

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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## CHAPTER FOUR: A Hermeneutic of the Text

In the previous chapter, we applied the first of Ormond Rush's three hermeneutics, the "hermeneutic of the authors," to the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy. In this chapter, we will attend to the second of Rush's interpretative elements, a "hermeneutic of the text." The key feature of a hermeneutic of the text is that it takes the text more or less "as is" and is less concerned with the history that came before it. In addition to a close reading of the content, we must pay attention to issues of style, structure and form, as well as the relationship of the Constitution to other texts.

The chapter is divided into three parts. The first part looks at the Constitution as a whole with an eye to uncovering its central themes. I will argue that the best way to understand the Constitution's underlying principles is to see them as a set of concepts held in tension. Faithfulness to the Constitution demands an interpretative approach that can maintain these tensions rather than resolving them inappropriately.

The second part of the chapter will focus on the document's specific norms governing the use of the vernacular and the preparation of translated texts. Article 36 provides general norms for the use of the vernacular in the liturgy, while Article 54 (and to a lesser extent Article 40) provide specific norms for its use in the celebration of the Eucharist. We will focus particular attention on the language dealing with the Holy See's role in reviewing the decisions of the episcopal conferences. Here, we will depart slightly from the principle of taking the text "as is" and make use of some of the commentaries that were written shortly after the Constitution was promulgated.

The third part of the chapter will address the issue of intertextuality by examining two other texts from Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium* and *Christus Dominus*. Both of these documents address the roles and responsibilities of

individual bishops and bishops' conferences, and the relationship of bishops to the Holy See. These documents will therefore shed light on the Council's broader intent with respect to these issues.

Each of these parts is a building block in an argument that has four central points. First of all, the Constitution envisions and encourages the reform and adaptation of the liturgy to specific cultures in order to facilitate greater participation by the faithful. Secondly, this process of reform and adaptation must remain faithful to the tensions in the Constitution that are identified in Part I. Thirdly, the principal actors in this process of adaptation are the episcopal conferences. Finally, while the Constitution does not limit the authority of the Holy See to regulate the liturgy, respect for the principle of episcopal collegiality should lead the Holy See to give substantial deference to the decisions of the episcopal conferences.

### **Part I: Tensions as Themes**

In interpreting the Constitution, two strategies have been dominant. The first is the path taken by tradition commentaries of interpreting each article in sequence.<sup>87</sup> A second approach, often used in concert with the first, has been to identify a set of key themes that can serve as an overall guide when interpreting individual articles. Annibale Bugnini, who spearheaded the implementation of liturgical reform in the wake of the Council, described six fundamental principles of the Constitution: 1) the liturgy as an “exercise of the priestly office of Jesus Christ;” 2) the liturgy as “summit and fount” of Christian life; 3) full, conscious and active participation; 4) the liturgy as a “manifestation of the Church;” 5) “substantial unity” not “rigid uniformity;” 6) “sound tradition” and “legitimate

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<sup>87</sup> See Annibale Bugnini and Carlo Braga, *The Commentary and the Instruction on the Sacred Liturgy* (New York: Benzinger, 1965); Josef Jungmann, “Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy,” in *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Herbert Vorgrimler (New York: Herder and Herder, 1967); Frederick McManus, “The Constitution on Liturgy Commentary: Part One,” *Worship* 38:6 (May 1964), 314-374.

progress.” Writing more recently, liturgist Rita Ferrone has identified seven essential concepts that overlap with Bugnini’s in many respects.<sup>88</sup>

There is nothing wrong (and much right) with these approaches, but I would suggest that they have at least one limitation. If interpreting the Constitution is really as straightforward as this, it raises the question as to why interpreting the Constitution has become so fraught with controversy. As noted in Chapter 2, Hermann Pottmeyer has argued that the documents of Vatican II often contain juxtapositions of concepts in tension with one another, which reflect the two goals the Council fathers were pursuing: renewal of the Church and the preservation of continuity.<sup>89</sup> I would argue that these tensions and juxtapositions are also reflected in the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy. To grasp the Constitution, we must grasp these underlying tensions.

In the first part of this chapter, we will be exploring four key tensions that emerge from a close reading of the document. To say that a tension exists, however, is not to assert that all of the poles of these tensions are weighted evenly. In some cases, the text clearly leans more in one direction. However, I will argue that even in these cases, some significant weight on the opposite pole of the tension remains.

### Liturgy: Reception and Expression

One of the major tensions that the Constitution navigates is an enduring one in the Christian tradition: the dialectic between divine action and human action. To what extent is the liturgy something that we *receive* from God and to what extent is it an *expression* of our faith? The obvious response is that it is both, but this answer can be offered too easily in a way that elides the challenges

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<sup>88</sup> See Annibale Bugnini, *The Reform of the Liturgy 1948-1975* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1990), 39-48; Rita Ferrone, *Liturgy: Sacrosanctum Concilium* (New York: Paulist, 2007), 23-50. Ferrone’s concepts include: 1) the liturgy as “paschal mystery;” 2) the liturgy as “source and summit” of the Christian life; 3) full, conscious and active participation; 4) ecclesiology/equal dignity of all the baptized; 5) inculturation; 6) renewal of the liturgy; and 7) education and formation.

<sup>89</sup> Hermann J. Pottmeyer, 30-31.

involved in holding these two concepts in a productive tension. The text of the Constitution reflects an effort to do this.

In its opening articles, the document articulates a relatively “high” theology of the liturgy that sees it first and foremost as an activity of the triune God. The liturgy is, as Article 7 puts it, an “exercise of the priestly office of Jesus Christ.” In Christ, “our reconciliation was perfectly achieved and the fullness of divine worship was given to us” (SC 5). In Baptism and Eucharist, the Church celebrates the “paschal mystery” (SC 6) Christ is present in the sacraments, “so that when anyone baptizes it is really Christ himself who baptizes” (SC 7). The Eucharist is “a paschal banquet at which Christ is received” (SC 47) and which is offered “through Christ, the Mediator” (SC 48).

The emphasis in these passages is on the liturgy as something that is *received*. In the liturgy, God is giving Himself to humanity. The liturgy is the source from “which all [the Church’s] power flows” (SC 10). In the Eucharist, the renewal of the covenant between God and humanity “draws the faithful into the compelling love of Christ and sets them on fire” (SC 10). From the liturgy, grace is poured forth upon us to sanctify us and give us the strength for the apostolic works through which God is glorified (SC 9-10).

There are a number of other passages, however, where the liturgy is depicted as a form of human activity, a fitting *expression* of thanks to God for the work of salvation he has wrought on our behalf. The liturgy is not only the source of Christian life, but also the “summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed” (SC 10). Because the liturgy is an act of the mystical body of Christ, those who have been incorporated into that body through baptism are called to participate actively in it (SC 14). The Constitution stresses the importance of this participation, noting that “in the restoration and development of the sacred liturgy the full and active participation by all the people is the paramount concern” (SC 14).

The structure of the Constitution also exhibits this tension between reception and expression. The articles dealing with the liturgy as the priestly action of Jesus Christ come first, emphasizing the primacy of divine action. The articles dealing with liturgical formation are also placed before the articles dealing with liturgical reform, emphasizing that we must be formed by the liturgy before we can be in a position to re-form it. At the same time, however, it is obvious that the majority of the articles deal with reform of the liturgy, i.e. of those elements “subject to change” and which, in fact, should be changed “if they have suffered from the intrusion of anything out of harmony with the inner nature of the liturgy or have become less suitable” (SC 21).

#### Action: Communal and Hierarchically Ordered

A second key tension that the Constitution exhibits relates to the nature of human action in the liturgy. There is a very strong emphasis in the text on the *communal* nature of the liturgy. It is the wish of the Church that “all the faithful should be led to take that full, conscious, and active part in liturgical celebrations which is demanded by the very nature of the liturgy” (SC 14). In the reform of the liturgy, the “full and active participation by all the people is the paramount concern” (SC 14). Liturgical services are meant to be “celebrated in common with the faithful present and actively participating” (SC 27). With respect to the Eucharist, the Constitution states that the assembly offers “the immaculate victim, not only through the hands of the priest but also together with him” (SC 48).

The active participation to which the liturgical assembly is called is not only internal. The Constitution suggests that to develop active participation, “the people should be encouraged to take part by means of acclamations, responses, psalms, antiphons, hymns, as well as by actions, gestures and bodily attitudes” (SC 30). The Constitution suggests extending the use of the vernacular (SC 36;

54; 63) and restores the “prayer of the faithful” in the Mass in which “the people are to take part” (SC 53).

Because of the importance the Constitution places on participation by the assembly, many of its norms recommend efforts to make the liturgy more intelligible to the faithful. The text calls for liturgical formation for pastors (SC 14-18), who are then called to instruct the faithful (SC 19). Article 33 notes that while the liturgy is “principally the worship of divine majesty, it likewise contains much instruction for the faithful.” Accordingly, the Constitution states that the rites should radiate a “noble simplicity,” and be “within the people’s powers of comprehension” (SC 34).

While the liturgy is communal, it is also *hierarchically ordered*. The Church is the “holy people united and organized under their bishops” and for this reason, the liturgy touches “individual members of the Church in different ways depending on ranks, roles and levels of participation” (SC 26). “All taking part in the liturgy, whether ministers or members of the congregation, should do all that pertains to them and no more, taking into account the rite and the liturgical norms” (SC 28). The exercise of liturgical ministry, however, is not limited to the ordained priesthood, but also includes servers, readers, commentators and members of the choir, who exercise a “genuine liturgical ministry” (SC 29).

The hierarchical ordering of the liturgy is also apparent in the regulation of the liturgy. Regulation of the liturgy depends on the authority of the Church, i.e. the Apostolic See, as well as individual bishops and groups of bishops.<sup>90</sup> For this reason, no one, not even a priest, “may add, remove, or change anything in the liturgy on their own authority” (SC 22).

While the Constitution discusses both the communal nature of the liturgy and its hierarchical ordering, there is no question that the accent is on the former. The word “participation” appears 15 times in the document, always in

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<sup>90</sup> At the time the Constitution was written, national episcopal conferences had not yet been formally defined. The text uses the term “competent territorial ecclesiastical authority” (SC 36).

the context of participation by the assembly. As noted above, the text considers the “full and active participation by all the people” as the “paramount concern” in the reform of the sacred liturgy. This is the underlying theme behind the majority of the norms, which are aimed at facilitating active participation through liturgical catechesis and reform of the liturgy itself.

### Reform: Sound Tradition and Legitimate Progress

We come now to one of the most obvious tensions in the document, the tension between the desire (and even the obligation) to preserve the “sound tradition” of the liturgy and the need for “legitimate progress” to meet the pastoral needs of the age (SC 23). That the authors of this text wanted significant changes made to the liturgy cannot be seriously placed in doubt. The words “revise,” “revised,” or “revision” appear 25 times and are interspersed throughout the document, affecting every aspect of the liturgy.

The Constitution leavens this broad emphasis on reform, however, by offering specific norms to guide it. Article 23 lays out four broad principles. First, a careful investigation—theological, historical, and pastoral—should always be made into any part of the liturgy that is to be revised. Second, the liturgical laws (including the experience of recent concessions) must be taken into account. Third, there must be no innovations unless the good of the Church requires them. Fourth, new forms should develop organically from existing forms (SC 23).

Secondly, many of the additions the document contemplates are described as “restorations” (forms of the word “restore” appear 15 times in the text) while things that are proposed for elimination are generally described as accretions.

Article 50 provides a good example of the use of this vocabulary:

[T]he rites are to be simplified, due care being taken to preserve their substance; elements which, with the passage of time, came to be duplicated, or were added with but little advantage, are now to be discarded; other elements which have suffered injury through accidents of history are now to be restored to the vigor which they had in the days of the holy Fathers, as may seem useful or necessary.

The text also tries to maintain the tension between tradition and progress by juxtaposing norms that seek to preserve tradition with those that allow for additional progress. The most obvious example of this is in Article 36 which deals with the vernacular. Section 1 of the article states that “the use of the Latin language, except when particular law describes otherwise, is to be preserved in the Latin rites.” Section 2, however, allows for broader use of the vernacular and Section 3 gives the episcopal conferences the authority to decide how far to extend its use.

#### Adaptation: Substantial Unity and Legitimate Variation

The final tension we will identify in this section is one that is at the core of this study. Article 37 states that “even in the liturgy, the Church does not wish to impose a rigid uniformity in matters which do not affect the faith or the well-being of the entire community.” Article 38 continues this theme and states that “provided that the substantial unity of the Roman Rite is preserved, provision shall be made, when revising the liturgical books, for legitimate variations and adaptations to different groups, regions, and peoples, especially in mission countries.”

This desire for adaptation is accompanied by a decentralization of authority with respect to the liturgy. This was one of the Constitution’s most significant departures from the practice prior to Vatican II. In the wake of the Council of Trent in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the right of regulating the liturgy was reserved exclusively to the Holy See. The liturgical books were issued in “typical editions” to which nothing was to be added or subtracted.<sup>91</sup>

Article 22 of the Constitution modifies this state of affairs by stating that, in addition to the Apostolic See, “the regulation of the liturgy within certain

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<sup>91</sup> Annibale Bugnini, 42.

defined limits belongs also to various groupings of bishops, legitimately established, with competence within given territories.” One of the reasons for the vagueness of this language is that, at the time it was written, there existed no uniform statute in canon law regarding episcopal conferences, nor had the Council yet discussed them.<sup>92</sup>

Accordingly, the Constitution expands the power of the “competent territorial ecclesiastical authorit[ies]” and individual bishops to regulate and modify certain aspects of the liturgy, particularly “sacraments, sacramentals, processions, liturgical language, sacred music, and the arts” (SC 39). Articles 36, 54, and 63, for example, allow these authorities to expand the use of the vernacular in the liturgy, subject to the confirmation of the Holy See. Article 40 envisions cases where more radical adaptation of the liturgy may be needed; in these cases, the episcopal conferences may propose such adaptations to the Holy See, which reserves the right of approval. The authorities may develop local versions of the Roman Ritual with adaptations as to language and local customs, subject to the confirmation of the Holy See (SC63). The articles dealing with baptism (SC 65) and marriage (SC 77) specifically envision such adaptation.

The Constitution’s obvious openness to adaptation raises the question as to what the “substantial unity” of the Roman Rite consists of and how it is to be preserved. The Constitution itself does not seek to answer the question but rather offers a process for developing an answer. This process is described in Articles 39 and 40, and groups reforms into two categories. The first group includes a set of adaptations that the episcopal conferences are empowered to make with more limited oversight from the Holy See. These include aspects of the “sacraments, sacramentals, processions, liturgical language, sacred music and the arts,” the norms for which are included in the relevant chapters. The second group includes those adaptations that can be considered “more radical” (SC 40).

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<sup>92</sup> Josef Jungmann, “The Constitution on the Liturgy,” *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, Herbert Vorgrimler, ed. (New York: Herder and Herder, 1967), 20.

An example envisioned by the Council would be the extension of the vernacular to the priest's parts of the Mass (SC 54). In these cases, the episcopal conferences can make proposals to the Holy See, which will proceed "with requisite care," sometimes authorizing experiments so that the proposed changes can be evaluated before being implemented on a wider scale (SC 40).

In this section, I have argued that the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy is characterized by four major tensions: 1) *liturgy* as reception and expression; 2) *liturgical action* as communal and hierarchically ordered; 3) *reform* as preserving sound tradition while allowing for legitimate progress; and 4) *adaptation* as preserving substantial unity while allowing for legitimate variation. Faithfulness to the Constitution demands faithfulness to these tensions. Efforts to promote congregational participation, for example, must be tested against the understanding of the liturgy as hierarchically ordered. Similarly, efforts to preserve the unity of the Roman Rite must be tested against the real need to adapt the liturgy to particular cultures so that the faithful might be drawn more closely to it.

## **Part II: The Constitution and the Use of the Vernacular**

In this second part of the chapter we will move from a consideration of the general themes of the Constitution to a detailed analysis of the sections of the document that are most important for the purposes of this study. These include Article 36, which provides general norms for the use of the vernacular in the liturgy; Article 54, which provides specific norms for the use of the vernacular in the celebration of the Eucharist; and Article 40, which is referenced in Article 54 and deals with cases where more radical adaptation of the liturgy is required.

## Article 36

Article 36 is found in the third section of the first chapter of the Constitution, which deals with the general norms to be applied when reforming the sacred liturgy. It reads as follows:

1. Particular law remaining in force, the use of the Latin language is to be preserved in the Latin rites.
2. But since the use of the mother tongue, whether in the Mass, the administration of the sacraments, or other parts of the liturgy, frequently may be of great advantage to the people, the limits of its employment may be extended. This will apply in the first place to the readings and directives, and to some of the prayers and chants, according to the regulations on this matter to be laid down separately in subsequent chapters.
3. These norms being observed, it is for the competent territorial ecclesiastical authority mentioned in Art. 22, 2, to decide whether, and to what extent, the vernacular language is to be used; their decrees are to be approved, that is, confirmed, by the Apostolic See. And, whenever it seems to be called for, this authority is to consult with bishops of neighboring regions which have the same language.
4. Translations from the Latin text into the mother tongue intended for use in the liturgy must be approved by the competent territorial ecclesiastical authority mentioned above.

Clause 1 of the article states, as a general proposition, that the use of the Latin language is to be preserved in the Latin rite, although it does not specify what counts as preservation. The meaning of this phrase must therefore be interpreted in light of the subsequent clauses within the article as well as the other articles dealing with this question. The phrase “particular law” was inserted to protect vernacular concessions that had been granted prior to the Council.<sup>93</sup>

Clause 2 allows for wider use to be made of the vernacular, and gives some examples of both the rites where it may be used and the elements where the vernacular may be employed. Council *peritus* Frederick McManus has argued

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<sup>93</sup> Frederick McManus, 351.

that the expression “in the first place” (*imprimis*) should not be interpreted to limit the extension of the vernacular to the elements enumerated in the clause.<sup>94</sup> Norms governing the use of the vernacular in specific types of liturgy are found in later chapters.

Clause 3 states that it is the responsibility of the “competent territorial ecclesiastical authority” (i.e. the episcopal conferences) to determine (*statuare*) the extent to which the vernacular can be used in the liturgy in that territory. These decisions must be “approved, that is confirmed” (*probatis seu confirmatis*) by the Holy See. This small phrase lies at the heart of the dispute that is the subject of this study, so we will need to spend some time unpacking it. As we saw in the previous chapter, the Council Fathers debated a number of alternatives to this phrase. They rejected alternatives (e.g. *proponere, approbatis*) that arguably undermined the role of the episcopal conferences as decision makers in their own right.<sup>95</sup> At the same time, at least some Fathers opposed *recognitis* as unduly limiting the power of the Holy See to regulate the liturgy.<sup>96</sup> The literal translation of *probatis seu confirmatis* is “approved or confirmed,” but in context the addition of *seu confirmatis* seems clearly designed to modify the force of *probatis*. For this reason, English translations render the phrase “approved, that is confirmed.”

This context suggests that the phrase *probatis seu confirmatis* should be interpreted in a way that gives significant deference to the decisions made by the episcopal conferences. But how much deference? Carlo Braga argued in 1965 that the phrase should be understood as showing that “all power resides in the body of bishops” while the role of the Apostolic See was merely to confirm that

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<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 352.

<sup>95</sup> Mathijs Lambergitis, 119.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

things had been done according to law.<sup>97</sup> Josef Jungmann, writing around the same time as Braga, takes a more nuanced position. He agrees that the point of the term *statuare* was to give the episcopal conferences real decision making power, but suggests that it was “self-evident that this could not occur independently of the Holy See.”<sup>98</sup> Jungmann’s interpretation is that “the decision lay with the bishops’ conferences and Rome reserved the right of scrutinizing and confirming it,”<sup>99</sup> language that is slightly stronger than Braga’s.

The most comprehensive treatment of this question that is reasonably contemporaneous with the Constitution is found in a 1964 commentary written by Frederick McManus, who in addition to being a *peritus* at the Council was also a canonist. McManus argues that the confirmation the Council required should be understood as analogous to the review or examination of laws of plenary and provincial councils required by canon law. Examination of these decrees is termed “recognition” by canonists. It consists of an inspection of the acts by the Apostolic See to see if the acts in any way exceed the authority of the council. No additional sanction or authority is thereby conferred. The acts remain those of the council unless the Apostolic See confirms them *in forma specifica*, which converts the decisions to papal enactments or laws.<sup>100</sup>

If McManus’ argument is correct, it suggests that the Holy See does play an important role with respect to decisions about the vernacular, but that its role is primarily procedural. It must review the decisions of the episcopal conferences to ensure that they have not exceeded their authority. The review, as McManus envisions it, does not extend to the *content* of the decision. What this means is that even if officials of the Holy See personally disagreed with the decision of an

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<sup>97</sup> Carlo Braga, “The Language to be Used in the Liturgy,” *The Commentary and the Instruction on the Sacred Liturgy*, Annibale Bugnini and Carlo Braga, eds. (New York: Benzinger, 1965), 114-115.

<sup>98</sup> Josef Jungmann, 26.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>100</sup> Frederick McManus, 355

episcopal conference, they should still let the decision stand if it was made according to law.

Until now, we have been addressing the decision making power of the episcopal conferences with respect to decisions to extend the use of the vernacular. The issue of how the vernacular translations are to be approved arises in the fourth clause of Article 36, but in a somewhat ambiguous way. The primary purpose of clause 4 is to avoid a diversity of translations being in use in a given geographical areas. For this reason, it states that vernacular translations are to be approved by the entire episcopal conferences. No mention is made of the Holy See. Frederick McManus suggests that this is intentional. He notes that it was proposed to the Council Fathers that translations of liturgical texts should be proposed by the Holy See, who alone would have the power to approve them. This proposal was rejected, with the approval of the Council fathers, by the conciliar commission on the liturgy. McManus argues that the intent of the Council was to require confirmation for the decisions regarding the extension of the vernacular (Clause 3) but not for the vernacular texts themselves (Clause 4).<sup>101</sup> This specific issue is not treated by Jungmann. Braga concedes that the Holy See has a role with respect to the texts themselves, but argues that it is limited to ensuring that the texts are, in fact, ready to be promulgated and used.<sup>102</sup> As we shall see in the next chapter, the ambiguity of this clause led to an early controversy about the scope of the Holy See's authority to review the vernacular texts.

Taken as a whole, however, there is no question that Article 36 requires that substantial deference be given to the decisions of the national episcopal conferences with respect to the use of the vernacular. Even if one concedes that the Holy See's right to confirm these decisions extends to the vernacular texts as well, there is strong evidence to suggest that the term *confirmatis* is to be

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<sup>101</sup> Frederick McManus, 358.

<sup>102</sup> Carlo Braga, 115.

understood as applying primarily to the process by which the decisions are reached rather than the specific content of those decisions.

#### Article 54

It is tempting to think that our discussion of Article 36 virtually settles one of the key questions at the heart of the dispute over the translation of the Roman Missal. This conclusion is complicated, however, by the specific norms contained in Article 54 of the Constitution, which deal with the use of the vernacular in the celebration of the Eucharist. As we will see, these norms are moderately more restrictive than the norms of Article 36 and grant correspondingly more power to the Holy See. The text is as follows:

In Masses which are celebrated with the people, a suitable place may be allotted to their mother tongue. This is to apply in the first place to the readings and "the common prayer," but also, as local conditions may warrant, to those parts which pertain to the people, according to the norm laid down in Article 36 of this Constitution. Nevertheless steps should be taken so that the faithful may also be able to say or to sing together in Latin those parts of the Ordinary of the Mass which pertain to them. Wherever a more extended use of the mother tongue within the Mass appears desirable, the regulation laid down in Art. 40 of this Constitution is to be observed.

Here we see the fruit of the Council's debate. The article reflects the fact that while a majority of bishops favored wider use of the vernacular in the Mass, there were disagreements as to how extensively it should be used. In the end, no part of the Mass was excluded from consideration. The episcopal conferences are granted the authority to extend the use of the vernacular to the parts said by the people (subject to the confirmation of the Holy See as per the norms of Article 36).

## Article 40

The episcopal conferences may also make use of the provisions of Article 40 of the Constitution to request permission from the Holy See to make use of the vernacular in other parts of the Mass. The text of Article 40 is as follows:

In some places and circumstances, however, an even more radical adaptation of the liturgy is needed and this entails greater difficulties. For this reason:

(1) The competent territorial ecclesiastical authority mentioned in Article 22:2 must, in this matter, carefully and prudently consider which elements from the traditions and cultures of individual peoples might appropriately be admitted into divine worship. Adaptations which are considered useful or necessary should then be submitted to the Apostolic See, to be introduced with its consent.

(2) To ensure that adaptations may be made with the requisite care, the Apostolic See will, if needs be, grant permission to this same territorial ecclesiastical authority to permit and to direct the necessary preliminary experiments over a determined period of time among certain groups suitable for the purpose.

(3) Because liturgical laws usually involve special difficulties with respect to adaptation, especially in mission lands, people who are experts in the matters in question must be employed when they are being formulated.

What this suggests is that any effort to extend use of the vernacular in the Mass beyond the parts said by the people would, according to the norms of the Constitution, be considered a “more radical adaptation.” Article 40 states that such adaptations are to be subject to a higher degree of scrutiny. While decisions by episcopal conferences to extend the use of the vernacular to the parts said by the people are subject to “confirmation” by the Holy See, proposals to extend the use of the vernacular to other parts of the Mass require the Holy See’s “consent.” The locus of authority has clearly shifted in favor of the Holy See.

Left unaddressed in the article, however, is the question of whether the *translations* of the priest’s parts of the Mass are also to be subject to this higher level of scrutiny. As we saw above, the most reasonable interpretation of Article 36 with respect to this issue is that the texts would require the same kind of

confirmation as the decisions to extend the use of vernacular, i.e. a review to ensure that the episcopal conference had not exceeded its legislative authority.

If we follow that logic, however, it would suggest that any translations of the priest's parts would be subject to the same degree of review as the proposals to extend the use of the vernacular to these parts. If that were the case, then the Holy See would have to "consent" to those parts of the proposed translations rather than merely "confirming" them. This would seem to be an odd outcome, as it would lead to different levels of review being applied to different parts of the same translation of the Roman Missal. It seems unlikely that this is the intent. However, it seems that an honest reading of the text demands that some way be found to reflect the Council's caution with respect to the presidential texts. The commentaries we have cited so far do not specifically address this issue.<sup>103</sup> In the end, it seems that this is an unresolved tension within the text.

This review of Articles 36, 54 and 40 suggests three broad conclusions about the Constitution's norms for the use of the vernacular in the celebration of the Eucharist. First of all, the Constitution, while calling for the preservation of Latin in the liturgy, encourages expanded use of the vernacular and does not exclude any part of the liturgy from consideration in this regard. Secondly, the Constitution delegates the specific decisions regarding the extension of the vernacular and the preparation of the translations to the "competent territorial ecclesiastical authority," i.e. the episcopal conferences. Finally, the Constitution envisions that the decisions of the episcopal conferences will be subject to review by the Holy See. As a general rule, this review—which the Constitution terms "confirmation"—is meant to be procedural and is intended to ensure that the conferences have not exceeded their authority. However, a higher level of review (the Constitution uses the term "consent") is envisioned for decisions dealing with extension of the vernacular to the presidential prayers of the Eucharist. This

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<sup>103</sup> Braga does not specifically address the issue; McManus suggests that the provisions of Articles 54 and 40 reflect a certain caution about the use of the vernacular in the Roman Canon (see McManus, 470)

higher level of review may also apply to the translations of these prayers, but the Constitution is not entirely clear on this point.

### **Part III: Episcopal Conferences in Other Council Documents**

As noted in Chapter 2, one of the key aspects of a hermeneutic of the text is *intertextuality*, the relationship of a text to other texts with which it may be in conversation. Understanding those relationships can be important key to interpretation. The encyclical *Mediator Dei*, for example, reserved to the papacy all authority for regulating the use of the vernacular in the liturgy (MD 60). Knowing this history helps us understand that the change in this discipline made by the Constitution on the Liturgy was, in fact, a change, and one that was made intentionally.

In Part III of this chapter, we are going to explore two other documents from the Council that deal in various ways with the relationship of the Holy See to the national episcopal conferences. The first is *Lumen Gentium*, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, which was issued in 1964 and is one of the principal expressions of the Council's ecclesiology. The second is *Christus Dominus*, the Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church, which was issued in 1965 and provides specific norms for the functioning of episcopal conferences. An exhaustive exegesis of either document is beyond the scope of this study. What we are after is an understanding of the elements of these documents that can guide us in the interpretation of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy. In what follows, I will provide a brief overview of the relevant sections of both documents before attempting to draw conclusions.

#### *Lumen Gentium*

The key sections of *Lumen Gentium* that deal with the episcopacy are found in Chapter III. The Chapter begins, in Article 18, with a discussion of the primacy of the Roman Pontiff. It restates Vatican I's teaching regarding the

institution, the permanence, the force, and the infallible teaching authority of the Roman Pontiff. Having said this, the text then declares its intention to set forth the Church's teaching on bishops.

The next several articles deal with the episcopal college and its relationship to the Roman Pontiff. Articles 19 and 20 make clear that the college itself is of divine institution and that the bishops "have by divine institution taken the place of the apostles as pastors of the Church" (LG 20). While individual bishops do not have jurisdiction over dioceses other than their own, they are bound to be "solicitous for the entire Church" (LG 23) and to "collaborate with one another and with Peter's successor" (LG 23). With respect to the episcopal conferences, the text states that they are "in a position to contribute in many and fruitful ways to the concrete realization of the collegial spirit" (LG 23).

However, the college of bishops has no authority "other than the authority which it is acknowledged to have in union with the Roman Pontiff, Peter's successor, as its head, his primatial authority over everyone, pastors or faithful, remaining intact" (LG 22). The Roman Pontiff has "full, supreme and universal power over the whole Church, a power which he can always exercise freely" (LG 22). The college of bishops, "together with its head, the Supreme Pontiff, and never apart from him," is the subject of supreme and full authority over the universal Church; but this power cannot be exercised without the consent of the Roman Pontiff" (LG 22). While the bishops are not to be regarded as vicars of the Roman Pontiff (LG 27) and exercise their authority "personally in the name of Christ" (LG 27), the exercise of that authority is "ultimately controlled by the supreme authority of the Church and can be confined within certain limits should the usefulness of the Church and the faithful require this" (LG 27).

### *Christus Dominus*

*Christus Dominus*, the Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church was issued on October 28, 1965, during the Council's final session. It

provides more detailed norms regarding the exercise of the episcopal office, collaborative work between bishops, and the relationship of bishops to the Holy See.

The document begins by briefly restating some of the central teachings of *Lumen Gentium* noted above. The Roman Pontiff has “full, immediate and universal power in the care of souls,” including “the primacy of ordinary power over all the churches” (CD 2). The bishops have been “designated by the holy Spirit to take the place of the apostles as pastors of souls” (CD 2) and, together with the supreme pontiff and subject to his authority, “they are commissioned to perpetuate the work of Christ, the eternal Pastor” (CD 2). United in one college for the government of the universal Church, each bishop exercises governance over a portion of the Church that is entrusted to him (CD 3).

Chapter III of *Christus Dominus* provides norms for bishops engaged in collaborative work on behalf of a number of churches. This includes synods, councils, and, in particular, episcopal conferences. Chapter III begins by expressing the Council’s hope that “these admirable institutions—synods and councils—may flourish with renewed vigor” (CD 36). Since episcopal conferences have “produced outstanding examples of a more fruitful apostolate” the Council judges that it would be “in the highest degree helpful” if bishops of each country were to meet regularly to share experiences and jointly formulate a program for the common good of the Church” (CD 37).

Article 38 of the document establishes a number of norms to govern the operation of episcopal conferences. Decisions of the episcopal conferences must be approved by two-thirds of those with deliberative votes and must be “confirmed” by the Holy See. This is the same term used in the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy to describe the level of review required of decisions to extend the use of the vernacular in the liturgy. As the discussion in Section Two of this chapter suggested (see Page 53), the term implies the “recognitio” of the laws of plenary and provincial councils by the Holy See that is required by canon law.

### Reflections on *Lumen Gentium* and *Christus Dominus*

The purpose of Part III of this chapter was to briefly explore the intertextual relationship between the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy and two other Council documents dealing with the relationship between bishops and the Holy See: *Lumen Gentium* and *Christus Dominus*. What guidance, if any, do these documents give us in interpreting the Council's intent regarding the relative roles of the bishops and the Holy See in the regulation of the liturgy?

First of all, there is a clear intent in both *Lumen Gentium* and *Christus Dominus* to elevate the status of bishops, whether acting individually or collectively. While *Lumen Gentium* reaffirms the teaching of Vatican I regarding papal primacy, the bulk of Chapter III focuses on the episcopacy in general and the idea of episcopal collegiality in particular. The college is seen as existing by divine institution (LG 20; CD 2) and individual bishops receive their offices of teaching, sanctifying and governing through episcopal consecration, which is the fullness of the sacrament of Holy Orders (LG 21).

Secondly, the Council clearly intended to recommend the establishment of national episcopal conferences and to grant them real decision-making authority (LG 23; CD 38). It specifically drew a connection between the episcopal conferences and the historical institutions of local councils and synods (CD 36). *Christus Dominus'* use of the word "confirmed" to describe the level of papal review required of conference decisions appears to view those decisions as analogous to those of plenary and provincial councils.

It also seems clear, however, that the Council's understanding of episcopal collegiality does not envision a situation in which the exercise of that collegiality would place any significant limits on a pope's freedom of action. It would be a mistake to interpret the doctrine (as articulated in *Lumen Gentium* or *Christus Dominus*) as suggesting anything analogous to the "separation of powers" found in the United States Constitution, where, for example, Congress or the judiciary

can assert certain prerogatives against the will of the President. The drafters of *Lumen Gentium* and *Christus Dominus* appear to have taken pains to prevent any interpretation along these lines, restating the doctrine that the pope has “full, immediate, and universal” power over the entire Church, which he can always exercise freely (LG 22; CD 2).

While there may be few *canonical* limits on the pope’s authority, one might still ask whether, with respect to the actions of bishops and episcopal conferences, the pope should observe certain *prudential* limits. One can argue that, whatever the pope’s canonical authority, he should generally exercise that authority in ways that reinforces and preserves the teaching on episcopal collegiality that is articulated in *Lumen Gentium* and *Christus Dominus*. This may be particularly important in cases where others (e.g. curial congregations) are assisting the pope in his executive (as opposed to legislative) role. It is perhaps no accident that in *Christus Dominus*—the document that most clearly established the authority of the episcopal conferences—the Council Fathers also chose to include a call for the reorganization of the Roman Curia (CD 9).

## **Conclusion**

In this conclusion, I want to weave the various strands of argument from the first three parts together into a unified reading of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy. Part I of the chapter examined the Constitution as a whole, with an eye to uncovering its central themes. Part II looked specifically at the sections of the text dealing with the regulation of the use of the vernacular in the liturgy. Finally, Part III focused on two other Council documents dealing with relations between the episcopacy and the Holy See. Our intent there was to see whether material from other Council documents could help us interpret the related sections of the Constitution. Having reviewed these three broad areas, what conclusions about the Constitution can we offer?

First of all, the Constitution is a document characterized by four major tensions. With respect to the liturgy itself, the Constitution asks that we see it as both something we receive from God, but also something that expresses our faith. Many of the liturgy's elements are historically conditioned and subject to change, but we must do so with humility, allowing ourselves to be formed by the liturgical tradition before seeking to form it ourselves. Secondly, the Constitution's understanding of human action in the liturgy is that it is both communal and hierarchically ordered. All of the faithful are to participate consciously and actively, according to the role that each has within the liturgy. Thirdly, reform of the liturgy must walk a *via media* between preserving sound tradition and allowing for legitimate progress. Finally, efforts must be made to adapt the liturgy to particular cultures while still preserving the "substantial unity" of the Roman Rite.

One of the implications of this reading is that faithfulness to the Constitution demands faithfulness to these tensions. Efforts to promote congregational participation, for example, must be tested against the understanding of the liturgy as hierarchically ordered. Similarly, efforts to preserve the unity of the Roman Rite must be tested against the real need to adapt the liturgy to particular cultures so that the faithful might be drawn more closely to it. As we will see in the next chapter, one of the underlying issues in the translation dispute is the extent to which the parties involved may have inappropriately favored one pole of a particular tension at the expense of another.

Secondly, we saw that these tensions emerge in a particular way in the Constitution's efforts to regulate the use of the vernacular. While calling for the preservation of Latin in the liturgy, the Constitution encourages expanded use of the vernacular in order to adapt the liturgy to culture and does not exclude any part of the liturgy from consideration. The document delegates the specific decisions regarding the extension of the vernacular and the preparation of the translations to the "competent territorial ecclesiastical authority," i.e. the

episcopal conferences. Finally, the Constitution envisions that these decisions will be “confirmed” by the Holy See, a term that implies that the review is primarily procedural. However, the “consent” of the Holy See is required for decisions extending the vernacular to the presidential prayers of the Eucharist. The Constitution is unclear on whether this higher level of review (i.e. “consent”) applies to the translated texts of these prayers.

Finally, we examined two other documents from the Council—*Lumen Gentium* and *Christus Dominus*—to see if they could shed any light on the Council’s vision of relations between the bishops and the Holy See. What emerged from these documents was a strong defense of episcopal collegiality in general and of the role of episcopal conferences in particular. The Council clearly intended that the conferences be established and that they be given real decision-making authority, although the exercise of that authority cannot be construed as to place limits on the pope’s freedom of action. However, given the importance the Council placed on episcopal collegiality, one can argue that the pope should generally act in ways that reinforce and strengthen the collegial bond.

In closing out this chapter, I want to make four synthetic points about the Constitution on the Liturgy in light of the material we have covered. First of all, the Constitution clearly envisioned that reform and adaptation of the liturgy to specific cultures would be necessary in order to draw the faithful more closely into the divine action that was taking place. While God is always present in the liturgy, our ability to respond to God’s offer of Himself may be constrained by linguistic, cultural or other barriers. To the extent that these are true barriers, and that they arise out of aspects of the liturgy that are of human origin and can thus be changed, the Constitution holds that—all things being equal—they should be changed. It is also true, however, that the Constitution is more cautious about reform and adaptation of the Eucharist than it is about the other sacraments.

Secondly, this process of reform must be guided by faithfulness to the tensions that serve as the Constitution’s underlying principles. Reforms must not

arbitrarily dispense with sound tradition. The process of inculturation must respect the unity of the Roman Rite. Efforts to promote active participation by the congregation cannot obscure or downplay the hierarchical ordering of the liturgy. Language and gestures must reflect a strong belief in the presence and activity of God in the liturgy.

Thirdly, the Constitution sees the bishops of a given territory as the principal actors in the process of adapting the liturgy to given culture. They are the ones, for example, who are to decide how far to extend the vernacular concessions granted by the Constitution. They are also charged with preparing the translations of the liturgical texts. To the extent that they judge that more radical adaptation of the liturgy is needed, the initiative for making specific proposals to the Holy See lies with them. While it is true that, in theory, any of the faithful could make such proposals, the collegial bond that binds the bishops suggests that the Holy See would be bound to give proposals issuing from the bishops very serious consideration.

Finally, the previous point does not imply that the Holy See's traditional authority to regulate the liturgy has been constrained by the Constitution. The locus of that authority has shifted, however. The Constitution envisions that the principal focus of the Holy See's activity will be the reform and adaptation of the original Latin texts and rubrics in accordance with the norms of the Constitution. The Holy See also has the responsibility of confirming certain decisions of the episcopal conferences and considering proposals issuing from the conferences for more radical adaptation of the liturgy.

The purpose of this chapter was to undertake a broad analysis of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, with a specific focus on the provisions of the Constitution related to the use of the vernacular and the authority of episcopal conferences to regulate its use and prepare translations. In the next chapter, we will narrow our focus considerably as we examine the controversies over

translation that emerged in the years following the Council, particularly in the final years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.