

Mount Saviour Chronicle

THE BENEDICTINE MONASTERY OF MOUNT SAVIOUR
PINE CITY, N. Y., 14871

NUMBER 23

CHRISTMAS, 1963



The Lord is Our witness when, at this first moment of the second session of the great synod, We declare to you that in Our mind there is no intention of human predominance, no jealousy of exclusive power, but only the desire and the will to carry out the divine mandate which makes Us, of you and among you, Brothers, the supreme shepherd, and which requires of you that you be His joy and glory, "the communion of saints," offering your fidelity, your loyalty, your collaboration. This same mandate confers on you that which pleases him most to give — his veneration, his esteem, his trust, his charity.

From the address given by his Holiness Pope Paul VI at the opening of the second session of the Second Vatican Council, on September 29, 1963.

Dear Friends of Mount Saviour:

We set out once more in your direction, at the beginning of Advent, hoping that by the time the Chronicle reaches you it will be the Christmas season and the appropriate moment for wishing you all a joyful feast of the birth of the Messias. As always we are deeply conscious of our indebtedness to you, and particularly this year, in this season of light and of gift, do we feel beholden to all who are taking an active part in our building program. The Midnight Mass will be our solemn Act of Thanksgiving, offered to the Father in grateful remembrance of all your kindness.

When we advert to the fact that this is Advent 1963, it dawns on us that a whole year has passed since the last Chronicle was sent to you. So many things have happened that it would be hopeless to try to cope with them all. Among the events that took place outside the confines of Mount Saviour that touched us most deeply I must mention the death of Pope John, the election of Pope Paul, and now recently the assassination of President Kennedy. The whole world has mourned for the death of Pope John as man would mourn for the death of his father. In a unique and inimitable way he represented to the entire human family of mankind the goodness of "our Father who is in heaven, who makes his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matthew 5:45). President Kennedy was to the citizens of this nation rather like an older brother, and this is why the bullet that hit him hurt us all so deeply. In the case of both the passing of those who held it shows forth the higher dignity of the office, and so our prayers are with President Johnson and with Pope Paul VI. It is to the latter that we would like to devote this Chronicle, in token of the special bond that exists between him and Mount Saviour.

In order to describe the nature of this bond and to put it into the right perspective, so that it may become a living thing to you also, I have to go far back into the days of my youth. In retrospect I can say that there are two experiences on the cultural level which have influenced deeply my way of thinking. The first is the contact with the so called "youth movement". This movement had developed in Germany already before the First World War under the influence of the writings of Nietzsche, as a "protest" of the younger generation against the self-complacency, the lack of cultural authenticity and sincerity of the Victorian Age. There was a growing tendency among the young people to withdraw from the "apparatus" of the dominant cultural milieu, and the simplest way of doing it was to flee the cities over the week-ends, and during vacations to go hiking, not for fun, but to live a new life in simplicity, austerity and charity, close to nature and close to the people. Folk songs and folk dances, the fairy tales and the mystery plays took the place of the sophisticated forms of urban entertainment, or of the beer parties common among the university students of the old school. The conventional forms of social intercourse met with contempt. Away from the artificial, away from falsehood, back to truth, to genuine love, to genuine beauty, to genuine joy, this was the battle cry of the new generation! After the First World War had shattered the "Second Empire" of William II, this movement reached greater proportions and spread to Catholic milieus, through "Quickborn" (fountain of life) and "Neudeutschland." Here it took on a new character. It developed into a religious renaissance,

because to a Catholic youth to return to the truth and to shun falsehood meant necessarily to become "genuine" in the practice of his religion, not only in the sense of becoming a "practicing Catholic", but by returning to the authentic sources of the spiritual life, the Word of God and the Liturgy. The "Bible circle" and the "community mass" became indispensable features of the new life which the young Catholic generation tried to develop in their various groups. In the liturgy they found true community, true beauty, and true joy, all the things which youth had been seeking. Here the eternal youth of the Church manifested itself to the hearts of the young. Beauty, greatness, depth was to be found in the authentic forms of the public worship of the Church. All this came like the discovery of a new world to the young who had been bored by their catechism lessons, by the deadly monotony of pious exercises, by their being constantly on the defence in the fields of apologetics or of morals.

My first contact with the youth movement took place during the War, but the only thing I remember was a rather embarrassing episode. On one of our hikes I had been appointed cook. In those days of strictest rationing it was not easy to find something suitable to put into the big pan I carried on my back in an enormous knapsack. So we were all very pleased to have with us some oatmeal, some milk, some margarine and even some cocoa. We stopped, made a fire and started things cooking. My plan was to cook the oatmeal with the milk, then to mix it with the cocoa, and then to put the margarine into the pan to turn the mixture into cookies, over the open fire. Everything went well, until I held the pan with the margarine and the oatmeal mixture over the fire, and the flames suddenly jumped into the pan, and I got frightened and let the whole thing fall into the fire. The effect this had on the group was devastating. It was the end of my career as cook. I was advised from here on to stick to the intellectual aspect of things. This I did. After the war had come to an end I went to Goettingen to study, and there I met the other factor that was going to play such an important role in my life: Rome, and all the things the Eternal City stands for. Situated as she is in the heart of Europe, Germany is the meeting place for the three ethnical groups which make up Europe: The Slavs to the East and South East, the Germanic nations to the North, and the Latin nations to the West and the South West. Naturally this makes for complications. In the region where I lived, around Hannover and Goettingen, people generally considered the Slavic East as the home of strong and deep emotions, unpredictable and untrammled, but combined with a mysterious sense of community. Tolstoy and Dostojewski had a tremendous attraction. The Germanic North, represented principally by Shakespeare, Kierkegaard and Kant, naturally had nothing threatening, but was considered as the real thing: realistic, bold, deep, free, courageous, sincere, heroic. The West was the region of darkness, the home of the "arch-enemy", France, hopelessly corrupted, while south of the Alps the poor and lazy Italians live, completely unreliable and shockingly dishonest.

I accepted all this without questioning it, until the Prior of Maria Laach appeared on our thoroughly Germanic scene, a Benedictine monk from the west bank of the Rhine! Evidently, he was neither corrupt, nor lazy, nor dishonest. He opened our eyes to the splendor of the Roman liturgy, putting the emphasis deliberately on "Roman". Our first conversation very soon gravitated to-

ward this topic, because he had some misgivings about my North-German background, and how I would fit in with a community and an abbot deeply committed to the spreading of the spirit of the Roman liturgy as an antidote to German "subjectivism". He grew more apprehensive, when he realized my connection with the youth movement. I must confess that there was a difficulty indeed. It presented itself to me under the label of "Life and Form". All through my novitiate I was working on an "opus maximum" on this topic, without ever finishing it. Naturally, because it is too big for one human life to bring it to a satisfactory conclusion. The fact that I was wrestling with this problem came to the attention of my abbot, Ildefonse Herwegen, and he decided that the best thing for me would be to go to Rome for my studies, in the hope that the atmosphere of the Eternal City would bring more form into my life. The Prior was not enthusiastic about the prospect. He thought my North-German instincts would react unfavorably to the Roman atmosphere, as it had proved to be too much once before for one of my fellow countrymen, Martin Luther, from Eisleben in Thuringia. The decision of the Abbot prevailed over the hesitations of the Prior, and soon I was on my way to the Eternal City. I shall never forget the moment when I first saw the signs ROMA, and heard the railroad officials shouting "ROMA TERMINI"!

Here I was, the youth from Hannover, now monk of Maria Laach, in that city which, under the direction of my Abbot and my novicemaster, I had come to see as the formative power in the living tradition of Western Christianity, as a beacon of order and clarity, endowed with a special genius for universal government. But already on our drive by taxi to S. Anselmo our attention was called to the complications of the day. It was just a year after Mussolini had entered Rome. He had begun with his efforts to revive the spirit of Rome as head of an empire. Hundreds of billboards proclaimed his latest message: "It is better to live one year as a lion, than centuries as sheep!". It sounded like playing Wild Indians. The Rome we had in mind was the Rome of the Church, the Rome of Pius XI, and this Rome impressed me deeply. The anxieties of my Prior were not justified. The bad singing of the Canons in St. Peter's did not throw me off. It was submerged in the waves of enthusiasm which greeted the venerable figure of the Vicar of Christ when he was slowly carried on the sedia gestatoria over the heads of the crowds that filled the vastness of St. Peter's. Pius XI impressed one by his slow and solemn manner. The expression of his face never changed from its habitual seriousness and unmoved majesty. Once when in my youthful enthusiasm I dared to mention to him during an audience, that we were a group of newly ordained Benedictines studying at Sant' Anselmo, I met with the solid silence of a marble wall. Only later did I realize that my attitude offended against protocol. Not only the "small fry" but even Cardinals trembled when they had to appear before Pope Pius XI. The papal authority, in its very remoteness, radiated an atmosphere of unquestionable firmness and solidity. The Pope and his Curia truly appeared as the "rock", upon which the Church was built. As much as we enjoyed the feeling of security which the authority of the Holy See inspired, we could not help running up against certain difficulties which arose from this very condition. There were some stirrings in the air which did not leave us untouched. Historical research had made rapid progress in the liturgical field. Much of it was being accomplished

under Benedictine auspices, and we had first hand information about it. The results were not of a merely theoretical nature. They affected the celebration of the liturgy and its formative role in the life of the Christian. We could not help noticing that not much of the spirit of the Roman liturgy was in evidence in the Eternal City itself, neither in the parishes nor in the administration. Nor did the general rigidity of the system give much hope for a change. "Form" seemed to be stronger than "Life". In the course of the years we became more aware of the situation and we began embarking on little escapades, in the liturgical as well as in the philosophical and theological field. We began to read things which were not altogether in the line of thomistic orthodoxy. Rousselot, Maritain, Max Scheler, Eric Peterson appeared on the horizon. Here and there we celebrated Mass according to the new ideas in neighboring S. Sabina, or in the catacombs. But things like these were decidedly avant garde!

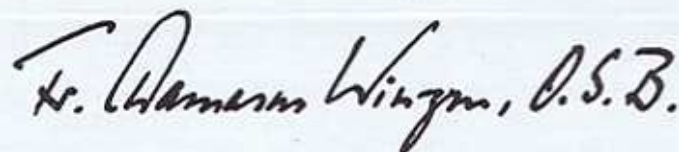
Now it happened under these general circumstances that one day toward the end of my stay at Sant' Anselmo, the Abbot Primate, Fidelis v. Stotzingen, who had been Abbot of Maria Laach, before being elected Abbot Primate, told me that there was a young Monsignor of the Secretariate of State who was anxious to learn German, and asked me to tutor him. The students at Sant' Anselmo ordinarily did not have much opportunity to get into closer contact with members of the Italian clergy. The only ones I knew well were Msgr. Giulio Belvederi, rector of the Pontifical Institute of Christian Archeology, and Msgr. Angelo Grazioli, Canon of the cathedral of Verona. Both have since been called to their heavenly reward. Both were zealous priests and enthusiastic apostles of the Liturgical Movement in Italy. Don Grazioli had visited Maria Laach several times and was a great friend of Abbot Ildefonse as well as of Prior Albert. He was very popular with the novices at Laach, because he loved to accompany us on our boat rides on the lake, and took a most active part in the fierce naval battles in which we used to engage on such occasions. With his blond hair, his blue eyes and ruddy face he did not look to us like an Italian at all, and we were not surprised to hear that he was an enthusiastic mountain climber. After the Second World War, when I visited him in Verona, he showed me a picture of himself with Monsignor Montini on a mountain tour, and who was next to him but Monsignor Montini, whom he greatly loved and admired. He lived just long enough to see his friend elevated to the See of Milan, and in his last letter to me he wrote the prophetic words: "Monsignor Montini, Arcivescovo - cardinale - Papa!". Now he rejoices in heaven over the fulfillment of his dream. It did not take me long to discover that the young Monsignor from the Secretariate of State and I, the monk of Maria Laach, had much in common. It was his love for the liturgy and for Gregorian Chant that had brought Monsignor Montini to Sant' Anselmo. Later he visited Maria Laach and other Benedictine Abbeys. As an avid reader he was well acquainted with the liturgical literature, including the works of Abbot Ildefonse, whom he held in high esteem. Moreover I soon found that we shared the same love for the young. It had caused him to turn his priestly solicitude to the University students in Rome. He worked with the "fucini", the members of the Italian Catholic Federation of University students, as their chaplain, introducing them in his homilies to the riches of the liturgy and of the Word of God. "I shall approach the altar of God, of God Who is the joy of my

youth." These words of the prayer at the foot of the altar had made an indelible impression upon me, ever since the early days of my conversion to the monastic life. They expressed the inner affinity between the best in the youth movement and Christianity. Now I saw that the same spirit filled the heart of Monsignor Montini. Devoted as he was to the young, he was not a revolutionary. With a great openness for the needs of our times, with his passionate desire to share with his students the spiritual vitality of the Church he combined loving reverence for tradition, precision of thought and tactful caution in action. In other words, he was a "Roman" in the best sense of the word, a man of order and balance. Now you can see, what this meeting meant to me. I found in the person of Monsignor Montini the answer to my problem about the relation between "Life" and "Form". He was a Roman in whom Rome was young again, full of hope for the future, and at the same time deeply rooted in the deposit of faith she had received.

How different was this Christian renaissance from the revival of pagan Rome which Mussolini's arrogance tried to bring about at the same time! The Duce acted the part of Caesar, while Christian Rome could gather only in the spirit of the glorified Saviour whose image greeted the people of God from the apses of so many of the Roman basilicas in the majesty of truth and in the lovingkindness of the Good Shepherd. "People of Sion, behold the Lord shall come to save the nations: and the Lord shall make the glory of his voice to be heard in the joy of your heart." This Introit of the Second Sunday in Advent expresses beautifully the new life which in a still hidden and scarcely perceptible way began to rise in the Church of Rome. Not the Lion but the Lamb of God was its source. It did not explode immediately in big campaigns or organizations. It began in the catacombs with a small group of priests and laymen, known as the "Cultores martyrum" (venerators of the martyrs). In my time their leader was the papal Master of ceremonies, Msgr. Respighi. We find quite often in the catacombs of Rome the representation of a woman lifting up her hands in prayer. It is an image of the deceased as living in the peace of Christ, and at the same time of the Church interceding for the deceased. This picture of the "Ecclesia Orans" (Church in prayer), as it was being called, indicated best the heart of the liturgical renewal. I mention this here, because it helps us to understand what is deepest in the heart of our Holy Father. I have spoken about the balance between Life and Form, between the "new" and the "old", the past and the future, which attracted me so much in Monsignor Montini. But it is essential to notice that this balance is not simply a matter of discipline, nor of local genius. It has its roots in prayer. It springs from the right order between contemplation and action. Underneath his eagerness to serve the souls and to understand the times there lived in the

heart of Monsignor Montini a deep love for the monastic life, for solitude, for quiet and recollection. Later, when he was made Archbishop of Milan, he found himself at the head of the most progressive, most rapidly expanding diocese of Italy. But while he strained all his resources to meet the challenge of expansion, he always kept foremost in his mind the idea of creating in the midst of all this busy life an island of worship where the heart would be lifted up and refreshed in the joy of the Lord. For the same reason he took such a lively interest in the foundation of Mount Saviour, and in Benedictine life in general. He recognized the constant effort that was being made in various ways to combine contemplation and action, the monastic and the apostolic life. When I first mentioned the idea of Mount Saviour to him, his advice was to "keep the gates open". He wanted the monastic life to radiate into the life of the faithful.

Dear Friends of Mount Saviour, we have tried in this Christmas Chronicle to share with you the special bond that we feel unites us to our Holy Father, Pope Paul VI. Let us be his faithful disciples. Let us respond to the deep aspirations of his heart. Let us be his crown and his joy. Following his example let us keep, at this time of spiritual renewal in the Church, the right balance between "Life" and "Form", between the "new" and the "old", between contemplation and action. Let us be "Romans" in the catholic sense of the term. You see, in what a marvelous way Divine Providence has guided the Church, if you look back upon the way we have travelled since those days in the twenties. Who could ever have thought that it would be Monsignor Montini who, as Paul VI, would promulgate the first decrees of the Second Vatican Council, and that these decrees would serve to bring about the renewal of that same liturgical life of the Church which he had come to love so deeply, and which was at the root of all his priestly activity. It is now up to us to give life to these decrees by entering willingly and eagerly into the spirit that lies behind them. It is the spirit of that heavenly proclamation which accompanied the Word's becoming flesh and His dwelling among us: "Glory to God in the highest, and peace on Earth to men that are God's friends."



We call the attention of our readers to the pastoral letter on Liturgical Formation issued by Pope Paul VI in Lent 1958, when he was Cardinal-Archbishop of Milan. An English translation was published in "Liturgical Arts", Volume 31, Number 4, August 1963.