

Liturgy and Renewal: Participation, Celebration and Inculturation

Andrew Cameron-Mowat SJ teaches liturgy at Heythrop College, University of London. Here he explores the future of the renewal of the liturgy, with emphasis on three topics: the meaning of 'active participation', the need to move away from a focus on text toward the liturgy itself, and the importance of real inculturation in the liturgy.

In an article published in October of 2004 on the topic of 'Polarisation and Liturgy'¹ I explored some tensions that exist in the liturgical life of the Church. Reference was made, among others, to the writings of Pope Paul VI, who had major significance in fostering the implementation of *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (SC).

In this article I would like to explore some specific points that have been brought to my attention by people who read that original article, or which have come to my notice since. I think they are important because they impinge on the future direction that liturgical renewal takes.

A. 'Full, conscious and active'. What does the phrase really mean?

B. Liturgical renewal is about the liturgy more than it is about texts.

C. The process of inculturation needs to be implemented more effectively.

Full, conscious and active participation

A. Right from the beginning of the Liturgical Movement, the desire of the Church's leaders and liturgical experts was to help all the faithful to a greater liturgical experience. Of particular importance for them was that a more active participation by the faithful was encouraged wholeheartedly by Popes of the time, particularly Pius X. This represented a gradual development in the Church's understanding of the liturgy. The arguments of St. Giuseppe Tommasi (d. 1713) and Ludovico Muratori (1750) for greater participation in order to foster more frequent reception of the Eucharist had pretty much fallen on deaf ears.²

'Actuosa' is about singing

The moment of truth for the Liturgical Movement came in 1903 when Pius X issued his *moto proprio* 'Tra le Sollecitudini' which argued that in order to foster greater participation, the faithful should be taught to sing the various parts of the Mass.³ In the foreword, Pius states that the true Christian spirit comes from the font of 'the active participation in the most holy mysteries and in the public and solemn prayer of the Church.' At n.3, Pius X writes that 'Special efforts are to be made to restore the use of the Gregorian Chant by the people, so that the faithful may again take a more active part in the ecclesiastical offices, as was the case in ancient times.' In the first quotation, the original Italian text is 'partecipazione attiva', and this word, 'attiva' appears also in the second quotation. At the point at which the *moto proprio* was translated into Latin, this word appeared as 'actuosa', which served to emphasise its true meaning; the most recent Latin dictionary available gives an even more striking list than mere 'active' as the translation of 'actuosa': 'active, busy, energetic, full of life; acting with extravagant gesture'.⁴ Thus if we are able to derive the original intention of the word from its use in the document, 'actuosa' participation was to be ensured by having the members of the congregation actually *do* something, namely, sing. It was to be through this activity that a deeper, more profound and fundamentally grace-filled participation in the Sacrifice of the Mass would take place. One has a sense here that it is through particular sorts of external activity that the deeper and truly effective participation, that between God and us, can take place. It is understandable, therefore, that Pius X writes at length on proper decorum, on the sorts of music to be used, and so forth. This point was reaffirmed by Pius XI in 1928 and, most signif-

icantly, by Pius XII in 1947, who extended the understanding of this participation to its natural conclusion in his encyclical, *Mediator Dei*. The high point of this participation would be in reception of the Eucharist by the faithful: [119]

May God grant that all accept these invitations of the Church freely and with spontaneity. May He grant that they participate even every day, if possible, in the divine sacrifice, not only in a spiritual manner, but also by reception of the august sacrament, receiving the body of Jesus Christ which has been offered for all to the eternal Father. Arouse Venerable Brethren, in the hearts of those committed to your care, a great and insatiable hunger for Jesus Christ. Under your guidance let the children and youth crowd to the altar rails to offer themselves, their innocence and their works of zeal to the divine Redeemer. Let husbands and wives approach the holy table so that nourished on this food they may learn to make the children entrusted to them conform to the mind and heart of Jesus Christ.

From the external to the internal

Sacrosanctum Concilium itself gives confirmation of this understanding, and it is disappointing that the meaning of ‘participation’ has been polarised between those who think it is entirely about physical movement and gesture, or who insist it is *entirely* about interior mystical devotion.

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The document presents a more nuanced approach. ‘Actuosa’ participation of the faithful will be ensured through pastors promoting it ‘internally and externally, taking into account their age and condition, their way of life, and standard of religious culture’ [note the emphasis on adaptation], SC 19. Great importance is given to communal celebrations over private ones, ‘involving the presence and *active participation* of the faithful’ (my emphasis) SC 27.

Section 30 shows the continuation of papal legislation regarding participation through conscious activity, particularly singing, thus continuing an approach that had remained constant since the time of Pius X:

To promote active participation, the people should be encouraged to take part by means of acclamations, responses, psalmody, antiphons, and songs, as well as by actions, gestures, and bodily attitudes. And at the proper times all should observe a reverent silence.

Further detail on this then follows in Chapter Six. SC 114 could not be more clear:

The treasure of sacred music is to be preserved and fostered with great care. Choirs must be diligently promoted, especially in cathedral churches; but bishops and other pastors of souls must be at pains to ensure that, whenever the sacred action is to be celebrated with song, the whole body of the faithful may be able to contribute that active participation which is rightly theirs, as laid down in Art. 28 and 30.

An element of adaptation and inculturation makes a significant appearance at Art. 119:

In certain parts of the world, especially mission lands, there are peoples who have their own musical traditions, and these play a great part in their religious and social life. For this reason due importance is to be attached to their music, and a suitable place is to be given to it, not only in forming their attitude toward religion, but

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also in adapting worship to their native genius, as indicated in Art. 39 and 40.

Musicians are encouraged to produce compositions for the liturgy, on condition that they have the qualities of 'genuine sacred music' and that they provide for 'the active participation of the entire assembly of the faithful.' [art.121] In the context of other Papal pronouncements, it would be difficult to interpret this in any other way than as meaning that the whole assembly would be expected to sing. Note, however, that this continues to be the means to the greater end of full participation. Thus, by means of a renewed and reformed liturgical celebration, in which cantors, choirs, and the whole assembly take an active role in the celebration, with Gregorian chant, polyphony, communal hymn and song, as well as prayer, proclamation, reading, gesture and movement, the entire community of faith praises and worships God: to the Father, through the Son, in the Spirit. Those who reject this approach were described by J. D. Crichton in his book *As it Was*:

Many were dismayed when they were asked to take an active part in the celebration with which came the suggestion that they were members of a community that involved them all. The Mass was something they did in company with all the rest. The radical individualism of Catholic piety was thus revealed.⁵

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The community that celebrates

B. It seems that we may be reaching a turning point in the place that text has in liturgical celebration. At the heart of the liturgy is the worship that we give to God and the graces that we receive through Christ in the proclamation of his word, in the preaching, in the music and movement, in the aural and the visual experience, that help us to become aware of the activity of God's spirit in us. The gathered community itself becomes a kind of living 'text' through the action of this spirit, ever developing and ever deepening in our evolution into the body of Christ in head and members, which is the Church at prayer. No particular text itself can create a spiritual experience, although it is true that inappropriate texts and prayers and hymns that do not fit the season or the pastoral situation can act in such a way as to severely hinder the liturgical moment. By bringing in the use of the

vernacular in the liturgy, the reformers of the Second Vatican Council created the possibility that the faithful would no longer need to rely on printed translations in their Missals to understand the words that were being proclaimed, often silently; we would no longer be reading at Mass but could hear and understand the words prayed on our behalf, and join in with those prayers when appropriate. As discussed elsewhere, the battles that currently rage are concerned with the quality of the translation, questions of transliteration rather than translation, conformity with rules that were changed after ICEL completed its work, and so forth. The matters that seem to me to be more important than this concern the local community and its pastoral leadership who gather together week by week. This group of people, spread around the world, brings extraordinary richness and diversity to the community of faith. We must question the ways in which we incorporate or ignore this diversity. The Roman Rite, itself created from a patchwork of sources over many centuries, must continue to develop and change as it always has. It may be time to begin thinking and praying about what the next Roman Rite should contain; how it will be adaptable and even more available to diverse styles and celebrations. Of central importance, and this also tends to become overlooked in debate, is the real meaning of what takes place in liturgy: God's communication with us as we worship. Nathan Mitchell puts it directly:

Liturgy is not something beautiful we do for God, but something beautiful God does for us and among us. Public worship is neither our work nor our possession; as the *Rule of St Benedict* reminds us, it is

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Opus Dei, God's work. Our work is to feed the hungry; to refresh the thirsty; to clothe the naked, to care for the sick; to shelter the homeless; to visit the imprisoned; to welcome the stranger; to open our hands and hearts to the vulnerable and the needy. If we are doing those things well, liturgy and the Catholic identity it rehearses will very likely take care of themselves.⁶

While many continue to regard their celebration of the liturgy on Sunday as the high point of their week as Christians, it is just that, the high point; it is not, however, the only point. There is a crucial union between our experience on Sunday and the rest of our life as Christians who are members of the society in which we make our dwelling place. Our experience of Sunday liturgy: the gathering, the song, the movement, the scripture, the prayer, the vestments, the music, and above all, the Eucharist, challenges us and moves us as we are filled by the Spirit and drawn ever closer to Christ. This is central to our living out the mandate given us as baptised Christians: proclaiming liberty to captives, forgiving seventy times seven, giving our cloak as well as our coat, turning the other cheek. By ensuring that the structure and the symbols of the liturgy are more accessible and their purpose and place in the liturgy are clearer, the reforms of Vatican II have revived worship that in large part had become stagnant and around which myths and superstitions abounded. Catalogues of vestments based on pre-Vatican II designs may keep lace makers in employment, but they speak more of a strong case of nostalgia than a committed attitude to the worship of God by a united assembly with its priorities in proper focus. Nathan Mitchell warns that

the rush to reassert old-time religion falls victim to the very values it claims to criticize, values derived from a 'shop till you drop' consumerism. Rifling internet sites for preconciliar prayerbooks, paraments, and paraphernalia, the neotraditionalist seems as indefatigable a shopper as any retro-chic consumer schlepping through a consignment shop in Chelsea.

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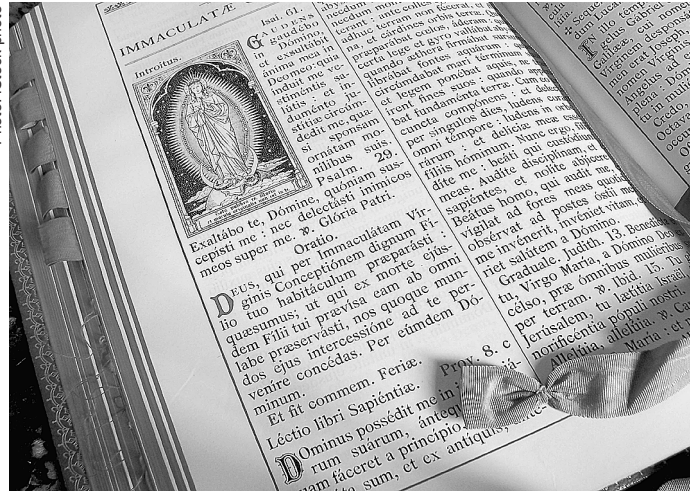
Moreover, nostalgia is inherently selective, exclusive, and elitist.⁷

Inculturation: more yet to be done

C. Pope John Paul II left an important legacy of practice from his many visits around the world and the papal liturgies that made up such an important part of his ministry to the Church. These mega-events were significant occasions at which, with the careful guidance of his Master of Ceremonies, Archbishop Piero Marini, local cultural influence, in language, movement, gesture, music, and symbol, was clearly seen to be incorporated into the whole liturgy. Simply to take the case of liturgical dance, the late Pope experienced this important use of inculturation during many of his visits overseas. Two examples will suffice: Mass in Sydney, Australia in 1995 included dance and an aboriginal ‘smoke and fire’ purification ritual; there were three dances during the Eucharist in New Delhi in 1999. Such a significant and concerted transformation of liturgy would have seemed impossible before the Second Vatican Council.⁸ In a recent interview, the retired Cardinal of New Zealand, Thomas Williams, praised the efforts of the late Cardinal of Samoa, Pio Taofinu’u, who has endeavoured to bring a high level of inculturation into the liturgy in his country. During one liturgy, the ritual of kava was incorporated into the Eucharistic liturgy.

The kava is the root of a pepper tree, which is ceremonially pounded and strained to make a drink. It’s an elaborate ceremony, with a special cloth used to strain the kava. Those preparing the drink are guarded by warriors while they perform the rites. Taofinu’u said the Eucharist is the kava *par excellence*, and so he had it guarded by the chiefs themselves. There are also parallels with the

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symbolism of the Eucharist. The kava is always served only from one cup, and it’s taken to the people as a sign of unity. Taofinu’u’s book was called *Kava as Prophecy*. ... The Samoans have brought that kind of liturgy here. I was there when we did this for the first time, and an old man came up to me and said, ‘This is the first time I’ve ever been to Mass that I felt like I was Samoan.’⁹

Liturgy in the United Kingdom

I relate these examples, and emphasise the importance of the contribution of the late Pope, because I believe that we still have a long way to go in this country towards the full implementation of the reforms of Vatican II in this particular area of inculturation of the liturgy. The United Kingdom is blessed with astonishing cultural and linguistic diversity and it is vital for us to show that the liturgy does not act as a defensive barrier against this diversity, but actually

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incorporates it into its celebration. In order for this to happen effectively, we will need to be open to the possibilities that the examples of the late Pope and the conscientious cardinals and bishops of other countries have shown us. Committed Catholics from numerous races and cultures live within our shores: how are we helping them to celebrate the liturgy in ways that raise their bodies and spirits to God? Must they leave their cultural heritage at the door as the organ strikes up with the opening notes of 'forty days and forty nights'? Are they to be forced to arrange themselves in row upon row of fixed pews, with no possibility of movement or spontaneity? We worship with our bodies, and so our bodies need to be participating in the liturgy. Xavier John Seubert, in an article in *The Heythrop Journal*, points towards the importance of the Incarnation as the event par excellence that established the significance of *bodiliness* in the relationship between God and creation.

There is no removal of individuals out of this world and into the life of God beyond the bodily and the historical ... Jesus is God through relationship that is the substance of God – and this now takes place forever within his bodiliness that is irrevocably one with human history. We are saved by relating our lives in all our bodiliness to that relationship within our history, not by securing our escape or release from it.¹⁰

Can an invitation be made to other cultures for their inspiration and insight so that they can experience the 'listening church' that seeks their guidance in the process towards deeper inculturation of the Gospel? We must continue to watch and hope. ■

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available at http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/pius_x/motu_proprio/documents/hf_p-x_motu-proprio_19031122_sollicitudini_it.html
The Latin version is found in AAS 36 [1903-1904].

- 4 See <http://lysy2.archives.nd.edu/cgi-bin/words.exe?actuose>, and also Leo F. Stelten, *Dictionary of Ecclesiastical Latin* (Hendrickson Publishers, 1995).
- 5 Crichton, J.D., *As it Was* (Decani Books, 1999), 32.
- 6 Mitchell, N., 'Amen Corner: Being Good and Being Beautiful,' *Worship* 74 (2000), 557-58.
- 7 Mitchell, N., 'Amen Corner: Consuming Liturgy,' *Worship* 79 (2005), 178-9.
- 8 Archbishop Marini, after the celebrations of the Asian Synod, wrote about the extent to which inculturation was a significant element of the liturgy: 'These Masses were enriched in the spirit of the liturgical reform of Vatican II by the various languages and ritual expressions of Asia. In these celebrations the Particular Churches of Asia expressed their faith, history and tradition through prayer, song, dance, ritual gestures and at the same time they demonstrated their solidarity with the Universal Church, which is manifested by the presence of the Holy Father.' (*Pastoral Visit of His Holiness Pope John Paul II to New Delhi*, 23rd October, 1999).
- 9 Allen, J. L. Jr., *Word from Rome*, Vol. 5 Nr. 25, *National Catholic Reporter*, February 24th, 2006.
- 10 'But do not use the Rotted Names': Theological Adequacy and Homosexuality,' *The Heythrop Journal*, XL (January 1999) 75. I owe this citation to Nathan Mitchell who used it in another context in 'The Amen Corner: Giotto's Joy', *Worship* 79 (2005), 273.

1 *Priests & People*, October 2004

2 For further detail about these two important liturgical figures see Crichton, J. D., *Lights in the Darkness* (Liturgical Press, 1996) 11-24.

3 The Italian version of this document is