

Liturgical Reform and the Council

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In the preamble to its *Constitution on the Liturgy*, the second Vatican Council has clearly established the place of liturgical reform within that framework of the Church's inner renewal which is the Council's primary concern.¹ 'The sacred Council has for its aims the daily reinvigoration of the Christian life of the faithful, the better adaptation to the needs of our own time of those institutions that are subject to change, the fostering of everything that can contribute to the union of those who believe in Christ, and the strengthening of all that can call the whole of mankind into the household of the Church. For those reasons the Council considers it has a special obligation to undertake the reform and promotion of the liturgy.'

This firm assertion of the pastoral importance of the liturgy is a faithful reflection of the prolonged debates of the first session of the Council in 1962. It became increasingly evident that the preparatory commission on the liturgy had indeed anticipated what the great majority of the conciliar Fathers wished for, and, despite numerous modifications in the light of the debates, the final constitution is a magnificent vindication of the work of that commission. For it must not be supposed that the work of liturgical renewal, now sanctioned by the Council's almost unanimous vote, and promulgated by Pope Paul at the close of the second session, is a sudden happening, a flash of lightning that has pierced the gloom of centuries of indifference and neglect. It is true that the 'liturgical movement' of the nineteenth century was a romantic, not to say nostalgic, evocation of former glories. And even the efforts of St Pius X did little to awaken any popular response to the ideal of the liturgy as the common prayer of the people of God.

But with Pope Pius XII's encyclical letter, *Mediator Dei*, the principles of liturgical advance were at least universally proclaimed. And in the meantime the quiet but determined work of pastoral liturgists, especially

¹Note. The translation of extracts from the *Constitution* is by the author of this article. The Latin-French text, with useful notes, has appeared in *Maison-Dieu*, No. 76 (Paris: Editions du Cerf.)

in France and Germany, increasingly had their effect in Rome. From 1951 onwards, international gatherings of liturgical specialists as well as priests with daily pastoral obligations met to discuss the adaptations, and radical some of them must be, if the liturgy was to recover its place in the life of the Church—not as a hierarchical prayer to be cherished as an ancient monument, but as the birthright of all the baptized, the very mystery which day by day proclaimed their incorporation in Christ and made available to them both his continuing work of redemption and the living word which the Bible transmits.

The practical consequences of this pastorally inspired concern for liturgical reform were important in themselves. Such changes as the re-casting of the liturgy of Holy Week, with its revival of the Paschal Vigil, were deliberately intended to restore the liturgy to its true place in the life of the faithful. Their share in the secret mysteries was to be active and informed, and the liturgy itself was once more to be seen not as a spectacle to be witnessed but as the very means by which the people of God are gathered together, in virtue of their baptism, to share in the daily re-presenting of the mystery of faith. It was to be seen, too, as itself a means of instruction and incorporation in the life of the Church: hence the repeated emphasis on the word 'pastoral'.

These preliminary discussions and experiments reached a decisive point in the great international Congress of Pastoral Liturgy held at Assisi in 1956, when a vast gathering of cardinals, bishops and priests from all over the world for the first time were made aware of the direction which the liturgical movement had now decisively taken. No one who was present at Assisi can forget the sense of purpose that united the papers and discussions alike, nor indeed the very clear indication, for instance, by Fr Antonelli, a consultor of the congregation of Rites and a prime mover in the restoration of the Paschal Vigil, that what had been accomplished so far, with its unequivocally pastoral emphasis, must guide the future evolution of liturgical reform. It was now evident that the cause of rendering the Church's public worship intelligible to the faithful, of simplifying and adapting it so that its true character could emerge in all its strength, was no longer a matter for a few specialists in a few countries, but was an integral factor in the renewal of the Church's mission throughout the whole world.

The *Instruction* of the Congregation of Rites of 1958, with its formulation of the methods of participating in the mass, was in fact only an interim regulation of what had so far been accomplished. And that was much. In the meantime the missionary dimensions of the liturgical

revival had become very evident. An international missionary congress at Nijmegen² had already stressed in emphatic terms the need for drastic reforms of the liturgy, so that in countries which had no cultural continuity with the Graeco-Roman world in which the public worship of the West had developed, the truly universal character of the Church's mission might be revealed. The influence of the bishops from Asia, Africa and South America in the subsequent debates in the Council was a decisive one. But it had already been aroused, and in this, as in so much else, the Council gave to the whole Church—in the persons of the bishops gathered from the ends of the earth—the true picture of the Church's mission in terms of our own times: in fact, the very hope that had inspired Pope John's calling of the Council was at once made plain in its first discussions on the liturgical *schema*.

The preparation of the *schema* in advance of the Council had meant intensive work for a commission which, to some critics, was not representative enough of the currents of radical reform. Its task was a difficult one, for a conciliar document must reflect a breadth and authority going far beyond localised problems or a particular theological approach. Two problems had to be decided. Should the discussion be limited to the Latin liturgy alone, and should the emphasis be theological, practical, or both combined? As to the first question, it was evident that the wide variety of oriental rites made a detailed consideration of their adaptation or reform virtually impossible, though the commission—and later on the Council itself—took into full account the vast wealth of the Eastern contribution to the Church's total work of worship. As to the second question, it was decided that the pastoral needs which had so frequently been emphasized by Pope John must at every point influence the theological debate. What was needed was a document enunciating the *principles* of reform, biblical and patristic in its roots, but at the same time aware of the need of a practical application, which must in detail be left to those responsible for its implementation. (And here, of course, the debates in the Council on the authority of the bishops, especially of regional councils of bishops acting collectively, had a special relevance.)

The preliminary commission's *schema* was debated from 22 October to 13 November 1962. The discussion was badly organized, often repetitive, often trivial in the details that were so hotly contested. It was evident that so varying were the conditions in such different parts of the world that what was meat for the Congo was certainly unmitigated

²cf. Bede Griffiths, O.S.B., *Blackfriars*, Jan. 1960.

poison for Los Angeles. The main questions discussed—the use of the vernacular, the restoration of concelebration of mass, the permitting of communion under both kinds for the laity, the revision of the breviary, apart from the whole question of the major revision of the mass itself—at least allowed a freedom, an exchange of immensely varying convictions, that gave to the Council's sessions from the beginning a freedom which greatly impressed the non-Catholic observers, and no doubt astonished many a bishop who had never expected to hear views he had hitherto thought to be radical, even dangerous, proceeding from unquestionably episcopal—not to say cardinalial—lips.

On November 14 the Council by a massive majority (2,162 *placet*, 46 *non placet*) approved the *schema* in principle. The Council's liturgical commission was to re-formulate the *schema*, in the light of the hundreds of suggestions made (both orally and in writing) by the conciliar Fathers. Further votes were taken on particular revisions, and, for instance, so numerous were the qualifications (votes *juxta modum*) on some issues, such as that of concelebration, that the Commission drew up new articles, taking into account these minority views.

The *Constitution* was finally promulgated by Pope Paul VI on 4 December, 1963, and he described it as 'the first subject to be examined and also the first, in a certain sense, because of its intrinsic value and importance in the life of the Church'. The final document differs in many respects from the early drafts of the pre-conciliar Commission. It rightly takes into account all that had emerged in the course of the lengthy debates, but it nevertheless stands as an unequivocal statement of all that Pope John had intended, for, whatever else the Council achieves, it has asserted the primacy of the worship of God and the imperative need that its public expression should be truly available to the people of God.

The *Constitution*, then, is not so much a piece of legislation as a framework—both doctrinal and pastoral in its emphasis—which will enable the Council's virtually unanimous decision to be put into action. Furthermore, although it came into effect on the first Sunday of Lent (16 February, 1964), many of its implications must await the work of the Liturgical Commission to be set up after the Council—e.g., the further and presumably more radical revision of the Missal and Breviary. Some of its directions depend, too, on the Bishops' Conferences who will legislate according to their decisions on the need of the areas where they have jurisdiction. And Pope Paul's *motu proprio* of 28 January 1964 specifically states that some provisions of the *Constitution* are not to be

put into effect immediately. In particular, the introduction of the vernacular must await the revision of some rites and the preparation of new liturgical texts. A special commission is to be established for this purpose. This *motu proprio* simply puts into effect the provisions of the *Constitution*, in particular such matters as the immediate provision of qualified professors of liturgy in seminaries and theological faculties, the setting up of diocesan commissions to see that the *Constitution* is put into effect and the obligation that sermons are to be preached at all public masses on Sundays and days of obligation. But certain matters await the decisions of the Commission, though for example the French bishops have already sanctioned the public reading of epistle and gospel at mass in French, the text having already—one supposes—been approved by the Holy See.

It cannot be too strongly emphasized that the *Constitution's* aim throughout is both doctrinal and pastoral. It is a complete misconception, both of the Council's purpose and indeed of the *Constitution's* text, to seize on particular points of reform and to isolate them from the larger context of the work of renewal which the liturgy as a whole is to exemplify.

That is why the *Constitution*, as was suggested in the beginning, is at pains to relate the liturgical changes to the general aims of renewal and reconciliation—that *aggiornamento* which was Pope John's constant concern. The liturgy is nothing other than the renewal of the work of man's redemption (*Preamble*): it is a sign of the unity that gathers together all the children of God.

The first chapter is concerned with 'General Principles for the Reform and Promotion of the Liturgy'. It is a profoundly theological statement, rooted in a biblical understanding of the salvation achieved by Christ, now continued in the Church and made available each day through its liturgical re-presentation. All that Christ achieved on earth goes on being achieved in the sacraments, at whose heart lies the eucharist, the memorial of his death and resurrection. And so the paschal mystery is seen as the very centre of the economy of salvation: it is, therefore, the centre of all liturgical prayer. The paschal event is proclaimed, its mystery is communicated to men, its celebration gathers together the faithful—and this is achieved by the liturgical commemoration of Easter, its weekly recalling on the Day of the Lord and, above all, by the offering of the mass which 'shows forth the death of the Lord until he come again'. And the Church is always going forwards towards that final Pasch, the Parousia, in whose perennial worship she already shares in her earthly pilgrimage.

It is in the liturgy, then, that Christ acts—as prophet, priest and king. And the Church that is united to him as head is not simply a hierarchy: it is a holy people, with a right to an active share in the sacred liturgy. This theme of the need of an active, conscious participation of the whole people of God in the liturgical action runs through the whole constitution: it is with this in mind that we must always judge its particular prescriptions.

The first chapter, although devoted to the general principles of liturgical renewal, contains the seeds of the detailed reforms that, inevitably, attract most public attention. And the importance of this is that a long work of careful education must precede any fruitful advance. Echoing St Pius X's *Motu Proprio*, the *Constitution* describes the liturgy as 'the first and indispensable source from which the faithful must draw a truly Christian spirit; and that is why it must be ardently pursued by the pastors of souls in all their pastoral work, with the teaching that necessarily goes with it'. (I. 14.) The clergy must themselves be formed for this task: the faithful must be led not merely by words but by example.

Many of the *Constitution's* detailed provisions, as has already been said, await the definitive work of the special commission that is to be established. So far-ranging are the changes, that it may well be some years before this task can be completed. One can at this point simply indicate the more important of them, seeing them always in the light of the magnificent general principles the *Constitution* proclaims.

The government of the liturgy belongs uniquely to the Church's authority (22): it belongs to the Holy See, and, as provided in the *Constitution*, to the bishops alone to legislate, so that no individual can have any right to change or modify the prayer that is the expression of the Church's life as a community. But local differences, reflecting traditions and cultures that have a proper validity, are respected and indeed encouraged in so far as they contribute to the primary purpose of securing an active and informed participation in liturgical worship. A communal celebration is always to be preferred to a private one, and this is specially true of the mass. Those who participate, in whatever capacity—as readers, commentators, servers—have a true function to perform, and this must be respected (30).

The liturgical rites must be of 'noble simplicity', avoiding useless repetitions: they must as far as possible be adapted to the faithful's capacity and so avoid the need of lengthy explanation. Above all, the biblical roots of the liturgy must be strongly evident. A longer and more

representative cycle of scriptural readings at mass is to be drawn up; a homily is to be preached at every public mass, so that the word of God may be seen as intimately linked to the work of Christ which is being renewed. Catechetical methods must take into constant account the theological rites and biblical readings which present the history of salvation to the faithful. And the solemn celebration of the word of God is commended, especially on the vigils of great feasts and during Advent and Lent: and, in the absence of a priest, a deacon or someone else authorized by the bishop can lead the celebration.

It is the question of liturgical language, of the use of the vernacular, that has above all others stirred public interest—and, sometimes, not-so-private fury. But, once again, the decision whether or not the traditional use of Latin is to be modified must be measured against the general intention of the Council and of the liturgical *Constitution* in particular. 'The use of the Latin language, saving any particular privilege, is to be retained in the Latin rites.' The *Constitution's* statement is simply a recognition that, historically, the Latin language has for long centuries been the language of the mass in the West. But the use of the mother tongue, 'which can be often so useful for the faithful, whether in the administration of the sacraments, or in other parts of the liturgy', may be extended—specially in the readings and directives and in some prayers and chants. The advisability of this use of the vernacular is left to the judgment of the competent ecclesiastical authority, and bishops of neighbouring territories are to consult together when they in fact make use of the same language. Any wider use of the vernacular must be a matter for special approval by the Holy See.

But, quite apart from the question of language, the *Constitution* lays great stress on the adaptation of the liturgy to the culture and traditions of different nations. Hence provision is made for variations, and even for experiments where these seem likely to lead to a more fruitful integration of the liturgy into the cultural life of a people.

The second chapter of the *Constitution* is devoted to the eucharist, and here the emphasis once more is on a revision that will more clearly indicate its central place in the liturgical life of the Church. Simplification, more biblical readings, the regular homily, and the restoration of the 'prayer of the faithful' after the gospel and homily: all this, in advance of any later reforms, is designed to encourage a truly corporate prayer, and the provision, for instance, for communion in both kinds on special occasions (e.g. to adult converts in the mass that follows their baptism) and for concelebration (on such occasions as diocesan synods and at the

conventual mass of a community) is to be seen, once again, not as 'novelty' but rather as a true extension of the mass's pastoral meaning.

Sacraments and sacramentals are, in chapter three, to be revised in the light of the governing pastoral principles of the whole *Constitution*. Here the use of the vernacular is extended to all the sacraments.³ Baptismal rites are to be simplified, so that their true significance as rites of initiation may be made plain. Confirmation is to be revised, so that its connection with the whole process of Christian initiation will appear, and the sacrament of penance, too, is to have its rites and formulae changed to stress more effectively the nature and effects of the sacrament. So, too, texts of the sacraments of holy order, matrimony, and of the anointing of the sick are to be revised in the same pastoral sense. The rites of burial are to express more emphatically the 'paschal character' of the death of the Christian, and they are to take into account the customs of different nations—such as the liturgical colours to be used.⁴

The revision of the divine office is to be in terms of a greater biblical stress: the main hours are to be Lauds and Vespers. Prime is abolished, and a choice of the little hours (Terce, Sext, None) can be made according to the appropriate time of day. A newly devised order of Matins will make it appropriate to any hour of the day: fewer psalms and longer readings, and a careful revision of the lessons, will underline its truly liturgical character. The psalter will no longer be distributed through one week but over a longer period. Latin is to continue as the language of the divine office for clerics, but in individual cases the vernacular may be allowed by the bishop for good reasons.

The chapters on the Liturgical Year, Sacred Music and Sacred Art complete the *Constitution*. They are all marked by the same liberating, pastoral emphasis that runs through the whole document. And one may welcome, in particular, the sense of legitimate freedom that marks the distinction made between liturgical tradition and the artistic forms, varying as they do from age to age, and from culture to culture, in which that tradition is expressed.

It can be left to the *Constitution* itself to summarize the significance of this great step towards the work of spiritual renewal which awaits the Church and all her members. For it is above all a *spiritual* reality that we are concerned with, a renewed realization that the Church has no

³ A proposal to retain Latin for the 'form' of the sacraments was defeated in the Council.

⁴ At the Assisi Conference, Bishop Van Bakkum had pointed out the absurdity of Catholic missionaries using black vestments for funerals in the Far East, where the colour of mourning is invariably white.

other end but that of bringing men to share in the divine life that has been made available to them through Christ. And so it is (Constit. 8) that 'in the liturgy we already enjoy on earth a foretaste of the heavenly liturgy which is celebrated above in that heavenly Jerusalem whither this earthly pilgrimage shall lead us, where Christ is seated on the right hand of his Father, as giver of holiness and priest of the true tabernacle; in the liturgy we join with the whole court of heaven in praising the Lord in hymns of glory; we honour the memory of the saints and hope for a share with them in the company of the blessed; we look forward to the coming of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ who will in heaven indeed be our life, with whom we shall reign in glory'.

Nothing less than that is the aim of the Liturgy—and hence of the Council's *Constitution* designed to restore it to its true dignity.

Jewish Sabbath and Christian Sunday

BERNARD P. ROBINSON

There is a great movement of rapprochement taking place in the world today, not only between Christian and Christian, but also between Christian and Jew. More has been written on ecumenical work among Christians than on the Christian-Jewish dialogue, which is yet in its infancy and is perhaps regarded with the same half-conscious suspicion and diffidence that the Christian unity movement at first aroused; but the most recent news from Vatican II shows that the relation of the Church to the Synagogue is at last receiving serious attention.

It cannot, I think, be too often emphasised that there is no discontinuity between the Jewish and the Christian dispensations. St Paul in Romans II explains the relation between the covenants in terms of the growth of a tree. It is as if, he says, some branches were broken off from an olive tree and a wild olive were grafted into their place. It is not that the old tree was uprooted and a new one planted in its place; there is one