

## SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL

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THE FIRST CONSTITUTION OF THE II VATICAN COUNCIL

J. P., I

### THE CONSTITUTION ON THE SACRED LITURGY

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## The First Constitution of the Second Vatican Council

**T**HE second session of the Second Vatican Council must be considered a great historical event, for more than one reason. Its discussions on such vital themes as the nature of the Church, the episcopacy, ecumenism and religious liberty will form the subject of a subsequent article in the *CLERGY MONTHLY*. In the present issue we present to our readers the conciliar "Constitution" on the Sacred Liturgy which was solemnly promulgated at the public session of December 4th.

This Constitution crowns the efforts of the liturgical movement which for the last sixty years has been enlisting the work of scholars and of pastors for the purpose of revitalizing the liturgical life of the Church. It also bears the stamp of the theological and biblical revival which has been steadily spreading in recent years.

The schema on the liturgy, the first to be discussed at the first session of the Council, is also, as Pope Paul VI said in his address of December 4th, "in a certain sense, the first in order of intrinsic excellence and importance for the life of the Church". For, in the oft-quoted words of St Pius X, active participation in the sacred mysteries of the Church is the primary and indispensable fount of the genuine Christian spirit.

To promote and facilitate this active participation of all the faithful in the liturgy is the chief aim of the new Constitution. Its purpose is pastoral and it does not mean to give any doctrinal definitions, as the Secretary General, Mgr Felici, expressly declared before the final vote was taken. The doctrine it contains is simply an expression of the ordinary teaching of the Church.

### *A Brief Analysis*

In its final shape the Constitution comprises seven chapters (those on sacred art and on church furnishings having been united into one).

The first chapter, the longest and most important, had been approved already during the first session (cf. *CLERGY MONTHLY* 1963, 45-47). The instructive analysis of it by C. Vaggagini is known to our readers (ib., 130-137). It describes the place of



the liturgy in the life of the Church and lays down the leading principles that must govern the liturgical renewal. It calls for greater simplicity and intelligibility; allows an important place to the vernacular (the point most hotly discussed during the first session); foresees important adaptations to the religious genius and traditions of various nations (this being the first time that the principle of adaptation, so often stressed in Roman documents concerning the missions, is explicitly extended to the liturgy); it promises a certain decentralization, giving ample scope to the initiative of regional and national episcopal conferences. One cannot read these texts without visualizing the great possibilities they open up for new developments in countries like India.

Chapter II (art. 47-58) treats of the Sacred Eucharist, the living centre of the liturgy. During the discussions very numerous suggestions were made for the reform of the Mass. These will be studied by the post-conciliar commission which will be entrusted with the complex task of revising the liturgical books. The present Constitution decides only a few major points. There shall be a wider choice of scriptural readings (51); the "common prayer is to be reintroduced before the offertory (53); the vernacular may be used in the readings, the common prayer, and in other "parts pertaining to the people" as episcopal conferences will decide (54). Communion under both kinds may be granted on some special occasions (55); the manner of doing it will be determined by the competent commission.

Finally, there is one major change which will affect priests much more than the laity: concelebration may be allowed on numerous occasions and may become the regular practice in communities of priests (57). The present practice of each priest saying his "private" Mass, however legitimate, has obvious drawbacks whenever many priests are gathered for a retreat or some convention. Above all, it obscures the meaning of the Eucharist as the sacrament of unity: at the signal for Mass, instead of gathering round the common table with the family of God, each one retires to some corner apart from the community. In monasteries especially, the conventual Mass is thus deprived of much of its meaning. The liturgical movement has deepened the desire for a return to the ancient practice, when the rule was, "one church, one altar, one sacrifice" (cf. art. 41). The Council has met this wide-spread desire by re-introducing concelebration as a normal practice in the Roman rite as it has always been in the oriental churches. (Cf. "Community Mass and Concelebration", *CLERGY MONTHLY* 1955, 41-53). In religious communities the major superior is competent to give the required permission. A new rite for concelebration is to be drawn up; it will most probably be simpler than the one found in the present Pontifical.

Chapter III, on the other sacraments and sacramentals, contains a number of interesting decisions, always for the

purpose of clarifying the meaning of the rites and facilitating the participation of the faithful. The vernacular can be used throughout, in accordance with art. 36 (63). At first the sacramental "forms", except the one of matrimony, were to be in Latin, but a last-minute vote removed even this restriction.—"Extreme unction" is now preferably called "anointing of the sick", but danger of death from sickness or old age is still required for its administration (73).—The rites of baptism, confirmation, confession, holy orders, matrimony are to be revised. It is recommended to adapt local customs which can enrich the Christian rites, especially as regards the rites of initiation, matrimony and burial.

Chapter IV lays down the principles for a reform of the breviary. This topic had been the object of so many proposals and counterproposals that the competent commission must have found it difficult to keep the balance between opposite extremes. The present chapter gives only the general lines of the reform; no final judgment is possible until the post-conciliar commission will have produced the new breviary—a task that may take anything between five and ten years.

From the text we have it is clear that the structure of the daily office will be simplified so as to be more adaptable to the rhythm of modern life. Lauds and Vespers, the traditional morning and evening prayers, will form the hinges on which the daily office turns. The hour of Prime, which is a later duplication of the morning prayer, will be suppressed. (509 Fathers voted against the suppression; it is the hour many priests like best, and we are told that some of its prayers will be inserted in some other place of the office.) Matins will be mainly a kind of spiritual reading, suitable for any time of the day. As for Terce, Sext and None, outside choir it will be enough to say any one of these according to the time of the day. Compline, though a duplication of the evening prayer, will be kept but revised so as to be a suitable prayer for the end of the day.

Clerics for whom Latin is a serious obstacle to prayer may be allowed by the ordinary to recite the breviary in the vernacular; the translation must be approved by the episcopal conference. Nuns can be granted the same permission by the competent superior.

Chapter V, on the liturgical year, stresses the essentials of the Christian mystery, the Proper of the seasons, which must have precedence over other devotions, the Proper of the Saints.

Chapter VI, on sacred music, and chapter VII, on sacred art and church furnishings, tend to foster genuine art, including new forms and the traditions of the newly converted peoples.

### ***Conclusion***

Those who expected a direct answer to the world's problems will be little impressed by the Constitution on the liturgy. "The

liturgy is the life of the Church with her face towards God" (J. Jungmann) rather than towards the world. Yet it is only by continually renewing and deepening her inner life, by drawing from the essential fountain of the Christian spirit, that the Church becomes able to act as the leaven of the world. The importance of the Constitution on the liturgy lies in this that by its bold decisions it opens the way to such a renewal and deepening. On some points (as in the question of the vernacular, to mention but one instance) it gives more than seemed possible even a year ago.<sup>1</sup>

It has been said that December 4th, 1963, marks the end, in the history of the liturgy, of the Tridentine period; after four centuries of strict uniformity and immobilism, it ushers in a new era. But it largely depends on bishops and clergy how the new possibilities will be used.

The reform of the liturgy as decreed by the Council will evidently be a gradual process. It will take years before the new liturgical books will be ready. But in the mean time a decree, to be published soon, will indicate some changes that can be made immediately by each priest or by the episcopal conferences. In his concluding address the Holy Father warned: "No one should arrogate to himself the right to interpret arbitrarily the Constitution on the liturgy which today We promulgate, before opportune and authoritative instructions are given." In any case, the faithful need some explanations to be prepared for the changes lest the simple folk be upset by what they might consider a change in their religion.

The reform is meant to be a means towards greater fervour and sincerity; but it cannot be expected to raise automatically the spiritual level of the Catholic community. This will always require considerable effort:

"In order that the liturgy may be able to produce its full effects, it is necessary that the faithful come to it with proper dispositions, that their minds should be attuned to their voices, and that they should cooperate with divine grace lest they receive it in vain. Pastors of souls must therefore realize that, when the liturgy is celebrated, *something more is required* than the mere observation of the laws governing valid and licit celebration; it is their duty also to ensure that the faithful take part in it intelligently, actively and fruitfully" (art. 11).

*The translation of the Constitution on the liturgy printed in this issue reproduces, with very few changes, the one prepared by Fr Clifford Howell.*

1. The practically unanimous approval which these decisions received in the final voting may seem surprising after the strong opposition they had met with during the discussions. The explanation is to be found in the catholic sense of the Fathers, which the Council itself has broadened. Though many of them do not feel the need of some of the changes proposed, they realize that others may need them and they want to leave the door open. The argument of the "open door" was often used during the discussions.

# CONSTITUTION ON THE SACRED LITURGY

## INTRODUCTION

1. This sacred Council has several aims in view: it desires to impart an ever increasing vigour to the Christian life of the faithful; to adapt more suitably to the needs of our own times those institutions which are subject to change; to foster whatever can promote union among all who believe in Christ; to strengthen whatever can help to call the whole of mankind into the household of the Church. The Council therefore sees particularly cogent reasons for undertaking the reform and promotion of the liturgy.

2. For the liturgy, "through which the work of our redemption is accomplished",<sup>1</sup> most of all in the divine sacrifice of the eucharist, is the outstanding means whereby the faithful may express in their lives, and manifest to others, the mystery of Christ and the real nature of the true Church. It is of the essence of the Church that she be both human and divine, visible and yet invisibly equipped, eager to act and yet intent on contemplation, present in this world and yet not at home in it; and she is all these things in such wise that in her the human is directed and subordinated to the divine, the visible likewise to the invisible, action to contemplation, and this present world to that city yet to come, which we seek.<sup>2</sup> While the liturgy daily builds up those who are within into a holy temple of the Lord, into a dwelling place for God in the Spirit,<sup>3</sup> to the mature measure of the fulness of Christ,<sup>4</sup> at the same time it marvellously strengthens their power to preach Christ, and thus shows forth the Church to those who are outside as a sign lifted up among the nations<sup>5</sup> under which the scattered children of God may be gathered together<sup>6</sup> until there is one sheepfold and one shepherd.<sup>7</sup>

3. Wherefore the sacred Council judges that the following principles concerning the promotion and reform of the liturgy should be called to mind, and that practical norms should be established.

1. Secret of the ninth Sunday after Pentecost.
2. Cf. Heb. 13: 14.
3. Cf. Eph. 2: 21-22.
4. Cf. Eph. 4: 13.
5. Cf. Is. 11: 12.
6. Cf. John 11: 52.
7. Cf. John 10: 16.

of its works. In consequence they will be able to appreciate and preserve the Church's venerable monuments, and be in a position to aid, by good advice, artists engaged in producing works of art.

130. It is fitting that the use of pontificals be reserved to those ecclesiastical persons who have episcopal rank or some particular jurisdiction.

#### APPENDIX

##### A DECLARATION OF THE SECOND ECUMENICAL COUNCIL OF THE VATICAN ON REVISION OF THE CALENDAR

The Second Ecumenical Sacred Council of the Vatican, recognizing the importance of the wishes expressed by many concerning the assignment of the feast of Easter to a fixed Sunday and concerning an unchanging calendar, having carefully considered the effects which could result from the introduction of a new calendar, declares as follows:

1. The sacred Council would not object if the feast of Easter were assigned to a particular Sunday of the Gregorian Calendar, provided that those whom it may concern, especially the brethren who are not in communion with the Apostolic See, give their assent.

2. The sacred Council likewise declares that it does not oppose efforts designed to introduce a perpetual calendar into civil society.

But among the various systems which are being suggested to stabilize a perpetual calendar and to introduce it into civil life, the Church has no objection only in the case of those systems which retain and safeguard a seven-day week with Sunday, without the introduction of any days outside the week, so that the succession of weeks may be left intact, unless there be most serious reasons, concerning which the Apostolic See shall judge.

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"If it is to be implemented effectively, the Constitution on the liturgy takes for granted that there will be a deep-rooted change in mentality both for the clergy and the faithful. It is not spectacular reforms or just any pedagogical method which can bring about the 'aggiornamento' we need. What is required is *conversion*.

"The conversion consists above all in realizing precisely what the Church is, that is, seeing the Church as the gathering of the members of the People of God around the living Christ, who communicates His word and His life through the hierarchy. Thus also will the laity understand their own proper place in the liturgical action. Their active presence is essential; participation in the mystery of Christ is the goal of their entire Christian life. This participation gives strength and meaning to all their activity for the spread of the Gospel and the consecration of the world..."

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*Cum permissu Superiorum*



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