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Positio N. 9

SILENCE AND INAUDIBILITY
IN THE
EXTRAORDINARY FORM

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From the General Introduction

These papers, commissioned by the International Federation *Una Voce*, are offered to stimulate and inform debate about the 1962 Missal among Catholics ‘attached to the ancient Latin liturgical tradition’, and others interested in the liturgical renewal of the Church. They are not to be taken to imply personal or moral criticism of those today or in the past who have adopted practices or advocated reforms which are subjected to criticism. In composing these papers we adopt the working assumption that our fellow Catholics act in good will, but that nevertheless a vigorous and well-informed debate is absolutely necessary if those who act in good will are to do so in light of a proper understanding of the issues.

The authors of the papers are not named, as the papers are not the product of any one person, and also because we prefer them to be judged on the basis of their content, not their authorship.

The International Federation *Una Voce* humbly submits the opinions contained in these papers to the judgement of the Church.

Silence and Inaudibility in the Extraordinary Form: Abstract

Liturgical texts read silently or inaudibly are a striking feature of the Extraordinary Form, and this has seemed scandalous to those attached to a didactic model of the liturgy, such as the supporters of the Synod of Pistoia. The explanation of why some texts cannot be heard by the Faithful is threefold. First, some texts are obscured by singing, at sung Masses; these include the texts actually being sung. The close connection between the singing, and the natural space in the liturgy which allows this singing to take place, was noted by Pope St Pius X. Secondly, the ‘priestly prayers’ addressed personally by the celebrating priest to God, for example at the *Munda cor meum* and *Lavabo*, express the intimate relationship between the priest and God, which, as Pope Benedict XVI has emphasised, is important for all to appreciate and imitate. Thirdly, the silence of the Canon marks it as a prayer of special sacredness, with an atmosphere recalling the silence of Calvary. Pope Benedict XVI has described the deeply prayerful participation of the Faithful in the ‘filled silence’ the silent Canon creates.

Comments can be sent to

positio@fiuv.org

FIUV Position Paper: Silence and Inaudibility in the Extraordinary Form

1. A marked characteristic of the Extraordinary Form is the use of silence, particularly the silent Canon, which contrasts with the practice of the Ordinary Form. It is a natural parallel to celebration *ad orientem*,¹ which, like it, developed and spread in the early centuries of the Church.² The use of silence in the Extraordinary Form is complex, however, and indeed silence is not excluded from the Ordinary Form. Without attempting an exhaustive account of the subject, this paper will limit itself to certain generalisations about the place of silence in the Extraordinary Form.
2. Silent prayer was one of three aspects of the ancient Latin liturgical tradition criticised by the Jansenist Synod of Pistoia of 1786, a criticism itself condemned by Pope Pius VI.³ It is grouped with ritual complexity and the use of a non-vernacular language, but silence might seem the most profound challenge to the Enlightenment principles which motivated Pistoia. For it would not seem to make the liturgy more immediately comprehensible to the Faithful if it were simplified and translated into the vernacular, if the prayers were still said inaudibly. Although the Faithful, even with a limited liturgical formation, will be familiar with the content of Ordinary prayers said silently,⁴ it is clearly necessary to go beyond a functionalist and didactic model, and consider the symbolic significance of silence, in order to understand its role.

¹ See Positio 6: 'Liturgical Orientation'

² Pope Benedict XVI (Joseph, Cardinal Ratzinger) *The Spirit of the Liturgy* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2000) p215: 'It is no accident that in Jerusalem, from a very early time, parts of the Canon were prayed in silence and that in the West the silent Canon—overlaid in part with meditative singing—became the norm.' Evidence is lacking on whether the Canon was said silently before the 8th Century; a tendency towards saying it in a low voice is implied by the attempt by the Emperor Justinian to outlaw this practice in the year 565 (Novella 137 in the collection edited by Schoell & Kroll in Mommsen's *Corpus Juris Civilis* vol. 3 p 699). It seems likely that the Oratio Super Oblata, the 'Secret Prayer', has been said silently since its introduction into the Mass in the 5th Century, though this cannot be established definitively. Jungmann notes that the contrast between the words 'Nobis quoque peccatoribus', said aloud, and the rest of the Canon, said silently, was noted and discussed in 9th Century, citing Amalarius of Metz (d. c.850) (Joseph Jungmann: *The Mass of the Roman Rite: Its origins and development* (English edition: New York: Benzinger, 1955) Vol II, p257, footnote 47).

³ Pope Pius VI, Bull *Auctorem Fidei* (1794) 33: 'The proposition of the synod by which it shows itself eager to remove the cause through which, in part, there has been induced a forgetfulness of the principles relating to the order of the liturgy, "by recalling it (the liturgy) to a greater simplicity of rites, by expressing it in the vernacular language, by uttering it in a loud voice"; as if the present order of the liturgy, received and approved by the Church, had emanated in some part from the forgetfulness of the principles by which it should be regulated,— rash, offensive to pious ears, insulting to the Church, favourable to the charges of heretics against it.'

⁴ For many years the Sacred Congregation of Rites forbade translations of the Ordinary of the Mass; this legislation was reiterated as late as 1858. Nevertheless, the meaning of the Canon, and even paraphrases of it, were part of devotional aids to the Mass, which began to appear with the advent of printing, and developed particularly from the 17th Century onwards. See Alcuin Reid *The Organic Development of the Liturgy* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005) footnote 191 on p63. See also *The Lay Folks Mass Book, or, the Manner of Hearing Mass: with Rubrics and Devotions for the People, in Four Texts, and Office in English according to the Use of York, from Manuscripts of the Xth to the XVth Century* by Thomas Frederick Simmons (Early English Text Society, 1879) (available online <http://archive.org/details/layfolksmassbook00simmuoft> , and print-on-demand from Nabu Public Domain Reprints).

Inaudibility

3. It is worth noting briefly the case of prayers said, not silently, but nevertheless inaudibly. This happens in a Sung Mass, when the singing of the Introit and Kyrie obscures the Preparatory Prayers⁵ and those immediately following them, even if they would otherwise be audible. Similarly, the singing of the other Proper and Ordinary chants obscure the priest's reading of the same texts.
4. The traditional practice creates a very intimate relationship between liturgical music and the liturgy. Pope St Pius X in his Motu Proprio on Sacred Music, *Tra le Sollicitudini*, explained that singing should not unnecessarily exceed the space created for it by the liturgy.⁶ Such spaces would be reduced considerably if the celebrant did not read the texts which the choir is singing, and eliminated altogether if singing were not allowed to obscure other prayers. When singing does exceed this space, Pius X warned,
the liturgy in ecclesiastical functions is made to appear secondary to and in a manner at the service of the music.⁷
5. The principle of inaudible prayer by the celebrant while singing is going on is maintained in the 1970 Missal, with the Offertory, which may indeed be said silently even if there is no singing.

Silent prayers of the priest

6. In another category are those prayers which are in a certain sense personal to the sacred minister saying them, notably when he implores the purification and graces to perform a rite worthily. Examples would include the 'Munda cor meum' before the Gospel, the 'Lavabo' before the Canon, and the prayers said at the priest's Communion. Pope Benedict XVI comments:
The silent prayers of the priest invite him to make his task truly personal, so that he may give his whole self to the Lord. They highlight the way in which all of us, each one personally yet together with everyone else, have to approach the Lord. The number of these priestly prayers has been greatly reduced in the liturgical reform, but, thank God, they do exist...⁸
7. The silence of these prayers is a dramatic indication of the intimacy of the priestly task: they are addressed to God alone. As Pope Benedict indicates, this is important to stress

⁵ The Preparatory Prayers (the Prayers at the Foot of the Altar), though not necessarily inaudible, do also, historically, belong to the category of prayers personal to the priest (see paragraphs 6-7), or at least to the priest and the other sacred ministers. They were originally said in the sacristy, or on the way to the Altar (see Jungmann *op. cit.* Vol. I p291-5). This adds to the appropriateness of their inaudibility at Sung Mass.

⁶ Pope St Pius X, Motu Proprio *Tra le Sollicitudini* (1903) 22-23: 'It is not lawful to keep the priest at the altar waiting on account of the chant or the music for a length of time not allowed by the liturgy. According to the ecclesiastical prescriptions the *Sanctus* of the Mass should be over before the elevation, and therefore the priest must here have regard for the singers. The *Gloria* and the *Credo* ought, according to the Gregorian tradition, to be relatively short. In general it must be considered a very grave abuse when the liturgy in ecclesiastical functions is made to appear secondary to and in a manner at the service of the music, for the music is merely a part of the liturgy and its humble handmaid.'

⁷ See the fuller quotation in Note 6 above. The role of sacred music in the Extraordinary Form will be the subject, we hope, of a future Position Paper.

⁸ Pope Benedict XVI *op. cit.* p213. Pope Benedict goes on to list places in the 1970 Missal in which these silent prayers are to be found: at the preparation for the proclamation of the Gospel, the Preparation of the Gifts, and before and after the Priest's reception of Holy Communion.

both for the priest himself, and for the Faithful who are to associate themselves with him and follow his example of humility before God.

The Silent Canon

8. In a category of its own is the Canon of the Mass. While the Sanctus is sung, at a Sung Mass, during the Canon,⁹ the words of Consecration themselves take place during a privileged period of silence, during which nothing may be sung and the organ may not be played. This silence is heightened by the ringing of the bell to signal, first, the approaching Consecration, and then the double Consecrations themselves. Later, if singing is not taking place, the celebrant can be heard to say, in a more elevated voice, 'Nobis quoque peccatoribus', the opening words of a prayer for the living,¹⁰ which serves to emphasise the priest's unworthiness, following the moment of his closest identification with Christ. The otherwise complete silence of the Canon gives it a particular sacred atmosphere, and raises it, in importance, above what goes before or comes after it. It recalls the words of the prophet Habbakuk, used in a hymn of the Liturgy of St James with a well-known English translation: 'the Lord is in his holy temple. Let all the earth keep silent before him.'¹¹ Again, the book of Wisdom:

For while all things were in quiet silence, and the night was in the midst of her course, Thy almighty word leapt down from heaven from thy royal throne, as a fierce conqueror into the midst of the land of destruction.¹²

9. This part of the Mass naturally reminds us of the High Priest passing into the Holy of Holies in the Temple, the mediation of Moses, hidden by the cloud on Mount Sinai, and the silence of Calvary, broken only by the Last Words. The sense of the priest passing out of the ordinary world, into another realm in which to meet God, is strongly underlined in an iconographic way. Such parallels have been noted by the Fathers and Doctors of the Church, a tradition summarised by St Robert Bellarmine.¹³

⁹ Sung to a chant setting, the Sanctus and Benedictus are generally short. Polyphonic settings tend to be longer, and for this reason the Benedictus is postponed until after the Consecration. (Formerly choirs were directed to divide up the Sanctus and Benedictus in this way with Chant settings also; this was not made clear in the 1908 *Graduale Romanum*, but was reiterated by the Sacred Congregation for Rites in a response to a *dubium* (14th January 1921) and abolished by the Instruction *Musica Sacra* in 1958.)

¹⁰ Often understood as being for the clergy specifically. See Jungmann *op. cit.* pp249-250. He also discusses a possible practical origin of these words being said aloud, and cites allegorical interpretations, and their importance in spreading the practice from Solemn to Low Mass, recorded in the writings of Amalarius, Bernold of Constance, and Durandus (*op. cit.* pp258-9 and footnote 54).

¹¹ Habakkuk 2:20: 'But the Lord is in his holy temple. Let all the earth keep silent before him.' ('Dominus autem in templo sancto suo: sileat a facie eius omnis terra.') The Cherubic Hymn of the 4th Century Liturgy of St James was translated into English by Gerard Moultrie as 'Let all mortal flesh keep silence.' Cf. Zephaniah 1:7: 'Be silent before the face of the Lord God: for the day of the Lord is near, for the Lord hath prepared a victim, he hath sanctified his guests.' ('Silete a facie Domini Dei: quia iuxta est dies Domini, quia praeparavit Dominus hostiam sanctificavit vocatos suos.') Again, Isaiah 32.17: 'the service of justice [is] quietness', more strikingly in Latin: 'cultus iustitiae silentium'.

¹² Wisdom 18.14: 'Cum enim quietum silentium contineret omnia et nox in suo cursu medium iter haberet, omnipotens sermo tuus de caelo a regalibus sedibus durus debellator in mediam exterminii terram prosilivit.'

¹³ St Robert Bellarmine *Controversies* Book VI, chapter 12. 'We also have the example of the sacrifice of the Old Law. For in the solemn offering of the incense, it was commanded that only the priest should pass through the veil to sacrifice, praying for himself and for the people. They stood without, waiting, and not only did they not hear the priest, they could not even see him. ... Again, when Christ hung upon the cross, as the exemplar of all sacrifices, he made his oblation in silence.' Quoted in Thomas Crean *OP The Mass and the Saints* (Oxford: Family Publications, 2008) p104; see also note 9 above.

10. As noted above on the priestly prayers, silence indicates that the prayer is addressed to the Father, and not to the congregation, but this time this is not because of the personal nature of the petition, but because of its uniquely sacred nature. The importance of the prayers of the Canon lie in what they bring about on the altar: they are, above all, performative, not informative or didactic. As Blessed John Henry, Cardinal Newman, expressed it:

Words are necessary, but as means, not as ends; they are not mere addresses to the throne of grace, they are instruments of what is far higher, of consecration, of sacrifice.¹⁴

11. Before his election, Pope Benedict XVI more than once suggested that the Canon be said silently in the Ordinary Form.¹⁵ He comments:

Anyone who has experienced a church united in the silent praying of the Canon will know what a really *filled* silence is. It is at once a loud and penetrating cry to God and a Spirit-filled act of prayer. Here everyone does pray the Canon together, albeit in a bond with the special task of the priestly ministry. Here everyone is united, laid hold of by Christ, and led by the Holy Spirit into that common prayer to the Father which is the true sacrifice—the love that reconciles and unites God and the world.¹⁶

The value of silence

12. Blessed Pope John Paul II wrote, in *Spiritus et Sponsa* (2003), of the importance of silence, in relation to the re-evangelisation of the West.

One aspect that we must foster in our communities with greater commitment is the experience of silence. We need silence ‘if we are to accept in our hearts the full resonance of the voice of the Holy Spirit and to unite our personal prayer more closely to the Word of God and the public voice of the Church.’ In a society that lives at an increasingly frenetic pace, often deafened by noise and confused by the ephemeral, it is vital to rediscover the value of silence. The spread, also outside Christian worship, of practices of meditation that give priority to recollection is not accidental. Why not start with pedagogical daring a specific education in silence within the coordinates of personal Christian experience? Let us keep before our eyes the example of Jesus, who ‘rose and went out to a lonely place, and there he prayed’ (Mk 1: 35). The Liturgy, with its different moments and symbols, cannot ignore silence.¹⁷

As has been discussed in Positio 2,¹⁸ and contrary to the Enlightenment assumptions of Pistoia, the liturgy communicates not only at the verbal level but non-verbally. Pope Benedict XVI recently affirmed silence as ‘a particularly powerful mode of expression’:¹⁹

¹⁴ Bl. John Henry, Cardinal Newman (1848) *Loss and Gain: The Story of a Convert* Part II, Ch 20.

¹⁵ Pope Benedict XVI *op. cit.* pp214-216, referring to and reiterating the suggestion he had made in 1978.

¹⁶ Pope Benedict XVI *op. cit.* pp215-216

¹⁷ Blessed Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Spiritus et Sponsa* (2003) The first internal quotation is from the *Institutio Generalis Liturgiae Horarum*, 202.

¹⁸ Positio 2: ‘Liturgical Piety and Participation’

¹⁹ Pope Benedict XVI: Message for the 46th World Communications Day ‘Silence and the Word: Path of Evangelization’ (2012): ‘It is often in silence, for example, that we observe the most authentic communication taking place between people who are in love: gestures, facial expressions and body language are signs by which they reveal themselves to each other. Joy, anxiety, and suffering can all be communicated in silence—indeed it provides them with a particularly powerful mode of expression. Silence, then, gives rise to even more active communication, requiring sensitivity and a capacity to listen

If God speaks to us even in silence, we in turn discover in silence the possibility of speaking with God and about God. “We need that silence which becomes contemplation, which introduces us into God’s silence and brings us to the point where the Word, the redeeming Word, is born”²⁰

In the liturgy, silence communicates the sacrality and importance of key moments with great force, even to the people of our own day.²¹

13. Pope Benedict XVI has argued that ‘for silence to be fruitful, ...it must not be just a pause in the action of the liturgy.’²² What is needed, as he puts it in the passage quoted in paragraph 10, is a ‘filled silence’: a silence during which there is something specific and appropriate to meditate upon. There is a certain parallel here with the singing which takes place, in accordance with the teaching of St Pius X, not in a pause in the liturgy, but while it continues. The silence of the priestly prayers and the Canon, in the Extraordinary Form, provides this ‘filled silence’ in a way which is both natural and symbolically charged.

that often makes manifest the true measure and nature of the relationships involved. When messages and information are plentiful, silence becomes essential if we are to distinguish what is important from what is insignificant or secondary.’

²⁰ *Ibid.* The internal quotation is from Pope Benedict’s Homily, Eucharistic Celebration with Members of the International Theological Commission, 6 October 2006. Pope Benedict XVI’s discussion of God’s silence as a means of communicating to us, recalls St Faustina Kowalska’s words in her diary: ‘Silence is so powerful a language that it reaches the throne of the living God. Silence is His language, though secret, yet living and powerful.’ (‘Diary: Divine Mercy in My Soul’ by Maria Faustina Kowalska (Marian Press; 3rd edition, 2003) section 888.

²¹ Cf. Paul VI Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi* (1975) 42 ‘Modern man is sated by talk; he is obviously tired of listening, and what is worse, impervious to words.’ (‘Qui sunt hodie homines, eos novimus, orationibus iam saturatos, saepe saepius audiendi fastidientes atque - quod peius est - contra verba obdurescentes videri.’)

²² Pope Benedict XVI *op. cit.* p209