

# THE CONSTITUTION *SACROSANCTUM CONCILIUM* THE PRIMACY OF THE LITURGY IN THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH

## ARCHBISHOP PIERO MARINI



Archbishop Piero Marini is President of the Pontifical Committee for International Eucharistic Congresses. From 1987 to 2007, he served as Master of Pontifical Liturgical Celebrations for Blessed Pope John Paul II and Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI.

Archbishop Marini was born in Valverde, Italy in 1942. He was ordained a priest on June 27, 1965. He holds a doctorate in liturgy from the College of Sant'Anselmo. In 1975, Marini became personal secretary to Archbishop Annibale Bugnini, a principle architect of the liturgical reforms that followed Vatican II. He was appointed Titular Bishop of Martirano on February 14, 1998 and was ordained bishop on March 19, 1998. On September 29, 2003 he was named an archbishop.

This talk was delivered at the National Meeting of the Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions on October 9, 2013 in Erie, PA. The meeting's theme was "The Christian Mystery and the Enduring Value of *Sacrosanctum Concilium*. It anticipated the fiftieth anniversary of the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* on December 4, 2013. The meeting is co-sponsored annually by the FDLC and the Bishops' Committee on Divine Worship of the USCCB.

The address was delivered entirely in Italian and the translation was projected on screens for the sake of the participants. What follows is the official English translation of Archbishop Marini's inspiring speech.

## **The Constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium* The Primacy of the Liturgy in the Life of the Church**

### **I. Introduction**

The promulgation of the Constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium* on the Sacred Liturgy on 4 December 1963 did not only open a door to the subsequent documents of the Second Vatican Council; it also marked the beginning of the renewal of the liturgy and of the Church which, various difficulties notwithstanding, continues even today to shape our Christian communities. At the time, few realized the significance of the document. Today, after fifty years, it is easier for us to assess the influence of *Sacrosanctum Concilium* on the overall renewal of ecclesial life. The presence and action of the Holy Spirit in the celebrating community, which the text of the Constitution forcefully reaffirms, makes it quite timely to reread the document from the standpoint of the relationship between celebration and Christian life: between the faith which is celebrated and the faith which is lived. This entails a recognition of the primacy of the liturgy in the life of the Church and in our own lives.

The present article, over and above the various chapter titles and their numbering, is really made up of three parts. Following the introduction, which looks at the situation of the liturgy and the Church's life on the eve of the Council, the first part is devoted to the Second Vatican Council and its distinctive characteristics, something indispensable for understanding not only the significance of the Council but of *Sacrosanctum Concilium* itself. The second part deals directly with the conciliar Constitution, which is seen above all in relation to the other Council documents. The principles underlying the Constitution and the entire liturgical reform are then examined. Finally, the third part, somewhat briefer than the other two, offers some reflections on the concrete implementation of the conciliar liturgical reform with an eye to the future: the liturgy and the challenges which still need to be faced.

#### *1. The gap between the progress of the liturgical movement and the Church's liturgical practice.*

Despite the growth of ideas regarding the renewal of the liturgy proposed by the liturgical movement from the first half of the nineteenth century on, and despite the reforms carried out by Pius XII, on the eve of the Council the notion of a highly centralized Church and a liturgy based essentially on rubricism continued to be widespread. It was generally held that *causae maiores* were exclusively the competence of the Roman Curia. This way of thinking had been consolidated as a result of the heavily centralizing praxis which began with the Council of Trent and the establishment of the Roman Congregations. The practice, justified at that time by the need to defend the Church's unity, became yet more radical following the definition of papal infallibility at the First Vatican Council, to the point that many felt that there was no longer a need to summon councils. Moreover, for centuries prior to Vatican II, the Church had lacked a broad experience of synods of bishops. In Italy, for example, prior to the Council, the bishops had never held a plenary meeting.

Not only ecclesial life, but liturgical practice was marked by immobility. For four centuries, except for the field of liturgy beginning with the time of Pius X, the term "reform" had not been part of the Catholic vision, since the term was associated with the Churches of the Reformation. Frequently

the term “continuity” was used instead, precisely to defend the Catholic Church from the charge of having abandoned authentic tradition. The tridentine liturgy, in fact, was based on the use of a single language and fixed rubrics. This was the fruit not only of Trent’s response to the Reformed Churches, but also of a lengthy process which had already begun in the first millennium, whereby the Roman liturgy passed from the simplicity and pastoral character typical of the patristic period to being marked by court pageantry and ritual complexity; this process reached its peak in the Avignon period and its aftermath, and with the redaction of the various *Caeremoniales*.<sup>1</sup> “The liturgical books published by order of the Council of Trent by Popes Saint Pius V, Gregory XIII, Clement VIII and Paul V were simple revisions, in an effort to return to the origins of the Roman liturgy as it had been fixed in the Middle Ages. It can be said in general that liturgical texts had changed little from the end of the thirteenth century and that, on the whole, the rites preserved the overall shape given them by the Carolingian liturgists”.<sup>2</sup> Such was the situation of the liturgy on the eve of Vatican II.

I recall that during my seminary years, each Sunday in the cathedral of my diocese of Bobbio there was a very complex ceremonial governing the celebration of the Pontifical Mass of the Bishop: the opening procession with the Bishop dressed in cappa magna with ermine and followed by his trainbearer, the rite of removing his shoes and putting on the slippers used for the celebration while servers extended a veil all around and the canons recited the prescribed Psalms. It was, to say the least, a great and empty choreography which had very little to do with the authentic spirit of the liturgy. Attention was completely focused on the celebrating Bishop, with the use of the bugia, genuflections and the kissing of his ring, and presence of an assistant priest. Then, during the celebration itself, everything took place with uncoordinated and overlapping movements. While the Bishop celebrated Mass, the schola performed chants and the assembly was practically abandoned to itself. The Mass itself was called “Pontifical”: in other words, it was the Bishop’s Mass. It gave the impression of a great disconnect between the celebrant and people. The only two moments in which the celebrant addressed the people were when he turned to say the *Orate, fratres*, and the elevation of the host at the moment of the consecration.

## 2. *A reform which could no longer be delayed*

The announcement of the Council, made by Blessed John XXIII on 25 January 1959 in the great hall of the monastery of Saint Paul Outside the Walls in Rome, was received by the cardinals present with “a resounding reverent silence”, as the Pope himself commented in his journal.<sup>3</sup> It was greeted instead with satisfaction by all those engaged in the renewal of the Church’s liturgical life. For them, the Council was an event which could make possible the reception of the ideals and suggestions developed over the fifty years of the liturgical movement. Indeed, exactly fifty years had passed since the Communication with which Dom Lambert Beauduin had inaugurated, on 23 September 1909, the Congress of the Catholic Works of Malines,<sup>4</sup> thus laying the foundations of the liturgical movement which in turn had prepared and facilitated the discussion of the liturgy during the Council.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. P. MARINI, *Il “Caeremoniale” e il Maestro della celebrazione*, in *Rivista Liturgica*, anno XCVIII, n. 6, 998-999.

<sup>2</sup> G.A. MARTIMORT, *Bilancio della riforma liturgica*, Milano, Edizione O.R., 1974, 14-15.

<sup>3</sup> G. ALBERIGO, *Storia del Concilio Vaticano II*, II, p. 20, Il Mulino, Bologna, 1995.

<sup>4</sup> L. BEAUDUIN, *La vraie prière de l’Eglise: Rapport présenté par le R.P. Dom Lambert Beauduin (sic), o.s.b.*, in *Questions Liturgiques, Studies in Liturgy* 91 (2010), 64-75.

From the moment of the announcement, then, the widespread hope for an eventual reform of the liturgy and of the Church was accompanied by concern about potential risks which a new Council might bring to the stability of doctrine and ecclesial life.<sup>5</sup>

These differing attitudes of concern and hope regarding the Council were evident in the publication of the *Motu Proprio Rubricarum Instructum* of 25 July 1960, prepared by the Sacred Congregation of Rites. The text was later put at the beginning of the Roman Missal published by the same Congregation in 1962.

The *Motu Proprio* began by recalling the Commission established by Pius XII on 12 May 1948 “in order to study a general liturgical reform”, and went on to say:

“We arrived at the decision... to leave to the Fathers of the forthcoming Ecumenical Council, the higher principles (*altiora principia*) regarding general liturgical reform, but not to delay further the aforementioned revision of the rubrics of the Breviary and the Missal”.<sup>6</sup>

The 1962 edition thus constituted the “reformed” Roman Missal which the Congregation intended to offer to the Council Fathers and to the Church.

It is true that the “Pian Commission” had already worked for a number of years on the project of a general reform of the liturgy,<sup>7</sup> but the decision to proceed to the revision and the publication of the two fundamental liturgical books on the very eve of the Council seemed to many liturgical experts at the time an attempt on the part of the Congregation of Rites to take over the reform of the Missal and the Breviary, and to limit the Council Fathers to discussing “the higher principles regarding general liturgical reform”.<sup>8</sup>

The concerns of the experts were not completely unfounded. In fact, the *Motu Proprio* accepted a de facto separation between the “higher principles” and rubrical instructions, ritual sequences and liturgical texts. Unfortunately, this separation was already centuries-old. From the Middle Ages on, the *lex orandi* and the *lex credendi et intellegendi* had gone their separate ways, resulting in a growing impoverishment of christology, which was increasingly detached from a soteriological perspective, and reducing the liturgy to mere rubricism and legalism. The celebration of the liturgy, detached from the general principles of liturgical theology was in practice reduced to the mechanical execution of rubrics which had little to do with the life and history of actual men and women.<sup>9</sup> The 1962 Missal did not in fact represent true reform: it was merely a new and improved edition of the tridentine missal and restated the old conception of the Mass as tied to the Latin language, to fixed rubrics and above all to a single priest celebrant. Even the method employed in the revision reaffirmed, on the very eve of the

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<sup>5</sup> A. MELLONI, “*Sacrosanctum Concilium 1963-2003*”. *Lo spessore storico della riforma liturgica e la ricezione del Vaticano II*, in *Rivista liturgica* 90/6 (2003), 916-917.

<sup>6</sup> “In sententiam devenimus, altiora principia, generalem liturgicam instaurationem respicientia, in proximo Concilio Oecumenico Patribus esse proponenda; memoratam vero rubricarum Breviarii et Missalis emendationem diutius non esse protrahendam”. *Missale Romanum ex decreto SS. Concilii Tridentini restitutum Summorum Pontificum cura recognitum. Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis*, 1962, p. IX.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. C. BRAGA, *La riforma liturgica di Pio XII. Documenti*. Edizioni Liturgiche, Roma 2003; A. BUGNINI, *La riforma liturgica (1948-1975)*, Edizioni Liturgiche, Roma, 1997, 902.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. E. CATTANEO, *Il culto cristiano in occidente*, Edizioni Liturgiche, Roma, 2009, 524-525.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. G. TRAPANI, *Gesù Cristo: mistero pasquale da celebrare*, in *La Liturgia della Chiesa, la Sacrosanctum Concilium e la sua eredità*, a cura di P. SORCI, Città Nuova Editrice, 2013, 139-140.

Council, the practice of centralizing power in the Roman Curia. As can be readily understood, the publication of the *Motu Proprio* and the relative Roman Missal created, as we have seen, deep concern on the part of those who were expecting the Council itself to give an impulse to the concrete renewal of the liturgy. Nonetheless, the *Motu Proprio*, while the expression of a mentality still far removed from the general principles of the liturgical movement and common to the great tradition of the Church in East and West, remained even for the Curia a sign of the need for a reform which could no longer be delayed.

## II. Understanding the Council in order to understand *Sacrosanctum Concilium*

To understand in depth the renewal brought about by the working of the Holy Spirit in the Church's life through the liturgy as renewed by the Council, it is helpful to keep in mind certain specific characteristics of the Second Vatican Council. Without such a vision, in my judgment, it is not possible to appreciate fully the value of the Council documents, and *Sacrosanctum Concilium* in particular.

### 1. *The specific characteristics of the Council*

Usually, in speaking of the Council, we immediately think of the documents which it issued; in other words, we look to what the Council said. The Council actually published a variety of texts: the four great Constitutions, two of which were Dogmatic, nine Decrees and three Declarations. But to understand more fully what Vatican II meant, we need to understand its specificity, what made it different from the other twenty Councils which preceded it. We need to understand, in other words, "What Happened at Vatican II", to use the title of Fr. John O'Malley's book<sup>10</sup>. Studying the Councils held over twenty centuries of the Church's life makes us realize that no one Council was like any other.<sup>11</sup> We can think, for example, of the role played by the Emperors in the Councils of the first millennium: they, and not the Pope of Rome, called and directed them. In those times the Pope, the Bishop of Rome, was generally content to send his representatives, who frequently were not bishops.<sup>12</sup> Also, from one Council to another, the participants themselves varied. One can also ask which Churches were represented at Councils by their bishops. Which categories of persons took an active part in the Council? It is clear in fact that various persons collaborated and prepared the decisions made by the bishops. So, to understand Second Vatican Council and the liturgical reform, we cannot restrict ourselves to asking about the documents alone.

Among many specific characteristics of Vatican II, here I will mention only two. In the first place, the Second Vatican Council was the first Council of the universal Church in the history of Christianity. The bishops present came from all over the world; they were not simply European bishops exported to missionary lands.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, the problems discussed did not regard the history

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<sup>10</sup> J.W. O'MALLEY, *What Happened at Vatican II*, Cambridge, 2010.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. G. RUGGERI, *Il Vaticano II come Chiesa in atto*, in *Concilium* 3/2012, 48-60.

<sup>12</sup> At the Second Council of Nicaea, for example, two presbyters took part as legates of Pope Hadrian: Peter, proto-presbyter of the Church of the Holy Apostle Peter in Rome and Peter, presbyter, monk and hegoumen of the monastery of San Saba in Rome. Cf. *Atti del Concilio Niceno secondo, ecumenico settimo*, a cura di C. VALENZIANO, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2004, I, p. 55.

<sup>13</sup> "At the opening of Vatican II, the Council Fathers came from 116 nations, of which 849 came from Western Europe (32%), 601 from Latin America (23%), 332 from North America (13%), 250 from Black Africa (8%), 174 from the

of Europe alone, but the history of the world. Remember that when the Council was announced, only fourteen years had passed since the end of the Second World War and the Gospel had to be somehow reinterpreted in a language comprehensible to the entire modern world. Humanity was in fact at the beginning of a new era marked by the economic and social ascendancy of the working classes; the entrance of women into public life – in Italy, women would only vote for the first time in 1948; the disappearance of the distinction between ruling peoples and ruled peoples; and by the need for peace in a world dominated by the Cold War.

Secondly, the Council was, as we are by now used to defining it, a pastoral Council. For the first time in the history of the Church, a Council was celebrated without using the formula *anathema sit*. This is one of the great advantages of Vatican II. The approach to the issues discussed at the other Councils had always been conditioned by the positions of the adversaries. At Trent, for example the discussions among the Council Fathers were determined by the lists prepared by Catholic theologians in response to statements by the Churches of the Reformation. This naturally set limits on a catholic vision of ecclesiastical issues. Only at Vatican II were the Fathers able to discuss the Church's problems without being conditioned by outside factors. The result was a new and different method and style, pastoral in nature, a method which tends not to lessen but rather to increase the weight of conciliar decisions.<sup>14</sup> Pastoral considerations, according to the Council, are not a sort of corollary to doctrine, but an essential dimension of doctrine itself. In other words, as we have already noted above, the ritual aspect and the doctrinal aspect can never be separated in liturgical theology. Here too, the Council demonstrated the vitality of tradition.<sup>15</sup>

In the end, as with every other Council, we need to view the convocation of the Second Vatican Council and its subsequent labors with the eyes of faith, as a result of the working of the Holy Spirit. For believers, the announcement made by Blessed Pope John XXIII was not only the fruit of his own personal insight as a Pope well acquainted with history and the changed conditions of our time,<sup>16</sup> but

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Communist bloc (7%), 95 from the Arab world (4%), 256 from Asia (10%) and 70 from Oceania (3%). As for the Council of Trent, although convoked for 15 March 1545, it could not be opened until 13 December of the same year, because in March almost no one was present. Finally, at its opening, it counted 31 fathers, the majority of whom were Italians. In its first phase (1545-1547), the number of Fathers never went beyond 70, practically all of whom were Spanish or Italians. In the last phase of the Council the number of Fathers fluctuated between 150 and 200". G. ROUTHIER, *Sacrosanctum Concilium: la sua singolarità della storia dei concili e la sua ermeneutica attuale*, in *Il Concilio Vaticano II e la Liturgia: memoria e futuro*. Atti della XLI Settimana di studi, APL, Rocca di Papa (Roma), 27-31 agosto 2012, Edizioni Liturgiche, Roma, 2013, 24.

<sup>14</sup> "The method of responding to errors and abuses adopted by Trent was replaced by a method of discernment, since the Council was a moment of spiritual discernment par excellence. In this way Vatican II succeeded in offering a coherent and well-structured exposition on the liturgy, as Trent had been unable to do, considering the method it adopted": G. ROUTHIER, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 24.

<sup>15</sup> "Vatican II was a re-reading of the Gospel in the light of contemporary culture. It produced a renewal movement that simply comes from the same Gospel. Its fruits are enormous. Just recall the liturgy. The work of liturgical reform has been a service to the people as a re-reading of the Gospel from a concrete historical situation. Yes, there are hermeneutics of continuity and discontinuity, but one thing is clear: the dynamic of reading the Gospel, actualizing its message for today – which was typical of Vatican II – is absolutely irreversible". Interview with POPE FRANCIS, *La Civiltà Cattolica* 2013, III, 467.

<sup>16</sup> "Our situation today, the demands of the last fifty years and developments in doctrine have forced us to confront new realities, as I said in the opening address of the Council. It is not the Gospel which has changed; we are the ones who come to understand it better. Anyone who has lived long, and found himself at the beginning of the century confronting new human and social challenges, anyone who has lived, as I have, for twenty years in the Orient or in France and had to face different cultures and traditions, knows that the time has come to read the signs of the times, to seize its possibilities and to

above all as the expression of a realization on the part of a man of God moved by the Spirit. The Pope in fact saw the Council as “a new Pentecost which would cause the Church to flourish”,<sup>17</sup> while Pope Paul VI, at the beginning of his pontificate, confirmed the convocation of the Council by John XXIII as an act of obedience to a divine inspiration: “O dear and venerable Pope John, it was by a divine inspiration, we believe, that you desired and convoked this Council”.<sup>18</sup>

As Pope John himself made clear in the address *Gaudet Mater Ecclesia* with which he solemnly opened the Council on 11 October 1962, Vatican II was a witness of the Church’s faith in Christ’s presence, both in herself and in her mission in the service of the human family, and a celebration which openly manifested the union between Christ and his Church:

“Ecumenical Councils, whenever they meet, are the solemn celebration of the union between Christ and his Church; thus they lead to the universal spread of truth; right guidance of individual, domestic, and social life; and the consolidation of spiritual energies, in a perennial elevation towards true and eternal goods (No. 4)”.<sup>19</sup>

In the Council, then, according to the Pope, the whole Church in some way becomes present, inasmuch as Christ is present and one with his Church, in accordance with the liturgical theology of betrothal. This was evidently the case with Vatican Council II. Precisely in her Councils, the Church both celebrates Christ’s union with herself and points to the presence of the risen Christ in history. Historical events must therefore, in some sense, be interpreted by believers as a new manifestation of the incarnation: the signs of the times are signs of the continuing presence of the risen Christ in history, through his Spirit.

The Church at the Second Vatican Council thus confirmed that tradition is constantly growing and that the Church herself, through the working of the Spirit, transmits it in time to every new generation of believers: “It is not the Gospel which changes, but rather we, who come to understand it better”. Consequently, as Pope John put it: Christ is ever resplendent at the centre of history, and the Church’s task is to enable the modern world to make contact with the perennial vitality of the Gospel. It is thus necessary to be able to interpret the events of history in the light of salvation history. These words of Pope John contributed significantly to clarifying the meaning of Tradition in the Catholic Church.<sup>20</sup> In this regard we can ponder an important observation of Pope Francis:

“God manifests himself in historical revelation, in history. Time initiates processes, and space crystallizes them. God is in history, in the processes. We must not focus on occupying the spaces where power is exercised, but rather on starting long-run historical processes. We must initiate processes rather than occupy spaces. God manifests himself in time and is present in the processes of

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be be farsighted”. A. RONCALLI, *Il Giornale dell’anima*, a cura di A. MELLONI, Istituto per le scienze religiose, Bologna, 1987, 500.

<sup>17</sup> JOHN XXIII, *Final Address of the First Session of the Council*, 8 December 1962, in *Enchiridion Vaticanum*, I, EDB, Bologna, 1979, n. 124, [77].

<sup>18</sup> PAUL VI, *Opening Address of the Second Period of the Council*, 29 September 1963, in *Enchiridion Vaticanum*, I, EDB Bologna, 1979, n. 138, [87].

<sup>19</sup> A. MELLONI, *Fede, tradizione, profezia. Studi su Giovanni XXIII e sul Vaticano II*, Paideia ed., Brescia, 1984, 246-247.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Roman Missal, Introduction, No. 9.

history. This gives priority to actions which give birth to new historical dynamics. And it requires patience, waiting.”<sup>21</sup>

Without this ability to see things in the light of faith and the working of the Holy Spirit, neither the Council nor *Sacrosanctum Concilium* can be understood.

## 2. *A Council important for the liturgy*

The Second Vatican Council was a significant Council for the liturgy. Its importance is evident if we consider that in the entire history of the Church it was the only Council which devoted a specific document to the liturgy: the Constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium*. Vatican II also benefitted from a general vision of centuries of development in liturgical practice in East and West, a vision which was not possible four centuries earlier, at the time of the Council of Trent, not least for the lack of adequate tools.<sup>22</sup> We can think, for example, of the great benefits which the invention of printing brought, only after the Council of Trent, to the spread of the Bible, liturgical books and patristic texts.

With Vatican II, for the first time in the Church’s history it was possible to set forth, also drawing on the research promoted by the liturgical movement, both the fundamental principles of the liturgy and of the essential elements of liturgical celebration, with due consideration for the liturgical experience of the Oriental Churches. In the fifty years or so which have passed from the beginning of the liturgical reform willed by the Council, a reform has taken place which exceeds in breadth and depth every other past reform, including that attributed to Saint Gregory the Great and that of the sixteenth century.

Before continuing, allow me a brief digression of a personal nature. Your speaker did not take part in the Council, but breathed its fresh air at close hand. I arrived in Rome as a priest at the end of September 1965, while the Council was still in session. I never took part in any conciliar session, even though more than once I would take a look out of curiosity at the inside of the Council hall. Also, almost every day during the months of October, November and December of that year, towards one o’clock in the afternoon, following a morning’s work at Santa Martha, I would walk together with my superior, Fr. Annibale Bugnini, through Saint Peter’s Square and bump into the bishops streaming out of the Council hall, vested, as was then the custom, in the mantelletta. It was a unique spectacle, very impressive and most striking. That spontaneous choreography remains still vividly present in my memory. My work at the “Consilium” brought me into contact with the greatest experts in liturgy of the time, and with about 50 Council Fathers<sup>23</sup> who were members of that body, established at the beginning of 1964 by Pope Paul VI for the implementation of the liturgical reform of the Council. It also enabled me to know personally over a number of years some of the major figures at the Council, and to breathe deeply, also in the years which followed, the spirit and the enthusiasm which animated the Fathers and the experts. Enthusiasm for that grandiose experience which resulted from the

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<sup>21</sup> Interview with POPE FRANCIS, *La Civiltà Cattolica*, 2013, III, 468.

<sup>22</sup> For example, there was little or no knowledge of the history of the Roman liturgy. “In particular, as far as the Roman Canon of the Mass was concerned, practically nothing was known about the historical development of the Roman liturgy; the majority of the Fathers [of the Council of Trent] believed that the essential elements of the Roman Canon in use came directly from the Apostles and consequently dated back to Peter, and that secondary elements alone were decreed by the Popes in successive ages”. K. SCHATZ, *Storia dei Concili. La Chiesa nei suoi punti focali*, EDB, Bologna, 1999, 193.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. CONSILIIUM AD EXSEQUENDAM CONSTITUTIONEM DE SACRA LITURGIA, *Elenchus Membrorum, Consultorum, Consiliariorum, Coetuum ad Studiis*, Tipografia Poliglotta Vaticana, 1967.

“movement of the Holy Spirit in his Church”, as the Council Fathers themselves wrote in the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy.<sup>24</sup> A spirit and enthusiasm for which, fifty years later, I feel an even greater nostalgia and desire. That is why I believe that the commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the promulgation of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy is an opportunity to understand more fully and to experience anew the spirit of the Council “as *the great grace from which the Church benefitted in the twentieth century*”.<sup>25</sup> Truly, “the liturgical renewal is the most visible fruit of the entire work of the Council” (1985 EXTRAORDINARY SYNOD OF BISHOPS, *Relatio finalis*, II, B b., 1). For many people, the message of the Second Vatican Council was perceived principally through the liturgical reform”.<sup>26</sup>

For my part, I thank the Lord for having let me meet and know for many years, along with the generation of liturgists of the Council, the three great figures of the liturgical reform: Pope Paul VI, Cardinal Giacomo Lercaro and Archbishop Annibale Bugnini, respectively the President and Secretary of the *Consilium ad exsequendam Constitutionem de Sacra Liturgia*.<sup>27</sup> I am convinced that the words spoken in quite different circumstances by an English statesman, can be applied to them: “Never have so many owed so much to so few”.

### III. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, a critical document for the Council and the Church

#### 1. *The discussion of the schema on the liturgy at the Council*

Following almost four years of preparation, on 11 October 1962 Pope John opened the Council and set out its goals in the aforementioned address, *Gaudet Mater Ecclesia*.<sup>28</sup> From the time of its announcement, the Council met with different reactions. At the beginning, however, almost everyone was agreed that the discussion of liturgy would not present great problems, and so it could serve as a moment of calm reflection before approaching the more decisive topics of Church renewal. The Pope, following the suggestion of numerous Fathers, thus decided to begin the work of the Council with the treatment of the schema on the sacred liturgy. Debate began on 22 October 1962, and from that date until 13 November fifteen plenary sessions took place. The interventions of the Fathers numbered 685. “The overwhelming majority declared itself favorable and in agreement with the principles and proposals stated, since these had been dictated by pastoral criteria”.<sup>29</sup>

At the conclusion of the interventions, on 14 November 1962 the Fathers voted on a general statement which represented in effect the acceptance or not of the liturgical schema. The result of the vote was the following: those voting, 2,215; the required majority (2/3), 1,476; in favor, 2,162; not in favor, 46; invalid votes, 7.

The individual sections of the Constitution were then examined. On 8 December 1962, Pope John XXIII closed the first session of the Council. He died on 3 June 1963. Pope Paul VI was elected on 21 June and opened the second session of the Council on 29 September 1963. The relations and the

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<sup>24</sup> SC 3.

<sup>25</sup> JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Letter *Novo millennio ineunte*, 57.

<sup>26</sup> JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Letter *Vicesimus quintus annus*, 12.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. P. MARINI, *A Challenging Reform*, Liturgical Press, Collegeville, 2007.

<sup>28</sup> A. MELLONI, *Fede, tradizione, profezia*, 241-283.

<sup>29</sup> E. CATTANEO, *Il culto cristiano in occidente*, 631.

voting on the individual parts of the schema continued until the end of October. All the proposals for modifications were studied by the conciliar Commission and on 22 November 1963 the schema was submitted to a definitive vote: of 2178 voters, 2158 voted for the scheme and 19 against, with one invalid vote.

Pope Paul VI nonetheless requested that the Fathers continue to study the text until 4 December, on which date he would ask for a final vote prior to the solemn promulgation of the Constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium*. The result of this final vote was: in favor, 2,147; not in favor, 4. The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy was thus in effect promulgated unanimously.

## 2. *The value of “Sacrosanctum Concilium”*

Thus the lengthy period of hope and expectation on the part of the liturgical movement came to an end, and the new phase of concretely implementing the Council’s decisions began.

The document on the liturgy, after more than a year of debate, became the first document to be approved by the Council Fathers. At the time, few realized that the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy was not simply a good document for inaugurating the labors of the Council, since it had garnered the overwhelming approval of the Fathers, but also a text which would guide the entire work of the Council and the life of the Church herself.

For the first time in the Church’s history, the liturgy was presented in all its profound and authentic beauty, in its fundamental biblical and theological principles, and in its specific celebratory and pastoral aspects. The Fathers were concerned both for general principles and the actual ritual texts and sequences. They not only moved beyond the division between “higher principles” and actual rites, but they confirmed the relationship between the two; without that mutual relationship, it is not possible fully to understand the liturgy. Principles and rites both pertain to the category of mystagogy: the principles lead to an understanding of the mystery being celebrated, while the rites lead to an understanding of the principles of the mystery celebrated. The celebration of the rite was set at the center of the *lex orandi* and the *lex credendi et intellegendi*. In other words, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* confirmed that the higher principles are derived from the Church’s celebratory tradition and that the Church’s celebration draws constant inspiration from the higher principles. Only with this hermeneutic can we interpret and understand the liturgical reform.

In speaking of *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, then, we can distinguish first the general principles which are the basis and foundation of the liturgy itself (i.e., the sources mentioned in *Sacrosanctum Concilium*) and then the general principles which relate to, and are more directly connected with, the celebration of the rites themselves (for example, the principles of active participation and of celebration as an image of Church).

In the second part of this talk, mention will be made of what remains to be done after fifty years of liturgical life. What has already been accomplished is a well-known part of the Church’s life.

Pope Paul VI, who at the time was probably among the few who understood the historic and pastoral importance of the document, expressed the joy of the entire Church: “Our heart rejoices for this result. We observe the respect given to the scale of values and obligations: God in the first place; prayer as our first duty; the liturgy as the first divine source communicated to us, the first school of the

spiritual life, the first gift which we can give to the Christian people who believe and pray together with us, and a first invitation to the world to open its lips in blessed and sincere prayer and to feel the ineffable regenerative power of joining us in singing God's praises and humanity's hopes, through Christ our Lord and in the Holy Spirit".<sup>30</sup>

### 3. "*Sacrosanctum Concilium*", the matrix for other reforms

The Church, living in a general climate of freedom, and freed as never before in her history from forms of temporal conditioning and restrictions, was able to look forward, thanks to the Council, to a great project of renewal. This project, based on the indications given by Blessed Pope John XXIII in his address *Gaudet Mater Ecclesia*, was prophetically set forth in the first number of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy and synthetically described in four points: "the sacred Council has set out to impart an ever increasing vigor to the Christian lives of the faithful; to adapt more closely to the needs of our age those institutions which are subject to change; to encourage whatever can promote the union of all who believe in Christ; and to strengthen whatever serves to call all humanity into the Church's fold. Accordingly it sees particularly cogent reasons for undertaking the reform and promotion of the liturgy".<sup>31</sup>

Liturgical reform is thus the foundation of other reforms. The reform of the Church, ecumenism, mission, dialogue with the contemporary world, all these depend, in other words, on the reform of the liturgy. *Sacrosanctum Concilium* was the first of the Council's constitutions not only in a temporal sense, but also because it was the matrix for the other constitutions and every other reform advanced by the Council. For this reason I would agree that "*Sacrosanctum Concilium* is not about the liturgy alone, but in a real way about the fullness of the Christian experience, and that it thus contains a whole series of elements which are the premise, vital core, and even in some way the systematic framework of all the elements contained in the other acts of the Council".<sup>32</sup>

In marking the fiftieth anniversary of the promulgation of *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, then, we cannot limit ourselves to considering the value of the document in itself. We cannot, in other words, consider *Sacrosanctum Concilium* as a text which is now dated, or as a kind of "manual" for reforming the Church's rites, but rather as a document which was the *fons* in an "evolutionary" sense of the acts of the reform. To put it differently, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* inaugurated a reform which is not complete but ongoing, thanks to the presence and the working of the risen Christ in history through his Spirit. "The process of implementing the Council, as we realize from historical precedent, requires positing a fundamental distinction between what is pure implementation, however faithful, and what is inevitably an interpretation, in the sense of an evolution, of the same acts, as a consequence not only of historical development but also of the growth in grace which occurs in the process of implementation itself".<sup>33</sup>

Consequently we need to take into consideration the influence which the document and its practical implementation have had in the life of our Churches. In fact, the basic decisions of the

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<sup>30</sup> PAUL VI, *Address for the Solemn Closing of the II Session of the Second Vatican Council*, 4 December 1963, in *Enchiridion Vaticanum*, I, n. 212, [127-128].

<sup>31</sup> SC 1.

<sup>32</sup> G. DOSSETTI, *Il Vaticano II. Frammenti di una riflessione*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 1996, 25.

<sup>33</sup> G. DOSSETTI, *Per una "Chiesa eucaristica". Rilettura della portata dottrinale della Costituzione liturgica del Vaticano II. Lezioni del 1965*, a cura di G. ALBERIGO e G. RUGGIERI, Bologna, 2001, 23.

Council Fathers had their origin and point of departure in the text of *Sacrosanctum Concilium*. The same Spirit who awakened the liturgical movement in the Church, and who guided and inspired the basic decisions of the Fathers in the Council,<sup>34</sup> continues even today, through the celebration of the liturgy, to renew ecclesial communities the world over.

Awareness of the significance of the Council's constitution on the liturgy has grown with time: both the brief period of the Council's duration and the longer period of recent history.

*Sacrosanctum Concilium* in fact contains the great themes which would be developed in the principal documents of the Council.<sup>35</sup>

Lastly, it should be remembered that the understanding of *Sacrosanctum Concilium* has grown through the progressive implementation of its specific dispositions in liturgical celebrations. In this way, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* has been increasingly understood not only by experts in liturgy, but also by all the celebrating assemblies throughout the world, and thus by the whole Church. The implementation of the reform thus became, starting on 7 March 1965,<sup>36</sup> a school of formation for the whole Christian people, not only in understanding the value of the document itself, but the Council as a whole. It needs to be kept in mind that the work of the Council is strictly linked to the implementation of the liturgical reform.

Today our view of these events and our reading of the documents takes place not only from the standpoint of the Council itself, but also of the fifty years in which it has influenced the life of the Church.

We cannot fail, then, to ask what impact the Council and the liturgical reform have had on the Church, since we are dealing with an event which continues even today to mark ecclesial life. We need in fact "to realize that the basic decisions taken by the Council Fathers and consigned to the promulgated documents – especially the four constitutions – have affected ecclesial life so greatly over

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<sup>34</sup> SC 3.

<sup>35</sup> "In *Sacrosanctum Concilium* we find contained germinally, as in the prelude of a symphony, the great themes which will then be developed in the principal documents of the Council: *Lumen Gentium*, with its vision of the Church as a sacrament or mystery of communion whose privileged manifestation is in the celebration of the paschal mystery on the part of the whole priestly people (LG 11), presided over by the Bishop (LG 25); *Dei Verbum* on Divine Revelation, with its statement that the Church venerates the divine Scriptures as she does the body of Christ, and in the liturgy is constantly nourished by Christ, the bread of life at the table of both the word and the body of Christ (DV 21); *Unitatis Redintegratio*, which recognizes in baptism the basis of Christian unity and in partaking of the one Eucharist the goal of the entire ecumenical journey (UR 22), and *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*, which acknowledges the equal dignity of the rites of all the Churches of East and West; *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, which considers the celebration of the Eucharist and of the other liturgical actions as the source and summit of all evangelization, the primary and qualifying task of the priestly ministry; *Ad Gentes*, which sees in Christian initiation with its culmination in the celebration of the Lord's Supper, the memorial of the death and resurrection of Christ, with the entire people of God the scope of all missionary efforts (AG 14); *Gaudium et Spes*, with its statement that the vocation of every Christian, associated by Baptism to the Paschal mystery, is to make his or her life conform to the death of Christ, in order to share in his resurrection (GS 22), and its acknowledgment of the dignity of work and of all efforts to humanize creation, which come to perfection in the celebration of the paschal mystery (GS 38)". P. SORCI, *Introduzione*, in *La liturgia della Chiesa: la Sacrosanctum Concilium e la sua eredità*, Città Nuova Editrice, 2003, 14-15.

<sup>36</sup> The date that the Instruction *Inter Oecumenici*, of 26 September 1964, took effect.

the past fifty years, that very little of the Church today would be as it is, had the Council not taken place".<sup>37</sup>

#### IV. Fundamental principles of the reform

The Council Fathers, in addition to setting down in the introduction to *Sacrosanctum Concilium* a number of goals which they had established for reforming the ordering of texts and rites, also laid down the fundamental criteria governing the entire reform. The constitution on the liturgy, in its first chapter, presents the general principles of the restoration and advancement of the liturgy in accordance with tradition and the needs of our time. In the constitution, two sets of principles can be distinguished: guiding principles and operating principles.<sup>38</sup>

Here I would briefly mention two basic principles laid down by *Sacrosanctum Concilium*: the return to the sources and the one priesthood in worship. These principles, inseparably linked, constitute, in my opinion the foundation for all the others.

##### 1. *The return to the sources: sacred Scripture and the practice of the Church of the Fathers.*

The sources of the liturgy indicated by *Sacrosanctum Concilium* are essentially two: sacred Scripture and the norm of the Fathers.

##### a) *sacred Scripture*

The relationship between Scripture and liturgy is clearly expressed by the constitution: the actions and signs derive their meaning from sacred Scripture.<sup>39</sup>

The liturgy accomplishes what is written in Scripture. The Bible stresses the importance of the people of God: the journey of salvation on which God leads his people is made not by one individual, but by the entire people. Scripture thus helps us to understand not only the content of the celebration but also the importance of the assembly and the public nature of the liturgy itself. Scripture, in other

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<sup>37</sup> *Una Chiesa contemporanea* (editorial), in *Il Regno*, 2012, n. 16, 559.

<sup>38</sup> These principles were listed and discussed, for example, by Annibale Bugnini:

*Guiding principles:*

- the liturgy as an exercise of the priesthood of Christ (SC 7)
- the liturgy as the source and summit of the Church's life (SC 10)
- full, conscious and active participation (SC 8)
- the manifestation of the Church (SC 26)
- substantial unity, not rigid uniformity (SC 38)
- sound tradition and legitimate progress (SC 23)

*Operating principles:*

- language
- the word of God
- catechesis
- song
- the reform of the liturgy

Cf. A. BUGNINI, *La riforma liturgica (1948-1975)*, 53-62.

<sup>39</sup> SC 24.

words, testifies to a lived history between God and his people, the history of salvation which continues in the liturgy through prayers and symbolic acts: *per ritus et preces*.

The elements which compose the liturgy: posture, gestures, formulas, all have a value and meaning which transcends their purely anthropological, functional or utilitarian dimension. These elements need to be perceived and experienced as “signs of the new and eternal covenant”, which take on meaning and saving value with reference to the words and acts of salvation history, and consequently by that great plan, made known to us by revelation, which culminates in the communion which God desires to bring about with humanity, and which has its center in the ministry of Christ. This means that the understanding of the words and signs of the liturgy is bound to a catechesis which, beginning with their anthropological significance, leads to an understanding of their symbolic and salvific value in reference to the events and words of Israel’s history and the life of Christ. They have a human meaning, yet by their relationship with the word of God they invite us to “go deeper”; they enable the believer to receive the Spirit which the signs are meant to signify and communicate. In order to understand this, it is necessary to go deeper, and going deeper demands the word of God in the Old and New Testaments. In this way, in the Passover meal of Christ we can discover the sacrifice of the new and eternal covenant. It is clear that the “understanding” of the mystery will be facilitated if the human sign is eloquent and, likewise, if its reference to the word of God is rich and constant.

Sacred Scripture is thus the norm and criterion for understanding the liturgy and for reforming its praxis. “In order to achieve the restoration, progress and adaptation of the sacred liturgy, it is essential to promote the warm and lively appreciation of sacred Scripture”.<sup>40</sup> There is a close connection between deepening knowledge of the Scriptures and liturgical reform. The ancient mystagogical texts attest that knowledge of the liturgy is none other than knowledge of Scripture.

b) *the norm or practice of the Fathers*

If Scripture is the source from which the renewal of the liturgy must draw, the early liturgical practice of the Churches of the Fathers, the “*pristina Sanctorum Patrum norma*” (cf. SC 50), must be considered the norm and rule inspiring the reform itself. In order to understand the ecclesial import of the conciliar principle of the “return to the norm of the Holy Fathers”, it is helpful to consider an address given by Pope Paul VI at the inauguration of the Augustinianum Institute of Patrology on 4 May 1970.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> SC 24.

<sup>41</sup> “The return to the Church Father is in fact part of that return to Christian origins without which it would be impossible to carry forward the biblical renewal, the liturgical reform and the new theological approach called for by the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council. To be convinced of this, we need but think of the particular role which the Fathers play in the Church. As witnesses of the faith of the first centuries, they are a living part of the tradition which comes from the apostles. “The sayings of the Church Fathers – as the Council points out – are a witness to the life-giving presence of this tradition, showing how its riches have been poured out in the practice and life of the believing and praying Church” (DV 8) ... But the Fathers were also brilliant theologians who set forth and defended Catholic dogma, and, for the greater part, zealous pastors who proclaimed it and applied it to the needs of souls. As theologians, they were the first to give systematic form to the apostolic preaching, for which reason, as Saint Augustine points out, they were to the Church’s development what the apostles were for her birth: “*talibus post apostolos sancta Ecclesia plantatoribus, rigatoribus, aediicatoribus, nutritoribus crevit*” (*Contra Iulianum Pelagianum*, 11, 10, 37: PL 44:70). As pastors, moreover, the Fathers were aware of the need to adapt the Gospel message to the mentality of their contemporaries and to nourish with the solid food of the truths of the faith both themselves and the People of God. And so it was that, for them, catechesis, theology, sacred Scripture, liturgy, and the spiritual and pastoral life were all joined in a living unity, and their works do not speak to the mind alone, but to the

The text, both scholarly and insightful, begins with a general statement of the absolute need for a return to the origins. Without such a “return to Christian origins it would not be possible to carry forward the biblical renewal, liturgical reform and the new theological method called for by the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council”.

Three reasons were given in support of this statement.

- The Fathers are witnesses to the faith of the first centuries, and a vital part of the tradition which comes from the Apostles. They bear witness to “the life-giving presence of this tradition, whose riches have passed into the practice and the life of the believing and praying Church”.
- The Fathers are also in the forefront of a second process: they gave systematic shape to the apostolic preaching, and in this sense they were for the Church’s development what the Apostles were for her birth. As theologians too, they testify to the bond of continuity of the Church with the tradition of the Apostles.
- Finally, the Fathers are witnesses to the process by which the Gospel message was adapted to the mentality of their contemporaries. They managed to combine catechesis, theology, sacred Scripture, the liturgy, and spiritual and pastoral life in a vital unity, with the result that their works do not speak simply to the intellect, but to the entire person, engaging thought, will and feeling.

All this, the text concludes, is united in the Fathers to a personal witness of holiness in such a way that their faith was expressed in life, not on the basis of intellectual arguments but by a concrete participation in the sacred mysteries.

As regards the liturgy in particular, the Fathers testify to a maturity attained in understanding the ritual sequences in the Church’s celebrations. The liturgical practice of their time can be said to testify to the conclusion of a gradual process of clarification on the part of the Church with regard to celebration of the sacred mysteries, beginning with the Last Supper and specifically with Christ’s command to “Do this in memory of me”. Precisely in the liturgical practice of their time, they guarantee the continuity of the apostolic tradition, not least by their adaption of texts and rites to the mentality of their contemporaries.

Consequently, the liturgy must always return to the pure sources of Christianity, to which the Fathers are the most authoritative witnesses, and constantly draw from their spirit for inspiration. The liturgical practice of the Church of the Fathers should become, in other words, the primordial form of the Christian liturgy, against which the liturgical life of the Church in every age is called to measure and judge itself, without, however, falling into an uncritical antiquarianism, since the men and women of today are no longer those of the fourth century. Both the reform willed by the Council of Trent and the reform willed by the Second Vatican Council were inspired by the principle of a return to the tradition of the Fathers.<sup>42</sup> Hence a number of fundamental elements characteristic of the patristic era

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whole person, engaging intellect, will and feeling. They had, in addition, a superabundant richness of Christian spirit, derived from their personal sanctity, thanks to which, at their school, faith is not content with mere intellectual reflection, but readily inflamed with mystic understanding as well”: PAUL VI, *Address for the Inauguration of the new Institute of Patrology Augustinianum*, 4 May 1970.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. PAUL VI, Apostolic Constitution *Missale Romanum*, 3 April 1969: AAS 61 (1969), 217-222.

were taken up by the Second Vatican Council as the guide and foundation of the reform. For example, clarity and simplicity: “the rites should radiate a noble simplicity. They should be short, clear and free from useless repetitions”.<sup>43</sup> And again: “the rite are to be simplified, due care being taken to preserve their substance. Duplications made with the passage of time are to be omitted, as are less useful additions. Other parts which were lost through the vicissitudes of history are to be restored according to the ancient tradition of the Fathers”.<sup>44</sup>

The intention of the Council Fathers in laying down the principles of the reform, and the efforts of the Church to enact it, has been, and is, precisely that of a *return to the sources*. In other words, to bring forth a newness which is deeply rooted, to reshape a deposit already possessed. To do so, the Church needs constantly to pore over the sources of her faith, with her vision – or better, her heart – attuned to the needs of today’s world.

Only a broad gaze, which takes in the entire ancient tradition, of every time in every place, can enable us to press forward, beyond the more recent past. Once again, the Introduction of the new Roman Missal tells us:

“The ‘tradition of the holy Fathers’ calls not only for the preservation of the tradition passed down by our immediate predecessors, but for a deeper appreciation of the Church’s entire history, as well as careful study of the many ways in which the one faith has been manifested in quite different cultures, such as the Semitic, Greek and Latin. Such a deeper appreciation helps us to see how the Holy Spirit grants to the People of God a marvelous fidelity in preserving unchanged the deposit of faith, despite the immense variety of prayers and rites”.<sup>45</sup>

## 2. *A sole priesthood for worship*

The second principle, on which the entire conciliar Constitution hinges, is the liturgy understood as the exercise of Christ’s priesthood and the accomplishment of his paschal mystery through the work of the Church.

Indeed, just as the Father sent the Son for the salvation of the human race (cf. Jn 3:16; Rom 8:32; 1 Jn 4:9), so the Son gathered to himself the Apostles and sent them, filled with the Holy Spirit (cf. Jn 20:21-22) into the world (cf. Mt 28:18-20; Mk 16:15), to continue visibly and in every place his saving work. The Apostles, after the outpouring of the Paraclete on the day of Pentecost, proclaimed the word and sanctified the faithful with the paschal sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist (cf. Acts 2:14ff). They were sent not only to proclaim the resurrection, but also to “enact through the sacrifice and the sacraments, around which the entire liturgical life revolves”, the work of salvation which they preached”,<sup>46</sup> thus making it clear that “Christ is always present in his Church, especially in liturgical celebrations”.<sup>47</sup>

In our own days we have come to understand the genuine nature of those liturgical actions, as they are described in the conciliar constitution: “the liturgy, then, is rightly seen as an exercise of the

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<sup>43</sup> SC 34.

<sup>44</sup> SC 50.

<sup>45</sup> Roman Missal, Introduction, No. 9.

<sup>46</sup> SC 6.

<sup>47</sup> SC 7.

priestly office of Jesus Christ. In the liturgy, the sanctification of men and women is given expression in symbols perceptible by the senses and is carried out in ways appropriate to each of them. In it, complete and definitive public worship is performed by the mystical body of Jesus Christ, that is, by the head and his members”.<sup>48</sup> The liturgy, then, as God’s work, is *opus Dei*: the work of the Father through Christ in the Spirit; but inasmuch as man acts through sensible signs which are christological ecclesiological and anthropological in nature, it is likewise *opus hominis*: the work of human beings who through the rites, in the Spirit of Christ the High Priest, render all honor and glory to the Father and strive to cooperate in his saving plan (cf. 2 Cor 5:20).

The priesthood of Christ is thus at the foundation of both the universal priesthood and the ministerial priesthood. These are understood only in their mutual relationship, and in connection with the High Priest who is Christ.

In the 1962 Missal, the *Ordo Missae* began with the following text: “*Sacerdos paratus cum ingreditur ad altare, facta illi debita reverentia, signat se signo crucis a fronte ad pectus, et nisi peculiari rubrica aliter statuatur, clara voce dicit: In nomine Patris...*”.<sup>49</sup>

In the Missal of Paul VI, the celebration of the typical form of Mass begins: “After the people have assembled, the priest and the ministers go to the altar while the entrance song is being sung”.<sup>50</sup>

In the text from the 1962 Missal, the figure of the celebrating priest alone is emphasized, while the Missal of Paul VI emphasizes first the presence of the gathered assembly, and immediately thereafter that of the priests and ministers.

The latter text teaches us that, to understand fully the ministerial priesthood, we need to consider it in the context of the ecclesial community. The ministerial priesthood is thus understood only in relation to the common priesthood and thus with the sacrament of Baptism, which is its basis and which consequently makes possible the sacrament of Holy Orders within, and in service to, the assembly.

## V. Principles linked to the celebration of the rite

I would now like to mention two principles which relate more directly to the celebration of the rite and which help us to understand the true nature of the liturgy: the liturgical assembly as the manifestation of the mystery of the Church, and active participation in the celebration itself.

### 1. *The celebration as an image of the local Church* (SC 41)

Vatican II was able to move beyond the type of centralized Church which characterized the period prior to the Council, thanks to the rediscovery of the relationship between Church and liturgy. This rediscovery led to a reassessment of the local Church. The first and fundamental impulse in this direction was given precisely by *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, based on the celebration of the liturgy.

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<sup>48</sup> SC 7.

<sup>49</sup> Missale Romanum, anno 1962 promulgatum, p. 216.

<sup>50</sup> General Instruction of the Roman Missal, No. 47.

Indeed, the Eucharistic celebration in particular, with the full and active participation of the entire holy people of God, at which the bishop presides, surrounded by his priests and ministers in his cathedral church, is to be considered as the principal manifestation of the Church.<sup>51</sup>

The Council Fathers thus sketched the image of the Church by starting not with theological speculation but with the actual celebration of the Eucharist.<sup>52</sup> In this way a vision of the Church in which juridical and hierarchical aspects prevailed yielded to the recovery of a vision typical of the most ancient biblical, patristic and liturgical tradition, based on the idea of *sacramentum*: a visible, human reality which reveals a hidden, divine and invisible reality. The human element, external and visible, is, in this conception, subordinated to the divine element, internal and invisible, and becomes a sign which reveals and manifests the latter. Prior to the Church, Christ himself, God and man, belongs to the category of sacramentality. He is in fact the first and primordial sacrament, “the sacrament of our salvation” (SC 5). For this reason, the Church too is “human and divine, visible but endowed with invisible realities, zealous in action and dedicated to contemplation, present in the world and yet a pilgrim” (SC 2). The Church, born of the Christ’s paschal mystery, is herself a “wondrous sacrament” (SC 5).

In this vision, the liturgical assembly takes on greater importance, for as it is the normal place where the Church is made manifest and where we encounter Christ and our brothers and sisters. The celebration builds “into a holy temple of the Lord” “those who are in the Church”, who by their witness manifest the Church to “those who are outside as a sign lifted up among the nations, a sign under which the scattered children of God may be gathered together until there is one fold and one shepherd” (SC 2). Here we better understand not only the fundamental role of the liturgy as source and summit of the Church’s life, but also the unique importance of the local Church. By participating in the liturgy in accordance with their different orders and ministries, each member of the community will learn to acknowledge and love holy Church. This is one of the basic tasks of the pastoral program willed by the Council and it remains timely: “the liturgy, especially in the divine sacrifice of the Eucharist, is supremely effective in enabling the faithful to express in their lives and to express to others, the mystery of Christ and the real nature of the true Church” (SC 2).

## 2. *Active participation*

The rediscovery of the one priesthood for worship is at the basis of the “active participation” (*actuosa participatio*) in the liturgy on which the Council so greatly insisted. It should be kept in mind that “the idea of active participation enters into Vatican II through the constitution on the liturgy before invading, so to speak, the whole of the conciliar documents”.<sup>53</sup> It is important to remember that as a result of the Council, the concept of participation changed profoundly. Previously it had been essentially linked not to the rite, but to the personal disposition of the faithful. Consequently, those who did not wish to follow the order of the liturgy could participate in the Eucharistic sacrifice “in other ways... for example, by devoutly meditating on the mysteries of Jesus Christ, or by carrying out acts of piety and saying other prayers which, albeit differing in form from the sacred rites, yet by their nature corresponded to them”.<sup>54</sup> This so-called *parallel participation* was rendered obsolete by

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<sup>51</sup> SC 41.

<sup>52</sup> SC 41.

<sup>53</sup> G. ROUTHIER, *Il Concilio Vaticano II. Recezione ed ermeneutica*, 101.

<sup>54</sup> “At ii alia ratione utique possunt, quae facilius nonnullis evadit; ut, verbi gratia, Iesu Christi mysteria pie meditando, vel alia peragendo pietatis exercitia aliasque fundendo preces, quae, etsi forma a sacris ritibus differunt, natura tamen sua cum

*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, which calls for only one model of participation, participation *per ritus et preces*.<sup>55</sup>

This was the greatest novelty of the Second Vatican Council: declaring that the rites and prayers of liturgy are the means of coming to understand the mystery of faith ... The rites and prayers are not, then, an outward embellishment of the content, but the very vehicle whereby the content exists. The rites and prayers are the vehicle whereby the faithful can draw from the mystery of the faith or, in other words, participate in it”.<sup>56</sup>

It is not possible, therefore, to have a beautiful liturgy without active participation in its texts and rites. It is also helpful to remember that *actuosa participatio* embraces various spheres of participation. Participation must be conscious (its intellectual aspect); active (its corporal aspect: the whole body must be involved as called for by the rite); and devout (the aspect of shared emotions). Liturgical celebrations “are not private functions but are celebrations of the Church, which is ‘the sacrament of unity’, namely, the holy people united and organized under their Bishops. Therefore, liturgical services have to do with the whole body, the Church. They make it visible and have effects on it. But they also touch individual members of the Church in different ways, depending on ranks, roles and levels of effective participation”.<sup>57</sup> These words reaffirm the theological reason for the active participation of the faithful<sup>58</sup> and the primacy of the communitarian celebration<sup>59</sup> with respect to other ways of experiencing and celebrating the liturgy. Unless priests and faithful participate in the sacred rite in this way, even today, sadly, we can risk yielding, even in the liturgy, to the dominant individualistic culture, in which the freedom of initiative of individuals tends to prevail over community participation. The result is a return to the mentality of considering liturgical actions as private actions and not as celebrations which manifest and engage the entire body of the Church. (cf. SC 26).

It is also clear that *actuosa participatio*, which unfolds in a variety of forms – in posture, words and gestures, song, moments of silence and contemplation – is not to be confused with a purely outward “activism”. Rather, it is the fruit of a sincere attachment in faith to the person and message of the Lord Jesus; it is awakened and sustained by the Holy Spirit, the same Spirit who consecrated the Incarnate Word as the High Priest of the New Covenant from the very womb of his Mother,<sup>60</sup> and who is bestowed in the sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation, enabling every member of the faithful to receive the “royal priesthood” and to make his or her life an act of worship pleasing to God. Finally, it must be remembered that there is only one subject which celebrates: the entire assembly. Consequently, the task of the priest cannot be separated from that of the faithful; it is not sufficient to say that the priest offers the Divine Victim and that the faithful unite themselves to this offering. The mystery being celebrated must also be experienced in their lives by the members of the assembly. Here we get to the heart of the liturgical reform. “In the history of liturgy, the reform of Vatican II differed

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iisdem congruunt”: Encyclical Letter *Mediator Dei et hominis*, in C. Braga – A. Bugnini (edd), *Documenta ad instaurationem liturgicam spectantia (1903-1973)*, CLV – Edizioni Liturgiche, Roma 2000, n. 1968.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. SC 48, 21.

<sup>56</sup> E. MAZZA, *La partecipazione attiva alla liturgia prima e dopo il Vaticano II*, in *Rivista di Pastorale liturgica* 51 (2013), 22.

<sup>57</sup> SC 26.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. SC 30-31.

<sup>59</sup> Cf. SC 27.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. SAINT AUGUSTINE, *De Trinitate*, XV, 46: CCL 50A, 526-527.

from all the other reforms by its pastoral nature, inasmuch as the ultimate aim of the Council was the conscious participation and active engagement of the People of God in the Church's life of worship ... Both during and after the Council, the active participation of the faithful was always the dominant idea in the field of liturgy, and was always examined under its pastoral aspect".<sup>61</sup> Finally, it must be kept in mind that the notion of active participation is naturally linked to that of the adaptation of the liturgy to different situations and different cultures, and necessarily hearkens back to the idea of communion.

## VI. The future of the reform

### 1. *The liturgy, the source of the Church's renewal*

In this year marking the fiftieth anniversary of *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, the words written by Blessed John Paul for the twenty-fifth anniversary of the document remain timely:

*"The liturgical reform desired by the Second Vatican Council can now be considered complete, whereas the pastoral care of the liturgy represents an ongoing effort to draw ever more fully from the richness of liturgy that vital strength which spreads from Christ to the members of his body which is the Church".*<sup>62</sup>

These words invite us pay ever closer attention to the activity of celebrating.

The liturgy is not only a teaching moment and an exercise in participation, but above all something which shapes the Christian community and makes of it God's holy people. The liturgy is the womb in which Christians are given birth in the Spirit, the setting in which Christians grow and develop, and the setting in which Christians experience their communion with Christ and their brothers and sisters.

Some twenty-five years ago, the Pope invited priests and faithful to a changed perspective in liturgical practice: passing from concern for "reforming" the liturgy to concern for seeing liturgy as itself the "form" of renewal in the Church's life.

It is a matter of returning to the desire of the Council to reform the Church through the liturgy (cf. SC 1).

In the first phase of the post-conciliar renewal, attention was completely centered on the liturgy as an object to be reformed: an object to be made meaningful, to purify, to free from incrustations and make more beautiful, yet always an object. Liturgical reform was understood as "reforming the liturgy"; we went from a *ritus servandus* to a *liturgia reformanda*.

Nowadays our attention should be increasingly directed towards the liturgy as a source of renewal for the life of the Church. The liturgy, in other words, should itself become the subject of renewal. To put it more clearly: thanks to the liturgical renewal desired and enacted by the Council, the

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<sup>61</sup> A. KAI-YUNG CHAN, *Partecipazione alla liturgia*, in A.J. CHUPUNGO (ed.), *Scientia Liturgica. Manuale di Liturgia* 2, Piemme, Casale M., 158.

<sup>62</sup> Apostolic Letter *Vicesimus quintus annus*, 4 December 1988, 4.

Church has reformed the liturgy; now, some fifty years later, our shared hope is that the renewed liturgy will renew the Church herself.

Today, when that the reform of the liturgy desired the Council can be considered more or less complete, it is clear that it is not sufficient to know the meaning of what we do; rather, what counts is the act and the “style” with which we do it. Sound liturgical creativity at the beginning of the reform was seen above all as being able to choose texts and ritual sequences; today it consists mainly in our way of acting. “The *ars celebrandi* is the best way to ensure *actuosa participatio*.<sup>63</sup> Setting the liturgy at the heart of the Church’s life and activity is one of the first and most significant fruits borne by the Council. Today we readily return to the liturgy in order to start anew from the liturgy, for the place of the liturgy in the experience of believers is at the beginning.

The Constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, more than being a manual for reforming rites, is a *magna carta* capable of inspiring the renewal of the Church.

But we know well enough that the liturgy is incomplete if it fails to lead to the renewal of our communities and the entire Church. “Frequently one has the impression that in the Church the liturgy is seen more as a problem to be solved than a resource from which to draw. And yet the future of Christianity in the West depends to a great degree on the Church’s ability to make her liturgy the source of the spiritual life of the faithful. The liturgy is something for which the Church of today is responsible. I am increasingly convinced from personal experience that the primary question which urgently needs to be answered is not how the faithful celebrate and participate in the liturgy, but rather how the faithful draw life from the liturgy they celebrate. How the faithful experience the liturgy depends greatly on how they draw life from it. Drawing life from the celebration of the liturgy means drawing life from what the liturgy itself brings to life: the forgiveness we implore, the word of God we hear, the thanksgiving we give, the Eucharist we receive as communion. If the faithful draw life from the liturgy, they will experience the liturgy differently, because the liturgy itself contains those spiritual energies needed to become the source of the spiritual life of the faithful ... Making the liturgy a spiritual experience and drawing life from it: these are not things that can be taken for granted; we can celebrate the liturgy for an entire lifetime without really experiencing a ‘celebration’ of the liturgy”.<sup>64</sup>

## 2. *What remains to be done for the future*

Has the liturgical reform really ended? To the axiom “*Ecclesia semper reformanda*” we can respond “*Liturgia semper reformanda*”. The rigidity of the tridentine liturgy depended on a narrow concept of tradition, which had also affected the Church’s life, making her heavily centralized. Beginning with the Second Vatican Council, the concept of tradition came to be better understood. And the rediscovery of the local Church thanks to the liturgy helped to overcome the excessive centralization of ecclesial structures. One of the finest texts reflecting the dynamic sense of tradition as understood by Vatican II is found in the Introduction to the Roman Missal of Pope Paul VI:

Is the reform desired by the Council complete? Certainly one can state that the reform as a whole has proved faithful to the will of the Council Fathers and that the basic principles on which it

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<sup>63</sup> BENEDICT XVI, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum caritatis*, 38.

<sup>64</sup> G. BOSELLI, *Il senso spirituale della liturgia*, Edizioni Qiqajon, Magnano 2011, 7.

was built, are enduring. Its concrete implementation, however, could not and cannot ever be perfect or complete. One phase only has ended, and a new one has already begun. Consequently, the work of reform must still be carried forward.

The reform of the liturgical books has been completed, but the reception of the principles we have outlined above has not yet fully taken place, and many of their practical requirements have not yet become part of the daily lived experience of many priests and members of the faithful. In this sense, Council is not behind us; it still precedes us.

Various practical problems remain to be examined and confronted with an eye to better solutions. I think for example of the problems of formation, mystagogy, translation, the enrichment of euchology, the Eucharistic Prayer, and the sacraments of Reconciliation and Confirmation.<sup>65</sup>

Even so, we can count on the working of the Holy Spirit who constantly guides the Church on her pilgrim way, enabling her daily to find new enrichment from the Council and the liturgy. We need the courage to speak out and to bear witness to the spirit of the Council.<sup>66</sup>

## VII. Conclusion

### 1. *Looking to the future with hope*

If we reflect on the principles of *Sacrosanctum Concilium* and make them our own, if we reflect on the whole course of the liturgical reform, we can look to the future with hope. All of the problems we faced, if wisely reconsidered, can provide us with inspiration and encouragement as we strive to experience anew, even amid difficulties, misunderstandings and contradictions, the marvelous experience of the liturgical reform with all its initial enthusiasm. We are certain that the movement of the Holy Spirit which awakened the liturgical movement, inspired the Council Fathers and accompanied the reform, continues to be felt in the Church. All of us, as individuals and in our communities, are asked to become ever more open to the presence and working of the Holy Spirit. Truly, the Spirit speaks to the Church and constantly raises new questions about how the liturgical reform can be implemented.

A poignant observation of Pope Paul VI can point the Church, and all of us, toward the horizon of hope:

“Hope, which is the Church’s gaze to the future, fills her heart and makes it beat with new and serene sense of expectation. The Church is not old, she is ancient; time does not weaken her, and if she

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<sup>65</sup> P. DE CLERCK, *La réforme liturgique: ce qui reste à faire*, Questions liturgiques 91 (2010), 64-75.

<sup>66</sup> “Banish the expression ‘spirit of the council’. Sure, the expression is easily manipulated, but we need to recall that the distinction between spirit and letter is venerable in the Christian tradition. We should therefore be loath to toss it into the dust bin. More important, *spirit*, rightly understood, indicates themes and orientations that imbue the council with its identity because they are found not in one document but in all or almost all of them. Thus, the ‘spirit of the council’, while based solidly on the ‘letter’ of the council’s documents, transcends any specific one of them. It enables us to see the bigger message of the council and the direction in which it pointed the church, which was in many ways different from the direction before the council”: JOHN W. O’MALLEY, *Misdirections. Ten sure-fire ways to mix up the teaching of Vatican II*, in *America*, 4 February 2013, 20.

is faithful to the inner and out principles of her mysterious life, it makes her ever younger. She is not afraid of what is new; she draws her life from it. Like a firmly rooted tree, she brings forth from herself, in every age of history, a new springtime.”<sup>67</sup>

† Piero Marini

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<sup>67</sup> PAUL VI, *Insegnamenti*, VII, 1969, 995.