him in support of his article, including some whom the media would normally describe as "conservatives."

He has only given voice to a growing concern within the hierarchy itself. We should all be grateful to him for his forthrightness and courage.

Father McBrien is a professor of theology at the University of Notre Dame.



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