

CONSTITUTION ON THE SACRED LITURGY

The work under discussion is not theological in the same sense as any of the other books on the program. This is obvious, of course; but explicit notation is necessary in order to establish a correct orientation in the discussion. *The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, once having been approved by the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council and promulgated by His Holiness, Paul VI, becomes for the Catholic theologian a *source* for his reflection. Its authenticity, as source, surpasses that of any other theological reference in that it is the expression of the dogmatic conviction of the universal Church.

The discussion, therefore, can be conducted on any one of three different levels. First, the theologian can attempt to interpret the text of the Constitution itself. Beyond this, however, he is obliged to engage in two other types of reflection in order that the interpretation be valid: (1) reflection on the context of the document, i.e., the sources from which it comes, the ecclesial experience of which it is an expression; (2) reflection on the consequences which flow from the document, especially in its dogmatic aspects. It would appear that the first of these latter two processes is the first in the order of execution.

The general context from which the Constitution took its origin is, of course, *ecclesial reform*. The pastoral liturgical movement is now about a half-century of age; and the Constitution expresses the fruits of many valid experiences that have been lived through in these fifty years or so. Y. Congar puts his finger on the connection between Council and reform when he observes that

. . . consciousness of the real missionary problems and the true needs for reform arises more readily from a common sharing. In the Church, especially in the order of charity . . . true reformism calls for a loyalty, purity and transparency, established and maintained most effectively when men, in a fraternal way, are, as it were, witnesses and help-

ers to one another. And in conformity with the demands of charity—which is the heart of the Church—the more a person is carrying on a task of reform or criticism, the more he ought to orient himself toward the fraternal life and, indeed, the life of the Church as such (*Vraie et fausse reforme dans l'Eglise* [Paris, 1950], p. 293).

This, then, is what has actually occurred before our eyes: the bishops of the Catholic Church have, in a spirit of fraternal charity—and correction—exchanged their experiences critically with a view toward a more adequate, up-to-date expression of the Church's mystery of worship.

By the same token, however, recognition must be given to the evangelical expression of the mystery of the Church itself, contained in the introduction to the Constitution. This is another contextual observation. In a way which, perhaps, would not have been relevant (and certainly impossible) at the Council of Trent, the Fathers note that in the Church the human and divine, the visible and invisible, the active and contemplative, secular commitment and eschatological orientation are wedded in a peculiar way, i.e., in a way that follows from the Church's being the Body of Christ, who himself is established in power at the right hand of the Father as the sender of the Spirit. In each of these couplets, then, the first factor is *subordinate* to and *directed* toward the second. To reflect upon these relationships is a prerequisite to a true understanding of the life of the Church, of which the sacred liturgy is the primary expression.

On this occasion consideration of the text of the Constitution was limited to two points: the significance of the way in which the document presents the "paschal mystery" and the nature of a "celebration," i.e., a liturgical worship service. As to the first of these, an attempt was made to show how the work of theologians such as H. Schillebeeckx is not only reconcilable with the presentation, but would appear to have been somewhat influential in the redaction of the text. Reference here, of course, is to his *Christ, the Sacrament of the Encounter with God*, especially those sections which deal with the simultaneously revelatory and redemptive aspects of the mys-

teries of Christ. This suggestion occasioned what would appear to be the most interesting discussion in connection with the topic. The discussion was not concerned, at least directly, with the authenticity of the theological work of Schillebeeckx, but rather with the implications of saying that the Constitution *depended* on his thought. The chief of these would seem to be, of course, that the Church is giving implicit approval to his theologizing (or that of any other theologian involved in the production of this or another conciliar document). In this case, then, the Church would seem to be committing herself to the kind of phenomenological method which is in vogue today.

If this statement, and others of its kind, be viewed as an objection to our seeing a peculiar theological standpoint as included in a given document of the magisterium, it might be answered that the language of the document is to be understood, at least *ut in pluribus*, in a "common sense" way, so that the Church is not engaging herself in the opinions of any school. Furthermore, the magisterial pronouncements are to be understood as accurate expressions of Christian tradition in a given area, without their exhausting the intelligibility of the doctrine in question. Finally, attempts to analyse the document with the help of the principles and methods of any theological school stand or fall on the validity of those principles and methods. Whereas this discussion did not concern any specific point in the Constitution, I felt it to be of value in that it brought out the possible need for a *renewed* theological approach to a document which itself is an expression of renewal in the Church.

The groups which took part in these discussions manifested a good deal of pastoral interest; and so part of the exchange that followed the formal presentation centered around the nature of the preaching through which the principles of liturgical renewal are to be sown among the Christian people. One obvious point that was made concerned the centrality of the paschal mystery as the object of preaching. It is through this mystery that the people are introduced to and nurtured in the trinitarian life of which the Church is a participation.

As to theological questions that are evoked by the Constitution,

the most important would seem to be: the sacramentality of the Church in all her activity, and consequently the efficacy of the word preached in the Church; the problem of the *Mysteriengegenwart*, to which Pope Pius XII referred in *Mediator Dei*, concerning which, however, little precision is offered in the present document; the nature of the ecclesial mystery itself, which stands behind the document as its matrix; and the long-standing problem of the relationship between the liturgy, as activity, and the other activities in which the Church is engaged in her members, both hierarchical and lay.

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