

A CRISIS OF RECEPTION:  
THE CONSTITUTION ON THE SACRED LITURGY AND THE  
DEBATE OVER THE ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF THE  
ROMAN MISSAL

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## **CONTENTS**

CHAPTER ONE: Introduction	1
CHAPTER TWO: Methodological Considerations	5
CHAPTER THREE: A Hermeneutic of the Authors	17
CHAPTER FOUR: A Hermeneutic of the Text	
CHAPTER FIVE: A Hermeneutic of the Receivers	
CHAPTER SIX: Evaluation and Conclusion	

### **CHAPTER THREE: A Hermeneutics of the Authors**

As noted in the previous chapter, Ormond Rush’s approach to the interpretation of Vatican II demands three distinct approaches. The first—what Rush calls a “hermeneutic of the authors”—attempts to reconstruct the intentions of the Council fathers. The second approach, a “hermeneutic of the text,” focuses on the text itself, attending not only to its words, but also to its style, genre and structure. Rush’s final approach, a “hermeneutic of the receivers,” looks at how a particular text was interpreted and applied in the life of the Church.

In this chapter, we will be attending to the first of Rush’s hermeneutics, that of the authors. My purpose will be to reconstruct—to the extent possible—what was on the “mind” of the Council fathers as they debated the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy. To understand that debate, however, we also need to understand the role of the modern liturgical movement in raising questions to which the Council felt compelled to respond. As we will see, the movement played a particularly important role in arguing for a broader use of the vernacular in the liturgy.

This chapter is divided into three main sections. The first reviews the history and animating concerns of the modern liturgical movement. The second looks at how the debate over the use of the vernacular emerged out of that movement. Finally, I will examine the Council deliberations themselves, focusing specifically on the debates over the use of the vernacular and the authority of episcopal conferences to authorize its use. A concluding section will draw out the implications of this review for the interpretation of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy.

## The Liturgical Movement

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Church faced a number of social, cultural and political trends that would lead it to embrace the liturgy as a means of revitalizing Christian life. Since the French Revolution of 1789, the Church across Europe had been on the defensive as political leaders seized church property, closed monasteries, and limited privileges that the Church had historically enjoyed. Industrialization and modernization created additional challenges, as socialist and communist parties competed with the Church for the loyalty of the working classes.<sup>29</sup>

Liturgically, the Church was still wrestling with the legacy of its battle with Protestantism. The promulgation of a new Roman Missal in the wake of the Council of Trent froze in place many of the practices that had increased the distance between the congregation and the action of the rite. The result was that the piety of ordinary Catholics remained focused on devotions external to the liturgy.<sup>30</sup>

The election of Pope Pius X in 1903 marked the beginning of an effort to place liturgical piety at the center of Christian life. An opponent of many of the intellectual and political trends sweeping Europe, Pius believed that participation in the liturgy could be an important source of spiritual renewal. Within three months of his election, he issued a motu proprio, *Tra le sollecitudini*, in which he called for the restoration of Gregorian chant. One of Pius's motivations was to recover a form of sacred music that would be more conducive to congregational participation than classical or baroque compositions:

It being our ardent desire to see the true Christian spirit restored in every respect and preserved by all the faithful, we deem it necessary to provide before everything else for the sanctity and dignity of the temple, in which the faithful assemble for the object of acquiring this spirit from its

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<sup>29</sup> Thomas Bokenkotter, *A Concise History of the Catholic Church* (New York: Image, 1990), 300-301.

<sup>30</sup> James F. White, *Roman Catholic Worship: Trent to Today* (New York: Paulist, 1995), 9-14.

indispensable fount, which is the active participation in the holy mysteries and in the public and solemn prayer of the Church.<sup>31</sup>

Pius would apply this principle beyond the field of sacred music. In 1905, his instruction *Sacra Tridentina Synodus* encouraged “frequent and daily communion.” *Quam singulari* of 1910 lowered the age of First Communion.<sup>32</sup>

It was during the pontificate of Pius X that one of the most important figures in the early liturgical movement emerged. Lambert Beauduin was a Belgian priest active in ministry to workers who had entered the Benedictine monastery of Mont César in 1906. In 1909, he gave a landmark address at the National Congress of Catholic Works titled “La vraie prière de l’Eglise” where he laid out his vision of liturgical renewal. Taking his starting point from the writings of Pius X, Beauduin highlighted the importance of “active participation” in the liturgy. He advocated the use of vernacular missals to make the Mass more accessible and recommended that liturgists and musical directors make annual retreats at centers of liturgical renewal.<sup>33</sup>

Beauduin also played an important role in bringing the liturgical movement to the United States. While teaching in Rome in the 1920s, he encountered a young American Benedictine named Virgil Michel who was studying there. Michel—a brother of the Benedictine Abbey of Saint John’s in Collegeville, Minnesota—was inspired by Beauduin’s vision of the liturgy. After his return home, he became one of the leaders of the American liturgical movement and the founder of *Orate Fratres*, a monthly journal of liturgical studies<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Pope Pius X, *Tra la Sollecitudini (Instruction on Sacred Music)*, November 22, 1903, <http://www.adoremus.org/MotuProprio.html> [accessed on May 29, 2007].

<sup>32</sup> Alcuin Reid, *The Organic Development of the Liturgy* (Farnborough: St. Michael’s Abbey Press, 2004), 64-65.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>34</sup> Mark J. Twomey, 2001. *Seventy-Five Years of Grace: The Liturgical Press 1926-2001* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 2001), 11.

An article written by Michel in the inaugural issue of *Orate Fratres* succinctly describes the problem that those active in the liturgical movement were trying to solve. He asks the reader to imagine that a small group of people have decided to interview the governor of their state to thank him for some work that has recently concluded or to ask his help in furthering an effort:

The members of the group choose a spokesman, who is to talk and act for them. They go to the office of the governor, and are admitted to a waiting room. When the governor enters, the spokesman announces the purpose of the interview and in well-chosen words expresses the sentiments and good wishes of the group, or presents their petition....What, under such circumstances, would you think if you saw one of the group sitting in a corner chair asleep, another reading a paper taken from his pocket, another figuring out the money accounts of the last several days and making jottings in a small note-book, and still another studiously examining a painting on the wall? What would the governor think if he saw these things, and how would he feel?<sup>35</sup>

This was precisely, suggested Michel, what many persons attending Mass were doing by praying private devotions rather than participating actively in prayer of the Mass. Citing Pius X's dictum, "Do not pray in the Mass, but pray the Mass," Michel suggested that every Catholic should try to understand the action of the mass and to pray with the priest as he offers it.<sup>36</sup>

During the 1920s and 30s, those involved in the liturgical movement made use of a number of tools to try to promote active participation. They encouraged the use of bilingual missals with Latin on one side of the page and a vernacular translation on the other, which allowed the people to follow along with the prayers of the priest. Some parishes—particularly in Germany—embraced a form of the Mass (known as the "dialogue Mass" or "missa recitata") in which the people would recite some of the responses along with the servers.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Virgil Michel, "Participation in the Mass," *Orate Fratres*, 1:1 (1926), 17-20.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>37</sup> Keith Pecklers, *The Unread Vision: The Liturgical Movement in the United States of America 1926-1955*. (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1998), 50-55.

Those involved in the liturgical apostolate in those early years were primarily focused on what might be termed “bringing the people to the Mass.” The hope was that effective catechesis would bring Catholics to a greater appreciation of the Mass as it existed at that time. By the late 1930s, however, many of those involved in the movement believed it was failing to achieve its goals and began to support changes in the liturgy that would make it more conducive to active participation. Writing in *Orate Fratres* in 1936, Fr. Roger Schoenbechler, OSB, suggested, for example, expanding the use of the vernacular—particularly in the administration of the sacraments—and changes in the construction of altars to allow for celebration *versus populum*.<sup>38</sup> While these proposals were praised by some, others worried that too much was being conceded. Fr. William Busch (a key collaborator of Virgil Michel’s), asked “if modern life finds the liturgy difficult, is it the liturgy that should be changed? Ought we not to adjust ourselves to the liturgy, rather than wish to adjust it to our liking?”<sup>39</sup>

By the end of the 1940s, the need for at least some reform of the liturgy was recognized by the highest levels of the Church’s leadership. In 1946, Pope Pius XII established a commission to examine reform of the liturgy and in 1947 he issued a landmark encyclical on the subject titled *Mediator Dei*.<sup>40</sup> The encyclical stated that the liturgy contains both divine and human elements. The latter, instituted by God, cannot be changed. “The human components,” however, “admit of various modifications, as the needs of the age, circumstance and the good of souls may require” (MD 50). The encyclical also noted that “the use of the mother tongue in connection with several of the rites may be of much

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<sup>38</sup> Roger Schoenbechler, “On Liturgical Reform,” *Orate Fratres*. 10:11-12 (1936), 562-565.

<sup>39</sup> William Busch, “On Liturgical Reforms,” *Orate Fratres*. 11:7 (1937), 353-357.

<sup>40</sup> Pope Pius XII, *Mediator Dei*, November 20, 1947. [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/pius\\_xii/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_p-xii\\_enc\\_20111947\\_mediator-dei\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/pius_xii/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xii_enc_20111947_mediator-dei_en.html) [accessed on May 29, 2007].

advantage to the people,” although it cautioned that the Apostolic See alone is empowered to grant this permission (MD 60).

### **The Debate over the Vernacular**

Of all the reforms being advocated during this period, the use of the vernacular was the most controversial. In its early years, *Orate Fratres* was extremely cautious in its approach to the question. In the journal’s second issue, the magazine’s editors noted that “the way of a liturgical reawakening is indeed not made easier by reason of the Latin language” but argued that the difficulty should not be exaggerated and that “participation in the liturgy will bring the language closer to us.”<sup>41</sup> By 1938, Virgil Michel was suggesting that the Church should consider use of the vernacular in certain situations, particularly in the instructional and exhortatory parts of the liturgy, e.g. the readings.<sup>42</sup> In light of the subsequent history, it is interesting that Michel makes the following observation:

We cannot imagine that anyone would advocate the use of the vernacular to the extent of wishing to drop the Latin altogether, and we are moreover in favor of teaching simple liturgical Latin courses even in our grade schools. Hence any argument against the use of vernacular in the Roman rite based on dropping the Latin altogether is for us beside the point at issue and to be rejected without further ado.<sup>43</sup>

By the late 1940s, organizations had formed in several countries to promote the use of the vernacular. In the United States, for example, the Vernacular Society was formed in 1948. Led by the retired Lieutenant Colonel K. John Ross-Duggan, the Vernacular Society would eventually grow to more than

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<sup>41</sup> Editor, “The Apostolate,” *Orate Fratres*. 1:8 (1927), 252-255.

<sup>42</sup> Virgil Michel, “The Liturgy in the Vernacular,” *Orate Fratres*. 12:4 (1938), 172-174.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 173.

100,000 members. The Society published a journal, called *Amen*, in which the issues surrounding the use of the vernacular were endlessly debated.<sup>44</sup>

Even at this early stage, advocates for the vernacular were raising questions about how best to translate liturgical texts. One of the earliest discussions was over the usage of “Thou” or “You” when addressing God in worship.<sup>45</sup> John Cort, a former editor of *Commonweal*, came out strongly for the latter in the pages of *Amen*:

I would like to cast one small vote for ‘You.’ If we are going to have some of the Sacraments in English, why not go all the way and put them into the actual English that they themselves use when they are speaking to God...When a man faces God directly and prays to Him in the secret fastness of his heart, he does not say ‘O God I beseech thee.’ To use such language would make him [so] self-conscious that his prayer would become almost worthless. Why, then, when a man goes into church, must he speak to God with such archaic formality?<sup>46</sup>

Not all advocates for the vernacular were as critical of “archaic formality” as Cort, however. There was also a significant reservoir of sympathy for the Anglican Book of Common Prayer and its beautiful Shakespearean cadences. Irwin Tucker, the editor of *Amen*, wrote an article for the journal titled “*The Book of Common Prayer: It’s Catholic—Let’s Claim It!*” Tucker argued that it would be better to use the BCP rather than “re-inventing the wheel” by translating Catholic liturgical texts from Latin to English.<sup>47</sup>

In the late 1940s and early 1950s, advocates for the vernacular made a number of advances. Pius XII’s qualified praise of the vernacular in *Mediator Dei* led to requests from bishops in a number of nations to use the vernacular in the celebration of the sacraments. The U.S bishops received approval for an

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<sup>44</sup> James F. White, *Roman Catholic Worship*, 103.

<sup>45</sup> Keith Pecklers, *Dynamic Equivalence: The Living Language of Christian Worship* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2003), 62.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 152.

English translation of the Roman Ritual on June 3, 1954.<sup>48</sup> The issue of the vernacular was also raised at a number of important liturgical conferences held in Europe in the early 1950s.

Storm clouds, however, were already on the horizon. At the 1956 international conference on the liturgy held in Assisi, Cardinal Cicognani, Prefect of the Congregation for Rites, defended the continued use of Latin in the liturgy as a “splendid sign of unity” and a safeguard against the corruption of doctrine. He argued that it was not necessary for the assembly to understand the action of the Mass since they did not participate in the ordained priesthood.<sup>49</sup> After the close of the conference, some of the participants traveled to Rome for an audience with Pius XII. The pope, while praising the liturgical movement, reaffirmed that “the Church has serious reasons for steadfastly retaining in the Latin rite the unconditional obligation of the celebrating priest to use the Latin language.”<sup>50</sup>

While Assisi displayed the growing strength of the movement for the vernacular, it also marked the beginning of a reaction against it. In 1958, the Congregation on Rites issued an “Instruction on Sacred Music and Sacred Liturgy.” The instruction took pains to reaffirm the use of Latin in the liturgy, conceding the use of the vernacular only in limited cases.<sup>51</sup> In March of 1962, less than six months before the start of Vatican II, Pope John XIII dealt the movement for the vernacular what appeared at the time to be a stunning setback with the promulgation of the apostolic constitution *Veterum sapientia*. The constitution was a forceful defense of Latin as the official language of the Church. It stated that:

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 65.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 88.

The employment of Latin has recently been contested in many quarters, and many are asking what the mind of the Apostolic See is in this matter. We have therefore decided to issue the timely directives contained in this document, so as to ensure that the ancient and uninterrupted use of Latin be maintained and, where necessary, restored.<sup>52</sup>

Advocates for the vernacular were quick to point out that the focus of the document was the training of seminarians and that nothing in the document rescinded existing vernacular concessions that had been granted or prevented such concessions from being extended in the future. Even as the preparations for Vatican II were underway, many advocates for the vernacular believed their progress had been halted for the foreseeable future.<sup>53</sup>

### **The Debate at the Council**

With all the ferment on these questions in the decades leading up to Vatican II, it is not surprising that the reform of the liturgy became a major topic at the Council. In this third section of the chapter, we will begin with a brief overview of the process by which the Council developed and approved the text that became the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy. An understanding of that process will be helpful as we move to examine the key debates over the use of the vernacular and the authority of episcopal conferences.

#### The Council's Deliberative Process

Prior to the Council, a preparatory Commission on the Liturgy had sifted through the various proposals submitted by bishops from around the world and developed a draft schema titled *De Sacra Liturgia*. The preparatory commission handed its work off to the Council's own Liturgical Commission, which was elected shortly after the Council convened. The Commission had the job of

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<sup>52</sup> Pope John XXIII, *Veterum sapientia*, February 22, 1962, <http://www.adoremus.org/VeterumSapientia.html> [accessed February 11, 2008].

<sup>53</sup> Keith Pecklers, *Dynamic Equivalence*, 117.

briefing the Council Fathers on the contents of the schema, integrating any proposed changes, and assisting the Council presidents in managing the process by which the document was brought to the floor for voting.<sup>54</sup>

The schema on the liturgy was among the council's first real items of business and debate began on October 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1962. The debate lasted until November 13<sup>th</sup>, and included 328 oral interventions and 297 interventions submitted in writing. The major points of discussion were 1) the use of the vernacular; 2) the authority of bishops and episcopal conferences to regulate the liturgy; 3) adaptation of the liturgy; 4) reform of the liturgical books; and 5) the anointing of the sick.<sup>55</sup>

On November 14<sup>th</sup>, the entire schema was brought forward for a vote. The point of this vote was not to give the document final approval, but to confirm that there was sufficient support to justify continued work on it. While many criticisms of the schema had been offered during the debate, it was approved by 2,162 fathers out of a possible total of 2,215. The vote was a decisive victory for those who favored significant reform of the liturgy.<sup>56</sup>

Even before the November 14<sup>th</sup> vote, the Liturgical Commission began the work of sifting through the various interventions and making amendments to the text. Each chapter would then be presented to the full Council for a vote. The Fathers had the option of voting *placet* (approve), *non placet* (disapprove), or *placet iuxta modum* (approve with amendments). Despite the Commission's hard work, the clock was working against them. Ultimately, only the revised Introduction and Chapter One of the Constitution were presented for a vote

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<sup>54</sup> Mathijs Lamberigts, "The Liturgy Debate," in *History of Vatican II: Volume II*, eds. Giuseppe Alberigo and Joseph Komonchak (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1997), 110-112.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 110-112.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 149.

during the Council's first session. On December 7<sup>th</sup>, the vote on these sections produced a vote of 1992 *placet*, 11 *non placet*, and 180 *placet iuxta modum*.<sup>57</sup>

When the Council reconvened in October of 1963, it moved quickly to consideration of the remaining chapters of the schema. Chapter Two, on the Eucharist, produced a large number of *placet iuxta modum* votes, necessitating additional work by the Commission to integrate proposed amendments (called *modi*) into the texts. Amendments that were likely to be controversial were sometimes submitted for individual consideration by the Council, but the number of *modi* was too large for all of them to be voted on individually. Prior to the final voting on each chapter, the Commission submitted a report to the Council detailing how it had dealt with the *modi*. Once all the chapters had been approved, a final vote was taken on the document as a whole. This cleared the way for a final solemn vote on the Constitution, which was taken on December 4<sup>th</sup>, 1963 in the presence of Paul VI, who confirmed the approval of the Fathers.<sup>58</sup>

### The Use of the Vernacular

The debate over the use of the vernacular had been heated even during the work of the preparatory commission. While there was significant support for some use of the vernacular, there were questions about how extensive that use should be. The American Benedictine Godfrey Diekmann, a member of the commission, recalled one of the debates:

Vernacular—on the presidential prayers in the vernacular: Grimshaw, Hallinan, McManus are the only ones who fought...Even Wagner spoke up for keeping the collect in Latin! “It would be beautiful to have this island of Latinity in the Foremass, as it would be to have an island of vernacular in the Canon.” We argued violently...I was so mad I could spit. Wagner, Martimort, not honest. There, priest whispers collect in *Latin*, and commentator reads it aloud in *German*.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 149.

<sup>58</sup> Reiner Kacynski, “Toward the Reform of the Liturgy,” in *History of Vatican II: Volume III*, eds. Giuseppe Alberigo and Joseph Komonchak (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1996), 192-218.

<sup>59</sup> Keith Pecklers, *Dynamic Equivalence*, 173.

The debate continued when the commission's proposed schema reached the Council floor, with the Fathers offering 80 interventions on this topic alone. Although the schema stated that "the use of Latin in the western liturgy should be preserved," it also permitted more liberal use of the vernacular in the Mass, the sacraments, and the divine office. It was the latter two concessions that provoked the most opposition. Those bishops who spoke in opposition expressed concern that the wider use of the vernacular would endanger the unity of the Church and lead to diverse and potentially contradictory understandings of dogmas.<sup>60</sup>

Opponents of the vernacular dominated the early stages of the debate, with Cardinals Ruffini, MacIntyre and Spellman offering interventions on the first day. By the second and third days, however, advocates for the vernacular began to make their presence felt, with significant interventions coming from Cardinal Joseph Ritter of St. Louis, Cardinal Feltin of Paris, and Eastern Rite Patriarch Maximos IV Saigh of Antioch.<sup>61</sup> The Patriarch accentuated his point by making his intervention—against the official rules—in French and reminding the Fathers that Latin was not the only language in which Catholic liturgy was celebrated.<sup>62</sup>

Bishops from Africa and Asia, whose intellectual traditions had not been shaped by Latin, were outspoken in their desire to introduce local languages into the liturgy. Cardinal Gracias of Bombay acknowledge the challenge of celebrating liturgy in the vernacular in a country where so many languages were spoken, but nevertheless strongly supported the vernacular concessions.<sup>63</sup> The African bishops expressed their own support for the use of the vernacular and called for

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<sup>60</sup> Mathijs Lamberigts, 120-121.

<sup>61</sup> Keith Pecklers, *Dynamic Equivalence*, 183-185.

<sup>62</sup> Xavier Rynne, *Vatican Council II* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1999), 61.

<sup>63</sup> Keith Pecklers, *Dynamic Equivalence*, 186.

the removal of the term “western” as a description of the Latin rite.<sup>64</sup> Bishop Kobayashi of Japan argued that Latin was easily rejected by his countrymen as “foreign” and asked “is our unity with the Holy See so feeble that it has to be maintained by a rigid uniformity?”<sup>65</sup>

Flemish Bishop Calewaert of Ghent offered the mediating position that would eventually command majority support. He suggested that the Latin should be retained in the principal parts of the Mass (with some exceptions made for mission territories) while the vernacular could be used in the catechetical portions, such as the readings and some of the responses, as well as in the administration of the other sacraments.<sup>66</sup>

After the November 14<sup>th</sup> vote on the schema—which was overwhelmingly in the affirmative—the document was remanded back to the Liturgical Commission, which had already begun working on changes to Chapter One, which dealt with the principles governing liturgical reform. In response to the concerns raised by African bishops, the word “western” was replaced by the word “Latin,” so that the text now read “the use of Latin in the Latin liturgy is to be preserved.” The phrase “with due respect to existing particular law” was added take into account those who were already celebrating the liturgy in the vernacular. The Commission declined to make any modifications that would have either explicitly permitted unlimited use of the vernacular or restricted its use in particular cases.<sup>67</sup>

When the Commission turned its attention to Chapter Two, on the Eucharist, its approach to the language question took a modestly more conservative approach. When stating which parts of the Mass could be said in

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<sup>64</sup> Xavier Rynne, 60-63.

<sup>65</sup> Keith Pecklers, *Dynamic Equivalence*, 189.

<sup>66</sup> Xavier Rynne, 64-65.

<sup>67</sup> Mathijs Lamberigts, 155.

the vernacular, the Commission opted for language offered by Cardinal Léger which stated that the vernacular could be used in the readings and some of the prayers and hymns.<sup>68</sup> Despite the requests of some members to specifically exclude the Roman Canon from consideration, the Commission opted not to do this.<sup>69</sup> At the same time, language was added that stressed the importance of the faithful knowing the Ordinary of the Mass in Latin.<sup>70</sup> In his report to the Council on the Commission's work on Chapter Two, Bishop Jesús Enciso Viana of Mallorca noted:

We have formulated the article (54) in this manner so that those who wish to celebrate the entire Mass in Latin may not be able to force their viewpoint on others, while those who wish to use the vernacular in some parts of the Mass may not be able to compel others to do the same...The door is not closed against anyone.<sup>71</sup>

As noted earlier, the Introduction and Chapter One of the Constitution were voted on during the Council's first session, on November 7<sup>th</sup>. The remaining chapters could not be considered until the Council reconvened in October of 1963. Chapter Two, which dealt with the Eucharist, was briefly held up when it failed to secure the required two-thirds vote for approval.<sup>72</sup> Only a minority of the proposed *modi*, however, dealt with the vernacular and while the Commission made other changes to the chapter, it did not make any changes to the language governing the use of the vernacular.<sup>73</sup> The revised chapter was

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 157.

<sup>69</sup> Anibale Bugnini, *The Reform of the Liturgy 1948-1975* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1990), 111.

<sup>70</sup> Mathijs Lambertigts, 157.

<sup>71</sup> Anibale Bugnini, 111.

<sup>72</sup> Reiner Kaczynski, 202.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 214-215.

ultimately approved overwhelmingly, which cleared the way for the final solemn approval of the Constitution on December 4<sup>th</sup>.<sup>74</sup>

### The Liturgical Authority of Episcopal Conferences

As was the case with the issue of the vernacular, the liturgical authority of episcopal conference was a topic of controversy before the Council itself even convened. While the schema approved by the Liturgical Commission had given “episcopal conferences” (which were not explicitly defined) the right to “establish” (*statuare*) the limits of the use of the vernacular, the passage had been changed to “propose to the Holy See” (*Sanctae Sedi proponere*) prior to the text being submitted to the Council floor.<sup>75</sup> In addition, an introductory note had been added to the schema that appeared to place the authority to make specific decisions about reform solely in the hands of the Holy See: “The intention of this Constitution is to propose only general norms and ‘loftier principles that concern the general liturgical renewal,’ leaving it to the Holy See to implement the individual matters.”<sup>76</sup> Council fathers who had been involved in the production of the original draft reacted angrily, suggesting that “unknown hands” within the Curia were responsible for the changes.<sup>77</sup>

In the intervention noted above, Patriarch Maximos IV Saigh of Antioch argued strongly that episcopal conferences be given significant decision-making power with respect to the use of the vernacular:

I propose that it be left to episcopal councils in each region to decide if, and to what extent, it is convenient or not to adopt the vernacular in the liturgy. The text only leaves the episcopal conferences the responsibility of proposing the adoption to the Holy See—but there is no need to have an episcopal conference to put forward such a proposal. Any of the faithful

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 218-219.

<sup>75</sup> Mathijs Lambertigts, 115; Xavier Rynne, 57.

<sup>76</sup> Mathijs Lambertigts, 115, Note 43.

<sup>77</sup> Keith Pecklers, *Dynamic Equivalence*, 182.

could. Episcopal conferences should not be called just to propose, but to decide something, subject to the approval of the Holy See.

I propose, therefore, that clause No. 24 should end thus (lines 16-19): *sit vero conferentiae episcopalis in singulis regionibus...limites et modum linguae vernacular in liturgiam admittendae statuare, actis sancta sede recognitis* (Let the conference of bishops decide for each region what is to be the manner and the limits of the use of vernacular in the liturgy, the acts being approved by the Holy See).<sup>78</sup>

A number of the schema's sections raised issues related to the role of episcopal conferences. Paragraph 16, for example, dealt with the revision of the liturgical books by a group of experts and called for consultation with episcopal conferences, and provoked charges that such a move would supplant the proper role of the Congregation for Rites. Debate was similarly heated over Paragraphs 20-22, which expanded the authority of episcopal conferences and individual bishops to regulate the liturgy.<sup>79</sup> Even though these proposals were softened with language that required the decisions to be approved by the Holy See (*actis a Sancta Sede recognitis*), critics such as Cardinals Ruffini and Browne saw them as an inappropriate challenge to papal authority in liturgical matters.<sup>80</sup> Supporters of these provisions, such as Cardinal Gracias, argued that giving more authority to the episcopal conferences gave bishops the ability to respond to local concerns.<sup>81</sup>

After the November 4<sup>th</sup> vote on the schema, the Liturgical Commission made a number of changes to clarify the authority of the episcopal conferences. In Article 36 of the Constitution, the authority to establish the limits of the use of the vernacular was left in the hands of the episcopal conferences, which were now

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<sup>78</sup> Xavier Rynne, 61.

<sup>79</sup> Mathijs Lambertigts, 119.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

defined as “competent territorial ecclesiastical authorities.”<sup>82</sup> The language requiring those decisions to be reviewed by the Holy See (*actis a Sancta Sede recognitis*) was changed to state that they should be “approved or confirmed” (*probatis seu confirmatis*) by the Holy See.<sup>83</sup>

With respect to the Chapter on the Eucharist, however, the Commission made certain distinctions between areas where the use of the vernacular could be approved by the episcopal conferences (subject to confirmation by the Holy See) and areas where the conferences would have to propose such changes to the Holy See. These situations were to be covered by Article 40, which dealt with cases where more significant adaptation of the liturgy to local cultures was deemed necessary. In these cases, the role of the Holy See is stronger and the episcopal conference must propose (*proponere*) the change to the Holy See. In making the Commission’s report to the Council on the issue, Bishop Viana described the distinction:

In regard to the various parts of the Mass in which the vernacular may be used—and we have expressly not decided to exclude any part, even though persons entirely deserving of respect wanted to exclude the Canon—we have decided on the following method of achieving the goal stated above:

a) for the readings and the prayer of the faithful, where there are very special reasons for using the vernacular, the territorial authorities will have competence in accordance with the norm set down in Article 36. The peculiar nature of these parts is suggested by the adverb *praesertim* (“in the first place”);

b) for the other parts of Mass, both in the Proper and in the Ordinary, we make a double distinction, according as these parts are sung or recited by the faithful or are sung or recited by the celebrant. In the former case, the territorial authorities have competence, again in accordance with the norm in article 36. In the latter case, the norm set down by Article 40 is to be followed.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 155.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 155-156.

<sup>84</sup> Anibale Bugnini, 111.

As noted above, Chapter Two encountered some difficulties during the second session of the Council and initially failed to win the required two-thirds vote necessary for adoption. But the Commission did not make any changes related to Article 40. In fact, the only major change they did make in the chapter was to strengthen the ability of bishops to regulate concelebration within their dioceses, which was an additional example of how the Council was gradually expanding the liturgical authority of bishops. With this change, the chapter won swift and overwhelming approval, which cleared the way for the final approval of the entire Constitution on December 7<sup>th</sup>, 1963.

## **Conclusion**

The purpose of this chapter was to develop a “hermeneutic of the authors” of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy. As noted earlier, the purpose of that hermeneutic is to reconstruct—as much as that is possible—the “mind” of the Council fathers at Vatican II. Understanding what was on the mind of the fathers as they debated the Constitution is a critical key to the document’s interpretation.

The liturgical questions debated at the Council were not new to the Council. They were the fruit of at least a century of pastoral and theological reflection on the role of liturgy in Christian life that coalesced in the modern liturgical movement. The movement’s leaders took to heart Pius X’s assertion that “active participation” in the liturgy was an indispensable source of the “true Christian spirit.” In the face of powerful currents of secularization and individualism, the liturgy came to be seen as a means of imparting, as the Council would put it “an ever increasing vigor to the Christian lives of the faithful (SC 1).”

“Active participation” became an ideal which was used to critique actual liturgical practice. Leaders of the liturgical movement like Beaudoine and Michel looked at the liturgy as it was currently being celebrated and asked what needed to be changed to promote participation. Initially, the movement embraced liturgical formation and catechesis. They sought to bring the people closer to the

liturgy as it was then celebrated. Over time, however, the majority of the movement's leaders embraced the proposition that the liturgy could, and should, be changed in order to promote active participation.

It was in this context that the question of liturgical language became increasingly urgent. Many of those involved in the liturgical movement had tried to overcome the problems inherent in using Latin by using bilingual missals, basic Latin classes in parishes, and other forms of catechesis. By the 1940s, however, these efforts were seen by at least some in the movement to have failed in their goal of bringing the faithful closer to the liturgy. A growing historical and ecumenical awareness led to an understanding that Latin had not been, in all places and all times, the language of Christian worship.

By the late 1940s, the question was not whether the vernacular should be used in the liturgy, but how extensive its use should be and who should make the decisions about that use. Pius XII's *Mediator Dei* affirmed that the use of the vernacular in the administration of the sacraments could be of "much advantage to the people," but reserved to the Holy See the right of making decisions about its use. What followed was a decade in which proponents and opponents of the vernacular engaged in a form of ecclesiastical trench warfare, with each side experiencing both victories and setbacks.

For these reasons, it is not surprising that the question of liturgical language was among the first issues debated at Vatican II. Hermann Pottmeyer has suggested that one of the hermeneutic keys to the Council is to follow the progress of the debates and to see what gradually gained in importance and what gradually lost in importance.<sup>85</sup> If we apply that principle here, we see that one of the ideas that gradually lost importance was the preservation of Latin as the exclusive language of the Roman Rite. While the final text of the Constitution does state that "the use of the Latin language...is to be preserved in the Latin

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<sup>85</sup> Hermann J. Pottmeyer, 30.

rites” (SC 36) the overall direction of the debate was toward fewer and fewer limits on the vernacular. Specific efforts were made by a few fathers to prevent the presidential prayers of the Mass—and the Roman Canon in particular—from being said in the vernacular. These efforts failed. This fact must weigh heavily on our attempt to understand the intent of the fathers on this issue.

One of the ideas that gained in importance, by contrast, was the notion that the episcopal conferences should have real authority in making decisions about the liturgy, particularly with respect to the use of the vernacular. Karl Rahner has noted that the Council was the first gathering of a truly world church with significant representation of a native episcopate.<sup>86</sup> By providing a forum for bishops from around the world to share experiences, the Council helped build a consensus that a single approach to the vernacular would not be sufficiently flexible to respond to the diverse needs of local churches. Accordingly, the Council removed the prefatory note that would have concentrated the authority for regulating the liturgy exclusively in the hands of the Holy See. It also modified the language regarding the Holy See’s approval of the decisions made by episcopal conferences (*probatis seu confirmatis*) in a way that strongly suggests that the primary locus of decision-making authority is at the level of the conference. In the end, though, it did not clarify the precise meaning of this admittedly ambiguous phrase.

The one exception to the general trend toward empowering the episcopal conferences—admittedly an important one for our purposes—is the role of the conferences with respect to the Mass. Here the fathers made a distinction between the parts said by the people and those said by the priest. While the episcopal conferences could make a decision (subject to confirmation) to extend the use of the vernacular to the people’s parts, they would have to propose any

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<sup>86</sup> Karl Rahner, “Toward a Fundamental Theological Interpretation of the Second Vatican Council,” *Theological Studies* 40 (December 1979), 716-27.

changes to the priest's parts to the Holy See for approval. In Chapter 4, we shall probe more deeply into the meaning of this distinction.