

## **“Participation in the Current Magisterium”**

**A paper presented by the Reverend Peter M. J. Stravinskias, Ph. D., S.T.D., to the Centre International des Études Liturgiques, 21 November 2003, Paris.**

### Introduction

*Laudetur Jesus Christus. Loué soit Jésus-Christ. Sia lodato Gesù Cristo. Albado sea Jesucristo. Garbé Jézui Kristui. Praised be Jesus Christ. Slava Isusu Christu.*

Your response to that acclamation is the highest form of participation in Christian worship possible, particularly when the witness of your life supports the profession of your lips.

It is a great joy and privilege for me to be with you at this conference. I am grateful to Loic Merian for the invitation, which has given me a wonderful excuse to visit your beautiful city yet again. Allow me to share with you a little secret. I am asked to make dozens of presentations every year and because I find it hard to say “no”, I compensate by re-cycling previously given talks very often. Twice a year, however, I make a point of doing fresh research on a topic that interests me greatly and as a way of forcing me to do original research. Back in August, I produced a paper entitled, “Newman the Failure.” My second sally into serious and brand-new work is the present effort.

I said that I thought this was an important topic because so many of our problems in the contemporary Church can be laid at the doorstep of a mistaken notion of participation – liturgical and otherwise. Let me illustrate this by means of an anecdote. Somewhere around 1985, *National Review*, the publication of noted conservative columnist Bill Buckley, ran a cartoon. It depicted an aboriginal tribe gathered around an altar with a young woman tied to it and a pagan priest preparing to thrust a knife into her in sacrifice. Two tribesmen, standing on the periphery of the liturgical assembly, are observing the event and one comments to the other: “Serves her right. She was always whining about women not being allowed to participate in the services.” Now, questions of human sacrifice and sexism aside, I think you can see where an exaggerated sense of “participation” can get someone.

The Latin adage says, “Discimus docendo.” And that has surely proven true as I went about the preparation of this paper. I knew that the “*participatio actuosa*” of Vatican II had a long pedigree, indeed, all the way back to Pope St. Pius X. I thought, however, that rendering it as “active participation” was just a mischievous English translation, only to discover that at least all the Romance languages have the

equivalent translation.<sup>0</sup> My next suspicion was that using the equivalent of “active” in the various vernaculars was a modern attempt to create a new vision or reality through linguistic manipulation. Once more, an historical search revealed that “active” was the word of choice going back to translations of Pius X’s landmark document, *Tra le Sollecitudini*.

That said, I am still going to suggest a better translation of *actuosa*, at least for our moment in history. Perhaps “active” did not carry all the baggage it does today. At any rate, it seems to me that if Pius X or the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council had wanted to say “active”, they could have used *activa*, but they didn’t; they used *actuosa*.

When I was sharing the sum and substance of my paper with someone recently, he asked, “So what’s the big difference between *actuosa* and *activa*? They’re all just words – a petty squabble over words.” Well, I explained, words are important for they bear meaning. Think, for instance, of this situation: You are living in a house. Does it matter whether you are the tenant or the owner? I don’t know anyone who would respond in the negative. And if that little example from daily life holds true, how much more so in philosophy and theology. After all, the Nicene Creed we pray at every Sunday Mass was the direct result of an apparently “petty squabble” over not a word but a letter – *homoousios* versus *homoioousios*. The little letter “iota”, hence, our common expression, “It doesn’t make an iota of a difference.” Except that it did in 325 A.D. And words continue to make a difference seventeen centuries later.

The methodology of this paper will be to “back into” my suggestion for a more appropriate vernacular rendering of *actuosa* by reviewing the use of *participatio actuosa* over the past forty or so years, so as to come up with a picture of what the contemporary Magisterium has had in mind. Then, we can settle on a word that might more adequately capture the reality.

### *Participatio actuosa* in Historical Perspective

Monsignor Richard Schuler, an eminent student and promoter of the Sacred Liturgy as well as an accomplished musician, has traced out for us a good deal of the historical background to this important phrase, and I wish to acknowledge my indebtedness to him for this.<sup>0</sup> As noted earlier, the first magisterial

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<sup>0</sup>French, *active*; Spanish, *activa*; Italian, *attiva*; Portuguese, *ativa*; Romanian, *active*.

<sup>0</sup>“Participation,” *Sacred Music*, Winter 1987.

use of our expression occurs in *Tra le Sollecitudini*, wherein the Pope observes: “. . . the faithful assemble to draw that spirit from its primary and indispensable source, that is, from active participation in the sacred mysteries and in the public and solemn prayer of the Church” [emphasis added]. Twenty-five years later, Pope Pius XI in *Divini Cultus* opined that through the restoration of Gregorian chant to the people, “the faithful may participate in divine worship more actively” [emphasis added]. Pope Pius XII in *Mystici Corporis* [1943] and in *Mediator Dei* [1947] likewise used the term. In 1958, the Sacred Congregation of Rites in *De Musica Sacra* distinguished several levels of participation. We find the following: “The Mass of its nature requires that all those present participate in it, in the fashion proper to each.” First of all, this participation should be “interior”, that is, union with Christ the Priest. The participation becomes *plenior* if the interior participation is yoked to external participation [e.g., gestures, posture, responses, singing]. The highest degree of participation is achieved when sacramental participation is added to the other forms.

We are now poised on the brink of Vatican II.

#### The Conciliar and Post-Conciliar Vision of *Participatio Actuosa*

One might arguably say that the most-cited and perhaps the most-misunderstood text of the Second Vatican Council is the following from the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy: “Valde cupit Mater Ecclesia ut fideles universi ad plenam illam, consciam atque actuosam liturgicarum celebrationum participationem ducantur, quæ ab ipsius Liturgiæ natura postulatur. . . .” That has come into English as: “Mother Church earnestly desires that all the faithful should be led to that full, conscious, and active participation in liturgical celebrations which is demanded by the very nature of the Liturgy” [n. 14].

The conciliar use of *participatio actuosa* takes for granted the understandings of the term as I have just outlined them. Oddly, though, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* employs our expression without providing a single reference as to its source or history – almost as if it were a novel concept. But that’s a topic for another time.

The same article observes that such participation by the Christian people is their “right and duty by reason of their baptism.” The passage goes on to speak of this *actuosa participatio* as the primary goal of all liturgical renewal, which will endow the faithful “with the true Christian spirit.”

Lest we get too far afield, however, let us return to the lofty vision set forth in article 14. A context is given for it three articles earlier, where we read: “But in order that the Liturgy may possess its full effectiveness, it is necessary that the faithful come to it with proper dispositions, that their minds be attuned to their voices, and that they cooperate with divine grace, lest they receive it in vain.”

Most realistically, the Council Fathers note “pastors must therefore realize that when the Liturgy is celebrated something more is required than the mere observance of the laws governing valid and lawful celebration; it is also their duty to ensure that the faithful take part fully aware of what they are doing, actively engaged in the rite, and enriched by its effects” [n. 11]. And how will this occur? The clergy “themselves must become imbued with the spirit and power of the Liturgy and capable of giving instruction about it” [n. 14]. And hasn’t that all too often been the very problem with our liturgical life in the post-conciliar era? Indeed, could we not even refer to this as a *locus classicus* of the *trahison des clercs*?

Subsequent articles flesh out just what is envisioned for this program of *actuosa participatio*. Thus, we read in article 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 time a reverent silence should be observed.” Eighteen articles later, this is spelled out in even greater detail:

The Church, therefore, earnestly desires that Christ’s faithful, when present at this mystery of faith, should not be there as strangers or silent spectators. On the contrary, through a good understanding of the rites and prayers they should take part in the sacred action, conscious of what they are doing, with devotion and full collaboration. They should be instructed by God’s Word, and be nourished at the table of the Lord’s Body. They should give thanks to God. Offering the immaculate Victim, not only through the hands of the priest, but also with him, they should learn to offer themselves. Through Christ, the Mediator, they should be drawn day by day into an ever more perfect union with God and with each other, so that finally God may be all in all.

Clearly, no kind of shallow or superficial “participation” is being advocated. Nor is any type of frenetic activity anticipated or encouraged.<sup>0</sup> Even the Consilium, in its document restoring the Universal Prayer or Prayer of the Faithful, on 13 January 1965, stresses the importance of “participation through silent prayer.”

A little more than a month after *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, Pope Paul VI promulgated *Sacram*

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<sup>0</sup>For an excellent treatment of conciliar interventions on this topic, see: Robert A. Skeris, “*Participatio Actuosa* in Theological and Musical Perspective – Documentary Considerations,” *Sacred Music*, Winter 1990. Likewise valuable is: Alfons Cardinal Stickler, “Recollections of a Vatican II Peritus,” *The Latin Mass*, Winter 1999.

*Liturgiam* [25 January 1964], wherein he pleaded with bishops “to set at once about teaching their people the power and the interior worth of the Sacred Liturgy, taking into account their age, condition in life, and standard of religious culture,” with the hoped-for result that “their shared knowledge will enable the faithful to take part in the religious services together, devoutly, body and soul.”

Pope Paul was quite exercised about ensuring the proper implementation of the Council’s liturgical document, never missing an opportunity to share its vision with clergy and laity alike. In an address to the pastors of Rome on 1 March 1965, he said: “You must be convinced that the objective is to reach the heart of today’s people through the Liturgy as the truest, most authoritative, sacred, and effective way and so to rekindle in them the flame of love for God and neighbor, the awesome, intoxicating power to commune with God – authentically, consolingly, redemptively.” Less than a week later [7 March 1965], he explained to a group of lay faithful that the Church had embarked on this liturgical reform, “so that you may be able to unite yourselves more closely to the Church’s prayer, pass over from being simply spectators to becoming active participants.” Inexplicably, he saw this goal necessitating, in his own words, the “sacrifice” of Latin!

A year later, during a homily at a Roman parish [27 March 1966], the Pontiff informed the congregation: “A second undertaking of the Council is the reform of the Liturgy, and in a most beautiful and fruitful direction. The Council has taken the fundamental position that the faithful have to understand what the priest is saying and to share in the Liturgy; to be not just passive spectators at Mass but souls alive; to be the People of God responsive to Him and forming a community gathered as one around the celebrant.” Within ten days, he took the occasion of his general audience during Holy Week [6 April 1966] to assert: “If there is any liturgy that should find us all drawn together, attentive, earnest, and united through a participation that is ever more full, worthy, devout, and loving, it is the Liturgy of Holy Week.”

Prescinding from some judgment calls Paul VI made, one can see a consistent trajectory of thought on his part: The participation of the faithful needs to be interior as well as exterior, arising from personal faith and knowledge and bringing about an ever deeper life of faith and holiness.

From this time forward, one also finds the Holy Father becoming much more cautious and reserved in his praise of liturgical developments. Thus, in an address to a national congress of liturgical commissions, on 4 January 1967, he warned that the primacy of the sacrament itself “does not in any way

justify arbitrarily stripping Church-established worship of the sacral and aesthetic forms that surround it and present it to the People of God. Such a course would do more than cast aside the elements of art gracing divine worship; it would trivialize the meaning of the mystery celebrated, undermine the principles of community prayer, and could lead ultimately to doubt or even denial of the reality of the Sacrament of the Eucharist.”

*Musica Sacram*, promulgated on 5 March 1967, offered a most balanced depiction of our topic:

The faithful carry out their proper liturgical function by offering their complete, conscious, and active participation. . . . This participation must be: a. internal, that is, the faithful make their thoughts match what they say and hear, and cooperate with divine grace; b. but also external, that is, they express their inner participation through their gestures, outward bearing, acclamations, responses, and song. [n. 15]

*Tres Abhinc Annos*, issued by the Sacred Congregation for Rites on 4 May 1967, indicates that reports from bishops around the world attest to “increased, more aware, and intense participation.” One might have hoped that such an assessment was an accurate reflection of the reality; having been a boy in high school at that time, that is certainly not my recollection. Indeed, as catechesis began to fall on hard times, we were less aware than ever of the mysteries being celebrated.

It would seem officials in that dicastery may have been less impressed by episcopal assurances than first meets the eye, for within a month, *Eucharisticum Mysterium* makes its appearance. Article 5 addresses our area of concern by underscoring the Congregation’s notion of what is involved in *participatio actuosa*:

The active part of the faithful in the Eucharist consists in giving thanks to God as they are mindful of the Lord’s Passion, Death, and Resurrection; offering the spotless Victim not only through the hands of the priest but also together with him; and, through the reception of the Body of the Lord, entering into the communion with God and with each other that participation is meant to lead to. . . . All these things should be explained to the faithful in such a way that in consequence they share actively in the celebration of the Mass by both their inner affections and the outward rites, in keeping with the principles laid down by the Constitution on the Liturgy.

Do not miss the strong emphasis on a participation which springs from a clear understanding of a truly Catholic appreciation of the eucharistic mystery – the whole point of the document.

In yet another general audience address [19 November 1969], Pope Paul highlighted his hopes for the liturgical renewal: “The result anticipated – or better, longed for – is the more intelligent, more effective, more joyous, and more *sanctifying* participation by the people in the liturgical mystery”

[emphasis added]. Again, the internal aspects occupy center stage.

Jean Cardinal Villot, as Secretary of State, in December 1969, sent a message to the 12<sup>th</sup>

International Congress of Les Petits Chanteurs:

A few words may be said about the liturgical aspect. A more immediate and active *participation in the Liturgy calls for and even demands a sense of the sacred*, a knowledge of the significance of the feasts, liturgical seasons, and rites. . . . Preparation of this kind is a necessary prerequisite for the opening of the spirit to the knowledge of what singing as the service of God is meant to achieve.

. . . The singing will become a true harmony to the degree that it is a blending of skilled technique and of a genuinely religious spirit that allows the voice to become the devout expression to the soul.

While the Cardinal was addressing choristers, his insights apply across the board. Notice certain key phrases: “a sense of the sacred,” “knowledge of the significance,” “preparation,” “service of God,” “a genuinely religious spirit,” “devout expression to the soul.” Are these not the very elements whose loss is experienced and so lamentable in all too many post-conciliar liturgical events?

On 30 January 1969, *l'Osservatore Romano* took a rather unprecedented step in publishing an article by the Reverend Hubert Jedin, renowned scholar of the Reformation and the Council of Trent. Entitled, “Crises in the Church,” it delineates three crises: of the liturgy, of authority, of the Faith. Of course, these three are inextricably bound to one another. Indeed, I have made the point for at least two decades that if the Sovereign Pontiff mandated the use of the so-called Tridentine Mass throughout the Western Church tomorrow and priests did not obey, and bishops did not enforce the decree, and the Holy See was not willing to ensure the enforcement of the decree, nothing liturgical would change one bit. At any rate, let us limit ourselves to Father Jedin’s liturgical observations. I wish to quote him in some detail because I think he really captured significant aspects of our question. Writing before the final liturgical reforms were enacted, he says, “Only with great circumspection would I wish to express my opinion about the liturgical crisis.” Not at all opposed to liturgical reform, he nonetheless warns:

A liturgical renewal which proceeds step by step with a deepening of our concept of the Church can be regarded as one of the most important processes in the history of the Church of our century, as the overcoming of formalism which for many years has prevented the development of the liturgical life. A famous liturgist said, when the new Easter Vigil was introduced: “Now the ice age is over.” But let us remember: Liturgy is a disciplined service of God, a common *actio* of the celebrant and the community. The previous or concomitant reading of the texts of the Mass by the community is not the only, nor the most important form, of active participation (*actuosa participatio*) in the carrying out of the Liturgy; the decisive form is the interior participation of the faithful in the sacrifice and in the eucharistic meal.

He goes on: "Let us also remember this, that the Constitution of the Council on the Sacred Liturgy [nn. 22, 23] demands that all reforms take account of the *sana traditio*, the sound tradition, and that the venerable heritage of the tradition. . . should not be lightly jettisoned." He sums up his analysis in this way: "The Catholic divine service is both mystery and catechesis. As mystery, it is and remains impenetrable to our reason, and this fact cannot be changed in the least by the translation into the vernacular."

Why have I spent so much time citing a non-Magisterial source? Because I have a suspicion that his article's publication in *l'Osservatore Romano* was anything but happenstance and, further, that Magisterial statements thereafter adopt his approach with much greater clarity and force, as should become evident as we proceed in our survey of texts.

Taking on the rearing of iconoclasm's ugly head in modern guise, Paul VI addressed the Pontifical Commission for Sacred Art on 17 December 1969. Therein, he rehearsed Church teaching on sacred art, revisiting Nicaea II, Trent and Vatican II:

Their [sacred images'] purpose is to raise the spirit beyond the figure to what the figure stands for. . . . The Church entrusts art with a mediating role, analogous, we might say, to the role of the priest or, perhaps better, to that of Jacob's ladder descending and ascending. . . . The Liturgy superbly fulfills this [artistic] vocation in both beauty of form and profundity of content. . . . The alliance between art and the life of religion will also succeed in giving again to the Church, the Bride of Christ, a voice that love inspires and that inspires love. . . . As always, we must begin with the education of the person.

The Holy Father reflects a strong incarnational sense here, seeing beauty as bearing a meaning beyond its own objective value. Once more, he connects liturgical significance to "the education of the person."

Cardinal Villot picked up that theme in comments made to the Italian bishops' committee on the liturgy for the 21<sup>st</sup> Italian Liturgical Week [4 September 1970]: "There is cause for comfort in the increased measures to bring about a deeper knowledge of the Liturgy and an ever more intelligent, active, and personal participation by the faithful in the rites of the Church." Was this his honest appraisal of the situation or wishful thinking? It is hard to tell, but there is no mistaking the linking of proper catechesis to any true *actuosa participatio*.

The Sacred Congregation for the Clergy presented the Church with the landmark *General Catechetical Directory* on 11 April 1971. In tackling our theme, we find that catechists ought to be engaged in "forming the minds of the faithful for prayers, for thanksgiving, for repentance, for prayers with

confidence, for a community spirit, and for understanding correctly the meaning of the creeds. All these things are necessary for a true liturgical life.”

In a general audience on 22 August 1973, Paul VI spoke about the preservation of “Latin, Gregorian chant,” and prayed, “May that be God’s will.” He linked this intention up to full liturgical participation.

The ill-advised *Directory for Masses with Children* made its début on 1 November 1973, but even there we find this salutary reminder: “In all this, it should be kept in mind that external activities will be fruitless and even harmful if they do not serve the internal participation of the children. Thus religious silence has its importance even in Masses with children. The children should not be allowed to forget that all the forms of participation reach their high point in eucharistic communion, when the Body and Blood of Christ are received as spiritual nourishment” [n. 22]. Then quoting the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, n. 23, it repeats: “Even in Masses with children, ‘silence should be observed at the designated times as part of the celebration,’ lest too great a place be given to external action. In their own way, children are genuinely capable of reflection” [n. 37].

*Iubilare Deo*, which provided a basic repertoire of Latin chants and hymns deemed essential for every parish community, was promulgated on 11 April 1974; this document was presented to the whole Church as a way of implementing *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, n. 54, “that the voice of the faithful be heard in both Gregorian chant and vernacular singing.” The musical dimension was hit upon again by Cardinal Villot in an address to the 21<sup>st</sup> National Congress on Sacred Music [13 September 1974]: “All the parts of the Mass are in themselves already a form of evangelization, because they revivify faith and transform into adoration. But in singing and music, the parts of the Mass can find a powerful and expressive way to foster the participation of the faithful.” Noteworthy, too, are the references to evangelization and adoration.

In a general audience on 26 March 1975, Pope Paul returns to our theme, this time relying on both Scripture and St. Thomas Aquinas:

But there is an essential difference in the liturgical drama. . . . In contrast, the liturgical drama not only brings to mind again Christ’s deeds but reactualizes His salvific action (see ST 3a , 56.1 and 3); . . . as He is the always active source of our salvation. . . . In any believer who participates in the Liturgy there is no sense of remoteness or of being on the outside. Consequently in celebrating the Paschal Mystery, the believer is taken into and overcome by the dramatic power of the “hour” of Christ, “my hour” as he called it.

Later that year [6 August 1975], exactly three years before his death, the Holy Father gave a very fully developed appreciation of what is entailed in liturgical participation:

The Liturgy is a communion of minds, prayers, voices, agape or charity. Passive presence is not enough; participation is required. The people must see in the Liturgy a school for listening and learning, a sacred celebration presented and guided by the priest, but in which, as a gathering of hearts and voices, they join by their response, their offerings, their prayers. . . . Remember that Liturgy is believing, praising in song, alive to earthly experience, on pilgrimage toward the celebration of the eternal revelation.

Finally, on 6 June 1976, Paul VI sent a message to the bishops of the United States, commemorating the bicentennial of the nation. He urged the bishops to bring their people “to a deeper realization of the centrality of the Eucharist in their lives and of their needs to participate therein. To a profound sense of reverence for the eucharistic mystery.” He recalled for priests “their special duty: *sancta sancte tractanda*.” This dimension of worship, he said, is connected to “the very holiness of God, of Jesus Christ, [which] demands reverence and profound respect.”

Three years later [4 October 1979], Pope John Paul II, during his first pastoral visit to the United States, reminded priests in Philadelphia that “all our pastoral endeavors are incomplete until our people are led to the full and active participation in the Eucharistic Sacrifice. . . .” Throughout his pontificate, the Holy Father has underscored numerous elements of what he understands by “full and active participation.” To cite them individually would be nearly impossible and would overload the circuit unnecessarily, especially since they reiterate the very elements presented by the Magisterium of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

What is interesting, however, is to look up the topic of participation in the Catechism of the Catholic Church. The references deal with how we participate in the Lord’s Paschal Mystery [e.g., nn. 618, 654, 668, 1006]. The Catechism links our participation in a definitive manner to the Sacred Liturgy, especially the Sacraments of Baptism and Holy Eucharist. We are taught that “grace is a *participation in the life of God*. It introduces us into the intimacy of Trinitarian life: by Baptism the Christian participates in the grace of Christ” [n. 1997, emphasis in the original]. This grace likewise brings about our “participation.

. . in Christ's mission as Priest, Prophet and King," particularly through Baptism and Confirmation [n. 1546]. We also learn that Baptism confers "the sacramental character that consecrates [us] for Christian religious worship." It goes on to speak of how this "enables and commits Christians to serve God by a vital participation in the holy Liturgy of the Church and to exercise their baptismal priesthood by the witness of holy lives and practical charity" [n. 1273]. All this is brought to its culmination in the Eucharistic Sacrifice: "This 'how' exceeds our imagination and understanding; it is accessible only to faith. Yet our participation in the Eucharist already gives us a foretaste of Christ's transfiguration of our bodies" [n. 1000]. How is this so? Because "the Liturgy is also a participation in Christ's own prayer addressed to the Father in the Holy Spirit. In the Liturgy, all Christian prayer finds its source and goal. Through the Liturgy the inner man is rooted and grounded in 'the great love with which [the Father] loved us' in His beloved Son" [n. 1073]. An awareness of Christ's unique presence in the Eucharist "moves us to an ever more complete participation in our Redeemer's sacrifice which we celebrate in the Eucharist" [n. 1372].

Please do not miss how all our attention is focused on interior dispositions, rather than merely external postures, gestures and other such activities [as important as these are for body-soul unities to worship]. Why might this emphasis be given? I would venture to say that the experience of two decades of liturgical confusion and frenzy caused the editors of the Catechism to attempt to "balance the budget" in favor of fundamental truths that had been lost in the post-conciliar shuffle – at least at the practical level or lived experience of the average person in the pew.

For the past several years, Angelo Cardinal Sodano has sent letters to the annual liturgical conferences in Italy; they have taken a decided cautionary turn. And so, we read the following sent on 2 August 2001:

. . . it is necessary to keep in mind the particular nature of the Sacred Liturgy. As the Constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium* of the Second Vatican Council explained, "every liturgical celebration, because it is an action of Christ the Priest and of His Body, which is the Church, is a sacred action surpassing all others. No other action of the Church can equal its efficacy by the same title and to the same degree" [n. 7].

He continues:

According to the famous statement, used for the first time by the Magisterium in the *motu proprio, Tra le Sollecitudini* [22 November 1903] of Pope St. Pius X, the Constitution on the Liturgy desires: "that all the faithful be guided to that full, conscious and active participation in the liturgical celebrations, which is required by the very nature of the Liturgy" [n. 14]. Today this *participatio actuosa* (active participation) of the faithful is sometimes reduced to their performing some liturgical ministry. However, the Council wishes to invite all believers to take part,

consciously and actively, in the liturgical prayer itself, by offering to God the sacrifice of praise and adoring Him “in spirit and in truth” [Jn 4:23].

Once more, the interior dimension is highlighted.

Surely we cannot ignore Holy Thursday of 2003, when Pope John Paul II offered the Church Universal *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* as a gift commemorating the silver jubilee of his accession to the Chair of Peter. We would not be exaggerating were we to suggest that the entire encyclical can be viewed as an essay on the meaning of genuine *participatio actuosa*. He mentions three serious obstacles to full, conscious and active participation: liturgical abuses [n. 10]; lack of full ecclesial communion, both visible and invisible [n. 35f]; the presence of grave sin in a participant [n. 37]. All of Chapter Five is devoted to “the dignity of the eucharistic celebration” as he considers how the interior and external aspects of Christian worship should interact, including art, music, architecture and liturgical discipline. It was in reference to that last item – liturgical discipline – that the Holy Father took the occasion to announce the preparation of a “juridical” document by the Roman Curia to confront the abuses which have marred the life of the post-conciliar Church. In a powerful line, he declares: “No one is permitted to undervalue the mystery entrusted to our hands: It is too great for anyone to feel free to treat it lightly and with disregard for its sacredness and universality” [n. 52].

At the end of his encyclical, we hear echoes of the words he spoke to the priests in Philadelphia at the dawn of his pontificate:

Every commitment to holiness, every activity aimed at carrying out the Church’s mission, every work of pastoral planning, must draw the strength it needs from the eucharistic mystery and in turn be directed to that mystery as its culmination. In the Eucharist, we have Jesus, we have His redemptive Sacrifice, we have His Resurrection, we have the gift of the Holy Spirit, we have adoration, obedience and love of the Father. Were we to disregard the Eucharist, how could we overcome our own deficiency? [n. 60]

And then comes the clarion call to live the mystery of the Eucharist in all its fullness:

The mystery of the Eucharist – sacrifice, presence, banquet – *does not allow for reduction or exploitation*; it must be experienced and lived in its integrity, both in its celebration and in the intimate converse with Jesus which takes place after receiving Communion or in a prayerful moment of eucharistic adoration apart from Mass. These are times when the Church is firmly built up and it becomes clear what she truly is: one, holy, catholic and apostolic; the people, temple and family of God; the Body and Bride of Christ, enlivened by the Holy Spirit; the universal sacrament of salvation and a hierarchically structured communion. [n. 61, emphasis in original]

Finally, he takes on the pernicious dichotomy between the head and the heart introduced by the

Enlightenment<sup>0</sup> and ultimately has recourse, one may suppose to Blaise Pascal's trenchant observation: "*Le coeur a ses raisons que la raison ne connaît point.*" "If, in the presence of this mystery," he says, "reason experiences its limits, the heart, enlivened by the grace of the Holy Spirit, clearly sees the response that is demanded, and bows low in adoration and unbounded love." He then has recourse to St. Thomas Aquinas, whom he describes as "an eminent theologian and an impassioned poet of Christ in the Eucharist," urging us to "turn in hope to the contemplation of that goal to which our hearts aspire in their thirst for joy and peace" [n. 62].

### *Participatio Actuosa: A Synthesis and a Re-direction*

On October 8 of this year, Francis Cardinal Arinze, in his capacity as Prefect of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, addressed the national meeting of the Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions in San Antonio, Texas. As you may know, he devoted an entire section of his talk to the concern which occupies us these days. I think he admirably summarized the picture I have been trying to sketch. He asserts: "It is important that the internal aspect of participation is indispensable as a basis, a requirement and the aim of all external participation. That is why personal prayer, scriptural meditation and moments of silence are necessary." And even more to the point: "A sense of reverence and devotion is conducive to interiorized active participation."

The Reverend Michael R. Carey, O.P., offers a succinct explanation of the terms of the debate and excoriates what he calls "liturgical activism." He maintains that our participation "is conscious in that it engages the rational part of our soul – mind and heart. It is active in that it also engages our body. But the main point is that it must not be merely active, but *full.*" Good Dominican that he is, he expands on the question, relying on the Angelic Doctor:

So, a first principle of active participation is that whatever we do bodily should be a *sign* of what ought to be happening in our souls. For this, we have to look to what we are doing and to the words we are praying. Are we listening to the Word of God? Then it is appropriate to sit. Are we humbly beseeching God? Then it is appropriate to kneel. Are we contemplating after Holy Communion the Lord we have just received? Then it is appropriate that we close our eyes and bow our heads in silent prayer.

He seals his argument in this fashion: "External acts which inhibit or contradict the natural movements of

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<sup>0</sup>For a fine discussion of this problem and for some healthy remedies, see: Stratford Caldecott, "The Heart's Language: Toward a Liturgical Anthropology, *Antiphon*, 2001 [Number Two].

the soul in prayer are simply wrong, and will instinctively be felt to be wrong.”<sup>0</sup>

As I read that last line, I was reminded of a conversation I had with a Sister who informed me she had just finished preparing her second-graders for their First Holy Communion. I said she must be thrilled and proud. She replied, with great sadness in her face and in her voice: “Father, I have taught them everything the Church wants them to know and believe about the Holy Eucharist, but I just have the impression that they do not believe what I believed at their age.” I then asked her about eucharistic practices in her parish. Like most parishes in the West, just about anyone distributes Holy Communion to anyone in any position and in any degree of disposition. Until those situations are dealt with, I told the nun, her children will never be able to believe what she believed and, hopefully, still does believe. Why? Because our praxis is under-cutting our theology. The interior participation is not allowed to flower because of external modes of participation which are problematic.

What is the image of *participatio actuosa* with which I would like to leave you? That of another Dominican, Colman E. O’Neill. More than three decades ago, he offered the following definition:

(It is) that form of devout involvement in the liturgical action which, in the present conditions of the Church, best promotes the exercise of the common priesthood of the baptized; that is, their power to offer the Sacrifice of the Mass with Christ and to receive the sacraments. It is clear that, concretely, this requires that the faithful understand the liturgical ceremonial; that they take part in it by bodily movements, standing, kneeling or sitting as the occasion may demand; that they join vocally in the parts which are intended for them. It also requires that they listen to, and understand, the Liturgy of the Word. It requires, too, that there be moments of silence when the impact of the whole ceremonial may be absorbed and deeply personalized.<sup>0</sup>

What has been suggested by Father O’Neill is no more and no less than what Aristotle would have referred to as a “catharsis,” namely, that a would-be spectator so enters into the dramatic action that he becomes a participant. And I think the word we have been searching for is not “active” but “actual.” To illustrate the validity of my suggestion, let me leave you with this scenario.

You have decided to go to the opera for Puccini’s *Madame Butterfly*. You have paid your hundred dollars or euros and have a superb seat. The orchestra is outstanding. The sets are splendid. The performances are stellar. You are so drawn into the action that you completely identify with the protagonist, experiencing all the emotions the composer envisioned. In short, by the end of the work, you

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<sup>0</sup>“Active Participation Again,” *The Priest*, July 2003, 32.

<sup>0</sup>“The Theological Meaning of *Actuosa Participatio* in the Liturgy,” in *Sacred Music and Liturgy Reform after Vatican II*. Rome: Consociatio Internationalis Musicae Sacrae, 1969, 105.

have run out of handkerchiefs and tissues. The only drawback, however, is that you did not get up on the stage and sing the final, heart-tugging aria yourself. I ask you: Did you have a genuine experience of catharsis in the Aristotelian sense? Was it an example of *participatio actuosa*? I believe it was. Was it “active” participation? I think not. What was it, then? I submit it was that form of real participation which we should call “actual.” And that, I further submit, is the kind of participation the post-conciliar Magisterium has had in mind. May it become a reality in our day.