

***Deformata reformare.* Erroneous liturgical practices and concerns about liturgical reform in the decrees of the Council of Trent**

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1. The dogmatic and disciplinary objectives of the Council of Trent and the question of liturgy

Quite providential amid the heresies and schisms of the 16th century, the Council of Trent did not only result in the restoration of a theologically sound rule of faith through major dogmatic decrees.

It can even be taken for granted that if the Council's efforts had been limited to controversial issues alone, the disciplinary decrees would not have succeeded, as was indeed the case following the Council and for the greater good of the Church, in reforming the concrete practice of life in the Church so quickly and effectively².

Indeed, it became apparent at that time that dogmatic errors were not generally the primary and direct cause of the deterioration of ecclesial discipline; often, erroneous practices, apparently without serious dogmatic consequences and without being the direct result of heresies, had gradually crept into the liturgical sphere and opened the door to dogmatic heresies.

The restoration of dogmatic norms, limited to magisterial definitions—and therefore purely theoretical and abstract—would have allowed these concrete errors to flourish freely, and the work of restoration would have been completely insufficient in such a context.

Doctrinal unity, reinforced by the dogmatic decrees of the council, requires that it be matched, through the energetic exercise of pastoral responsibility, by unity in the truth that must be practised, supported by the reforming decrees of the council. Sometimes drafted in a rather general and cautious manner in the form of compromises³, the reform decrees were therefore not always able to take into account, in a truly comprehensive manner, the existing aberrations or the corresponding radical measures that were necessary to remedy them. It therefore remains to be seen

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² This dual objective – dogma and disciplinary practice – was constantly reaffirmed before and during the council in various declarations of intent, including the papal bull convening the council, which stated that this council should address “*quae ad integritatem et veritatem christianae religionis, quae ad bonorum morum reductionem, emendationemque malorum*” (MANSI 35, 7AB). These two aspects are closely linked. Dogmatic definitions must therefore be given a certain directive for the disciplinary reform of the Church.

This is attested to in a particularly clear manner, for example, with regard to liturgical reform in the *Decretum de invocatione, veneratione et reliquiis sanctorum et sacris imaginibus* (session XXV, 3 December 1563). On the basis of dogma, this decree defends the Catholic principle of the veneration of images against Calvinist iconoclasm and, without directly and positively enacting disciplinary norms concerning liturgical or extra-liturgical iconography, nevertheless warns the episcopal authority to oppose profane, heretical or lascivious representations. Thus, a normative reference was established which, as such, was able, following the council, to contribute decisively to a renewal of Catholic art in the liturgy (see on this subject E. KIRSCHBAUM, “L'influsso del Concilio di Trento nell'arte,” in *Gregorianum* 26 (1945), 100-116).

³ H. JEDIN, “Das Konzil von Trient und die Reform der liturgischen Bücher” [The Council of Trent and the Reform of Liturgical Books], in *Ephemerides Liturgicae* 59 (1945), 27–28: “Just as all the work of reforming the Church, which, after overcoming great difficulties, was nevertheless accomplished during the third phase of the Council under the firm leadership of Cardinal Morone, the liturgical reform was also a compromise between the reform projects of the national churches represented at Trent and the traditions of the Roman Curia.”

to what extent these reform decrees alone could at the same time determine in detail the reform work that followed⁴ .

Although based on uncertain dogma, the attacks by innovators against Catholic doctrine concerning the Sacrifice of the Mass⁵ met with some success, using as a pretext a practice *in liturgicis* based on abuses with serious consequences⁶ . These attacks first demanded a precise dogmatic response from the Council, which, after two attempts at implementation, could only be given during the third phase of the Council, at session XXII on 17 September 1562, in the form of a dogmatic decree on the Sacrifice of the Mass. According to H. Jedin, this decree, together with the decree on justification, represents the most important of all the dogmatic decisions of the Council of Trent⁷ . Limiting itself to the dogmatic point of view, nothing was done to clearly stigmatise the corresponding errors in the liturgy of the Mass, nor to enact effective prescriptions for their elimination. Moreover, the decree on the Sacrifice of the Mass itself was not, as we shall see, limited to an explanation of the purely dogmatic essence of the Sacrifice of the Mass, but was accompanied, in the same decree and without further distinction, by details concerning the liturgical form of the Mass⁸ .

Thus, in line with this reciprocal dependence between dogmatic clarification and disciplinary reform in matters of liturgy, J.A. Jungmann arrives at the following conclusion:

It was a fact that the Council of Trent, in its authoritative decisions distinguishing truth from error, highlighted the objective nature of the Sacrifice of the Mass, which elevates it far above a mere remembrance of the Sacrifice of the Cross or a simple rite of communion. Thus, the foundations of Catholic liturgy were assured. But a reform was still needed to address the ecclesial practice of celebrating Mass and also, without further delay, the missal itself, which had often fallen into anarchy⁹ .

Thus, in order to provide an effective instrument that could respond to the expectation of a reform of the liturgy of the Mass in the Roman rite, a special decree was added during the 22nd session to the dogmatic decree concerning the Sacrifice of the Mass: *de observandis et evitandis in celebratione missae* (Decree concerning the things to be observed and avoided in the celebration of

⁴ Thus, H. JEDIN, "Il Significato del Concilio di Trento," in *Gregorianum* 26 (1945), 27, offers a reserved critical assessment of the three reform decrees of the third phase of the council (1562-63), particularly because of their compromising nature: "For many, therefore, they are not a completely perfect work from the point of view of Catholic reform."

On the other hand, F. M. CAPPELLO, *Carattere e importanza della riforma tridentina*, in *Gregorianum* 26 (1945), 85-99, places great importance on the direct impact of the Council's reform decrees on the effective reform of ecclesial life.

⁵ H. JEDIN, *Das Konzil*, 9: "The attack launched by the reformers was not directed solely against the obviously false situations existing in liturgical life, but had its origins in the realm of dogma."

⁶ In the *Confessio Augustana*, a clever connection was made between possible abuses in ecclesiastical discipline (for example, by drawing attention to profanities linked to benefices or the pursuit of profit) and the dogmatic positions of the Reformation (against *private masses* and the frequency of their celebration). Considering only the situations that were actually false, Melancthon could rightly observe: "Neque ignorauerunt hos abusus Episcopoli, qui si corexissent eos in tempore, minus nunc esset dissensionum" (P. H. MELANCHTHON, *Confessio Augustana ipsa in Corpus reformatorum*, vol. 26, 297-302).

⁷ H. JEDIN, "Il Concilio di Trento: Scopi svolgimenti e risultati", in *Divinitas* 5 (1961), 352.

⁸ H. JEDIN, *Geschichte des Konzils von Trient* vol. IV /1, Herder: Freiburg in Br, 1975, 188: "Half of the canons had no dogmatic content, but defended the liturgical form of the Mass".

⁹ J. A. JUNGSMANN, *Missarum sollemnia* vol. 1 Herder: Vienna, 1948, 169.

Mass)¹⁰ . This decree is, strictly speaking, the main source of our research on what the decrees of the Tridentine reform contributed to effectively overcoming the liturgical abuses of the time. But first we must examine, albeit briefly, the other reform decrees of the Council of Trent, which, as we shall see, only touch on the subject of our study from a distance and rather by accident.

2. The reform decrees of the Council of Trent and the liturgical crisis

H. Jedin cites three main concerns addressed in the reform decrees of the Council of Trent: compliance by bishops and parish priests with the obligation of residence, reform of priestly training through the Tridentine decree on seminaries, and finally the *Tametsi* reform of the canonical form of marriage¹¹ .

However, among the reform decrees, there is not a single one that is devoted, either directly or indirectly, to erroneous practices in the liturgy of the Mass.

But from these numerous reform decrees, we can draw allusions or clues referring to erroneous practices observed in public worship as a whole.

Three examples can attest to this. First, in the second chapter of the reform decree of Session V of 17 June 1546, concerning the preaching of the Word of God, the obligation to teach the faithful by sermon "at least on Sundays and feast days" is emphatically reiterated¹² , undoubtedly in opposition to a wrongful practice that was indeed common at the time.

Or again, in the eighth chapter of the reform decree of session VII, concerning the duty of canonical visitation, when, with regard to the damage occurring in places of worship and detrimental to the dignity of celebrations, the ordinary is sternly reminded that he must "by appropriate legal means ensure that what needs to be repaired is repaired"¹³ .

Finally, as a third example, when, as part of a reform decree that could only be adopted at the last minute (session XXV of 9 December 1563), a remedy had to be found for the abuse that existed in certain churches of too many masses¹⁴ being said for the dead, instituted in such proportions¹⁵ that it was no longer possible to ensure that they were all said.

In summary, it must be said that in the context of the disciplinary reforms of the Council of Trent, we rarely encounter denunciations of liturgical errors, except in the form of accidental allusions of a very general nature. The same is true of the concrete instructions for resolving these situations through disciplinary measures.

¹⁰ MANSI 35, 132-133

¹¹ See H. JEDIN, *Il Concilio*, 354

¹² MANSI 35, 31: "diebus saltem dominicis et festis solennibus".

¹³ MANSI 35, 57C: "et opportunis juris remediis providere, ut quae reparatione indigent, reparentur".

¹⁴ J. A. JUNGSMANN, *Missarum sollemnia* I,166 cites erroneous conceptions regarding the effects of the Mass as the cause of this accumulation of votive Masses and Masses for the dead. See also A. NOCENT, *La célébration eucharistique avant et après Saint Pie V*, Beauchesnes: Paris, 1977, 42.

¹⁵ See MANSI 35, 183-184

However, we cannot in any way conclude that this issue was not addressed by the Council or that liturgical reform was not an essential concern in the overall reform work inspired by Trent. This can now be demonstrated by a study of *the decretum de observandis*.

3. Premises for a reform of the liturgy of the Mass in the Tridentine decree *de observandis et evitandis in celebratione missae*

From the point of view of its specific status, the *Decretum de observandis*, which we are now going to examine, cannot be counted among the *decreta de reformatione* in the true and specific sense of the term¹⁶, because it was conceived by the council as an addition to the dogmatic decree on the Sacrifice of the Mass. For this reason, it was not formally called a *decretum de reformatione*, although from the point of view of its content and purpose, it served, on the one hand, to reform the liturgy of the Mass by correcting existing liturgical errors and, on the other hand, to apply in practice the dogmatic principles previously enunciated.

3.1 Regarding the historical genesis of the decree

From the very beginning of the sessions of the Council of Trent, complaints about abuses in liturgy were heard from all sides, coming both from individual council fathers and from various reform manifestos proposed by national churches¹⁷.

Even among the council fathers, certain abuses seemed to be very persistent, as evidenced by the decree of the second session, *De modo vivendi et aliis in concilis servandis*, which is a kind of code of conduct and rule of life for the council fathers: among other things, they had to be enjoined to offer the Sacrifice of the Mass at least every Sunday¹⁸.

All initiatives for liturgical reform remained on hold during the first two phases of the council, while the liturgical abuses stemming from the Reformation continued to spread. We must therefore agree with H. Jedin's observation at the beginning of the third phase of the council that "at that time, liturgical chaos had reached its peak."¹⁹

This objective was reserved for the third phase of the council, when the French delegation made its presence felt more strongly and the growing threat of Calvinism came to the fore²⁰. Calvinism's radical liturgical concepts (iconoclasm, supremacy of biblical texts) reinforced the

¹⁶ While the decrees concerning doctrine appear in Trent under the name *Doctrina* or *Decreta de fide*, disciplinary decisions are given the specific name *Decreta de reformatione*. Regarding the fluctuating terminology in the history of councils, see A. M. STICKLER, *Historia juris canonici latini: Institutiones Academicae*, vol. 1, LAS: Rome, 1985, 13-14.

¹⁷ As early as March 1546, undoubtedly in connection with the discussion on abuses in the use of Holy Scripture, attention was drawn to the existence of inappropriate texts in the breviary and missal. Similarly, in 1547, a commission was set up to identify abuses in the celebration of Mass. However, nothing is known about this work (see on this subject: H. JEDIN, *Das Konzil*, 18-19; J. A. JUNGSMANN, *Missarum sollemnia*, I, p. 170).

¹⁸ MANSI 35, 17 D: "Sacrificium Missae quolibet saltem die dominico peragere satagant".

¹⁹ H. JEDIN, *Das Konzil*, 24.

²⁰ H. JEDIN, *Il Concilio*, 350, characterises the third phase of the Council in this sense, stating that it "was no longer primarily addressed to Germany, but rather to France, which, since the death of Henry II, under the regency of Catherine de Medici, was facing the very serious danger of becoming Calvinist".

concern of the council fathers for a unified reform of the entire Latin Church. This made it possible to take the first steps towards the long-desired reform.

Thus, on 20 July 1562, at the same time as the commission responsible for preparing the dogmatic decree on the Sacrifice of the Mass was established, a second commission was set up with the aim of *ad colligendos abusos de sacrificio missae*²¹ .

The composition of this commission is surprising in that its president (Archbishop L. Beccadelli of Ragusa) and its Italian members (including Archbishop G. Pavesi of Sorrento and Bishop B. del Bene of Nîmes) had already emerged as bold reformers, finding themselves in contact with existing reform circles²² , while the French and Spanish members were, on the other hand, rather moderate on this issue²³ .

Although the *desiderata* drawn up by the commission were generally orthodox, the list of abuses and desired reforms was marked by the humanist thinking of the time, which included many biases and exaggerations. This situation was the result of the influence that various reformist manifestos had had within the Church and that of humanist ideas within the commission itself (starting with its president)²⁴ .

Thus, many of the *desiderata* betrayed an "Enlightenment" orientation in favour of "ancient purity" in the liturgy of the Mass, or an overly critical bias against later "apocryphal" elements²⁵ , which were often more popular but did not find favour in the harsh judgement of the humanists.

The path to the final text was a long one, starting with the first draft that the commission, taking into account the reform texts already presented previously²⁶ , drafted in five working sessions

²¹ ST. EHESES (ed.): *Concili Tridentini Actorum pars quinto*, Herder: Freiburg in Br., 1919 (*Concilium Tridentinum: Diarorum, Actorum, Epistularum, Tractatum* / Societas Goeressiana (ed.): vol VII, 721 (abbreviated: *Conc. Trid.*).

²² Thus L. Beccadelli was part of the Contarini reformist circle during the papacy of Paul III (see H. JEDIN, *Geschicht* p. 189) and G. Pavesi, who was close to Seripando (see *ipso loco*, 189), was himself able, as part of his own reformist activity in Naples, to amass extensive documentation in favour of liturgical reform (see *ipso loco*, 340, note 22).

²³ See *ipso loco*, 189.

²⁴ Thus, overly rationalist criticism attacked not only liturgical abuses, but also entirely legitimate parts of the prayers of the *ordo* then in force, as for example when the expressions "*hostia immaculata*" and "*calix salutaris*" used in the offerings before transubstantiation were criticised (see *Conc. Trid.* VIII, 917, 16-18) or when certain vivid words in the offertory of the Requiem were also designated as dogmatically dubious (see *ipso loco*, VIII, 917, 26-27).

Certain ceremonies of the legitimate *ordo* were also examined with an overly critical eye, such as, for example, the signs of the cross that the celebrant traces on the two species after transubstantiation, considered a dogmatically erroneous practice (see *ipso loco*, VIII, 917, 19-20). Similarly, the fact that private Masses were celebrated at the same time as High Mass in the same church was denounced (see *ipso loco*, VIII, 918, 8-9). It was even hoped that the council would stipulate as a rule that private Masses could only be celebrated if two candles were burning on the altar and if at least two listeners (*sic!*) were present (see *ipso loco*, VIII, 918, 29-30).

However, the Council of Trent did not endorse these exaggerated demands. But it is remarkable that almost all (!) of the excessive *desiderata* mentioned above, which had been expressed by the commission in the context of liturgical reform, were introduced, albeit with much delay, following Vatican II, into the liturgical legislation of the reformed Roman rite.

²⁵ Apocryphal prefaces (e.g., in honour of St. Jerome, St. Augustine, St. Roch) or Eucharistic formulas considered apocryphal, along with the customs associated with them, were constantly described as abusive, even superstitious (see *Conc. Trid.* VIII, 917, 11-15 and 31-35).

H. JEDIN, in a very general and cautious manner, refers to these humanistic and, in many cases, simply petty actions with the following words: "Not everything that the members of the commission felt to be abuses is directly contrary to the nature of the celebration of the Holy Mysteries" (see H. JEDIN, *Geschichte*, 190).

²⁶ For example, the very important work of the Archbishop of Braga, Bartholomäus, while, on the other hand, the review of the *abusos missae* by St. Peter Canisius, submitted only on 3 August to Cardinal Hosius, could undoubtedly not be taken into consideration.

from 27 July to 5 August 1562 and was finally able to submit to the competent conciliar president on 8 August. This first draft was returned on 19 August with instructions to produce an abridged version in which many details would be omitted - including, among others, all the *desiderata* of the first draft that were problematic or still lacked maturity²⁷ .

But even this abridged compendium was not discussed in the plenary session of the council; it had to be abridged once again and then reworked into nine canons²⁸ , which were finally studied from 10 September onwards in the general assemblies. However, the draft of the nine canons displeased so many of the council fathers²⁹ that the draft was once again extensively reworked and, on 17 September 1562, was accepted without difficulty at the same time as the decree on the Sacrifice of the Mass³⁰ .

3.2 Denunciation of abuses and calls for reform

Based on the great and holy dignity of the Mystery instituted by Christ himself, it is prescribed in the *Decretum de observandis* that the Sacrifice of the Mass be celebrated with the deepest respect³¹ , with the greatest interior purity of heart and with the greatest exterior signs of devotion and piety³² .

From these premises it follows that a reduction of the liturgy to the merely outwardly visible action is excluded, as is a reduction to pure interiority, neglecting the action and outward form.

Because of the abuses that have crept in and are contrary to the holy dignity of the Sacrifice of the Mass, the Holy Synod therefore decided "that bishops, as ordinary of the place, should watch over, as they are bound to do and must apply themselves carefully to do, to prohibit and expunge from their places all that the lure of gain, idolatry or lack of veneration, which is hardly distinguishable from blasphemy, or superstition, a false counterfeit of true piety, may have introduced there"³³ .

In the appendix, the three causes of liturgical misery are examined through a more concrete approach to abuses: the pursuit of profit, superstition and lack of respect. However, the numerous

²⁷ H. JEDIN, *Das Konzil*, 32.

²⁸ See *Conc. Trid.*, VIII, 26-928.

²⁹ Most often based on the desire that instead of nine canons, a single, more general canon could be created—according to, for example, the Archbishop of Granada (see *Conc. Trid.* VIII, 928), the Bishop of Coimbra (see *ipso loco* VIII, 931), the Bishop of Treni (see *ipso loco* VIII, 931), the Bishop of Modena (see *ipso loco* VIII, 933) and others. The Bishop of Krk criticised the fact that the nine canons unnecessarily included a systematic doctrinal section.

³⁰ This final revision, following the proposal of the Archbishop of Segovia, was supported by a large number of conciliar fathers. In the final draft, disrespect was added to the two reasons previously recognised as causes of liturgical abuse, namely the pursuit of profit and superstition (see *Conc. Trid.*, VIII, 932).

³¹ MANSI 35, 132: "Quanta cura adhibenda sit, ut sacrosanctum missae sacrificium omni religionis cultu ac veneratione celebretur" ("What care must be taken to celebrate the most holy sacrifice of the Mass with all the respect and veneration that must be used in matters of religion").

³² *ipso loco*, 132: "ut quanta maxima fieri potest interiori cordis munditia et puritate, atque exteriori devotionis ac pietatis specie peragatur". ("Every care and diligence must be taken to perform this action with the greatest inner purity and purity of heart and the greatest outward piety and devotion possible").

³³ MANSI 35, 132: "Decernit sancta synodus, ut ordinarii locorum episcopi ea omnia prohibere, atque e medio tollere sedulo curent ac teneantur, quae ab impietate vix sejuncta esse potest, vel superstitio, verae pietatis false imitatrix, induxit".

specific cases of the original project are no longer cited, and the abuses in question are named and refuted in a rather general manner.

With regard to the lure of gain, any kind of venality or commercialism is rejected from the liturgy of the Mass³⁴. As for lack of veneration, bishops are warned to forbid unknown and vagrant *clerici vagi* from celebrating Holy Mass or notorious public sinners from performing liturgical services or taking part in ceremonies³⁵. Furthermore, in order to avoid any kind of profanation, celebrations in private homes or simply outside churches must not be tolerated under any circumstances, but only in buildings exclusively dedicated to divine worship, assigned and visited as such by the local ordinary³⁶.

All participants in the liturgy of the Mass must appear in decent clothing and show that they are willing to participate in the liturgy not only by their outward behaviour but also with a spirit and heart piously united in prayer³⁷.

All kinds of lascivious or impure melodies must be excluded from sacred music³⁸. Likewise, "all worldly occupations, vain or profane conversations, wandering about, noises and cries" must be banned from the church, "so that the house of God may truly appear as a house of prayer and may be designated as such"³⁹.

Finally, in order to banish all forms of superstition from divine service, bishops must ensure, through ordinances and sanctions, that priests celebrate only at the legally established times⁴⁰ and use in the celebration of Mass no other rites, prayers or ceremonies than those controlled by the Church and accepted by constant and praiseworthy usage⁴¹.

³⁴ "The conditions of any kind of payment, agreements, and anything given for new masses to be celebrated, as well as importunate and ungenerous demands for alms, rather than requests, and other such things, which are not far removed from simony or certainly from shameful profiteering, are to be prohibited altogether."

³⁵ On the other hand, the wish of the Bishop of Cava, who wanted to see explicitly written: "Prostitutes must be excluded from Mass" was not accepted (*Conc. Trid.*, VIII, 929, 52-53).

³⁶ This requirement essentially reappears in the first draft; but it is already found in previous reform proposals, such as that of the Archbishop of Braga, where, according to H. JEDIN (*Das Konzil*, p. 28), it is already stated in particular: "By prohibiting celebration in private homes and on simple tables where meals are taken, we wish to avoid the Sacrifice of the Mass being treated as a private devotion."

³⁷ In the original draft of the abuses, alongside the prescriptions concerning the cleanliness and integrity of the vestments to be worn (see *Conc. Trid.* VIII, 920, 28-36), there are also instructions concerning the clothing and physical disposition of the celebrant and his ministers (for example, when it is said in *Conc. Trid.* VIII, 919, 43-49: "Item provideatur, ut clerici, maxime sacerdotes, in habitu et tonsura incedant, tunica usque ad talos demissa, nec sericeis utantur ornamentis, caveantque, ne barbam, maxime circa os, nutriant, labrumque superius detondeant, ne sacratissimo sanguine Domini abluatur"), whereas in general there is no mention of the decency of clothing for those participating in divine service, as shown in the final draft.

³⁸ The theme of the reform of sacred music is already found in the first draft (see *Conc. Trid.*, VIII, 918, 12-15).

³⁹ MANSI 35, 133: "item saeculares omnes actiones, vana atque adeo profana colloquia, deambulationes, strepitus, clamores, arceant, ut domus Dei vere domus orationis esse videatur et dici possit". The final draft only includes some of the abuses mentioned in the first draft.

⁴⁰ This provision essentially reproduces the provisions already contained in the original draft.

⁴¹ In the first draft, which cites abuses in even more concrete terms, it is noted: "ut idem in dicenda missa ab omnibus sacrificantibus initium, idem verborum exitus servetur, neque ullus sibi suo arbitrio novos introitus, novas aliquas orationes, ut fieri plerumque videtur, comminiscatur, sed eodem ritu ubique ab omnibus res sacra peragatur" (*Conc. Trid.* VIII, 917, 1-3). A unified official version of the rubrics is proposed with the motivation: "ne novis aut diversis ritibus populus offendatur et scandalisetur" ("so that the people may not be offended and scandalised by new and multiple rites", *ibid.*, VIII, 917, 10).

Similarly, special rites that easily spread superstition are rejected, such as a specific number of candles for certain votive Masses in honour of more or less apocryphal saints⁴² .

To combat superstition, pastors are reminded of their duty to teach the faithful through catechism about the specific and heavenly efficacy of this Sacrifice, as well as their duty to require them to attend the parish church at least on Sundays and feast days⁴³ .

Finally, local ordinaries are strengthened by the authority given to them by the council as delegates of the Apostolic See, solemnly warned of the gravity and importance of what is established in the *Decretum de observandis*. They are enjoined "to forbid, order, correct, decide, and compel the faithful to observe these decisions without fail, under penalty of ecclesiastical censure or other sanctions which they determine on their own authority, notwithstanding any privilege, exemption, right of appeal, or other practices"⁴⁴ .

It should be noted that, unlike the preliminary drafts, the final *Decretum de observandis* contains no explicit norms for a single, mandatory model of the ordo missae for the entire Roman rite, excluding contrary abuses and widespread liturgical particularism. there is no explicit norm for a single, binding model of the ordo missae for the entire Roman rite, excluding contrary abuses and widespread liturgical particularism, nor even any norm for a general reform of the liturgy of the Mass and of individual prayers and ritual elements, which was to be undertaken in a remarkably wise and prudent manner only after the Council through the reform of the missal⁴⁵ .

Thus, the denunciation of abuses and the desires for reform expressed in the *Decretum de observandis* concern less a reform of the structural elements of the liturgy of the Mass contained in the ceremonial than a subjective and moral reform of the internal and external dispositions of the celebrant and the faithful during the liturgical action, as well as a reform of isolated elements related to the liturgical environment that are not directly prescribed by the rubrics of the ordo missae (such as sacred music).

⁴² This highlights an abuse in the first draft (see *Conc. Trid.* VIII, 917, 31-38).

⁴³ This prescription also has its origin in the first draft (see *Conc. Trid.* VIII, 921, 34-39).

⁴⁴ MANSI 35, 133: "prohibeant, mandent, corrigant, statuunt, atque ad ea inviolate servanda, censuris ecclesiasticis aliisque poenis, quae illorum arbitrio constituentur, fidelem populum compellant, non obstantibus privilegiis, exceptionibus, appellationibus, ac consuetudinibus quibuscumque". The first two drafts make no explicit mention of bishops being granted coercive liturgical jurisdiction by delegation from the Apostolic See. It is only in the third draft that bishops are solemnly designated as responsible for the work of liturgical reform, and this is undoubtedly due to the demands of the Council Fathers (for example, the statement by the Bishop of Brescia, where it is said: "et detur facultas episcopis puniendi transgressores, exemptione et appellatione non obstantibus" (see *Conc. Trid.* VIII, 937, 33-34).

⁴⁵ J. A. JUNGSMANN: *Missarum sollemnia*, I p. 171: "There was no longer any question of reforming the missal. This, like the reform of the breviary, was transferred to the responsibility of the Pope by a decree of the 25th Session." See also on this subject: H. JEDIN, *Das Konzil*, pp. 36-37.

Compared to the extensive catalogue of abuses in the liturgy of the Mass that was initially drawn up by the conciliar commission, the final document may seem rather succinct overall⁴⁶ .

Nevertheless, it includes general guidelines aimed at strengthening the dignity of liturgical action, which will contribute to preparing the Church for the renewal of the liturgy of the Mass. It was also easier to reach a consensus among the Council Fathers on these general guidelines than on many detailed questions, which would certainly have given rise to unnecessary and endless discussions in the atmosphere of the Council⁴⁷ or to overly radical criticisms that could have caused more harm than real benefit.

4. The Tridentine decree and its importance for the general reform of the liturgy

The *Decretum de observandis* represents a decisive step towards a unified and binding reform of the Roman liturgy⁴⁸ .

This decree can therefore only be considered as the modest beginning of a liturgical reform process that was only completed and implemented after the Council of Trent; but it was in any case a successful start that made it possible to establish and determine the main objectives of the subsequent reform process. It was thanks to this decree that the numerous attempts at reform undertaken in various dioceses and ecclesiastical provinces—which had already begun in the decades preceding the convocation of the Council of Trent⁴⁹ but which, in practice, had not been followed up and which, in some cases had only increased liturgical confusion—were able to come together in a unified reform that alone could be assured of success.

The cause of the overall failure of previous attempts at reform was not solely due to the negligence and lack of energy of those responsible for implementing them. The rules of law in liturgical matters allowed bishops and superiors of exempt religious orders⁵⁰ to develop their own

⁴⁶ Only one of the council fathers, the bishop of Krk, during the plenary meeting of 11 September 1562 after the first draft, objected to the fact that the large number of abuses noted had been reduced: "et cum ultra centum abusus collecti sint circa celebrationem missarum et soli et leviores in his canonibus adnotantur" (see *Conc. Trid.* VIII, 932, 33 - 933, 1), referring above all to those abuses concerning the celebrant and the ministers at the altar. It is precisely here that the denunciation of these abuses would be of particular interest today; for example, when the fact that the celebrant is sometimes incapable of performing the rites and performs them, to the scandal of the faithful, in an undignified and unedifying manner (see *ipso loco* VIII, 919, 1-2), or the fact that some celebrants do not show the seriousness necessary for the celebration and instead perform it as a spectacle, or sometimes, for no reason, begin to shout or whisper (see *ipso loco*, VIII, 919, 10-13) and even engage in disorderly gestures during the consecration or when making the sign of the cross, to the point that those present are tempted to laugh (see *ipso loco* VIII, 919, 28-29) ; or when he mentions the faulty practice of many celebrants who either speak so slowly that it becomes boring or speak so quickly that they cannot be understood (see *ipso loco*, VIII, 919, 53-55). Unfortunately, none of these points were discussed in detail in the final draft.

⁴⁷ See H. JEDIN, *Das Konzil* p. 32. To illustrate the real danger of such endless discussions, which rarely lead to a common position, we can cite the example of the plenary meetings' debate on the general prohibition of what is known as *Missa sicca*. This prohibition was retained until the last draft of the nine canons, yet remained so controversial among the council fathers that, in the end, it was not mentioned in the final text.

⁴⁸ According to J. A. JUNGSMANN: *Missarum sollemnia* I, 169-170, it was mainly Italy, Spain and Portugal that committed themselves to the unified reform of the liturgy and to a unified missal, while France and England were more inclined towards national action.

⁴⁹ A general overview of the many attempts to reform specific liturgical anomalies prior to the Council of Trent, not only in the country where the schism originated but also in France, Spain and Italy, can be found in H. JEDIN, *Das Konzil*, pp. 11-24; cf. also J. A. JUNGSMANN: *Missarum sollemnia* I, 169-170; A. NOCENT, *La Célébration*, 43).

⁵⁰ See H. JEDIN, *Das Konzil*, 5-6.

liturgical practices and therefore objectively predisposed them to abuse. Moreover, the authorities proved ineffective in practice due to multiple privileges established *praeter et contra legem*, often invoked to preserve abusive practices.

Thus, a vast and flourishing plurality of liturgical elements developed, especially in the liturgy of the Mass itself (prayers, hymns, prefaces, etc.), corresponding to the customs of each local church, but without the competent episcopal authority being able to oppose them. This liturgical chaos became increasingly difficult to control. The unity of the rites of the Mass itself, and consequently the unity of the faith of the ecclesial community within dioceses or ecclesiastical provinces, was seriously affected; it also resulted in the appearance in public worship⁵¹ of popular or private devotions that were dubious from a dogmatic point of view.

All of these elements therefore constituted, at the time of the Reformation, the ideal conditions for the infiltration, *via facti*, into the concrete forms of the liturgy, of innovative errors concerning the essential nature of the Sacrifice of the Mass. These errors spread, not so much through doctrinal theses that were aimed only at restricted circles, but through alterations in the liturgical expression of the faith, which were apparently of lesser significance but had a profound effect on the beliefs of the faithful. These alterations were also difficult to distinguish from the plurality of liturgical practices that were widespread at the time⁵².

The *Decretum de observandis* marked a significant step forward in the unification of the Roman rite for the entire Latin Church. This advance was in no way the result of a natural Roman centralism; it was simply an emergency measure, *ad bonum ecclesiae*, motivated by real abuses and the repeated failures of previous reforms; it was ultimately accepted unanimously.

The various liturgical traditions whose antiquity was attested were not arbitrarily suppressed⁵³, but were relativised by the highest authority of the Church (Pope and council), in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity.

The restoration of ecclesiastical authority in the liturgical sphere restored them to their rightful place. Thus, by appealing directly to the jurisdictional authority of the bishops, the *Decretum de observandis* gives it the support of the council and the Apostolic See and strengthens it against abuses under the principle of subsidiarity. Bishops are thus encouraged, in order to be more effective, to make use of canonical sanctions, and the obstacles posed by multiple privileges are removed.

⁵¹ Precisely in *the autumn of the Middle Ages*, when something too outdated often marked liturgical forms (see J. A. JUNGSMANN *Missarum sollemnia*, I, 162), we see forms of personal piety, necessarily charged with emotion, entering into the public worship of the Church, no doubt in response to a nominalist vision, and corrupting the true scholastic vision, which is always oriented towards the affirmation of the objective character of being (see H. JEDIN, *Das Konzil*, 6).

⁵² Thus Luther began skilfully with minimal changes to the outward appearance of liturgical practice, discarding the Roman canon and private masses, but otherwise retaining the structure of the Catholic Mass and even Latin as the liturgical language. H. JEDIN, *Das Konzil*, pp. 10-11, concludes: "The less visible the fundamental dogmatic break that separates Protestant worship from Catholic worship, the more serious are the side effects on Catholic worship: as a result of the break that occurred in matters of faith, the liturgical diversity that existed at the end of the Middle Ages fell into arbitrariness and chaos."

⁵³ Thus, for example, in the bull *Quo primum* (19 July 1570), Pope Saint Pius V takes into account, albeit to a limited extent, a *consuetudo in liturgicis* that runs counter to the new provisions of the reformed missal.

This subsidiary elevation of particular authorities by the universal authority of *potestas regendi* in the Church (both relativising and strengthening them) arose from the difficulties of the time. First inaugurated by the *Decretum de observandis* for the liturgy of the Mass, it was subsequently continued, without always having the same force or being applied with the same energy; it was thus to find its place in the positive legal order of the Latin Church, often being the only proven means in times of crisis. It is only by this means that we can be sure of preventing particular authorities from being bypassed (which would ultimately be contrary to the principle of distributive justice) when, in a serious crisis, they are ineffective; it is also the only means of effectively preserving both the necessary unity and the legitimate plurality *in liturgicis*, which are necessary to guarantee the intangible and full identity of the Church's faith over time.

Is it not possible, on this basis, to find principles of action to overcome the current liturgical crisis?