

THE VATICAN II COUNCIL: PART III
RENEWING THE LITURGY: SACROSANCTUM CONCILIUM

I. The liturgical renewal of the Second Vatican Council built upon the reforms that came from the Council of Trent four centuries earlier and were the culmination of calls for another revival that had been growing for a century.

A. In response to the Protestant Reformation, the Council of Trent promoted a liturgical reform that would make the Roman liturgy standard in the Latin rite.

1. Some abuses regarding the veneration of saints and uses of indulgences were partial causes of the Protestant Reformation. Unfortunately, the initial attempts at a rightful correction spread to the wholesale rejection of the notion of the Mass, the priesthood, veneration of saints, and the like. The early Protestants (but not the Church of England) tended to focus on a simpler liturgy, simpler churches, and less or no hierarchy.

2. In response to the legitimate concerns raised, but determined to defend the true faith, the Council of Trent (1545-1463) set forth 15 decrees and related canons to clarify the faith and organize and reform practices across the board.

3. In 1551, the Council issues the Decree and Canons on the Eucharist, which emphasized as a matter of infallible dogma the true presence of Christ in the Eucharist under the appearance of bread and wine, and the fact that Christ is fully present under either species (bread or wine), as long as the physical appearance of that species continues. The canons also upheld the rightfulness of the reservation of the Eucharist in the tabernacle and Eucharistic adoration and processions.

4. In 1562, the Council issued the Decree and Canons on the Mass, which both upheld the ancient doctrines and practices, but also made some accommodations to the demands for a more accessible Mass.

a. Thus, the Council strongly upheld the Mass as the true re-presentation of the sacrifice of Christ and of great assistance to the faithful, both living and dead. It also upheld the rightfulness of Masses offered for the dead and in honor of the saints. Likewise, it upheld the use of such things as incense, fine vestments, and some prayers prayed in low voice by the priest to emphasize the mystery of the Mass.

b. The Council considered, but decided against, allowing the Mass to be celebrated in the vernacular. The reason was that, in the midst of so much change and rebellion against the unity of the Church, the Council decided that there was need for the universal language to be maintained in the Mass. However, in Chapter VII of the Decree, the Council did recommend that the priest or another official make more efforts during and after the Mass to explain the liturgy.

c. The Council did recognize that “many things have already crept into [the Mass] which are alien to the great dignity of the sacrifice.” To restore that

dignity, the Council issued such rules as: 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 or, even worse scandalous, music in churches; and encouraging people to attend their own parish church for Masses. The Council also authorized the standardization of the liturgy.

d. 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. Up to that time, most priests were simply trained in an apprentice-like system by other priests, who may or may not have given proper instruction.

B. Shortly after the Council, the Popes, and especially St. Pope Pius V (1566-72), implemented its decrees, including a standardization of the Mass and other liturgies.

1. In Quo Primum Tempore (1570), St. Pope Pius V made the Roman rite, later called the Tridentine rite, the standard for all diocesan churches in the Latin rite, although religious orders could keep their own form of the liturgy. This rite, described in the Missale Romanum, would prevail until the Vatican II Council with relatively few changes.

2. This rite strongly emphasized the unity of the Church and the permanence of the Mass. The Tridentine Mass also reduced the number and variety of saints being celebrated, but continued their honor in the Mass and on the calendar (usually several a day.) In this way and several others, there was also a focus on the Mass pointing the way to heaven.

3. There was not much emphasis on the participation of the people or on preaching. It was thought that the people could be more prayerful if they did not have as much to say. And preaching usually occurred more outside of Mass when the emphasis was not as much on mystery and sacrifice.

C. Between the Council of Trent and the twentieth century, there were also a number of other movements leading up to the twentieth century call for a renewal of the liturgy

1. At about the same time as the Council of Trent, 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. On the one hand, this emphasis did lead to greater enthusiasm. On the other hand, there was a tendency for the pomp and ceremony to obscure the importance of worship and conversion.

2. The monarchs and nobles of Europe, whose power was rising once again, began to get very interested 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 tended to get too involved in

controlling the liturgy, with such things as insisting on places of great prominence and giving the clergy sermons to preach.

3. In the so-called Enlightenment era of the eighteenth century, there was more of an effort at simplification.

a. For example, in Germany, while the Mass continued in Latin, more popular German songs were introduced.

b. In Tuscany in 1786, Bishop Scipione De' Ricci and Prince Leopold called the synod of Pistoia to call for reforms. Liturgically, it called for such things as the use of the vernacular language in the Mass and the placement of only one altar in each church to focus everyone's attention on the Mass. Unfortunately, the synod also made several heretical pronouncements, as well as some ridiculous proposals, such as the elimination of perpetual religious vows. As a result, the entire effort, including some legitimate liturgical ideas, became discredited.

c. In addition, the missionaries of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries tried to accommodate local customs. Some accommodations, such as more local vestments and longer preaching were allowed. Other accommodations, such as using rice bread, were forbidden.

4. 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 that would 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.

1. Dom Lambert Beauduin (1873-1960) of the Benedictine monastery in Mont Cesar in Belgium, emphasized the active participation of the faithful at Mass, especially in his 1914 book Liturgy in the Life of the Church.

2. 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 people thus must respect the unity and mystery of the Mass, but also actively make it their own.

3. 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.

4. The Popes authorized and encouraged a renewal of participation in the Mass and understanding of it.

a. Thus, in 1903, Pope St. Pius X issued the moto proprio Tre Le Sollecitudini, called for a renewal of Church music and encouraged the active participation of the faithful, especially in that context. In 1905, he encouraged frequent communion in the decree Sacra Tridentina Synodus. And in 1910, he published Quam Singulari, which lowered the age of First Communion to 7. In that year he also 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 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.

E. Thus, when Pope John XIII called for the Vatican II Council, he appointed one of the commissions to work on the liturgy. That effort would eventually lead to the first Vatican II Council document, Sacrosanctum Concilium, which promoted the reform of the liturgy, but in a way that would respect its ancient traditions.

II. Among the schemata that led to the Vatican II Council documents, the document on the liturgy, which was consistently called Sacrosanctum Concilium was promulgated as easily as any, although even here, there were calls for changes.

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.

1. The commission had subcommissions dedicated to the topics: (1) the mystery of the sacred liturgy and its relation to the life of the Church; (2) the Mass; (3) sacramental concelebration, i.e., more than one priest celebrating a Mass, a practice that basically stopped, except for ordinations; (4) the Divine Office, i.e., a liturgical prayer clerics and religious brothers and sisters pray every day; (5) the sacraments in general and sacramentals; (6) a revision of the calendar; (7) the use of Latin and options for using the vernacular; (8) liturgical formation; (9) participation of the faithful in the sacred liturgy; (10) linguistic adaptation to the tradition and ethos of peoples; (11) simplification of sacred vestments; (12) sacred music; and (13) sacred art.

2. The topics that would eventually be covered by Sacrosanctum Concilium basically paralleled the topics covered by these subcommissions. However, there was a greater emphasis on the theology that the first subcommission covered that might have first been expected.

B. 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.

1. As St. Pope Pius X pointed out in his 1911 instruction *Divino Afflatu*, many of the bishops at the Vatican I Council of 1870 had called for a simplification of the liturgy and especially of the sacramental calendar. The idea is that the instructions had become so complex that there was a tendency to be so concerned with getting every detail right that it was difficult to pray reverently and in a contemplative fashion.

- Because that Council had to be called off early, the issue had not been addressed. And so in that instruction, St. Pope Pius X promulgated a certain simplification of the Divine Office, reducing some of the complexity, especially associated with the addition of numerous saints' days.

2. 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 this 1960 instruction of Blessed Pope John XXIII, that committee's simplifications were put into effect. The Liturgical Preparatory Commission of the Vatican II Council would build upon these reforms.

C. In January, 1962, the Preparatory Commission completed its draft entitled Sacrosanctum Concilium. Although he had some hesitations, the dying Cardinal Cicognani signed it and it became the schemata for consideration by the Council.

D. After Cardinal Cicognani's death, Cardinal Larroana became Prefect of the Congregation on Rites and eventually president of both the Preparatory Commissions and the Conciliar Commission on Liturgy. For the Conciliar Commission, he would pass over Father Bugnini and appoint Fr. Ferdinando Antonelli as the secretary.

E. 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. And, second, 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.

F. There was extensive debate about the text, including many comments regarding the use of the vernacular language in the liturgy. However, the overall 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.

G. 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, the first document approved at the Vatican II Council.

III. Sacrosanctum Concilium, the Constitution on the Liturgy restated and elaborated on 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.

A. The introduction of this, the first document of the Council, enunciated the purposes of the Council and how the liturgical reform will accomplish it.

1. The document listed four goals of the Council: (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.

2. The introduction then emphasized that the liturgy, and especially the Mass, accomplishes these goals and makes present here and now the eternal work of our redemption. It focused on many ways in which the liturgy accomplishes our salvation, such as bringing the invisible and visible realms and uniting all times together to bring us and the whole Church on this path to heaven.

3. It also said 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.

B. Chapter I outlined the overall principles of the liturgical renewal.

1. Part I described in vivid form how it is that the liturgy is the current work and prayer of Jesus Christ through His whole Church, in heaven and on earth, and how in the liturgy “we take part in the beginning of the heavenly liturgy which is celebrated in the holy city of Jerusalem toward which we journey as pilgrims.” Section 8.

a. This part, and the chapter, begins by focusing attention on the salvation offered by Christ. The idea is that we must never forget that the liturgy makes this salvation present, as Christ is present with us in the liturgy.

b. It then states that “no other action of the Church equals [the liturgy’s] effectiveness by the same title nor to the same degree.” Section 7. It recognizes that the missionary and teaching efforts of the Church are necessary, along with charitable endeavors and other apostolates. But it states that the union with Christ and all the Church achieved in the liturgy is the goal and source of the Church’s mission.

c. The document then calls for ministers to ensure that the liturgy does in fact engage the faithful in this union with Christ.

d. This part also recognizes the need for devotions and other private prayers. This aspect of our prayer life is not discussed as much because it is more

individualized, although the document does say that devotions should be under the bishops' guidance.

2. Part II focused on promoting the full and active participation of the laity, the education of the laity in liturgy, and the careful training of clergy to celebrate the liturgy well and reverently. The silent implication in that such participation, education and training had been short of expectations in the past.
 - a. It began by emphasizing that, not only laity, but also clergy needs to be more involved. And so it called for greater seminary formation in the liturgy and continuing education of clergy in the liturgy.
 - b. This part then calls for pastors of souls to encourage the laity to learn more about the liturgy and be more involved.
3. Part III states the general norms of reforming the liturgy that the Council based its actions on. It begins by pointed 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.
 - a. Part A emphasizes that the Church universal, and to some degree local ecclesiastics, have the authority to alter the changeable elements, and that no one else should presume to do so on their own. It also strikes a cautious note, saying that the changes the Church makes should be careful and avoid unnecessary instability or variances between neighboring regions
 - It also outlines a central principle that the Council would emphasize, namely, the greater incorporation of the Word of God into liturgies.
 - b. Part B then emphasizes that liturgical services are celebrations of the whole Church, not private functions. And thus it says that liturgical books should clarify the roles of all of the people involved in the liturgy and promote the full and active participation of the laity.
 - c. Part C outlines ways in which the Council intends to increase pastoral and instruction value of the Mass and other liturgies. First, the document calls for "noble simplicity" in the liturgy. It then then gives some 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. This part concludes with a call for the increased use of vernacular languages in the liturgy, although it also emphasizes that use of Latin is to be preserved.
 - d. Part D calls for certain approved variations among areas so that their local customs may be respected, even as substantial unity is maintained. Thus, the bishops of different nations and regions can apply for dispensations for variations in the liturgy.

- e. Part E focuses on the central role of the bishop of each diocese in unifying the liturgy for his diocese and ensuring it reverent celebration.
 - f. Part F. calls for each diocese, or possibly particular areas, to have commissions to promote the liturgy, as well as sacred art and music.
- C. Chapter 2 then described the specific changes that the Council called for in the Mass, especially with regard to promoting the active, aware and devout participation of the laity.
- 1. The chapter begins by stating the overall purpose that all of those present for a Mass are drawn more deeply into the representation of Christ's sacrifice and the glory of His Resurrection that is given to us at this glorious celebration.
 - 2. The document then calls for the simplification of the liturgy, eliminating duplicative rites (e.g., the numerous signs of the cross and genuflections.)
 - 3. The Mass should bring forth 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.)
 - 4. There is to be a greater emphasis on the homily and a restoration of the prayers of the faithful after the homily.
 - 5. There can be a "suitable place for the vernacular language in the Mass," especially in the readings and common prayers of the faithful. The Council did say that the laity should be able to say or sing in Latin the standard Mass parts that are common to every Mass.
 - 6. As the Council of Trent and Pope St. Pius X had done before, the Council recommended frequent Communion. The document also authorized Communion under both species (bread and wine) for the faithful in special circumstances, as decided by the bishops. Regular communion under both species, receiving Holy Communion on the hand, and the use of Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion were later additions.
 - 7. The document emphasizes that the Liturgy of the Word, centered on readings from Sacred Scripture, and the Liturgy of the Eucharist are intertwined at Mass, such that people should fully participate in both of them. There may be a subtle warning against people coming to a Mass only to receive Communion, or against coming to Mass late in general, on the grounds that only the Eucharist is important.
 - 8. The document also authorizes concelebration of the Mass with other priests more often. (Before this time, concelebration was limited to Masses of ordination.)

9. 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. Chapters 3 then proceeds to apply the principles of liturgical formation to other sacraments and to sacramentals. i.e. liturgical actions, signs and objects that are not themselves sacraments, but that do reflect sacred realities, e.g., blessings, Bibles, crucifixes, icons, etc.
 1. The chapter begins with a call for a greater understanding of sacraments and sacramentals so that people can more easily benefit from them. It goes on to say that a number of extra features have been added that may detract from this understanding.
 2. Thus, the chapter calls for an increased use of the vernacular language in the administration of sacraments and sacramentals and new rites books that are adapted to people’s needs.
 3. The chapter then turns to baptism, both for adults and children.
 - a. It calls for a restoration of the catechumenate for those entering the Church. Before this time, it would be more common for there to be simple private instruction for people to enter the Church. Now we have the more unified Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults. The document focused only on those to be baptized, but there are implications for current Christians who join the Catholic Church.
 - b. The chapter then calls for a reform of the baptismal rite to make it simpler and emphasize the role of parents and godparents more.
 4. The chapter then calls for the sacraments of Confirmation and Penance to be revised to help people understand their character more.
 5. It then turns to “extreme unction,” now often called anointing of the sick. It emphasizes that the sacrament is available to any who are in danger of death from illness, not only if death is imminent. It also calls for a reform so that the sacrament can more easily be celebrated in differing circumstances. Before, it was often very complex and not easily adaptable to special circumstances, e.g., in hospitals.
 6. The chapter then also calls for a reform of the rites of ordination and marriage, allowing more use of the vernacular among other things. It also calls for a revision of the prayers over sacramentals, the consecration of perpetual virgins and religious brothers and sisters, and more pastoral funeral rites.
- E. Chapter 4 then deals with the Divine Office, also called the Breviary or the Liturgy of the Hours, a series of prayers, based heavily on the psalms, that priests, deacons, and religious brothers and sisters make a solemn promise to pray every day.

1. The chapter begins by emphasizing that, through the Divine Office, one enters into the prayer of the whole Church and consecrates the whole day. For the Divine Office consists of prayers for the morning, daytime, evening and night. Because priests usually pray the office alone, there can be a tendency of seeing it as a private prayer, rather than the prayer of and for the whole Church.
2. The chapter then calls for priests to pray the Divine Office with more fervor. There is a subtle warning against treating it as a mere obligation to be performed.
3. To help with the reverent prayer of the Divine Office, the document calls for revisions of the different “hours” or prayers for different times.
4. The chapter then calls for more understanding of the Scripture, and especially the Psalms, that are prayed. To help out, it provides that there will be fewer psalms per day, so that they could each be prayed better. All of the psalms would still be prayed over the course of time, but it would not have to every week. The breviary has been revised to cover the psalms over the course of four weeks.
5. The chapter also called for a richer selection of Scriptural texts and writings for the Office of Readings. It also called for a reform of the hymns used.
6. The document reminded people that they should in fact pray the parts of the Divine Office at the time of day to which they are assigned, e.g., Morning Prayer in the morning, Evening Prayer in the evening.
7. The document also calls for clerics to pray at least part of the Divine Office in common. (Religious order brothers and sisters usually do so as a part of their rule.) It also called for celebration of some of the Divine Office in public on Sundays and other high days, and encouraged the laity to pray the Divine Office as well.
8. Finally, the chapter authorized 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.

F. 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.”

1. 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.
2. Within the context of maintaining the ancient idea of a liturgical year, it calls for some reforms.
 - a. The Council upheld the notion of having special days for saints. But it also called for the number of saints’ days to be limited and generally subordinated to

Sunday celebrations and the cycle of the liturgical year so that the year may better reflect salvation history.

b. The chapter also has a particular emphasis on the Lenten season, saying that the liturgy should emphasize again idea of instructions on the call of baptismal holiness and the notion of penance, both individual and communal.

G. Chapter 6 discusses sacred music as a “treasure of inestimable value, greater even than that of any other art.” In order to help the appreciation of this gift and its centrality in the liturgy, the Council called for a renewal in this field.

1. Thus, the chapter called for more participation of the laity in liturgical music and permitting the use of the vernacular, while retaining Latin, in such music.

2. The chapter called for greater seminary and religious order training in music, as well as greater instruction for the laity.

3. The chapter calls for the preservation of Gregorian chant as having “pride of place” and also a rich selection of other music to be allowed, including music specific to mission lands.

4. It calls for the encouragement of the laity in liturgical music.

5. The chapter calls for the preservation of the pipe organ as central, with other instruments added for the edification of the people.

6. The chapter concludes with four points: (1) musicians should cultivate and increase this treasure of sacred music; (2) the laity should participate in liturgical music; (3) texts must always be very consistent with the faith; and (4) texts should draw heavily from Sacred Scripture.

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

1. The chapter begins 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.

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

a. The art and furnishings in a church should “reflect noble beauty rather than sumptuous display.”

b. 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 there had to be a reminder along these lines indicates that sloppiness in church design is not new.

- c. The design of churches should be helpful to the liturgy, rather than simply ornate for its own sake. The chapter calls for a revision of the laws governing church architecture, with more emphasis on the altar, the tabernacle, and the baptistery. 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.
- d. Sacred images are very helpful, but the amount of artwork in a church should not be excessive, but rather be supportive of the liturgy. Likewise, the motive of church artists should be the glory of God and edification of the faithful, rather than personal glory.
- e. Bishops should have commissions and priests who assist in the rightful decoration of churches.
- f. There should be more education in sacred art, especially for the clergy.