

The active participation of the faithful in the recent magisterium

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1. Introduction

I am grateful to the organisers of this symposium for limiting our discussion of this important subject to the relatively brief period of the "recent magisterium", an expression which we will interpret here as the period from the pontificate of Pius XII after the war to the introduction of *the Novus ordo missae*. This represents a period of about twenty years, which is negligible in comparison with the long history of the Church, but it is also a period during which the concept of "active participation of the laity in the liturgy" was much discussed and, in fact, evolved considerably. This limitation in time obviously has advantages, but also disadvantages: indeed, we cannot rely on the objective testimony of rites and buildings, as these underwent rapid and radical, but artificial and intentional, transformations during this period, in the wake of and in application of a certain liturgical theory, whereas previously it was empirical data that formed the basis on which theories were subsequently built. Cardinal Ratzinger made a remark along these lines:

J. A. Jungmann, one of the truly great liturgists of our century, defined liturgy as it was understood in the West at the time, based primarily on historical research, as a "liturgy that is the fruit of development" (...) What happened after the Council means something completely different: instead of liturgy as the fruit of continuous development, we now have manufactured liturgy.²

Given this reality, it would be a waste of time to appeal to the testimony of current rites and architecture: these "testimonies" would tell us more about the experimental theories of contemporary innovators than about the faith of the praying community. Therefore, this presentation will focus almost exclusively on the teaching of the recent magisterium.

Bossuet wrote: "There is no perfection in Christian practice and life except in participation in the Eucharistic banquet"³ ; yet this perfection, this participation in the Mass, is often presented as a modern discovery, brought about by the age of colour television and the Beatles. Bernard Botte both followed and led this trend when he allowed the title of his book to be translated into English:

¹ Lecture given at the 4th CIEL colloquium, Versailles, 1998.

² Joseph Ratzinger: "Préface" ("Preface"), in Klaus Gamber, *La réforme liturgique en question* ("The Liturgical Reform in Question") (Le Barroux 1992), pp. 7-8.

³ Quoted by His Holiness Pope John XIII during his installation at the Lateran, 23 November 1958 (*La Documentation catholique* 1968, col. 1605).

From Silence to Participation.⁴ This idea that the sad night of silence and inattention has been replaced by a new dawn of glorious participation is far from unusual today.

We will see below that this simplification is far from the truth. In fact, in his encyclical *Certiores effecti* of 13 November 1742, Pope Benedict XIV, who is credited with inventing the papal encyclical, urged the faithful to participate in Mass. At the beginning of this century, in *Tra le sollecitudini*, Pius X spoke of "active participation," a term taken up and used by Pius XI. These documents do not fall within the scope of the present study, which will focus only on recent magisterial teaching, but we mention them here to show that recent magisterial teaching is very much in line with a great tradition that dates back at least to the first papal encyclicals.

2. The encyclical *Mediator Dei*

We will begin with a study of the teachings of Pius XII's great liturgical encyclical *Mediator Dei*. Here, the concept of participation is introduced in the context of a vision of the liturgy that is radically Christological and, to use the term employed by the Pope himself, "theocentric." Participation is considered, first and foremost, as participation in the drama of Redemption. Through our fallen humanity, through sin, we are, by our very nature, participants in the liturgy of grace and Redemption. Pope Pius XII reminds us that God's benevolent and merciful plan was to restore the relationship between God and man, which had been destroyed by sin, and that this was accomplished through the sacrifice of his only Son.⁵

The Pope then notes – a remark that occupies an essential place in his theological perspective and in our subject – that the sacrifice that Christ offered in his mortal body was to continue "without interruption throughout the centuries in his mystical Body, which is the Church" [p. 10]. Thus, the liturgy is placed in the most grandiose and striking perspective—ininitely far from the nitpicking meticulousness that has come to characterise our conception of participation in recent years.

Having established the theological methodology that will guide and colour his teaching on the sacred liturgy, the Pope quickly addresses the question of participation in the concrete and narrower sense in which we commonly understand it, noting that the participation of the faithful in the liturgy is one of the fruits of liturgical studies which, "at the end of the last century and the beginning of this one [...] were pursued with singular ardour."⁶ He goes so far as to say that this participation is a duty (*officium*) for the faithful, according to their state. This concept of participation as a duty was quickly taken up and amplified by liturgists.

⁴ *The Liturgical Movement: Testimony and Memories* (Paris, 1973).

⁵ *Mediator Dei*, no. 1 [pp. 9–10]. [Official English translation published in *The Catholic Encyclopedia* and published by Téqui, Paris 1997. Page numbers refer to this edition.]

⁶ *Ibid.*, no. 4 [p. 11].

The Pope notes that the very nature of man means that worship must be both internal and external. Man is made up of a body and a soul, a composition that is reflected in the internal and external aspects of worship; he is a social being and, as such, worship, which comes to us through the Church and in the Church, necessarily has a social and communal aspect. However, the Pope makes it clear that "the essential element of worship must be internal".⁷

This need for inner worship is presented as an antidote to formalism, an attitude that we have so often witnessed in recent times. The Pope reminds us, in words that fifty years later sound like a prophecy, that Christ himself drove from the temple "those who believe they honour God by the mere sound of well-constructed phrases and theatrical poses, and persuade themselves that they can perfectly ensure their eternal salvation without uprooting their inveterate vices from their souls."⁸ Worship must, first and foremost, be interior so that, if they so desire, the faithful can associate themselves with *the per ipsum*, which is the sacred drama of the liturgy, "surrender themselves" to Christ,⁹ and appropriate the graces of Redemption and justification offered by Christ in the liturgy.¹⁰ Regarding this passage from the encyclical, L. Della Torre notes: "Active participation in the liturgy is not enough to have a faith that recognises the mystery and gives it its assent; it requires a set of interior attitudes that flow from faith, and a truly Christian orientation and tone."¹¹

This way of considering the nature of worship is very important for understanding what authentic participation is because, as we shall see, if we place the main element of divine worship in the interior dispositions of the faithful, in their openness to the graces offered in the Mass, then authentic participation will necessarily reflect this focus on the interior and the spiritual, without prejudice to external manifestations of active participation in the liturgy. Without this willingness to expose oneself to grace, to seek God sincerely in His sacraments, even though it objectively contains these sacramental graces, the liturgy becomes an empty and vain spectacle, "a sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal" (1 Cor 13:1), or, as the Pope says a little further on, it is a flood of "divine grace [from] the Head [which] diffuses [it] in the members of the Mystical Body,"¹² but in vain.

This essential attitude of openness to the effects of sacred liturgy, the religious behaviour that allows the faithful to appropriate the treasures of grace contained in the liturgy, is what the

⁷ *Ibid.*, no. 24 [p. 23].

⁸ *Ibid.* Cf. Mk 7:6 and Is 29:13.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ A little further on, the Pope adds: "It must therefore be affirmed that the redemptive work, independent in itself of our will, requires our inner effort in order to lead us to eternal salvation" - *Ibid.*, no. 31 [p. 27].

¹¹ L. Della Torre, *Understanding the Liturgy* (Langley, 1967), p. 21.

¹² *Mediator Dei* no. 31 [p. 27].

Pope calls, in *Mediator Dei*, "piety", a term which, in English at least, has a rather negative connotation ("devout"). Piety (*pietas*) is a crucial word for understanding this encyclical; of course, the meaning of this word goes far beyond **what** it implies in English. Piety is both the meaning of true participation and the end towards which this participation tends. A century earlier, Dom Guéranger had spoken in the same way about the central place of "anointing" in true worship.¹³ The entire second part of **the** encyclical *Mediator Dei* is devoted to a detailed instruction on the "participation of the faithful in the Eucharistic sacrifice".¹⁴ To begin with, the Pope takes up a theme already mentioned in **the** introduction: the duty of the faithful to participate in Mass.

It is therefore desirable, venerable brothers, that all Christians consider it a primary duty and a supreme honour to participate in the Eucharistic sacrifice, not in a passive and negligent manner, with their minds on other things, but with attention and fervour that unites them closely to the High Priest (...), offering with Him and through Him, sanctifying themselves in Him.¹⁵

It should be noted that, once again, the Pope speaks of **the** duty of the laity to participate in Mass – an idea that will be taken up and developed in subsequent documents of the Magisterium. This participation, which is the duty and dignity of all the faithful, is essentially interior and Christocentric: it "requires all Christians to reproduce, as far as humanly possible, the sentiments that animated the divine Redeemer **when** he offered the sacrifice of himself" (¹⁶). Thus, participating in Mass means identifying with Christ in his role as Priest and Victim. This is a conception of participation that flows from the very nature of liturgical action: the Pope draws a number of practical conclusions from this view, but once again he emphasises the profound importance and significance of the sacred rites and then, secondarily, the concrete and external activities that surround the drama. This identification with the divine victim should not be practised only when the faithful are 'at the altar', but rather this self-offering, refined and perfected in the holy liturgy, should permeate their entire lives, so that 'it is impossible for their faith not to act with greater ardour through charity, for their piety not to be strengthened and inflamed...¹⁷ By participating in Mass in this spirit, the faithful will experience what the Apostle of the Gentiles boasted: "I am crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Gal 2:19-29).

It is a sublime view of sacred rites, an elevated perspective that the Pope strives to emphasise in the face of a certain tendency to trivialise the Mass that was already evident at that

¹³ Dom P. Guéranger, *Institutions liturgiques*, 2nd edition, Part I, chap. 14 (Paris - Brussels, 1878), p. 401, no. 6.

¹⁴ *Mediator Dei*, nos. 80-111 [pp. 54-69].

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, no. 80 [p. 54].

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, no. 81 [p. 55].

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, no. 99 [p. 63].

time: "Let the faithful therefore consider to what dignity the sacred bath of baptism has raised them."¹⁸ This sublime and "theocentric" vision **does** not exclude the concrete elements of participation (the Pope mentions the Offertory, the "dialogued" Mass, etc.); these elements are mentioned, in a manner of speaking, in passing, not because the Pope considers them secondary or inappropriate, but **because** he considers them as means to an end; and that end is "to nourish and foster the piety of Christians and their intimate union with Christ."¹⁹ Thus, the Pope asks that we not exaggerate the value of methods of external participation: indeed, this union can be achieved by other, less liturgical means, and not all the faithful are capable or willing to practise this kind of participation.

Pius XII's awareness of the needs of individual Christians and his sensitivity in this regard suggest **that** the brutal methods of participation that have overwhelmed the piety of "non-liturgical" Christians should be avoided. In his conception of participation, the Pope **demonstrates** a pastoral concern that has often been lacking in the practical application of many recent liturgical reforms.

3. From *Mediator Dei* to Vatican II: participation in practice

We have examined the teaching of *Mediator Dei* at such length because this encyclical not only constitutes the highest level of Pope Pius XII's teaching on the liturgy, but also because it could be said to be the most important magisterial document on the liturgy of this century. Of course, this encyclical had a great influence on the pastoral activity of the liturgical movement, but the Pope did not stop there. In various allocutions and several decrees of the Sacred Congregation of Rites, he addressed the questions and problems raised by the developing liturgical movement. These years were marked by significant changes in the liturgy, beginning with the new offices of Holy Week in 1951. It should be noted that, in giving its approval to the new rite presented in its decree of 9 February 1951, one of the reasons given by the Sacred Congregation of Rites to justify the restoration of the Easter Vigil was **that** it was necessary to "encourage the participation of the faithful".²⁰

Published in 1953, the apostolic constitution *Christus Dominus*²¹ aimed to "facilitate the development of Eucharistic piety" (§ 22); and, the text adds, "these provisions [should] contribute greatly (...) to a great development of Eucharistic piety and will more effectively lead and encourage all the faithful to take part in the banquet of angels" (ibid.); this was also the intention, a

¹⁸ *Mediator Dei*, no. 104 [p. 65].

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, no. 106 [p. 67].

²⁰ Decree of the Sacred Congregation of Rites, 9 February 1951, quoted in: *The Teachings of the Pope – The Liturgy*, selected and presented by the Benedictine monks of Solesmes (*La Documentation catholique* no. 1091, 25 March 1951, col. 331)

²¹ 6 January 1953, quoted in: *Ibid.* (*La Documentation catholique* no. 1139, 25 January 1953, col. 65-72).

few years later, of the motu proprio *Sacram communionem*.²² In 1955, the Sacred Congregation of Rites published *Maxima redemptionis*,²³ once again justifying the changes made to the times of celebration of the various offices of Holy Week by referring both to ancient tradition and to the pastoral necessity of allowing the faithful to participate more easily. In 1955, Pope Pius XII's last encyclical devoted to the liturgy was published: *Musicae sacrae disciplina*. As its title indicates, the main subject of this encyclical is sacred music, but it also contains teachings on participation. In terms reminiscent of *Tra le sollecitudine* and foreshadowing *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, the Pope gives pride of place to Gregorian chant, without however disparaging polyphony. Music, the Pope notes, is a remarkable means of achieving the participation of the faithful in sacred services: "It makes the liturgical prayers of the Christian community more vivid and fervent, so that the Triune God may be praised and invoked by all with **greater** strength, fervour and effectiveness."²⁴

Musicae sacrae was his last encyclical devoted to the liturgy, but Pope Pius XII never ceased to urge the faithful to draw close to the fountains of grace of the sacred liturgy and to participate fully and actively in the sacred rites. The apostolic constitution *Primo exacto saeculo* expresses sentiments that are found in many less formal or official documents and speeches.

The Eucharist is indeed the centre of Christian life and the greatest source of help, since from it flow abundantly into our souls supernatural powers and divine graces (...) The sacrament of the Eucharist and the august sacrifice of the altar (...) call for our active and effective love; a love, we might say, that sustains and guides our conduct and our whole life."²⁵

In the final days of Pius XII's pontificate, the Sacred Congregation of Rites published an instruction entitled *De Musica sacra*, concerning sacred music and the liturgy. This instruction devotes several paragraphs to the participation of the faithful in the liturgy, in particular a passage which is essentially a summary of *Mediator Dei* and which concludes with the following remark:

It is this harmonious participation that the pontifical documents have in mind when they speak of "active participation," the first examples of which are the celebrant and his sacred ministers who serve at the altar with the required interior piety, strictly observing the rubrics and rites.²⁶

The issue here is therefore that of "active participation", with a rather vague reference to "pontifical documents": *De Musica sacra* refers, for this expression of "active participation", to

²² Motu proprio *Sacram communionem* of 19 March 1957 (*La Documentation catholique* no. 1248 of 31 March 1957, col. 387-390).

²³ Decree *Maxima Redemptionis* of 16 November 1955 (*La Documentation catholique* no. 1214 of 11 December 1955, col. 1537-1546).

²⁴ *Musicae sacrae*, nos. 31 & 34 (*La Documentation catholique* 1956, col. 75, no. 14).

²⁵ 1 November 1957. (*La Documentation catholique* no. 1266 of 8 December 1957, col. 1541-1546, here 1542-1543).

²⁶ AAS 50 (1958), p. 638 (*La Documentation catholique* 1958, col. 1434, no. 22b).

pages 530 to 537 of the version of *Mediator Dei* published in the AAS. However, this expression is not found in this part of the encyclical. In fact, it seems that the Pope carefully avoided using it because, in this section, he explains the pre-eminent place of interior dispositions and presents the dangers of exaggerating the notion of "objective piety". In this section of the encyclical, the adverb *actuose* appears twice and the adjective *actuosus* once, but not in the context of active participation. [What is interesting is that, in these three cases, these terms cannot be translated simply as "active/actively"; it seems that it is only when attached to the noun "participation" that the adjective inevitably takes on this meaning]. Perhaps Pope Pius XII had realised the ambiguity inherent in this now classic expression of *actuosa participatio*, an ambiguity that was to be fully exploited by certain liturgists in the years that followed.

4. The Second Vatican Council and *actuosa participatio*

The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy of Vatican II (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*) deals almost immediately with the participation of the faithful in the liturgy. This is discussed in paragraphs 11 to 14. The first mention of this recalls the essence of the magisterial teachings we have just studied, and this passage could truly be considered a recapitulation of previous statements: "Pastors should be careful that, in liturgical action, not only are the laws of a valid and lawful celebration observed, but also that the faithful participate in it in a conscious, active (*actuose*) and fruitful manner."²⁷

The second time participation is mentioned, the presentation is somewhat different and seems to reflect a certain evolution in doctrine:

The Mother Church greatly desires that all the faithful be led to this full, conscious and active participation in liturgical celebrations, which is required by the nature of the liturgy itself and which is, by virtue of their baptism, a right and a duty for the Christian people, "chosen race, royal priesthood, holy nation, redeemed people" (1 Pet 2:9; cf. 2:4-5). This full and active participation is what must be sought with all one's strength [*summopere* – "above all"] in the restoration and enhancement of the liturgy.²⁸

Monsignor Bugnini, who was certainly well placed to know, stated that this desire for participation applied above all in one way or another to all the articles of *Sacrosanctum Concilium* – it is indeed an idea that recurs constantly, putting into practice what the Fathers say about the different aspects of the liturgy: "Everything is presented from the perspective of conscious and devout participation, which should result from the well-organised instruction of the faithful."²⁹

The expression *actuosa participatio* used by the Council is not new: Pope Pius X had already used it nearly sixty years earlier in the motu proprio *Tra le Sollecitudini*:

²⁷ *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 11.

²⁸ *Ibid.* no. 14.

²⁹ A. Bugnini, *The Reform of the Liturgy 1948-1975* (Collegeville, 1990), p. 41.

We therefore consider it necessary to ensure, above all else, the sanctity and dignity of the temple in which the faithful gather for the purpose of acquiring this spirit from its supreme and indispensable source, which is active participation in the holy mysteries and in the public and solemn prayer of the Church.³⁰

Pius XI also used this expression in the apostolic constitution *Divini cultus*: "(...) in order to enable (the faithful) to participate more actively in divine worship (*quo autem actuosius fideles divinum cultum participant*), Gregorian chant should be restored among them, at least in those parts that concern them."³¹

Thus, the expression *actuosa participatio* was well established in the documents of the Magisterium, but what is new in *Sacrosanctum Concilium* is that this document emphasises "the active participation of the faithful *summopere* (with all their strength/above all else)"; in reality, this expression seems difficult to reconcile with previous teachings. Vorgrimmler considers that "this call for 'active participation' necessarily stems from the new conception of the Church."³² As we have just seen, Pope Pius X considered that it was the holiness and dignity of the temple that should be considered above all else; we should also remember that Pius XII took care to specify that active participation, although important, was not strictly speaking essential, that the faithful had the right to attend Mass in a manner that corresponded to their dispositions, and that the importance of active participation should not be exaggerated.³³

The elevation of "active participation" to the status of guiding principle and supreme norm of liturgical reform was to have very profound consequences and multiple repercussions. If the active participation of the faithful is the goal to be pursued above all else, then it is possible to legitimately sacrifice many things that are of great importance in the liturgy. Michael Davies calls this expression a "time bomb" and points out that it places virtually unlimited powers "in the hands of those who have the authority to implement the details of a reform that the Council authorised but did not spell out in detail."³⁴ Davies asserts that an illustration of this is the almost total disappearance of Gregorian chant from our churches,³⁵ even though the Council taught that, "in liturgical actions, all things being equal, [it] should occupy the first place."³⁶

³⁰ Motu proprio *Tra le Sollecitudini*, text presented in: *Official Catholic Teachings: Worship and Liturgy*, ed. James J. Megivern, (Wilmington 1978); (*La Documentation catholique*, 22 November 1903, vol. 72, pp. 66-73).

³¹ AAS 21 (1929), p. 39 (*La Documentation catholique* 1929, vol. 21, col. 1160, no. IX).

³² *Commentary on the documents of Vatican II*, ed. Herbert Vorgrimmler (London, 1967), vol. 1, p. 17.

³³ *Mediator Dei*, no. 115 [pp. 67–68].

³⁴ Michael Davies, *Pope John's Council* (Kansas City, 1992), p. 239.

³⁵ Cardinal Ratzinger made the same remarks, in a more scholarly and less succinct form, in: *Un Chant nouveau pour le Seigneur* (Desclée, Paris 1995), pp. 150–169.

³⁶ *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 116.

And so it was that liturgical experts were able to claim – and they did not hesitate to do so – that Gregorian chant hindered the active participation of the faithful, since most of them are unable to sing the proper parts of the Mass, and that it should therefore be replaced by music that encouraged active participation, i.e. hymns and popular songs. The same reasoning largely explains the rest of the liturgical reform: the eclipse of sacred polyphonic music – a musical style that Pius XII had vigorously defended – could be justified by the fact that polyphony, almost by definition, does not allow for the active participation of the entire congregation. By emphasising participation above all else, Latin was quickly replaced by vernacular languages, notwithstanding the teachings of John XXIII and the Council itself, which declared: "The use of the Latin language, except for special rights, will be retained in Latin rites."³⁷ And finally, this emphasis on the participation of the faithful above all else, established as the guiding principle of liturgical reform, would ultimately lead to the abolition of traditional rites. Baumstark and Jungmann were not the only great experts on liturgy to foresee this process; both saw that once the liturgy was celebrated in the vernacular, "only then will we be directly confronted with the much deeper problem of how to make linguistic expressions and modes of religious thought that have been frozen for 1500 years more acceptable to modern man."³⁸ For Jungmann, the solution to this problem was, in part, to "clarify the liturgical form to a certain extent and make it more lively."³⁹

These developments seem to justify Davies' dramatic expression "time bomb" to describe this priority given to active participation. No doubt this passage is full of hidden meaning which, as we shall see, was to bear abundant fruit. However, it is by no means certain that this is what the Fathers of the Council meant, or even **what** they said, in the passages from *Sacrosanctum Concilium* that we have quoted. In both cases, the Latin words *actuose* (no. 11) and *actuosa* (no. 14) are generally translated as "actively" and "active" respectively. Hence the famous expression: *actuosa participatio*, commonly translated as "active participation." Although widely accepted, this translation is far from obvious. In fact, there is a Latin word for "active" (*activus*); yet, as we have seen, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* uses the word *actuosus*, which has a broader and more nuanced meaning. According to the *Lewis Latin Dictionary* and the *Shorts Latin Dictionary*, this word means: "full of activity, very active, with the subsidiary idea of zeal and subjective impulse; different from *industrius*, which rather qualifies the means by which an object is achieved."

We can therefore see that translating *actuosa participatio* as "active participation" is neither obvious nor sufficient. There may not be an adjective that can convey the full meaning of this term on its own, but simply translating it as "active", **when** there is another Latin term for this particular meaning, and thus interpreting *actuosa participatio* as referring mainly to activity, is in any case a

³⁷ *Ibid.*, no. 36 (1). The instruction *Tres abhinc Annos* of the Sacred Congregation of Rites, dated 4 May 1967, extended the authorisation to use the vernacular to the entire Mass, referring to this need for participation above all else.

³⁸ J. A. Jungmann, *Pastoral Liturgy* (London, 1962), p. 98.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

distortion or, as Cardinal Ratzinger said, a "fatal reduction" of the meaning of this term and of the important teaching contained in these paragraphs of *Sacrosanctum Concilium*:

The Council rightly reminded us that liturgy also means *actio*, action, and asked that the faithful be assured of *actuosa participatio* (...) Certainly, this is a correct concept, but one which, in post-conciliar interpretations, has undergone a fatal restriction. The impression has arisen that active participation only occurs when there is tangible external activity: speeches, words, songs, homilies, readings, handshakes (...) But we have forgotten that the Council also includes silence in *actuosa participatio*, which promotes truly profound, personal participation, allowing us to listen inwardly to the Word of the Lord. However, there is no longer any trace of this silence in certain rites.⁴⁰

This discussion on the meaning and importance of *actuosa participatio* goes far beyond a semantic quibble between pedants; it touches not only on our conception of the nature of the liturgy but also on our assessment of recent changes to the liturgy. If we interpret *actuosa participatio* in the sense indicated by Cardinal Ratzinger, that is, as a profound personal participation in the liturgy, then we are in line with previous magisterial statements on the participation of the laity in the sacred liturgy. On the other hand, if we translate *actuosa participatio* as 'active participation' in the simple sense of activity in the liturgy, we depart radically from previous pontifical teachings, which justifies the radical break with liturgical tradition that Cardinal Ratzinger, along with many others, sees expressed in a number of post-conciliar reforms. When we use this expression, we must remember that we mean something more than external activity, but rather a participation that flows from a genuine personal and interior adherence to the liturgy. This conception of *actuosa participatio* is in accord not only with previous magisterium but also with other statements of the Second Vatican Council. The dogmatic constitution *Lumen gentium* recalls *Mediator Dei* when it identifies participation with the offering of oneself in union with the divine Victim, which finds its fulfilment in communion:

Participating in the Eucharistic sacrifice, the source and summit of all Christian life, they offer the divine victim to God and offer themselves with it; thus, through both the oblation and Holy Communion, all, not indiscriminately but each in his own way, take their original part in the liturgical action.⁴¹

Pope Paul VI himself frequently interpreted *actuosa participatio* in this broader sense, namely, full and ardent participation, as opposed to passive and negligent participation.⁴²

⁴⁰ Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, *Entretien sur la foi* (Paris, 1985), p. 151.

⁴¹ *Lumen gentium* no. 11. A few years earlier, Fr. Congar had written, in a chapter devoted to the participation of the laity in Mass: "Communion seals the whole (...) It is obvious that if the faithful participate in the Eucharistic oblation as we have said, (...) the final act of their participation will be to unite themselves, until they form one body with it, to the Victim in whom all other offerings are sanctified and accepted. If one truly offers the sacrifice, one must also participate in it." In: Y. Congar, *Jalons pour une théologie du laïc* (Paris, 1953), p. 294.

⁴² Cf. "Sermons and allocutions," in *Documents on the liturgy, 1963-1979* (Collegeville, 1980), pp. 125-126

We have seen previously that the expression *actuosa participatio* was generally translated as "active participation", and we will show later that the architects of the post-conciliar reforms interpreted it in the sense of activity: words and movement, external participation. We have also seen that another, more nuanced interpretation was possible – *actuosa participatio* meaning a lively and real involvement in the liturgy – and that not only did this meaning exist before the council, but also that, in the teachings of Paul VI, it survived the use made of it by the council. That being the case, it is reasonable to conclude that when the latter uses the term *actuosa*, – and as the dictionary definition also indicates – it must mean something deeper than mere activity, and that the 'reduction' of this term has been the source of many partial and one-sided interpretations of *Sacrosanctum Concilium*.

5. From Vatican II to the *Novus Ordo Missae*

It should be remembered that this period was marked by a profusion of documents on the liturgy, many of which applied the guiding principle of *actuosa participatio* to the concrete reform and modification of the liturgy. *Inter Oecumenici* (26 September 1964) was the first document of the Sacred Congregation of Rites devoted to the implementation of the constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium*. There is no need to examine in detail here the modifications and changes that were made: simplification of the ritual, authorisation of the vernacular, establishment of diocesan liturgical commissions, liturgy of the word in the absence of a priest, etc. What should be noted here, with regard to the topic that concerns us, is that the justification given for these changes was the urgent need for participation above all else: "This implementation, effective immediately, aims to ensure that the liturgy corresponds ever more perfectly to the spirit of the council, which is to facilitate the active participation of the faithful."⁴³

Inter Oecumenici appeared before the close of the Second Vatican Council; and even before the Council had ended, concerns about the implementation of liturgical reform and errors concerning the Mass and the Eucharist that were beginning to plague the Church had reached the highest levels of the Church. In the encyclical *Mysterium fidei* of 3 September 1965, Pope Paul VI condemns some of the errors concerning the Eucharist that were then causing "grave pastoral concern"⁴⁴ ; he then gives a magnificent presentation of the Church's unchanging faith in the Holy Sacrament. In this exposition, Pope Paul VI does not neglect the question of *actuosa participatio*; he conceives of this active participation in the sense presented in *Mediator Dei*, which he quotes in approval, in parallel with the passage from *Lumen gentium* quoted above:

⁴³ AAS 56 (1964), p. 878 ("Instruction of the Council for the Application of the Constitution on the Liturgy," in: *La Documentation catholique* no. 1435 of 1 November 1964, col. 1359-1376, here 1359).

⁴⁴ *Mysterium fidei*, AAS 57 (1965), p. 753 (*La Documentation catholique* no. 1456 of 3 October 1965, col. 1633-1651, no. 9).

But there is another point we wish to add, given its great usefulness in shedding light on the mystery of the Church: it is the whole Church, in union with Christ, fulfilling the role of priest and victim, which offers the sacrifice of the Mass and is offered in its entirety. This admirable doctrine, already taught by the Fathers, was recently expounded by our predecessor Pius XII, of blessed memory, and was most recently formulated by the Second Vatican Council in the constitution *De Ecclesia de Populo Dei*.⁴⁵

As its name indicates, *Tres abhinc Annos* was published three years after *Inter Oecumenici*. The list of changes is even longer: *the Ordo missae* is modified, with the suppression of genuflections, signs of the cross and changes to the rite of communion... This instruction also authorised, among other things, the use of purple for funerals and decreed that the maniple was no longer compulsory. The reason given for these changes, as for many others – in particular the extension of the authorisation to use the vernacular, even in the canon of the Mass – was to encourage active participation. Referring to previous pre-conciliar reforms, the instruction states:

From the very beginning of this reform, abundant fruits began to be reaped, as evidenced by numerous reports from bishops, who also confirm that everywhere the participation of the faithful in the liturgy, especially in the sacrifice of the Mass, has increased, while at the same time becoming more conscious and active. In order to further encourage this participation, especially at Mass, and to make the sacred rites clearer and more understandable, the bishops suggested further adaptations.⁴⁶

All these documents, which represent **only** a small part of everything that has been published, clearly illustrate that the post-conciliar liturgical reforms were largely motivated by the desire to increase participation, and that this participation was interpreted in a much more prosaic and narrow way than had been the case until then. This is why Monsignor Bugnini was not exaggerating when he stated that "the full and active participation of all the people (...) was the essential motive behind the modern liturgical renewal."⁴⁷ The rites produced by this liturgical renewal bear witness to the kind of participation envisaged here.

Conclusion

Active participation was a concern that dominated more than the pre-conciliar liturgical reform. As we have seen, from the time of Pius X onwards, active participation was an essential element of the liturgical movement, then a leitmotif of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*) of the Second Vatican Council, and finally the guiding principle of the liturgical reforms that followed. *The Ordo missae* was designed with active participation in mind, developed with the

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 761 (*La Documentation catholique*, op. cit. (note 45), no. 31).

⁴⁶ AAS 59 (1967), p. 442 (*La Documentation catholique* no. 1494 of 21 May 1967, col. 887-893, here 887).

⁴⁷ Bugnini, *The Reform of the Liturgy*, p. 41.

participation of the faithful in the sacred liturgy as the most important consideration. It may not be out of place to conclude by asking:

Has this unconditional adherence to the concept of participation been fruitful? Is there really active participation? Is this "rich harvest," the "more intense participation of the faithful in all stages of the liturgy" referred to by the bishops at the Sacred Congregation of Rites and quoted in *Tres abhinc Annos*, still as evident and universal?

Quantitatively, it is undeniable that participation has declined, at least in the ancient Churches of the West. For England and Wales, the official Catholic directory indicated that the number of Catholics attending Mass was 2,111,219 in 1964 and 1,111,077 in 1996—practically a reduction by half, while the Catholic population continued to grow. What is happening in England is certainly not an isolated case: these raw statistics mean that there are millions of Catholics who do not attend Mass at all; and one cannot help but wonder: is the coincidence between this decline and the ever-increasing emphasis on participation really just a coincidence?

And what about what we might call qualitative participation, the experience of those who continue to attend Mass and participate in rites designed with participation in mind? This, of course, is something that is more difficult to assess: in the final analysis, even after the general overview we have just given of the teachings of the Magisterium, our answer to this question will be based largely on anecdotal evidence and personal experience. But are we wrong to conclude that the experience of recent liturgical reforms teaches us that the multiplication of words can drown out the Word? That a proliferation of actions can sometimes obscure the true action? That participation expressed in activity can sometimes be an obstacle to our participation in the holy mysteries?

All this will come as no surprise to those who have read Dom Guéranger's remarks on "anti-liturgical heresy" in *Liturgical Institutions*. If Latin, as a sacred language, were to be removed from the Mass and everything were to be reduced to the level of the immediately comprehensible, certain consequences would be inevitable: "Offered to profane eyes like a dishonoured virgin, from that moment on, the liturgy lost its sacred character, and the people would soon find that it was not worth disturbing their work or their pleasures to go and hear people talking as they talk in the public square."⁴⁸

The answers to the questions posed above go beyond the scope of this presentation, but at the very least, they illustrate the paradox noted by many learned and distinguished authorities since Dom Guéranger, namely that the excessive importance given to participation can have the perverse effect of destroying the desired result, or, more precisely, that the interpretation given to *the actuosa participatio* called for by recent magisterium was seriously erroneous insofar as it considered, almost exclusively, only its active aspect, and that, by excess, participation can be destroyed. This observation was made shortly after the introduction of *the Novus Ordo missae* by the Benedictine liturgist Dom Bernard McElligott, and the years that followed have not shown much change in the

⁴⁸ Dom Guéranger: *Institutions liturgiques*, Part 1, chap. XIV, p. 403, no. 8.

situation he describes. In fact, the challenge he presents at the end of this quotation could be considered the imperative of the day:

It seems to me that we are losing or forgetting the right balance between personal inner worship and public outer worship – in which personal inner worship is the fundamental religious element – and that we risk seeing our religion become primarily 'externalist'. This corresponds to what the Catholic psychologist Karl Stern presents as a disease or anomaly of our time, namely "activism", as opposed to the values of wisdom and interiority summarised in *Our Lady*. But if this "externalisation" occurs, then something must be done to correct it.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Excerpt from a speech delivered to the Association for Latin Liturgy at Campion Hall, Oxford, on 16 June 1970, and published in *The Remnant* 4/21 (1971).