

Active Participation in Liturgy, An Unfinished Agenda of Vatican II: Contemporary Reflections

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One of the most influential ecclesiastical event of the twentieth century was the Second Vatican Council. That is why even fifty years after the council we still explore the content of the conciliar documents. There are more post-conciliar documents after Vatican II than any other council in the entire history of the Church. In the previous issue of *Vaiharai*, I began to write on one of the most mind-capturing expressions at Vatican II, namely 'active participation' in the celebration of liturgy. Since this expression at the Council received such a profound attention, I mentioned my intention to write about it in three parts: 1) the Historical context in which the phrase emerged, 2) the Council and the phrase, and 3) Contemporary reflections on accomplishing this unfinished agenda of the Council. To begin this venture, in my previous articles I explained the context prior to the Council in which the phrase 'active participation' emerged and the deliberations at the Council. Therefore in this third part of this series of articles I shall write about contemporary reflections on accomplishing this unfinished agenda of the Council, namely 'active participation in liturgy.'

Sacrosanctum Concilium was the first document of Vatican II which was promulgated on 4th December 1963; hence, we just completed Golden Jubilee of its promulgation. As we celebrate fifty two years of the promulgation of the Constitution on Liturgy let us reflect for a while on the fulfillment of one of the pastoral aims of the Council, namely 'active participation.'

1. Tasks Accomplished and Present Concerns

The 40th anniversary of the promulgation of *Sacrosanctum Concilium* was celebrated in December 2003 throughout the world with public lectures and symposia along with special publications to remember the occasion. One such public event took place at Rome. During the sessions, one of the memorable talks came from a liturgical scholar Ignacio Calabuig, O.S.M., of the Marianum in Rome, who worked in the Secretariat of the *Consilium* just after Vatican II. Leaving his prepared text, Calabuig made an impassioned plea to the Cardinal Prefect of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, Francis Cardinal Arinze, and to the Secretary of the Congregation, Archbishop Domenico Sorrentino, both of whom were seated on the dais. With great emotion and at times on the verge of tears, Calabuig recalled the hope and promise of those early days after the Council. He lamented the fact that in recent years, the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments had worked not within a climate of collegiality but rather of suspicion, leading to a breakdown in communication with episcopal conferences and liturgists alike. Calabuig concluded by begging that the door to authentic renewal of the liturgy be re-opened

and that trained liturgical experts be again consulted, so that the Council's agenda and mission might be discovered anew and implemented. The large audience of Roman professors and students broke into sustained applause including Archbishop Sorrentino.¹

Since the 1980s the Church has witnessed a growth in traditionalist or conservative movements leading to an unfortunate polarization within the Church between 'conservatives' and 'progressives.' As liturgy is the heart and lifeblood of the Church it should come as no surprise that this polarization has been felt most acutely within our worship. Such divisiveness, of course, weakens the body of Christ and our common witness in the world. Today, around the world one can observe a growing interest in Latin Mass and the Tridentine Rite of 1570, concerns over placement of the tabernacle, kneeling for reception of communion, and debates over the orthodoxy of liturgical translation. And within the liturgical world itself conservative lobbyists have emerged with the ardent desire to correct the Council by 'reforming the reform' (e.g., the work of Kocik).²

For their part, a number of bishops and episcopal conferences have expressed concerns. They contend that the Council's liturgical agenda for active participation is being challenged by influential conservative groups within the Church. At the Asian Synod of 1998, several bishops addressed the issue of liturgical authority and competence within the framework of collegiality. In one intervention, Bishop Francisco Claver, S.J., retired Apostolic Vicar of Bontoc-Lagawe in the Philippines and well-known lecturer at the East Asian Pastoral Institute, spoke of liturgical language as an issue of trust and dialogue:

Why do we have to send vernacular translations of the liturgy to Rome for approval? Or to the bishop of the place, for that matter, if he doesn't speak the language in question? Don't we trust our people enough to speak the language of orthodoxy? But in truth the best judges of the correctness, even theological, of translations and texts are the faithful and clergy of the place where the language is spoken.³

Bishop Peter Remigius of Kottar,⁴ India, echoed Claver's concerns in reporting on his small group's discussions at the Synod: "Speaking of translation, it was observed that the local churches make use of the services of experts in church matters as well as of experts in the local languages to translate liturgical texts. Many expressed their experience of inordinate delay by the Roman commissions in approving translations."⁵ It is not too difficult to understand why bishops are annoyed when they learn that their proposed liturgical texts are given to seminarians in Rome to check for literal faithfulness to the *editio typica*. And that they are less than pleased to discover that their texts, discussed and approved by their episcopal conference, have been rejected by the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments based on the judgment of those seminarians. Clearly, such behaviour does not reflect the vision and intent of the Council. This implies the urgency for dialogue and trust with good fraternal exchange between diocesan bishops, their episcopal conferences, and the Congregation for Divine Worship. It would seem self-evident that bishops to whom the Holy See has entrusted the leadership of local churches should be sufficiently competent to judge what will best suit that particular church or region, assisted by cultural anthropologists, liturgists, and other experts. Implied here is a close working relationship between

bishops, episcopal conferences, and the Congregation for Divine Worship.

The Papal Master of Liturgical Celebrations, Archbishop Piero Marini, in his statement on the 40th anniversary of the Liturgy Constitution said that it was the Holy Spirit who brought about the liturgical movement in the first place and guided the liturgical deliberations at the Council, and it is that same Spirit who leads the Church along its path even still. Thus, we need to see *Sacrosanctum Concilium* not as a closed document but rather as an invitation to plumb its depths and dedicate ourselves ever more intentionally to its effective implementation in a new century and millennium.⁶

2. Liturgical Formation

I would like to present this as the most important issue to be addressed if one is serious about the future of liturgical renewal, especially promotion of active participation. It includes liturgical formation not only for seminarians but most importantly for priests, religious and laity. Although Vatican II has emphasized in clear terms that liturgy should be part of the major courses taught in the seminaries and sufficient hours should be allotted for the same, still there are several houses of formation in India that do not have a qualified liturgy professor to teach and to animate liturgical celebrations in the seminaries. Even when professors are available, sufficient hours are not allotted for them to teach the necessary courses on various aspects of liturgy. This formation is needed not only among the seminarians, but also among clergy, religious and laity. Amazingly, there are still some parts of the world where seminarians are not taught the art of presiding (*ars*

celebrandi) at the rites nor are they trained in liturgical preaching. Good presiding and preaching does not come with the grace of ordination, of course. It is a learned art that takes time, practice, and regular feedback. This is a crucial part of liturgical formation and will influence the credibility of Sunday worship either positively or negatively. Fifty years after the Council we have yet to understand just what our liturgical participation demands when we gather together each Sunday for our common celebrations. What it demands, of course, is nothing less than everything. Not only do we need to offer our hearts, minds, voices, and entire bodies as we participate fully and actively in the liturgical celebration, but we need to commit ourselves fully to the service of human liberation wherever oppression exists in its myriad forms both in our own countries and throughout the world.

3. The Changing Role of the Laity and Liturgical Ministry

In his keynote address in Bangkok at the Second International Meeting on Jesuits and Liturgy, noted Jesuit scholar Michael Amaladoss spoke of the need to make those in the assembly feel that they are agents of the celebration and not merely passive spectators.⁷ The presiding minister (principal celebrant) has an important and unique role to play as leader of the ritual exercising his ministerial priesthood. The exercise of this role should not dominate or suppress other ministries in liturgy. Fundamentally, we are speaking here about liturgical participation based on solid baptismal theology. Christian initiation both unleashes the Spirit's gifts for the good of the Church and serves as the common denominator for all ministries.

Increasing numbers of lay Catholics are theologically trained and pastorally smart. This is revealing itself in the fact that lay women and men are assuming administrative positions within the Church that had formerly been occupied only by clergy. Such positions of leadership would have been unthinkable fifty years ago and are positive signs that the Conciliar Church is coming of age. There is growing interest in many dioceses that liturgy commissions are formed at diocesan and parish levels. Lay men and women contribute their might to prepare and celebrate liturgy meaningfully in their parishes. Such liturgy committees at local level promote active participation in terms of preparation of biblical readings ahead of time and proclaiming the same during the celebration. There is growing enthusiasm among the members of the Catholic Church to know the meaning of gestures and prayers during liturgy. The GIRM (chapter 3, article numbers from 91 onwards) gives opportunity for the laity to exercise various liturgical ministries such as ushers, choir, altar servers, lector, acolyte, and permanent deacons. The laity should be encouraged to assume these roles during liturgy after appropriate training and motivation.

From my own experience of giving seminars and conferences for priests, religious and laity, the sessions always manifest enthusiasm seeking answers for questions on liturgical matters. This enthusiasm has to be encouraged and directed properly to promote active and conscious participation which is one of the important goals of the conciliar constitution on Liturgy. If the liturgical renewal is to continue we need to promote authentic vocations among the natives of every country. While emphasizing the role of the laity and their leadership in the Church we should not minimize the

role of ministerial priesthood. Every diocese and parish must strive to promote vocations to priesthood and religious life.

4. Liturgical Inculturation

Inculturation of the Church's worship will be an essential part of our future if our liturgy is to remain a credible force in shaping the Christian life. The genius of the Roman Rite was precisely that it corresponded to and, indeed, flowed from the genius of fifth century Roman culture. In other words, liturgical texts and forms followed a structure that was consistent with Roman literary forms known within secular culture. The frustrations mentioned above regarding Vatican delays in approving liturgical translations from the *editio typica* point to a far more systemic question: is it fair, even possible, to import Roman texts into a non-Roman world and simply translate them into local idiom, or is not something more substantial needed?

This issue was raised quite strongly by the Indonesian bishops at the Asian Synod and has been raised elsewhere by a number of Asian theologians and liturgical scholars. The bishops lamented the fact that the Roman importation of liturgical rites impedes the possibility of more local, inculturated rites that grow within an indigenous community. They concluded: "Clinging too much to the 'substantial unity of the Roman liturgy' may end up in rigidity that obstructs proper incarnation of Christian faith."⁸ As Jonathan Tan notes in his commentary on the bishops' statement, the fundamental problem is that simply translating texts into the local languages of the people does not make such rites 'local liturgies.' They

remain Western liturgical rites and therefore foreign to the Eastern genius. Thus, the bishops conclude:

In order to promote the inculturation process the universal Church has to be more open and ready to change its own pattern of thinking, and to allow local Churches the freedom to think and act in response to concrete life situations, guided by the Spirit and led by the local hierarchy. Rigid rules and regulations, in discord with local conditions, will put restrictions on the interest of inculturation and will hamper the result of inculturation.⁹

The Church's historical consciousness is helpful here. The Christian East succeeded in maintaining its rich liturgical diversity over two millennia and resisted numerous Western attempts to suppress Oriental liturgical practices in favour of Roman centralization.¹⁰ In the West, the Church of Milan held firm in celebrating its Ambrosian Rite much to the frustration of Rome, demonstrating that one can be truly Catholic without needing to be 'Roman.' Interestingly, one of the fears in abandoning the use of liturgical Latin both at the Council of Trent and again at Vatican II, was that some bishops had equated Latin with being Catholic. In other words, to be Catholic was to pray in Latin and abandoning Latin would be equal to abandoning Catholic orthodoxy. But the Eastern and non-Roman Western rites remind us that unity and diversity need not be mutually exclusive.

At the conclusion of the Asian Synod and as a concrete fruit of their deliberations, participants made the following proposition on the subject of 'Inculturation':

For many Asian Catholics, the official liturgy is often experienced as alien and does not touch their hearts. This points to the need for inculturating the liturgy in

such a way that the liturgy becomes more meaningful and nourishing for people in the setting of their own cultures. Consequently, local Churches need the authority and freedom to inculturate the liturgy by adapting it to the local cultures while recognizing the need for dialogue and communion with the Holy See, the principle of unity in the Church. The Synod requests the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments to grant Episcopal and Regional Bishops' Conferences the authority or competence to approve translations of liturgical texts in the vernacular which are to be ultimately forwarded to the said Dicastery.¹¹

As we consider both the present and future challenges of inculturation, we have but scratched the surface. Vatican II has set a path for us, opening the door to recovering the integral relationship between liturgy and life. But that agenda of a full and comprehensive liturgical inculturation remains largely unfulfilled. What is clear is that commitment to the work of human liberation in the wider sphere of interreligious dialogue will provide the framework for judging and critiquing our efforts.¹²

5. The Challenges of Globalization and Implications for Worship

The influence of globalization is intrinsically related to the combined task of liturgical inculturation, interreligious dialogue, and our call to be promoters of justice. This invitation to promote justice flows from liturgy that we celebrate. The Love that we celebrate in Liturgy must be transformed into acts of love when we leave the church after the celebration of liturgy. That is why, the new translation of the concluding

rite of the Mass is so beautifully highlights the missionary aspect of liturgy "Go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your life."

Globalization has been sharply criticized for provoking increased inequality and the degradation of the environment, giving rise to a host of energy and environmental issues, for example, food and water access, and migration. Within the shadow of the most elegant apartments and residential areas of the cities in India lie some of the most desperate slums of the country. If liturgy is to be intimately engaged with the world and especially with the plight of the poor and all who suffer, liturgists and pastoral agents will need to consider carefully the challenges offered by globalization so that our liturgical communities can both model authentic human relationships based on equality and reverence, and seek to maintain the cultural integrity and genius of each local community. All this must be exercised in a climate of hospitality that leaves no room for partiality. These problems of globalization should find place in our prayers and preaching, always connecting the gospel values to the present context. The conciliar liturgical renewal is triggered to engage with the realities of life. The connection between liturgy and life should always be kept in mind to promote authentic liturgical renewal initiated by Vatican II.

6. Liturgy and New Media

The three most recent pontificates, namely the reign of John Paul II, Benedict XVI and Francis have witnessed Church's use of new media. During these recent years, Church has started using not only radio, television and movies but also the social networks such as Facebook, websites,

tweeting, and blogging. Today, this is how the Church must communicate to younger people until these new media are replaced by another digital form. Possibilities should be opened to use new media to educate and instruct youngsters to attract them to liturgy.¹³ Sometimes, the children grow in spiritual and liturgical starvation due to the abuse/misunderstanding of post-conciliar liturgical renewal. Errors and misunderstanding from both sides aggravate and deepen the division. Some children who come from broken families never attended church in their young age. They get first time church experience only when they are in colleges.

In the light of this changing context of new media the Church has to take note of the tremendous influence of social network among the youngsters in order to carry on the liturgical renewal envisioned by Vatican II to the next generation. The young seminarians, priests and religious should be initiated into this proper use of new media with responsibility. It is not only priests and religious who should be involved in it but laity, the parish youth organizations, college campus ministry groups should also be profoundly involved in the use of new media to give proper instruction and promote liturgical renewal for the future.

The new media facilitates opportunity to listen to the voices of believers from every continent transcending the racial and ethnic discrimination within the Church. The future of the Church is clearly in Africa and Asia. Views of these continents, in their own voices, are heard through new media. As we look back over these fifty years we need not be discouraged by apparent obstacles to authentic liturgical renewal that we have encountered along the way. Much has been accomplished and there is much for which to be grateful.

We live with a renewed understanding of what it means to be baptized into Jesus Christ and his paschal mystery. And we live with a renewed worship which is infinitely better than what preceded it. We can take courage that it is indeed the Spirit who is guiding the Church and that same Spirit will guide our liturgical future, as well. In the words of Archbishop Piero Marini:

The people of God are always on pilgrimage and all of us need to walk forward with joy, certain that the Spirit surrounds us like a cloud and guides us like a column of fire. May we experience the liturgy of the Council as the column of fire of the Spirit who continually renews the heart of the Church on her pilgrim way towards the Kingdom, filling her with beauty ever new, with joy and hope.¹⁴

We who have opportunity to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the promulgation of *Sacrosanctum Concilium* are privileged to be torch bearers of liturgical renewal in our own times and pass it on to the next generation as if in a relay race. Let us work together and strive to promote opportunities to open ourselves to the promptings of the Holy Spirit to make liturgy as genuine experience of glorification of God and sanctification of man.

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Endnotes

¹http://www.fdlc.org/Liturgy_Resources/LITURGICAL_MOVEMENT-Pecklers.htm. ACCESSED ON 5TH MAY 2013.

² T. Kocik, *The Reform of The Reform? A Liturgical Debate: Reform or Return* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2003).

³ F. Claver, "Inculturation as Dialogue" edited by P. C. Phan, *The Asian Synod: Texts and Commentaries* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2002), 101.

⁴ When the intervention was made he was bishop of Kumbakonam in Tamil Nadu, India.

⁵ P. Remigius, "Report of Group Discussions: English Group A" edited by P. C. Phan, *The Asian Synod: Texts and Commentaries* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2002), 130.

⁶ See Marini's Presentation: "The Fortieth Anniversary of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy," in the volume published by the Centre national de pastoral liturgie, *Renouveau liturgique * Documents fondateurs* (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 2004) (*Collection Liturgie*, n.14).

⁷ M. Amaladoss, "Inculturation and the Liturgy" (unpublished manuscript).

⁸ J. Y. Tan, "The Responses of the Indonesian and Japanese Bishops to the *Lineamenta*" edited by P. C. Phan, *The Asian Synod: Texts and Commentaries* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2002), 61.

⁹ Ibid, 61-62.

¹⁰ R. Taft, "The Missionary Efforts of the Eastern Churches as an Example of Inculturation" in *Le Chiese Orientali e la Missione in Asia: Riflessioni in preparazione all' Assemblea Speciale del Sinodo dei Vescovi* (Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1998); See also the post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation of Pope John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Asia*: (no. 21-B) as quoted in Kroeger and Phan, *The Future of the Asian Churches: The Asian Synod and Ecclesia in Asia* (Quezon City, Philippines: Claretian Publications, 2002), 155.

¹¹ "Proposition 43: Inculturation," edited by P. C. Phan, *The Asian Synod: Texts and Commentaries*, 159.

¹² P. C. Phan, *In Our Own Tongues: Perspectives from Asia on Mission and Inculturation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2003), 128.

¹³ T. Finigan, "New Movements and New Media," *New Blackfriars* 94 (2013): 223-235.

¹⁴ P. Marini, "The Fortieth Anniversary of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy."