Why the Immaculate Conception

Pure. Whole. Intact. Entire. Spotless. Stainless. Sinless. Unsoiled. Unsullied. Unblemished. Uncorrupted. Immaculate!

I live in an age, and a country, wherein the largest single cause of death of infants under one year of age is homicide. I live at a time when, according to those who claim to know these things, Ronald McDonald has surpassed Jesus Christ in popularity among children. I live at a time when the best known moral theologians have despaired of leading people to a more virtuous life, but are principally concerned to insulate the sinner from the consequences of his sin; logic has given way to latex as the preferred medium of instruction. I live in a country where, this very day, in the time between my rising and my standing here before you, four thousand of our fellow citizens, four thousand human beings with an eternal destiny, were summarily killed by abortion. I live at a time when most promises will be broken, most vows will be repudiated, most marriages will fail. I live at a time when it is virtually impossible to go through a day without using some commodity which, however innocent in itself, is not hawked in terms of some base or venal allure. I am promised prosperous and intriguing companions by the folks who brew my beer; and those who sell my shaving cream are at pains to assure me that it will provoke the women I encounter into sexual frenzy. (The last claim, I might add, is an exaggeration.)

It may seem pointless at such a time, in such a place, to hold up the Virgin Mary, and especially her Immaculate Conception, as a source of nourishment for our lives as Christians. For her perfection can appear so remote from the moral sweatiness and squalor in which our personal struggles occur that it recedes entirely into the background; it is swallowed up by our furious temptations and enthusiasms, and

Originally published in *Voices* 5, no. 1 (Winter 1990), online edition. Taken from a homily preached at Women for Faith & Family's Immaculate Conception Mass and festival, held at St. Roch's Church in St. Louis, December 8, 1989.

so is lost to us. This remoteness is widened, and not helped, by a way of speaking which would present the Virgin Mary to us as "the representation of an Ideal," that is, as an abstraction, or at best a personified Virtue, like the Roman goddesses of Wisdom or Moderation. Thus, she, who begins as a real flesh-and-blood woman, "a virgin, betrothed to a man named Joseph," as [Lk 1:27] has it, becomes at the end an abstract noun, a figure of speech.

And of course it's not hard to see why in and of itself a personified Ideal is of little consequence to the moral or spiritual life. To use an analogy from a more trivial world, we might imagine a mythological golfer who scored 18 in every round he ever played, yet few instructors would "hold up" such a figure as an example to his pupils, and even fewer players would tell themselves in preparing to make a treacherous shot, "Steady now. Remember that the Great McTavish always did the 530-yard fifth hole in one stroke ..." Ideals can be beacons to guide us, but they are seldom fires at which we can warm our hands; they may be necessary to our thinking, but they don't strengthen the will.... If you think about the two or three saints to whom you yourself have the deepest devotion, is it not the case that part of what attracts and fascinates you about these saints is that you can recognize a certain kinship in the kind of fragility they possess, a fragility against which their heroism blazes with particular glory in your eyes, in your heart? Isn't it the case that, since you can see God's work in their weakness, you can come to accept the possibility of God's working in your weakness too?

Perhaps then we're in a little better position to understand the unique complications this presents in terms of the Virgin Mary. She says, "My soul glorifies the Lord ... for He has looked with kindness on His lowly servant" [Lk 1:46, 48]. Now isn't there a voice in the back of our heads which whispers at this point, "Lowly? We should all be so lowly!" That is, we assume that Mary's perfection would have been as obvious to her as it is to us, and it seems a trifle stagy in such circumstances to pretend to true lowliness. Now I apologize to those of you who have never been vexed by this problem, but I think it is common enough to be worth trying to free ourselves from it.

It seems to me that in speaking of the Virgin Mary as sinless, as immaculate, we all too often mean that she was constitutionally *incapable* of sinning, that she was no more capable of sin than a man is

capable of giving birth or an oyster is capable of flight. There are some difficulties here. First, we are told in the Letter to the Hebrews that "we have not [in Jesus] a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weakness, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, but without sin" [4:15]. There is then a theological difficulty in attributing to Mary that freedom from temptation which her own Son did not cling to. Further, if we speak of the Virgin Mary as constitutionally incapable of sin, it is all the more difficult to discover in her the humanity which is by its very weakness transparent to God's power. Consequently, in an age like our own especially, she is all the more likely to be treated as precisely that sort of Ideal which cannot warm our affections or stir our courage.

One obvious, all-too-predictable solution is to deny the Immaculate Conception and the sinlessness of Mary, under the fatuous pretense that by doing so, she will become more "human," and so more accessible to the rest of us sinners. Wrong on all counts, the most obvious being that a human who sins is *less* human after he succumbs than he was before. Still, there is a persistent, though imbecile, way of speaking in which some public figure who has an adulterous affair or a personal foible come to light thereby reveals a "human side" of himself. In fact, it is in keeping his commitments and displaying evidence of virtue that a man is most fully human; in giving in to temptations, even trivial or petty ones, he becomes that much more bestial.

When we fall, we fall from a *human* dignity, not an angelic one; our skid may well end at a level of animal savagery, but we never "tumble down" into humanity—and not because pigs are of themselves wickeder than men, but because the elevator, so to speak, was already at that floor. There is no point, then, in exploring this avenue further. I think the way out is more direct. A friend of mine is fond of saying, "Whenever I hear the word 'dialogue,' I reach for my dogma." Let us, in the same spirit, reach for our dogma and see if it has anything to say to us.

Pope Pius IX's dogmatic definition of 1854 [*Ineffabilis Deus*] runs thus: "The Blessed Virgin Mary, at the first instant of her conception, by a singular privilege and grace of almighty God, in consideration of the merits of Jesus Christ, the Savior of mankind, was preserved free from all stain of original sin." First, it should be noticed that the grace

given to the Virgin Mary was "in consideration of the merits of Jesus Christ." That is, in and of herself, she too was in need of salvation and was saved through the sacrifice of her Son, although it worked "retroactively," as it were, so as to affect her even at her conception.

A very partial analogy might be drawn with a woman afflicted from birth with a progressive terminal disease, whose own child grows up to be the scientist who discovers the cure for the disease, and so heals the mother. But let's not push that too far. The second point, and this is the one I want to stress, is that it is *original sin* from which Mary was preserved at her conception. The contamination which we all inherited from Adam, namely, estrangement from God with its consequent warping of our human appetites, as well as death itself, did not touch her. The fittingness of this "singular privilege and grace" was, to my mind, well expressed by the English bishop Langdon Fox, who asked, "How could Mary be said to have been made fit to stand in the relationship of Mother to the all pure God if the Devil could claim, and claim truly, that once, even if only for a moment, she had been in the state of original sin?"—that is, if the devil had her in his control even briefly. Be that as it may, it should be clear that freedom from original sin does not bring with it an incapacity for actual sin. After all, Adam and Eve were both created without original sin; it was in fact their first *actual* sin whose effect we call "original" in their descendants.

Now the upshot, it seems to me, is this. The Blessed Virgin Mary lived her life in the state in which Adam and Eve lived before their sin. She was as capable of sin as they were; her life, to this extent like ours, was a series of choices between good and bad, self and other, God's will and her own. Her glory, for which all generations will call her blessed, is that in every instance she said, "I am your servant. Let it be done to me in accordance with your word" [Lk 1:38]. She, who was full of grace, said, "Your will be done, not mine." When she praised God because he had looked on her in her lowliness, she was not feigning humility. She was uniquely aware that it was God's grace, and not her own merit, in virtue of which she had been set apart. And the consciousness of the gap between her humanity and God's power was uniquely acute in her case.

C. S. Lewis remarked somewhere [in *Mere Christianity*] that we are not to imagine that Jesus had an easier time with temptation than we.

In fact, he said, Jesus Christ was the only one who ever felt the full strength of temptation, because he was the only one who never gave in to it. He said by way of explanation something like this: "After all, you don't discover the true strength of the German Army by laying down and letting it roll over you; but only by standing up to it and fighting it at every turn." If I might extend (and correct) C. S. Lewis here, I would say that the Virgin Mary is, apart from her Son, the only one who really knew humility, since it was she who, in every instance, chose obedience, who let God's will trump her own, who refused to be duped into trusting in her own resources.

We might illustrate what this means from the Gospel: I once heard another Jesuit talk over coffee about a homily he had to give at a summer camp for retarded children. The Gospel text on which he was to preach was the account of the rich young man. Unsure how he was going to communicate the message to his congregation, this priest somewhat despairingly brought out a simple coffee cup after reading the Scripture. He said, "You see, the rich young man's cup was already full of all the things he had, and so Jesus couldn't give him anything; there was no room." I still think that to be one of the most striking exegeses of that passage I've ever heard. And, when it is reversed, the same image can be applied to Mary. Her cup alone was genuinely empty; she alone had room only for God, for herself, no element of possessiveness or self-will, which took up the space made for God's love. She alone was truly an earthen vessel, a repository, she whom the archangel Gabriel called "full of grace" [Lk 1:28].

Her humility, her lowliness, was not a sham. Alone of our race, she could point to her humility without an admixture of hypocrisy. The lowliness was hers; the glory was God's. Far from being aloof from the pain of decision, she is the only one of us who ever felt the full sting. If you think I am laying it on a bit thick here, I'd invite you to try living for ten minutes genuinely unconscious of your own dignity, genuinely reliant on God. It hurts like blazes.

There is a strain of feminist Mariology which feels repugnance at the dogma of the Immaculate Conception because it views the notion as demeaning to women. Orthodox theologians were so scandalized by the particularly feminine dimension of sinfulness (according to this school) that they found it necessary to cook up the idea of an immaculate conception in order to sanitize the event of the Incarnation. I

hope I have shown that this way of thinking has got things exactly backward. In articulating its belief that Mary was free of original sin, the Church is thrusting the Blessed Virgin into the heart of the problematic struggle of temptation and grace; it is the opposite of insulation. It is not some angelic perfection, but her *humanity* which is vindicated by Pius IX's definition—her dependence on merits of Jesus Christ, her constant reenactment of the drama of Adam's choice, a drama which is no less dramatic for its happy ending, a drama which ultimately includes us all, in the vision of the woman clothed with the sun, crushing the serpent at the world's end.

Every true Christian instinct points to this; all orthodox devotion to Mary rejoices in her triumph, because she was conscious of that profound humility of which we have ourselves only the faintest inklings; whether she is pictured at the foot of the cross, or with a child at her breast, or as the queen and bride arrayed in splendor, the prefigured bride without spot or wrinkle, it is our fragility in which we give thanks for God's love, God's grace, God's fidelity to us in her.

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In Praise of Conformity: Why Priests Should Stop Fooling Around with the Liturgy

The theologian Brian Daley, S.J., has suggested that the Eucharist serves as an "icon" of the Church. That is, it both represents the Mystical Body of Christ in symbolic terms and re-enacts the central event of salvation history. In this view, there is no detail concerning the celebration of the Eucharist which can be termed trivial or unimportant, for there is no aspect of our gathering for Mass which cannot acquire a meaning larger than itself, and hence become a source of edification or corruption. It is idle to pretend that the Eucharist is not a battleground: every Christian disagreement—theological, ethical, or ecclesial—will be fought symbolically in the arena of liturgy as well as discursively in the arena of the academy. For a man to claim he is "indifferent" about liturgy is to admit he is indifferent about the faith.

In my experience, such indifference is rare among churchgoers, regardless of their level of theological awareness. For steamfitters as well as for the clerical professoriat, it matters whether or not a priest uses the *lavabo*; it matters whether or not he crosses himself when he begins Mass. In the diction he chooses, in the rubrics he follows or omits, in his gestures and dress, every celebrant connects himself doctrinally with some believers and signals a doctrinal distance with others. The degree of offense each worshiper takes when a distance is signaled varies in direct proportion to the seriousness with which he invests his own hopes for the Church.

I have lived in a house of religious where the "trivial obedience" of commingling water and wine at the Offertory would cause two contrary reactions: one man would go white with indignation and stiffen as the veins bulged on his forehead. His brother priest would nod in approval and satisfaction. These men were exact contemporaries.

Originally published in *Crisis Magazine*, February 1, 1991.

Of course, the lines are seldom drawn quite so sharply, and not all reactions are so blatant as a consequence. There is a great deal of pseudo-naiveté used to paper over the cracks in the integrity of the liturgy whereby expedience and not disagreement is proffered as the reason for innovation.

Is it ever convincing? Surely it is disingenuous to pretend that the reception of Communion by the people before the celebrant (to take an example at random) is a simple convenience and not also a doctrinal statement. No doubt it is possible, in theory, consciously to depart from approved liturgical usages without intending to give notice of some underlying doctrinal disparity, but in the real world it almost never happens that way.

I have often heard my seniors engage in wry reminiscence about the number of mortal sins a priest was liable to commit when saying Mass "in the old days" by the tiniest violation of a single rubric—and indeed it seems that a rather morbid imagination was at work in some of the theology then. On the other hand, it is beyond question today that a priest has 201 ways of saying "In yo' face!" to his brothers while celebrating the Eucharist. Perhaps the old count wasn't so far-fetched after all, even though the fulcrum of sinfulness is different from that envisioned by the manualists. The currents run deep.

Guitar Theology

A cultural anthropologist-turned-cartoonist might say that the prime emotive thrust which powered pre-Vatican II liturgical practice was a distrust of spontaneity. Mass was "by the book." The people stood, knelt, and genuflected on cue. Hymns had a somewhat exaggerated gravity. While the Latin of the liturgy was never so obscure to the people as later polemicists have made it out to be, it was still mysterious, remote, and formal. It's almost impossible to be "down to earth" in Latin. All the trappings of religion were invested with the same tidiness, the same relentless adulthood. If a magazine publisher needed to add an ecclesiastical tone to a headline, he printed it in elaborate "Old English" letters, since this most formal, most adult typeface became synonymous with things churchy. One can still find older churches today where the fire-signs over the doors are painted

in large Latinate uncials. Behind this rigidity, perhaps, was the assumption that anything freer, anything more spontaneous, would somehow smirch the dignity of the Church; perhaps deeper still was the suspicion that if the shackles *were* taken off, the sentiments released would certainly be heterodox.

As a Church we are still eddying in the backwash from the wave of reaction precipitated by Vatican II—or better, from that picture of Vatican II which was given to us by the *apparatchiks* in the liturgical commissions, for it is quite clear that fraud was perpetrated in the "selling" of the Council to the laity. (Whether the fraud was benevolent or injurious depends on the value one assigns to continuity.) Mere allowances made by the Council were proclaimed to be directives; exceptions were said to be rules; chinks in the windows were taken to be doors. In Eucharistic practice, as in doctrine proper, there is more than a grain of truth in the joke that a "pre-Vatican II Catholic" is one who reads the Documents of Vatican II without a commentary.

Regardless of how one accounts for the changes, their impact can hardly be exaggerated. If the term "relentlessly adult" characterized the old Mass, the term "remorselessly infantile" might stand for the new. Spontaneity became the desideratum, and the place where Catholics chiefly chose to look for spontaneity was in the lives of children. The sugary hymns of Dan Schutte, Ray Repp, and Sebastian Temple are part of this legacy, and the general thrust of liturgical music reflects the change.

In the first place, "negative" feelings are almost wholly excluded from the modern corpus, or when they do appear are given such a banal and frothy treatment as to become unrecognizable. Whole portions of Scripture simply cannot make it into this genre because they can never be assimilated into the contrived bounciness and bonhomie through which its reality is filtered.

The use of the guitar is no less significant. It is primarily (in America) a teenager's instrument, the kind of thing that conjures up the beach bonfire and raggedy sweatshirts. It is, of course, the very antithesis of the concert organ, that grand and pompous engine of Johnsonian *pietas*. The guitar can be pawed by just about anybody. Obviously you can't *really* be spontaneous with it, but many people wished very much that you could, and we are still living, as a Church, with this fond daydream.

Nor is it an accident that contemporary Church music is scored in a high register. The new pretense is that ours is a *young persons'* Church; in the view of the major impresarios, there would be something fundamentally unwholesome, almost Republican, about introducing a choir of basses and baritones into a contemporary liturgy. Of course, you can sing "Yahweh, the Faithful One" in a baritone, just as you can sing "Old Man River" in a falsetto, but it's clear in each case that you'd be missing the point. And the point is that youth—spontaneous youth, uninhibited youth, bonhomous youth, joyous gregarious coyly androgynous youth—is the prime icon in the Catholic Church of Camelot. Some of the more sensitive liturgy coordinators will toss in a "traditional" hymn now and then as a kind of milk-bone for the rheumatoid faithful, but the picture is no less clear that such music belongs to the past.

Disenfranchised Believers

A side-effect of this emphasis is that Catholic culture has become much more haute-bourgeois, more suburban, than ever before. In effect the new liturgists disenfranchised working-class Catholics, and in particular working men, from reasonably wholehearted participation in the Mass. Say what you will, you cannot get a congregation of plumbers and foundry-workers to join in Ray Repp's hit "Allelu! Allelu! Evry'body sing Allelu!" and *mean* it. It might come off in Lake Forest but not in Gary. One of the main reasons the Church got fewer vocations from blue-collar families after the Council is the precious tone set by the parish liturgy. Few fathers who earn their living with their hands and shoulders are going to smile on the prospect of their sons' leading a congregation in "On Eagle's Wings."

What I say about liturgical music applies *a fortiori* to dance and "movement." Unless the Church consciously decides that it is in her best interests to further distance herself from humble working people, I cannot imagine why she continues to flirt with these diversions. I do not think it impossible that liturgical dance may have a limited place in certain peripheral, para-liturgical situations, but I would doubt the canniness or the sincerity of anyone who claimed that it should be part of the liturgical life of the conventional parish.

Once again this is more than simply a question of taste; a vision of the Church is at stake. One of the moments of most acute embarrassment for me as a religious occurred during a weekend gathering, as part of which we were formed in a circle and led in a Shaker "movement exercise." We bobbed and bowed and raised our hands like toy puppets as we sang:

> When true simplicity is gained
> To bend and to bow we won't be ashamed.
> So we'll turn to the left and turn to the right
> And turn and turn 'til we come 'round right.

I wince as I remember the sight of the faces of grown men—whom I had come to admire in office and classroom and chapel—freeze in obedience as they shuffled back and forth in their Docksiders. And for what? For "true simplicity"? Hardly. No authentic simplicity requires a man to lay aside the benign dignity of adulthood. No, it was for the image of a New Church.

The new liturgy has likewise decorated itself with the artistic concomitants appropriate to its status. Sister Corita taught us to expect bold daubs of bright sunny colors—again, we were to escape the stained-glass formalities of the past and trust in the naive good taste of the child and his paintbox. Corita's influence is palpable to this hour in nearly every banner, every embroidered vestment, every illustrated publication which finds its way into our churches. This involves a disservice to real children (by sentimentalizing their experience we render ourselves less able to attend to the darker questions they have), yet it did provide Catholics with a crude "alphabet" with which they might spell out those hopes so long petrified by the solemnity of the *ancien régime*.

Once I came upon a missalette (important word!) which featured on the cover a photo of a plump suburban child clutching a patently fraudulent watercolor which read, "Never underestimate the power of a rainbow." This was the philosophy, of course, not of the child, but of his tender-hearted schoolmarm; the image has remained with me. Real children are at once too canny and too cruel, too innocent and too wise, to come up with this Snoopy rendition of *Kraft durch Freude*, so the adult had to become the child herself: a synecdoche of American Catholicism.

I mentioned above the Latin uncials on the fire-signs; they need now to be replaced. We have moved from the unfree to the free, from the predictable to the impulsive. Signs once lettered needlessly in Gothic are now lettered needlessly in imitation of graffiti: it is the scrawl, the spray-painted splash, which is today's ecclesiastical type-face par excellence. We have come half circle.

Missing Gravitas

C. S. Lewis once wrote of Christian liturgy that even if the celebrant's vestments are not in fact heavy, they should look heavy. That is, they should make it clear to the worshipers that his part in the service is not an extension of his own personality but is a *munus*, a responsibility laid on his shoulders the way a chain-of-office was laid around the shoulders of a mayor.... This notion opens up into the wider question of the relation between obedience and freedom in liturgy. A deft treatment of this problem is found in Cardinal Ratzinger's book *Feast of Faith*:

> Liturgy has a cosmic and universal dimension. The community does not become a community by mutual interaction. It receives its being as a gift from an already existing completeness, totality.... This is why liturgy cannot be "made." This is why it has to be simply received as a given reality and continually revitalized. This is why its universality is expressed in a form binding on the whole Church, committed to the local congregation in the form of the "rite."
>
> ... It is a guarantee, testifying to the fact that something greater is taking place here than can be brought about by any individual community or group of people. It expresses the gift of joy, the gift of participation in the cosmic drama of Christ's Resurrection, by which the liturgy stands or falls.
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> Moreover, the obligatory character of the essential parts of the liturgy also guarantees the true freedom of the faithful: it makes sure that they are not victims of something fabricated by an individual or a group, that they are sharing in the same liturgy that binds the priest, the bishops, and the pope. In the liturgy, we are all given the freedom to appropriate, in our own personal way, the mystery which addresses us.

While admitting the need for constant revitalization, Ratzinger views the liturgy as imposing an obligatory form on priest and people—not to curtail their spiritual freedom, but to protect it.

It is doubtless the case that not all interpolations are equally bad, yet I hazard two generalizations concerning them: First, departure from the text or rubrics is almost never really necessary. Second, even the most innocent innovations upon more careful reflection turn out to be theologically obtuse and manifestly inferior to what is printed in the Sacramentary. Two examples should suffice.

"May almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us our weaknesses, and lead us to everlasting life." This is unlikely to have the faithful sprinting for the exits, but ultimately it's just plain dumb. It *makes sense* to ask God to forgive us our sins, for sins are voluntary and avoidable acts and we can feel genuine remorse for them. But our creative celebrant feels queasy at the mention of sin and so uses the gentler word "weaknesses." But weaknesses, like talents, are among those things for which we're not responsible. Weaknesses are part of the hand we were dealt—by God. What logic is there in asking God to "forgive" what he has granted or withheld? None whatsoever. The clumsy urge to innovate has replaced a solid with a surd.

"This is the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world. Fortunate are those who are called to his supper." Once again, few garments will rend at these words, but they're entirely pointless. Theologically it is correct to say that they are truly blessed, *beati*, who are called to share in the meal of our redemption. But are they fortunate? "Fortunate" means aided by *fortuna*, that is, by sheer luck, by chance. Is this what we really want to say about those who receive the Eucharist, that they're lucky, that they've pulled the ace they needed out of the deck? Is there any room whatsoever in a theological view of the universe for "luck"? Can it ever be part of an alert theological vocabulary?

Both these turns of phrase would be quite venial if they were part of an impromptu address in which the speaker under the stress of the moment reached for the right term, missed it, and simply hit on an infelicitous expression. We all do it. But such changes are not of that sort. They are deliberate departures, conscious deviations from the text. With the best will in the world, it is difficult to see the point of substitution in the first place; it is doubly painful to have to rub one's

temples and pretend not to have heard Father's "improvement." The examples cited above are among the blandest and most innocuous I could muster. The real-life situation is, I fear, much worse.

Fair Warning

I have yet to be in a situation where liturgical deviation was a matter laid before the whole of the "worshiping community." I have never, for example, seen a celebrant address the congregation in these terms: "Before we begin Mass, I thought it only fair to let you folks know that I will be introducing several departures from the Sacramentary into today's liturgy. I intend to omit the words 'Do this in memory of me' after the consecration; I intend not to genuflect; I intend to use gender-neutral language during the Preface. If anyone here might find any of these changes offensive, let me urge him or her to find a more comfortable occasion of worship than the present one."

It doesn't happen, does it? Precisely among those whom we might expect to be most alert to the notion of covenant, we find that liturgy is rarely "covenanted" between presider and faithful. Even in those situations (such as weddings) where the preferences of a large number of people are consulted, the ordinary member of the congregation has little idea about what variations will actually take place when he walks through the church doors.

Liturgical deviation is essentially manipulative. It trades on the docility of the community of the faithful (who, it must be remembered, have come primarily to worship) by assuming that in almost every case considerations of good will and respect for the clergy will overcome any bafflement or uneasiness occasioned by novelty. The game is to present the Church with a *fait accompli*, and then wait for doctrine and practice to catch up at their own pace. Now it occasionally happens in a given setting that a certain set of innovations are employed so consistently as to acquire (for that particular setting) the status of a "received liturgy" in Ratzinger's sense. This may be the case in certain monastic houses. Spiritual freedom might thus be regained for the happy few. But it is precisely this kind of freedom which, it seems to me, most dissenters are out to destroy.

Liturgical conformity, by its very nature, tends to *build up* the Church, the Body of Christ. It is essentially edifying. The obedience

of the universal Christian community to the rite committed to it strengthens the Church, and—this is the point—it strengthens the Church as the Church understands herself. However, it is news to no one that there are groups even within the Church who find her self-understanding extremely offensive. For these, the very notion of the Church as an "edifice" is repellent. Their (often explicit) aim is to deconstruct the Church, that is, to "disedify" her. They speak of Church "structures" as inherently and irredeemably oppressive. It stands to reason, then, that manipulation of the liturgy will be a prime tactic of these groups, since there is surely no more effective way to "disedify" the faithful.

Am I therefore claiming that every priest who omits the *lavabo* is in league with [Catholic feminist] Rosemary Ruether to bring the institutional Church to her knees? I am not. On the other hand, it is hardly news that the Catholics who are most anxious for liturgical variation have very deep sympathies with dissenting movements. Personally, I know of no priest who would style himself a "dissenter" who is not also a deviationist as a celebrant.

What about Vatican II?

I anticipate an objection to my remarks along the following lines: You give a picture of liturgical conformity with minimal allowance for change, but this runs counter to the intention of the Second Vatican Council that the Mass be adapted to the needs of different regions and peoples. This objection involves a red herring which must be disposed of.

Liturgy "embodies" doctrine. Even in its non-verbal aspects, Eucharistic celebration proclaims those beliefs which we as a Church hold to be true. Now by "adapting" the liturgy to different regions it seems to me beyond dispute that the Council Fathers meant that there are occasions in which we must adapt in order to proclaim the same truth. They did not intend adaptation to mean acknowledgment of the particular doctrinal convictions voiced by some part of the Church. To speak of "the tensions of unity and diversity in the Church" is to obscure the real point. The tension is that between *doctrinal* unity amid *cultural* diversity. Inasmuch as a given celebration of the Eucharist acknowledges some conviction not held by the

Universal Church, it is not a liturgy at all but an imposture, a *coup de theatre*.

For example, a priest may find himself chaplain to a university community where many members are offended by any reference to God as "Father." Yet the acknowledgment of God as Father is an essential part of Christian *kerygma*; it is unarguably the belief of the Catholic Church. The priest may responsibly take prudent measures not to give casual offense, but if he "adapts" the wording to "Parent" or "Mother/Father," he has forsaken that very doctrine which he was entrusted to pass on in the liturgy. He blesses a fissure in the Church; he promotes disunity.

It is a common rebuke leveled at those who plead for the Book in preference to liturgical innovation that they are guilty of exclusivity, whereas a truly inclusive Church would adapt her rites and usages so as to embrace the largest possible number. There is a truth here, but it is obscured by a widespread confusion.

I say in effect, "Let's worship as one because our faith is one. If you believe x, y, and z, let us sit at the table of the one Lord." *De facto* this is enormously inclusive. I take my stand with objective forms of worship (or, to be more precise, with "received liturgy" in Ratzinger's phrase) because doctrinal exclusivism is most truly catholic, most color-blind to differences of culture, race, social class, and political conviction.

On the other hand, if one is willing to "temper the wind to the shorn lamb" by anticipating occasions of offense in the liturgy and altering it accordingly, he is obliged to face three consequences: (1) He has given feelings of *ressentiment* a theological status with the Christian community. (2) He makes himself and his fellows prey to the more articulate, better educated, and more influential part of the community, and so opens the door to manipulation of the liturgy by those whose purposes are not shared by the Church Universal and whose principles are least likely to be those of the "little ones" toward whom the Church has special guardianship. (3) He encourages a kind of congregationalism by which vague notions of "comfort" or "feeling at home" are given primacy over the more truly catholic esteem for the bedrock of shared faith.

The paradox is that liturgical and doctrinal "openness" (by which I mean a flexibility born of the desire not to exclude) inevitably allies itself with the attitudes and aspirations of one particular part of the

Church community. By gradual degrees the congregation separates itself from the larger body of Christians—not because it closes its doors to anyone, but because its own style of openness will necessarily appeal to an ever smaller and more inward-looking population. The "exclusivity" of the Roman Rite is joyfully embraced by Christians all over the world; the "openness" of the Church of Joliet won't even play in Peoria; in ten years, it won't play in Joliet.

The liturgy belongs to the Church—to all of us, living and dead—as the emblem of our common faith and the enactment of that sacrifice once-for-all by which we are redeemed. No one has any license to rob us of our rightful patrimony. Taken together, all the visions of the deconstructionist, all the resentments of the disaffected, all the personal quirks and daydreams of the individual minister, all the globally contextualized inclusivities of the professorial hierophant, do not add up to a single reason to deprive the faithful of the Mass, the Mass in its full integrity. Those who come into our midst mouthing the sweet words of compassion and openness are, very often, trying to wheedle us out of our birthright. Perhaps the time has come to resist.