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Active participation in Catholic school-based liturgy

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In England and Wales, diocesan inspectors are charged with assessing the overall quality of Catholic education provided by Catholic schools. As part of this assessment, inspectors are required to give an account of the liturgical life of the school. Often the reports which result from these inspections refer to the degree of students' 'active participation' in liturgy. This terminology has its roots in Biblical and patristic theological literature. Its meaning has evolved over time and has been used to describe a wide range of seemingly diffuse human behaviours. This article casts light on the meaning of 'active participation' in the context of Diocesan inspectors and offers some reflections on how this term could be refined in order to make diocesan inspections more informative.

Keywords: Liturgy; participation; inspection; Catholic schools

'Active Participation' is a phrase which is amongst the most widely commented on in the field of liturgy. The term appears in paragraph 14 of *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, the constitution on liturgy produced by the Second Vatican Council. The simple claim that 'all the faithful should be led to that full, conscious and active participation in liturgical celebrations,' has provoked a great deal of debate amongst liturgists (Second Vatican Council 1963, 14). In the context of school-based liturgy, the waters are further muddied by the use of the term 'active participation,' to designate quite different, pedagogical practices. The following is intended as a clarification of the meaning of 'active participation,' as it applies to the development of school-based liturgies by Catholic educators and should provide some guidance for those who are tasked with assessing the quality of school-based liturgy.

The study uses an empirical basis providing a meta-analysis of seventy-seven diocesan inspection (Section 48) reports carried out by diocesan inspectors across four dioceses and two provinces of the Catholic Church in England and Wales between 2014 and 2020.¹ The conclusion of this study is intended to act as guidance for Catholic educators and for policy makers within Catholic education.

What follows is a brief history of the usage of this terminology within Catholic liturgical thought. We then proceed to a summary of the use of similar terminology in an entirely separate sphere: educational theory. This is followed by an account of the interpretation of the term 'active participation' by those who are engaged with both educational and liturgical theory. In closing, this article highlights the pitfalls

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inherent to a system of assessment which puts visible, outward signs of an inward process – such as engagement – at the forefront of its success criteria.

‘Active participation’ in liturgical terms

From the early Church period up to the present day, the concept of participation has been central to Christian – and particularly Catholic – liturgical thought. At various points, during that history, Church leaders have called for greater and more active participation on the part of the laity in the liturgical life of the Church. Particularly during the period following the Second Vatican Council, powerful voices within the church called for the removal of barriers to lay involvement in liturgy.² In the proceeding decades, other voices sought to counterbalance this movement towards greater lay participation which they believed to have gone too far.

The endeavour at the heart of the *Sacrosanctum Concilium* project was, the conciliar authors avowed, to ‘impart an ever increasing vigour to the Christian life of the faithful’ (Second Vatican Council 1963, para. 14). In commenting on the particular importance that the laity would have in the development of a new liturgy, the conciliar fathers who produced the document were determined to clarify that ‘the full and active participation by all people is the aim to be considered before all else’ (Second Vatican Council 1963, para. 14). The scriptural roots of the theological concept of ‘participation’ can be found in the second letter of St Peter. In the first chapter of this epistle, we read that God ‘has given us everything we need for a Godly life,’ in Christ, that, through this ‘He has given us His very great and precious promises,’ and that ‘through them you may participate in the divine nature’ (2 Peter 1:4). From the patristic era onwards, this passage was linked with liturgy. Cyril of Jerusalem declared that through participation in the eucharist, Christians become ‘made of the same body and the same blood with [Christ]’ (Cyril of Jerusalem 2022, lecture 22, no. 3). When Jovinian used the concept of participation to prove his doctrine that all of the baptised are immune to temptation, he was rebutted by Jerome, who argued that ‘participation in the divine nature,’ was dependent on continued participation in the grace-giving life of the Church (Jerome 2022, book 2, chapter 29). 2 Peter 1:4 was also understood by Aquinas to refer to the sacraments. Since the sacraments were understood to ‘cause grace,’ it was therefore determined that participation in the sacraments was equivalent to participation in ‘the divine nature’ (Aquinas, III, question 62, article 1). This, then, provided the theological basis for the conciliar fathers’ declaration on the importance of ‘active participation.’

However, when it came to describing the epiphenomena of ‘active participation,’ the fathers were less than specific. Active participation could be evident, to the observer, in ‘acclamations, responses, psalms, antiphons, hymns,’ in ‘actions, gestures and bodily attitudes,’ and also in ‘reverent silence.’ Each of these different elements would have their place in the definition of active participation (Second Vatican Council 1963, paras. 14, 30). At different points in history, after all, liturgists have held different points of view on what constitutes the outward sign of active participation. In some contexts, activity among the lay congregation was interpreted as a failure of participation. In the pre-vernacular era, Catholic churches were often sites of paraliturgical practises. In the eighteenth century, the English priest John Gother wrote his *Instructions and Devotions for Hearing the Mass*. He lamented that too many of his congregants were engaged in activities which prevented them from ‘accompanying’ him in the Mass:

Some saying their beads all the time of mass, others their morning prayers, others their Offices of the Day or some private devotion with little regard for what the priest does. (Gother 1767, 7–8)

Gother's words reflected a wider concern within the Church – following the Council of Trent – that the laity should be encouraged not only to attend but also to be attentive to the actions of the Mass.³ This would usually entail *less* rather than more visible activity on the part of the congregation. Even in the mid-twentieth century, many liturgical writers and church-leaders did not presume that active participation would have any observable, external characteristics. In the encyclical *Mediator Dei*, Pius XII called for 'active and individual participation,' in the sense 'that all should approach and be drawn to His cross, especially by means of the sacraments and the eucharistic sacrifice, to obtain the salutary fruits produced by Him upon it' (Pius XII 1947, para. 78). Certainly the term was not used as a by-word for more demotic liturgical formulae. The term 'active participation' was also used by Pius X in a *motu proprio* of 1903 entitled *Tra Le Sollecitudini*. This text was intended, by the Pope, to outline the proper use of ecclesiastical music, and it is usually read as a repudiation of liturgical modernism and as an admonition to Catholics to use Gregorian chant in their liturgies. In lauding the 'great perfection' of liturgical music that could be found in the work of Palestrina, Pius X also condemned those who sought to introduce those musical styles which bore 'reminiscences of motifs adopted in the theatres,' or bore the 'external forms' of 'profane pieces.' He lamented 'the fatal influence exercised on sacred art by profane and theatrical art,' even in the hands of good-intentioned and 'pious' persons (Pius X 1903, para. 5).

From the post-war era onwards, however, active participation was used to describe greater, practical, observable lay involvement in the liturgy. There were significant barriers to this, notably a language barrier for those uneducated in Latin. Some of these barriers were addressed in the reforms of the Second Vatican Council. The text of *Sacrosanctum Concilium* includes the following declaration:

Mother Church earnestly desires that all the faithful should be led to that fully conscious and active participation in liturgical celebrations which is demanded by the very nature of the liturgy. (Second Vatican Council 1963, para. 14)

The move towards vernacularisation and other innovations were intended to guarantee a 'new liturgical dignity' to the laity. Many took the call for 'active participation,' in the latter half of the twentieth century, to signal a move towards an increased role for the laity and an increased role for secular modes of expression within the context of the liturgy. Thomas P. Rausch, among others, saw the documents produced by the council on liturgy as a clarion call for more participation in the design and delivery of liturgy by the laity.⁴ His historical analysis drew attention to the fact that 'liturgical assemblies' had preceded the sacerdotalist liturgy – the latter only coming to the fore in the eleventh century (Rausch 1995, 23–27). He joined Bob Hurd in calling for a reconfiguration of the role of the priest: away from 'celebrant' and towards 'presider' (Rausch 1996, 262–275). Hurd himself called for a move away from 'priest-centred liturgies with congregations' towards 'assembly-centred liturgies' (Hurd 1991, 132). These developments were a cause for alarm for those pontiffs whose reigns succeeded the Second Vatican Council. John Paul II – in his address to the Bishops of the Church in Washington, Oregon, Montana, Idaho and Alaska in 1998 – clarified the meaning of

active participation in order to dispel any interpretation which suggested that the latter required vocal or physical action on behalf of the worshipper:

Active participation does not preclude the active passivity of silence, stillness and listening: indeed, it demands it. Worshippers are not passive, for instance, when listening to the readings or the homily, or following the prayers of the celebrant, and the chants and music of the liturgy. These are experiences of silence and stillness, but they are in their own way profoundly active. (John Paul II 1983, 3)

His successor, Benedict XVI, was even more explicit in his rejection of the newly conventional interpretation of this increasingly contentious term. Before he ascended to the chair of St Peter, Ratzinger had expressed profound concern about the direction of liturgy in the Church and he ascribed some blame for perceived failures to those who had abused the documents of the *Sacrosanctum Concilium*. In his memoirs, published in 1998, he bemoaned the fact that the Second Vatican Council had ushered in new ‘community made’ liturgical practices. Whilst he acknowledged the value of liturgical innovation in some settings, he nevertheless prophesied that ‘self-made liturgy’ would eventually obstruct the ‘proper gift’ of liturgy: ‘encounter with the mystery that is not our own product but rather our origin and source of our life’ (Ratzinger 1998, 148). In ‘self-made’ liturgy, Ratzinger saw echoes of the story of the Golden Calf, the telling of which was intended ‘as a warning about any kind of self-initiated and self-seeking worship.’ Such practises could only provide ‘a nice little alternative world, manufactured from one’s own resources’ (Ratzinger 2000, 23). He further cautioned that liturgy should not only serve as a medium for ‘speaking ... to one another,’ but rather as a medium for ‘speaking to God.’ Here Ratzinger notes that participation ‘at its most profound’ really refers to ‘participation in God,’ rather than ‘participation in liturgy,’ and that, in this task, ‘interiorisation is of prime importance’ (Ratzinger 1986, 70). As Pope, Benedict reiterated these points, drawing attention to a ‘misunderstanding ... concerning the precise meaning of this participation.’ ‘Participation,’ he wrote ‘does not refer to mere external activity during the celebration,’ but rather refers to ‘a greater awareness of the mystery being celebrated and its relationship to daily life.’ Repeating his warnings about ‘self-made’ prayer and liturgy, he cautioned that ‘active participation of the laity does not benefit from the confusion arising from an inability to distinguish, within the Church’s communion, the different functions proper to each one.’ Benedict was equally explicit in his assertion that the liturgy should be pedagogical in its nature, but he stressed that the aim of this pedagogical process was *not* to render the nature of the sacraments more intelligible, but rather to point to their mysterious nature. ‘Mystagogical catechesis,’ was the proper aim of liturgy, and ‘mystagogy,’ the ‘basic structure of the Christian experience’ (Benedict XVI 2007, paras. 52, 55, 64).⁵

Benedict’s pronouncements on these subjects have been welcomed and explored by liturgists like John Francis Baldovin. ‘Participation does not mean merely external action,’ Baldovin writes ‘but more profoundly refers to interior spiritual dispositions’ (Baldovin 2008, 88). Baldovin and others have drawn attention to the influence of the early leaders of the twentieth century Liturgical Movement in shaping Benedict’s thought. The movement which emerged during this period was spurred on by the publication of *Tra Le Sollecitudini*. The young Josef Ratzinger was a fervent admirer of Romano Guardini.⁶ Guardini placed great emphasis on the potential of liturgy to draw Christians beyond the immanent frame towards the transcendent. Tradition played an important role in this process for Guardini who believed that the ‘full

expansion of spiritual life,' could be aided by participation in 'the devotional life of [a] great community which has spread its development over a long period of time,' and whose 'scheme of life has by then matured and developed its full value' (Guardini [1935] 2014, 5–6). Such 'matured' tradition allows for a 'corporate body composed of people of highly varied circumstance, drawn from distinct social strata ... different races ... different historical and cultural periods,' to participate in 'that which is universally accepted as binding and essential.' In this analysis, 'Catholic liturgy' is presented as the 'supreme example of an objectively established rule of spiritual life' (Guardini [1935] 2014, 6). Liturgy is not individualistic, but rather: 'it reaches out beyond the bounds of space to embrace all the faithful on earth,' and permits 'the body which is praying upon earth' to 'know itself to be at one with those for whom time no longer exists, who, being perfected, exist in Eternity' (Guardini [1935] 2014, 19).

All of this suggests that 'active participation' is a contested term within the Church. At times, within the Church, changes in liturgical practise have been designed in order to promote the visibility of active lay participation. This was particularly evident in the period following the Second Vatican Council. Some, meanwhile have strenuously argued that active participation cannot be reduced to empirically observable, external behaviours. Whilst this debate has ensued within the sphere of liturgical thought, similar debates have unfolded in recent decades within the sphere of pedagogical theory. In what follows, we address the use of 'active participation' as a theoretical tool in the writing of educational theorists.

The use of the term 'active participation' in the field of pedagogical theory

'Active participation,' means something quite different to educators. For educators, the concept of an 'active participation' by learners in the task of learning is perhaps most notably expressed in the writing of John Dewey. Dewey described learning as an 'active, personally conducted affair' (Dewey [1916] 2014, 335). This fundamental claim informed the development of a movement in the twentieth century towards the encouragement of more 'active learning.' In the late twentieth century, according to Stanford C. Ericksen, 'nearly every treatise about schoolroom learning [referred] to the importance of active participation by the student' (Ericksen 1984, 58). Most of these texts conflate 'good teaching' with the facilitation of active participation by students and, conversely, they conflate 'bad teaching' with the lack thereof. For Bonwell and Eison, learning could properly be understood as taking a variety of forms ranging along a 'continuum' from 'passive' to 'active,' with the former lacking in participatory elements and the latter being rich in participatory elements. The passive – and by implication less effective – form of learning, involves learners 'sitting in class inattentively ... listening and occasionally taking literal notes.' The other end of the continuum might involve 'presentations, debates and role-playing activities.' The goal of this form of pedagogy is, according to these authors, to 'involve students in doing things and thinking about the things they are doing.' A raft of empirical studies were conducted to suggest that, when 'students are actively involved in their learning' that 'they learn more than when they are passive recipients of instruction' (Bonwell and Eison 1991, 18–19). Learning, in this way, became understood as a visible phenomenon.

One of the key benefits of active participation techniques in the classroom, according to some scholars, is the fact that active engagement is more easily observable, empirically, than passive involvement. When students are engaged in a task which

is recognisable as an active form of learning, teachers are better able to ‘observe,’ them and to ‘get an idea of whether all students understand the content’ (Robertson 2014). In England and Wales, Catholic schools are subject to inspection by Ofsted (The Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills) as well as by the diocesan education services. With the development of the consensus that active participation by learners was more likely to produce good outcomes for learners, the assessment of teaching quality became more based on the observation of active learning in the classroom by Ofsted inspectors. This was the conclusion drawn by Robert Peal, whose research in 2014 concluded that inspection reports focussed more on the fauna of active participation and less on the actual process – less empirically obvious – of learning itself. Peal identified this over-emphasis on ‘child-led teaching’ as potentially ‘harmful’ (Peal 2014, 1). Michael Wilshaw, then Chief Inspector of Schools, (reluctantly) echoed Peal’s conclusion leading to a shift away from the assessment of teaching purely on the basis of visible evidence of active participation by students (Vaughan 2014).

In recent times, as such, the tide has turned against the active participation consensus. In 2008, John Hattie published his influential *Visible Learning*. The book comprised a range of meta-studies intended to measure the ‘effect size,’ of different techniques. He found that many ‘constructivist’ teaching approaches did not have a strong evidence base and that ‘student-centered inquiry learning, problem-based learning and task-based learning ... [were] almost directly opposite to the successful recipe for teaching and learning’ (Hattie 2009, 26). In 2014, Coe, Aloisi, Higgins and Major followed Hattie’s lead and conducted a major meta-analysis of educational research. Amongst their findings, they noted that educational theorists occasionally trade in unscientific myths. Within the latter category, the authors included the claim that ‘learners should always be active rather than passively listening if we want them to remember.’ This claim, they write, has ‘no empirical evidence’ and is ‘pure fiction’ (Coe et al. 2014, 24). There is a growing recognition, amongst teachers and amongst those who judge teachers, that active participation by students – identifiable in obvious outward behaviours – cannot be used as the sole or primary yardstick for the evaluation of good teaching.

In what follows, we explore the influence of the language of ‘active learning’ on the assessment of liturgical practices in school. The desire to develop easily, empirically observable teaching and learning practices is reflected in the desire amongst Catholic educators and their assessors to develop easily, empirically observable modes of liturgy. As we shall see, this emphasis can lead to a tendency to privilege outward signs of engagement at the expense of less easily observable yet equally important aspects of engagement.

The interpretation of the term ‘active participation’ in school-based Catholic liturgy

Liturgy remains at the heart of Catholic education and the quality of the liturgical life of a school is an important aspect of the assessment of Catholic schools by diocesan inspectors. Despite this, very little scholarly literature has explored the way in which the quality of liturgical life is assessed. This suggests that a level of ambiguity exists which itself can lead to a degree of subjectivity in the assessment of Catholic schools by inspectors and other observers.

In some areas of Catholic education research, the principle of ‘active participation,’ is used as a metric for assessing the virtue of school-based liturgies. At

times, however, it appears that the use of the term conflates its pedagogical and its theological valences. A good example of this can be found in an article written by Robert Starratt entitled ‘Liturgy as Curriculum’ (Starratt 2000, 57–71). Starratt gives an account of a school Mass observed in an American school in 2000. Whilst this text is not immediately relevant to the study of liturgy in Catholic schools in Britain in 2022, it remains one of the very few scholarly texts written on the subject. It also provides an explicit and scholarly expression of many of the themes implicitly expressed in some of the diocesan reports which we surveyed.

Starratt defends the importance of liturgy as a centrepiece of Catholic education. Liturgy, for Starratt, is primarily important as a locus for communal engagement. In this respect, Starratt compares liturgy, unfavourably, with other forms of communal practice. He notes that graduation ceremonies and other lay-centred rituals involve the participants more actively, whilst traditional forms of liturgy require the laity to ‘attend or hear,’ services without actively participating in them. Starratt places much of the blame for this failure to engage members of the school community on the apparent anachronism of liturgical tradition. Traditional liturgies, in their failure to use the ‘language, music and expressive media’ of the ‘teenage subculture,’ only serve to ‘exclude young people’ from ‘the Church’s desire for local liturgy to express local concerns, life experiences, language, and cultural artefacts’ (Starratt 2000, 57–58).

In order to remedy this, Starratt proposes that school-based liturgists should ‘teach young people how to participate fully in the celebration.’ This, he claims, would involve the abandonment of ‘inauthentic ritual,’ a ‘robotic kind of enactment,’ replacing the latter with a liturgy which speaks ‘the language’ of students, ‘using metaphors, imagery, music and gesture that express who they are and what they are thinking and feeling.’ In practical terms, it demands the involvement of ‘students and faculty in the music, gesture, sharing of faith, communal reflections on the readings and translation of the themes of the readings into appropriate musical and artistic expression’ (Starratt 2000, 59).

Starratt used a case study of a school Mass to illustrate this ideal. The liturgy involved a homily delivered by a student:

with the customary unease of a teenage boy speaking in front of his peers about ‘spiritual stuff,’ with shuffling of the feet, constant rubbing of the nose, some scratching of the back of the head. (Starratt 2000, 67)

The ‘authenticity’ of this form of spiritual expression, Starratt noted, ‘was all the more convincing to the assembly.’ Starratt then outlines the liturgy of the eucharist:

The offertory prayers contained references to offering the gifts of seeing so that God might clarify, deepen, and enrich the sight of all. During the silence after Communion, slides of family picnics, mountain scenery, circus performers, youngsters competing in Special Olympics, old men on Skid Row, teenagers dancing, and clouds were projected on a screen to the side of the altar, while the hymn ‘Amazing Grace’ was played. Then the lights were turned off again, and the final prayer of Thanksgiving for the gift of sight was offered in darkness. The liturgy ended with the boisterous playing of ‘Let the Sunshine In’ from the Broadway show *Hair*. (Starratt 2000, 67)

In a closing comment on the school-based liturgy he observed, Starratt mused on the lessons that could be drawn from this event not only by school-based liturgists but also by the Church more widely. He reported comments made by staff at the

school to the effect that ‘church attendance would be considerably increased by such liturgies’ (Starratt 2000, 69).

Starratt’s work begins with the assumption that liturgy is a vital part of any rounded Catholic education, and he fully appreciates the value of liturgy as a tool for ‘cultivating young minds and emotions.’ It is clear, meanwhile, that Starratt’s assessment of school liturgy is informed by a particular set of subjective, qualitative judgments, themselves informed by a particular understanding of the concept of ‘active participation.’ For Starratt, ‘active participation’ should be an observable feature of school-based liturgy. It should be designed with the participation of the students themselves and it should be facilitated in part by the students. In the following, we outline the ways in which these qualitative claims are shared by some of those charged with assessing the quality of liturgy in Catholic schools in England and Wales at the present time. Whilst Starratt’s study focused on an American setting, it was influenced by currents within the Church which have also influenced Catholic liturgists and educators in England and Wales. As we shall see, many of those charged with assessing the quality of school-based liturgy share Starratt’s perspective.

The interpretation of the term ‘active participation’ by diocesan inspectors

Catholic schools have a long history of diocesan oversight particularly regarding religious education and prayer and liturgy. Often a priest within the diocese was appointed to inspect (Drinkwater 1962, vii). The organisational structures of the Catholic Church are often misunderstood. On one level, the Church is a united, interdependent organisation with a clear, hierarchical leadership structure focused around the bishops and the Pope. However, there is tension within this model, as each bishop holds authority within his own diocese. Each bishop is directly responsible for the inspection of schools within his diocese, according to Canon law and therefore can develop their own criteria for inspection. At the time of writing, there does not exist a single, united set of criteria, grade descriptors or an evaluation schedule for making inspection judgments across the 22 diocese of the Church in England and Wales. However, there has existed a level of collaboration between dioceses since 1875 in the area of Catholic school inspection and religious education. Made up of representatives from each diocese, the National Board of Religious Inspectors and Advisers (NBRIA), has produced guidelines for inspection. Following the NBRIA guidance, diocesan inspectors should provide feedback on three areas: the Catholic life of the school, the quality of religious education and the quality of collective worship. For each area, inspectors should grade the school as Outstanding, Good, Requiring Improvement or Inadequate. Some dioceses have adhered to these guidelines faithfully, while others have beaten their own path. Despite this long history, the nature and function of diocesan inspections remains under-explored in the literature of Catholic education studies.

In order to provide a picture of the way in which these terms and concepts are applied on the ground, we have conducted a survey of a sample of diocesan reports produced across four diocese in England over the course of the past six years. For the purpose of this study, the four dioceses all used the NBRIA guidance for the evaluation schedule and grade descriptors without deviation. The purpose of this survey of diocesan reports is to provide an analysis of the interpretation of active participation by diocesan inspectors. We will use four indicators in order to provide an overall impression of the emphases which the diocesan inspectorate uses in

determining the quality of school-based liturgies. Each of these emphases can be effected either through positive or negative reinforcement. In some cases, the inspectors may celebrate the presence of a particular feature, in other instances the inspectorate may criticise its absence.

- A preference for student rather than teacher led liturgy.
- A preference for liturgical acts in which all participants are performing a visible action.
- A preference for silence and reverence among participants.
- A preference for the role of tradition in liturgy.

These indicators synthesise different observable aspects of the liturgical life of a school which the NBRIA guidance for inspectors recommends for assessment (National Board of Religious Inspectors and Advisers 2020, 35). The purpose of this study, therefore, is to determine the extent to which each of these occasionally contradictory requirements are prioritised by inspectors. Reports from four different dioceses from across the Episcopal Conference of England and Wales were used in the development of this survey. All of the inspections were conducted between 2014 and 2019. All of the reports surveyed were from state schools. Fifty-five of the schools surveyed were primary schools, and twenty were secondary schools.

Overall, 70 of the 77 reports surveyed conformed to the first metric. That is to say that 93% of reports used the extent to which students led or designed liturgy as an indicator of the extent to which students were actively participant in said liturgy. Seventeen out of the seventy-seven schools were warned that students were insufficiently involved in the planning and delivery of liturgy, whilst fifty-three schools were commended for having a good level of student leadership. The distribution was consistent across the four diocese. In the majority of secondary schools, the participation of students in the planning and design of liturgy was commended. ‘Whole school liturgies and Masses are led and prepared by members of the [student] chaplaincy team,’ wrote one inspector [CS2]. Another inspector [CS4], noted that students ‘participation’ in ‘worship,’ was due in part to the student-led planning process, writing: ‘pupils respond positively to the worship opportunities created by their peers.’ One secondary school [CS5] was commended for including students in the planning of liturgy. However, the inspector commented that there was still insufficient opportunity for students to be ‘active participants in the worship.’ The inspector therefore recommended that teachers identify ‘a theme,’ which would enable students to ‘personalise’ the liturgy further. Other secondary schools were less equivocally criticised for the lack of student involvement in the planning of liturgy. One school [BS1] was told that their students responded with ‘reverence and respect’ to acts of ‘collective worship’ but was told that the overall standard of ‘participation’ was ‘not yet good overall’ since ‘too few pupils are involved in the planning and delivery of liturgy.’ The inspector further reinforced this contradistinction between reverent listening and active participation, writing that ‘pupils act with reverence and are keen to participate in Worship, [but] much of the provision is adult led.’ A similar pattern is evident in reports from the inspection of primary schools. One primary school [DP14] was commended for allowing students to participate fully, by ‘planning and leading gatherings.’ The example cited was of a ‘year 4 liturgy, which explored the theme of anti-bullying through the story of Joseph and his jealous brothers.’ Others, meanwhile, were criticised. ‘Worship is largely planned and prepared by staff,’ one

school [DP2] was told and ‘pupils are not given sufficient opportunities to plan and lead worship independently.’ Another school was commended for the fact that students were ‘reverent and respectful,’ that ‘collective worship’ was ‘carefully planned and resourced,’ but was nevertheless criticised on the basis that pupils ‘are not yet given sufficient opportunities to plan and lead worship.’ Even in schools where students did participate in the delivery of the liturgy, they were pressed to do more. One report [BP3] noted that students ‘take the lead in presiding’ during ‘collective worship,’ but nonetheless lamented that ‘pupils are not yet able to plan liturgies completely independently.’ It is clear, in short, that the vast majority of inspectors appear to associate active participation *in* liturgy with the design and leadership *of* liturgy.

A preference for liturgical acts in which all participants are performing a visible action was evident in 57 of the 77 reports surveyed. 64% of secondary school reports referred either to the presence or absence of visual acts of active participation, whilst 75% of primary school reports did. In the former, active participation was observed in such activities as the saying of morning prayers [AS2], singing and ‘taking part in all parts of the Mass’ [AS4].

Often schools are commended for introducing liturgical practices which can provide a source of evidence of universal, active participation. In these instances, the language used by inspectors closely mirrors the language of ‘active learning’ as used by pedagogical writers. One school [DS2] was commended for its use of ‘kinaesthetic worship,’ and the inspector cited – as an example of this – an exercise called ‘love your selfie.’ Conversely, schools are occasionally criticised by inspectors for the lack of exuberance shown by students during prayer. One report [BS2], for example reads: ‘some pupils take part in the regular prayer life offered by the school, though not always ... with any great enthusiasm.’ ‘A willingness to join in and pray ... was not seen,’ wrote another inspector [BS2]. The picture in primary schools is similar, with inspectors reporting as evidence of ‘pupil participation,’ that ‘pupils joined in all the prayers and sang joyfully and with great enthusiasm’ [CP11]. Another inspector [AP6], explicitly drew a correlation between ‘active participation’ and physical action, writing that pupils ‘participate fully in liturgy through song, reading and contributing to bidding prayers.’ Moreover, the active participation of primary school pupils in acts of liturgy are often identified with activities which appear to be designed primarily in order to be observed as such. One report [CP3] reads that pupils ‘respond to and participate in the school’s Collective Worship,’ and cites as evidence that ‘pupils participate with mime and acting and plans are in place to extend the musical repertoire for liturgies.’ Some schools, meanwhile, are criticised for not providing sufficient evidence, in the physical actions of students, of active participation. One school was otherwise commended by the inspector, who nonetheless declared that teachers ‘are not yet sufficiently skilled or confident enough to inspire and enthuse the pupils to be creative in their worship’ [CP11].

A far smaller proportion of inspectors wrote about the merit of silence and reverence in their assessment of ‘active participation.’ Of the 77 schools surveyed, only 23 referred to the presence or absence of silent reflection. 38% of primary school reports referred to this theme, while 13% of secondary schools did. Some secondary school reports referred to ‘active listening’ as an indicator of participation [AS3]. Others refer to ‘prayerful silence and the depth of reverent participation,’ with which students engage in acts of prayer and liturgy [CS4]. The vast majority of secondary school reports, however, make no mention of silence as having a role to play in the active participation of students. Indeed in one report [DS3] the inspector commented

negatively on the use of silence in collective prayer, noting that ‘school-based acts of worship, particularly in form time, were quiet and reflective rather than palpably enthusiastic.’ Primary school inspection reports are slightly more likely to include reference to silence and reverence. ‘Pupils know how to be reflective, pray silently and act reverently,’ wrote one inspector [BP8]. Another reported that students had acknowledged that being ‘silent, quiet, undisturbed’ could help them to ‘have a real conversation with God’ [BP11]. One report, of the 77 surveyed, criticised a primary school for the lack of provision for silent prayer [AP5]. In this report, the inspector advised that more ‘meditative prayer’ would benefit the quality of liturgy.

Reference to tradition is rarely found in the diocesan reports surveyed. Given the link drawn by Catholic liturgists between ‘matured’ tradition and ‘active participation’ this is perhaps surprising (Guardini [1935] 2014, 6). Of the 55 primary schools surveyed, only 18 referred to tradition as an important feature of active participation. Of the twenty secondary schools surveyed, eight referred to tradition. As such, it appears that diocesan inspectors of secondary schools are more likely to see tradition as an important feature of school-based liturgy than inspectors of primary schools. Most references to tradition centred on the ‘reciting of traditional prayers’ [CP5], or on students awareness of ‘traditional prayers’ [AP3]. A small number of inspectors refer more broadly to ‘the richness of the Catholic tradition of prayer and worship’ [AP7]. To reiterate, two thirds of all reports surveyed made no reference to tradition. Indeed, in some schools, the use of traditional patterns of liturgy is criticised as bespeaking a lack of innovation. One primary school [BP1] was told by the inspector that ‘familiar responses and well known prayers are being used regularly,’ while ‘there has been little chance to be innovative or to build pupils’ skills in preparation and leadership.’ ‘Liturgies tend to be formulaic and generally lack creativity,’ wrote another inspector [CP11], whilst a third commended the ambitions of a school which ‘planned to build on the mostly traditional varieties of prayer and continue to introduce more contemporary and creative forms across the school’ [DP10].

It should be clear that it is not the case that ‘active participation,’ is taken by *all* diocesan inspectors to *directly* connote either outward behaviours – singing, reciting, miming – or student-leadership of liturgy. At times, inspectors associate active participation with ‘reverence,’ ‘respect,’ and ‘reflective’ prayer. However, it is clear that a predominance of reports equate ‘good liturgy,’ with practices which involve visible actions on the part of the student congregation.

Reasserting the mystagogical dimension

Part of the problem that derives from the ambiguous interpretation of the term ‘active participation,’ – particularly in relation to the phenomenon identified by Benedict XVI as ‘self-made’ liturgy – can be remedied with a consideration of the function of liturgy and how it relates to other forms of ritual. Liturgy, according to Benedict XVI, is mystagogical in nature. As such, it is incumbent on those educators who are also responsible for shaping the liturgical life of the school, to clearly distinguish between those practices which are intended to be pedagogical and those which are intended to be mystagogical.

Johan Huizinga placed ritual in the category of play, in the sense that ritual relies on the existence of a ‘consecrated spot,’ within which ‘special rules obtain.’⁷ The provision of ‘consecrated spots,’ creates ‘temporary worlds, within but distinct from the ordinary world,’ which allows for the performance of ‘an act apart’ (Huizinga [1940]

1955, 10). Colin Campbell, and other scholars of religion, have noted the very real importance of these ‘acts apart,’ or ‘experiences of the extraordinary,’ in cultures or cultural climates in which ‘goal rationality’ – to use the Weberian parlance – is the predominant discourse (Weber 1978, 85). Ritual, according to Kees de Groot, provides an escape from the ‘goal rational’ society in the sense that it ‘does not work with the truth-versus-false opposition.’ Nevertheless, within this paradigm, de Groot offers a more detailed matrix of meaning within which different rituals can be categorised. Some rituals are best understood as the creatures and the sustainers of horizontal relations, ‘between those present,’ whilst some are understood to be connected with a vertical relation: ‘with the sacred.’ In reality, most rituals combine elements of both. However, the relative emphasis on one or the other, for de Groot, is the best indicator for the definition of different kinds of ritual (de Groot 2017, 194–205).

In de Groot’s ‘typology of events,’ he uses a matrix of two characteristics – the presence of the sacred and the presence of community – in order to produce four distinct families of ritual. Where the sacred is absent and community is present, the ritual is properly understood as a ‘gathering.’ Where neither the sacred nor community is present, the ritual is best defined as a ‘show.’ Where the sacred is present in the absence of community, the ritual is best described as a ‘ceremony.’ Only where both the sacred and the communal is present, can be reasonably understand the ritual to be a form of liturgy. It is partly a failure to understand the nuances of these distinctions that allows some school-based liturgies to either become too much like a ceremony – on the one hand – or too much like a gathering – on the other. Fear of allowing student participation can lead to the ceremonialisation of school-based liturgy. Starratt criticises this approach as ‘robotic’ and ‘inauthentic.’ Equally, though, the desire to demonstrate the active participation of students through visible actions can lead liturgists to create gatherings rather than liturgies, removing the sacred and the mysterious.

This analysis points to a more fundamental dimension. For Torevell, the definition of ‘religious performance,’ in contradistinction with secular performance, lies in the fact that the former involves ‘the making present of a sacred event.’ In other words, for liturgy to be recognisable, ‘those present must be prepared to be changed by those things which underpin every sacred performance.’ This draws us back to the concept of ‘self-made’ liturgy. If school-based liturgy is intended to be transformative of participants, then it cannot be understood as a process which is solely designed by those same participants. In the words of Benedict XVI, the missing element in such practices is the ‘mystagogical’ (Torevell 2004, 35).

A secondary issue can be identified here. The proper function of ‘experience,’ in a goal rational society is – as noted above – to create ‘acts apart’ from the ‘ordinary world.’ But as Gerhard Schulze noted at the end of the twentieth century, in goal-rational societies, even in subcultures which are experientially oriented, experiences invariably become co-opted by goal-rationalisation (Schulze 1992). Whilst Schulze had something quite separate in mind, his point is remarkably pertinent for those engaged in the provision of and the inspection of school liturgy. There is a troubling paradox at play in the notion that liturgy – a ritual oriented towards both community and the sacred – can or should be assessed for its effectiveness in pursuit of a particular goal. Certainly assessing liturgy using tools which were originally intended for the measurement of clearly empirical outcomes (in terms of outward behaviour) is problematic. These are issues which those charged with creating school liturgies and

with analysing school-based liturgies must be cognizant of going forward. Those who design inspection criteria for the assessment of liturgy, in other words, should avoid the temptation to create a tyranny of metrics. The task of measuring the level of engagement in liturgy requires careful, nuanced and longitudinal evidence.

Conclusion

The intention of this paper is not to call for the banishment of ‘active participation’ as a goal of school-based liturgy. There is undoubted merit to including the language of active participation in the description of school-based liturgy. All educators are aware that engagement is closely related to relevance. Students who do not understand that the process that they are involved in is relevant to their lives will not engage in that process. Nor should we be interpreted as arguing that any use of active participation – as currently interpreted by many inspectors – should be limited within the context of school liturgy. Nevertheless, the dual lessons that can be drawn from recent writings on the subject of pedagogy *and* recent writings on the subject of liturgy point us towards a more nuanced conclusion. Neither learning, nor liturgy should be formed with the intention of providing visual clues to those assessing the validity of these processes. Moreover, inspectors and all educators must be wary of the temptation of conflating the concept of active participation as employed by educationalists with the concept of active participation as employed by liturgists. The onus, therefore, should be shifted from the practitioner – liturgist or teacher – to the inspector, in developing a thicker and more nuanced and detailed understanding of how liturgy and learning is experienced by participants. It is our hope that this study, which makes a foray into an under-researched area of Catholic educational theory, will prompt educators and scholars alike to pursue further and deeper investigation.

Notes

1. Under the terms of section 48 of the 2005 Education Act, all faith schools in England are required to undergo inspection by an independent body to assess the standard of their provision of religious education. Catholic schools are assessed by inspectors who are appointed by their diocese in compliance with this regulation.
2. The Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican was announced in 1959. The council met in St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome for four periods between 1962 and 1965. The council was precipitated by the perceived need to – in Pope John XXIII’s terms – ‘update’ the Church and respond to the challenges of secularisation in the twentieth century.
3. The Council of Trent was the nineteenth ecumenical council in the history of the Catholic Church. It was convened in 1545 in response to the emergence of Protestantism in Europe. The documents produced by the Council defined the Churches position on a number of theological issues and it also standardised the liturgy used by the Catholic Church, paving the way for the codification of the Tridentine mass.
4. Thomas P. Rausch is an American Jesuit priest and theologian. His most recent work engages critically with the theology of Pope Benedict XVI [see Thomas P. Rausch, *Pope Benedict XVI: His Theological Vision* (New Jersey: Paulist Press, 2009)].
5. Mystagogy is defined as the process through which Christians are initiated into the sacred mysteries of sacramental worship.
6. Romano Guardini was a German Benedictine priest and theologian. His work had a profound influence on the leaders of the Liturgy Movement in Germany in the twentieth century. His thoughts on the subject of liturgy are exemplified in a work of 1918 entitled *The Spirit of the Liturgy*.

7. Johan Huizinga was a Dutch cultural historian. His influential work posits that play is a fundamental aspect of human culture [see Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, trans. R.F.C Hull (London: Routledge, 1949)].

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