

THE KINGDOM OF GOD: EVER ANCIENT EVER NEW:  
REFLECTIONS UPON THE VATICAN II COUNCIL  
PRESENTATION IV: SACRED LITURGY, PART II: AN OUTLINE OF THE REFORMS

- I. Chapters 2 through 7 of Sacrosanctum Concilium apply the principles described in chapter 1 to liturgies, devotions and the supporting aspects of church music, art and architecture.
- A. Chapters 2 and 3 cover the Mass, the Eucharist and then all of the sacraments, along with sacramentals. Chapter 4 covers the Liturgy of the Hours and the church calendar. Chapters 6 and 7 then discuss how music, art and the architecture of churches should support these liturgies.
  - B. Each chapter begins with a theological discussion on the subject and then proceeds to describe in general the reforms that were to take place
- II. Chapter 2 describes the glory of the Eucharist and the Mass and then outlines principles of reforming the Mass to the active, aware and devout participation of the laity.
- A. The chapter begins with a brief theology of the Mass. In particular, in section 47 outlines in quick order the teaching that the Jesus entrusted the Mass (here called “the Eucharistic sacrifice”) to the Church so that the faithful would for all time have access to His sacrifice on Calvary, His risen presence with us, a perpetual bond of charity and a first promise of eternal glory.
  - B. Sections 48 – 50 then outline the overall principles of the reform,
    - 1. Section 48 outlines the overall principle that the laity should be active and aware participants in the Mass, with a full understanding of this liturgy. Section 49 states that the purpose of the proposed reforms is to assist in this full participation, especially on Sundays and holy days of obligation.
    - 2. Section 50 then presents the overall goal of both simplifying the liturgy by eliminating duplicative practices (e.g., the multiple signs of the cross required in the traditional form) and restoring parts of the Mass that had been lost through the years (e.g., the prayers of the faithful.)
  - C. The chapter then outlines specific ways of accomplishing this end.
    - 1. Section 51 says that the Mass should include the full “treasures of the scriptures,” by for example including readings from the complete course of the Bible over a set number of years. (Today the lectionary is set up to reflect a three year cycle for Sundays and a two year cycle for weekdays.)
    - 2. Sections 52 and 53 call for a greater emphasis on the homily and a restoration of the prayers of the faithful after the homily. Both are particularly called for on Sundays and holy days of obligation
    - 3. Section 54 says that there can be a “suitable place for the vernacular language in the Mass,” especially in the readings and common prayers of the faithful. Increased use of the vernacular may be appropriate in other parts of the Mass that involve the laity, and vernacular could be more extensively if that would be helpful. The section refers back to earlier provisions of the Constitution

that call for translations and accommodations to localities to be drafted by the local bishops' conferences and then approved by the Vatican. The section also says that the laity should be able to say or sing in Latin the standard Mass parts that are common to every Mass.

4. Section 55 recommends frequent Communion at Mass, as the Council of Trent and Pope St. Pius X had done before. The section also authorizes Communion under both species (bread and wine) for the faithful in special circumstances, as decided by the bishops, such as Masses of baptism or the profession of religious vows. Regular communion under both species, receiving Holy Communion on the hand, and the use of Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion, were later additions.
  5. Section 56 emphasizes that the laity should participate in both the liturgy of the Word (the first main part of the Mass, centering on the Scriptures) and the liturgy of the Eucharist (the second main part of the Mass, centering on the Eucharistic prayer and Communion.) There may be a subtle warning against people coming to a Mass only to receive Communion, or generally ignoring the readings, on the grounds that only the Eucharist is important.
  6. Section 57 authorizes the concelebration of Masses. Concelebration occurs when there is one priest who is the main celebrant and one or more other priests who also celebrate the Mass. Under the traditional Mass rubrics, concelebration was only permitted at the Masses of ordination for new priests and the consecration of new bishops.
  7. The idea of celebrating Mass facing the people, rather than *ad orientalum*, i.e. "liturgical east," or toward an image of Christ, was a later addition.
- D. Pope Paul VI promulgated the current Roman Missal, the instructions for Mass, in 1969, following previous revisions in 1965 and 1967. He likewise promulgated the revised Lectionary, which sets for the Scriptural readings for the Mass. There have been some minor changes in the Latin since then, most especially with the addition of new feast days and memorials. The International Committee on English in the Liturgy (ICEL) publishes the translations of the Missal, the Lectionary and other liturgical texts, with approval from the Vatican Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of Sacraments. The current translation of the Lectionary is from 2002 and the Missal from 2011.

II. Chapter 3 then proceeds to apply the principles of liturgical formation to other sacraments and to sacramentals. Sacramentals are liturgical actions, signs and objects that are not themselves sacraments, but that do reflect sacred realities, such as blessings, Bibles, crucifixes, icons.

- A. The chapter begins in sections 59 - 61 with a theology of sacraments and sacramentals.
  1. Section 59 describes the goals of the sacraments. They are first meant to sanctify people, to build up the Church, and to glorify God. But they should

also be instructive and able to strengthen people's faith. Thus, the Council calls for the sacraments to be administered in a way that people can understand and thus learn from. There is an implication that the deep symbolism of the liturgy was not being understood by most people.

2. Section 60 describes sacramental as sacred signs that also confer spiritual realities. They thus can help people in receiving the full benefits of the sacraments.
  3. Section 61 says that, as sacraments and sacramentals are always meant to direct people to the saving power of Christ, people can use almost any material thing to advance towards salvation and glorify God.
- B. Sections 62 and 63 outline the overall principles of the reform of sacraments and sacramentals.
1. Section 62 says that the Council is trying to change the rubrics so that these liturgies and devotions will be more clear to the people and adapted to the modern world.
  2. Section 63 calls for the increased use of the vernacular language in the administration of sacraments and sacramental. It authorizes local bishops' conferences to draw up translations, for approval by the Vatican. It also says that bishops' conferences can, with the Vatican's approval, make local adaptations as long as the universal instructions are respected.
- C. The rest of the chapter then applies these principles to individual sacraments and other liturgies.
1. Sections 64 – 66 addresses baptisms for adults.
    - a. Section 64 called for a restoration of the catechumenate for adults. In the early Church, there was an extensive, often three year, program for people entering the Church, usually from a pagan religion. As the centuries progressed, the process became simpler, with people simply meeting with a priest or other church official to receive instruction, and then receiving the sacraments. Since the Council, the Church has developed extensive programs and liturgies for those who are entering the Church. This section itself only dealt with those who are to be baptized (called catechumans), but there are also programs and prayers for non-Catholic Christians who are entering the Church, as well as baptized Catholics who are receiving Confirmation as adults. Section 69 very briefly addresses the situation of people entering into the Church who have already been baptized. In theory, these three groups are distinct, although the books for the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults describe all three situations. Practically speaking, the preparation involves many common elements and usually common classes. Section 65 does allow adaptations for mission countries. Many adaptations are also made in historically Christian countries.

b. Section 65 calls for a more developed liturgy for adult baptisms, which had usually been done very simply. The ideal time for such baptisms is the Easter Vigil, which Pope Pius XII had already revised to make it more of the celebration we have now.

2. Sections 67 – 69 address infant baptisms. They call for an increased focus on the roles of parents and godparents and allow for accommodations for clergy are scarce. There is a call for a revision of the supplying of rites for those who were privately baptized, likely because there was a danger of death. Section 70 authorizes the water blessed for baptism to be used as holy water on other occasions.
3. Section 70 calls for changes in Confirmation to emphasize the connection to baptism and the Eucharist more and calls for the sacrament ordinarily to be administered during Mass. Thus, for example, there is now the renewal of baptismal promises before Confirmation and more instruction during the sacrament.
4. Section 71 briefly calls for a revision of the sacrament of Penance to express its nature and effect better. The sacrament tends to take on a more personal character now.
5. Sections 73 – 75 cover the sacrament of Extreme Unction, which the document also wishes to call Anointing of the Sick, the name by which it now goes. It clarifies the fact that the sacrament is available not only to the dying, but to those in danger of death from illness. It calls for revisions to make the liturgy more pastoral. It should be noted that the term Last Rites applies to this sacrament when it is given to a dying person; the Last Rites includes a special prayer called the apostolic pardon, which confers a plenary indulgence.
6. Section 76 briefly addresses the liturgy of ordination for priests and bishops. It permits the address given at the beginning of priestly ordination to be in the vernacular. Practically speaking, almost the entire liturgy is usually now in the vernacular.
7. Sections 77 and 78 address marriage. Section 77 once allows for local adaptations, but with the requirement that priest must still receive the consent of the couple. Section 78 establishes the current custom of celebrating Matrimony during a Mass; the prior rule was that the sacrament was conferred before the Mass, as is the case in the Eastern Catholic Churches now.
8. Section 79 calls for new instructions on the sacramentals, especially with regard to blessings. We now have the revised Book of Blessings.

9. Section 80 proposes a change to the consecration of virgin so that the liturgy has a “greater uniformity, sobriety and dignity.” It also calls for the profession of religious vows to be during Mass.
10. Sections 80 and 81 address funerals. They call for a greater focus on the connection to the Paschal mysteries and allow for more local adaptations. There was an expansion of the colors allowed from only black to allowing violet and white as well, with the latter two colors symboling penitence and confidence in the resurrection. Section 81 also calls for a revision of funerals for infants. There is now a funeral for infants whose parents intended to baptize them but could not because of miscarriages or other early deaths.

III. Chapter 4 then outlines reforms of the Divine Office, also called the Breviary or the Liturgy of the Hours. The Divine Office is series of prayers, based heavily on the psalms, that priests, deacons, and religious brothers and sisters make a solemn promise to pray every day. Laity are also encouraged to join in these prayers.

- A. The “hours” of the Office are not time periods, but rather specific portions of the prayers, namely, the Office of Readings, Morning Prayer, three Daytime Prayers, Evening Prayer, and Night Prayer. There are specific prayers for different days of the week, each liturgical season, and the whole year. Except for the Office of Readings, they all have a time in which they are to be prayed. The Office of Readings can be fittingly prayed at any time during the day, even the night before the day designated. Practically speaking, it is usually the first prayer of the Divine Office that a priest or religious brother or sister prays.
- B. Although not sacraments, these prayers are liturgies because they are prayers in which Jesus Christ leads the whole Church in offering worship to God. Diocesan priests promise to pray the Office of Readings, Morning Prayer, one of the Daytime Prayers, Evening Prayer and Night Prayer. Religious brothers and sisters pray at least those hours, and often all three Daytime Prayers. Permanent Deacons promise to pray some part of the Divine Office each day, most commonly Morning Prayer, Evening Prayer and Night Prayer. Laity can join in any of the prayers, with Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer being the most common.
- C. The chapter begins in sections 83-85 by describing the theology and purpose of the Divine Office.
  1. Section 83 begins by pointing out that Jesus, through the Incarnation, joined heaven and earth together in the praise of God. The Divine Office is central in continuing this praise at all times.
  2. Sections 84 and 85 describe the centrality of the Divine Office as consecrating the day, as helping Holy Mother Church sing to her groom Jesus Christ and praise God the Father.
- D. Section 86 calls for priests to pray the Office more fervently. One goal of the reform is to reduce the number and complexity of the prayers in order to allow priests and

others to pray the Office more intensely. As section 87 points out, these changes were building on previous simplifications promulgated by Pope St. Pius V's Apostolic Constitution Divino Afflatu in 1911

- E. Sections 88 – 101 then describe individual reforms, which are more extensive than those of any other liturgy that this Constitution dealt with.
1. Section 88 also describes the goal of getting the different parts of the Divine Office back to the place of the day they are supposed to be and adapting them to the demands of modern life, which presumably involves both the ability of parish priests to pray them and the ability of laity to join in. Following on this instruction, Section 89 then describes reforms of the individual parts of the Divine Office, with Morning and Evening Prayer being central. Section 94 reiterates the importance of praying the different parts (hours) of the Divine Office at their proper time.
  2. Section 90 calls for priests and others who have the duty to pray the Divine Office to develop a greater understanding of the Bible and the liturgy generally so that they can pray it with more understanding.
  3. So that people can pray the Divine Office with greater attention to the specific prayers, rather than rushing through, section 91 calls for the Psalms to be distributed over a greater period of time than the one week that would encompass them before. Now almost all of Book of Psalms, with the exception of three psalms and 19 other verses, is distributed over a four week cycle.
  4. Sections 92 and 93 call for a broader range of Scriptural readings, non-Scriptural readings (used for the Office of Readings) and hymns. Now there are proposed hymns in the breviary; a new translation will soon revise them to include many older hymns.
  5. Sections 95 – 97 describe the duties of different clerics and religious brothers and sisters to pray the Divine Office. Section 98 points out that members of la institutes (e.g. third orders or Opus Dei) who are praying the Office, or even a shorter version of it, as part of their membership are also joining with the liturgy of the Church.
  6. Section 99 advises praying the Divine Office in public, or in choir, as much as is feasible. The Divine Office is prayed in choir when there are two groups who alternate praying part of the psalms and the canticles. Section 100 advises parishes to have public Morning and Evening Prayers, especially on Sunday, and says that the laity are welcome to join in the Divine Office at any time.
  7. Section 101 authorizes the use of the vernacular language if necessary to pray the Divine Office properly. However, it emphasizes again that the Latin

language is to be retained. And, as always, translations must be drafted by the regional ecclesiastical authorities, with Vatican approval.

- F. Pope Paul VI promulgated the current Divine Office in 1970 with the Apostolic Constitution Laudis Canticum. Our current English translation was published in 1974. A new translation that will be closer to the original Latin will be authorized about the year 2020.

IV. Chapter 5 describes some changes in the liturgical year so that it would better “unfold the mystery of Christ from the Incarnation and Nativity to the Ascension, to Pentecost and the expectation of the blessed hope of the coming of the Lord.”

- A. Section 102 outlines the idea of a liturgical year as necessary to Church as she “unfolds the whole mystery of Christ from the incarnation and nativity to the ascension, to Pentecost and the experience of the blessed hope of the communing of the Lord” and “opens up to the faithful the riches of the Lord’s power.” The idea is that we learn truths, not only by words but also by action.
- B. Sections 103 – 106 then outline the overall aspects of the liturgical year. Section 103 speaks first of the veneration of Mary as central in the “annual cycle of the mysteries of Christ.” Section 104 then describes the importance of saints’ days, which are traditionally on the day the saint died, as joining us with them. Sections 105 and 106 then describe the seasons of the year and the centrality of Sunday as “the original feast day” and “a day of rejoicing and freedom from work.”
- C. Sections 107 – 111 then describe the individual reforms that the Council wished to enact.
  - 1. Section 107 states the overall goal of both preserving the traditions of the liturgical year and adapting them to the conditions of the modern time so that they really enhance the piety of the faithful.
  - 2. Section 108 states that the liturgical season should generally be given preference over saints’ days. The idea is that there is a rhythm to the seasons that the faithful should learn from. Before the Council, the prayers for saints and other occasions often took precedence.
  - 3. Sections 109 and 110 describes the goal of having a greater focus on Baptism and Penance during the Lenten season. Far from downplaying the need for penances the sacrament of Penance, there is call here for understanding them better. Section 110 also emphasizes the importance of the Triduum.
  - 4. Section 111 upholds the idea of saints’ days, but says that there should be a distinction between the saints on the universal calendar and the more numerous saints that should be on a specifically national or local calendar. Before the Vatican II Council, there were up to 280 feast days, and they had numerous ranks. There were also such days as the 12 ember days and the four rogation days. These days, combined with Sundays, made for a more

complex calendar than we have now with the number of saints' and other days greatly reduced so that they occur on about half the days of the year. Masses in honor of any saints that are in the martyrology (the list of saints of the Church as organized by the liturgical year) can still be celebrated for good reason.

5. It was not specifically in the document, but the new calendar has a greater emphasis on ordinary time.
6. The chapter first defends the idea of a liturgical year in which the full mystery of Christ's saving power is presented. It emphasizes the fittingness of having saints' days and devotion to Mary in the liturgical year, as well as the centrality of Sunday.

V. Chapter 6 discusses sacred music and proposes reforms to make sacred music more helpful to people in the liturgy.

A. Section 112 begins with an introduction describing sacred music as a "treasure of inestimable value, greater even than that of any other art." It outlines the role of sacred music in the liturgy. It should be noted that there is a difference between religious music generally and liturgical music more specifically. Religious music can be of many kinds and can stand on its own more, which liturgical music takes on the sacred role of supporting sacraments and other divine worship. As section 113 describes, liturgy is more dignified when supported by music.

B. Sections 114 – 121 then outline the specific reforms that the Council was calling for.

1. Section 114 calls for the preservation of the great "treasury of sacred music" including chant. It promotes both the use of choirs and lay participation.
2. Section 115 calls for more education in sacred music, in seminaries, religious houses, and even other Catholic schools.
3. Sections 116 and 117 says that Gregorian chant has "pride of place" and also that a rich selection of other music is allowed to help in worship. Similarly, Section 120 says that the pipe organ "should be held in great esteem," but that other instruments may be used as well provided that they are suitable to the place and helpful for the edification of the faithful. Section 119 gives a balancing consideration that the musical traditions of different lands, especially missionary countries, should also be incorporated into the liturgy. Thus, there is both a desire to preserve traditional chant and a willingness to use local adaptations.
4. Section 118 says that churches should encourage the faithful to join in liturgical music, in accordance with the Church's instructions.
5. Section 121 says that composers should consider it part of their calling to provide music for large and small choir and the faithful at large. It also says that

liturgical music is consistent with Catholic doctrine and is drawn chiefly from Scripture and the liturgy. Thus, there is a desire to draw different people into sacred music and also maintain the unity of the faith and prayer.

VI. Chapter 7 discusses sacred art and furnishings and how they can enhance the liturgy and sense of the sacred.

A. The chapter begins in section 122 with a statement of the importance of art as expressing “the infinite beauty of God in works made by human hands.” It brings out the role of the Church in preserving and ennobling many different types of art from various times and places. It says the Church is a friend of art and also an arbiter of what is consistent with sacred use. Section 123 goes on to say that the Church is not attached to any one style of art, but rather tries to bring forth the best of fine arts in every land and place, including from the modern world. There is thus a call for appreciation of local and modern art, but also of all artists to join in “that wondrous chorus of praise sung by the great masters in past ages of the Catholic faith.”

B. To ensure that sacred art does in fact enhance worship and faith in general, the chapter lays down certain principles.

1. Section 124 says that the art and furnishings in a church should “reflect noble beauty rather than sumptuous display.” There should be no works of art that are “repugnant to the faith,” either because of decadent motifs or mediocre or pretentious styles. The fact that such a warning was needed is noteworthy.
2. Sections 125 - 128 point out that the design of churches should be helpful to the liturgy, rather than simply ornate for its own sake. Section 125 calls for care with regard to sacred images so that they are not so numerous or randomly distributed as to cause distraction. Section 127 points out that the motive of church artists should be the glory of God and edification of the faithful, rather than personal glory. Likewise, section 128 calls for church architecture to emphasize dignity and suitability for the purpose of prayer and worship. Later instructions for the Mass and baptism would encourage having the baptistery in the vestibule of the church, and having one altar and one tabernacle so that there would be more focus in the church.
3. Section 126 specifically says that, when there are renovations, sacred art and furnishings are not to be destroyed or disposed of. This instruction was unfortunately often ignored in the years that followed.
4. Section 126 calls for diocesan commissions on sacred art. And section calls for the study of sacred art to be a part of clerical formation.

VII. There is short appendix that allowed consideration of proposals to move Easter to a fixed day each year as a part of the reform of calendars generally, as long as the 7 day week with Sunday is preserved. That proposal did not go very far.