

Objection to the Re-Ordering
of Saint Colman's Cathedral
Cobh, Co. Cork

By Rev. Father Gabriel Burke, CC
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Reference no. 05/52040

This objection is divided into the following sections:

1. The Current Liturgical Requirements of the Catholic Church
2. Relevant Theological and Pastoral Issues
3. Other Issues

Conclusion

1. The Current Liturgical Requirements of the Catholic Church

A. Introduction

i. In their application of 15th July 2005, McCutcheon Mulcahy state that “the planning authority is...required to respect the liturgical requirements of the cathedral as a place of worship when considering this application.” Professor Cathal O’Neill, in his letter of 14th July 2005, states that his designs are based on the need “to meet the requirements of the Cathedral as a place of worship.” Professor O’Neill appends his July 2005 *Report on the Re-Ordering of the Sanctuary and Other Works* which evinces similar liturgical rationales for the proposal, and a document by Rev. Father Daniel Murphy, *Liturgical Requirements*, which carries the approval of the Cloyne Historic Churches Advisory Committee.

ii. The central question here is without doubt what is *required* for the correct celebration of the Liturgy in the cathedral. For if the cathedral as it stands lacks an essential *requirement* for Catholic worship, such a lack must be supplied (as sensitively as possible). However, if there is no “compelling need” to alter the cathedral as it now stands, then changes to the interior of the cathedral’s liturgical arrangements, even though some people may *prefer* them, ought not to be made, for the cathedral is a building of significant historic, architectural and cultural value, and significant changes to it would detract from that value.

iii. Preferences are not requirements. The documents written by Professor O’Neill and Father Murphy express many preferences but very few if any genuine liturgical requirements which justify altering the cathedral as proposed. I shall examine these documents in detail below.

iv. The preferences expressed in the documents submitted come from a somewhat dated school of liturgical thought which has been subject to considerable scholarly criticism in recent years.¹ It should be noted that our new Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, has himself written and spoken a great deal in this area,² and that neither Professor O’Neill nor Father Murphy, nor the documents they cite in their submissions,³ seem to have taken into account the latest in liturgical thinking.

¹ See: K. Gamber, *The Reform of the Roman Liturgy: Its Problems and Background* (1993); A. Nichols OP, *Looking at the Liturgy* (1996); S. Caldecott, *Beyond the Prosaic* (1998); K. Gamber, *The Modern Rite: Collected Essays on the Reform of the Liturgy* (2002); T.M. Kocik, *The Reform of the Reform?* (2003); A. Reid OSB, *The Organic Development of the Liturgy* (2004), U.M. Lang, *Turning Towards the Lord: Orientation in Liturgical Prayer* (2004). It should be noted that Cardinal Ratzinger wrote prefaces endorsing the books by both Reid and Lang and the work of Gamber.

² As Cardinal Ratzinger, Pope Benedict XVI wrote: *The Feast of Faith: Approaches to a Theology of the Liturgy* (1986) and *The Spirit of the Liturgy* (2000). He also discusses current liturgical issues in chapter 9 of *The Ratzinger Report* (1985). More recently he convened and spoke at a conference at the French abbey of Fontgombault, the discussions at which are published in English in: A. Reid OSB, *Looking Again at the Question of the Liturgy with Cardinal Ratzinger: Proceedings of the July 2001 Fontgombault Liturgical Conference* (2003). Cardinal Ratzinger has also written many articles that touch on liturgical questions, though the substance of his thought is present in the books referred to above.

³ In particular, it seems that the most recent edition of *The Place of Worship: Pastoral Directory on the Building and Reordering of Churches* (1994) needs to take account of recent developments in liturgical thinking, and indeed of recent liturgical legislation (the GIRM of the *Missale Romanum* of 2002 and *Redemptionis Sacramentum* of 2004) and alter some of its preferences accordingly.

B. O'Neill & Associates – Report on the Re-Ordering of the Sanctuary and Other Works

i. In the section headed “Design Analysis” this report states that “the central theme of the liturgy is that of a congregation gathered around the altar.” It goes on to assert that a “close” and “dynamic” “relation” with the “sacrifice” is the “main thrust” of the “liturgical guidelines.” This language is lacking in specific content.

ii. An attempt at supplying content is made in the assertion that “the present separation of the sanctuary from the assembly...does not facilitate the active and full participation of the laity in the liturgy.” There are two issues raised here; firstly one of separation (presumably by the altar rails); and secondly that of active participation in the liturgy. These two matters will be dealt with below.

iii. In respect of the “separation” of the assembly, one can observe that no document of the Second Vatican Council or of the Holy See has required the removal of altar rails. This is a fashion, a trend, that began in the years after the Council, but which is simply not required. The words of the current Prefect of the Congregation for Divine Worship in Rome, delivered in 2003, should be kept in mind:

Some people think that liturgical renewal means the removal of kneelers from church pews, the knocking down of altar rails or the positioning of the altar in the middle of the sitting area of the people. **The Church has never said any such thing.** Nor does liturgical restoration mean iconoclasm or the removal of all statues and sacred images. These should be displayed, albeit with good judgment. And the altar of the Blessed Sacrament should be outstanding for its beauty and honoured prominence, otherwise in some so-called restored churches one could rightly lament: “They have taken my Lord away, and I don't know where they have put Him” (Jn 20:13).⁴

Indeed, far from removing the altar rails in the cathedral, it may well be time to rediscover their meaning and to return to their use, for as our new Holy Father has written:

It may well be that kneeling is alien to modern culture – insofar as it is a culture, for this culture has turned away from the faith and no longer knows the One before whom kneeling is the right, indeed the intrinsically necessary gesture. The man who learns to believe learns to kneel, and a faith or a liturgy no longer familiar with kneeling is sick at the core. Where lost, kneeling must be rediscovered...⁵

Hence, using talk of “separation” to assert that the altar rails create a “barrier” which should be removed misses the point of their *current* and *future* value, both liturgically and artistically, and therefore spiritually, and risks destroying something at the very time the Church is being called to rediscover their liturgical value.

⁴ Francis Cardinal Arinze, Address to the Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions, 8th October 2003. Emphasis added.

⁵ Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, p. 194. It should also be noted that the Congregation for Divine Worship stated in 2003 that the faithful have the *right* to kneel to receive Holy Communion if they wish (26th February 2003; Prot. n. 47/03/L).

iv. The Second Vatican Council called for “active participation” in the Sacred Liturgy.⁶ It should be noted that so too did Pope Saint Pius X in 1903, and indeed all of the Liturgical Movement of the Twentieth Century leading up to the Second Vatican Council.⁷ This concept is not something new. It has a specific context and content. The Second Vatican Council’s *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy: Sacrosanctum Concilium* uses the Latin term *actuosa participatio*, which when translated “actual participation,” is less misleading than the usual English rendering “active participation.” This underlines that the participation in the liturgical rites and prayers is *primarily* through mind and heart and *secondarily* through external actions or through physical proximity to one another.⁸ Cardinal Arinze warned in 2003:

Church architecture also influences active participation. If a church is built and the seats are arranged as in an amphitheatre or as in a banquet, the undeclared emphasis may be horizontal attention to one another, rather than vertical attention to God. In this sense the celebration of Mass facing the people demands from the priest and altar servers a high level of discipline, so that as from the offertory of the Mass it be seen clearly that both priest and people are turned toward God, not toward one another. We come to Mass primarily to adore God, not to affirm one another, although this is not excluded.⁹

So it is a mistake to assert – as do the submissions in this proposal – that the desire for physical closeness or “visual participation” *require* the reordering of existing churches and cathedrals. Certainly those people making these proposals seem to *prefer* this style of Liturgy. However, as the Church does not *require* this, reordering the cathedral is not justified.

v. This *Report* asserts that the present sanctuary is not large enough for the “great liturgical celebrations.” With fewer clergy today, and no foreseeable increase in vocations, this argument does not appear to have validity. There have been “great occasions” in the past (the Second Vatican Council did not invent the ones listed) and the cathedral has dealt with them adequately to date.

vi. The *Report* speaks of the “temporary altar.” It is right to consider this a problem. However the liturgical thinking of the *Report* ignores the guidelines published by the Congregation for Divine Worship in 1993:

3. The placement of the altar *versus populum* [facing the people] is certainly something in the present liturgical legislation that is desirable. It is not, nevertheless, an absolute value over and beyond all others. It is necessary to take into account cases in which the sanctuary does not admit of an arrangement of the altar facing the people, or it is not possible to preserve the preceding altar with its ornamentation in such a way that another altar facing the people can be understood to be the principal altar. In these cases, **it is more faithful to liturgical sense to celebrate at the existing altar with the back turned to the people rather than maintain two altars in the same**

⁶ Cf. Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no 14.

⁷ Cf. chapter 3 of A. Reid OSB *The Organic Development of the Liturgy*.

⁸ Cf. Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *The Feast of Faith: Approaches to a Theology of the Liturgy*, pp. 68ff; G. Shirilla, *The Principle of Active Participation of the Faithful in Sacrosanctum Concilium*, (1990) pp. 356-357.

⁹ Francis Cardinal Arinze, Address to the Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions, 8th October 2003.

sanctuary. The principle of the unicity of the altar is theologically more important than the practice of celebrating facing the people.¹⁰

It may come as a surprise for us here in Ireland, for like many people we have thought that ‘Vatican II brought in Mass facing the people,’ but there is absolutely no need for Mass to be said (from the offertory onwards) facing the people. Cardinal Ratzinger has spoken of this at length.¹¹ The 2002 edition of the *Missale Romanum* does not *require* it.¹² And, in the light of the principles of the Congregation of Divine Worship (cited above), it would in fact be more faithful to current liturgical norms for the cathedral to remove the temporary altar and to return to the liturgical use of the high altar. Clearly the proposal of putting in a new second altar in the crossing, in line with the high altar, is contrary to the principle of unicity of altar.

vii. The *Report* proposes to put in a new bishop’s chair. The principle of unicity of altar may be applied also to the bishop’s chair *mutatis mutandis*. I know of no serious liturgical scholar who would approve of *two* bishop’s chairs in the same cathedral – the duplication of the symbolism would be intolerable. However, I understand that the existing choir stalls, cathedra (bishop’s chair) and sedelia are all the subject of an agreement between the trustees of the cathedral and the chapter and the Heritage Council by which they cannot be changed or altered. Even if that is not the case, the existing cathedra is of artistic merit and should not be removed. In the light of this, in accordance with sound liturgical practice, a new cathedra cannot be introduced.

viii. A similar argument may be made about the pulpit. As its removal is out of the question, it should once again be used as the table of the Word. Processions to it for the gospel would enhance the quality of liturgical celebration in the cathedral. The presence of a second table of the Word (lectern/ambo) as proposed in Professor O’Neill’s designs is simply an intolerable duplication of primary liturgical symbols that would be countenanced by no serious liturgist.

ix. The *Report* asserts that “the extension of the sanctuary...” is “inevitable if the primary needs of the Liturgy are to be fulfilled.” This is simply not true. The official web site of the Cathedral states: “The Cathedral...accommodates the celebration of all Liturgy as envisaged by the revised rites of the Catholic Church.”¹³ There exists a perfectly usable altar, pulpit and bishop’s chair, none of which prevent the active participation called for by St Pius X or by the Second Vatican Council. That some liturgists and architects have preferences for another style of sanctuary design is not sufficient reason substantially to alter our cathedral as it has been handed on to our generation.

x. The proposal to remove the marble predellas in front of the altars in the two transepts will preclude the possibility of Mass ever being offered on them. This violates their liturgical integrity and is unnecessary. If circulation is truly a problem, a pew might need to be removed.

¹⁰ Emphases added. The Italian original may be found in *Notitiae* (the journal of the Congregation for Divine Worship) no. 332, Vol. 29, No. 5, May 1993, pp. 245-249.

¹¹ Cf. *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, pp. 74-84.

¹² See the detailed discussion of its provisions, and of the subsequent clarification issued by the Congregation for Divine Worship in chapter 1 of U.M. Lang, *Turning Towards the Lord: Orientation in Liturgical Prayer*.

¹³ As at 11th August 2005.

C. Father Daniel Murphy – Liturgical Requirements

i. *Liturgical Requirements* depends heavily upon the *The Place of Worship: Pastoral Directory on the Building and Reordering of Churches* (1994). As was noted in the introduction above, this document requires updating in the light of later liturgical legislation and thinking. In many ways it expresses preferences which the Church seems to be questioning today.

ii. *Liturgical Requirements* shares the same errors of understanding about active participation as does the *Report* (see above).

iii. The section “Communal and Inclusive Worship” lists many items that are seen as a “must” for a place of worship. Whether or not these are a “must” for places of worship is arguable. Many seem in fact to be the *preferences* of some liturgists. What is clear is that this section of *Liturgical Requirements* does not establish any *requirements* for the cathedral.

iv. Other sections of the document seem to reflect the sort of “emphasis [that] may be horizontal attention to one another, rather than vertical attention to God” of which Cardinal Arinze has spoken (above). This fashion in liturgical thinking seems to be on the way out now, which makes the liturgical theology of *Liturgical Requirements* questionable in some aspects.

v. The specific “Liturgical Requirements within St Colman’s Cathedral, Cobh” include many *preferences*, as if one were free to redesign an existing worship space accordingly. But none are *requirements* justifying the disruption or cost of a total re-ordering. Some suggest areas in which improvement may be justifiably made. Specifically:

- The current entrance is adequate; if improved disabled access is required, let it be done without prejudice to the current liturgical uses of the building.
- The proposal for a new baptistery is an *ideal* but not a requirement. The new rite of Baptism envisages a procession to the font for the baptism; the visual participation of all at this part of the rite is not a liturgical requirement.
- A new vesting room is not required, however desirable, particularly if it involves the loss of existing chapels. Other arrangements can be made for the once a year needs of catechumens.
- Movable seating is not envisaged in Professor O’Neill’s proposals. Why this discrepancy? It does not seem necessary.
- The distribution of Holy Communion under both species is not a *requirement*. If it is deemed pastorally desirable, the faithful can approach the Chalice at the front of the cathedral as it is presently ordered.
- Improved lighting can be introduced without reordering the cathedral.
- Improved amplification can be introduced without reordering the cathedral.
- The issues in respect of the altar, ambo, cathedra and the need for proximity have been dealt with in the section above.
- Wheelchair access in these situations would be truly exceptional and could be facilitated by the provision of temporary ramps.
- The supposed need for the removal of supposed “barriers” (presumably the altar rails) has been dealt with above.
- An adequate choir loft exists. The tendency to put the choir and musicians in a prominent place so that they appear to be ‘performing’ in fact mitigates against the active participation of the congregation because they can feel that should watch others perform. Here, ‘visual participation’

of the congregation in the ministry or cantors and choir should be avoided to enhance the people's actual participation in the Liturgy.

- Better restrooms, improving the existing sacristies and the addition of hot water are good ideas that do not require the reordering of the cathedral.
- Private prayer before the Blessed Sacrament is possible both in the cathedral as it is now, and in the chapel of Perpetual Adoration.
- There is no liturgical *requirement* to take the architectural focus off the tabernacle as it now stands. Indeed, if the high altar is once again used for Mass, this focus will be on the place where Mass is celebrated.
- The two confessionals that were originally shrines could be returned to that use without prejudice to the cathedral's architectural or liturgical integrity.
- The existing Marian shrines do not compete visually or liturgically. Valid pastoral reasons may exist that suggest they be retained.
- There seems to be no need to alter the current use of either the pieta or mortuary chapels. Curiously, *The Place of Worship: Pastoral Directory on the Building and Reordering of Churches* (19.1-3) would seem to support the current arrangement in the cathedral, with the proximity of the mortuary chapel to the baptistery, and not any change to this arrangement.

D. Other Liturgical Considerations

- i. In interpreting the wishes of the Second Vatican Council, one could wish for no better than the very Fathers of the Council themselves. Bishop Ahern was one such Father of the Council who surely showed, by himself not reordering the cathedral, that there was no liturgical *requirement* to do so.
- ii. Other cathedrals around the world have not seen the need to reorder their cathedrals. In recent years Westminster cathedral has explored various ways of returning to the use of their high altar, realising that the temporary altar they have (like ours) is unsatisfactory.
- iii. A reflection on the liturgical mistake of reordering from the pen of Pope Benedict XVI:

After the Council...new altars were set up everywhere, and today celebration [of Mass facing the people] really does look like the characteristic fruit of Vatican II's liturgical renewal. In fact it is the most conspicuous consequence of a reordering that not only signifies a new external arrangement of the places dedicated to the Liturgy, but also brings with it a new idea of the essence of the Liturgy – the Liturgy as a communal meal. This is, of course, a misunderstanding of the significance of the Roman basilica and of the positioning of its altar, and the representation of the Last Supper is also, to say the least, inaccurate.¹⁴

And a specific response from our new Holy Father to the Bishop of Carlow in 1996:

It is certainly true that a great number of churches since the Second Vatican Council have been re-arranged; such changes, while inspired by the liturgical reform, **cannot however be said to be have been required by the legislation of the Church.**¹⁵

¹⁴ *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, pp. 77-78.

¹⁵ Letter to the Bishop of Carlow, 12th June 1996. Emphasis added.

With such advice from our new Holy Father, we should not repeat the same mistakes at St Colman's. Rather, we should use the beautiful and liturgically adequate building that has been entrusted to our care for the full celebration of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and the other liturgical rites for which it is perfectly adequate.

2. Relevant Theological and Pastoral Issues

a) The widespread opposition to the proposals felt and expressed by significant numbers of people both within the parish of Cobh, in the diocese of Cloyne, and beyond, cannot be ignored. Theologically, this may be seen to be an expression of the *sensus fidei*,¹⁶ of the innate sense of the ordinary faithful as to what is or what is not in accordance with the faith. Such people may not be able to argue against the proposals of architects and liturgists, but they do have a deep sense of what is or is not appropriate for Catholics. Hence, their objections, whilst perhaps simplistic, are nonetheless real. It would be pastorally insensitive to override them.

b) Similarly, neither the faithful whose ancestors' contributions paid for the Cathedral, and whose current contributions help to maintain it, nor the clergy of the diocese, have been informed of the costing of the proposed works, nor of the proposed sourcing of the funds required for this. Thus they have not been able to express any opinion or to enter into any dialogue as to whether such expenditure is justified or proportionate in respect of other needs of the parish or of the diocese as a whole. Surely, when so much is said about the participation of the laity in the life of the Church today, and of collaborative ministry between a bishop and his priests, this should have been done before the planning application was submitted.

3. Other Issues

a) A curious part of the July 2005 *Report on the Re-Ordering of the Sanctuary and Other Works* by Professor O'Neill and Associates is the inclusion of the handwritten letter of July 3rd 1894. This is presented as being almost a prophecy foreseeing the *current* proposed reordering. It must be pointed out, however, that the Bishop Elect to whom the letter is addressed is Robert Browne. Bishop Browne was consecrated in August 1894. He later finished the Cathedral and installed the present sanctuary (as the Cathedral Guide makes clear). The hand written letter, therefore, refers not to the *present* sanctuary but to what ever was there *before* it was installed, and it is this, not what we have now, which the author of this letter is criticising. Therefore, the use of this letter by Professor O'Neill is somewhat disingenuous.

b) i. In July, the Bishop ordered that a pastoral letter dated 6th July 2005 be read out at all Masses in the diocese on the following Sunday, July 10th. In this letter he announced his intention to proceed with the reordering of the Cathedral. The bishop also stated that "The design was submitted by me to the relevant Congregation in Rome and received its approval." This is somewhat curious, as the Congregation for Divine Worship is not normally consulted and its

¹⁶ Cf. Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 12.

approval is not normally sought for re-ordering churches or cathedrals. One must ask why this was done, if indeed it was?

ii. Also, it is important to note that the full text of this letter has not been disclosed either to the priests of the diocese nor as part of the documentation of the planning application.¹⁷ The Bishop's pastoral letter speaks of the Congregation having given "approval." This can only be done by a formal decree of the Congregation, duly protocolled and published. Where is this decree? It must also be noted that if a decree has been issued, such a decree may be appealed through the processes of canon law, and that if appealed, it may not be acted upon before due process has been completed. It would appear that there has been no opportunity to date for anyone to appeal this.

iii. However, if the letter from the Cardinal Prefect of the Congregation in Rome to which the Bishop refers is simply a letter and not a formal decree, it has the authority of personal correspondence, and it must be pointed out that an opinion, even of a Cardinal Prefect of the Congregation for Divine Worship, is simply an opinion and carries no juridical authority in the matter.¹⁸ One may also ask whether those who object to the proposals were given the opportunity to express their opinions to the Cardinal before his opinion was sought?

iv. Referring to "Rome" as has been done in the pastoral letter tends to move Catholics to obey whatever Rome 'decides.' This is a healthy instinct. But it tends also to stifle dialogue and critical debate in matters that are *not* defined doctrines of the Catholic faith (such as what is best for the cathedral). Certainly, I am aware that such use of authority would tend to prevent priests from expressing their opinion, as they would not wish to be seen to go against what Rome had decided.

c) The consultation meetings held throughout the diocese following the Bishop's pastoral letter in July were very poorly attended. In my own town barely ten people attended, and I understand that attendance at the other meetings was similarly poor. One cannot conclude from such poor attendance that the people of the diocese are interested in or supportive of the reordering of the Cathedral. Indeed, one may conclude that a certain apathy or resignation exists, perhaps because of the impression given in the Bishop's pastoral letter that the re-ordering was a *fait accompli* approved by Rome.

d) The diocesan authorities are well aware that significant opposition exists to the reordering of the cathedral. It must be wondered then, whether it is appropriate to give people a period of fewer than two months – and summer holiday months at that – in which people can learn about, consider and discuss, and if necessary object to the proposals that have been made. The time allowed for all of this is simply too short.

e) The cathedral is without doubt of significant cultural, architectural and heritage value as an organic whole. I presume that various competent organisations will be making their assessment

¹⁷ In 1996 the Bishop of Carlow quoted selectively from a letter to him from Cardinal Ratzinger in respect of the Church's official requirements in the re-ordering of churches. Only later, at the request of a High Court Judge, was the full text of the letter made public (it is cited above). It would seem desirable that the full text of the letter to which the Bishop referred in July should also be made public.

¹⁸ Such private correspondence differs from the publicly expressed policy of the Cardinal Prefect, such as may be seen in the address of Cardinal Arinze quoted above.

of the proposals known in respect of these issues. I would simply add that altering the existing organic relationship between the various parts of the cathedral as it now stands would result in a compromise that would be to the detriment of the cultural, architectural and heritage value of the cathedral, which themselves have a pastoral and spiritual importance. Such a compromise, given that the reordering is not liturgically necessary, should not be allowed.

Conclusion

For the reasons advanced above, I therefore submit that the reordering of St Colman's Cathedral applied for by McCutcheon Mulcahy in their letter of 15th July 2005 and by Professor Cathal O'Neil and Associates in their letter of 14th July 2005 is not required by the current liturgical norms of the Catholic Church, and is unadvisable for the pastoral, theological and other reasons outlined. I request that the requested planning permission be refused.

Reverend Father Gabriel Burke, CC
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19th August 2005