

SACROSANCTUM CONCILIUM

DAY THREE

THE REFORM OF THE SACRED LITURGY: WHAT DID THE COUNCIL ACTUALLY ASK TO BE CHANGED?

Chapter I, Sections 21-46

On Day Two, we examined one of the most important and perhaps most misunderstood expressions in *Sacrosanctum Concilium*: full, conscious, and active participation. We discovered that the Council did not invent this idea.

St. Pius X had already called the faithful toward active participation in the sacred mysteries. Pius XII continued that work and emphasized the interior participation of the soul in the Sacrifice of Christ. And *Sacrosanctum Concilium* itself explicitly spoke of participation that is both internal and external.

We also discovered something that will become increasingly important as we continue this study. We must distinguish between three things:

What the Council actually commanded.

What legitimate Church authority subsequently introduced.

What people eventually did in the name of Vatican II.

Today that distinction becomes essential. Because now, beginning with Section 21, we arrive at the part of the Constitution that explicitly calls for the reform of the sacred liturgy. And immediately we encounter words that deserve careful attention:

Restoration.

Reform.

Change.

Tradition.

Innovation.

Latin.

The vernacular.

Scripture.

Adaptation.

Authority.

These paragraphs are extraordinarily important because many of the things Catholics associate with Vatican II are connected in some way with the liturgical reform that followed the Council.

But once again our question cannot simply be: What happened after Vatican II? Our first question must be: What did Vatican II actually say? And Sections 21-46 give us an opportunity to begin answering that question with much greater precision.

Perhaps nowhere is that more important than Section 23, where the Council establishes a principle that should govern the entire reform: **There must be no innovations unless the good of the Church genuinely and certainly requires them.**

And even when changes are introduced, the Council says that care must be taken that new forms grow organically from forms already existing. Those words deserve to remain before us throughout today's study. Because the Council clearly calls for reform. But it does not call for unlimited change. It calls for development. But not liturgical reinvention. It permits adaptation. But within the authority and discipline of the Church. It allows greater use of the vernacular. But it also says that the use of the Latin language is to be preserved in the Latin rites.

And perhaps most importantly, Section 22 declares something that should eliminate an enormous amount of confusion. **No one – not even a priest – may change the liturgy on his own authority.**

So today we enter the heart of the question. What kind of reform did the Council envision? And how closely did what followed correspond to the principles the Council itself established? We will not assume the answer. We will read. We will remember what came before. We will listen to Benedict XVI. And then we will begin comparing the principles of the Council with the liturgical reality that eventually emerged.

I. READ

Read Chapter I, Sections 21-46: "The Reform of the Sacred Liturgy."

21. In order that the Christian people may more certainly derive an abundance of graces from the sacred liturgy, holy Mother Church desires to undertake with great care a general restoration of the liturgy itself. For the liturgy is made up of immutable elements divinely instituted, and of elements subject to change. These not only may but ought to be changed with the passage of time if they have suffered

from the intrusion of anything out of harmony with the inner nature of the liturgy or have become unsuited to it.

In this restoration, both texts and rites should be drawn up so that they express more clearly the holy things which they signify; the Christian people, so far as possible, should be enabled to understand them with ease and to take part in them fully, actively, and as befits a community.

Wherefore the sacred Council establishes the following general norms:

A) General norms

22. 1. Regulation of the sacred liturgy depends solely on the authority of the Church, that is, on the Apostolic See and, as laws may determine, on the bishop.

2. In virtue of power conceded by the law, the regulation of the liturgy within certain defined limits belongs also to various kinds of competent territorial bodies of bishops legitimately established.

3. Therefore no other person, even if he be a priest, may add, remove, or change anything in the liturgy on his own authority.

23. That sound tradition may be retained, and yet the way remain open to legitimate progress careful investigation is always to be made into each part of the liturgy which is to be revised. This investigation should be theological, historical, and pastoral. Also the general laws governing the structure and meaning of the liturgy must be studied in conjunction with the experience derived from recent liturgical reforms and from the indults conceded to various places. Finally, there must be no innovations unless the good of the Church genuinely and certainly requires them; and care must be taken that any new forms adopted should in some way grow organically from forms already existing.

As far as possible, notable differences between the rites used in adjacent regions must be carefully avoided.

24. Sacred scripture is of the greatest importance in the celebration of the liturgy. For it is from scripture that lessons are read and explained in the homily, and psalms are sung; the prayers, collects, and liturgical songs are scriptural in their inspiration and their force, and it is from the scriptures that actions and signs derive their meaning. Thus to achieve the restoration, progress, and adaptation of the sacred liturgy, it is essential to promote that warm and living love for scripture to which the venerable tradition of both eastern and western rites gives testimony.

25. The liturgical books are to be revised as soon as possible; experts are to be employed on the task, and bishops are to be consulted, from various parts of the world.

B) Norms drawn from the hierarchic and communal nature of the Liturgy

26. Liturgical services are not private functions, but are celebrations of the Church, which is the "sacrament of unity," namely, the holy people united and ordered under their bishops [33]

Therefore liturgical services pertain to the whole body of the Church; they manifest it and have effects upon it; but they concern the individual members of the Church in different ways, according to their differing rank, office, and actual participation.

27. It is to be stressed that whenever rites, according to their specific nature, make provision for communal celebration involving the presence and active participation of the faithful, this way of celebrating them is to be preferred, so far as possible, to a celebration that is individual and quasi-private.

This applies with especial force to the celebration of Mass and the administration of the sacraments, even though every Mass has of itself a public and social nature.

28. In liturgical celebrations each person, minister or layman, who has an office to perform, should do all of, but only, those parts which pertain to his office by the nature of the rite and the principles of liturgy.

29. Servers, lectors commentators, and members of the choir also exercise a genuine liturgical function. They ought, therefore, to discharge their office with the sincere piety and decorum demanded by so exalted a ministry and rightly expected of them by God's people.

Consequently they must all be deeply imbued with the spirit of the liturgy, each in his own measure, and they must be trained to perform their functions in a correct and orderly manner.

30. To promote active participation, the people should be encouraged to take part by means of acclamations, responses, psalmody, antiphons, and songs, as well as by actions, gestures, and bodily attitudes. And at the proper times all should observe a reverent silence.

31. The revision of the liturgical books must carefully attend to the provision of rubrics also for the people's parts.

32. The liturgy makes distinctions between persons according to their liturgical function and sacred Orders, and there are liturgical laws providing for due honors to be given to civil authorities. Apart from these instances, no special honors are to be paid in the liturgy to any private persons or classes of persons, whether in the ceremonies or by external display.

C) Norms based upon the didactic and pastoral nature of the Liturgy

33. Although the sacred liturgy is above all things the worship of the divine Majesty, it likewise contains much instruction for the faithful [34]. For in the liturgy God speaks to His people and Christ is still proclaiming His gospel. And the people reply to God both by song and prayer.

Moreover, the prayers addressed to God by the priest who presides over the assembly in the person of Christ are said in the name of the entire holy people and of all present. And the visible signs used by the liturgy to signify invisible divine things have been chosen by Christ or the Church. Thus not only when things are read "which were written for our instruction" (Rom. 15:4), but also when the Church prays or sings or acts, the faith of those taking part is nourished and their

minds are raised to God, so that they may offer Him their rational service and more abundantly receive His grace.

Wherefore, in the revision of the liturgy, the following general norms should be observed:

34. The rites should be distinguished by a noble simplicity; they should be short, clear, and unencumbered by useless repetitions; they should be within the people's powers of comprehension, and normally should not require much explanation.

35. That the intimate connection between words and rites may be apparent in the liturgy:

1) In sacred celebrations there is to be more reading from holy scripture, and it is to be more varied and suitable.

2) Because the sermon is part of the liturgical service, the best place for it is to be indicated even in the rubrics, as far as the nature of the rite will allow; the ministry of preaching is to be fulfilled with exactitude and fidelity. The sermon, moreover, should draw its content mainly from scriptural and liturgical sources, and its character should be that of a proclamation of God's wonderful works in the history of salvation, the mystery of Christ, ever made present and active within us, especially in the celebration of the liturgy.

3) Instruction which is more explicitly liturgical should also be given in a variety of ways; if necessary, short directives to be spoken by the priest or proper minister should be provided within the rites themselves. But they should occur only at the more suitable moments, and be in prescribed or similar words.

4) Bible services should be encouraged, especially on the vigils of the more solemn feasts, on some weekdays in Advent and Lent, and on Sundays and feast days. They are particularly to be commended in places where no priest is available; when this is so, a deacon or some other person authorized by the bishop should preside over the celebration.

36. 1. Particular law remaining in force, the use of the Latin language is to be preserved in the Latin rites.

2. But since the use of the mother tongue, whether in the Mass, the administration of the sacraments, or other parts of the liturgy, frequently may be of great advantage to the people, the limits of its employment may be extended. This will apply in the first place to the readings and directives, and to some of the prayers and chants, according to the regulations on this matter to be laid down separately in subsequent chapters.

3. These norms being observed, it is for the competent territorial ecclesiastical authority mentioned in Art. 22, 2, to decide whether, and to what extent, the vernacular language is to be used; their decrees are to be approved, that is, confirmed, by the Apostolic See. And, whenever it seems to be called for, this authority is to consult with bishops of neighboring regions which have the same language.

4. Translations from the Latin text into the mother tongue intended for use in the liturgy must be approved by the competent territorial ecclesiastical authority mentioned above.

D) Norms for adapting the Liturgy to the culture and traditions of peoples

37. Even in the liturgy, the Church has no wish to impose a rigid uniformity in matters which do not implicate the faith or the good of the whole community; rather does she respect and foster the genius and talents of the various races and peoples. Anything in these peoples' way of life which is not indissolubly bound up with superstition and error she studies with sympathy and, if possible, preserves intact. Sometimes in fact she admits such things into the liturgy itself, so long as they harmonize with its true and authentic spirit.

38. Provisions shall also be made, when revising the liturgical books, for legitimate variations and adaptations to different groups, regions, and peoples, especially in mission lands, provided that the substantial unity of the Roman rite is preserved; and this should be borne in mind when drawing up the rites and devising rubrics.

39. Within the limits set by the typical editions of the liturgical books, it shall be for the competent territorial ecclesiastical authority mentioned in Art. 22, 2, to specify adaptations, especially in the case of the administration of the sacraments, the sacramentals, processions, liturgical language, sacred music, and the arts, but according to the fundamental norms laid down in this Constitution.

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

1) The competent territorial ecclesiastical authority mentioned in Art. 22, 2, must, in this matter, carefully and prudently consider which elements from the traditions and culture of individual peoples might appropriately be admitted into divine worship. Adaptations which are judged to be useful or necessary should then be submitted to the Apostolic See, by whose consent they may be introduced.

2) To ensure that adaptations may be made with all the circumspection which they demand, the Apostolic See will grant power to this same territorial ecclesiastical authority to permit and to direct, as the case requires, the necessary preliminary experiments over a determined period of time among certain groups suited for the purpose.

3) Because liturgical laws often involve special difficulties with respect to adaptation, particularly in mission lands, men who are experts in these matters must be employed to formulate them.

E) Promotion of Liturgical Life in Diocese and Parish

41. The bishop is to be considered as the high priest of his flock, from whom the life in Christ of his faithful is in some way derived and dependent.

Therefore all should hold in great esteem the liturgical life of the diocese centered around the bishop, especially in his cathedral church; they must be convinced that the pre-eminent manifestation of the Church consists in the full active participation of all God's holy people in these liturgical celebrations, especially in the same

eucharist, in a single prayer, at one altar, at which there presides the bishop surrounded by his college of priests and by his ministers [35].

42. But because it is impossible for the bishop always and everywhere to preside over the whole flock in his Church, he cannot do other than establish lesser groupings of the faithful. Among these the parishes, set up locally under a pastor who takes the place of the bishop, are the most important: for in some manner they represent the visible Church constituted throughout the world.

And therefore the liturgical life of the parish and its relationship to the bishop must be fostered theoretically and practically among the faithful and clergy; efforts also must be made to encourage a sense of community within the parish, above all in the common celebration of the Sunday Mass.

F) The Promotion of Pastoral-Liturgical Action

43. Zeal for the promotion and restoration of the liturgy is rightly held to be a sign of the providential dispositions of God in our time, as a movement of the Holy Spirit in His Church. It is today a distinguishing mark of the Church's life, indeed of the whole tenor of contemporary religious thought and action.

So that this pastoral-liturgical action may become even more vigorous in the Church, the sacred Council decrees:

44. It is desirable that the competent territorial ecclesiastical authority mentioned in Art. 22, 2, set up a liturgical commission, to be assisted by experts in liturgical science, sacred music, art and pastoral practice. So far as possible the commission should be aided by some kind of Institute for Pastoral Liturgy, consisting of persons who are eminent in these matters, and including laymen as circumstances suggest. Under the direction of the above-mentioned territorial ecclesiastical authority the commission is to regulate pastoral-liturgical action throughout the territory, and to promote studies and necessary experiments whenever there is question of adaptations to be proposed to the Apostolic See.

45. For the same reason every diocese is to have a commission on the sacred liturgy under the direction of the bishop, for promoting the liturgical apostolate.

Sometimes it may be expedient that several dioceses should form between them one single commission which will be able to promote the liturgy by common consultation.

46. Besides the commission on the sacred liturgy, every diocese, as far as possible, should have commissions for sacred music and sacred art.

These three commissions must work in closest collaboration; indeed it will often be best to fuse the three of them into one single commission.

Because this is a much larger section than day two's reading, it may help to watch for several major principles as you read.

Section 21 begins by distinguishing between two kinds of elements within the liturgy: those divinely instituted and therefore immutable, and those which can change. The Council therefore acknowledges that legitimate liturgical development is possible. But change is not presented as an end in itself. The purpose is that the Christian people may more abundantly receive the graces flowing from the sacred liturgy.

Then Section 22 establishes who possesses authority over the liturgy. That authority belongs to the Church. It belongs principally to the Apostolic See and, according to law, to the bishop. Certain territorial bodies of bishops may also possess authority where the law grants it. And then comes one of the clearest statements in the entire Constitution:

No other person – even if he is a priest – may add, remove, or change anything in the liturgy on his own authority.

This is extremely important. The Council calling for liturgical reform does not mean the Council authorized liturgical creativity by individual priests or communities. Quite the opposite. The very section authorizing reform simultaneously establishes limits upon who may carry it out.

Then comes Section 23. This paragraph may be one of the most important passages in the entire Constitution for understanding what the Council intended by reform. The Council requires careful theological, historical, and pastoral investigation before revision is undertaken. It requires attention to the laws governing the structure and meaning of the liturgy. It requires that the likely effects of proposed changes be considered. And then it gives two extraordinary principles:

There should be no innovations unless the good of the Church genuinely and certainly requires them.

And:

New forms should grow organically from forms already existing.

These are not the words of revolution. They are the words of cautious development.

Section 24 then gives Sacred Scripture an especially important place in the restoration of the liturgy. The Council points out that Scripture provides the readings, psalms, prayers, hymns, signs, and actions from which the liturgy draws its meaning.

Section 25 calls for the revision of the liturgical books.

Sections 26-32 emphasize the ecclesial and public nature of the liturgy. Liturgical celebrations are actions of the Church, not private possessions. The Council therefore prefers communal celebration when the nature of the rite allows it, while still preserving legitimate individual celebration. It also insists that each person should perform **all and only those parts which belong to his office.**

That phrase is significant. Participation does not mean everyone does everything. The liturgy contains different offices and different roles.

Section 30 again calls for participation through acclamations, responses, psalmody, antiphons, songs, actions, gestures, and bodily attitudes. But then the Council adds something that must not be forgotten: **Sacred silence is also to be observed at the proper times.**

Silence, therefore, is not an absence of participation. It is part of the liturgy envisioned by the Council.

Section 33 reminds us that although the liturgy contains instruction for the faithful, worship is directed principally to God.

Sections 34-36 then address the character of the rites and the question of language. The rites should possess a noble simplicity. They should be clear. Unnecessary repetitions should be avoided.

But then we reach Section 36. And here we must read carefully. The Council does **not** say: Latin is abolished. It says the opposite. **The use of the Latin language is to be preserved in the Latin rites,** except where particular law provides otherwise.

The Council then acknowledges that the vernacular may frequently be useful, particularly in readings, directives, and certain prayers and chants, and therefore allows its use to be extended according to the norms established by competent ecclesiastical authority.

That is considerably more nuanced than the popular memory that "Vatican II got rid of Latin." It did not.

Sections 37-40 address legitimate adaptation. The Church does not desire a rigid uniformity in matters that do not involve faith or the good of the entire community. The Council therefore permits adaptations for different peoples and cultures. But again, this does not mean unrestricted local experimentation. Adaptations belong within a structure of ecclesiastical authority and, in more radical cases, require the involvement and approval of the Apostolic See.

Finally, sections 41-46 turn our attention to the bishop and to the commissions that would promote and regulate the liturgical apostolate. The bishop stands at the center of the liturgical life of his diocese. The cathedral liturgy is presented as especially important. Dioceses are to establish liturgical commissions, and where possible commissions for sacred music and sacred art as well.

So what emerges from Sections 21-46? The Council unquestionably desires reform. But the reform it describes is: careful, authoritative, pastoral, rooted in Scripture, respectful of tradition, open to legitimate development, and restrained by the principle that innovation must be genuinely required by the good of the Church.

That is the standard the Council itself gives us.

II. SCRIPTURE

The Council's call for reform must be understood within a profoundly biblical understanding of worship.

Section 24 tells us that Sacred Scripture is of the greatest importance in the celebration of the liturgy. That should not surprise us. Christian worship did not begin as a human invention. It arises from God's revelation and reaches its fulfillment in Jesus Christ.

St. Paul tells us: **"For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you" (I Corinthians 11:23).**

Notice the movement. Paul received something. And then he handed it on. That pattern – receiving and handing on – lies at the heart of Catholic Tradition. The Church does not approach worship as though every generation were beginning again. She receives. She guards. She hands on.

And because she is a living Church, legitimate development can occur within what she has received. But development is not the same thing as invention.

This is why St. Paul also tells the Thessalonians: **"Therefore, brethren, stand fast; and hold the traditions which you have learned, whether by word, or by our epistle" (II Thessalonians 2:15).**

That does not mean nothing in the Church can ever develop. It means development takes place within something already received. This helps illuminate the Council's language in Section 23. New forms should grow organically from existing forms.

There is another biblical principle here. St. Paul writes: **"But let all things be done decently, and according to order" (I Corinthians 14:40).**

The sacred liturgy is not a place for individual self-expression detached from ecclesiastical authority. That principle appears clearly in Section 22. The priest is not the owner of the liturgy. The congregation is not the owner of the liturgy. The parish liturgy committee is not the owner of the liturgy. The liturgy belongs to the Church because the worship being offered is ultimately the worship of Christ Himself.

And Scripture also helps us understand why the Council places such importance upon the Word of God. After His Resurrection, Our Lord walked with the disciples on the road to Emmaus.

"And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded to them in all the scriptures, the things that were concerning him" (Luke 24:27).

Then, after opening the Scriptures to them, He was made known: **"In the breaking of bread" (Luke 24:35).**

Word and Sacrament.

Scripture and Eucharist.

The pattern is already visible.

The Council's desire for Catholics to encounter Sacred Scripture more abundantly in the liturgy therefore has deep biblical roots. But there is another biblical image worth remembering. Our Lord says: **"Every scribe instructed in the kingdom of heaven, is like to a man that is a householder, who bringeth forth out of his treasure new things and old" (Matthew 13:52).**

New and old. Not new instead of old. Not old merely because it is old. Not new merely because it is new. The Catholic instinct has always been deeper than either extreme. The Church receives a treasure. She lives from it. She may develop its expression. But she does not cease to recognize it as something received.

III. REMEMBER – WHAT CAME BEFORE?

This section is especially important today because the desire for liturgical reform did not suddenly appear in 1963. Once again, Pope Pius XII provides an essential point of comparison.

In *Mediator Dei*, published in 1947, Pius XII had already distinguished between elements of the liturgy instituted by God and therefore unchangeable, and human elements capable of modification. That language is strikingly similar to Section 21 of *Sacrosanctum Concilium*.

Pius XII recognized that the liturgy had developed throughout history. He did not teach that every ceremony existing at a particular moment had existed unchanged from the Apostles. The Church is living. Liturgical discipline can develop. Rites can develop. Certain practices can be altered by legitimate ecclesiastical authority.

So once again we find continuity. The Council did not invent the idea that the liturgy could develop. But Pius XII also placed strong boundaries around that development. He warned against unauthorized innovations. He warned against treating antiquity as though something were automatically superior simply because it was older.

This became known as a warning against archaeologism – the assumption that the earliest recoverable form of a practice must necessarily be the best form.

That is extremely important. Authentic reform is not simply: **Find the oldest practice possible and restore it.**

The Church's liturgy has genuinely developed through the centuries. Latest developments are not automatically corruptions. A thousand years of Catholic worship cannot simply be dismissed as an unfortunate detour between the early Church and modern scholarship.

Pius XII also spoke directly about Latin. He called Latin a beautiful sign of the Church's unity and a protection for doctrinal integrity, while simultaneously acknowledging that the vernacular could be useful in certain rites when authorized by the Church.

Again, notice the similarity. Latin retained. Vernacular permitted when useful. Competent authority governing its use.

Then came Pius XII's own liturgical reforms, including significant changes to Holy Week. Therefore, it would be inaccurate to imagine the Church before Vatican II as absolutely opposed to liturgical reform. She was already reforming. The real question is not: Can the liturgy ever change? Catholic history clearly answers yes. The deeper question is: What principles should govern legitimate liturgical change?

And here *Mediator Dei* and *Sacrosanctum Concilium* appear remarkably close. Change must occur under legitimate authority. The Church's tradition must be respected. Pastoral good matters. Participation matters. Scripture matters. But innovation for its own sake is not the goal.

This makes Section 23 especially important. The Council did not merely permit reform. It established a test for reform.

Is the proposed innovation genuinely and certainly required by the good of the Church?

And then another:

Does the new form grow organically from what already exists?

Those two questions may become extraordinarily important as we eventually examine the reforms that followed the Council.

IV. BENEDICT XVI

Perhaps no modern pope thought more deeply about the relationship between Vatican II and the liturgy than Benedict XVI. And his central concern was not simply whether the Church should accept or reject the Council. He rejected that false choice. The deeper question was how the Council should be interpreted.

Benedict repeatedly resisted what he called a **hermeneutic of discontinuity and rupture** – the idea that Vatican II created an entirely new Church separated from everything that came before it. Instead, he called for a **hermeneutic of reform in continuity**.

That distinction is enormously helpful when reading Sections 21-46. Reform is real. Continuity is real. They are not enemies. Authentic Catholic reform does not require pretending nothing can ever change. But neither does reform mean that the Church awakens one morning and begins again.

The Church before the Council and the Church after the Council are the same Church. The liturgy therefore cannot be treated as though one generation has authority simply to manufacture a new form of worship according to contemporary preferences.

This helps us understand why Section 23's phrase "organic growth" is so important. A tree grows. Its appearance changes. Its branches extend. It may be pruned. But an oak tree does not organically develop into something unrelated to the oak that existed before it. Organic development implies identity through change. Benedict's writings on the liturgy repeatedly return us to this principle.

He also strongly resisted the idea that the liturgy is something a community constructs for itself. The liturgy is received. That is why obedience to liturgical form can itself become spiritually important. The priest does not need to make the liturgy interesting by constantly inserting himself into it. The community does not need to manufacture a sense of fellowship. The liturgy already possesses an objective reality greater than the personalities of those celebrating it.

Benedict also helps us with the question of Latin. The Council permitted an expanded use of the vernacular. But Benedict did not interpret that permission as meaning Latin had become irrelevant.

In *Sacramentum Caritatis*, he encouraged future priests to be capable of celebrating the Mass in Latin and encouraged the faithful to know common Latin prayers and to sing portions of Gregorian chant. Why? Because Latin can express something about the universality of the Church.

A Catholic from Texas, a Catholic from Poland, a Catholic from Nigeria, a Catholic from France, and a Catholic from Japan belong to the same Church. The sacred liturgy is larger than the local community. Benedict therefore helps us avoid two opposite mistakes.

One would be to say: **Nothing should ever have changed.**

The Council did not say that.

The other would be: **Vatican II intended the older liturgical inheritance to disappear.**

The Council does not say that either.

The more Catholic approach is harder. Reform and continuity must remain together.

V. PILLARS COMMENTARY

Now we arrive at the heart of today's investigation.

Sections 21-46 are among the most important paragraphs we have encountered because here the Council begins giving us standards by which the reform itself can eventually be evaluated. And the first thing we must admit clearly is this: **Vatican II intended liturgical reform.** We should not minimize that.

Anyone claiming that *Sacrosanctum Concilium* intended absolutely no meaningful liturgical changes would have difficulty reconciling that claim with Section 21. The Council explicitly called for a general restoration of the liturgy. Liturgical books were to be revised. Certain rites were to be simplified. Scripture was to be given a more abundant place. The vernacular could be extended. Adaptations could be made. The faithful were to participate actively. So reform was intended.

But now comes the equally important truth: **Not every change that subsequently occurred was explicitly commanded by the Council.**

And even changes legitimately introduced afterward must still be distinguished from the Council's own text. That distinction is not an attack upon Vatican II. It is simply historical accuracy.

Let us begin with Latin. Section 36 does **not** say: The vernacular shall replace Latin. It says that the use of Latin is to be preserved in the Latin rites, while permitting wider use of the vernacular. Those are not the same proposition. So when Catholics eventually experienced parishes in which Latin disappeared almost completely, we have to ask a historical question:

How did we move from "Latin is to be preserved" to a practical situation in which generations of Catholics could attend Mass their entire lives without hearing more than an occasional Latin phrase?

The same principle applies to Gregorian chant, which we will encounter even more explicitly later in the Constitution. Then consider sacred silence. The Council explicitly requires it.

Yet many Catholics experienced a postconciliar liturgical culture in which almost every moment seemed to require words, music, explanation, movement, or commentary. Again we must ask: Was that demanded by Vatican II? Sections 21-46 do not suggest it.

Then there is Section 22. This may be one of the most ignored paragraphs in the entire Constitution. **No priest may change the liturgy on his own authority.**

Think about how many practices Catholics have encountered over the decades that were justified with phrases such as:

"Our parish does it this way."

"Father likes to do this."

"We thought this would be more meaningful."

"Our liturgy committee decided."

"We wanted everyone to feel included."

Those intentions may sometimes have been sincere. But sincerity does not create liturgical authority. The priest is a servant of the liturgy. The congregation receives the liturgy. Neither possesses the authority to reinvent it.

And now we come to Section 23. Perhaps this paragraph should be written above the door of every room in which liturgical reform is discussed: **No innovation unless the good of the Church genuinely and certainly requires it.**

And:

New forms should grow organically from existing forms.

Those principles raise serious historical questions. When we eventually compare the liturgy immediately before the Council with the liturgy that emerged after the reform, we will need to ask:

Which changes were explicitly requested by the Council?
Which changes were introduced afterward by legitimate authority?
Which changes arose experimentally or locally?
Which changes represented organic development?
Which changes were genuine pastoral necessities?
Which changes went further than the Council's text itself required?

And perhaps most importantly:

Did the cumulative effect of many individually authorized changes create an experience of rupture even when rupture was not the Council's stated principle?

That is a harder question. And we should not answer it carelessly. But neither should we be afraid to ask it.

Consider what Sections 21-46 **DO NOT SAY**. They do not say that every altar must be turned toward the people. They do not say that communion rails must be removed. They do not say that Latin must disappear. They do not say that Gregorian chant should disappear. They do not say that sacred music should be replaced by popular musical styles. They do not say that tabernacles should be removed from prominent places. They do not say that sanctuaries should be stripped of traditional ornamentation. They do not say that priests should improvise prayers. They do not say that every moment of silence should be eliminated. They do not say that the distinction between sanctuary and nave should disappear. They do not say that everything inherited from earlier centuries should be viewed with suspicion.

That does not automatically mean that every postconciliar practice not explicitly mentioned here is illegitimate. That would be another mistake. The Council established principles and entrusted implementation to legitimate ecclesiastical authority. Therefore, something does not have to appear word-for-word in *Sacrosanctum Concilium* in order to be lawfully introduced afterward. We must remain intellectually honest about that. But neither can we reverse the logic and claim: Vatican II required it when Vatican II did not actually require it. This is why our three distinctions remain essential:

What the Council commanded.
What legitimate authority later introduced.
What people eventually did in the name of the Council.

Now another question appears. Section 23 tells us that new forms should grow organically from existing forms. What does **organic** mean? Organic growth normally possesses continuity. The thing develops while remaining recognizably itself. That does not mean no substantial reform can occur. But it does raise a legitimate question about scale.

At what point can the number and magnitude of changes become so great that ordinary people experience not development but replacement? That question deserves serious historical investigation. But we are not ready to answer it yet. We need more evidence.

There is another extremely important aspect of these sections: Scripture. One of the genuine goals of the reform was to open the treasures of Sacred Scripture more abundantly to the faithful. That should not be dismissed.

Catholics should know Scripture. Catholics should hear Scripture. Catholics should understand how the entire history of salvation culminates in Christ.

A criticism of certain aspects of postconciliar implementation should never become a rejection of authentic goals the Council itself expressed. This study cannot become: **Everything before Vatican II was perfect; everything afterward was wrong.** History is more complicated than that. Nor can it become: **Everything before Vatican II was defective; Vatican II finally fixed the Church.** That is equally untenable.

The Church is our Mother. The Holy Spirit did not abandon her before 1962. And He did not abandon her after 1965. Our task is therefore not to choose a liturgical tribe and defend it at all costs. Our task is to seek the truth. And Sections 21-46 give us a remarkable standard for doing that.

Tradition and legitimate progress. Not tradition without development. Not development without tradition. Both. Section 23 even places them together. That may be one of the keys to the entire document.

There is something else here that should not be overlooked. The Council envisioned reform occurring under authority. The bishop matters. The Apostolic See matters. Liturgical commissions matter. Competence matters. Careful study matters. Theological study matters. Historical study matters. Pastoral study matters.

This was not supposed to be an uncontrolled liturgical revolution spreading spontaneously from parish to parish. Whatever reform occurred was supposed to be disciplined by the Church. And so perhaps the question with which we should leave Day Three is this: **If the Council called simultaneously for reform and continuity, did the implementation always preserve both?**

That is not an accusation. It is a question. But it may become one of the most important questions of our entire study. Because if reform loses continuity, reform can become rupture. And if continuity refuses every legitimate reform, continuity can become mere immobility. The Catholic way must somehow hold both together.

The Council itself gives us the standard:

Sound tradition.
Legitimate progress.

And whatever judgment we eventually make about the liturgical reform must take both seriously.

VI. REFLECT

As we finish today's reading, ask yourself –

Before reading Sections 21-46, what did I assume Vatican II actually said about changing the Mass?

Have I ever attributed something to Vatican II without first checking whether the Council actually commanded it?

What does it mean to me that the Council itself says there should be no innovations unless the good of the Church genuinely and certainly requires them?

What do I think "organic growth" should look like in the sacred liturgy?

Can I distinguish between legitimate development and unnecessary innovation?

Did I know that *Sacrosanctum Concilium* says the use of Latin is to be preserved in the Latin rites?

If the Council called for Latin to be preserved while allowing greater use of the vernacular, how should those two principles exist together?

Do I understand sacred silence as something the Council explicitly desired rather than as an obstacle to participation?

Have I ever experienced a priest, parish, or community changing the liturgy according to personal preference?

Do I understand why the Council says that no priest may change the liturgy on his own authority?

When I think about liturgical reform, am I tempted to assume that older automatically means better?

Am I equally tempted to assume that newer automatically means better?

Can I recognize genuine fruits of the liturgical reform while still asking difficult questions about aspects of its implementation?

Can I criticize abuses without blaming the Council for things the Council never said?

Can I examine legitimate postconciliar reforms honestly even when they went beyond what the Council explicitly required?

And perhaps the most difficult question:

Am I willing to follow the evidence even if it challenges the story about Vatican II that I have always believed?

VII. DEEPER THOUGHTS TO CONCLUDE THIS DAY

There is something profoundly Catholic about the phrase: "Sound tradition may be retained, and yet the way remain open to legitimate progress."

Those two realities belong together.

Tradition.
Progress.
Receiving.
Developing.
Remembering.
Growing.

Perhaps many of our arguments about the liturgy become distorted because we separate things the Church intends to hold together. One person says: Nothing should change. Another says: Everything must change. But the Church says something more difficult. Receive what has been handed down. Guard what is sacred. Understand why it exists. And when genuine pastoral need requires development, allow that development to emerge carefully, organically, and under legitimate authority. That requires humility from everyone. And it requires humility from us as we study these documents.

We already have opinions. We already have experiences. Some of us have known beautiful celebrations of the reformed liturgy. Some have known irreverence, improvisation, banality, and confusion. Some have discovered the older Roman liturgy and wondered why so much of that inheritance seemed to disappear. Others have found in the reformed liturgy a deeper encounter with Scripture and a more conscious participation in the worship of the Church. Those experiences are real. But experience alone cannot tell us what the Council intended. For that, we must read. And today the text has told us something important.

The Council wanted reform. But it wanted careful reform. The Council wanted participation. But it also wanted sacred silence. The Council permitted greater use of the vernacular. But it also ordered that Latin be preserved. The Council allowed adaptation. But it placed adaptation beneath ecclesiastical authority. The Council wanted progress. But it called that progress legitimate. The Council allowed new forms. But it said they should grow organically from

existing forms. And the Council permitted innovation only when the good of the Church genuinely required it.

Those qualifications matter. Perhaps much of the history we are trying to understand lies inside those qualifications.

But now we must go further. Because the story did not end when *Sacrosanctum Concilium* was promulgated. The Council gave principles. Then men were entrusted with implementing them.

Paul VI established the **Consilium for the Implementation of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy**, and the Holy See itself described its task as preparing the general liturgical reform on the basis of the principles contained in the Constitution. Annibale Bugnini was appointed its secretary. That fact matters enormously.

Bugnini was not a marginal figure standing outside the reform. He was at the center of its implementation. His influence, his methods, his liturgical vision, and the controversies surrounding him therefore belong to any serious investigation of what happened after the Council. And those controversies are not insignificant.

For decades, grave accusations have surrounded Bugnini, including allegations concerning Freemasonry and claims that information about him eventually reached Paul VI. Those allegations should not simply be omitted because they are uncomfortable. Neither should we build our entire judgment upon accusations alone. But they belong to the history and they deserve examination.

More importantly, even apart from every disputed allegation, there is something we can examine directly: the reform itself. We can examine what Bugnini and the Consilium proposed. We can examine what Paul VI approved. We can examine what changed. We can compare the Roman liturgy before the reform with the Roman liturgy that emerged afterward.

And eventually, in 1969, Paul VI promulgated the new Roman Missal and the new *Ordo Missae* – what Catholics commonly call the **Novus Ordo**. Paul VI himself described the new *Ordo Missae* as the outcome of the reform of the Mass desired by the Council, and his apostolic constitution acknowledged that the revised Missal involved substantial changes, including new Eucharistic Prayers, a reworked Order of Mass, an expanded lectionary, and considerable revision of other parts of the Missal.

This means that we can no longer speak only in vague terms about “liturgical development.” A concrete new order of Mass emerged.

And Section 23 gives us a standard by which to examine it.

The Council said that sound tradition was to be retained. It said there were to be no innovations unless the good of the Church genuinely and certainly required them. It said that new forms should grow organically from forms already existing.

Those are not decorative phrases. They are criteria. So now a much more difficult question stands before us: **Did the Novus Ordo truly represent the organic growth envisioned by Section 23?**

That question cannot simply be brushed aside by saying that the reform was legally promulgated. The authority of Paul VI tells us that the reform was officially promulgated by the Church. But questions of prudence, continuity, scale, organic development, and historical rupture still remain legitimate questions. And they become even more serious when we consider how extensive the transformation was.

The older Roman liturgy had developed across many centuries. Then, within only a few years, Catholics saw substantial changes in the prayers of the Mass, the lectionary, the offertory, the Eucharistic Prayer, the calendar, the rubrics, the use of Latin, and the overall experience of the liturgy.

And beyond the official texts, still other changes became widespread: Latin largely disappeared. Celebration facing the people became nearly universal. Communion rails often disappeared. Traditional sacred music was frequently displaced. Sanctuaries were altered. Lay ministries expanded. Silence often diminished. And many Catholics experienced the change not as a slight adjustment, but as the ending of one liturgical world and the arrival of another.

Some of those things came from the official reform. Some developed through later legislation. Some became common pastoral practice. Some came from local experimentation. Some were outright abuses. We must distinguish them carefully. But we must not pretend the official reform itself was small. It was not. Nor should we pretend Vatican II explicitly commanded everything that followed. It did not. This is why Bugnini and the Consilium matter so much.

Between the Council's text and the Novus Ordo lies an enormous process of interpretation and implementation. We need to ask:

Who decided what "organic growth" meant?

Who decided which innovations were "genuinely and certainly required"?

What did Bugnini advocate?

What did the Consilium propose?

What did Paul VI personally approve?

What did he modify or reject?

Which changes clearly arose from *Sacrosanctum Concilium*?

Which required a broad interpretation of its language?

Which went beyond anything explicitly requested by the Council Fathers?

And perhaps most importantly:

Did the cumulative result preserve the continuity Section 23 demanded?

This question becomes even more striking when we remember that Paul VI himself reminded the Consilium that there should be no contradiction between the liturgy of the present and that of the past, and that innovations should remain in harmony with sound tradition and grow from existing forms.

So the men carrying out the reform knew the principle. They knew the standard. That makes the historical question sharper, not weaker.

How did we move from that standard to the Novus Ordo that emerged only a few years later?

Perhaps part lies in Bugnini and the Consilium. Perhaps part lies in decisions made personally by Paul VI. Perhaps part lies in experimentation and subsequent implementation. Perhaps part lies in the wider cultural revolution of the 1960s. And perhaps the answer is a combination of all of these.

But we cannot answer the question responsibly if we refuse to investigate the men who actually carried out the reform. That includes Bugnini. His role was too important. The controversies surrounding him are too serious. And the consequences of the reform with which he was so closely associated were too great. So we will not ignore him. We will examine his own writings. We will examine the records of the Consilium. We will examine the testimony of those who worked with him. We will examine the charges made against him. We will distinguish what is documented from what remains disputed. And above all, we will examine what he helped produce.

Because ultimately the question before us is larger than the character of one man. The question is: **What happened to the Roman liturgy?** Did the reform remain within the Council's stated vision of sound tradition and legitimate progress? Or did something happen in the process of implementation that introduced a rupture the Council itself had not demanded? We are not yet finished with that question.

In truth, we have only just reached the place where it can finally be asked seriously. But today we have acquired the criteria.

Genuine pastoral necessity.

Careful investigation.

Ecclesiastical authority.

Sacred Scripture.

Sound tradition.

Legitimate progress.

Organic growth.

Those are not standards we have imposed upon Vatican II. They come from the Constitution itself. And therefore, as we continue, our question can no longer be merely: Do I like this change? It must become: Does this change correspond to the principles the Council itself established?

And now another question must stand beside it: When we finally place the liturgy before the Council beside the Novus Ordo produced after it, will we truly see organic growth – or will we discover that somewhere between *Sacrosanctum Concilium* and its implementation something more radical occurred?

We will not brush that question aside. We will follow it wherever the evidence leads.

VIII. CLOSING PRAYER

O Lord Jesus Christ, Eternal High Priest, You are the true center of every sacred liturgy and the One toward whom every authentic reform must lead.

Give us wisdom as we continue this study.

Protect us from judging Your Church according to our preferences, our memories, our frustrations, or our fears.

Give us reverence for everything holy that has been handed down to us.

Give us also the humility to recognize that Your Church is living and that legitimate development can serve the salvation of souls.

Teach us to distinguish true development from unnecessary novelty, organic growth from rupture, and authentic participation from activity that draws attention away from You.

Help us to love Sacred Scripture and to hear Your voice when the Word of God is proclaimed.

Teach us to treasure sacred silence.

Teach us to recognize the universality of Your Church and to cherish those things that unite Catholics across nations, languages, cultures, and generations.

Bless our bishops and priests.

Remind them that the sacred liturgy is not their possession but a treasure entrusted to their care.

Give them fidelity to the laws of the Church, reverence before the sacred mysteries, and the humility to disappear so that You may become more visible.

Guard Your Church from reckless innovation.

Guard us also from a fear of every legitimate development.

Give us the Catholic heart capable of holding together what should never have been separated: Tradition and authentic reform, reverence and participation, Word and sacrament, action and contemplation, the visible and the invisible, Earth and Heaven.

As we continue examining the history of the liturgical reform, keep us from easy answers.

Help us neither to condemn what we have not understood nor to defend what cannot be defended.

Give us the courage to ask difficult questions without losing charity.

Give us the honesty to recognize genuine fruits wherever they appear and genuine failures wherever they occurred.

Above all, keep our eyes fixed upon You.

For the liturgy does not exist so that we may celebrate ourselves. It exists because You, Eternal Son of the Father, have drawn Your Church into perfect worship.

May every reform, every rite, every word, every gesture, every song, and every moment of sacred silence lead us more deeply into Your Sacrifice.

And may the sacred liturgy on earth always turn our hearts toward that heavenly liturgy where, with Our Lady, the angels, the saints, and the whole Church triumphant, we shall worship the Father through You forever.

Sacred Heart of Jesus, have mercy on us.

Immaculate Heart of Mary, pray for us.

Amen.