SACROSANCTUM CONCILIIUM

Notes

Overall summary: “PASSIVE to ACTIVE”

Mother Church earnestly desires that all the faithful should be led to that fully conscious, and active participation in liturgical celebrations which is demanded by the very nature of the liturgy. Such participation by the Christian people as "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a redeemed people (1 Pet. 2:9; cf. 2:4-5), is their right and duty by reason of their baptism. In the restoration and promotion of the sacred liturgy, this full and active participation by all the people is the aim to be considered before all else; for it is the primary and indispensable source from which the faithful are to derive the true Christian spirit; and therefore pastors of souls must zealously strive to achieve it, by means of the necessary instruction, in all their pastoral work. (SC 14)

Title and purpose

As is customary with Catholic documents and documents of an Ecumenical Council, the name of this Constitution, "Sacred Council" in Latin, is taken from the first line of the document:

As the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, Sacrosanctum Concilium was one of the most significant measures enacted by the Second Vatican Council. It was approved by the assembled bishops by a vote of 2,147 to 4 and promulgated by Pope Paul VI on December 4, 1963.

1. At the very beginning we are told that the sacred Council has several aims in view:
   i. **TO ENERGIZE CATHOLICS**: it desires to impart an ever increasing vigor to the Christian life of the faithful;
   ii. **TO UPDATE CHURCH INSTITUTIONS**: to adapt more suitably to the needs of our own times those institutions which are subject to change;
   iii. **TO ENCOURAGE CHRISTIAN UNITY**: to foster whatever can promote union among all who believe in Christ;
   iv. **TO REACH OUT TO THE WHOLE WORLD**: to strengthen whatever can help to call the whole of mankind into the household of the Church.

With these aims in mind, the Council therefore sees particularly cogent reasons for undertaking the reform and promotion of the liturgy. (Sacrosanctum Concilium)

Participation of the laity

The first issue considered by the Council therefore, and one which has the most immediate effect on the lives of individual Catholics, was the revision of the liturgy. The central idea was that there ought to be greater lay participation in the liturgy.
Mother Church earnestly desires that all the faithful should be led to that fully conscious and active participation in liturgical celebrations which is demanded by the very nature of the liturgy. Such participation by the Christian people as a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a redeemed people (1 Peter 2:9; cf. 2:4–5), is their right and duty by reason of their baptism. —Sacrosanctum Concilium 14

- Liturgy was the first topic discussed / debated at the Second Vatican Council.

- The Bishops decided to take up the topic of Liturgy first because of all the draft documents prepared for the Council, the Draft Document on Liturgy was is the best shape.
  - European Monasteries had done much work on improving their liturgical life. (Dom Guerenger / Pius Parsch)
  - Pope Saint Pius X (1903-1914) had begun liturgical reform in encouraging frequent Holy Communion.
  - Pope Pius XII (1939-1958) He relaxed the time of Eucharistic Fast to encourage the laity to receive the Eucharist. He seriously addressed the topic of Liturgy in an Encyclical Letter called “Mediator Dei” (The mediator of God).
    - Christ is not only present under the forms of bread and wine, but also is present in the priest and the people.
  - In 1951 Reformed the ceremonies of holy Week
  - Encourages Bi Lingual Missals for the use of the laity.
  - LIMITED use of Vernacular was encouraged in many places.
  - In 1950’s the “Sacred Congregation for Rites” encourages the use of the Dialogue Mass.
  - These developments – a century in the making – reached their culmination in the Constitution on the Liturgy.

- Going into the Council there was a sense many experienced “that Liturgy was done FOR the people, NOT BY the people.

- Growing sense that Latin / rubrical performance of ritual etc. created a sense of “separation” between priest and people.

- Consequently, Lay faithful were PASSIVE in the liturgy and so tended toward “extra-liturgical” devotions: Benediction / Novenas / Rosary.
Debate began on Monday, October 22, 1962. The debate / discussion lasted for FIFTEEN MEETINGS (Called Congregations). It took up Half of the Council’s first Session.

The initial draft (which changed little from the final document) was put together by a Preparatory Commission, influenced largely by Fr. Annibale Bugnini, laying out principles of reform.

During 15 days (Congregations) of debate, 328 Speeches were delivered by Council participants (another 297 comments were submitted in writing).

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2. Topics generating most intense and vigorous debate were:
   (1) The use of Vernacular language in the Liturgy,
   (2) Whether or not priests could Concelebrate.
   (3) the possibility of Holy Communion under both forms,
   (4) the role of national conferences of Bishops in implementing localized adaptation of the liturgy.

A. Introduction (1-4)
   General Principles for the Restoration and Promotion of the Sacred Liturgy (5-46)  Theological and pastoral principles for the reform and promotion of the liturgy grounded in a vision of Christ and the Church :
   (1) “Jesus Christ is the source of our lives, our salvation and our worship” (This theme runs through the entire Constitution)
   (2) The Church is actualized and made manifest in the liturgy
      ▪ Christ, through his life, death, and resurrection, is the instrument of the salvation of humankind.
      ▪ Through this paschal event (death/resurrection) of Jesus the Church is born.
      ▪ All of Catholic liturgy is embedded in the paschal mystery of Jesus Christ.
      ▪ The Church continues the mission of Jesus Christ: to proclaim the Gospel to all creatures.
      ▪ Christ always present in the Church and its liturgy:
• a. in the minister
• b. in the eucharistic elements
• c. in the sacraments
• d. in the proclamation of the Scriptures in the assembly
• e. in the Church gathered for prayer and praise.

- Each liturgy is a realization of the priestly office of Jesus Christ, accomplished by the whole body of Christ, head and members.
- The Church’s earthly liturgy participates in the heavenly liturgy, toward which we journey as pilgrims.
- Liturgy does not exhaust the entire activity of the Church:
  • presumes faith and conversion,
  • based in evangelization,
  • catechesis,
  • and mission

(3) Liturgy is the fount and summit of the Christian life

• evangelization, conversion, faith find full expression in liturgy.
• liturgical celebration leads to life of holiness and discipleship.

- For liturgy to be efficacious, all the faithful must take part with proper dispositions:
  • a. pastors: concern for worthy celebration
  • b. people: prepared and engaged in the liturgy and its action - developing their lives of personal prayer and spirituality

CHAPTER I

A. The Nature of the Sacred Liturgy and Its Importance in the Church’s Life (5-13)

i. Christ’s work of redemption was achieved through the Paschal mystery of his death and resurrection.
ii. This redemption touches us through the liturgy, especially Baptism and the Holy Eucharist.
iii. The Church continues the mission of proclaiming the Gospel to all
iv. Christ is present, in the liturgy, in many ways: the “Eucharistic species”, the priest, the people.
v. While preaching and private and popular devotions are good and necessary, it is the Liturgy itself which is the SOURCE and SUMMIT of all the Church’

B. The Promotion of Liturgical Instruction and Active Participation (14-20)

i. liturgy involves elements subject to change as well as unchangeable elements (21)
ii. Full, Conscious, Active (actual), participation of everyone at the Liturgy is to be encouraged. This is the PRIMARY concern of renewal. The theme is repeated more than twelve times
C. The (principles of) Reform of the Sacred Liturgy (21-46)
   i. The call for a general, comprehensive reform of the Liturgy.
   ii. 1. reform guided by competent authority 2. reform will involve an organic development of liturgical rites which is theologically, historically, and pastorally sound scripture is central to worship (24)
   iii. Not just the Mass /but the entire liturgical system.
   iv. To accomplish this, books are to be revised as soon as is possible.

D. General Norms (22-25)
   a. Norms Drawn from the Hierarchic and Communal Nature of the Liturgy (26-32)
      i. Since the church does not wish to impose a rigid uniformity, local adaptation of the liturgy is sometimes appropriate. One of the more salient theological insights of The Sacred Constitution on the Liturgy is its vision of the local church united with its bishop around the Eucharist. (also LG, 23, 26).
      ii. The issue of the relationship of the local bishop to the universal church (clearly denoted by union with the bishop of Rome, the pope) would come to dominate the debate on the Constitution on the Church.
      iii. But this issue first came up in the debates on the liturgy: Just how much authority could local leaders exercise in adapting the liturgy?
      iv. The minority position (some bishops and cardinals wanted all authority to rest in Rome, with the pope and the various Vatican offices of the curia.)
      v. The majority position (voiced mainly by various Diocesan bishops and cardinals) wanted more authority at the local level. In the end the Constitution on Liturgy affirmed the authority of local bishops’ conferences to make ‘come’ adaptations, provided that the “substantial unity” of the liturgy is preserved. Changes that involve a “more radical adaptation” are to be referred to Rome.

   b. Norms Based Upon the Teaching and Pastoral Nature of the Liturgy (33-36)
      i. liturgical rites should be able to ‘speak for themselves’ and not require much explanation (34).
      ii. Sacred Scripture readings need to be central and throughout the liturgical year more varied Scripture read. (35).
      iii. preaching requires more attention and should draw from Scripture & Tradition (35).
      iv. The Latin Language is to be preserved but for the sake of pastoral care, more extensive use of the vernacular is permitted and even encouraged (36)

   c. Norms for Adapting the Liturgy to the Culture and Traditions of Peoples (37-40)
      i. The Liturgy may be adapted to the culture and traditions of the peoples (37-40). - genius and talents of various peoples are appropriately incorporated into liturgy insofar as they foster its true spirit (37)
      ii. goal is unity rather than uniformity (38).
iii. inculturation process guided by appropriate authority (39-40).
iv. In the end SC affirmed the authority of local bishops’ conferences to make adaptations, provided that the “substantial unity” of the liturgy is preserved. Changes that involve a “more radical adaptation” are to be referred to Rome.

d. Promotion of Liturgical Life in Diocese and Parish (41-42)
   i. liturgical life must be promoted on national, diocesan, and parish levels (41-46)

e. The Promotion of Pastoral-Liturgical Action (43-46)
   i. Regions should establish qualified Liturgical Commissions to oversee good faithful celebrations of the liturgy

CHAPTER II
A. The Most Sacred Mystery of the Eucharist (47-58)
   a. Chapter two begins with a review of eucharistic theology. Instituted at the Last Supper, the Eucharist is a sacrifice of Christ’s Body and Blood, a sacrament of love, a sign of unity, a bond of charity and a paschal banquet.
   b. Then moves to recommendations for reform, guided by concern for the promotion of the active participation of all of the faithful.
   c. Therefore, while preserving their substance with great care, the rites are to be simplified, more Scripture is to be used, homilies are recommended, and the prayer of the faithful is to be restored.
   d. While fostering the vernacular, care must be taken to preserve the Latin Language in liturgy and the people of God should be adept at participating in both languages.
   e. Faithful to the dogmatic teaching of the council of Trent, nonetheless, the laity should (at least on occasions) receive Holy Communion also from the Cup.
   f. Since The Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist are joined as one, essential for homily to be preached (52)
   g. Concelebration of priests shows the unity of the priesthood and should therefore be restored (for certain occasions at least).

CHAPTER III
A. The Other Sacraments and the Sacramentals (59-82)
   a. The concern for the intelligibility of the rites and the active participation of the people continues in SC’s treatment of the other sacraments.
   b. Significant proposals made in chapter three include the restoration of the catechumenate for adults (a period of formation and instruction for those who choose to be baptized into the church),
   c. the revision of the rite of confirmation so that its connection with baptism is made clearer,
   d. the recognition that the sacrament called “Extreme Unction” is more accurately named “Anointing of the Sick” and that it is not intended only for those at the
point of death, and the renewal of the funeral rites so that they express more clearly the hope of the resurrection.
e. Certain elements from local cultures, where appropriate, can be incorporated into the church’s sacramental life (for example, initiation and marriage rituals).

CHAPTER IV

A. The Divine Office (83-101)
   a. The Divine Office, or the Liturgy of the Hours, is the church’s public prayer, a recitation of psalms and other scriptural passages and prayers said throughout the day.
   b. At the time of Vatican II, these regular prayers were sung in many communities of vowed religious and were required of most clerics. Thus SC keeps these groups in mind.
   c. But the text also encourages the laity to take up this ancient tradition. The specific suggestions made are meant to help everyone who prays the Divine Office better integrate this practice with the conditions of modern life.

CHAPTER V

a. The Liturgical Year (102-111)
   a. Over the course of a year, the church celebrates the whole story of Jesus—from his birth and life, to his death and resurrection, to his ascension into heaven and the promise of his return.
   b. The reform of the liturgical calendar is meant to bring out more clearly the profoundly Christ-centered nature of the church’s seasons.
   c. Thus, while celebrating the lives of Mary and the other saints is important, these should not distract from the church’s primary focus on Jesus.
   d. In response to movements outside the church, an appendix was added to SC, stating that the Council was not opposed to a perpetual calendar with a fixed date for Easter—provided that all Christians agreed on it.

CHAPTER VI & VII

b. Sacred Music (112-121) Sacred Art and Sacred Furnishings (122-130)
   a. The final chapters on sacred music and sacred art generally praise the role of art and the work of artists in promoting prayer and piety.
   b. The document encourages forms of music that enable the active participation of the people.
   c. In art, it recommends noble beauty over sumptuous display.
   d. Church buildings should be designed with the liturgy in mind.
e. The space should allow for the active participation of the faithful.

c. Appendix: A Declaration of the Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican on Revision of the Calendar

THE DOCUMENT TODAY
UNDERSTANDING AND MYSTERY

Perhaps the greatest gain to come from the reform of the liturgy inspired by SC is an increase in understanding. With prayers in the vernacular as well as in Latin, Catholics today can more easily understand what is going on at Mass. And with many of the rituals simplified, the major symbols in the sacraments stand out more clearly.

If a sacrament is both sign and cause of God’s grace, it is the sign aspect that has been emphasized since Vatican II: “In this renewal, both texts and rites should be ordered so as to express more clearly the holy things which they signify” (SC, 21).

But some Catholics feel that what has been lost in all of this is a sense of mystery. For these Catholics, Sunday liturgy feels more like an informal gathering of people than the solemn worship of God. Many of these Catholics have no memories of the liturgy prior to Vatican II, but they still hunger for a greater sense of the sacred in worship. They want a feeling of awe and a recognition of God’s transcendence.

Other Catholics respond that God is encountered precisely in other people and in the basic activities of everyday life. This is the beauty and mystery of sacraments: God comes to us in the forms of bread and wine, God works through water, words and the touch of human hands. For these Catholics, the reform of the liturgy helps us to recognize the extraordinary in the ordinary, the sacred in the assembly.

Sometimes, differences between these two viewpoints erupt in conversations about music (traditional hymns or contemporary songs?) or church architecture (Where is the tabernacle to be placed? How are the pews to be arranged?). It is far too simplistic to label these “pre–Vatican II” and “post–Vatican II” positions. For all involved are post–Vatican II people.

Many have claimed that Vatican II went much further in encouraging "active participation" than previous Popes had allowed or recommended. Popes Pius X, Pius XI, and Pius XII consistently asked that the people be taught how to chant the responses at Mass and that they learn the prayers of the Mass in order to participate intelligently.

For its part, Vatican II never asked for the involvement of the laity in the sanctuary that is typical of post-conciliar practice.