

PARTICIPATION

With the constitution on the liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, issued in 1965 by the Second Vatican Council, everyone became very conscious of personal participation in the sacred liturgy, particularly in the Mass.

But active participation in the liturgy was not a concept created by the Second Vatican Council. Indeed, even the very words *actuosa participatio* can be found in the writings of the popes for the past one hundred years. Pope Pius X called for it in his *motu proprio*, *Tra le sollecitudini*, published in 1903, when he said that "the faithful assemble to draw that spirit from its primary and indispensable source, that is, from active participation in the sacred mysteries and in the public and solemn prayer of the Church."

Pope Pius XI in his apostolic constitution, *Divini cultus*, wrote in 1928, that the restoration of Gregorian chant for the use of the people would provide the means whereby "the faithful may participate in divine worship more actively." Such participation was to be achieved both by singing and by an appreciation of the beauty of the liturgy which stirs the heart of the worshiper, who thereby enters into the sacred mysteries.

In his encyclicals, *Mystici corporis* in 1943, and *Mediator Dei* in 1947, Pope Pius XII used the term but carefully insisted that true participation was not merely external but consisted in a baptismal union with Christ in His Mystical Body, the Church.

In 1958, the Sacred Congregation of Rites issued the instruction, *De musica sacra*, which distinguished several qualities of participation:

The Mass of its nature requires that all those present participate in it, in the fashion proper to each.

This participation must primarily be *interior* (i.e., union with Christ the Priest; offering with and through Him).

b) But the participation of those present becomes fuller (*plenior*) if to internal attention is joined *external* participation, expressed, that is to say, by external actions such as the position of the body (genuflecting, standing, sitting), ceremonial gestures, or, in particular, the responses, prayers and singing. . .

It is this harmonious form of participation that is referred to in pontifical documents when they speak of active participation (*participatio actuosa*), the principal example of which is found in the celebrating priest and his ministers who, with due interior devotion and exact observance of the rubrics and ceremonies, minister at the altar.

c) Perfect *participatio actuosa* of the faithful, finally, is obtained when there is added *sacramental* participation (by communion).

d) Deliberate *participatio actuosa* of the faithful is not possible without their adequate instruction.

It is made clear that it is the baptismal character that forms the foundation of active participation.

Vatican II introduced no radical alteration in the concept of *participatio actuosa* as fostered by the popes for the past decades. The general principle is contained in Article 14 of the constitution on the sacred liturgy:

Mother Church earnestly desires that all the faithful should be led to that full, conscious and active participation in the ceremonies which is demanded by the very nature of the liturgy.

Such participation by the Christian people as a "chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a redeemed people" (I Pet. 2:9; 2: 4-5) is their right and duty by reason of their baptism.

In the restoration and promotion of the sacred liturgy this full and active participation by all the people is the aim to be considered before all else; for it is the primary and indispensable source from which the faithful are to derive the true spirit of Christ. . .

The word "full" (*plena*) refers to the integrally human fashion in which the baptized faithful take part in the liturgy, i.e., internally and externally. The word "conscious" (*conscia*) demands a knowledge of what one is doing on the part of the faithful, excluding any superstition or false piety. But the word "active" (*actuosa*) requires some greater examination.

A true grasp of the meaning of participation in the liturgy demands a clear understanding of the nature of the Church and above all of Christ Himself. At the basis of so much of today's problems in liturgy lies a false notion of Christology and ecclesiology. Christ, the incarnate Word of God, true God and true Man, lives on in this world now. "I will be with you all days until the end of the world." Even though He has arisen and ascended into heaven, He lives with us. The Church is His mystical Body, indeed His mystical Person. We are the members of that Body. Its activity, the activity of the Church, is the activity of Christ, its Head. The hierarchical priesthood functions in the very person of Christ, doing His work of teaching, ruling and sanctifying. Thus the Mass and the sacraments are Christ's actions bringing to all the members of His Body, the Church, the very life that is in its Head. Participation in that life demands that every member of the Body take part in that action, which is primarily the liturgical activity of the Church. The liturgy is the primary source of that divine life, and thus all must be joined to it in an active way. Baptism is the key that opens the door and permits one to become part of the living Body of Christ. The baptized Christian has not only a right to participation in the Church's life but a duty as well. It is only the baptized person who can participate.

The difference between participation in the liturgy that can be called *activa* and participation that can be labelled *actuosa* rests in the presence in the soul of the baptismal character, the seal that grants one the right to participate. Without the baptismal mark, all the actions of singing, walking, kneeling or anything else can be termed "active," but they do not constitute *participatio actuosa*. Only the baptismal character can make any actions truly participatory. Let us use an example. Let us say that a pious Hindu attends Mass, takes part in the singing and even walks in a procession with great piety. In the same church is also a Catholic who is blind and deaf and who is unable to leave his chair; he can neither sing nor hear the readings nor walk in the procession. Which one has truly participated, the one who is very active, or the one who has confined himself solely to his thoughts of adoration? Obviously, it is the baptized Catholic who has exercised *participatio actuosa* despite his lack of external, physical movement. The Hindu even with his many actions has not been capable of it, since he lacks the baptismal character.

Granting then the absolute necessity of baptism, it still is imperative for the Christian to take part in the liturgy actively by a variety of actions. This means that the internal *actuosa participatio*, which the baptismal mark empowers, must be aided by those external actions that he is capable of. He should do those things that the Church sets out for him according to his role in the liturgy and the various conditions that age, social position and cultural background dictate. He must join *participatio activa* to his *participatio actuosa* which he exercises as a baptized person.

What are those actions that make for true active participation in the liturgy? These must be both internal and external in quality, since man is a rational creature with body and soul. The external actions must be intelligent and understood, sincere and pious internally. The Church proposes many bodily positions: kneeling, standing, walking, sitting, etc. It likewise proposes many human actions: singing, speaking, listening and above all else, the reception of the Holy Eucharist. They demand internal attention as well as external execution.

One of the most active and demanding of human actions is that of listening. It

requires strict attention and summons up in a person his total concentrative effort. It is possible, for example, to walk without really knowing that one is walking or advert to where one is going. It is possible even to sing, especially a very familiar tune, and not be conscious of actually singing. But one cannot truly listen without attention. Especially in our day of constant radio and TV broadcasting, we are able to tune out almost every sound we wish. To listen attentively demands full human concentration. Listening can be the most active form of participation, demanding effort and attention. Truly, as the scriptures tell us, faith demands hearing, *fides ex auditu*.

With that in mind, surely the baptized Christian who listens with care to the proclamation of the gospel or the singing of the preface at Mass truly has achieved participation, both *activa* and *actuosa*.

The Church does not have the entire congregation proclaim the gospel text, but rather the deacon or the priest does it. It is the duty of all to listen. The canon of the Mass is not to be recited by everyone but all are to hear it. Listening is a most important form of active participation.

There is a variety of roles to be observed in the public celebration of the liturgy. There is the role of priest, deacon, reader, cantor, choir and congregation, among many others. Because each office has his own purpose and its own manner of acting we have the basic reason for a distinction of roles. If the reader or the cantor is to read and sing, certainly the role of the others is to listen. If the choir is to sing, someone must listen and in so-doing participate actively in the liturgy, even if during the period of listening he is relatively inactive in a physical way.

Every age has participated in the liturgy through baptism, as members of the Church and part of the mystical Body of Christ. All ages have shared in the right and duty of *actuosa participatio*. If, as Pius X insists, the liturgy is the primary source of the Christian life, everyone must take part in it to achieve salvation. Active participation is not an invention of our day; the Church throughout the ages constantly shared the life of Christ with its members in the Mass and the sacraments, the very actions of Christ Himself working through His Church and His priesthood. For each age the activities deemed by it to be useful in promoting that participation have varied according to the needs and ideas of the period. One cannot say that because the medieval period developed a chant that was largely the possession of monastic choirs, the congregations who listened were not actively participating. Perhaps not according to post-Vatican II standards, but one must carefully avoid the error of judging the past by the present and applying to former times criteria that seem valuable in our own times. Because Palestrina's polyphonic Masses require the singing of trained choirs, can one assume that non-choir members in the renaissance period were deprived of an active participation in the liturgy? No age could permit such a thing to happen and thus be deprived of the primary source of the spiritual life. The sixteenth-century baptized Roman did participate through listening along with other activities, as no doubt an eighteenth-century Austrian did when he heard a Mozart Mass performed by a choir and orchestra.

We must then carefully consider the roles of each individual, and we must consider the cultural and personal conditions of each one who must find in the liturgy the primary source of his spiritual life. A variety of opportunities for liturgical activity is needed, and good pastoral direction will supply the need. The Church herself does so by the very rubrics of the liturgical books, directing what is to be done. The Vatican Council taught the need of various functions and various roles to carry out completely the liturgical actions.

Surely the spoken and sung responses and acclamations in the liturgy are the right and the duty of all present. But the practice of calling the *Sanctus* an acclamation is

without foundation; it is a hymn, found in the Old Testament and sung by the angels. It is not the exclusive prerogative of the congregation as it might be thought to be if it is labelled an acclamation. As a hymn it can be given to a trained group and sung in a more elaborate setting. The same is true of the parts called the ordinary of the Mass, including the *Credo*, which may be listened to and consented to with great faith without having to be spoken by the congregation. The proper parts of the Mass, because of the great variety of texts and settings, fall of necessity to trained and practiced groups. One may, of course, never exclude the congregation totally from participation by singing, but the variety of methods allows for many possibilities for participation by singing or by listening to singing. The possibilities of participation are almost infinite.

Important too for any participation in the liturgy is the elevation of the spirit of the worshiper. Ultimately, liturgy is prayer, the supreme prayer of adoration, thanksgiving, petition and reparation. Prayer is the raising of the heart and the mind to God as Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier. The means to achieve such elevation of the spirit in prayer involve all the activities of the human person, both spirit and body. Such means produce true *actuosa participatio*. Thus beauty, whether it appeals to the sight, the ear, the imagination or any of the senses, is an important element in achieving participation. The architectural splendor of a great church or the sound of great music, or the solemnity of ceremonial movement by ministers clothed in precious vestments, or the beauty of the proclaimed word—all can effect a true and salutary participation in one who himself has not sung a note or taken a step. But he is not a mere silent spectator as some would say; he is actively participating because of his baptismal character and the grace stirred up in him by what he is seeing and hearing, thinking and praying.

The Church has always promoted Gregorian chant. Especially during this past century, the popes have fostered the music of the renaissance polyphonists. Pope John Paul II celebrated Mass in Saint Peter's Basilica with the Vienna orchestra and singers doing Mozart's *Coronation Mass*. Anyone who was present on that memorable occasion in that great church experienced true participation.

Thus to limit participation to singing impoverishes seriously the opportunity of the Christian to take part in the most essential means for his salvation. One does not have to sing to save his soul. But one must be active (*actuosa participatio*) in the liturgy, through baptism and other actions according to his ability, state, culture and disposition, in order to enter into the mystery of the redemption wrought by Christ, outside of which there is no salvation.

We can conclude with this definition of *participatio actuosa*:

(It is) that form of devout involvement in the liturgical action which, in the present conditions of the Church, best promotes the exercise of the common priesthood of the baptized: that is, their power to offer the sacrifice of the Mass with Christ and to receive the sacraments. It is clear that, concretely, this requires that the faithful understand the liturgical ceremonial; that they take part in it by bodily movements, standing, kneeling or sitting as the occasion may demand; that they join vocally in the parts which are intended for them. It also requires that they listen to, and understand, the liturgy of the word. It requires, too, that there be moments of silence when the import of the whole ceremonial may be absorbed and deeply personalized. (Colman E. O'Neill, "The Theological Meaning of *Actuosa Participatio* in the Liturgy," in *Sacred Music and Liturgy Reform after Vatican II*. Consociatio Internationalis Musicae Sacrae, Rome, 1969. p. 105.)

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Saint Michael conquering the Dragon. Tympanum of the church of St.-Michael d'Etraignes, Angoulême. c. 1140.

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FROM THE EDITORS

- Concerts in Church 3
The Demise of the Devotional 4
Latin and the Novus Ordo 5

PARTICIPATION

- Monsignor Richard J. Schuler* 7

GREGORIAN SEMIOLOGY: THE NEW CHANT. PART III

- Robert M. Fowells* 11

CONCERTS IN CHURCHES

- Declaration of the Congregation for Divine Worship* 17

EDWARD M. CONNOR (1919-1987)

- Catherine M. Dower* 22

ORGAN RESOURCE LIST 23

REVIEWS 26

NEWS 29

EDITORIAL NOTES 30

CONTRIBUTORS 30

INDEX TO VOLUME 114 31