

THE KINGDOM OF GOD: EVER ANCIENT EVER NEW:  
REFLECTIONS UPON THE VATICAN II COUNCIL  
PART III: SACRED LITURGY, PART I: JOINING HEAVEN AND EARTH

I. In the lead-up to the Vatican II Council, there was an increasing emphasis on liturgical reform in the Church.

- A. The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were a time of liturgical reform, unification and renewal in the liturgy, partially in response to the Protestant Reformation. There was also an increase in church building, music and art, combined with struggles with secular rulers who sometimes tried to take over the liturgy.
  1. The sixteenth century Council of Trent was a response to the Protestant Reformation and other calls for reforms. The council both explained the faith and made many changes that many people were understandably calling for. One central change that the Council promoted was the standardization of the liturgy, making the Roman rite the controlling one, rather than have many different varieties that changed from one country or area to another. Some other important reforms included forbidding the demand of offerings for the celebration of the Mass (although freewill offerings could be accepted); forbidding the superstitious near worship of relics and the like; forbidding “wandering” or scandalous priests to celebrate the Mass; prohibiting secular music in churches; and encouraging people to attend their own parish church for Masses. The Council considered allowing much of the Mass and other liturgies to be celebrated in the vernacular, as opposed to Latin. But the bishops decided that there with so much change going on, and with so many translation disputes over the Bible, it was not a good time to do so.
  2. In Quo Primum Tempore (1570), St. Pope Pius V made the Roman rite, the standard for all diocesan churches in the Latin Catholic Church (as distinguished from Eastern Catholic Churches); religious orders were allowed to keep their own form of the liturgy. These instruction for the liturgies, that is for the sacraments, the Divine Office (prayers clergy and religious brothers and sisters are required to pray each day), Eucharistic Adoration, burials, and the like, continued with few changes until the Vatican II Council. These instructions (rubrics) did not begin with the Council of Trent; and in fact many portions of them go back to the earliest centuries of the Church. Nevertheless, they have come be known as the Tridentine rite to distinguish them from the post-Vatican II form of the liturgy.
  3. The Council also called for the establishment of seminaries, which would train all future priests so that they would know the faith and be able to celebrate the Mass and other liturgies properly.
  4. At about the same time, the Baroque period of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries emphasized a notion of glory and splendor at Mass, with polyphony music, very elaborate vestments, fine artwork and architecture, and the like.

5. The monarchs and nobles of Europe, whose power was rising, were often very involved in the liturgy. On the one hand, they supported the building of churches, the composition of music, and support for schools and missionary activities. On the other hand, they often wanted to control the liturgy, with such things as insisting on places of great prominence and giving the clergy sermons to preach.
- B. In the so-called Enlightenment era of the eighteenth century, there were many efforts at simplification and making the liturgy more understandable to the people. Likewise, the missionaries of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries tried to accommodate local customs. The Vatican allowed some accommodations, such as more local vestments and longer preaching, but said that other accommodations, such as using rice bread, were forbidden.
  - C. In the nineteenth century, there was a great rise in devotions, and especially Marian devotions, including the appearances at Lourdes and Rue de Bac, Paris and the Dogma of the Immaculate Conception. In addition, the Benedictines, especially in Solemnes, France, and in Beuron and Maria Laach, Germany, promoted a more reverent, ancient liturgy to reflect the timelessness of the Church in the midst of a changing world. There was also a great effort to explain the liturgy to the people more, especially as literacy was increasing
  - D. As the twentieth century dawned, there was a great deal of interest in a liturgical renewal that would get the people more involved. For example, Dom Lambert Beauduin (1873-1960), a monk of the Benedictine monastery in Mont Cesar in Belgium, called for more active participation of the faithful at Mass, especially in his 1914 book Liturgy in the Life of the Church. Dom Odo Casel (1886-1948), abbot of the Benedictine monastery at Maria Laach in Germany emphasized the fact that the Mass is a timeless mystery that brings about a current transformation. The implication is that people thus must respect the unity and mystery of the Mass, but also actively make it their own. In 1918, Fr. Romano Guardini (1885-1968), a priest of the diocese of Mainz, Germany wrote The Spirit of the Liturgy, in which he emphasized the delightfulness of liturgy, pointing out that, like all of the most joyful things, it is not meant to be “practical,” but rather enriching of the spirit.
  - E. The Popes authorized reforms and encouraged a renewal of participation in the Mass and a greater understanding of it.
    - a. Thus, in 1903, Pope St. Pius X issued the moto proprio Tre Le Sollecitudini, which called for a renewal of Church music and encouraged the active participation of the faithful, especially in that context. He encouraged frequent Communion in the 1905 decree Sacra Tridentina Synodus. And in 1910, he both published Quam Singulari, which lowered the age of First Communion to 7 and allowed the “dialogue Mass,” which involved more participation by the faithful.
    - b. In Mediator Dei (1947), Pope Pius XII promoted a liturgical renewal and the active participation of the faithful in liturgies, particularly the Mass. In that encyclical, he also insisted on a more reverent form of the Mass, avoiding either

an aura of routineness or experimentation not specifically authorized by the Church. In the 1950s, he restored the Easter Vigil to her previous prominence and reduced the Eucharistic fast to three hours to allow more frequent reception of Communion, as well as lessen the burdens on priests.

- F. There were also calls for the simplification of the liturgy as the Council approached. The Vatican I Council had called for such efforts, but its deliberations were cut short due to the invading Italian army. St. Pope Pius X renewed the idea of simplification in his 1911 instruction *Divino Afflatu*. Likewise, in 1955, Pope Pius XII called for a simplification of both the Mass and the Divine Office, and created a committee to propose the changes. In July, 1960, Pope John XXIII promulgated *Rubricarum Instructum*, which enacted a simplification of the rubrics, or instructions, for the Mass and the Divine Office. The Liturgical Preparatory Commission of the Vatican II Council would build upon these reforms.

II. There was a broad debate at the Vatican II Council about the Constitution on the Liturgy, which was consistently called Sacrosanctum Concilium. However, a consensus quickly developed, and the document became the first one passed by the Council.

A. In June, 1960, Pope John XXIII and the Curia finalized the structure of the Preparatory Commission on the Liturgy, with Cardinal Gaetano Cicognani, the Vatican Prefect of the Congregation on Rites as the president of the commission, and Father Annibale Bugnini, who would later succeed him, as the secretary. The overall proposals of that Commission were mostly incorporated in the final document Sacrosanctum Concilium, although the final document did have a greater emphasis on theology.

B. In January, 1962, the Preparatory Commission completed its draft, which had the title Sacrosanctum Concilium. Although he had some hesitations, the dying Cardinal Gaetano Cicognani signed it and it became the schemata for consideration by the Council. After Cardinal Cicognani's death, Cardinal Arcadio Larroana became Prefect of the Congregation on Rites and eventually president of both the Preparatory Commissions and the Conciliar Commission on Liturgy, with Fr. Ferdinando Antonelli as the secretary.

C. Fr. Antonelli presented the document to the Council and, in a short speech, made two main points. First, he emphasized that, as the two previous councils (Trent and Vatican I) had called for liturgical reform, while maintaining the ancient traditions of the Church, so now the Commission, in union with the consensus among liturgical experts, recommended the same. Second, he said that, consistent with the liturgical renewals of the twentieth century, there was a desire to bring the laity from being "mute spectators" at the liturgy into full participation.

D. There was extensive debate about the text, including many comments regarding the use of the vernacular language in the liturgy. Other topics that received a substantial amount of debate were whether to allow concelebration of the Mass by more than one priest, Communion under both species (bread and wine) for the laity, and local adaptations to the liturgy, and whether to amend the rules on Friday abstinence. Cardinal Alfredo Ottaviani, prefect of the Holy Office, led the presentations of those who thought

that the proposed changes were going too far. However, the overall comments, expressed in 328 speeches and 297 written comments, tended to be favorable to the document. And so, on November 14, 1962, the Council fathers voted 2162-47 to approve the basic document, with the revisions debated at the Council to be used for amendments of it.

E. During the next session, which began on September 30, 1963, the revised Sacrosanctum Concilium was brought before the Council for debate and then a vote. On December 4, it was approved by a vote of 2147-4, and thus became the first document promulgated by the Vatican II Council.

F. Sacrosanctum Concilium restated and elaborated the theology of the Mass and other liturgies, and called for certain changes in how the Mass and other liturgies are celebrated, while respecting the ancient forms. The introduction describes the overall goals of the Council and how liturgical reform fits into them. Chapter I outlines the overall theology of liturgy and the principles of the reform. The next six chapters address: (1) the Mass; (2) the other sacraments and sacramentals; (3) the Divine Office, prayers that clerics and religious pray every day; (4) the liturgical calendar; (5) church music; and (6) sacred art and furnishings. Each chapter begins by describing the theology of its subject and then enunciating norms for a careful reform that also upholds tradition.

III. The introduction of the Constitution describes the purposes of the Council and how the liturgical reform will help accomplish them.

A. The document begins with describing the goals, not just of the liturgical reform, but of the entire Council. These goals are: (1) to increase the vigor of Christian lives of faith; (2) to adapt to modern needs institutions that can be changed; (3) to encourage the unity of Christians; and (4) to call all of humanity to the Church. The Council realized that this document would set the precedent for all the others. The first two goals are focus on change within the Church, with the second two goals focusing on outreach to other Christians and to the world.

B. The introduction then emphasizes that the liturgy, and especially the Mass, accomplishes these goals.

1. Section 2 describes the balance that the liturgy strikes to make the Christian life active in the world, but pointed to a greater realm. It describes some paradoxes of the Church, and by extensions the liturgy, that accomplish this goal, such as the fact that the Church and the liturgy are both divine and human, both visible and invisible, both present in the world and focused on a greater world, both active and contemplative

2. Sections 3 and 4 say that the practical instructions are meant to apply to the Latin rites of the Church, but also that the 22 Eastern rites are equal in dignity and should be maintained in fullness. Practically speaking, the liturgical renewal of the Latin rite also led to the renewal of other rites as well.

IV. Chapter I then outlines the overall principles of the liturgical renewal.

A. Part I provides a rich theology of the liturgy, and how it brings about the work of God in humanity.

1. Section 5 begins this part by recalling the centerpiece of the Gospel message, namely that God wishes for all people to be saved through Jesus Christ, who fulfilled the promises of the Old Testament, showed God's compassion and wisdom in His life, and finally saved us through His death, resurrection and Ascension.
2. Section 6 then speaks about how Jesus created the Church and sent His disciples into the world so that, throughout all time, His Church would bring this saving message to people, both in preaching and in the liturgy. There is a particular focus here on Baptism and the Eucharist as liturgical ways in which the grace of God is present. The section also emphasizes the importance of preaching and common prayer.
3. Section 7 then describes how the liturgy is "rightly seen as an exercise of the priestly office of Jesus Christ" through His mystical body, the Church. In the liturgy, Jesus Christ becomes present to His people through the minister, through the Scriptures, and in the unified prayer of the people. The most powerful presence of Jesus is in the Eucharist, but all of the actions of the liturgy bring Him to us. The liturgy is thus the most powerful work of the Church.
  - The section does not expressly make this point, but one reason why the Church gives specific instructions about how each liturgy is to be performed is that these prayers are not only the prayers of an individual or a group, but of the whole Church led by Jesus Christ.
4. Section 8 then describes in eloquent terms how it is that the liturgy joins us with the angels and saints who are celebrating the liturgy in heaven and thus is a first promise of the day when we will fully join their company.
5. Lest people think that the Council is downplaying other works of the Church, section 9 describes preaching the word, both to Catholics and non-Catholics, as essential so that people come to the faith and live it out in practice.
6. Sections 10 and 11 then comes back to the liturgy. Section 10 describes the liturgy as both the source of the Church's power and the summit of her action. For in the liturgy, her covenant with the Almighty God is renewed and made present. Section 11 calls for pastors "ensure that the faithful take part [in the liturgy] fully aware of what they are doing, actively engaged in the rite and enriched by it."
7. Although it is not the focus of the document, sections 12 and 13 deal with devotions and other private prayers that are not liturgies. It encourages the use of private devotions so that the effects of this covenant will be carried on

into each person's life, provided that they "conform to the laws and norms of the Church." It calls for bishops to authorize and promote devotions for their specific areas and connect them to the liturgies.

- The document does not discuss individual devotions, but some devotions, such as the Rosary, the Divine Mercy chaplet, stations of the Cross or novenas, have specific ways of praying them. Other devotions, such as lectio divina (prayerful reading of the Scriptures or other works) and devotional concerts, are more flexible. Even when there are such rules or traditions, there can be informal adaptations because these devotions are additions to the liturgy and thus more under the control of those participating in them.

B. Part II picks up on the theme of full and active participation enunciated in section 11. It describes the importance of such complete participation by both the clergy and the laity and gives instructions on how the Church can achieve this goal.

1. Section 14 points out that the faithful have both the right and the duty to take a "full, conscious and active part in the liturgy" so that they can become "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a redeemed people" as the First Letter of Peter says. See 1 Peter 2:9. But it points out that the faithful can hardly be expected to be fully engaged in the liturgy unless the clergy first engage it in an understanding, reverent way. There is a subtle criticism of the sometimes rote or lax ways in which clergy could be celebrating the liturgies.
2. Thus, sections 15 – 17 describe how seminaries should make liturgical studies central to the curriculum. Such studies should cover, not just the way in which priests should celebrate liturgies, but also their historical and theological background to the liturgies and interactions with other fields, such as Scripture, history, and spirituality. There is an implication that liturgical training had not been sufficient up to this point; in particular, seminarians were learning how to perform the liturgy, but often did not understand the background or spirit of it.
3. Sections 18 and 19 then call for the continuing education of both clergy and laity in the liturgy. Section 20 allows for the transmission of the liturgy by radio and television but cautions that it must "be done with delicacy and dignity" under the supervision of the local bishop.

C. Part III builds upon this theology and statement of the goals of the Council as it describes the norms that the Council will use to guide the specific changes that it will call for. It begins by pointing out that there are both changeable and unchangeable aspects of every liturgy and that people should expect the changeable elements to be updated so to accommodate changing circumstances. There are then six subparts, with the first one giving the overall norms and the other five describing the application to specific issues.

1. Subpart A focuses on the overall way that the reforms will take place.
  - a. Section 22 points out that the reforms are generally made by the whole Church together, centered on the Vatican. To some degree local

authorities can legitimately alter the changeable elements, but no one else should presume to do so on their own.

- b. Section 23 says that any proposed reforms should be based upon careful research and lessons from experience. Reforms should flow from an organic development of the current liturgy; and there should not be unnecessary instability or variances between regions.
  - c. Section 24 focuses on the importance of Sacred Scripture in the liturgy. There was great effort at the Council to have a broader range of Scripture at Masses and other liturgies.
  - d. Section 25 calls for a revision of the liturgical books by experts “as soon as possible.” There has been some criticism that the revisions were made so quickly that the clergy and people did not understand what was really happening.
2. Subpart B describes how the entire people of God should be involved and benefit from the Mass, although in different ways.
- a. Section 26 emphasizes that liturgical services are celebrations of the whole Church, not private functions. But they do involve specific people in their own ways.
  - b. Section 27 describes how it is that the liturgy should generally be celebrated publicly, rather than in a private or quasi-private way. There is an effort to downplay the notion of “private Masses” and other liturgies only on one’s own. It should be noted, however, that a privately celebrated liturgy is better than none.
  - c. Section 28 states what should be an obvious principle, namely, that people should perform the roles assigned to them, and not take on additional roles. There should not be a confusing of roles, as sometimes happens when either the priest would take over everything, or would assign his roles (e.g., preaching) to others.
  - d. Section 29 emphasizes the fact that lay roles (e.g., lectors, singers) are very important and should be performed by people who are reverent and well trained.
  - e. Sections 30 and 31 describe how the congregation should be more involved by such means as taking part in the responses and hymns.
  - f. Section 32 discourages preferences paid to some members of the congregation over others, as could occur with such things as special reserved seating or the focus on some who are richer or more prominent than others

3. Subpart C outlines ways in which the Council intended to increase the pastoral and instructional value of the Mass and other liturgies.
  - a. Section 33 sets forth the overall principles that: (1) the liturgy should help with the instruction and learning of the faithful; and (2) the liturgy should raise the people's minds to heaven to enhance their worship and enable them more to receive the grace of God.
  - b. Section 34 says that, in order to make the liturgy more instructive and conducive to worship, the liturgy should reflect a "noble simplicity."
  - c. Section 35 then gives some additional principles that will help bring out the value of liturgies more, namely: (1) a broader scope of Scriptural readings; (2) more emphasis on homilies; (3) more instruction in the liturgy generally; and (4) more "sacred celebration[s] of the word of God," especially in places where priests are not easily available.
  - d. Section 36 then calls for both the preservation of the Latin language in the liturgy and the increased use of vernacular languages when it is helpful to promote full and active participation. Translations and norms for this use of the vernacular would be handed on by the local bishops conferences, in accordance with guidance by the Vatican.
4. Subpart D describes the adaptations that specific nations and regions can be permitted to make to inculturate the liturgy in their regions better. Section 23 had cautioned against having too many variations from one place to another. But here there is a recognition that the Church can have "legitimate variations and adaptations to different groups, regions and peoples, especially in the mission countries." Such permissions for variations include allowing the special Mass for July 4 in the United States, moving the memorial of St. Elizabeth of Portugal's day from July 4 to 5, and allowing blue vestments for Mary in Spain. There used to be an indult for the United States to allow laity to purify the precious vessels, but it expired in 2009.
5. Subpart E emphasizes the role of the bishop and the parish in liturgical life. Section 41 focuses on the local bishop's role as "the high priest of his flock" and the importance of united the entire diocese in liturgies including those at the cathedral. Section 42 calls for parishes to develop their communities through the liturgies, especially the Sunday Mass.
6. Subpart F describes enthusiasm about the liturgy as a sign of the work of Providence in the Church and calls for liturgical commissions of areas and specific diocese to promote more understanding and participation in the liturgical life of the Church. It also encourages either those commissions or others to promote developments in sacred music and art.