The Discussion of the Liturgy

Cardinal Gaetano Cicognani, prefect of the Congregation of Rites and elder brother of the secretary of state, chaired the Preparatory Commission on the liturgy. Annibale Bugnini, a priest who taught at both the Lateran and Urbaniana universities in Rome, served as its secretary, a position of considerable importance. Bugnini was a skilled and respected liturgist who had guided Pius XII in his liturgical changes. He was able to coordinate the efforts of the sixty-five members and consultants who made up the commission to produce, by January 1962, a coherent text that combined a concise statement of principles with concrete recommendations for action. Cicognani, gravely ill at the time and also unsympathetic to aspects of the document, hesitated to sign it. Felici, fearful that Cicognani would die without signing, appealed to Pope John, who appealed to Amleto, who on February 1, 1962, persuaded his still-reluctant brother to affix his signature to the text. Sacrosanctum was ready for the council.²

Three weeks later, on February 22, the pope appointed Cardinal Larraona as the new prefect of the Congregation of Rites and therefore as head of the Preparatory Commission. As such, he was the successor to Cicognani, who had since died. Larraona aligned himself with some of the most conservative members of the council and became a leader among them.³ On that same February 22, the Vatican published Véterum Sapientia, the Apostolic Constitution that insisted on the intensification of study of Latin in seminaries. As noted, this text might be taken as indirectly confirming the place of Latin in the liturgy.⁴ John XXIII not only signed the document but, in an address that day in St. Peter’s, singled it out for praise.⁵ Where did the pope himself stand on liturgical issues? It was anybody’s guess.

As was expected for the head of a Preparatory Commission, Larraona became president of the Liturgical Commission of the council itself. He proved a poor chairman, at least in part because he deliberately tried to obstruct action on a text that displeased him. On October 21, at the first meeting of the commission, moreover, he passed over Bugnini as secretary and replaced him with Ferdinando Antonelli, a priest working in

The First Period (1962)
the Curia at the Congregation of Rites. Larraona considered Bugnini too progressive and held him responsible for the disagreeable schema he inherited.

The appointment of Antonelli was all the more surprising because he had played no role in the preparation of the document. Ottaviani, it was rumored, had a hand in his selection. In all the other commissions the secretaries, like the presidents, were retained from the pre-council commissions. Not only was Bugnini not named secretary; he was also almost immediately dismissed from his post as a teacher of liturgy at the Lateran University. Word spread fast. Many at the council construed the incidents as further evidence of machinations by "the Curia" to control the council at any cost, by any means. Ultimately, perhaps to the consternation of those who promoted him, Antonelli turned out to be an evenhanded reporter of what Bugnini bequeathed him.

On October 22, the day after Bugnini's dismissal, Larraona took the floor in St. Peter's to say not much more than that Sacrosanctum Concilium would be introduced by Antonelli, who spoke for about twenty minutes. Antonelli began by making two general points. First, just as the Council of Trent and Vatican I had mandated revision and emendation of liturgical texts, experts were now unanimously convinced that, while holding fast to the liturgical tradition of the church, similar changes in texts and rites were needed "to accommodate them to the ethos and needs of our day." The aggiornamento theme was clear.

Second, a great pastoral problem had to be addressed. The faithful had become "mute spectators" at Mass instead of active participants in the liturgical action. This development, he said, dated back to the Middle Ages, and recent popes, beginning with Pius X, had taken steps to remedy it. To deal with these issues, Pius XII had established a commission in 1948 that produced a full volume of reflections and recommendations. In 1951 Pius, acting on the recommendations, had restored the Easter Vigil and, in 1955, the liturgy for the entire Sacred Triduum, the last three days of Holy Week. Antonelli, by convincingly arguing that Sacrosanctum Concilium was in keeping with recent papal teaching and actions, was able to forestall a problem that would dog other schemas at the council.

He listed five criteria that had guided the Preparatory Commission in drawing up the schema. First, the commission would exercise great care in conserving the liturgical patrimony of the church. Second, it would be guided by a few principles that would undergird a general renewal (instau-
ous by insisting on the liturgy as nourishment for one’s spiritual life. In so doing, however, it affirmed right at the beginning of the council what would become one of its great themes, the call to holiness that God, through the church, addresses to all men and women.

Chapter one was especially important for its insistence on active participation by everyone in the congregation. Such participation was the right and duty of every Christian. It was demanded by the very nature of the liturgy and was conferred upon the faithful by virtue of their baptism. This principle was the most fundamental in the whole schema. It was a counterpoint to the long historical development that bit by bit had located all the action in the priest-celebrant.

The chapter was also important for enunciating other principles. Whatever obscured or distracted from the essential meaning of the liturgical celebrations was to be eliminated. Intelligibility and simplicity were thus to be norms in whatever changes were implemented. Christ was present in the Word of Scripture as well as in the Eucharist, and therefore the significance of that part of the liturgy—the “Liturgy of the Word”—was to be made more effective. This highlighting of “the Word” in Sacrosanctum pre-saged a new centrality of Scripture in Catholic preaching and piety, which would become another major theme of the council. While the essential structure of the Roman Rite was to be maintained, local adaptation, especially in mission territories, was legitimate and encouraged. Greater autonomy was to be granted to bishops in making adaptations appropriate to their cultures, which was a clear call for some decentralization.

About liturgical languages, the chapter said:

Latin is to be retained in the liturgies of the Western church. Since, however, “in some rites it is clear that the vernacular has proved very useful for the people” [a quotation from Mediator Dei], it should be given a wider role in liturgy, especially in readings, announcements, certain prayers, and music. Let it be left to episcopal conferences in different parts of the world, in consultation if need be with bishops of nearby regions speaking the same language, to propose to the Holy See the degree and the modes for admitting vernacular languages into the liturgy.8

 Whereas the first chapter consisted in principles, only the most important of which I have mentioned here, the others consisted almost entirely in concrete applications or directives. For instance chapter two, on the Eucharist, became specific about the vernacular: “In Mass let a suitable place be made for the vernacular, especially in the readings, in prayers, and in some canticles, in accordance with article 24 of this Constitution.” Somewhat ironically, this provision was more conservative than the corresponding directive of the Council of Trent, which had stated simply that “it is wrong to maintain that the mass must everywhere be celebrated in the vernacular.” Trent left the question open, but in the violent atmosphere of the day, no change was possible. Vernacular had already come to stand for Protestant.

The next article called for reception of the Eucharist by the faithful on certain occasions under the form of both bread and wine, a change in the medieval tradition of reserving wine for the priest. Trent, again, had left this issue open, but the earlier tradition had been reaffirmed by sixteenth-century popes in the face of the Protestant practice of sharing the cup. Sometimes the directives were generic in the extreme. In chapter three, the schema had only the following to say about the Sacrament of Penance: “Let the rite and formula of the Sacrament of Penance be revised so as more clearly to express the effect of the Sacrament.” No matter how generic some of its provisions, the document also laid down a number of specific measures to be adopted in the reform of the liturgy. Despite these prescriptions, the text in some passages pointed in the direction of the non-juridical, Scripture-based, patristic-inspired style the council would eventually adopt as its own. It contained no canons or anathemas.

In his presentation, Antonelli quite properly did not go into detail. When he finished, the president for the day opened the floor for discussion. How would the document be received? The first six speakers that day included some who would turn out to be among the most influential in the whole council. Cardinal Frings of Cologne led off from the presidents’ table. His opening words: “The schema before us is like the last will and testament of Pius XII, who, following in the footsteps of Saint Pius X, boldly began a renewal of the sacred liturgy.” Frings thus sounded what would become a leitmotif of the majority: the council was carrying forward work that had already begun. His next sentence was equally significant: “The schema is to be commended for its modest and truly pastoral literary style, full of the spirit of Holy Scripture and the Fathers of the Church.” He then made four brief suggestions, three of which pertained
to use of the vernacular. Within ten minutes of beginning and letting it be known how highly he thought of the draft document, he sat down.

Ruffini spoke next, even more briefly and also from the presidents' table. He criticized the text for being too exclusively focused on the Roman Rite, reminded the fathers that only the Congregation of Rites had authority in matters liturgical, and, more significant, expressed no praise for the document. Then came Lercaro of Bologna. Clear in his approval for the text and insistent on how much it accorded with the tradition of the church, he tried to refute one of the standard criticisms leveled at liturgical reformers: "The changes the document mandates do not grow out of some sterile archeology or out of some insane itching for novelty but out of the requests of pastors and out of pastoral needs—active participation in the liturgy is, according to the memorable words of Pius X, the first and irreplaceable source of the Christian spirit." He concluded: "When taken as a whole and with due allowance for appropriate emendation, I willingly and eagerly in the Lord give my approval to the document."¹²

Then Montini. In substance he approved the text, especially because it rested on the principle of pastoral efficacy. The schema conceded nothing to those who arbitrarily wanted to make changes nor to those who insisted that the rite can in no way be changed, as if the historical form were inseparable from what it signified. Montini called for greater use of the vernacular, but with qualification.¹³

Then came Spellman of New York with one of the longer interventions, in which he managed never to say outright that he liked what he had read. His message was simple: caution. In particular, though the vernacular might be fine in the administration of some of the sacraments, it should not be introduced into the Mass. Later in the course of the debate he was seconded in this opinion by Cardinal McIntyre of Los Angeles: "The sacred Mass should remain as it is."¹⁴ Spellman had meanwhile taken a swipe at professional liturgists by reminding the council fathers that as far as the liturgy was concerned, the perspective of real pastors was often different from that of liturgical scholars.¹⁵

Döpfner of Munich stated immediately his wholehearted approval of the schema. He registered his disagreement with those who felt that the document should stick to general principles and not descend, as it did in some matters, to specific measures. He probably made this point because he feared what would happen in the Congregation of Rites if the provi-

His Beatitude Maximos IV Saigh. Photograph courtesy of the Melkite Catholic Patriarchate.

sions were left too vague. Then, seemingly in direct response to Spellman, he voiced his support for use of the vernacular even in the Mass.

Meanwhile, outside the precincts of St. Peter's, bishops from the "new churches" began holding press conferences about the liturgy. Bishop Willem van Bekkum of Ruteng, Indonesia, held the first on October 23, followed within a few days by another by Archbishop Eugene D'Souza of Nagpur, India, and then another by Lawrence Nagae of Urawa, Japan.
They all insisted on the urgency in their countries of cultural adaptation, including use of the vernacular. These conferences attracted considerable attention in the media and thus had at least as much impact on the other bishops as if they had been delivered on the council floor.16

Back in St. Peter's on October 24, the day after van Bekkum's conference, Maximos IV rose to speak and shook the bishops to attention right off by addressing them in French. His voice was strong, his tone assured. Here was a speaker, the council fathers immediately recognized, with a quite different perspective, a speaker representing a venerable tradition that had not been subject to many of the historical developments that so much conditioned the traditions of the western church.

Maximos praised the document but said he would confine his remarks only to section 24, concerning Latin:

The almost absolute value assigned to Latin in the liturgy, in teaching, and in the administration of the Latin church strikes us from the Eastern church as strange [assez abnormal]. Christ after all spoke the language of his contemporaries. . . . [In the East] there has never been a problem about the proper liturgical language. All languages are liturgical, as the Psalmist says, "Praise the Lord, all ye people." . . . The Latin language is dead. But the church is living, and its language, the vehicle of the grace of the Holy Spirit, must also be living because it is intended for us human beings not for angels.

He had two suggestions. First, instead of saying that Latin was to be kept as the language for the liturgy, the text should be emended to say simply that it is "the original and official language of the Roman Rite." Second, instead of saying that the episcopal conferences "propose" to the Holy See whatever use of the vernacular they think appropriate, the text should say that the conferences "decide," subject to the approval of the Holy See.17 When the session ended, a number of bishops rushed up to Maximos to congratulate him and shake his hand. That very day, Pope John noted in his diary that the Latin issue divided the council into those who had never left their own country "or Italy" and those especially from mission territories.18

But Maximos was far from being the last bishop to address Sacrosanctum. Discussion of the schema dragged on from October 22 to November 13—three weeks, fifteen sessions, with 328 interventions from the floor and 297 submitted in written form. Although speakers were held to a ten-minute limit, the "Regulations" failed to provide a procedure for closing debate on a topic. Bishops began to fear that the discussion on the liturgy would go on forever. Speaker after speaker repeated the same points. On November 6 Pope John intervened, making an ad hoc change in the "Regulations" to allow the presidents to close discussion if they felt an issue had been adequately addressed. Timely closure was now legal, an important step in moving the agenda along more quickly.

Where did the schema stand when, on November 13, the presidents successfully called for a vote to halt the interventions? It obviously had strong support, perhaps most notably from African and Asian bishops, but it had also received much criticism. Two issues attracted the most attention and generated the most heat. The first was the vernacular. Eighty-one interventions focused on that issue. The second revolved around the competence of local bishops or episcopal conferences to make decisions, and thus concerned the limits of the authority of the Congregation of Rites. Early on, therefore, the crucial issue of center-periphery bounded to the surface. It was well known, moreover, that in the Central Preparatory Commission, when the council was still being planned, resolutions to abolish the Holy Office outright had come to the floor—but had gotten nowhere.

Ottaviani had already come to stand for "the Curia" and to embody everything people disliked about the Holy Office, which was being increasingly criticized. This perception of him was not confined to members of the council. Even for those who followed the council from afar, Ottaviani became almost a household name. Jokes about him circulated broadly and began to appear in newspapers and journals. One morning, supposedly, Ottaviani called a taxi and directed the driver to take him to the council. The driver hit the road for Trent.

As early as October 24 Archbishop Pietro Parente, the assessor (administrative director) of the Holy Office, complained in an angry intervention about criticisms of his Congregation: "We in the Holy Office are martyrs, martyrs." He called on the innovators at the council—novatores—to learn a thing or two from the caution with which the Holy See operated and not rush into changes. Although novatores could have a less noxious meaning, in ecclesiastical parlance it was a synonym for heretic, as everybody at the council knew full well.19

A few days earlier Ottaviani had criticized Sacrosanctum for its literary style. The language was often ambiguous, he said, even in the doctrinal
parts. Those parts, furthermore, "invaded" the doctrinal camp and hence needed to be reviewed by theologians, by which he meant his own Doctrinal Commission.\textsuperscript{20} His patience was wearing thin. He took the floor again on October 30, opening his intervention with a series of rhetorical questions that made clear how utterly unacceptable he found the schema. Among the questions: "What, now, are we dealing here with a revolution regarding the whole Mass?"\textsuperscript{21}

He insisted that the Mass not be changed and that reception of the Eucharist under both forms was a bad idea, as was concelebration, that is, more than one priest officiating at a single Mass. He then hit his adversaries at their most vulnerable point. It was all well and good to quote popes like Pius XII when they agreed with one's position, but what about quoting them when they did not? In 1956, he reminded the council, Pius XII had made it clear to liturgists who had just completed an important meeting at Assisi that Latin was and would remain the language of the Mass.\textsuperscript{22}

He was well over the ten-minute limit. Cardinal Alfrink, presiding that day, interrupted the powerful head of the Holy Office to inform him that he had already spoken for the maximum amount of time. This was treatment to which Ottaviani was not accustomed: "I've finished! I've finished! I've finished!" The basilica broke into applause. Ottaviani, insulted and humiliated, boycotted the council for the next two weeks, a dramatic and extraordinarily meaningful gesture from somebody of his stature.

Finally, on November 14 Cardinal Tisserant, the presiding president of the day, put Sacrosanctum Concilium to a vote on whether to accept the schema as the base text. Because so many interventions on the document had been critical, this vote, the council's first on a schema, was awaited with considerable tension. A positive vote meant that the document was fundamentally sound, so that after revisions by the Liturgical Commission, it could later in the council be resubmitted for approval of the changes and then for final approval. It also implicitly meant that it need not be submitted to the Doctrinal Commission, as Ottaviani had asked, to have its orthodoxy ensured. The outcome of the voting astounded everybody—a landslide in favor, 2,162 votes, with only 46 opposed. That was a 97 percent approval.

The next year, on December 4, 1963, the council overwhelmingly gave its approval to the revised text of Sacrosanctum Concilium, and Paul VI then promulgated it. The final vote was even more of a landslide: 2,147 in favor, 4 against. This was the first document approved by the council and, compared with others, was remarkable for how little it had changed from the original version. Regarding Latin, for instance, the text, though softened slightly, remained substantially the same.\textsuperscript{23} Regarding the other hotly debated issue, however, the text in three places affirmed the authority of bishops and bishops' conferences to make decisions in adapting the liturgy to local circumstances. This action effectively nullified Canon 1257 of the Code, which placed all decisions about liturgy exclusively in the Holy See.

By approving Sacrosanctum, the council set in motion a programmatic reshaping of virtually every aspect of Roman Catholic liturgy unlike anything that had ever been attempted before. The changes mandated by the Council of Trent, for instance, consisted basically in standardizing traditional texts and paring away some accretions. Worshippers would hardly have recognized the difference. Not true with Vatican II.

The institution that was to guide the reshaping was created almost immediately after Sacrosanctum was promulgated. On the morning of January 3, 1964, Cardinal Cicognani summoned Father Bugnini to his office to tell him that Pope Paul VI had created a commission to implement and interpret Sacrosanctum Concilium and had named him secretary. The appointment of Bugnini to this crucial post was another example of the remarkable rehabilitations that took place during the council. Moreover, though Cardinal Lerraona, still prefect of the Congregation of Rites, was named to the commission, Cardinal Lercaro was to be its president. When the question arose as to where the Consilium, as this body became known, was to meet, Cardinal Cicognani replied tersely, "Wherever you wish, but not at the Congregation of Rites."\textsuperscript{24}

The Consilium set about its task. The Mass began to look different. The priest, instead of celebrating Mass with his back to the congregation, from which he was separated by a railing around the sanctuary, now faced the pews. This change signified that the ceremony was an act of worship of a gathered community as well as a sacrifice to God performed in the congregation's name. During the first part of the Mass, the Liturgy of the Word, the celebrant no longer stood at the altar with his back to the people. He now stood in the pulpit facing them, or, if someone else read the Scripture passages, he sat at the side of the altar.

Right after the council Latin was retained in the central Eucharistic
prayer, the so-called canon of the Mass, a measure in keeping with Sacrosanctum, but within a few years the Mass in its entirety was being celebrated in the vernacular worldwide. It had become increasingly obvious that the principles of intelligibility and active participation did not sit well with maintaining for such a meaningful part a language only priests understood. The decree thus contained within itself a dynamism that led to changes that were beyond some of its specific provisions but that were almost required by its most fundamental principles.

These were only two of the changes implemented through a series of decrees from 1964 until 1975. Were they revolutionary, as Cardinal Ottaviani feared? The answer depends in part on one’s definition of revolution, but there can be no doubt that the changes were obvious to even the most casual observer and so considerable that a few Catholics repudiated them as heresy and betrayal. To worship in the vernacular was to worship like Protestants, a complaint heard especially in English-speaking countries. The vast majority of Catholics accepted the changes—enthusiastically, reluctantly, or somewhere in between, but with full awareness that the Mass, while surely maintaining its basic elements and structure, was to the naked eye and ear different from what it had been before.

Within the council itself the vote that originally approved Sacrosanctum, on November 14, 1962, had a significance beyond liturgy and worship. It enunciated and gave first voice to at least four principles that would be adopted and developed by other documents and help give Vatican II its final profile. The first is the principle of aggiornamento, or adaptation to contemporary circumstances. In fact, however, the provisions and great themes of the text are as much due to the principle of ressourcement as to that of aggiornamento. The liturgists, that is to say, had returned to the ancient sources in order to find their way. The Mass was thus not so much “modernized” as made to conform more closely to fundamental and traditional principles.

The second is the principle of adaptation to local circumstances: “The church does not wish to impose a rigid uniformity in matters that do not involve the faith or the good of the whole community.” Unity, the document implies, can be maintained within diversity. In stating that “the art of our own times and of every nation and culture shall be given free scope,” the council took a step out of its European box.

The third is the principle of episcopal authority and of greater decision-making on the local level. The document is thus consonant with the doctrine of episcopal collegiality. The final principle is the full and active participation of everybody present in the liturgical action. This is a principle of engagement and active responsibility, and by implication it extended beyond liturgy to the church at large, to the church as “the people of God.” Liturgy, that is to say, had ecclesiological implications and ramifications.

Was the vote on November 14 a victory for those whom the media were beginning to call “the progressives”? The vote was so close to unanimity that it seemed to be a victory for everybody. Even so, it was by now clear that there were two orientations among the council fathers that seemed destined to clash. Would they? If so, when and over what?