

Vernacular liturgy

Fr Uwe Michael Lang's reported assertion (News from Britain and Ireland, 24 July) that those who encouraged widespread use of the vernacular went beyond the Council's constitution on the sacred liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium* is without foundation. The position the Council took is perfectly clear. It delegated decisions about the vernacular to bishops' conferences: they were to decide "whether and to what extent the vernacular is to be introduced" and their enactments were "to be approved, that is confirmed, by the Holy See" (art. 36, section 3).

As to the vernacular in the Mass itself, the Council placed no restriction in regard to the extent of its use. The only guidance it gave in regard to the retention of Latin was that "steps should be taken to enable the faithful to say or to sing together in Latin those parts of the Ordinary of the Mass [i.e. Gloria, Credo, Sanctus, Pater noster, etc.] that belong to them" (art. 54). It gave no guidance about how this should be done. The significance of that guidance was not for the purpose of safeguarding the Latin language, but to ensure that when the faithful are present at large international gatherings, when Mass might well for good reasons be celebrated principally in Latin, they are still able to participate in it – by being able to sing in Latin those parts of the Ordinary of the Mass that belong to them.

What is so disturbing about Christopher Lamb's report of this lecture is that Fr Lang is an official of a Vatican Congregation, and that a person in such a position is misleading the faithful about an issue as important as the use of the vernacular in our liturgy. While the Council Fathers were certainly quite cautious about the introduction of such a far-reaching reform, what they actually stated was that "the use of the mother tongue ... frequently may be of great advantage to the people" (art. 36, section 2). Surely no person in any post within the Vatican would wish to challenge that assertion.

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Justice with mercy

It is disappointing to find *The Tablet* (Leader, 24 July) aligning itself with those who condemn the decision to release the dying Abdelbaset al Megrahi. The Scottish Justice



Abdelbaset al Megrahi in his room at a hospital in Tripoli in September 2009.

Photo: Reuters

Minister had an absolute duty to apply the principle – unknown, it would seem, in other traditions – that a dying criminal is not left to breathe his last in prison. There was nothing "clumsy" about his decision to act when medical opinion forecast death within a few months. To say Megrahi was "not nearly as ill as supposed" begs the question fully as much as the voices demanding "an apology for a horrendous mistake". Scottish justice had to take the best available opinion in a notoriously difficult field: at Mass last week, I gave Communion to a lady who was confidently told a year ago that she had less than a week to live.

We Scots can be as sceptical as anyone about background negotiations with Libya and the desertion of al Megrahi's appeal. But we are proud that we have a system that tempers justice with mercy and ministers who will to do their duty and stick to their guns.

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Lip service to the environment

What a shame that no Catholic bishops attended the National Justice and Peace Conference ("Hungry for a change", 24 July). Environmental sustainability has an impact on the mission and work of the Catholic Church. Environmental pressures such as the permanent loss of food-producing soils, water shortages, as well as the human health impacts of chronic air pollution and water contamination, are issues of Justice and Peace.

The encyclical *Caritas in Veritate* highlighted the need to include environmental factors in the development and rights of people, and in relation to economic development. As a lay person involved in environmental awareness-raising and project work in the Church, I find it demoralising when bishops appear to pay

lip service to the environment. For Catholics involved in initiatives which put into practice church teaching on the environment, we need our bishops to give more support if congregations are to become more engaged.

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Liz Dodd's article coincided with Minister for Agriculture and Food Jim Paice MP's defence in a letter to *The Guardian* of the Government's determination "to deliver sustainable and secure food". Paice claims the Government "supports a competitive and sustainable food industry", yet the Swanwick conference, at nearly every session, considered food security as a caring provision for people and soil, not a business.

Food production, whether in my own garden, allotments or on farms, is "sustainable" when the soil community is nurtured and renewed so that it can support plants, animals, biodiversity and people indefinitely. Food provision is not "competitive" but productive. It seems the coalition, like New Labour, and unlike the Swanwick conference, considers that industrial food production, if intensive and competitive, can "feed the world".

We may recall Environment Minister David Miliband's infamous remark that organic food is "a lifestyle choice". In truth, food security derives not from industrial methods but from women and men working locally and small scale on the land, caring for the soil and all its creatures.

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Questions about the ordinariate

Your headline "Anglo-Catholics and McMahon clash over married priests" (News from Britain and Ireland, 17 July) gave a misleading impression of the meeting between the Bishop of Nottingham and a number of Anglicans exploring the apostolic constitution *Anglicanorum Coetibus*, which took place in Leicester a few weeks ago. Bishop McMahon was extremely gracious and the whole meeting was cordial and encouraging. My question about one clause in the constitution was asked to gain further elucidation; it could hardly be described as a clash between us.

Furthermore, I do not recall using quite the words that are ascribed to me when the journalist telephoned a few days later. I simply pointed out that if he, the journalist, wanted further clarification, he ought to address his questions to those who drafted the constitution, namely the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

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Correction

In Part 4 of our series "Understanding Benedict" (24 July), Lewis Ayres stated that the Second Vatican Council's Constitution on the Church was *Gaudium et Spes*. The correct name of this constitution is *Lumen Gentium*.

Creeping emasculation?

I feel sure that many of your readers were heartened by Bishop Kevin Dowling ("Too safe a system", 17 July). Over the years, in North America, South Africa, Australasia and here I have met with what I can only describe as a powerless dismay among many in the face of the creeping emasculation of Vatican II reforms.

It is surely no longer a cause for dismay but scandal that, nearly 50 years after *Lumen Gentium*, the Church's central authority will still not implement in any meaningful way the doctrine of a General Council: Episcopal Collegiality.

To implement it would trigger structural reform at every level in the Church; to continue ignoring it is surely to be resisting the Holy Spirit. Ultimately, somebody has got it wrong, either the Twenty-First Ecumenical Council of the Catholic Church in 1964 or the Vatican today.

How about a bit of cyber-collegiality to consider the matter? The resolution of one episcopal conference registering concern on this issue would, I feel sure, not be unsympathetically heard by any other conference it was shared with.

Such action might create a worldwide united episcopal voice. The Vatican would have the power to resist it, but would it have the moral authority to do so? Bishops cannot go on being silent unless they agree with the policy.

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In addition to Bishop Dowling's valid concerns on the concentration of power within the Church, I am also saddened that the positions and attitudes being adopted by the current governance structure appear increasingly disconnected from the "good news" message of Christ's teachings as set forth in the gospels.

Refined by the wisdom of the great theologians of the Church, the powerful original works of the four evangelists still loudly proclaim the realm of the "Good Shepherd" and his welcoming "come to me" call of love and forgiveness to the lost sheep of Israel.

There now seems to be very little in the way of Christ's love and compassion emanating from the corridors of Vatican power. The fixation on absolute obedience to an authority which is neither transparent or accountable, and has great difficulty distinguishing man-made laws from eternal truths, appears neither holy nor wise.

In this political atmosphere, the "come to me" welcome of Christ's promise and love for all men and women is barely audible, perhaps because of leadership uninterest in the study,

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prayer and honest dialogue among the faithful that over the centuries has so successfully guided and refined the gospel teachings.

An old pastor frequently cautioned our congregation "not to take anything serious about the Church except Christ". At the time I thought the statement somewhat extreme. Now I find it a valuable compass for navigating the gospel path through our complex modern world.

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Rekindling faith

Pope Benedict's establishment of the Pontifical Council for New Evangelisation ("Parable of the prodigal West", 10 July) might prove to be the most direct attention a pontiff has taken in the evangelisation of Northern Europe since the sixth-century decision of Gregory the Great to send Augustine on a mission to the English. Curiously, Bede, the church historian, referred to Gregory, not Augustine, as the "apostle" of the English.

Archbishop Fisichella noted that the collaboration of the new council with Vatican dicasteries will be necessary for the success of the new evangelisation. Yet, among the offices targeted that have been for such collaboration, no mention was made of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments.

Certainly, the celebration of the liturgy remains a primary locus of evangelisation as implied in the 1974 Synod of Bishops on Evangelisation and Paul VI's apostolic exhortation on evangelisation in the modern world (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*).

Auto-evangelisation (the ongoing self-evangelisation within the local worshipping communities of faith) remains one obvious starting point in the new (re)evangelisation of so-called secularised countries.

Augustine began his evangelisation with already existing liturgical communities of faith; the challenge remains the same for the Church some 15 centuries later.

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Point of exclusion

Here is a story with a certain irony. A few weeks ago my mother-in-law attended a Mass in which a group of young children were "confirmed" as altar servers.

The presiding bishop, in his homily, drew attention to the importance of altar servers and in particular to the fact that it has so often been the beginning of something great for the child, viz. a vocation to the priesthood. The irony was the fact that all but one (out of six or seven) of the children were girls.

Perhaps the bishop did not notice and maybe that might give Catholic women cause for hope. They can go ahead and get ordained and the bishops, not noticing that they are female, will be none the wiser!

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The living Spirit

For they knew that he was man; but they knew not that he was God. They knew him as the Son of Mary, and as a man sharing their daily life in the world. On the mountain he revealed to them that he was the Son of God, and himself God. For they knew that he hungered and that he ate; that he thirsted and that he drank; that he laboured and that he took rest; that he felt need of sleep and that he slept; that he feared and that he sweated. And all this belonged not to his divine nature, but only to his humanity; and therefore he led them to the mountain, so that the Father may with his own voice call him Son ...

He brought them up to the mountain that he might also show them, before his Resurrection, the glory of his divinity, so that when he had risen from the dead they might then know that he had not received this glory as the reward of his labour.

St Ephrem

(306-373)

Sermon on the Transfiguration

Who am I, who
speaks from the dust,
Who looks from the clay?

Who hears
For the mute stone
For fragile water feels
With finger and bone?

Who for the forest breathes the
evening,
Sees for the rose,
Who knows
what the bird sings?

Who am I, who for the sun fears
The demon dark,
In order holds
Atom and chaos?

Who out of nothing nesc has gazed
On the beloved face?

Kathleen Raine

(1908-2003)

"Self"

*6 August is the Feast of the
Transfiguration*