

The new concelebration

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The traditional concelebration was eminently hierarchical: the Roman pontiff, as well as a few diocesan bishops, who, when they celebrated pontifically, did so with the assistance of their entire "senate" (the College of Cardinals for the Pope, the Cathedral Chapter for the bishop), on certain particularly solemn occasions they were joined by some of the members of the order of priests of this senate (4, 6) who concelebrated the sacrifice with them.

On the other hand, the new concelebration introduced in 1964-1965, which no longer required the bishop to preside, brought together a sometimes considerable number of celebrants and became a universal and commonplace way of celebrating Mass. In the liturgy, where everything is symbolic, this was a very visible expression of equality in the priesthood – which was real, incidentally – but inflected in a 'democratic' sense. St. Thomas, on the contrary, in the *Summa Theologica*, IIIa q 82 a 2, referring to the concelebration of the Mass of priestly ordination to the Last Supper – which was not a concelebration, but a gift of the priesthood by the High Priest to his Apostles – insisted on the hierarchical root of this rite of equality: priests exercise among themselves and with the bishop an identical Eucharistic power, which they have received from the bishop, as the Apostles received it from Christ.

It should be remembered that, in practical terms, before Paul VI's reform, the Roman rite only recognised three types of Eucharistic concelebration: the concelebration of the principal consecrator and the bishop or bishops consecrated during an episcopal consecration; the concelebration of the ordaining bishop and the priests ordained during a priestly ordination¹; and the concelebration of the archbishop and six priests who assisted him during the pontifical Mass on Holy Thursday in Lyon, during which the holy oils were consecrated, the latter being the last and only witness to the few Roman concelebrations of the pope and cardinal priests, which took place on the most important feast days until the beginning of the 13th century.

In contrast, in Eastern rites, it was much more widespread, but in different ways: among the Greek Orthodox, the essential words are spoken only by the bishop; among the Syrian Uniates and Jacobites, and among the Malankaras, several priests celebrate together, but consecrate separate Eucharistic materials; as for the dissident Syrians and Copts, they do not practise concelebration.

¹Let us note for the record the opinion we mentioned in our contribution on the Lyon concelebration. The Oratorian Pierre Lebrun (1661-1729), in the 15th of his *Dissertations historiques et dogmatiques sur les liturgies de toutes les églises du monde chrétien* (*Historical and Dogmatic Dissertations on the Liturgies of All the Churches of the Christian World*), "On the practice of reciting part of the Mass in silence in all the Churches of the world" ([Literal, historical and dogmatic of the prayers and ... - Pierre Lebrun - Google Books](#)), in which he refutes the claims of Jansenist liturgists who wanted the canon to be recited aloud, denying the character of concelebration to the Mass following priestly ordination. The pontiff recites the words of the Offertory and the Canon in an intelligible voice so that the new priests can recite them with him. But their position, kneeling at the foot of the altar without making the pontiff's gestures, shows, according to Lebrun, that they are not concelebrating but practising the prayers they will have to recite during their first Mass. Lebrun quoted the rubric from Durand de Mende's Pontifical, in the 13th century, which said: *dicunt (novi presbyteri) totum submissa voce sicut si celebrerent*, "as if they were celebrating."

1. The Liturgical Movement of the 1950s and the decline of the individual Mass

It should be borne in mind that the proliferation of private Masses, Masses without singing and celebrated without solemnity by a priest, has become one of the major characteristics of the Latin Church in general, and the Romano-Frankish Church in particular. This development corresponded to a theological deepening of the value of the sacrifice of the Mass offered *pro vivis et pro defunctis*: the fruits of the unique sacrifice of the Cross are applied all the more by the sacrifices of the Mass which renew it, as there are many Masses, which is made possible by their non-solemn celebration. It is possible, however, that there were also private Masses in the East, at least during the period of iconoclastic persecution, but in the West they are attested to by the *Regula vitæ communis*, or *Regula canonicorum*, a rule composed for his canons by Chrodegand, Bishop of Metz in the 8th century.

They have been repeatedly criticised by historians, who held Saint Gregory the Great responsible for their "invention". The distant origin of this criticism was Luther's criticism of "works". Historiography in the 19th century and beyond followed suit. The last representative of this ideological criticism was Cyrille Vogel in the 1980s².

Concelebration was therefore very often mentioned as an element of renewal of the liturgy of the Mass in order to "regain its full meaning" during the many meetings organised by priests and religious of the Liturgical Movement. In a context where the pontifical Mass and even the solemn Mass with a deacon and subdeacon, ironically referred to as "three horses", were considered too "pompous", and where private priestly Masses were viewed negatively, there was a desire to promote communal dialogued Masses, celebrated by several priests, even if they were of equal dignity. The reasons given were varied: to manifest the unity of the priesthood; to draw inspiration from Eastern celebrations (which was also one of the reasons given for the multiplication of Eucharistic prayers during the reform).

The Liturgical Movement had organised itself into a real pressure group³, with symposiums, international meetings, conferences, journals, *La Vie liturgique*, a newsletter founded by Dom Lambert Beauduin, *La Maison-Dieu*, from the Centre de Pastorale liturgique, *Questions liturgiques et paroissiales*, from the Abbey of Mont-César, the *Ephemerides Liturgicæ*, directed by Fr. Annibale Bugnini, and *L'Art sacré*, which will be discussed later. The colloquiums consisted of working sessions between experts, followed by days open to the public, which was mainly composed of priests and bishops. Based on this model, a meeting was held in Lugano in September 1953, where Herman Schmidt of the Gregorian University spoke about the reintroduction of concelebration on Holy Thursday. In 1954, at Mont-César, only experts met: they again discussed concelebration, on which the Secretariat of State reminded them that they had no decision-making authority, as we shall see later, with the Germans favouring silent concelebration and the French wanting a

²See, for example, Cyrille Vogel: "Two consequences of Gregorian eschatology: the proliferation of private masses and monk-priests," in *Grégoire le Grand*, Colloque de Chantilly, ed. Jacques Fontaine (Paris, 1986), pp. 267–276.

³; Claude Barthe, *Histoire de la messe de Vatican II* (Paris, 2018), pp. 41-51.

minimum of formulation (at least the words of consecration). In September 1956, the "First International Liturgical Congress" was held in Assisi, bringing together 30 experts, 1,400 priests and 80 bishops or abbots, and giving rise to a message from Pius XII, which will be discussed later. In 1960, the congress was held in Munich, where concelebration was discussed at greater length, this time with a view to the conciliar reform, notably with an important lecture by Aimé-Georges Martimort⁴.

Articles multiplied. In 1945, Canon Maurice Michaud, parish priest in the diocese of Lyon, in an issue of *La Maison-Dieu*⁵, outlined the "main ideas" that were to govern this new practice. He noted: "In the eyes of the faithful, given the almost universal practice of the altar being arranged for celebration with the priest's back to the people, the return to the ancient discipline appears to be an innovation." In 1946, Dom Beauvain discussed the desirable extension of concelebration in the Roman rite, with the following clarifications: "Concelebration would only take place under the presidency of the local bishop. [...] This rite, *at least in the beginning*, would be reserved for major solemnities" [my emphasis]⁶. Similarly, Dom Adalberto Franquesa (1906-2005), a Benedictine monk from Montserrat, published an article on concelebration in 1956, the year of the Assisi congress⁷.

A debate arose as to whether, historically, all concelebrants pronounced the words of consecration. Historical accounts are far from unanimous. Did the cardinals surrounding the Roman Pontiff pronounce the words of consecration? In fact, the earliest evidence of "spoken concelebration" dates back to the 8th century⁸. But was this not a novelty? Dom Botte saw in the gesture of the priests surrounding the bishop extending their hands over the oblates, as described in *The Apostolic Tradition*, a silent communal consecration⁹.

Father Jean-Michel Hanssens (a specialist on Amalric of Metz, who refers to concelebration in Rome during the Carolingian period) argued for the necessity of words in order for there to be a common celebration: he distinguished between "sacramental concelebration," where all the concelebrants pronounce the words of consecration, and "ceremonial concelebration," where they remain silent¹⁰. According to him, the early Church, before the 8th century, did not practise sacramental concelebration. Pius XII took up this distinction between concelebration proper

4. Aimé-Georges Martimort, "The ritual of Eucharistic concelebration," lecture at the international session in Munich, August 1960, in *Ephemerides Liturgicæ* 77 (1963), pp. 147-168.

5. "La célébration de la messe face au peuple" (The celebration of Mass facing the people), in *La Maison-Dieu* 2 (1945), pp. 93-123.

6. "La concélébration" (Concelebration), in *La Maison-Dieu* 7 (1946), pp. 7-26.

7. "La concelabración: Nuevos testimonios," *Liturgica*, Volume I, (Montserrat 1956), pp. 67-90.

8. Ordo III: "The cardinal priests [...] surround the altar and recite the canon with the Pontiff, holding the oblates in their hands, not placed on the altar, so that the Pontiff's voice may be clearly heard, and they consecrate together the Body and Blood of the Lord, the Pontiff alone making the signs of the cross."

9. "Historical note on ancient concelebration," in *La Maison-Dieu* 35 (1953), p. 11.

10. "De concelebratione eucharistica," in *Periodica de re morali, canonica, liturgica* 16 (1927), pp. 143-154; same place, 1928, pp. 93-127; and 1932, pp. 193-219.

and concelebration "of pure ceremony". In his address to the congress participants in Assisi on 22 September 1956, he specified that for there to be concelebration in the proper sense, all the priests had to say the words of consecration together¹¹. He did not specify that he was making a retroactive decision, and historians who believed in a very ancient concelebration, or even one that had existed since the beginning of the Church, did not give up, arguing that the spoken model would only have come about when there was a transition from an improvised Eucharistic prayer to a fixed prayer, which, in fact, would have happened well before the 8th century.

2. Quasi-concelebrations

During Masses celebrated at international liturgical conferences, many priests preferred to attend Mass celebrated by one of their colleagues and receive Communion there, rather than celebrating individually (there was contemptuous talk of the "Mass factories" traditionally organised during gatherings of priests).

But even in the time of Dom Odon Casel, who died in 1948, at Maria Laach Abbey, during priestly retreats, the priests did not celebrate Mass, but attended the Mass celebrated by Dom Casel in the crypt, standing in front of him in a semicircle and receiving Communion from his hand¹². Similarly, in some parishes and communities, priests began to attend Mass celebrated by one of their number wearing an alb (rather than a surplice) and a stole¹³.

In an article in *La Maison-Dieu*, Fr. François Vandenbroucke advocated community celebrations of the kind that were becoming widespread in international gatherings¹⁴. Karl Rahner even wanted these priests attending Mass around the altar to be considered as practising concelebration, while remaining silent. According to him, they participated in a sacrificial manner in the Eucharist being celebrated, but not necessarily in a sacramental manner, a distinction that leaves one wondering¹⁵.

¹¹What he had previously said, more allusively, about priests attending the Mass of one of their colleagues: "As for the offering of the Eucharistic sacrifice, there are as many actions of Christ the High Priest as there are priests to celebrate, and not to listen piously to the Mass of the bishop or the celebrant" (Address to the episcopate on 2 November 1954).

¹²Alexis-Ceslas Rzewuski, *À travers l'invisible cristal. Confessions d'un dominicain* (Paris, 1976), pp. 459-460.

¹³Waldemar Trapp (*Prehistory and Origin of the Liturgical Movement: Mainly with Regard to the German-speaking Area*, Pustet, 1939) and Aidan Nichols (*Regards sur la liturgie et la modernité*, Ad Solem, 1998) believe that *the Catholic Enlightenment* is the distant origin of the Liturgical Movement in its 1950s version. However, there is an echo of "concelebrations" in the 1794 Apostolic Constitution *Auctorem fidei*, in which Pius VI condemned the Synod of Pistoia, a Jansenist assembly that was very representative of this "enlightened" Catholic tendency: Pius VI rejected the proposal that "only one Mass, or at most two, should be celebrated each day, and that it should be sufficient for the other priests to concelebrate with the community" (*Dz* 2691), "concelebrate" presumably being understood in the sense of attending the community Mass and receiving Communion there.

¹⁴"La concélébration acte liturgique communautaire" [Concelebration as a communal liturgical act], in *La Maison-Dieu* 35 (1953), pp. 48-55.

¹⁵Karl Rahner, "Dogmatics of Concelebration," *Liturgical and Parish Questions*, Mont-César, 36 (1955), pp. 119-135 – see especially: p. 130. He separates consecration and sacrifice, stating that the main celebrant certainly consecrates and sacrifices, while the silent concelebrants may consecrate, but in any case sacrifice.

Ritual changes in the direction of concelebration also took place in certain places, such as the celebration of synchronised Masses, for example during pilgrimages or large Catholic Action gatherings: pilgrimage of prisoners and deportees to Lourdes on 8 September 1946; pilgrimage of the Women's Catholic Action League to Lourdes in August 1952; student pilgrimage to Chartres, starting in 1945¹⁶ ; gatherings on the occasion of the pilgrimage of the statue of Our Lady of Boulogne to Colombes and Rouen in 1946¹⁷ . In these synchronised Masses, a number of priests individually said Mass at various altars placed side by side or very close to each other, "synchronising" their gestures with those of the main celebrant at the central altar. This practice was prohibited by the instruction *De Musica sacra* of 3 September 1958.

From an architectural point of view, from the 1950s onwards, the vast majority of newly built altars were detached from the apse wall. The aim was both to be able to incense them by walking around them during solemn Masses and to allow for possible celebrations facing the congregation, which were already practised¹⁸ , and possible concelebrations, which it was hoped would soon be practised with a large number of priests, ceremonies that traditional altars would have made very difficult. The examples of major altars highlighted in the magazine *L'Art sacré*, published by Éditions du Cerf and edited by the Dominicans Marie-Alain Couturier and Pie-Raymond Régamey, were almost all of this type. Furthermore, as a kind of manifesto against private Masses, the construction of these new churches was intended to mark a "return" to the single altar (or almost: they generally included a high altar and an altar of the Blessed Sacrament for weekday Masses), a layout that was thought to have been the norm before the Carolingian era and the "invasion" of private Masses.

Furthermore, genuine "unauthorised" concelebrations were already taking place in the "pilot parish" of La Bouverie, in the diocese of Namur, from the early 1950s onwards¹⁹ . However, the importance of these "abuses", which remained limited, should not be exaggerated. They were, however, part of a climate of rebellion among "progressive" clerics, in comparison to whom the experts of the Liturgical Movement appeared to be "moderate" reformers, somewhat overwhelmed by a demand that felt ready to explode. This anticipated the situation they would find themselves in when they took control. This was already practically the case when Aimé-Georges Martimort gave his lecture in Munich in 1960, stating in a style that foreshadowed that of the conciliar and post-conciliar documents (affirmation of the principle *but* with as many exceptions as one might wish): "Concelebration in the Latin Church can only be conceived of as taking place around the diocesan

¹⁶Cf. Samuel Pruvot, *Monseigneur Charles, Chaplain of the Sorbonne: 1944-1959* (Paris, 2002).

¹⁷During Mass in Le Havre, the parish priests surrounded the altar without saying Mass, but they all received Communion from the chalice.

¹⁸Paul Claudel's reaction to this novelty is known from an article in *Le Figaro littéraire* on 29 January 1955, "La messe à l'envers" (Mass in reverse). He protested against "the increasingly widespread practice in France of saying Mass facing the congregation", as exemplified by the parish of Saint-Séverin in Paris.

¹⁹Jean-Thierry Maertens, "Une liturgie déchantée. Entretien inédit avec Bruno Roy" (A disenchanted liturgy. Unpublished interview with Bruno Roy), in *Cahiers internationaux de Théologie pratique*, "Documents" series 10 (1999), p. 42.

bishop and under his presidency: it finds its normal place within the Mass, where the bishop is surrounded by his clergy in full vestments. *However* [my emphasis], it would not seem to me contrary to this tradition to also allow the clergy in full vestments and concelebration around a dignitary, delegated by the bishop"²⁰ . He allowed up to 25 concelebrants, sometimes more, but never more than 80...

It should also be noted that, since he addressed this issue at the Assisi Congress, it could possibly be understood that Pius XII did not completely rule out extending concelebrations beyond the three existing cases in the Roman area (ordinations of priests and bishops, and the Mass of St. John Chrysostom on Holy Thursday). However, in 1954, the Secretariat of State sent a letter to the experts gathered at Mont-César to inform them that they did not have the authority to make a decision on concelebration. And in 1957, the Holy Office responded negatively to Bishop Théas of Tarbes and Lourdes, who had requested an indult for the shrines of Lourdes, where synchronised Masses, as described above, were practised during large gatherings²¹ . It is possible that in 1956 Pius XII simply wanted to tell priests who preferred to attend Mass rather than say it individually that they were not celebrating at all.

Moreover, assuming that the Congregation of Rites and the Congregation of the Holy Office of Pius XII, which held the CPL partially responsible for the untimely liturgical innovations taking place in France, had deemed it appropriate to extend concelebration in the Roman rite, one might think that they would have organised it in line with the historical tradition of this rite: a concelebration of canons dressed in their vestments around the diocesan bishop, similar to that of Lyon, in other words, since the reform of Holy Week in 1955, during the bishop's Chrism Mass on the morning of Holy Thursday.

3. Liturgical reform and universal concelebration

In any case, this preparation of clerical opinion bore fruit. When Vatican II opened, the need to extend concelebration beyond ordination Masses was considered obvious. The only disagreement among the Council Fathers on this subject was over the number of cases in which concelebration could take place. The text they voted on, the constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, on 4 December 1963, by an overwhelming majority of 2,147 votes in favour, against 4, was typical of the open doors of Vatican II ("The use of the Latin language, except for special rights, will be retained in Latin rites. However...", SC, n. 36): concelebration was provided for in certain cases, but... Concelebration was thus provided for in the following cases: Masses on Holy Thursday; Masses of councils, synods, episcopal assemblies; Masses for the blessing of an abbot. But in addition, it could be extended with the permission of the Ordinary to Masses of priests' assemblies, conventual Masses and especially "to the main Mass of churches, when the needs of the faithful do not require

²⁰. Lecture already cited, published in *Ephemerides Liturgicae* 77 (1963), pp. 147–168.

²¹. Holy Office, 23 May 1957, *Dz* 3928.

that all the priests present celebrate individually" (n. 57). This extension *ad missam principalem in ecclesiis*, taken verbatim from the preparatory draft, in fact referred to any Mass attended by the faithful.

A first *Ritus concelebrationis* had even been drafted before the promulgation of the Constitution. The work was taken up again by the *Consilium ad exsequendam Constitutionem de Sacra Liturgia* and presented to Paul VI, who allowed its use *ad experimentum* on 26 June 1964. Trials took place in abbeys and convents (in France, in the Benedictine abbey of En Calcat, in the Tarn, and at the Dominican convent of Saulchoir, in Paris). Permission was given to concelebrate at the Eucharistic Congress in Bombay in November and December 1964. Indults were also granted to sick priests so that they could join in a celebration led by another priest. There were many other occasions when permission was granted: by 1965, 720 indults had already been granted. And, of course, many concelebrations took place without any authorisation.

The first official concelebration took place in St. Peter's Basilica in Rome on 14 September 1964, presided over by Paul VI, at the opening of the third session of the Council. It was repeated in December, at the closing of the session. In addition to the publicity that these ceremonies gave to concelebration, they also had the effect of significantly simplifying the rites of the papal chapel. Returning to their dioceses at the end of the session, many bishops presided over similar ceremonies.

As a result, one of the first texts drafted by the Commission appointed by Paul VI in 1964, and published by it and by the Congregation of Rites, was the *Ritus servandus in concelebratione Missæ et ritus Communionis sub utroque specie*²². It should be noted in passing that it was concelebration that officially paved the way for the abolition of the ancient Roman rule of "silence of the canon" (recitation in a low voice), since some concelebrants took turns saying the prayers, and certain parts (consecration, conclusion of the canon) were said in common and could even be sung. In reality, the practice of saying the prayers of the canon aloud was already widespread, especially when priests said them, without being allowed to do so, in the vernacular.

The decree stated that concelebration by several priests more clearly manifested (*quasi ab oculos ponitur*) the unity of the priesthood, which is indeed understandable. But the decree also said that it manifested the unity of the sacrifice of the cross, which is less obvious, unless one considers, particularly in an ecumenical intention towards Protestantism, that the multiplication of Mass sacrifices veiled this unity, according to what was affirmed by an increasingly common theology.

The *Ritus concelebrationis* applied the norms of n. 57 of *Sacrosanctum Concilium* and explained that this form of celebration could be used: during Christ Masses or Masses on Holy Thursday evening; during councils, synods, and meetings of bishops; at the Mass of an abbatial blessing; at priestly meetings; and, with the permission of the Ordinary, at conventual and parish Masses, when the needs of the faithful do not require Masses to be celebrated individually.

²²Typus Polyglottis Vaticanus, 7 March 1965.

In fact, only Masses *sine populo* were theoretically excluded from concelebration, although the presence of several concelebrants could be considered as "people". Based in particular on the words of moderation in a letter dated 30 June 1965 from Cardinal Lercaro, President of the Consilium for the Reform of the Liturgy²³, the theme of sobriety in the number of concelebrants for a dignified concelebration was subsequently the subject of a series of works, such as that by Nicola Giampietro, *La concelebrazione eucaristica e la comunione sotto le due specie nel corso della storia liturgica*²⁴ or Guillaume Derville's *La concélébration eucharistique. Du symbole à la réalité*²⁵. However, no legal restrictions have ever been placed on the number of concelebrants, with papal concelebrations, including those presided over by Benedict XVI, bringing together huge numbers of priests.

But also, mini-concelebrations became frequent, practised by a few priests, sometimes only two, who wanted to celebrate together rather than individually, disregarding the hierarchical nature of concelebration. In concrete terms, the inflation in the number of concelebrations and the number of concelebrants whenever possible also contributed to the general decline of the Mass rite. And so it was that the Roman rite, contrary to its tradition of multiplying Eucharistic sacrifices, became a rite of habitual concelebration.

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²³. "It will therefore be appropriate to promote concelebration in cases where it may be beneficial to the piety of priests and the faithful. [...] Indeed, individual celebration, even without the assistance of the people, retains all its doctrinal and ascetic importance and the full approval of the Church."

²⁴ Fede & Cultura, 2011.

²⁵ Wilson & Lafleur, 2012.