

# philippine studies

Ateneo de Manila University · Loyola Heights, Quezon City · 1108 Philippines

---

## **The Bishop's Directives on Participation in the Mass**

Paul Brunner, S.J.

*Philippine Studies* vol. 9 no. 4 (1961): 557–570

Copyright © Ateneo de Manila University

---

Philippine Studies is published by the Ateneo de Manila University. Contents may not be copied or sent via email or other means to multiple sites and posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's written permission. Users may download and print articles for individual, noncommercial use only. However, unless prior permission has been obtained, you may not download an entire issue of a journal, or download multiple copies of articles.

Please contact the publisher for any further use of this work at [philstudies@admu.edu.ph](mailto:philstudies@admu.edu.ph).

<http://www.philippinestudies.net>

# The Bishops' Directives on Participation in the Mass

---

· PAUL BRUNNER, S.J.

**O**N August 6th, 1961, the Bishops of the Philippines issued their annual statement. The theme of this year's statement is the active participation of the faithful in the Liturgy of the Church. The Bishops earnestly exhort their flock to join in the liturgical revival "with the vivacity and enthusiasm of a young and dynamic Church". They do not content themselves with merely inviting the faithful to join the movement, they also provide them "with specific rules and regulations to be implemented in all our churches during the Mass on Sundays and holydays of obligation. These directives will be issued in the form of a booklet and will be distributed to all parishes and schools."

The publication of "Pastoral Directives of the Hierarchy of the Philippines for the celebration of Holy Mass and the participation of the faithful" should be counted among the major events of recent years in the spiritual life of the Catholic Philippines. The importance of the Directives can be gathered from the fact that, as of now, there are only three other countries which can boast of a similar document jointly adopted by all the Bishops on a national level: France with its "Directoire pour la Pastorale de la Messe" published by the French Episcopate in 1956, Argentina with its "Directorio del Episcopado Argentino" issued in 1958, and Germany with its "Richt-

linien... fuer die Feier der heiligen Messe in Gemeinschaft" published in June 1961.

The aim of the document is to implement the directives repeatedly given on the matter by the Popes since Pius X and especially those given in the September 1958 Instruction on Participation in the Mass by the Sacred Congregation of Rites.<sup>1</sup> The Philippine document does not merely reiterate the Roman directives; it completes them and adapts them to the particular conditions of this country in order to promote the laity's active, intelligent and interior participation in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.

The Philippine "Directives" takes advantage of all the similar documents published in recent years. It also manifests a thorough knowledge of the current literature on the liturgy as well as of the many experiments engaged in by the contemporary liturgical movement in various countries. From all this wealth of information and experience the document has selected the elements most up to date and most suited to the situation here. It can safely be proposed as a model for similar adaptation by those countries which do not yet have definite regulations in the matter. By issuing this document the Catholic Philippines fulfills "the role of being the beacon light of Christianity in the Orient" to which Divine Providence seems to have called it.

#### THE PREFACE

The Preface to the "Directives" is a letter by His Eminence Rufino J. Cardinal Santos. It is he who has been the instigator and inspirer of this liturgical Pastoral. The impression made by the people's participation in the Eucharistic Congress held in Munich in July 1960 seems to have given him the final impulse to carry out a project which had long occupied his mind: to have the Philippines join as one body in the Liturgical Renewal. From the Cardinal's letter we learn that the "Directives" was composed by Father Camilo Marivoet, C.I.C.M., who "painstakingly and masterfully prepared (it) at

<sup>1</sup> In this article the term Instruction will always refer to this document of the Sacred Congregation.

the instance of the Catholic Hierarchy". Father Marivoet, Rector of Guadalupe Minor Seminary (Makati, Rizal), had already rendered a great service to the Church when in 1956 the Philippine National Catechism, of which he is the main redactor, was published.

#### THE LETTER

The preface is followed by the Pastoral Letter of the Hierarchy on the Liturgical Revival. The Bishops briefly describe the liturgical Revival as "a return to the primitive forms of Christian piety. . . . The Mass was then much more simple in structure, with its essential parts easily recognizable, and so the faithful also saw, believed and lived what is essential." The Bishops urge the faithful to "act the Mass" in virtue of the share they have in the Priesthood of Christ Himself. From the laity's active participation in the Mass they expect a deepening of Christian life since this "is an exchange of love between the Father and His people". They also hope that "living the Mass" will help to solve partially "the greatest problem of our Church in the Philippines", namely, lack of religious instruction. "If in the past centuries the Liturgy has been found an effective means of religious instruction, there is no reason why it cannot be as effective today in our country if we only work to make our faithful *understand* and *act* and *pray* the Liturgy, especially the Holy Mass."

#### THE DIRECTIVES

The full title of the Pastoral Directives themselves is: "We shall go to the altar of God. Pastoral directives of the Hierarchy of the Philippines for the celebration of Holy Mass and the participation of the faithful." The document is divided into five parts. The first gives "Doctrinal considerations" on the nature and the structure of the Mass, the second deals with "General pastoral directives for the Mass", the third part regulates the "Participation of the faithful in Low Mass", the fourth determines the "Participation of the faithful in Sung Masses", while the last part lays down directives for "Commentators" in Low and Sung Masses.

The characteristic feature of the doctrinal part is its thorough biblical approach. From the time of the Council of Trent we have been used to systematic explanations of the Mass which originated during the Counter-Reformation controversies with the Protestants. In order to defend the points attacked by adversaries, some aspects of the total doctrine about the Mass have been overstressed, while other fundamental themes, like the community aspect of the Sacrifice of the Church, have remained undeveloped. Following the trend of contemporary theology, the "Directives" presents a catechesis of the Mass in which the respective elements are given the hierarchical value which they have in Revelation itself. These are the main aspects chosen by the "Directives": "The Mass is a holy meal. The Mass is a memorial. The Mass is a Pasch. The Mass is the making of a covenant with God. The Mass is the pledge of our Resurrection and the preparation for the marriage feast of Heaven." At first sight these themes seem to have only a rather loose connection with one another. But a closer study reveals that they are all centered around the idea of a meal. We could re-write the titles as follows: A holy meal; a sacrificial meal; a memorial meal; a paschal meal; a meal which seals our covenant with God; a meal which anticipates our Resurrection and the wedding banquet of Heaven.

This is the fundamental approach of Revelation itself, since the Mass is essentially the Last Supper re-enacted and extended to all times and all places so as to bring all men into personal contact with the Pasch of Christ, His Passion, Resurrection and Ascension, mystically anticipated in the Upper Room. Moreover, it seems to be the most suitable approach in this country where the family and community spirit is so strong and where every event furnishes a pretext for a gathering of friends, a celebration or "Fiesta."

The second part, which is concerned with "General pastoral directives for the Mass", opens with an analysis of the different roles of the Church's members in the celebration of Mass. Before instructing priests and faithful about how to carry out active participation, this part lays the doctrinal foundation on which that participation is based. Before teaching us *how*

to participate, it tells us *why* we should participate. The faithful should participate because "by its very nature the Mass is the sacrifice not only of the celebrating priest acting in the name of Christ, but also of the whole Church." Since it is the faithful who are the Church in virtue of their baptism, it necessarily follows that they, as the Church, have their own proper role to play in the celebration. The Mass as such is hierarchically structured, with a distribution of roles. Therefore the participation of the laity is more than a pastoral device intended to help the faithful in their devotions by keeping them busy with hymns and prayers. The differentiation of roles springs from the structure of the Mass itself.

This distribution can hardly be recognized in the Low Mass as it is today, now that the rites have evolved for so many centuries. Here the priest, "acting the role which pertains exclusively to him, also takes to himself the roles that normally belong to others. He assigns the faithful's responses to the acolytes; he reads the parts normally to be sung by the choir and the faithful; he himself does the readings that belong to the sacred ministers." If we want to get a clear picture of the hierarchical structure of the Mass, we must look at a Solemn Mass. "The right distribution of roles is best found in the Solemn Mass, although even there the part of the faithful may have been taken over by the choir."

The role of the priest is of course "essentially" different from that of the others. He alone speaks and acts in the name of Christ, consecrates and distributes the Bread of Life. This unique dignity creates an obligation for the priest to discharge his own function properly. "The harmony, dignity and devotion of the whole liturgical celebration of the Mass depend mainly on him." Thus he is invited to offer the Holy Sacrifice "unhurriedly". Here the document happily modifies the decree of the Acts of the Plenary Council of the Philippines which had fixed as a norm for the celebration "not less than 20 minutes", a disposition which has sometimes led to misunderstanding. The "objective" time of celebration of a Low Mass, "particularly when the faithful participate, is twenty-five to thirty-five minutes." The document goes on to ask that the priest say the

parts to be said aloud "in a clear, loud voice, so that he can be heard by the congregation, to wait for certain interventions of the Commentator," of whose role more will be said below. The document here also corrects the rubrical interpretation of those who think they have to say the prayers at the foot of the altar and to read the Epistle and Gospel in such a loud voice that they disturb the praying or singing of the faithful or the vernacular reading of the Lector. "In this instance the obligation (of speaking aloud) is transferred to the Lector who takes his (the priest's) place."

After mentioning briefly the sacred ministers, the Deacon and Subdeacon in Solemn Masses, the "Directives" defines the role of the Lector. His function is to read the Epistle to the faithful in the vernacular and in Low Masses the Gospel also. He should normally be a cleric but, if none can be found as is the usual case in most places, a layman may assume the function. "The pastor of the parish should see to it that two, three, or even more young men of the parish are properly trained for this task."

The role of the "Commentator" is a modern one, its creation made necessary by the fact that due to the evolution of society the words and signs used in the Liturgy are no longer self-explanatory. There is need of someone to translate the Liturgy's language. The Commentator, who made a timid appearance after the second World War, then little by little gained a solid position in spite of the attacks of some excessively rubric-minded liturgists, finally acquired an official status in the September 1958 Instruction. Now his cooperation in the liturgical service is not only tolerated but positively recommended. The success of any community celebration of Mass depends a great deal on him. The "Directives" repeats the main rules given by the Instruction on the requirements for the Commentator and on the proper way to discharge this function. It also adds practical advice drawn from experience. The commentator may take over the Lector's role when there is no other choice. A woman may be allowed to lead the prayers and the singing and even read the Epistle and the Gospel. She may stay in the first row among the faithful or may face

the congregation from outside the sanctuary. "The training of the Commentator should be given at least as much care as that of the Lector."

The next paragraphs deal with the function of the Acolytes and of the *Schola* (choir). The members of the choir should be aware that they exercise a liturgical function; it will help them to realize it if they sing not from the choir loft but from a place near the sanctuary or even inside it, except if it is a mixed choir. On this point the "Directives" tempers the prohibition of the Plenary Council of the Philippines against having mixed choirs and allows such, if a *schola* of men and boys cannot be organized.<sup>2</sup>

In speaking of the participation of the congregation, the "Directives" first insists on the interior participation to be awakened and fostered by the teaching of the priest. The faithful must become aware that they are "the offering Church united with the Head of the Mystical Body and with one another by the bond of Charity." This consciousness is the necessary condition of an authentic participation. "Interior participation translates itself in outward actions. The first of these consists in making common gestures and taking the common bodily postures." The "Directives" assigns a posture to each part of the Mass, indicating at the same time the reason for it. "The changes in posture have their reason and that reason is not to keep people awake by change."

The faithful are strongly encouraged to engage in community singing. Taking into account the love of the Filipinos for music, the "Directives" states: "We should be careful not to deprive the faithful of the singing of those parts that are legitimately theirs or which they share with the priest or the *schola*. Artistic considerations should impel us to teach them how to sing properly rather than to keep them silent." "At a Low Mass vernacular songs are permitted and even recommended, provided they satisfy certain conditions."

Unfortunately, "it is to be noted that many of the hymns in common use now do not meet these requirements. We should

---

<sup>2</sup> Acts of the Plenary Council of the Philippines, no. 587.

gradually replace them with better ones. The fact that the people all know those poorer ones is no valid excuse."

The end of this section gives short but very pertinent directions about Church building and the altar. It warns against "superfluous ornamentations and statues that distract the people from the altar." "The altar should receive our particular attention. . . it is a table and should look like a table." Celebration while facing the people is allowed "at special occasions, if the local Ordinary does not oppose this practice". "Side altars should be so located in a church that they draw away the attention of the faithful from the main altar as little as possible."

The following three paragraphs deal with different aids which help the participation of the faithful. Concerning mechanical aids, like a sound-system, the "Directives" merely repeats the prescriptions given by the September 1958 Instruction. On preparation for the participation of the faithful, the "Directives" suggests that the pupils of our Catholic schools and the members of the various groups of Catholic Action be trained in a special way and act as a nucleus within the crowd. Prudence dictates, the third paragraph says, that the introduction of the various forms of community participation be done step by step and each step be accompanied by pertinent explanations.

The last section of this second part contains short but important suggestions on how to stress the main parts of the Mass in order to facilitate the faithful's understanding of the Holy Action as an integrated unity. Special care is to be devoted to take advantage of the dramatic and visual elements of the Mass Liturgy. It should be noted that this is not a concession made to a people fond of show, in order to make the Mass more attractive. The remarks grouped here simply restore to their original meaning those exterior elements introduced by the Church herself to express an interior attitude of the participants.

For instance, the opening rites of the Mass are meant to transfer the community gradually from this world and its daily

worries into the presence of the living God. This "passing over" to God is best expressed by the Entrance Procession of the Priest and the Acolytes walking slowly from the back of the church towards the altar, while the community, singing a hymn, walks also in spirit towards the altar. This kind of procession is recommended by the "Directives" for Sundays and feast-days, wherever the architecture of the Church permits.

For the Collect, the "Directives" proposes one small detail which restores the original meaning of the rite. "It is suitable that the priest make a slight pause in between the Oremus and the text of the Collect." This time is allotted for the personal silent prayers of the faithful, which are afterwards summed up, "collected", by the priest in the name of all.

Great care should be taken to surround the "Service of the Word" with solemnity, so that it is quite apparent that it is God who speaks to his people. "The Holy Book from which the Word is proclaimed. . . should be presented and used with great respect and dignity. It is recommended that the Lectionary or Bible be placed on a lectern and rest on a veil or cloth of the color of the day." The time when God's Word is being proclaimed to us is not the time for the faithful to read the text in a Missal but the time for all to listen to God's Word "with our ears".

The proclamation of God's Word is a sacramental, not a sacrament which works *ex opere operato*. This means that it is useless to read even a vernacular text if the faithful cannot grasp it or if at least a large part of it is lost to them. Unluckily this is the case for some of the Sunday Epistles. For this reason the Bishops, anxious to fulfill their duty of breaking the bread of truth to their flocks, make provision that the faithful at least grasp a minimum of the message conveyed to them. If the text is difficult, the Commentator should guide the listeners through a short introduction. Further, the priest may even simplify the text, if necessary. "In community Masses for school children or for people with little education, the text may be somewhat simplified, provided its ideas are respected." A

vernacular lectionary is to be prepared, to secure a dignified, rhythmical and uniform reading.

The Offertory procession in its various forms is recommended. Very practical counsels are given as to how to make use of the collection, which sometimes appears to our faithful as an intrusion of Mammon into the sanctuary, a liturgical action expressing the share which the body of Christians has in the offering of the Sacrifice.

A short but essential element of the participation of the laity has been carefully stressed in the "Directives": the *Amen*, concluding the Canon. "This Amen should be very emphatic." It seems that to have the faithful sing a threefold Amen is in line with this recommendation.

The "Directives" also acknowledges and recommends the so-called General Prayer, a kind of litany for the general intentions of the Church. This type of prayer, a traditional part of the Mass in the ancient Church, has been widely restored and advocated by several liturgical conventions for its pastoral advantages.

The third and fourth parts of the "Directives" deal explicitly with the participation of the faithful in Low and Sung Masses. Here the document closely follows the September 1958 Instruction, although it does make some significant modifications or additions.

Whereas the Instruction begins with the rules for sung Masses and afterwards proceeds to low Masses, the "Directives" inverts the order. The reason is not that it does not consider the Latin sung Masses as the higher form of the Christian Worship. It explicitly says that "the faithful should be gradually introduced to and prepared for participation in the singing of the Gregorian chant." But from the pastoral point of view, the low Mass with vernacular prayers and hymns is of greater help to introduce the people into the meaning of the Holy Sacrifice and therefore will, at least in the beginning, be the better and more common form in parishes.

Like the Instruction, the "Directives" speak of various prevailing forms of participation in low Masses. The first form

is expressly forbidden: this is the public recitation of the Rosary. This prohibition is timely, since the practice is now being continued here even in some religious communities, although it is against the spirit of the September 1958 Instruction, which has further been explicitly clarified by a reply of the Sacred Congregation of Rites.

For the form of "direct" participation the "Directives" adopts the four grades of participation recommended by the Instruction, adding some remarks drawn from pastoral experience. Where in the second grade of participation the Instruction assigns to the faithful all "the parts which according to the Rubrics are to be said by the server", the "Directives" excepts the 42nd Psalm at the foot of the altar "which proves often too difficult for the ordinary faithful." It adds another reason for the omission: "Strictly speaking, Psalm 42 belongs anyway to the celebrant and the clergy." The Confiteor may be recited "if the people are well prepared for it." A similar restriction is made regarding the *Suscipiat* in response to the *Orate Fratres*: "As this prayer lacks good rhythm for recitation and as it is directly intended for the clergy it is better to leave this answer to the acolyte." Because it is very difficult to obtain truly synchronized answers in these places, the response, *Deo gratias*, after the Epistle and the last Gospel, and the response, *Laus tibi Christe*, after the Gospel are, it is suggested, not to be given by the people.

The September 1958 Instruction is very brief on popular songs during Mass and although it does not forbid the addition of vernacular prayers to the Latin answers, neither does it mention them when speaking of direct participation. Thus certain authors have concluded that the Instruction presents that form of low Mass in which everything is recited in Latin, without any vernacular prayer or hymn whatsoever, as the ideal form towards which we all should strive. The "Directives" clearly precludes such an erroneous interpretation by adding two further forms: the Dialogue Mass with vernacular prayers, the Dialogue Mass with vernacular hymns, or a combination of both. Moreover, speaking of the Dialogue Mass

with vernacular hymns, it says: "This is the form of participation we should arrive at; for it is the form that ordinarily appeals most to the people." Therefore the ideal form is the one that best fosters active, intelligent and interior participation<sup>3</sup>

For a music-minded people like the Filipinos, active and intelligent participation undoubtedly includes singing. It is also to be noted that the "Directives" allows the faithful to recite a free version of the *Gloria, Sanctus, Agnus Dei*, and the Apostle's Creed instead of the Latin text. Even the Our Father may be recited in the vernacular, following the *Pater Noster* of the priest.

For participation in sung Masses, the "Directives" like the Instruction distinguishes three degrees. Realizing the difficulties met with by simple people, it suggests means to carry out a high Mass even with a choir of little capacity. "If the choir is not skilled enough to sing the sometimes difficult Gregorian melody of the Introit, the Latin text may be sung in psalmody, that is, according to some simple melody used for singing Psalms. The same rule of substituting psalmody applies to the singing of the Gradual, Alleluia, Tract, and to the Offertory and Communion Antiphons."

"A Sung Mass should not deprive the people of the benefit of the explanations given by a Commentator. On the contrary, the Sung Mass being a more difficult form, the need for a Commentator is greater than in Low Mass. However, his interventions should be less copious in number."

It is on this function of the Commentator that the document closes, determining when he may intervene and suggesting some ideas on how he should comment.

---

<sup>3</sup> The privileges granted in 1960 by the Holy See to the dioceses of Argentina clearly show that this interpretation is not against the spirit of the Instruction of 1958. The faithful in Argentina are allowed in Low Masses to recite the *Gloria, Credo, Sanctus, Agnus Dei* and even *Pater Noster* and *Domine, non sum dignus* in Spanish. In High Masses they are allowed to sing vernacular hymns, like the German Catholics.

## CONCLUSION

One word has recurred constantly in our analysis, the word, pastoral. Actually this is the adjective that best qualifies the "Directives" of the Philippine Hierarchy. It is a specifically pastoral document fully aware of needs and problems on the parish and barrio level and anxious to propose practical answers to these needs and practical solutions to these problems.

As has been said, the document displays a perfect knowledge of the current literature on the Liturgy and of whatever has been done practically in the field. Yet, standing far apart from any mere Esthetism and Rubricism, the "Directives" subordinates such artistic and intellectual elements to the needs of the people. This is why, for instance, it exhausts all the possibilities allowed by the actual legislation regarding the use of the vernacular, because this is what the people need. This is why it takes full advantage of the dramatic elements in the structure of the Mass (for example, Entrance and Offertory Processions) because these help the people understand the Mass. This is why it rejects the unauthentic elements introduced into or left in the Liturgy, whenever such rejection is possible within the frame of the present rubrics, because these unauthentic elements confuse the people.

If the directives in this document are implemented, the Philippines can become in a short time one of the most "liturgical" countries in the world, especially since this is a people who love rites and ceremonies. Moreover, a historical study of evangelization in the Islands would probably reveal that the Liturgy has always been a great factor in conversions, winning hearts to Truth through Truth's outward splendor.

Now as then the liturgical movement, to be genuine, must be based on solid Theology; otherwise it will spread like a fad, very fast, but like a fad die away as quickly. Responsible Church leaders, the priests, the religious and the Sisters most especially, must make a serious effort to deepen the study of the theological aspects of the Liturgy and its connection with the spiritual life, and from that its flow out into practice.

The "Directives" itself suggests that "those priests who are more versed in the Liturgy and who were perhaps already carrying out pastoral liturgical projects of their own could render their confreres a tremendous service by applying the present pastoral directives to the full as soon as possible and then let their parishes act as pilot projects to which they invite their fellow priests for inspiration."

This is greatly to be hoped for since it would be of great help not only for the Philippines but also for neighboring countries. Manila is a crossroads. Missionaries passing through here to their own fields would learn from this Catholic country of the Far East how genuine children of God worship their heavenly Father in spirit and in truth.