

# Msgr. Frederick R. McManus: An Ecumenical Remembrance

By Horace T. Allen, Jr.

To remember the Reverend Monsignor Frederick R. McManus as an ecumenist is not perhaps the first thing that comes to one's mind. It is, however, the first thing that comes to *my* mind as an ecumenically informed Protestant (Presbyterian Church U.S.A.). To remember Fred in *this* way is immediately to remember one of his regularly made self-disclaimers: "Horace," he would insist, "I am *not* a liturgist!" It was always in a liturgical context, however, that I would meet Fred on this continent or that. It is also a happy thought, since "remembrance" - *anamnesis* - itself suggests, to a liturgical or ecumenical mind, the joy of resurrection.

Fred, of course, was discrete in all things; but I will never forget the faint smile that crossed his face, usually the very icon of *gravitas*, especially during the liturgy, as he sat with the concelebrants of the *Societas Liturgica's* 1981 Mass in Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris. The reason he smiled, though discretely, was that he had looked up to see me, a Presbyterian, vested in alb, pendant stole, and small cross, being led, by some extraordinary ecumenical mix-up, to a bishop's *cathedra* at the corner of the altar in full view of several thousand worshipers. He told me later that every time he heard my name, he would smile at the incredible humor of my having been mistakenly identified as a visiting Roman Catholic bishop by an earnest young French clerical master of ceremonies, probably himself a bishop by now! Especially as that day, that year, that place, was of all days, Saint Bartholomew's Day!

My memories of Fred are, of course, more serious than that, though no less warm and personal. I recall a splendid sunlit evening in Rome, wither Fred and I had gone in 1994 with the steering committee of the [North American] Consultation on Common Texts (CCT). We were housed at the North American College, on the lovely Janiculum Hill, and, happily, my room looked out over red-tiled roofs toward the dome of Saint Peter's Basilica. As the setting sun cast lengthening shadows, I was hard at work reviewing and refining my remarks for the next day's meeting at the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments. A quiet knock on my door, and Fred entered to school me in that elusive ecclesiastical science known as *Romanitá*. So well did he tutor me that, after said meeting, even my Catholic colleagues in CCT complimented me on my ability to speak diplomatically in a Curial way!

However diplomatic, my efforts to promote the Common Lectionary as a project worthy of Roman participation went unheard, save for one quiet Jesuit staffer of the Congregation, who told us he was so happy to learn of the Protestant use of the Roman Lectionary, as edited by CCT, because, he quietly confided, "My mother was a Protestant." Again, Fred smiled. This Vatican sojourn marked our final time together in

Rome but, thankfully, it was by no means our last time together, since Fred would return, in his retirement, to his home Archdiocese of Boston, whose See city has been this Philadelphian Presbyterian's adopted home since just after I first met Fred McManus.

That first meeting took place in 1970, when I became the Presbyterian delegate to the Consultation on Church Union (COCU) and to CCT, a mission which permitted me to take part in the revision of *Prayers We Have in Common*, published in 1974, and providing the Roman Catholic Church, the Episcopal, Lutheran, Presbyterian and Methodist Churches, and the United Church of Christ - to name only some of the participating Churches - with shared texts for the *Gloria*, *Credo*, *Sanctus* and *Agnus Dei* of the Ordinary of the Mass, the Lord's Prayer, and the Daily Office Canticles of Zechariah (the *Benedictus*), of the Virgin Mary (the *Magnificat*), and of Simeon (the *Nunc Dimittis*). To this corpus of shared prayer were added, during the years Fred and I worked together, the "Preface Dialogue" at the beginning of the Eucharistic Prayer and, eventually, the great ecumenical *anamnesis* (how pleasant to recall *that* "remembrance" in *this* remembrance): "Christ has died; Christ is risen; Christ will come again."

As many readers will know, the publication of *Liturgiam Authenticam* in 2001 marked the beginning of the end of that ecumenical sharing (of which more later); and the sealing of that end has occurred, ironically, this very day, as the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops have voted their final approval of revised, specifically Roman Catholic (and, therefore, specifically not "in common") versions of those prayers, and have done so just as I am putting this ecumenical remembrance of Fred into its final form.

How different the ecumenical world appeared as Fred and I completed the first of many projects we would work on together. Rereading the conclusion of my report to my own Church's authorities brings sweet, or more accurately, bittersweet remembrance of so many shared hopes that, like those prayers, Fred and I had in common. It was August of 1974 when I wrote: "I can only confess that for all the difficulties of developing, receiving and introducing contemporary texts, the unanimity with which the whole Church is working at this process is a convincing sign that liturgically, as in so many other ways, the Holy Spirit is, as of old, hard at work, re-forming the Church of God." That same year, the two of us attended the final meeting of the International Commission on English Texts (ICET), which was succeeded in 1985 with the formation, in Boston, of the English Language Liturgical Consultation (ELLC).

None of these associations would have been what they were, or would have succeeded in accomplishing all that they did, had it not been for Fred McManus, who nevertheless, remember, often reminded me, "I am *not* a liturgist!" Indeed, the academic title by which he identified himself was "canonist," and he was a canonist of international and bi-ritual renown, recognized the world over for his scholarly contributions in both the

Latin and Eastern Catholic Churches. When he received his doctorate in canon law from The Catholic University of America in 1954, it was on the strength of his still remarkable dissertation, "The Congregation of Sacred Rites." During the Second Vatican Council, in October, 1963, Fred and several colleagues met at the well-known coffee bar, "Bar Jonah," in the north transept of Saint Peter's Basilica. They agreed on the need to establish an international committee to produce quality translations of the official liturgical texts for the whole English-speaking world. This became the International Committee (later Commission) on English in the Liturgy (ICEL), with its Secretariat in Washington, D.C.

The following year, Fred met with some Protestant scholars of liturgy at the Lutheran Churches' regular meeting at Valpraiso Univeristy, Valpraiso, Indiana. They included: Father Massey Shepard of the Episcopal Church, USA; Pastor Hans Böeringer, Lutheran Church, Missouri Synod; and Dr. F. Scott Brenner, United Presbyterian Church, USA. Out of that meeting, there developed the Consultation on Common Texts of North America. It was Fred's ecumenical, liturgical, and - dare I add - canonical inspiration to put these two groups in correspondence with each other, for the primary purpose of drafting mutually acceptable translations of the basic liturgical texts of the Western Church, the compilation published in 1970 as *Prayers We Have in Common*, the 1974 revision of which, as already noted, Fred and I worked on together. Subsequent work of the Consultation addressed the issue of weekly and daily lectionaries.

Thus our collaboration in ecumenical-liturgical matters brought us together frequently over a span of some twenty-five years. Throughout that time, I marveled at, and now fondly remember, Fred's irenic, yet authoritative speech: he knew whereof he spoke. One vivid memory of this was Fred's instant grasp of and most skillful handling (is manipulation too strong a word?) of the age-old rivalry (is conflict too strong a word?) between the Church of Scotland and the Church of England.

In 1983, we were meeting at a monastery in Mödling, near Vienna. Fred and I set as our goal the acceptance by the Church of England of Common Lectionary, the ecumenical adaptation of the Roman Catholic three-year Sunday Lectionary, a lectionary to which, until that point, the Church of England had not been very receptive, being already committed to a lectionary prepared, on entirely different principles, by their own Joint Liturgical Group of England. The Church of England's participation in the Common Lectionary project was crucial, if there was to be any hope of Rome's becoming interested in the project, since, as seen most recently in Benedict XVI's proposal to establish Ordinariates, Rome sees Canterbury as the "bridge across the Tiber" for the other ecclesial communities of the Reformation.

How, then, to win over the Church of England? I suggested to Fred that if the Scottish Kirk found out that the English Church was against Common Lectionary, the Scottish Church would undoubtedly - and quickly - be for it! "Well," Fred asked, "how do we get

Scotland involved?" I answered, "Why, you invite whoever it is that goes by the unlikely title, 'Convener of the Commission on Public Worship and Aids to Devotion,' of course!" "Of course," Fred said; and he smiled.

He smiled again, this time more broadly, when said Convener, the Reverend Colin Williamson, arrived at the monastery, in the same kind of wide collar which was Fred's signature clerical attire. With myself chairing - and Fred smiling - there then came a moment in the meeting when our Treasurer, who just happened to be the Church of England delegate, the Reverend Canon Donald Gray, Residentiary Canon of Westminster Abbey and Chaplain to Her Majesty the Queen, had to leave the room momentarily to settle accounts with the monastery's financial director.

It was at that precise point of the Anglican delegate's absence, that Fred broached the subject to Mr. Williamson. "The lectionary in *The Book of Common Order* is little used," Williamson noted, "but the Kirk is somewhat used to the idea of a Lectionary from the work of the Church of England's Joint Liturgical Group." "Yes," Fred said, "but would there be any interest in *our* three-year Common Lectionary," and he put our scheme into action by adding, "even though the Church of England does *not* seem very interested in joining us?" Williamson reacted precisely as Fred and I had hoped and planned he would: "The Kirk would always be interested in furthering an ecumenical endeavor," Mr Williamson replied, "no matter what the whims of the other Established Church may be." Now, indeed, Fred smiled! At which point Canon Gray returned; and, in short order, the Church of England was likewise on board with Common Lectionary!

"Horace," Fred exclaimed when we were alone, "you must be Irish! What a politician!" More smiling. Oddly, we never saw or heard from Mr. Williamson again! But the work of Common Lectionary forged ahead. *Societas Liturgica* met in Boston in 1985, and the Revised Common Lectionary was published in 1991, then presented, as already noted, to the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments in Rome, 1994.

Yes, Fred knew whereof he spoke. Moreover, he knew *with* whom he was speaking: Christian brothers and sisters, throughout the North American continent, and from time to time, in Europe as well. He was, in that context and in the positive sense of the word, an accomplished and spirited politician. Perhaps his relationship to canon law, and through it to the other Churches' governance and worship, made him a natural interpreter.

Always a delight to be with at meals, meetings and, I would imagine, at tennis! Tennis, in fact, was yet another form of ecumenism for him. None of us ever met him on the court and could only speculate as to how fascinating he must have been at such times. Just as I always found a place, in the course of my travels, to buy *The New York Times* and, on that quest, met countless "separated brethren," so Fred, in the course of his

travels, often found a way to attend professional tennis matches, and met and enriched how many non-liturgical and doubtless extra-canonical souls who would otherwise never have encountered so dedicated and natural a priest. Yet it was precisely this astonishing match-up of politics and sport that endeared him to everyone he met. At the same time, his encyclopedic knowledge of his own Church's *ordo*, and his natural ability to communicate its theology and spirituality comprehensively yet concisely, in a manner both erudite and accessible, demanded the attention of anyone fortunate enough to work with him.

After his retirement, he returned to his native and beloved Boston, first to live on the North Shore and part time at Regina Cleri, the Archdiocesan residence for senior priests - to be near his brother priests and helpful to them and to parishes needing a Sunday supply priest - and later full time at Regina Cleri which is also close by Massachusetts General Hospital, a God-send as Fred's health began to decline. Surely a high point of those golden years was the publication of Pope John Paul II's encyclical letter *Ut Unum Sint, That All May Be One*, whose very title articulated not only Jesus' farewell bequest to his disciples and high priestly prayer for them, but what well might have been Fred's episcopal motto had the Holy Spirit done a better job inspiring those who choose the Church's bishops: There, above the signature of the Successor of Saint Peter himself, was praise for a project that owed no small amount of its inspiration to the work of Fred McManus. The Pope wrote:

Significant progress in ecumenical cooperation has also been made in another area, that of the Word of God. I am thinking above all of the importance for the different language groups of ecumenical translations of the Bible. Following the promulgation by the Second Vatican Council of the Constitution *Dei Verbum*, the Catholic Church could not fail to welcome this development. These translations, prepared by experts, generally offer a solid basis for the prayer and pastoral activity of all Christ's followers. Anyone who recalls how heavily debates about Scripture influenced divisions, especially in the West, can appreciate the significant step forward which these common translations represent (*Ut Unum Sint*, 44).

Nor, it seemed, was the Pope unaware of our work regarding Revised Common Lectionary, for in the same paragraph in which he praised convergence regarding frequency of the Lord's Supper, Pope John Paul mentioned specifically, though not by name, the principle behind Revised Common Lectionary:

Corresponding to the liturgical renewal carried out by the Catholic Church, certain other Ecclesial Communities have made efforts to renew their worship. Some, on the basis of a recommendation expressed at the ecumenical level, have abandoned the custom of celebrating their liturgy of the Lord's Supper only infrequently and have opted for a celebration each Sunday. Again, when the

cycles of liturgical readings used by the various Christian Communities in the West are compared, they appear to be essentially the same (*Ut Unum Sint*, 45).

It was in the midst of those joyful days that one of my last and fondest remembrances of being at table with Fred occurred. There was a national liturgical gathering in Boston and a number of mutual friends were in town. Everyone wanted to take Fred to dinner - a far greater number of eager guests than there were days on which to dine - and so "a great supper" was planned, and I suggested one of Boston's premier "vintage" restaurants - and a popular clerical venue, I might add - *Anthony's Pier 4* on Boston's renowned waterfront. This classic establishment, whose owner, Anthony Athanas, was patriarch of one of Boston's most prominent Greek families, features walls that are a veritable *iconostasis* of celebrities, including Boston's clerical celebrities, most prominent among them the late Richard Cardinal Cushing whose gatherings at Anthony's are still the stuff of legend - and about whom Fred had many wonderful anecdotes to share.

Knowing that a large table at Anthony's on a Saturday night with short notice was as unlikely a find as "the pearl of great price," I decided to be creative. Our party arrived - at least a dozen strong - and, just as we had anticipated, the multitude of those waiting for a table suggested that our chances of eating before closing time were slim indeed. Only one person among us was dressed in clerics: and, as always, Fred's crisp black suit was crowned with that wide Roman collar. "Put our names in right away," one of our party pleaded, "but we're going to be waiting forever!"

Not quite! For someone on the restaurant's staff had spied Fred's Roman collar and had hurried into the kitchen, from which, momentarily, a beaming Mr. Anthony Athanas himself emerged. He came right over to our gathering, everyone but me stunned by this personal attention on the part of no less an authority than the restaurant's owner. "And this must be the party from His Eminence, the Cardinal's Residence," Mr. Athanas exclaimed. Then, spying Fred's collar, "And you must be Monsignor McManus of the Cardinal's staff! Come right this way, Monsignor! You and your guests! Your table is ready! Monsignor, do give His Eminence my best regards and the greetings of all of us here at Anthony's. Enjoy your meal!" After Fred thanked Mr. Athanas and assured him that his best wishes would be conveyed to the Cardinal (whom Fred was not likely to see anytime soon, by the way!), he turned to me and shook his head at me with mock indignation, "Horace, you are incorrigible!" And he smiled!

But not long after that enjoyable evening together, darker days dawned both for Fred's health and for the future of what had been, for a quarter century or more, our life's common work and our ministry's shared endeavor. For "there arose a king over Egypt who knew not Joseph" (Exodus 1:8), or more precisely, a Prefect at the Congregation for Divine Worship in Rome "who knew not" Fred, or if he did, cared nothing about his life's work and mine. Fred had done his best to warn his colleagues in CCT that there was

ecclesiastical trouble ahead, disguising his own trepidation and dismay with curious references to an “*editio tertia*” of the *Missale Romanum*. Those of us who had known Fred a long time, and had never seen him so uncharacteristically gloomy, “had ears to hear” and heard the combination of fear and sadness in his heretofore unfailingly upbeat voice. Thus, we were not wholly taken by surprise by the publication in 2001 of *Liturgiam Authenticam* and those of its directives that were quite clearly directed at us! For instance, gone was Pope John Paul II’s praise, barely six years earlier, for the production of inter-church translations of scripture:

With due regard for the requirements of sound exegesis, all care is to be taken to ensure that the words of the biblical passages commonly used in catechesis and in popular devotional prayers be maintained. On the other hand, great caution is to be taken to avoid a wording or style that the Catholic faithful would confuse with the manner of speech of non-Catholic ecclesial communities or of other religions, so that such a factor will not cause them confusion or discomfort (*Liturgiam Authenticam*, 40).

And as for our collaboration, marked not only by good will but by mutual respect over a quarter century, the Vatican instruction seemed not to be impressed either by the work we had done or by those of us who, humble though we were, had nonetheless given so much of our lives to that work:

A similar agreement is desirable also with the particular non-Catholic Eastern Churches or with the authorities of the Protestant ecclesial communities, provided that it is not a question of a liturgical text pertaining to doctrinal matters still in dispute, and provided also that the Churches or ecclesial communities involved have a sufficient number of adherents and that those consulted are truly capable of functioning as representatives of the same ecclesial communities. In order completely to avoid the danger of scandal or of confusion among the Christian faithful, the Catholic Church must retain full liberty of action in such agreements, even in civil law (*Liturgiam Authenticam*, 91).

This was not the way Fred thought of or spoke about of his fellow Christian laborers in the fields of liturgy or ecumenism. This time, there were no smiles.

At the time of Fred’s death, he was little “remembered” by his own Archdiocese. His longtime collaborator at ICEL’s Washington, DC Secretariat, Dr. John Page, did his valiant best to right that wrong, much to the annoyance of the stony-faced auxiliary bishop deputed to substitute for the archepiscopal (not yet cardinalatial) absence. But although the Archbishop could not rearrange his schedule to honor by his presence one of the most widely influential of his priests, there was present, by cablegram, a Vatican official who was neither a canonist nor a liturgist, but a Vatican ecumenist, in fact, the

President of the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity, Walter Cardinal Kasper, who praised Monsignor Frederick R. McManus, priest of the Archdiocese of Boston, for his signal work in helping to establish that Council and promote its work.

Had my health permitted me to attend those funeral rites in Fred's home parish of Saint Joseph's in Lynn, Massachusetts, I would have risked the auxiliary bishop's wrath by rising to declare that the phrase "a gentleman and a scholar" must surely have been coined for my ecumenical collaborator, ministerial friend, and cherished brother in Christ, Fred McManus. And I trust that, had the auxiliary bishop glared down at me in pontifical high dudgeon, Fred would have shaken his head in mock dismay and reproved me with one last, "Horace, you are incorrigible!" But Fred would also have smiled! May he smile now for all eternity as he beholds face to face the God he knew, loved and served so well.

An epitaph comes to mind, a scriptural one that articulates all the best qualities of Fred the gentleman, the scholar, the liturgist, the ecumenist, the canonist, the priest, the friend, the brother, the man. In deference to *Liturgiam Authenticam*, I shall give it first in the Vatican's mother-tongue, that Latin in which Fred McManus, great champion of the use of the vernacular in liturgical celebration, was nonetheless fluent:

*Os iusti meditabitur sapientiam,  
et lingua eius loquetur iudicium.  
Lex Dei eius in corde ipsius:  
et non supplantabuntur gressus eius.*

And now because I am indeed, as Fred declared, incorrigible and would like to have my incorrigibility make Fred smile, I will present that epitaph in a translation that *Liturgiam Authenticam* would surely judge to be very non-literal, the literary translation of a man not unlike Fred in wit and wisdom, the late Monsignor Ronald Knox:

Right reason is on the good man's lips,  
well-weighed are all his counsels.  
His steps never falter,  
because the law of God rules in his heart. (Psalm 36/37:30-31)

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