

ACTUOSA PARTICIPATIO: the “why” and the “how” of participation in the liturgy according to *sacrosanctum concilium*

By Usman Jamahh Victor

INTRODUCTION

It is aptly true, that one could hardly understand the function of the concept *actuosa participatio* in the liturgical constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium* without knowledge of the *genesis* of the text - particularly in reference to the 20th century liturgical movement.¹ This does not rule out the fact however, that the text in itself establishes a basis for *actuosa participatio*, such that picking the text; one could understand this controversial phenomenon from within the text itself. Although the term goes back to earlier times, our task in this short treatise is to glean the basis of *actuosa participatio* from within the text of *Sacrosanctum Concilium* itself. Why must or should we participate in the liturgy at all? How do we participate? This is our focus here.

From the textual point of view, the basis of the active participation of the faithful in the liturgy could be said to be found in the first chapter, particularly section one running from paragraph 5-13.² This section carries the title: *The nature of the liturgy and its importance in the life of the Church*.³ When we decide to handle the text theologically however, we discover that the basis for active participation in the liturgy is spread almost throughout the text. While both methods have their advantages and disadvantages-a subject which is not to be reflected here- we hold that a composite of the two methods serves better to arrive at a more plausible basis for the function of active participation in the liturgy from within the text of *Sacrosanctum Concilium*. Stephan Schmid Keiser for example has suggested four extracts from four different Articles of *Sacrosanctum Concilium* as contributing to *der Grund zur Teilnahme an der Liturgie*.⁴ In our case here and for the purpose of clarity, we shall try to analyse paragraphs 5-13, and then 14 relating it to other sections of the Constitution.

THE “WHY” OF PARTICIPATION IN THE LITURGY

The beginning- God Himself as the source of the Liturgy

From SC 5-6 we could decipher the beginning of the “why” of our participation in the liturgy. The content takes a telling form of literary writing and depicts who the source of the liturgy is- God; in other words the liturgy originates from him! The liturgy is thus the product of the paschal mystery, a mystery which is not only interpreted directly as the blessed passion, resurrection from the dead and the glorious ascension of Christ, but also extensively as a composite of the entire salvation history which culminates in the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus; incidentally, the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus functions also forms the nucleus of our salvation history,⁵ and the salvations history involves us! This way “a people” of God was formed where communion with God

through the facilitation of the Incarnation is made possible. This is where the “why” of our participation begins-but it does not stop there.

From Divine initiative to human response

From what we have said above it is clear that the initiative to communicate with us was God’s. This initiative however, so that it would make sense and meaning to us, found human expression in the incarnation of Christ and opened us up to the fullness of the possibilities to commune with God. Liturgy then is the response of man in worship to commune with God, to praise him, a gift which we cannot resist actualising.⁶ As cardinal George has rightly observed then, participation is the common work or synergy between the divine initiative and the human response facilitated by the Holy Spirit.⁷ One cannot come to this stage of communion however without a necessary introduction through the sacrament of Baptism by which all receive the spirit of adoption.⁸ Today it is the duty of the Church to fulfil this injunction, such that when the Church baptizes, it is really Christ himself who baptizes,⁹ bringing people into this fold of those who are privileged to praise and adore God.

The nature of our Adoption - an invitation to *participatio-sharing* (κοινωνία)¹⁰

Our adoption by God then, is principally the basis for the right of every Christian to active participation in the liturgy. This idea comes up for the first time in article 6 of *Sacrosanctum Concilium*. There the Constitution says:

... By baptism men are plunged into the paschal mystery of Christ: they die with Him, are buried with Him, and rise with Him; **they receive the spirit of adoption as sons "in which we cry: Abba, Father"(Rom 8:15), and thus become true adorers whom the Father seeks.**¹¹

This is taken up again in 14. Though this theme of participation which flows from our baptism recurs 15 more times in the Constitution¹², it must be said that the nature of this adoption -which conversely should determine the core nature of our participation in the liturgy- apart from annotations given in the citations¹³ and the predicative uses of various adjectives of the verb *participatio*¹⁴, is not fully developed in the Text.

In an article however, Anna Kai -Jung Chan¹⁵ makes an interesting contribution to this question. With the help of imageries from the baptismal sermons of St. Augustine, Chromatius of Aquileia and St Leo the Great¹⁶ Kai – Jung Chan depicts baptismal adoption principally as spiritual. In the three sermons discussed, the imagery pictures the baptismal font of all Christians as parallel to the womb

of the Blessed Virgin Mary from which we are all reborn. While the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary brought forth Jesus, we are born from the womb of the Church which is the Font of Baptism. It is in this sense that the Catechism of the Catholic Church says that Baptism not only purifies from all sins, but also makes the neophyte "*a new creature, an adopted son of God, who has become a partaker of the divine nature, member of Christ and co-heir with him, and a temple of the Holy Spirit.*"¹⁷ Very importantly the Catechism goes on to state what the nature of the rights, duties and responsibilities that flow from the baptism we receive are thus: "Just as Baptism is the source of responsibilities and duties, the baptized person also enjoys rights within the Church: *to receive the sacraments, to be nourished with the Word of God and to be sustained by the other spiritual helps of the Church.*"¹⁸ Now this is a defining statement in the "why" of participation in the liturgy. It goes on also to show what the nature of this participation is: a "spiritual" adoption demands principally a "spiritual" and internal participation.¹⁹ Our ritual participation in the Eucharist for example is the physical expression of our participation in the paschal mystery of Christ since the Eucharistic community comes into being not by any other means, but by the collective (and essentially spiritual) sharing of its participants in the passion, death and resurrection of Christ.²⁰

THE RIGHTS AND DUTIES OF ALL THE MEMBERS OF THE CHURCH TO THE LITURGY: A CLOSER LOOK AT SC14 -THE "HOW" OF PARTICIPATION IN THE LITURGY

It should follow then, that when *Sacrosanctum Concilium* speaks then of rights and duties, it speaks about something essentially spiritual and not necessarily statutory or legal. It comes from a spiritual adoption that brings individual people into the Church on common grounds, on equal grounds to access all the spiritual benefits in the Church. It is in this sense that Christians exercise rights to the spiritual goods of the Church. It is in this sense that the Church is ἐκκλησία, - an assembly of believers, and it is the liturgy which is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed. The Liturgy is also the fount from which all the Church's power flows, since the aim and object of all apostolic activity is that all who are made children of God by faith and baptism should come together to praise God in the midst of his Church, to take part in the sacrifice and to eat the Lord's Supper.²¹ Let us take a closer look then at some of these rights, in other words, the "how" of participation in the liturgy.

The right to "full" participation (*participatio plena*)

The adjective "full", Latin *plena* occurs as predicated of the verb *to participate* for the first time in 14. It occurs twice. It occurs again in 21 in the context of the reform of the sacred liturgy, and for the third time in 41 within the context of liturgical life in the diocese and parishes. Although the context in which it is used in 41 is a little vague, one could glean the meaning of full participation from the other two contexts in which it is used in 14 and 21. In both cases, "full" is mentioned in the context of reform, understanding and in the context of deriving grace from the liturgy.²²

The right to *full* participation essentially refers to the rights of the faithful to be part of the liturgical assembly, not only with their voices, but also with their minds and hearts²³ and extensively, with their being. From the point of view of a “third-party” then, full participation is something essentially sublime and unquantifiable such that only God and the individual who takes part in the liturgy- priest or lay- can actually ascertain how fully he or she has participated. It is a right of the faithful to achieve the aim of taping the resplendent grace of God from the liturgy.²⁴ The right to full participation exists then only to the extent that the Church -universal as well as local- exercises its mandate, as far as possible, to make the liturgy accessible to the people such that they are able to tap the grace for which it is a wellspring.²⁵

A very helpful means to understanding again what *plena* means, is the way in which it is used in the Instruction on sacred music and liturgy of 1958.²⁶ There *plena* occurs three times in the comparative form. In articles 22b and 31 where it occurs, it is used to depict how the combination of internal dispositions and external actions lead to a “more complete” participation in the liturgy. Its use in 23 seals it all: The primary aim of general participation (both of laity and clergy) is “the more perfect worship of God and the edification of the faithful”, and the various means of congregational participation should be controlled that there is no danger of abuse, that this end is effectively achieved.

The right to conscious participation (*participatio conscia*)

Very close to the use of the adjective *plena* is the use of another *conscia*. To understand its function here in 14, it pays to compare it with its other uses in the Constitution.²⁷ Stuflesser has already observed for example, that its use in 48 (in the context of the Eucharistic celebration) is to contrast the presence of the faithful at the Eucharistic sacrifice as “strangers or silent spectators”.²⁸ The use of the word stranger here could be taken as axiomatic: no stranger understands something to which he is a stranger. He might be aware from the use of his external senses of what is happening, he might even take part physically. However, because there is no internal base of comprehension, this remains in the external. It is in this sense then that *participatio conscia* forms something like a link between the internal and the external. It is the point where the grace (*plena*) we desire and get from the liturgy becomes bound with the physical efforts (*actuosa*) we make to arrive at it.²⁹ Article 79 adds more weight to this view since there it speaks directly of intelligibility and comprehension as means to achieving participation.

Closely related to this right to conscious participation then is the question of the language of the liturgy. The Council in articles 36, 54, 63a, 76, 78, 101 even though it still insist on Latin as *lingua liturgiae*, goes on ahead to recommend processes by which the vernacular could be used in the liturgy when it is to the ultimate advantage of the faithful. Invariably then, the right to conscious participation in the liturgy refers to the right to be able to comprehend the liturgy, not necessarily to the extent that every word and phrase is understood by everybody at once, or to the extent that

reverential language is lost (to comprehend is not exactly the same as to understand) but to the extent that those present are not totally left out of the whole celebration to which they equally have been called to as true adorers which the Father seeks in order to worship God in truth and in Spirit.

The right to active participation (*participatio actuosa*)

Of all the adjectives predicated of participation, this is the one that is most frequently used. It has been so overused that people are hardly aware of the fact that there are other processes which precede it. Winfried Haunerland has counted its use in twelve places within the text.³⁰ To these however we add articles 27, 48 and 113 where the adjective also occurs.

For the 15 times counted where the adjective is used, it is good to note that 8 times out of these, the adjective does not occur alone, but functions within the framework of other adjectives with which it occurs. Whenever the adjective is used alone in the text, it would seem that the nature of the activity that constitutes this *actuosa participatio* is specified. Very pertinent examples could be found in articles 30 and 113. In the former the Constitution states: “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*”³¹ And in article 113 “Liturgical worship is given a more noble form when the divine offices are celebrated solemnly in song, with the assistance of sacred ministers and the active participation of the people.” Note the phrase *when the divine offices are celebrated in song*. With the further definitions in article 114 and the recapitulation of 30, this section of the Constitution uses the adjective *actuosa* in the very specific context it was used for the first time in a Church Document- the context of congregational singing.³²

The right to active participation then is the right to concrete and tangible self expression before God in the liturgy. By its very nature, it should proceed from the *participatio conscia* and tend toward the *participatio plena*. Sealed by the seal of the Holy Spirit in Baptism and moved by awareness of our adoption by God, all have the right to call God Father and sing his praises, not just for the sake of doing it, but for the reasons of spiritual communion with God.

Conclusion

From the point of view of *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, the origin of active participation in the liturgy is clear. It flows from one source which is baptism. Through baptism, one has the right to active participation in the liturgy; but it does not stop there. There is a natural way in which active participation in the liturgy should grow and not remain at the point of its origin or at the point of rights alone. There must be a transition from what is *a right* to what is *a duty*. In the same way that the faithful exercise the right to active participation in the liturgy, so also must they exercise the duty to *leaven* the world with the fruits of this participation, hence the *participatio fructuosa*. The Catechism of the Catholic Church for example speaks of the Eucharistic celebration as *Missa* because the liturgy in which the mystery of salvation is accomplished concludes with the sending forth

(*missio*) of the faithful, so that they may fulfil God's will in their daily lives.³³ A more important question then should always be: have I fruitfully participated? When the answer here is yes, then one could be sure that most of, if not all the others have been fulfilled; for it is hardly possible that one fruitfully participates in the liturgy who has not first of all consciously, fully and actively participated. *Actuosa participatio* hardly functions without the precedence of the *actuosa concia* and hardly makes any meaning when it does not translate to the *participatio plena* and the *participatio fructuosa*.

ENDNOTES

¹ This plausible position has been supported by almost all writers on the subject. See the presentations of Stephan Schmid-Keiser (1985): *Aktive Teilnahme, Kriterium gottesdienstlichen Handelns und Feierns*. Bern; Alcuin Reid (2005): *The organic development of the Liturgy*. Also Pamela Jackson (2004): *An Abundance of Graces, Reflections on Sacrosanctum Concilium*. Chicago/Mundelein Illinois

² This textual method has been used by Pamela Jackson (2004) *Abundance of Grace* (note cited 1) P11

³ This in itself is sensible because the Latin word *natura* which is used here and rendered in English as *nature* has the connotation of "a foundation". The German translations of the text render the Latin *natura* as *wesen* which does not only mean *nature* but also *essence*. In other words, the section talks about the *essential qualities* and *foundational reasons* for active participation in the liturgy. It is also logical since the statement that "The Church earnestly desires that all the faithful be led to that full conscious and active participation in liturgical celebrations called for by the very nature of the liturgy" comes forth in 14 immediately after this section.

⁴ Stephan Schmid-Keiser, (note cited 1) P 321-322. Here, the Author lists paragraphs 14 (with the famous statement as highlighted in 5 here above), 8 (The participation of the Church militant in the worship of the Church triumphant), 11 (the unity of heart and mind in true participation), and 21 (the need for "noble simplicity" to enable participation) as the basis for active participation within the text.

⁵ SC 6 Cf. particularly here the beginning of the second paragraph recalling the works of God in the Old Testament which functions as a counterpoint, a juxtaposition of the preceding paragraph, which ends by highlighting the position of the Incarnation in the salvations economy. In his recent Commentary, Reiner Kaczynski observes, not only that the basis of the liturgy is pivoted on the paschal mystery, but also that paschal mystery- when it is seen from the point of view of the Jewish Passover- is "(...) *das Heilshandeln Gottes an uns in Christus, das in Christi Tod und Auferstehung seine bleibende Mitte hat*" In other words, the salvation history typified in Christ, particularly with the death and resurrection of Christ as the centre. Cf. Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum zweiten vatikanischen Konzil vol 2. Ed by Peter Hünermann and Bernd Jochen Hilberath. 2004, p63. Also important is the excerpt of how the centrality of the paschal mystery as the source of the liturgy -as against the incarnation- came to be accepted in the *Schemas* of the preparatory commission. Cf. P46

⁶ Cf. Preface IV of Weekdays

⁷ Francis Cardinal George: *The Foundations of Liturgical Reform*, being a Paper presented at 40th anniversary celebration of *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, *Adoremus Bulletin*, online edition. Vol 10 no 1: March 2004. Taken from www.adoremus.org 08.11.10, 12:31 GMT

⁸ SC 9 Cf. Rom 10:14-15

⁹ SC 6

¹⁰ See the translation of κοινωνία (1 Cor. 10:16) in the Latin Vulgate calicem benedictionis cui benedicimus nonne **communicatio** sanguinis Christi est et panis quem frangimus nonne **participatio** corporis Domini est. **English NRSV** the cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a **sharing** in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a **sharing** in the body of Christ?

¹¹ SC 6. Cf. Jn 4:23. The emphases here are mine.

¹² Cf. Emil Joseph Lengeling (1965): Die Konstitution des zweiten Vatikanischen Konzils über die heilige Liturgie. Lateinische-Deutsche Text mit einem Kommentar. Münster. P 82

¹³ Here 1 Pet 2:9

¹⁴ *Actuosa, conscia, fructuosa* etc.

¹⁵ Anna Kai-Jung Chan: „Participation in the Liturgy“, in: Handbook for Liturgical Studies, vol. II. Ed by Anscar J. Chupungco,. Collegeville Minnesota. 1998, P145-159

¹⁶ Cf. Augustine, Sermo LVI, 5= Verbraken, RBen 68, 28, 70 – 29, 73; Chromatius of Aquileia, Sermo XXXIII, 4= Etaix-Lemarie, CCL IXA, 153, 102 – 222; Leo the Great, in nativitate Domini Serm. IV, 3= Dolle, SCh 22 bis, 114, also V, 5= Dolle, SCh 22 bis, 132 all as quoted in Anna Kai-Jung Chan. (note cited 15).

¹⁷ CCC 1265 Cf. 2 Cor. 5:17; 2 Pet 1:4; cf. Gal 4:5-7. 1 Cor. 6:15; 12:27; Rom 8:17. 1Cor. 6:19. All my emphases.

¹⁸ CCC 1269 Cf. LG 37; CIC, cann. 208 223; CCEO, can. 675:2.

¹⁹ Cf. Jn. 4:24 where Jesus declares that „God is Spirit and those who worship him must worship him in Spirit and in truth“!

²⁰ Cf. Reinhard Meßner (2009): Einführung in die Liturgiewissenschaft, 2. Auflage. Padaborn. Pp220-221.

²¹ Cf. SC 10.

²² SC 14 “In the restoration and promotion of the sacred liturgy, *this full* and active participation by all the people is the aim to be considered before all else; *for it is the primary and indispensable source from which the faithful are to derive the true Christian spirit; and therefore pastors of souls must zealously strive to achieve it, by means of the necessary instruction, in all their pastoral work.*” (Emphases are mine)

SC 21 “*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.*” All my emphasis.

²³ Cf. SC 11.

²⁴ Here see the arguments of Martin Stuffer where he describes *participatio plena* as a „Zielvorgabe“– Aim of the Council. Cf. *Actuosa Participatio* – zwischen hektischem Aktionismus und neuer Innerlichkeit. LJ 59(2009) 147-186, here pg161- 164.

²⁵ Cf. SC 21.

²⁶ AAS 50 (1958) 630-663

²⁷ Cf. SC 48 and 79.

²⁸ Cf. M, Stuffer *Participatio actuosa* (note cited 23) P 64.

²⁹ Again SC 11“ In order that the liturgy may possess its full effectiveness, it is necessary the faithful come to it with proper dispositions that their mind be attuned to their voices and that they cooperate with divine grace, lest they receive it in vain.”

³⁰ Cf. SC 11,14, 19, 21, 26, 30, 41, 50, 79, 114, 121, 124, Winfried Haunerland. *Participatio Actuosa*, Programmwort liturgischer Erneuerung in Internatioale Katholische Zeitschrift Communio. November- Dezember 2009. Pp 585-595. Here 586. Although Haunerland lists 26 here as one of the articles containing *actuosa*, it is good to note that what is actually in the Latin Text is *actualis*.

³¹ Italics mine

³² Cf. Tra le Sollecitudini of Pius X no 3 “ Gregorian Chant must be restored to the people so that they may again take a more active part in the sacred liturgy, as was the case in ancient times.”

³³ CCC 1332