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## Joseph McCabe Index

### The Artistic Sterility Of The Church

How The Church Stupefies Folk By Crude Emotionalism  
by Joseph McCabe

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The Black International No. 18

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### Chapter I

#### THE ALLEGED BEAUTIFUL SERVICES

In approaching this subject it will be useful to state again the angle from which I write the present series of booklets. It is to show that the scandalous action of the Vatican and most of its national hierarchies which I traced in the first series of booklets was just what you would expect if you know the Church of Rome. It is not a religious body like any other, and the venerable antiquity of which it is so proud merely recalls, to the informed mind, the violence and unscrupulousness of the methods by means of which it has survived. Its path through the ages is marked, not by the flowering of new cultures or new civilizations, but by the graves of rival religions and of masses of rebels. It consists essentially of a Black International which in every age wages an economic struggle for survival and has, in view of the absurdity of the creed on which it lives, to use violence and deception to hold together the body which supports it.

However many million devout laymen and however many thousand sincere priests there may be in the world this is its broad structure, and only when you see that can you understand its proved action in modern life.

Some American apologists have pleaded in excuse for their very un-american efforts to suppress criticism that the critics would like

to drive a wedge between the Catholic laity and their priests. The man who could succeed in doing this would render an outstanding service to the country. We say that the international army to which their priests belong is Fascist. The name "Fascist" was, it appears, taken from a bastard Italian word (*fascio*) which means a bunch or a group, but it goes back ultimately to the emblem of authority, the axe and the rods, in the ancient Roman army.

That emblem is so characteristic of the Roman Church that, we saw, even while it protested in a dozen tongues -- English, French, German, etc. -- that it is now tolerant and humane it still claimed in Latin its possession of the axe and the rods. In an age when the Fascist banner seemed destined to float over three continents it threw off the mask of meekness and openly joined the aggressors.

This involved a larger use than ever of its second weapon, suppression of truth and mendacity, in the lands that were not yet conquered, and I have endeavored to expose this and enable the reader to understand the Church. In the world at large it is, instead of being the impressive institution it represents in America, a tragic-comic spectacle.

If you grant it the 250,000,000 subjects it claims today, one-third of these are men and women who curse it in their hearts and go to church only under the shadow of its bloody emblem of the axe and the rods, and more than a third of the remainder are either children or illiterates. The only point of serious interest is how it keeps in its fold in America and Britain so many out of the teeming millions who have come from less educated lands, and I have, I think, explained this. There remain, however, two elements of explanation that are so frequently claimed that we must examine them. The first is the fairly common opinion that the Church of Rome appeals to the heart and, the emotions, far more than any other Church does, and this, it is thought, distracts the mind from the intellectual absurdity or moral repulsiveness of its doctrines.

The second is the familiar cry -- the parrot-cry, one might justly call it -- that it "does good," and on a scale that ought to impress even the skeptic.

Postponing the question whether the Church has rendered a service to art itself we may consider first the sensuous appeal which it makes, and against Protestant writers confesses that it makes, to the general body of the faithful. That this is one element of its success in inducing millions to continue in the profession of beliefs which are as incongruous in our modern world as an iron-clad knight would be, we fully admit. Statistics, it is true, do not show that the sensuous services give the Catholic Church any advantage over the leading Protestant Churches except in a preponderance of female church-goers over males, but in fact a

high proportion of Catholics would tell you that the character of the services attract them.

It is, part of my work to warn folk against generalizing from one or a few cases, but it may be of interest to give one. I have a neighbor, an elderly woman, a bombee of shattered nerves, who was brought up a strict Roman Catholic. Intelligence and education poor. She is ready at all times to join her son (a full apostate) in cursing the Pope and the priests, and she incurs eternal damnation cheerfully most Sunday mornings by refusing to go to mass. But she often does go, and she explains that it is because she "likes the services." I should add that she has a dull and lonely life.

What is important here is not the type but the psychological factor. We must not exaggerate it. About a third of the Catholic body discharge only the minimum of obligation and attend a "low" mass (without music) on Sundays. They take no part whatever in it and do not understand a word of the priest's Latin gabbling; and instead of having any sensuous or artistic enjoyment they just kneel uncomfortably and impatiently until it is over. The church itself which they attend is "artistic" only to a low taste, like the "best room" in the apartment of workers or small-middle-class folk with more money than education. A few of these may also attend the evening service. It is nearly all in Latin and they take no part in it, but the sanctuary is gay with surplices and silk, the altar ablaze, the service and choral, and the sermon usually short. If the alternative is anything like that of the old lady I have quoted, to be left alone in a drab room, one usually prefers to be "a Catholic." Remember that it is cheap -- two cents or a nickel.

These folk are not interested in doctrines. The "real presence" of Jesus on the altar, which seems almost grotesque when you coldly dissect the dogma as a theologian does, is vague in their minds. The church is "the house of God," and they do not make the theologian's subtle distinction between God and Jesus or between the human and divine persons in the "hyostatic union" of the theological Jesus.

This one-third of the Catholic body is, numerically, the chief source of leakage. To them the religion is, as I said, a practice or a sentiment, not a belief. Where there is no particular emotional response to the rhetoric of the pulpit and the weekly paper about the Holy Faith and Holy Father and the devouring thirst of the world and the devil to destroy them they are easily drawn off. The men and youths and many of the young women secede as soon as they get a live faith and ideal like Socialism. Others just drift away if the general atmosphere is non-Catholic. In a Catholic country these folk are held by the gaiety of the show. The wine-shop and the church are the two bright spots in their heavy lives.

The nice-minded skeptics who resent this coupling of the wine-shop and the church, who (with no knowledge of Catholic life) say

that "religion" is the real uplift in these people's hearts and it is wicked to try to remove it, may be recommended to read some such book as Prof. J.L. Mecham's *Church and State in Latin America* (1934). He has the very correct professorial attitude -- you try so hard to stand up that you fall backward occasionally -- especially as his university (North Carolina) publishes the book. It is mostly concerned with history but incidentally it tells some painful truths about the Church in those Catholic countries, to which the Catholic likes to refer you if he thinks that you know no more than he does about them. The clergy are admitted to be, as a body, sensual, lazy, and grossly ignorant. The bishops are fanatically conservative and more attentive to their political interferences than to the moral and spiritual welfare of the mass of the people. The Indians, the vast majority of the population of Latin America, are at the lowest level of ignorance and superstition, ready at any time to serve the political purposes of the hierarchy, though often barely Christian in religion and permitted by the priests the wildest license.

The Church festivals are orgies. In fact, Professor Mecham approves ugly quotes from another authority, "Bacchus is the one absolute and essential God. Sex-morals are as usual, inadequately and therefore untruthfully discussed in the book, but I have elsewhere shown that the general attitude is such that priests and monks indulge in the most open and ingenuous fashion. A more candid, and worse picture will be found in Braga and Grubb's work, based on intimate knowledge, *The Republic of Brazil*; and for a concrete richly-informed picture of the state of the people and the brutal exploitation of them by unscrupulous priests see Alan Hillgarth's novel *The Black Mountain*. And remember that these books were written and published before the victory of clerical Fascism in Latin America. In most republics the situation is worse today.

To these 60,000,000 or so Catholic worker's and peasants of Latin America add those of Cuba and the Philippines, the rural parts and small-town populations of Italy, Spain, Portugal, and the Portuguese, French, and Belgian colonies. I gave an authentic picture of life in such regions in Book IV of this series. The entire body of Catholics coming into this category are considerably more than half the whole number of the Pope's subjects; and you may not be disposed to put the majority of the Catholics of Eire, Poland, Hungary, Mexico, Quebec, Slovakia, etc., on a much higher level.

Then remember that half the remaining Catholics, of the world are children, and that half the adult Catholics of the United States come from some such environment and to a great extent reproduce their old atmosphere in American cities. The conception of them -- as so many tens of millions of simple folk elevated for an hour above their daily level by beautiful services in which they

absorb themselves every Sunday and Holy Day is as ingenuous as the Sunday School idea of George Washington.

As I said, the Catholicism of this larger half of the subjects of the Black International no more requires study than does that of children. It is an ingrained attitude or set of practices, protected from interference from the rebel who appears here and there by the power that the priest's have: a power which in all Catholic countries Fascism has made absolute. To an extent their minds are drugged on Sundays and Saints' Days, but it is hardly necessary in their case. It is at the higher levels that the intellectually depressing effect of the Catholic services becomes important, and the more artistic they are the more effective the opiate.

Two illustrations of the truth of this at once occur. I have not the Catholic Who's Who for America but the situation is much the same as in Britain, and I have already pointed out that, confining ourselves as far as possible to the same cultural level converts to the Church from the world of art are three or four times as numerous as from the scientific world. It would be quite natural to suggest that artists feel the charm of the beautiful services more than scientists, but it is a poor compliment to pay to any artist of distinction to suggest that he will enter a Church and on his knees make a solemn declaration of literal belief in all its doctrines, repeated one by one, just because its churches and services are artistic.

He is free at any time to attend the services and, if he feels inclined, see a pretty symbolism in them, but if he calls himself a Catholic he in the same breath denies that he takes a symbolic view of the services and doctrines. That is a comprehensive and deadly heresy in theology; though, of course, we are aware that a priest will, to secure or retain the name of a distinguished artist for the Church, not press him about his beliefs any more than he will be too inquisitive about a wealthy man's amorous adventures.

The truth is, however, that it is not the higher artistic sensitiveness but the comparatively lower intellectual vitality or equipment of the artist that explains why he is willing to make a profession of the creed I described in an earlier book. Probably in most cases these artist-converts flatter themselves that they have one sound reason which may be classed as intellectual. They are convinced the Roman Church has been, and is, a great inspirer of high art, and this at least predisposes them to endorse a creed that, in marked contrast to science, has had, they say, so beneficent an influence. Catholic literary artists have written this, and I have heard them say that art and the love of beauty are in danger of perishing in our drab, cold, materialistic age and they must rally to the Church as the best guarantee of survival. G.K. Chesterton, who when his earlier good nature was dissolved in the

acid of the Holy Faith wrote of its critics as "mad dogs," was strong on this point.

It is, as I will show presently, a sheer fallacy. But the artist who enters the Church in such a frame of mind loses any inclination to criticize. He has taken an opiate.

The second illustration is the preponderance of women over men in the richer and more artistic Catholic churches. Here I rely neither on impressions nor on the common belief that women are more religious than men. In the less artistic Protestant churches there is no material disproportion of the sexes, and it is not notable in the poorer Catholic districts. A Strict census of church-goers, spread over six months, in the city of London (England) in 1903 proved this. In the whole city (6,250,000 people) 372,264 men and 607,257 women attended church. But the disparity of the sexes was far and away the greatest in the artistic churches of the rich West End of London. In two Anglican churches there were 160 and 249 men and 886 and 1,034 women. In three Romanist churches there were 267, 276, and 237 men and 1,105, 807, and 701 women. In Methodist and Baptist churches in a poor quarter there were 3,336 men to 4,127 women.

It is clear what conclusion we must draw from such figures. Educated men are far less disposed to let their intellectual life be stupefied by emotional satisfaction. Religion, again, is a practice or an emotion rather than a belief.

The Church professes that it appeals to the emotions only as a preliminary appeal to the intellect. That is clearly false. It appeal's to the senses because if they find an attractiveness in the services less demand need be made upon the intelligence of the worshipper. To contrast the Protestant version of Christianity with the Roman as cold and unemotional is absurd. The Protestant service makes a very powerful appeal to the emotions of a believer. The prayers are heavily emotional and are not muttered in a tongue that any of the laity understand. The congregation silently takes part in them, and the emotions stirred are then released in the community-singing of the hymns, of which there is very little in the usual Catholic service. It would not be inaccurate to say that the Protestant service appeals to the emotions through the ideas or doctrines which are embodied in the prayers, hymns, and sermons, while the Catholic service aims at a direct gratification of the senses by florid music, flowers, candles, coloured silks and white robes, ornate altars, incense, stained glass, and a general artistic scheme according to the cultural quality of the congregation of each particular church.

In this sense it stupefies the intelligence or dulls its alertness and critical tendency by ensuing this gratification of the senses or, in wealthier churches, of the aesthetics sense. A friend of theirs once gave me the broad explanation of the Catholicism of Belloc and

Chesterton that they regard a Catholic church as a center of light, warmth, and colour in an materialistic world. One might carry the analysis further. One does not today suffer economically and socially by joining the Catholic Church as one does by quitting it, as Chesterton found. Soon after his conversion my mail brought me, doubtless because some careless person had simply taken a list of names and addresses from Who's Who, an appeal by a group of important Catholics for a subscription to a large fund to provide Chesterton with a basic income for the rest of his life. But we have in an earlier book considered the Church as a mutual aid society.

The field here is so large, the variety of types so great -- from Seymour Hicks or Charles Laughton to the Irish dock-labourers or the Italian street-vendors of New York, from St. Patrick's Cathedral to the dauby, garnishes of a poor Polish chapel -- that it is difficult to cover the facts usefully with a formula. The title I have given this chapter is the one usually selected by critics of the Church.

It is valid if by "stupefying" we mean that the emphasis of faith is deliberately transferred from the intellectual confrontation of doctrines to the enjoyment of sensuous experiences as a discharge of religious duty. A writer who was intimate, and on the whole sympathetic, to Italian life, Axel Menthe, has said that most of the uneducated or poorly educated Catholics rarely thought about Jesus or anything but the cult of Mary and the saints. For the majority everywhere the doctrinal ideas retire behind a vividly coloured screen of emblems, symbols, statues, pictures, and material rites and ceremonies. It is one of the reasons why those doctrinal ideas, which seem so crude and outrageous when you consider them apart from the churches services, linger in a world to which they are as alien as the ten-gallon hat or the crinoline.

## Chapter II

### THERE NEVER WAS A CATHOLIC ART

That, a Catholic reader would say, is such nonsense that it is impudent to ask people to read it. Better informed folk will say, with a smile, that it is an uncontrolled expression of my anti- Papal complex or at the best a paradox. Not a bit of it. It is a plain statement of fact, and my habitual readers will know that I have very closely studied the history of art, especially during the Middle Ages, and discussed it in earlier works. Let me first make a distinction which is elementary yet is quite commonly overlooked, and not infrequently by writers on art.

When you pass along the streets of a city you notice that, generally speaking, banks and insurance corporations have more artistic buildings than the others. Is there some artistic inspiration in the money-business, something that you would call financial art? You know the answer.

They just employ art more than other concerns because it pays them to do this. Never mind for the moment what their conception of art is. It may be block glass and chromium steel or a Gothic skyscraper. The point is that the diverse artistic effort in a collection of buildings expresses the resources of the business and the particular utility it finds in the employment of art. Well, the richest employer of artists is and always's was the Catholic Church, and no other business in the world derives so much profit from the employment of art as it does. It no more inspires the art than a funeral-furnisher does. If there is anything in its doctrines that may in any sense be said to inspire art it is just in those bastard dogmas in which the original Christian ideas are mixed with Greek or Roman mythology or medieval barbarism.

The history of Catholic art, even as it is known to every educated man, confirms this, and the more closely you study it the clearer the truth becomes. There was no art in the service during the first three centuries. Naturally, says the apologist. The faithful were fugitives from the police, holding services that were necessarily simple in the catacombs. . . . Rubbish. There were only a few years out of the 250 (from Nero to Constantine) when they had to dip underground. They hated and feared art. It was what the devil employed to make paganism attractive to keep the Greeks and Romans out of the Church. What happened in the 4th Century, when the Roman Church got freedom and wealth, was not that it began to inspire an art but that it began to rob the pagans of their art, The official Book of the Popes, composed in Rome from the early Middle Ages onward, has preserved an extraordinary list of the artistic furniture (silver, altars, statues, etc.) that the Emperor Constantine lifted from the pagan temples of Rome and donated to the new Christian churches. And when, decade after decade, the Romans still clung to the old religion, the Christian leaders, who were now fully-pledged Fascists since they had taken over the axe and the rods, emptied the gods and goddesses, the holy water and incense, the vestments and ritual, from the temples into the Christian conventicles on the other side of the street and nailed up the doors of the temples.

The eastern Churches were still so rooted in the anti-artistic tradition that they generally preferred to burn the temples and all their artistic paraphernalia. Pagan temples were not meeting-houses in which folk sat or stood in rows with long faces chanting doggerel or listening to some professional teacher of virtue. They were art-museums. Those gay old stories of Zeus and Aphrodite, of Apollo and Athene, had in four or five centuries "inspired" a wonderful art. In a century or two sculpture, painting, and architecture had made more progress than the more ancient world had made in 3,000 years. And it was mostly stored in the temples for the people to admire and enjoy. From about 390 to 420 most of these went up in smoke. Priests and monks, with the new Fascist

powers that the bishops had wheedled from the emperors, led mob's to the attack, and all over the Greek world there was such a holocaust of art as Goths and Vandals never perpetrated.

At least, the apologist might say, the Roman Church did better than the Greek. It preserved and Christianized the art. To what extent we need not inquire. The point here is that it did not inspire a new art but, in the words of one of the leading art- historians, Luebke, "put on the corporeal garment of ancient and decaying art." If you prefer me to quote a Catholic historian of art, Dr. F. Von Reber says in his History of Medieval Art (p. 73) that "the general debasement of art and the conceptions of Christianity worked together to destroy that perfection of outward appearance which is the vital principle of all art." In any case, the zeal for art, in the corrupt Roman Church of the 4th Century and Europe passed into the artistic hell of the Dark Age.

I have often illustrated the way in which the Black International has succeeded in recent years in poisoning the wells of public information by references to the latest edition of the Encyclopedia Britannica. The boast of British Catholics that they "revised" it is only too true. Amongst other changes notice that "Dark Ages," on which there had previously been no article, now bag a short notice from one of the professors of history of a second- rate British university. I suppose they had to pass over Oxford and Cambridge to find a man who could please Catholics. This man solemnly says, with all the superciliousness of his school that the phrase Dark Ages -- being a continuous period we ought to call the Dark Age -- used to be applied by writers who judged life by the classical standard of art and letters, to the period from the 5th to the 15th Century. He seems to be unaware that it was the Father of Catholic History, Cardinal Baronius, who first used the phrase; that, it does not simply designate the scarcity of art and letters but of all civilization; and that no responsible historian carries it as far as the 15th Century. It is, he says, now "obsolete"; whereas it is fully vindicated in the greatest historical work in the English language, the Cambridge Medieval History.

The only sense in which it could now be used, he says, is that the period, has left us only a very scanty and poor historical literature to inform us about it; and he does not reflect that this is precisely one of the symptoms of its degradation. But it is wrong to apply so opprobrious's a word to "one of the great constructive periods in human activity." This man is President of the British Royal Historical Society!

I must refer the interested reader to other works in which he can read about the total collapse of the fine Greek-Roman civilization and the five or six centuries of moral, social, legal, political, and economic, as well as cultural, debasement that followed. It is enough that art was dead, except amongst the anti- Papal

Ostrogoths and Lombards of North Italy, until, in the 11th Century, Greek art was introduced into Germany by a royal marriage, and it was not until a century later that Europe generally began to cultivate art. Professor Stenton is right that this was "one of the great constructive periods in human activity." He merely forgot to add that this was wherever the Roman Church did not exercise power.

Under the Moslem, from Spain to Eastern Persia, the earth shone with a brilliant art from the 8th Century onward.

But the great art of the Middle Ages! That is what the apologist and the artistic converts to the Church have in mind: the Gothic cathedrals of Europe, the superb paintings and statues, the work in gold, silver, and bronze, the tapestries and stained windows, the lace's and embroideries. Certainly a period of superb artistic creativeness, and because a half or more of the works of art then created are religious the apologists and the religious-minded artists clap their hands and cry: See what our religion inspired, see what the world has lost in discarding it!

I will not be tempted to reply that according to very many art-authorities of our time we, especially atheistic France, have created a greater art, because I must confess to an incurable enthusiasm for medieval cathedrals, paintings, and sculpture. But this art, is just as inspired in its "profane" as in its "Sacred" achievements: as great in its civic halls as in its cathedrals, in its painted Venuses and sinful princes as in its Madonnas and saints. And when you call the sacred part of it Catholic art, because it represents ideas or personalities of Catholic theology, remember the elementary distinction between an art inspired by Catholicism and one merely employed by the Church.

Nearly every modern historian of art or expert on the Renaissance has pointed out those facts. I have quoted a dozen of them in earlier works on the subject, of which a summary is given in Little Blue Book No. 1136, Medieval Art and the Church. Even Lord Leighton, the distinguished British painter and head of the Pre-Raphaelite School, says that during the early development of Italian painting the Church was a blight on the art and that it attained greatness only when the humanism of the Renaissance began to replace religion as its inspiration. (Addresses Delivered to the Students of the Royal Academy, 1896).

The Catholic artists and men and women of artistic sensitiveness but very little knowledge of the broad history of art or the lives and opinions of the great medieval artists feel that in this field the Church will find its most powerful argument. It is very little use asking them to study the leading modern authorities on the subject. They just kneel in rapture in a medieval cathedral or before a sacred painting, and because we no longer build such cathedral's or paint such pictures they say: Here is the glorious

flower of the Catholic spirit. They would say just the same about a fresco by Pinturicchio (a skeptical, dissipated artist employed by one of the most flagrantly immoral of the Popes to paint his, the Pope's, mistress as the Virgin Mary) in the Vatican, or a painting by Paolo Veronese (who was dragged before the Inquisition for the irreverence of his art) or Filippo Lippi (a loose friar who seduced a nun and lived for years with her while he painted beautiful religious pictures).

They would glow with fervor and pride before one of the great religious paintings of Rubens and then (I hope) blush with a sense of sin before the same artist's "Venus and Adonis," which is equally "inspired." They encourage the police to prevent the reproduction and sale today of the classical studies in which most of these great artists revelled, and then they have copies exhibited everywhere of the religious pictures which the rich churches and convents of Italy commissioned them to paint. The same bishop or cardinal would employ the same artist to paint a Leda and the Swan for his dining-room or library and a Holy Family for his chapel. The artist did equally fine work in both fields -- no expert has ever claimed that there is less "inspiration" in the profane than in the sacred work of Renaissance artists -- but the religious market was much the larger and richer.

The all-pervading fallacy of all this slush about Catholicism and Renaissance art is the supposition, which too many American historians now encourage, that the later Middle Age (say about 1150 to 1550) was a period of general piety and loyalty to the Church's commands. If that were so, the modern "psychological" historian would have a nice problem in explaining how that was just the period of the worst and most protracted degradation of the Papal Court, and why the one period of great art in Rome itself coincides with the most openly immoral and skeptical stretch of medieval Church history. Not only, all the leading authorities on the Renaissance (Burckhardt, Symonds, Hudson, and the Cambridge History) but the special Catholic authority on the period, Dr. Ludwig Pastor, make this quite clear. In respect of cruelty, dishonour, injustice to the weaker, and especially sexual freedom and sodomy, it was a more vicious age than any period of ancient civilization that was ever half as long.

A second fundamental fallacy, which well illustrates the difference between the artistic and the scientific mind and the greater readiness of the former to accept the claims of the Church, is the lack of testing and verification, in plain English, the failure of the artist to check his impression by testing it from various angles. If it occurs to a scientific man that a certain agency is the cause of a particular phenomenon he holds his tongue until he has convinced himself by a series, of check-studies that it explains the whole phenomenon and no other agency does. Scientific method is in this just the clarification of common- sense.

Applied to our present subject it would inquire whether an artist is more inspired in sacred than in profane subjects and whether and to what extent great religious works of art were produced by men of little or no religious feeling. We saw how ludicrously the protagonist of Catholic art fails to do this. But the common-sense inquiry would go much further. Was the European Renaissance the only great, or the greatest, period of artistic creation? And was there a religious inspiration in the other great periods, Greek, Chinese, Persian, and Arab? The plain conclusion emerges that if a man is a great artist it does not make any difference to his inspiration whether he has to paint a branch of cherry blossoms or a Buddha, a courtesan or a Virgin Mary, a peasant or a Christ. The Parthenon is the greatest religious building that was ever raised, and Pheidias its creator, was a skeptic.

Of the medieval cathedral in particular I have written much elsewhere and must be content with two points. It is obvious that if we have here a case of religious inspiration it must have been in the architects. But they are unknown. I cannot find that any writer on art has tried to compile even a short list or a biographical study of them, and the only such architect of whom I have found definite information, the architect of Speyer cathedral, was a roistering irreligious German bishop who was just as good at building a military fort or a castle. The second point is that modern experts on the Gothic style never notice religious inspiration, in their studies. The development of the style, on utilitarian as well as aesthetic lines, was spread over two generations and mainly occurred in the most frivolous and licentious region of France. The chief significance of it is that wealth was at this period rapidly expanding in Europe, and the clergy and monks got the most of it and wanted fine churches. It was a sound investment.

Another obvious cheek on this superficial Catholic theory is to inquire why great art so notably decayed after the 16th Century. In that pretentious collection of essays by American apologists, *Catholic Action* (2 vols., 1935), there is a section on "Catholic Action and Culture." The artistic convert who looks to it for what he believes to be the grandest argument for the Church, its inspiration of art, will be bitterly disappointed. The writer dismisses it in a few colourless lines, and the sterilization of Catholic art after the 16th Century is airily explained by saying that "we have not yet recovered" from the blight which the Reformation brought upon art. If the writer does not know that French painting (Poussin, Lorraine, Watteau, Greuze, Fragonard, etc.) and British painting only became great after the Reformation and was almost entirely humanist or naturalist, while Spanish and Italian art died though the countries were hermetically sealed against Protestant influence, he ought not to mention the word art.

Looking for some serious recent Catholic reply to my question why, if the Catholic creed inspires art, it so conspicuously failed to

do so in Italy, Spain, and Portugal when the Renaissance was over, although the Catholicism of those countries became stronger than ever, I find only two French works. The first, *L'art religieux apres le Concile de Trent* (1932) by Emile Male, is a large work on religious art after the Council of Trent." It does not admit on my contention. For Spain and the Netherlands (steeped in Spanish culture) it reminds us of Velasquez, Murillo and Rubens. Yes: but they belong essentially to the Renaissance, which was late in Spain, and after them, Spanish art was vapid until the skeptical days of Goya (a quite blasphemous painter). As great painters of Spain and Italy the author gives Montanes, Pedro de Mena, Minana, Crespi, Dolci, Giordano, Caroselli. ... I hope you have heard of them.

The second book, *La decadence de l'art sacre* (1931), by A. Cingria (a Catholic) grants my whole contention. It is enough to translate the title, "The decadence of 'Sacred art.'" The kind of question that the author sets out to answer is: "Why do the majority of Christians now like ugliness"? He doesn't know. Let us put him right to some extent. They do not like ugliness except in the sense that a church in a poor uneducated district naturally reflects the poor taste of the worshippers. But Catholics would be only too pleased to have great art once more if they could get it.

The Roman Church in America is many times as rich as the Italian Church was during the Renaissance and would pay ten or a hundred times as much as a medieval church or monastery did. They cannot get it. They have to import pictures from Spain, Italy, and Germany; and we should smile at the idea that the non-Catholic atmosphere of America prevents a Catholic artist from being inspired by Catholic ideas. The Church in Germany until a few years ago was as rich as the American. The Church in Spain and Spanish America is rich. But in the debauched monasteries of Germany and South America, where the Renaissance atmosphere of drink and sexual license is richly reproduced, no great art is produced.

Quebec is a medieval area with ideal Catholic conditions. Its Church is so rich that it is as zealous against Communism as Wall Street is. Cardinal Villeneuve, defending illegal acts against critics of the Church by the Catholic mayor of Montreal, said that above the laws of Canada is "the Law of Nature"; in the same sense as the Church overrides all modern civil law and claims to put folk to death on religious grounds. The taint of Protestantism never reached Quebec. Its people are poor and fanatical: its priests are rich, ignorant, and intolerant. But did you ever see any work of art that was produced in Quebec?

This artistic argument for the Church is futile because even if we could admit that it inspired great art in the later Middle Ages yet must add that it has no such inspiration today there does not seem

to be much gain to the Pope. The claim is clearly rhetorical. Every man with what we may call average information knows that the production of great art is not continuous but is richest in certain definite periods that last a few centuries and then decay. There have been three in the history of China, three in that of Persia, two in the long history of ancient Egypt, one in Greece, one in the Muslim world, and so on. Europe got the conditions for its second golden age of art in the Middle Ages.

It came to a close like all other such ages, though it began and ended later in France, England, and Spain than in Italy. It took so very largely a religious form because the Church was the richest employer and in so sensual and voluptuous an age it had a more extensive use than ever for art. This is what most of the chief historians of European art say. And remember always something which it is not their business to say but is of vital relevance to the Catholic claim of religious inspiration: that there is not in the whole history of religion, as far as we have positive knowledge or even ground for suspicion, so profound and general a religious corruption -- of Popes, cardinals, archbishops, bishops, priests, monk, and nuns -- as there was during the age (1300-1600) of supreme Catholic art. That nut wants some cracking.

### Chapter III

#### FEW POETS AND VAPID HYMNS

Two of the arts, literature and music, deserve special consideration. Both arts had their richest efflorescence after the Reformation; both ought to be of special value in the service of religion; and, while the plastic arts are scarcely suitable for illustrating most of the Catholic doctrines, literature and music are much better suited for the expression of ideas. In regard to literature, moreover, we have a much broader test of the Catholic claim. Even most folk with a fair general culture have to look to the verdict of experts for an appreciation of painting or sculpture. How many ever saw a picture, or a copy of a picture, by one of the Spanish or Italian artists whom Male presses upon us as "great painters" who worthily sustained the tradition of Catholic-inspired art?

How many, when they see a collection of reproductions of the religious work of, say, Raphael, Pinturicchio, L. da Vinci, Lippi, Botticelli, Veronese, and Murillo, have the least idea which of these men really had deep religious feeling and which had not? On the other hand, most people have a wider knowledge of books and authors, and every Catholic knows, and ought to have some idea of the artistic value of, the kind of literature which above all ought to show Catholic inspiration, the hymns that are sung in church.

In regard to literature as a whole I have repeatedly pointed out that Christendom did not produce a book that in the general opinion of cultivated men and women could be called "great" between Augustine's City of God (written about 412) and Dante's Trilogy (about 1300). No one, in fact, now reads Augustine's work as literature, and Dante's work, to which Goethe and other critics of the highest rank denied the title of greatness, has rather an esoteric circle of readers. Let us, however, pass them as great Catholic literature. It is far more notable, when you are discussing the question of religious inspiration, that the Catholic world failed to produce a single work of high rank during the intervening 900 years. Of what other civilization since the Greeks created a great literature can you say that?

We saw the apologist for the Dark Age, Prof. Stenton, admitting that the stretch of seven centuries after the Fall of Rome was "dark" in the sense that it has left us very little literature to throw light upon it. Who ever heard of a civilized period of seven centuries without a literature? It wrote books, of course. The whole output is preserved in the Migne Library, but if you cut out the theological works which not even a priest now reads -- Gregory, Anselm, Bernard, etc. -- you have a thin collection of weird treatises and chronicles, mostly written in a barbaric (often grotesquely ungrammatical) Latin, that makes you smile at the apologists for the Dark Age.

From about 1100 a very different literature began: troubadour songs, ballads, epics, light stories, and so on. Yes, but it was so pervasively licentious and crude in its moral sentiments that the Church, when it began to use its axe and rods, regarded the whole movement as a revolt against Christianity and gradually exterminated it. A religious profession who resents my characterization of the period -- which, by the way, is the same as that of every recognized European authority on it -- told me to read a recent French work, de Rougemont's *Passion and Society*, for the corrected historical appreciation of the period. The book is one of those freak originalities that the authorities ignore. It takes troubadour literature in its final and feeblest stage, when a few French and Italian poets were trying to save their art from the Church by taking religious themes, and it falsely represents these as typical troubadour literature. It describes as mystic in the religious sense the greater poems of the whole literature, *The Romance of the Rose*, whereas all experts recognize that "the rose" is sex.

If the apologist wearily grants that Europe in the Dark Age was so low, economically and culturally, that we cannot expect even religion to inspire a literature and insist that no power or agency could have raised Europe afresh more quickly than the Church did, the answer is that just during this period the Arabs and Persians, starting to rebuild civilization long after the Church did, created an

amazingly abundant and brilliant literature -- poetic, historical, scientific, and theological -- which Spanish Catholics and Moslem fanatics later destroyed. And if the apologist says that at all events after 1300 Christian Europe produced a great literature he runs into the difficulty I explained in the last chapter: How on earth does the Christian religion inspire a great literature only in the period when, according to all historical authorities, religious feeling and moral idealism were at their lowest ebb?

How many of the most distinguished writers between Dante and Rabelais could even plausibly be claimed to show the inspiration of the Catholic creed! Certainly not Chaucer, the greatest poet of that period. The highest British authority on him, Prof. Lounsbury, shows that he did not believe in immortality and, quoting the poet's words, asks: "Can modern agnosticism point to a denial more emphatic than that made in the 14th Century of the belief that there exists for us any assurance of the life that is lived beyond, the grave?" (Studies in Chaucer, II, 515).

Not the two greatest Italian writers, for Petrarch's best work was inspired by illicit love and he scourged Papalism as no modern does, while Boceaccio's great work is as far removed from religion as is that of Zola. Can anyone find the spirit of the Church in Froissart's blood-soaked Chronicle or in the defiant ethic of Villon's poetry! In the anti- ecclesiastical work of Valla, the purely scientific (a real anti- clerical) work of Bacon, the comedies (often very loose) of Ariosto or Benvenuto Cellini? The Catholic can have Tasso -- who reads him anyway? -- and the Summa of Thomas Aquinas, but he will hardly claim Erasmus or Rabelais as inspired by religion.

It is time the writers who fancy that Gothic cathedrals and religious paintings prove that there is a rich inspiration in the Catholic creed tried to explain to us why it so dismally failed to inspire great or artistic writers, especially poets. They never attempted it. they speak of this period (1100-1500) as the Ages of Faith they are mainly thinking of France and Italy. Isn't it peculiar that of the artistic writers of the two countries, who were numerous enough, three or four were "obscene" for every one who wrote stuff a modern nun would read? Quite a number of them wrote vindications of what the Church called vice, even unnatural vice, and comedies which would make a patrolman blush were written and played in the Papal Court itself, while the great works of religious art were being produced in other parts of the Vatican or the city. Your Catholic friend who says to you, with an air of common-sense; that in spite of all this talk Catholic art, and a very great art, is there for any man to see, is thinking chiefly of Rome, of St. Peters and the Vatican.

Well, ask him to reflect on this singular fact: Practically all this Roman art was created under three Popes (Alexander VI, Julius II,

and Leo X) of notoriously vicious character and at a time when the Papal Court and the clergy of Rome were steeped in what he calls immorality. And, except for the fact that two out of the three Popes were sodomists, which the Catholic apologist will swear black is white to disprove, he need not read McCabe to learn this but will find it in the most learned and authoritative Catholic history of the period, that of Dr. Ludwig Pastor, which has been translated into English.

It is hardly surprising that the writers of the time did not look for inspiration to the Catholic creed. The best of them, like Picodella Mirandola, looked to a blend of Platonism and primitive (decidedly not Papal) Christianity. But most of them concentrated on sex or, as they called it, love. They wrote the most brazen erotic literature that had yet appeared, and some of the hottest of them were patronized and rewarded by the Popes. Your professors of European history do not tell you these things. They may mention Machiavelli, who was really more poisonous than the erotic writers, but they prefer to enlarge on the pretty religious sentimentality of an ignorant friar (the Little Flowers of Francis of Assisi) and the work of Dante.

They do not care even to point out that Dante succeeds only when he is illustrating a concrete and repulsive doctrine like hell, and that his poetic inspiration evaporates when he tries to glorify the purely spiritual realm of paradise. The Catholic creed inspires one in the same sense as the Greek mythology did or the bastard Buddhist religion of Asia does. Tell the artist that Buddha, Christ, Moses, or Mary was above the common human level and he will set his imagination to create a superman or a superwoman: Zeus or Jehovah, Athene or Mary.

I said that if these Catholic apologists and artistic folk who blather about medieval art were quite honest they would try to explain why it was most "Inspired" when Italy, or Rome in particular, was most immoral (not merely in respect of sex). They would, have a still more awkward moment if they tried to explain why it shrivelled up as soon as the morals of Rome and the Papal Court had to be comparatively reformed because half of Europe was now Protestant and cynically watching the Popes. It was the same with literature as with the other arts. Italy, Spain, and Portugal became more Catholic than ever. Except that the brazen parade of sexual freedom had to be suppressed in Rome there was little or no change of the moral level but skepticism, which had abounded during the Renaissance, was extinguished and Protestantism truculently excluded. And art above the level of mediocrity died. It is almost a commonplace of the best recent histories of art that a human factor -- a great new wealth with its accompanying sense of freedom, adventure, emancipation, and enjoyment -- had quickened the blood of Europe during the later Middle Ages and

evoked its art as the spring-warmth quickens the circulation of the plants and causes the flowers of summer.

The soil of strictly Catholic countries froze again, and there was no great literary art until a new human factor, the vision of a better world, fired the blood again in the second half of the 18th Century.

But the absurdity of the Catholic argument, if you can call it an argument, is shown by the record between the Reformation and the Revolution, as it is shown wherever you test it by facts. A new Dark Age settled on Italy, Spain, and Portugal, and Germany was reduced almost to barbarism by the religious wars. In England, on the other hand, art burst into full blossom as soon as the Catholic creed was fully extinguished. No one who knows the history of England would expect it earlier, but the point is that once England got the conditions of an artistic age, which Italy had enjoyed much earlier, it did not make the slightest difference that there was now no Catholic faith to inspire it or Church to employ it. Literary art, in particular, burst into bloom with the robust Protestantism, richly leavened with skepticism, under the skeptical Elizabeth. From Shakespeare, Marlowe, Spenser, and Bacon, to Swinburne, Carlyle, Ruskin, and Dickens, England -- anti-Papal England -- created a great literature.

France has been a mixed country ever since the rise of Calvin. Until the later years of Louis XIV -- say to 1685 -- it had a very large and influential Protestant element as well as much skepticism, and after the death of Louis and his Jesuits, male and female, skepticism spread very widely. But though the Church controlled the majority it did not inspire the art. Literary historians assign as the greater writers from the Reformation to the Revolution Montaigne, Rabelais, Descartes, Pascal, La Fontaine, Corneille, Racine, Boileau, Moliere, Montesquieu, Voltaire, Rousseau, and Diderot. Eight out of the 13 were skeptics: two (Descartes and Pascal) were regarded with more than suspicion by Rome: two only, Racine and Corneille were good Catholics, but they found their inspiration chiefly in Greek tragedy.

Then came the new spring, the stirring of the blood of the race which we broadly call the passion for freedom and democracy, that is still raging.

As the Church of Rome was, and is, bitterly opposed to it we do not look for many Catholics amongst the greater writers of the last century and a half. The question is not whether you can name one or two Catholic writers of the first rank -- a Chateaubriand, a Newman (though his title is much disputed by critics), a Mistral (a sort of Catholic) -- but why, when the Pope claimed still to rule half the white world, there are only these three amongst a hundred writers as distinguished as they in France, Britain, America, Germany, Italy, Russia, and Scandinavia. And how do even these

compare in inspiration with Byron, Shelley, Swinburne, Goethe, Schiller, Nietzsche, Ibsen, Dostoievsky, Pushkin, Hugo, Carlyle, Shaw, D'Annunzio, Galdos, and a score of others? Catholic literature as a whole is the flattest, stalest, feeblest of all literature that takes itself seriously. They have to ask us to accept Chesterton, Ronald Knox, Noyes, and Joyce Kilmer as "great writers." And do not forget that the Church has far more money to pay for art today than it ever had before. It would give a million dollars for a great artist.

Ours will probably be described in historical manuals of the future as an age of mediocrity. Statesmen, artists, and scientific and literary men reach no peaks. Possibly the highest ability enters the business world, where the reward is greatest, but we have to remember that both in art and letters the man of outstanding ability is sure of recognition and will certainly not starve in an attic.

If any reader is still inclined to wonder if I have not yielded in part to prejudice in assigning the relative positions of Catholic and non-Catholic writers let me recall that I have in an earlier booklet followed a high and most impartial authority in estimating the writers of the last forty years: the Nobel Prize Committee. If anything the Committee, though it is supposed to be guided by national committees of great weight and impartiality, is prejudiced in favour of religious writers and, while it has had to award the great prize 27 times out of the 37 to skeptics, it has excluded skeptics whom the critics would put high above some who were selected.

Yet in this selection of the world's greatest writers during the last 40 years we have only four who seem to be in some literal way Catholics, though they were certainly not inspired in their work by the Papal creed. The Pope claims the allegiance of half the population of Europe and America but counts -- in some cases dubiously -- only one-ninth of their greater writers; and the award would have been more in accord with the general view of literary critics if these four Catholic writers had been replaced by my four selected from Wells, Conrad, Meredith, Zola, b'Annunzio, Sudermann, Galoz, Ibanez, Santayana, Gorki, and A. Tolstoy: all skeptics and not in favour in pious Sweden.

The most deadly reply to the Catholic argument here, the immediate reply to those who talk about the warmth, colourfulness, and emotional richness of the Catholic atmosphere, is the relative fewness of Catholic poets, especially of poets who show any sort of indebtedness to Catholic belief for their inspiration. In the large volume of distinguished poetical literature of Great Britain they can claim only that of Dryden, who was a skeptic until his later years and would in any case hardly be called inspired. In the German-speaking area of Europe, which has always been one-third Catholic, the record is not better.

But it is enough to point out that in what the Church claims as Catholic countries the majority of the more distinguished poets during the last century and a half have been anti-Papal and very few since Dante and Tasso can be claimed to show Catholic inspiration in their work. Yet in literary art we have one of the most effective tests of the Catholic claim. A church may commission a man to paint a picture or carve a statue but you cannot -- except where a Poet Laureate turns out verse to order -- pay a poet to sit down and write a poem. You can neither open the fount of inspiration with a golden key nor, in the case of a true poet, close it by opposition it is arrant nonsense to say that poets have "not yet recovered from the blight which the Reformation brought upon art." A hostile world inflames the true poet. Shelley was greatest in his Prometheus, Swinburn in his Songs before Sunrise, Goethe in the first part of Faust.

Most conspicuously is the failure of the Papal creed to inspire poetic art shown in the case of hymns. The great majority of the hymns in a Catholic hymn-book are very poor stuff and many of them are so vapid that one is forced to conclude that even priest-selectors would never have included them if they had plenty of good material to select from. In preparing a small popular work on Rome (The Popes and Their Church) some years ago I looked through an American Catholic hymn-book and selected a few gems. I doubt if even the Salvation Army would (apart from the Mariolatry of it) tolerate such doggerel as:

The earth is but a vale of tears  
O Maria!  
When this exile is complete  
O Maria!

or:

O the blood of Christ!  
it Soothes the Father's ire:  
Opes the gates of heaven, Quells eternal fire.  
Oft as it is sprinkled On our guilty beans,  
Satan in confession Terror-struck departs.

It is a conglomeration of rotten sentiments, wooden verse, and even bad grammar. The mechanical grind of the verse-maker runs through the book, and his insincerity is matched by the insincerity of the singers. A very popular hymn for services for young women (children of Mary, etc.) has the refrain:

Holy Mary, let me come: Holy Mary, let me come  
Soon to be happy with thee in thy home.

Not a girl of the hundreds of thousands who sing that means what she says, or, in fact, does not feel exactly the opposite sentiment. Grown-up men and women lustily sing:

O Paradise, O Paradise,  
'Tis weary waiting here;  
I long to be where Jesus is,  
To feel, to see him near.

or:

Arm for deadly fight, earth and bell unite,  
And swear in lasting bonds to bind me;  
Raise the cross on high, Jesus is our cry,  
With Jesus still the foe shall find me.

Large numbers of the hymns chant this glorious fight against the world -- most of the men make for the nearest beer-house when the service is over and the girls hurry to keep their dates -- the flesh, and the devil. It helps to keep up the prestige and importance of the clergy. They not only lead the troops but are the only channels of the supernatural force (grace) without which the fight is hopeless for the ordinary man.

This theme runs through the whole collection. Catholics are, you may have found, as cheerful and sinful as other folk, yet you would imagine from merely reading their hymns ("hell is raging for my soul," etc.) that they were a portentously serious and puritanical body of men and women. Next time your Catholic neighbour presses you to read his literature, while refusing to read yours, ask him to lend you his prayer-book and hymn-book. But I wager that he won't.

## Chapter IV

### MASSES COMPOSED BY SKEPTICS

The hymn is not so important in a Catholic as in a Protestant church. It had no place in the ritual as it was finally evolved in the Middle Ages; in accordance, of course, with the blue-prints entrusted to Peter by Jesus in ancient Galilee, The faithful were to assist AT, not assist IN or take part in the ceremonies, as I will consider in the next chapter. We are told in Pliny's letter to the Emperor Trajan that the early Christians met to "sing hymns to Christ as God." -- probably chanting psalms in the Jewish tradition -- but the "mass" was at that time not developed. When it was, the faithful were in much the same position as skeptics in a theatre, watching a performance in strange costumes at the far end of the building.

Into all that, however, we cannot enter here but must confine ourselves to the actual use of the art of music in Catholic services today; and the chief question that interests us about it is whether in the case of this art at least the Catholic creed has not simply employed but inspired the artist.

Music would lend itself to such inspiration more easily than any other art. No painter or sculptor has ever given us a Jesus or Mary that we could plausibly imagine in a Judaic environment, and Michael Angelo's "Last Judgment" and Ruben's "Descent of the Cross" are human scenes into which the spectator must read the Catholic idea. Literary art is more complete to express idea's or dogmas, but the expression can be immensely enhanced if it is associated with noble music. If Catholicism inspires art, therefore, we should look for a body of it in music corresponding in magnificence to the great architecture, sculpture, and painting of the Middle Ages; especially as, notoriously the chief attraction of the non-Catholics whom it is hoped to convert to the wealthier churches is "the fine music." Instead of having to listen, as one does in most non-Catholic churches, to communal singing which, while it is more enjoyed by the congregation itself, is rather artless than artistic to the outsider, though it may be relieved at one point by a professional soloist whom you may have heard in a cabaret the night before, you can hear, well rendered if the church is not poor, often with orchestral accompaniment, some of the finer compositions of masters of music.

Here you get the most decisive -- and the most deadly -- test of the claim that the Roman religion inspires art. Not relying on my memory of church-experience 50 years ago I take from a recent authoritative publication the names of ten of the greatest composers of masses, litanies, and shorter pieces that are used in Catholic churches today: Beethoven, Berlioz, Cherubini, Dvorak, Gounod, Haydn, Mozart, Schubert, Verdi, and Weber. All these are included in the Catholic Encyclopedia and it is claimed, especially or by implication that they were Catholics.

Yet no less than six of the ten were apostates -- Beethoven, Berlioz, Cherubini, Haydn, Mozart, and Verdi -- in some cases notoriously apostates, and some of the others were not clearly orthodox. Gounod alone can be quoted as a man of real Catholic piety -- in spots. You will read in biographies of him how at one time he got so religious that he began to study for the Church: how one day, when he asked Sarah Bernhardt if 'She ever prayed and she said, "Me pray! Never, I'm an atheist," he fell upon his knees before her and, to her disgust prayed for her for quarter of an hour: and so on. Yes, and in the same biographies you will read about his various little mistresses and his superficial changes of mood. In all his work, says one authority, he "hovered between mysticism and theatricality." Another authority says "between mysticism and voluptuousness's," In his sacred work, says the Catholic Encyclopedia sadly, he "did not penetrate the spirit of the liturgy": which is a flat denial of Catholic inspiration. It was such music, fine as it is, as Cound's Messe solennelle and Ave Maria that moved the distinguished scientist Claude Bernard (also

claimed as a Catholic, of course, though a well-known apostate) to say that Catholic services are just "opera for servant girls."

The most flagrant cases of Catholic misrepresentation are those of Beethoven, Cherubini, and Mozart. Beethoven's Mass in D is coupled by authorities with his famous Ninth Symphony as "the most gigantic of all musical designs." It is not, like Brahms's Mass, a Protestant composition but was intended, when he began to compose it, to be performed at the installation of the Catholic Archbishop of Olmutz and is today one of the richest treasures of the Catholic repertory. But almost any biography will tell you that at that time Beethoven had already abandoned his Catholic faith and adopted Goethe's Pantheism, in comparison with which he thought the Christian creed tawdry. His friend and chief biographer, A. Schindler, and Nohl in his preface to Beethoven's Brevier (1870) state this, and Sir G. Maeferren, who describes the Mass as "perhaps the grandest piece of musical expression which art possesses," says (Imperial Dictionary of Universal Biography) that he was "a free thinker." He was persuaded, as some other distinguished freethinkers were to accept the sacraments before death, but all admit that he looked upon them as, at the best, symbols. Nohl says that when the ceremony was over Beethoven murmured, in the old Latin theatrical phrase, "Applaud, friends, the comedy is over," but the better-informed Schindler says that in these words Beethoven referred to the approaching close of his life. It is at all events agreed that he had very seriously, on philosophic grounds, discarded Catholicism 30 years before he wrote the Mass and, unlike other artists, he never wavered in his Rationalism.

Cherubini, though his name is not as familiar to our generation as those of Beethoven and Wagner, composed five masses, two Requiems (or mass for the dead), and a very large number of pieces for Catholic use. A critic pronounces these "the most important works of their age," and Gounod who agrees, quotes Beethoven saying chiefly with an eye to his religious work, that Cherubini was "the greatest master of his age." But it is undisputed that he abandoned the Catholic religion before he composed any of this sacred music.

He lived in Paris in the revolutionary days and devoted his great talent to the revolutionary cause. It was after the Restoration, when he was superintendent of the royal chapel, that he wrote masses, etc., but he never returned to the faith. His British Catholic biographer Bellasis admits that he did not receive the sacraments before death and quotes the reluctant testimony of his Catholic daughter that he was "not mystical but broad-minded in religion." Another biographer observes that his sacred music was "not created by faith in and love of what he composed."

Mozart, who composed 15 masses and a very large amount of other Catholic pieces, had so decidedly rejected the Catholic creed in early manhood that when he was dying he refused his wife's entreaty that he would see a priest, and his apostasy was so notorious that when the wife herself asked a priest to come the man refused, and the great musician was buried without ceremony in the common grave of the poor. So his chief biographers Wilder and Ulibichev, and the facts are undisputed. The latter quotes Mozart saying in reference to his early Catholic belief: "That is all over and will never come back" (I. 243). He had become a Freemason before he was thirty, at a time when the Church regarded Freemasonry as a device of the devil, and to the end of his life he remained at the most a Deist. As is well known, he composed one of the most beautiful and most frequently used masses of the dead, and the circumstances throw an ironic light on this question of art and Catholicism. A rich musical amateur, Count Walsegg, secretly paid Mozart, who was desperately poor, to compose the mass and let Walsegg put his name on it. Shortly afterwards the great artist died and was "buried like a dog."

Let me further illustrate this point from the biography of another great musician. I do not suppose that the German Requiem of Brahms is used in Catholic services, as the music is set to texts from the German translation of the bible, which Catholics are forbidden to read, but it is just as "inspired" as Mozart's mass. Yet Brahms was an Agnostic, as he repeatedly tells in his letters (Letters of J. Brahms, Eng. trans. 1909). The instructive point is that it is obviously the thought of death that inspired the music, not the Catholic doctrine about death. In almost his last year of life Brahms wrote and composed his "Four Serious Songs (Ver Echte Gesänge)". The writer on him in the Encyclopedia Britannica calls these his "supreme achievement in dignified utterance of noble thought." It warns you to read some of these musical critics with discretion. The words of the songs plainly reject the idea of immortality, and Brahms admitted in a letter to Herzogenberg that that was his intention.

Haydn composed even more masses and other church music than Gounod or Cherubini, and he is still a high favourite in the Catholic repertory. In the Catholic Encyclopedia he is, of course, a loyal, if very amorous, son of the Church, though Mendelssohn's opinion that his sacred music was "scandalously gay" is quoted, and we get the usual caution that it is better as art than as an expression of Catholic ideas. In point of fact he was, like Mozart, a Freemason, and a Mason was to Rome in those days what a Bolshevik is today.

Verdi, has given the Church a mass for the dead, a Te Deum, an Ave Maria, a Stabat Mater and other sacred compositions, and he is feebly claimed in the Catholic Encyclopedia. It is a particularly brazen claim as, while such claims are usually in the case of great

artists or scientists based upon the fact that the last sacraments were daubed on them while they were unconscious or administered to gratify Catholic relatives, Verdi stipulated in his will that he was to be buried without "any part of the formulae" (F.T. Garibaldi, Giuseppe Verde., 1903, p. 235). He was a man of more solid character than is usual in the operatic world -- he gave 2,000,000 lire to build a home for aged and ailing musicians. -- and wrote his mass for the dead only to Honor his dead friend Manzoni. He was a moderate anti-Papal in the political struggle and was often assailed by the clergy.

A full inquiry, which naturally cannot be made for the purpose of writing one chapter of a booklet, into the lives and sentiments of all the leading composers of Catholic music would clearly be of considerable interest. I happened to have made some inquiry at an earlier date as far as these masters are concerned, and the results are quite enough for my purpose. The Church employed them and did not clearly inspire a single one of them. Like the painters of the Renaissance, whose art was equally great in depicting courtesans and saints, pious scenes and bacchanalian scenes, they were "neither Christians nor pagans but artists" as Symonds says. If you commission an artist, or if he himself proposes, to express the super-human, his own belief in the matter is not concerned.

Anyone who has heard one of these florid masses in a Catholic church feels that it is mainly, as in the opera-house, a commercial use of art. I was attached, as a priest and professor, to a middle-class suburban chapel in London for some years. As I have explained, the only obligation of the people was to bear a mass every Sunday morning, and the great majority discharged this, in spite of the general disposition to be longer abed on Sundays, by assisting at a short early mass. There was no music, and the "sublime" service was gabbled through by the priest in 25 minutes. At 11 there was a sung or "high" mass, and this -- it might have been called the Dress Parade -- all the more comfortable parishioners attended. Several times a year an orchestra was employed and one of the classical masses was sung. It doubtless gave many a heightened idea of the solemnity of the feast, but from the clerical angle it had only one aim: money. Very special collections, sometimes taken by the monks themselves, were made, and the extra hiring of singers and musicians was far more than covered.

The singers of these masses and other choral services are, even on ordinary Sundays quite commonly non-Catholics. They are just professional singers, and the question of combining a moderate wage with efficient work is regarded as more important than the question of their religion or irreligion. I never heard of one being "converted." Near the church to which I was attached was a popular beer-house of a superior type, and the pietists of our congregation sent in scandalized protests that after the Sunday

services they had to see the whole body of singers repair noisily to the Saloon Bar. They never understood a word that they sang; for, as I said, the English hymn has a very small place on a Catholic Sunday evening service and none in the morning service.

The whole performance is, in fact, sheerly theatrical. Even the priests at the altar -- there are usually three -- have a bench in the sanctuary and at intervals in their very sacred manipulations they retire to sit on this while the choir sings, with senseless repetitions (to give the composer elbow-room) and long-drawn phrases, certain parts of the mass. It is fine music; and it makes a mockery of the sense of the ritual from a religious viewpoint. Catholic's sometimes feel this.

My father used to tell of an experience of this kind. He once took a country cousin, a Catholic, to one of our swell morning services. When the choir finished the piece they were singing (in the ritual it was a simple recital of the creed) for the second or third time and went back to the middle once more, the man, who was moving restlessly in his seat, whispered to my father: "Damn it, Bill, why don't they say Amen and 'a done with it."

## Chapter V

### WHY A DEAD LANGUAGE IS USED IN THE LITURGY

The reader must not lose sight of the guiding idea of this booklet. It is an examination of the claim that the Catholic creed inspires great art: that it was the main inspiration of the superb art of the Middle Ages, and that the general mediocrity, or the lower general level, of art since the 16th Century is due to the destruction of the influence of the Church over half the world. This is one of the smooth generalizations which an age that has become, for not very creditable reasons, complaisant to the Church accepts too easily from the apologist. As history it is on a level with the mendacious claim that the Roman Church gave the world schools broke the fetter's of the slave, and inspired mercy and philanthropy.

Specially rich periods of artistic, production have always been limited in point of time. They may last 50 years or several centuries but they end in mediocrity. Such periods are also commonly periods of growing skepticism -- compare the great art-period of China, Athens, Persia, and Arab Spain and Sicily -- and the greater artists share this with the general educated class. But the temples and priesthoods are the richest employers, and the artist is concerned only that his art shall do justice to his subject. He may in a sense find an idea (of a Mother of God, for instance) inspiring though he does, not regard it as a truth or as an idea corresponding to reality. I have given ample evidence of this.

As to the common Catholic sophism that the reduction of the Pope's sphere of influence accounts for the cessation of medieval art we saw that the answer is easy. Two arts, literature and music, have been far greater since the Reformation than they were in the Middle Ages, and they ought to be particularly useful for expressing religious ideas. But Catholics have had a miserably small part in proportion to their numbers, in the finer creations of those arts. The medieval Church employed but did not inspire artists -- a rare Fra Angelica does not alter the general truth -- and it is plausible to think that the immense reduction of its wealth after the Reform affected this. But their reduction does not explain the death of art in Catholic, Spain or the predominance of secular art in France. Anyhow, the Church is now richer and more powerful than ever, and the non-Catholic world has been duped or bribed into such an attitude that it would welcome Catholic artistic production of a high order. You cannot even speak of the chill of a hostile environment, even if you think that such a thing does prevent a great artist from expressing himself. Yet the Church, while it boasts that it has more members than ever and certainly has far more wealth than ever, cannot inspire great art in its own body. Four-fifths of its best modern art, its music, was composed by the type of men it professes to abhor above all others -- apostates'.

"The Church and its great art" is part of the dupery it practices on the modern mind. But if I had been content to say so boldly, or to refer the reader to other writings of mine, I should have been unconvincing, so in this booklet I have had to give considerable detail. I trust it has interested the reader.

There remains the question why the Roman Church employs a dead language, Latin, in its services. It is, of course, not unusual for priests to continue to read the sacred books of a religion in the language, which may otherwise be dead, in which they were written. The Jews still have the Old Testament read in Hebrew: the Muslim even in Turkey and elsewhere read the Koran in Arabic. But in the Church of Rome practically the entire service on Sundays and the morning service on all days is in Latin. The Greek Church and its various national daughters have the services in ancient Greek, but their motive is the same as that of the Roman hierarchy. It is not as is sometimes suggested, in order to affirm and sustain the international or Catholic character of the Church. It has a double object. Locally it helps to maintain the very emphatic line that is drawn between the clergy and the laity and strengthen the position of the former as a separate and very much higher caste; and, especially, it is one of the most effective means of reminding Catholics everywhere of their connection with and object dependence upon the Vatican and the Papacy.

A Catholic church has the upper (away from the door) end, or usually about a fourth or fifth of the area, isolated by a decorative

low iron rail beyond which the laity must never go. Most of this is empty space to add to the impressiveness of the altar at the extreme end at which, raised by a number of steps above the body of the church, the priests, in vestments of coloured silk -- the colour changing according to the saint, or mystery honoured on that day -- over long white linen robes, the priests perform their ceremonies. Remember the Catholic belief that on that altar Jesus Christ is physically and bodily present under the "accidents" of a wafer or very thin cracker, and you will realize the feeling, almost of awe, with which the devout Catholic follows the evolutions in the distant sanctuary. The setting is exactly the same as in a theatre, and, though the body of the church is not darkened, at the evening service the light about the altar is increased by an immense number of candles in shining brass candelabra, flowers are used lavishly, and the sanctuary is gradually filled with a slight haze from the fumes of incense. It is a continuation of the old pagan tradition. So the priests of Isis or Mithra once impressed their followers.

Indeed it goes back to the sacrifices in the Jewish temple, the pageants on the great festivals of ancient Egypt, even the mysteries performed at the summit of lofty pyramid temples in ancient Babylon and Assyria while the crowd stood in silence in the court-yard. To some extent the modern theatre, which was not in its beginnings a revival of the Greek theatre, is developed from this clerical show. Simple theatrical features were added to the ceremony in the sanctuary to please the totally illiterate congregation and out of these developed the early "miracle play." Large numbers of non-Catholics attend Catholic services, generally standing near the door, just to see the quaint free spectacle at the far end of the church.

The use of Latin has an obvious advantage in spectacles of this sort, but it has others which are not obvious.

The morning service, the mass, is so rigorously confined to Latin that in my sacerdotal days we had to chant even the final prayer for the king in Latin!

On Catholic doctrine there is no disadvantage whatever in this use of Latin. The mass is not a "Service" in the ordinary sense. What happens in the mass is that the priest offers a real sacrifice to God. Don't ask me to explain here how Jesus Christ (God) is offered to a God who is not Jesus Christ, as in what sense it is a real sacrifice. I did enough cold dissection of the amazing doctrines of the Roman Church in the 16th book and do not care to return to that tedious occupation. It is enough to say that the Church theory is that the priest in every mass "repeats, the sacrifice of Calvary" and all that the people have to do is to be present on their knees with bowed heads and silent lips..

When this "solemn sacrifice" is in modern times accompanied by the operatic music of Gounod or Haydn, when the priests interrupt the solemnity in various places and sit while tenors and bass and perhaps violins and cellos, distort the language of the prayers into musical arabesques, the result is really so fantastic and. irreligious that Pius X, the blunt old peasant Pope of 40 years ago, issued a ukase that this sort of thing must stop. He wanted to bring the Church back to the use of plain chant, the simple musical notation used before operatic music was invented, at least as it was improved by Palestrina. For once a Pope found that he was not really an autocrat.

Even in the Church the power of the purse is greater than the terrific powers granted in theory to the Pope. The financial loss in every country would have been immense. There would be no more "opera for servant girls"; no more "beautiful services" for artistic converts and neurasthenic ladies.

This concealment of the mutilation or massacre of the liturgy in musical services by keeping the words in Latin is balanced by the advantage in low (or unsung) masses. I explained in an earlier chapter that, although this is a long series of prayers and addresses to the Almighty of a solemnity in accordance with the Catholic theory of the mass, the people are impatient and are apt to complain of any priest who does not "get through" in less than half an hour, usually 25 minutes. The young priest has to practice for weeks before he says his first mass. He has to learn to say the prayers, some of which change with the calendar, at -- I have just tested by experience -- about 200 words a minute. It is, perhaps, fortunate for himself that the words are in Latin, for, although he is supposed to understand the very elementary Church Latin, he is less sensible of the meaning, except in the slower and more solemn passages, than he would be if they were in English.

The advantage in helping to link the entire Church with Rome, the home of the Latin tongue, is just as obvious. I have occasionally made light comments on the American apologists and priests -- if not bishops and cardinals -- who are so blatant in stressing the harmony of their faith with American ideals that they swear they would cut the connection with Rome or (which is the same thing) defy the Pope if he gave orders inconsistent with the American spirit or Constitution. Would they, on that highly fantastic hypothesis, abandon the use of Latin in the services? On what ground could they retain it? And if they turned the liturgy into plain American how would the archaic sentiments sound, and how would the mutilation of the words by priests at the altar or by non-Catholic singers in the choir impress the faithful?

They could retain it only on one ground, and it is the chief reason why the Church retains it today in every country. It is part of the paraphernalia that makes a separate and very superior caste of the

priests. Like the black cassock or black suit, the reversed collar, the shaven poll which he is supposed to have, the incongruous title of "Father" for a man who professes to think paternity a weakness of the flesh, the ancient Roman (or possibly Persian and Egyptian) garb he wears at the altar, the dividing sanctuary line, the "blessing" which a good Catholic (on his or her knee's) is supposed to ask when he enters a house, and so on, it marks him off as a member of a sacred caste. In a Catholic country his indulgence in drink does not matter -- little notice is taken of this even in Eire -- and his amorous adventures are judged very humanly.

As he repeatedly reminds them in sermons, his character as a man has nothing to do with the mystic and august character which "Holy Orders" have conferred on him. He can absolve sins or in certain cases refuse to absolve them and leave a man under sentence of hell. He can work the stupendous miracle of transubstantiation. When countries are still solidly Catholic, and equally illiterate and densely ignorant, he encourages the belief that his magical powers go far beyond invisible results like absolving sins or turning a bit of paste into the living body of Jesus. His curse may be a very real thing. His prayers -- at from a quarter to one or two dollars a time -- are more effective than the services of a doctor or a veterinary surgeon and must be secured for a vast range of purpose's, from blessing a new house or a new churn or fishing boat to success in an impending examination, the detection of a thief, curing a woman of sterility, or painlessly removing a gall- stone.

We need not, however, go back once more into "the really Catholic world"; though you will not forget that these are conditions in which two-thirds of the Pope's subjects live. Our broad conclusion must be that instead of the Church of Rome rendering a notable service to the race and to civilization in inspiring art it has in every age used such art as was available for the usual purposes of the Black International: the protection or augmentation of their power and wealth. It has not rendered, a service to the exploited mass of the people by bringing colour and warmth into their drab lives by its services but has used art, if you can give that title to the decorations and services of the average Catholic church, to distract their attention from the absurdity of its doctrines and the extortions of the priests. In nine-tenths of its sphere of influence it uses debased forms of art to help to prevent people from reflecting, during their one hour a week in church, that what they are taught to call their faith is an idle and, in proportions to their resources, costly compliance with the traditional customs in which they were reared; and in the Churches of the more comfortable one-tenth it uses art, like any other employer and from almost any source, to help in sustaining that uncritical attitude which enables the apologist to foist amazing untruths and

sophistry even upon the educated layman. Religion may or may not be "the opium of the people." Catholic art certainly is.

It is a familiar Protestant charge that religion in the Roman Church is mechanical, materialistic, a matter of physical acts and sensuous titillations. It is an entirely just charge as far as the great majority of the faithful are concerned. The Black International has in its own interest enacted that it is compulsory under the direct penalties that a man shall be in the church, looking on at a ceremony, which he only half understands, for half an hour once a week. The rest is voluntary and has to be made attractive.

I have in Eastern Europe seen men standing outside the wide-open doors of a cathedral, some of them smoking cigarette's, listening to the distant mass. They are within the Catholic law. Religion is to them not a set of beliefs but a small number of compulsory movements. For the majority of the others it is a series of ceremonies which they usually -- there are, of course, special festivals at rare intervals which rouse real fervour -- follow in a frame of mind which it would be difficult to analyse and the clergy have no desire to analyse. People are "doing their duty." And if anybody thinks this a superficial statement of the situation let him wait until in the next book we squarely face the claim that the Church at least renders a great social service or "does good."

Joseph McCabe Index

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