Afterword

Robert Grisben

An Afterword is not another chapter. It is not so long, for a start. Mine is a few reflections from a colleague outside the Roman Catholic fold, who has however travelled these fifty years with the majority of this book’s authors, with the deepest appreciation for both them and their Church. There is one chapter by another ‘outsider’, an Anglican, Stephen Burns, and some of my responses will be parallel, but not greatly repetitive, of his. Join me for a few minutes as I remind you of some of the splendid phrases or challenging arguments you have read and marked in the margins.

The book has a context, of course an important anniversary in the world of liturgy. I remember Jake Empereur, whom I invited to lecture to some of my students in England thirty years ago, beginning by reminding them that they were going to consider matters of liturgy at a time when the rest of the world was worrying about the arms race and the threat of nuclear annihilation. And having delivered that sobering thought, he did indeed speak of the Church’s liturgy, embodying the life-giving spirit of Sacrosanctum Concilium (I think by now you know its acronym).

The world has not changed since, and it has probably not got worse. We all know for how long doom has been predicted. The new factors, at least for the churches of the west include the decline in numbers and influence, our position vis à vis our societies. The weight of this book has been on reclaiming the genius of SC for today; some essays have also considered the future. There is now also a need for writing on liturgy for the Christian communities which are not only growing in numbers but surely in influence on governments and others in power. SC actually has great wisdom for ‘evangelicals’, charismat-
ics and Pentecostals, and for those who now find themselves trying to discover faith between the historic churches and the 'new' ones. Several authors rightly asked if a return to a Latinist form of English helps anyone in the face of these challenges to Church and society.

There is now, regrettably, an internal challenge—to our own integrity. I mean the churches' own moral failure, now placarded before all through the media, and fuelled by the anger of so many alienated ex-Christians. It will be some time before sober and balanced judgements about the kind of institutions in which trusted leaders went wrong can be calmly assessed. This is a time for saying sorry, and until that word is heard and truly accepted, changes in the liturgy will look pretty irrelevant. This is therefore a time, however, when the teaching and practice of reconciliation comes to the fore, and when the churches—all at different points on the journey, but all equally lacking courage—must recommit themselves to serious listening and incorporation of the voices of the laity and women at every level of our existence. Churches are not alone in this need, of course (I think of political parties). Bad theology underlies historic divisions in the celebration of reconciliation, particularly the meaning of the absolution and its relation to baptism (and the greeting of peace). It also underlies the profound discomfort in relation to the doctrine and actuality of the Church; 'the horror of the absence of God in the symbol of the Church' alongside the pertinent affirmation that if the Church is 'sacrament', it is always in the process of becoming, a less-than-perfect creation on its way to becoming what the Spirit is calling it to be.

We were subtly reminded that it is the whole laos of the Church which is formed, by Baptism, Confirmation and the Eucharist, into a holy and royal priesthood, and that the vocation of all Christians is realised when the Church offers its thanksgiving of praise in the blessed sacrament. The implications of the Australian Bishops' document Woman and Man: One in Christ Jesus (1999) for full participation in the liturgy, at all levels, were spelled out. It has been interesting to see how many of the theological and liturgical arguments in this volume have subtly or directly called for a re-orientation of the ordained priesthood itself, a conversion indeed to the vision of the Second Vatican Council.

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3. It built on it with decrees on the Church (*Lumen Gentium* and *Gaudium et pep*),
   Ecumenism (*Unitatis Redintegratio*) and Missions (*Ad Gentes*), to name only the
   principal ones.

These are large agendas. They are, however, exactly what that
Council addressed in 1963. SC is the only Council document which
began with a foreword. It situated this first document within the stated
hopes of the whole Council: to intensify the daily growth of Catholics
in Christian living; to make more responsive to the requirements of
our times those Church observances which are open to adaptation;
to nurture whatever can contribute to the unity of all who believe in
Christ; and to strengthen those aspects of the Church which can help
to summon all mankind (sic) into her embrace. It may be somewhat
plodding language to modern Australian ears, but its sentiments ex-
press the hopes of many Christians (I could say 'Catholics' beyond
the Roman tradition): a call for renewal, appropriate adaptation, ecu-
menism and evangelisation, all in one sentence.

Vatican II 'changed the Church', turning it upside down, placing
the life of the local Church at the top, with the apostolic hierarchy
as its foundation and support. The distinguished historian Jaroslav
Pelikan, who wrote an appendix to SC in Walter Abbott's early and
much-studied edition of *The Documents of Vatican II,* boldly claimed
that the hopes of the sixteenth century reformers were fulfilled in its
pages, though Pelikan later decided that his own Lutheran tradition
had fallen short of realising its early dreams, and he joined the Ortho-
dox Church. No, SC did more than acknowledge a need for reform
already accepted in Europe nearly five centuries earlier; it opened the
door to all Christians to understand the contemporary challenge to
their life and health, and it started with the reform of the liturgy.

Paul VI is quoted, the liturgy is the first source of life communicated
to us, the first school of our spiritual life, the first gift we can give to
Christian people by our believing and praying, and the first invitation
to the world... "That is surely true for all of us.

Much of what we have read has been a reminder of this starting
point. For instance, the fundamental principle of 'full, conscious and
active participation' was explored in several chapters, opening up the
full impact of each of those words, and how that might be incarnat-
ed in liturgical celebrations. In the process, we learnt that liturgy is ‘about drawing people into the experience of doing, an experience which has both internal and external dimensions’ or, as the best list of words in the book has it, understanding ‘liturgical intelligibility’ not only as linguistic, but ‘semiotic, kinaesthetic, artistic, musical, proxemic, hierarchic, communicative, emotional, mimetic, anamnetic, temporal, theological and cultural forms of intelligibility also’.

Chapters which seemed at first straightforwardly to promote one or another practical way of renewing the liturgy in terms of music, architecture, language, actions, and the observance of sacred time all take us to core theological ideas in SC which illuminate and free us to ‘make more responsive to the requirements of our times those Church observances which are open to adaptation’. Against the spirit of the age—its individualism, its secularity, and its fascination with relevance defined by the latest fashion—we need to invoke the Lord’s criterion: that the keepers of the Father’s household who have their eye on the coming kingdom take from the storehouse of treasures things both old and new (with apologies to Matthew 13:52).

The subject of ‘sacrifice’ discussed in several chapters has been such a central part of all ecumenical dialogues that it no longer has the impact it once had. It summons up the ghosts of old disputes wherein we have misunderstood what the other was saying, and thereafter defined ourselves over against them. This is the wonderful contrast of the moods of Trent and Vatican II. That there is now a ‘clear measure of agreement’ is evident in reports of theological dialogue. In this we gladly honour the contribution of Bishop Michel Putney to such dialogue both in Australia and internationally. What is said in this book about sacrifice is at every point instructive for all Christians; to lose such a word out of old prejudice is to weaken both meaning and practice. There are many words in this book which the children of the Reformation need to reintroduce to their vocabulary—because they belong to us all.

The mysterious gift of SC in the field of liturgy is that it changed all of us who claim the name of Christian. It was, perhaps unintentionally, ‘permission all, by the Spirit to the oikoumen).

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The mysterious gift of SC in the field of liturgy is that it changed all of us who claim the name of Christian. It was, perhaps unintentionally, 'permission giving. It was the voice of a Catholic Council, so we all, by the Spirit, heard it. Its documents and its spirit gave permission to the okoumenè to consider its own need for aggiornamento. The Council’s fundamental commitment to the unity of Christians gave courage for this enterprise, but above all, the Council’s provision for the ‘scientific’ study of the liturgy in all its facets opened opportunities for other Christians to benefit from Catholic universities and seminars (often in ecumenical faculties) and to examine their own distinctive traditions. Without SC, other churches would not have encouraged liturgical study in their teachers, or founded curricula which required liturgy as a subject for their ordinands. Renewed Catholic scholarship has borne fruit in ecumenical discussions such as those in the Australian Consultation on Liturgy (ACOL) and the international English Language Liturgical Consultation (IELC), as well as other learned bodies such as Societas Liturgica and the Australian Academy of Liturgy.

Protestants were, for example, amazed by what SC said of the role of Sacred Scripture. After four hundred years, they said, Rome has finally seen the light. Then we discovered the breadth, depth and freshness of Roman Catholic biblical scholarship, and the common lectionary, and the libraries of resources which were brought to the promotion of ‘that warm and living love for scripture to which the venerable tradition of both east and western rites gives testimony’ (SC 24). And we began to rethink and to revitalize a venerable tradition of our own which we had allowed to become fixed and too familiar. One author here drew our attention to the important issue of how the words of scripture are used in liturgy: some new liturgies still have signs of the old ‘proof-text’ method—that the mere sprinkling of biblical words somehow adds the odour of sanctity when something more focussed is required! But at the same time that Catholics were challenged to embrace the scriptures, others also heard the balancing claim of the place of sacrament in our worship.

The conversation about the Divine Office also, and of its music and of liturgical music in general, could be elaborated by reference to what is happening in the whole Church, for the principles underlying its definition and choice are true for all. Here we could also draw on the chapter on architecture which asks whether ‘noble simplicity’ joined with ‘beauty’ does not require us to think more deeply about both.
As I say, more than Catholics will have read this book with great benefit. This book will have heartened them and bonded them again with Catholic brothers and sisters pursuing common goals. But there has been considerable dismay at the directions in which Catholic ongoing 'reform' has moved in recent times, marked perhaps particularly by the publication of *Liturgiam authenticam* (2001), which, in my personal experience as chair at the time, seemed to cast aside all the fruitfulness of the English Language Liturgical Consultation and its predecessors. It seemed that Rome was abandoning the ecumenical liturgical movement. There are plenty of signs that this was not its intention, but those outside are left in some confusion. I do not want this to be read simply as a negative critical comment; rather I am expressing my strong hope that cooperation might be resumed, perhaps, I pray; under Pope Francis whose inauguration was notable for the unprecedented involvement of ecumenical guests. For fifty years, the 'separated brethren' have increasingly been regarded as partners with the Catholic Church and with each other in a large enterprise, which at no point involves compromise or unjustified change, but rather moves by the 'exchange of gifts' (Pope John Paul II). We are grateful for that partnership and have benefited from it, and believe that this is part of the prayer of our Lord that his disciples might be one. Let this book encourage and cheer us on to further liturgical labour—together.

For together in the body of Christ, we need to receive and create a liturgy which, to complete the earlier quote from Paul VI, 'dissolves the tongue-tied into blessed and true prayer, and engages the ineffable, regenerative power of singing with us the divine praise and human hopes, through Christ the Lord, and in the Spirit.'

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