

# Renewal includes growing pains

No reforms initiated by the Second Vatican Council have had a more visible or more profound impact on the life of the Catholic Church than those pertaining to the Mass and the other sacraments. Catholics who have been happiest with the work of the council often point to the changes in the liturgy as their primary reason, while those who have been least happy focus their complaints at the very same place.

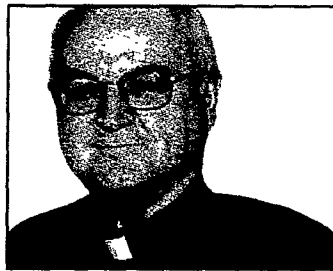
The document that has shaped the liturgical renewal since 1963 is the council's Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, known also by its Latin title, *Sacrosanctum concilium*. This December 4th the Catholic Church will mark the 40th anniversary of its promulgation by Pope Paul VI.

In preparation for that milestone, my Notre Dame colleague, Nathan Mitchell, has been devoting a series of his insightful and instructive "Amen Corner" columns in *Worship* magazine to the liturgy constitution. His January column was particularly helpful.

Therein, Mitchell reviews the impact of the post-conciliar liturgical renewal upon North American parishes.

The silent Masses of years past are now "virtually unknown." The people respond aloud to the prayers, serve as lectors, bring the gifts to the altar, help distribute Holy Communion and sing.

There is now a three-year cycle of readings, offering



Father Richard McBrien

## Essays in Theology

the people a much richer and more diverse sampling of sacred Scripture than was available before the liturgical renewal.

At Saturday evening and Sunday Masses, the great majority of the congregation comes forward to receive Communion, sometimes under both kinds.

Meanwhile, the other sacraments "are celebrated in symbols, gestures, songs, and words that people can see, hear, understand, remember, and respond to."

"In sum," he writes, "after centuries of disenfranchisement, lay Catholics have once more reclaimed a direct role in worship — as full-fledged participants and/or as ministers."

If the success of a reform can be judged by church growth, Mitchell points out, the liturgical reforms in the United States, have been largely successful. In the second half of the 20th century the number of parishes increased from 15,295 to 19,338, and the number of U.S. Catholics doubled from 28.8 million to 59.9 million.

"These numbers," Mitchell argues, "surely

challenge the view that Vatican II's progressive, vernacular and demotic forms of worship have 'driven people away from the church' and denied younger Catholics access to 'the rich Catholic liturgical tradition' (by which the Latin, Tridentine rite seems to be meant)."

However, the forward movement of the post-conciliar renewal took a major turn in 1984 when, in spite of overwhelming opposition from bishops all around the world, the Vatican's Congregation for Sacraments and Divine Worship authorized them to allow the use of the Tridentine Mass "under special circumstances." In 1988 Pope John Paul II issued an apostolic letter urging the bishops to accommodate the desires of traditionalist Catholics for the Latin Mass.

Instead of being the primary sign and instrument of church unity, the liturgy became, during the 1980s, a bone of contention. Conflicts over the liturgy affected discussions about the distinctiveness of the ordained priesthood in relation to the role of the laity; the nature and scope of the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist; and church art and architecture.

In this regard, Mitchell insists, the current period of liturgical renewal is no different from any other before it. Growth rarely comes without growing pains.

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

## Tales sought for research on schools

To the editor:

For the last six years I have described the changes in the Diocese of Rochester since 1950. The Lilly Foundation was interested in reading about some of the changes and why they occurred. I sent a report to them in 1998. I then worked on changes in the liturgy. The results of that work will be published in a very condensed version as a chapter in a book published by Sheed and Ward this year. I am now working on education in the Diocese of Rochester. I was wondering if your readers would help?

I need descriptions of both common and significant events associated with Catholic schools (K-12), non-school Religious Education/Faith Formation/CCD at any age, and sacramental preparation classes. I need teachers and students' experiences of what and when things happened in a classroom. Perhaps you had a class reunion and someone wrote a history of your years at a certain Catholic school. Perhaps you had an experience that you feel needs telling. I would appreciate receiving anything anyone wishes to share with me dealing with education in the diocese since 1950.

My e-mail is [nkollar@sjfc.edu](mailto:nkollar@sjfc.edu). My address is Dr. Nathan Kollar, St. John Fisher College, Rochester, NY 14618.

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## Says surgery is immoral

To the editor:

A groundbreaking circumcision lawsuit was settled this spring in New York, although terms of the settlements have not been publicly disclosed. William Stowell filed suit in 2000 against the Catholic hospital where he was circumcised as an infant in 1981, and against the physician who circumcised him.

Stowell's case did not claim an unexpected outcome, but questioned whether a physician could legally and ethically remove normal, healthy tissue from a non-consenting minor for non-therapeutic reasons. No national medical group in the world today recommends routine circumcision.

David Llewellyn of Conyers, Georgia, one of Stowell's attorneys, said, "This case should send a message to doctors that they run the risk of a lawsuit each time they circumcise an infant for non-therapeutic reasons. ... I would expect that this is just the first of many cases that will be brought by angry circumcised young men against their circumcisers."

The Catholic Catechism (No. 2297) in "Respect for bodily integrity" states, "Except when performed for strictly therapeutic medical reasons, directly intended amputations, mutilations, and sterilizations performed on innocent persons are against the moral law." The American Academy of Pediatrics in 1999 described circumcision as "amputation of the foreskin," and the American Medical Association called elective circumcision "non-therapeutic." Catholic hospitals that circumcise infants for non-therapeutic reasons violate the moral law.

St. Peter, our first Pope, said circumcision was unnecessary for Christians in Acts 15:10. Catholic hospi-

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