

The triumphs and pitfalls of *Sacrosanctum Concilium* 60 years on

It's arguably the Second Vatican Council's most contested and misunderstood Constitutions but six decades later, Professor Clare Johnson says the Catholic faithful have a way to go to fully grasp the central vision of *Sacrosanctum Concilium*.

As the first Constitution of the Council promulgated by Pope Paul VI, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* addressed a common yet inadequate understanding of the real presence of Christ throughout the divine liturgy.

Professor Johnson, Director of the ACU Centre for Liturgy, said the Council called on the whole Church, not just the clergy but also the lay faithful, to recognise that Christ was and is present throughout the entire liturgy, not just in the reception of Holy Communion.

"The liturgical vision detailed in *Sacrosanctum Concilium* called on the whole Church to recognise the numerous modes of Christ's real presence in the liturgy we celebrate – in the Word, Sacraments, Presider, Assembly's prayer and song, and the Body and Blood of Christ - and to engage with him fully - that is with our whole selves - consciously, and actively as we offer praise and worship to the Father in union with the Holy Spirit," Professor Johnson said.

The ACU Centre for Liturgy will mark the 60th anniversary of *Sacrosanctum Concilium* with [two special public lectures](#) in November and December.

In a live online lecture on 6 November, Professor Teresa Berger from the Yale University Divinity School will imagine the possible futures of Catholic liturgy beyond *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, including what liturgy will have to become in the 21st century.

The Centre will also host Professor Fr John Baldovin, SJ in Melbourne for a free public lecture on 3 December, examining the reception of the Constitution and whether the vision of liturgical reform is in peril.

Professor Johnson will also deliver a lecture at St Mary's Cathedral on 29 November as part of a new series in Sydney on the liturgical maturation of *Sacrosanctum Concilium* during Pope Francis' pontificate.

"The sixtieth anniversary of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy of Vatican II marks a significant historical milestone but also provides an opportunity for the Church to consider 'what we have done and what we have failed to do' in terms of how we celebrate liturgy," Professor Johnson said.

Over sixty years, many requirements of *Sacrosanctum Concilium* have been instituted. Professor Johnson said these changes, the most notable being the use of the vernacular, encouraging priests to face the people, and the active participation of the faithful, were made deliberately to realign with the Church's early history.

"In *Sacrosanctum Concilium* the Catholic Church consciously instituted a deliberate change in our liturgical practice informed by historical scholarship, so that how we celebrate today is more aligned with what we know of how the earliest Christians celebrated liturgy, with an emphasis on enabling the whole assembly's prayer rather than focussing primarily on the priest-presider's prayer," Professor Johnson said.

"The Constitution also emphasised the need for all the faithful to be able to understand what we are saying and doing by praying in our native languages, and the need for all of us to participate in the liturgy through words, movements, gestures, symbols, music, art, and cultural elements that truly reflect who we are in this time and in this place."

However, realising the full vision of the Constitution still needed work, Professor Johnson said.

"Every new generation must be taught *that* Christ is present when we celebrate liturgy, *how* he is present, and *what* that presence means for the way we celebrate," Professor Johnson said.

"Existing generations need regular reminding of this also because celebrating liturgy well is not just about performing the rites according to the rubrics but enacting them with understanding, beauty, humility, and joy so that each member of the worshipping assembly can recognise the truth of God's ongoing presence with us today through all our trials and triumphs."

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