

# The sacramental fruits of concelebration. Systematic evaluation of the current debate

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## 1. Dogmatic discussion on the sacramental fruits of concelebration after the Second Vatican Council

There are several dogmatic issues related to concelebration: in particular, the discussion on the possibility of sacramental concelebration without the words of Christ at the Last Supper being spoken, the specialised debate among liturgists concerning the meaning of the laying on of hands in concelebration (indication or epiclesis), and the validity of large-scale celebrations when the distance from the altar is very great.<sup>2</sup> The main problem, however, is that of the sacramental fruits of concelebration in relation to individual celebration and the case of simple assistance by a priest. It is on this subject that we will focus our attention.

In the dogmatic discussion that followed the Second Vatican Council on the sacramental fruits of concelebration, we can identify three different currents: a first current, introduced by Karl Rahner in 1949, cannot value concelebration, because it makes no difference to the priest whether he concelebrates the Eucharist or participates among the faithful; a second current affirms the distinct sacramental value of each Holy Mass, which remains the same, even in concelebration, so that it is preferable to multiply individual celebrations; a third current is convinced that the sacramental fruits of the Eucharistic sacrifice depend on the sacramental act of each celebrant and that there is therefore no dogmatic reason to limit concelebration.

### 1.1 *The theses of Karl Rahner SJ and his followers*

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The following text is an excerpt from the last three chapters of the undersigned's short monograph "Around the Altar: The Pitfalls of Generalised Concelebration" (Hong Kong 2023), pp. 35-67. The footnotes contain various references to previous sections omitted here.

<sup>2</sup> The first problem was addressed in the context of the anaphora of Addai and Mari: see, for example, the various contributions in U.M. Lang (ed.), *Die Anaphora von Addai und Mari. Studien zu Eucharistie und Einsetzungsworten* (Bonn 2007); Derville (2011) 72-75; A. Santogrossi, "Anaphoras without Institution Narrative: Historical and Dogmatic Considerations," in *Nova et Vetera* 10/1 (2012), pp. 27-59 (an excellent summary); C. Giraud (ed.), *The Anaphoral Genesis of the Institution Narrative in Light of the Anaphora of Addai and Mari* (Rome 2013); D. Heringer, *The Anaphora of the Apostles Addai and Mari. Form of Expression of a Eucharistic Ecclesiology* (Göttingen, 2013).

The second question, with a more specialised bibliography, can be found in B. Gherardini, "Sulla concelebrazione," in *Divinitas* 56/1 (2013), pp. 65-86 (67f); cf. also Meyer (1989) 497; Episcopal Commission for Liturgy, *La concelebrazione. Repères théologiques pour une pratique renouvelée* (Ottava 1992), 30ff (also in: *Notitiae* 29 (1993), pp.187-243); Giampietro (2011) 104-106; Derville (2011) 86; Tymister (2018) 291-303.

For the third theme, see K. Gamber, *Die alte Messe, immer noch? Überlegungen zu Volksaltar, Konzelebration und Messengottesdiensten im Freien* (Regensburg, 1982); M. Gurtner, "Konzelebration und Messen als Massenveranstaltungen," in *Una Voce Korrespondenz* 39 (2009), pp. 134-163; Derville (2011) 83-89.

In 1949, Karl Rahner (1904–1984) published an article entitled *Die vielen Messen und das eine Opfer* (*The Many Masses and the One Sacrifice*), which was also published in 1951, with a postscript, in the form of a monograph.<sup>3</sup> There were numerous reactions, both positive and negative.<sup>4</sup> Among them were the magisterial interventions of Pius XII in 1954 and 1956,<sup>5</sup> although the Holy Father did not mention any names. In 1955, Rahner wrote a short article to defend himself against the criticism expressed in particular following Pius XII's statement in 1954;<sup>6</sup> in the same year, he dealt with the same issues in a second article entitled *Dogmatische Bemerkungen über die Frage der Konzelebration* (*Dogmatic Remarks on the Question of Concelebration*).<sup>7</sup> A second edition of *Die vielen Messen und das eine Opfer*<sup>8</sup> was published in 1966: it was adapted by one of Rahner's disciples, the Benedictine Father Angelus Häussling, who retained the earlier text "as far as possible";<sup>9</sup> Rahner himself wrote the preface, which traces the history of his study.<sup>10</sup>

Rahner observes that the current practice whereby every (good) priest should celebrate Holy Mass every day is based on three assumptions: 1) each Eucharistic sacrifice, as a sacrifice of Christ, has infinite value for the glorification of God, regardless of the subjective participation of the priest; 2) each Eucharistic sacrifice has a limited effect in terms of expiation, satisfaction and intercession;

<sup>3</sup> K. Rahner, "Die vielen Messen und das eine Opfer," in *Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie* 71 (1949), pp. 257-317 (as a monograph, with a postscript: Freiburg i.Br. 1951).

<sup>4</sup> See in particular (before Vatican II) J. Brinktrine, "Zur Lehre von den sogenannten Messopferfrüchten," in *Theologie und Glaube* 41 (1951), pp. 260-265 (against Rahner's doctrine on the 'fruits' of the Mass); B. Neunheuser, *Archiv für Liturgiewissenschaft* 3 (1/1953) no. 171, pp. 188-191; *Catholica* 9 (1953) pp. 151-153; F. Vandenbroucke, *La concélébration, acte liturgique communautaire*, in *La Maison-Dieu* 35 (1953), pp. 45-55; Idem, "Fonctionnalité de la liturgie," in *Questions liturgiques et paroissiales* 37 (1956) 81-90; J.M. Granero, "Novum Pascha," in *Estudios eclesiásticos* 28 (1954), pp. 211-237; J. Putz, "Community Mass and Concelebration," in *Clergy Monthly* 19 (1955), pp. 41-53; V. Rassa, "Sul criterio circa il numero delle messe," in *Rivista liturgica* 42 (1955), pp. 217-222; G. Frénaud, "Théologie du sacrifice eucharistique et pratique des messes communautaires," in *Revue grégorienne* 34 (1955), pp. 74-80; A. Michel, "Valeur du sacrifice de la messe," in *L'Ami du Clergé* 66 (1956), pp. 593-602; H.F. Davis, "The Pope and Private Masses," in *Clergy Review* 42 (1957), pp. 2-14; M. Nicolau, "La concelebración eucarística" [Eucharistic Concelebration], in *Salmanticensis* 3 (1961) 269-294; see also the name 'Rahner' in the annotated bibliography of Joseph de Sainte-Marie (1982) 145-147; (2015) 168-171.

<sup>5</sup> See above, 1.3. For an overview of the debate from 1954 (Pius XII, *Magnificate Dominum*) to 1963 (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*), see Rheinbay (1988) 131–244 (bibliography 294–298).

<sup>6</sup> K. Rahner, "Die vielen Messen als die vielen Opfer Christi," in *Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie* 77 (1955) 94-101.

<sup>7</sup> K. Rahner, "Dogmatische Bemerkungen über die Frage der Konzelebration," in *Münchener theologische Zeitschrift* 6 (1955), pp. 81-106. A French translation has also been published: "Dogmatique de la concélébration," in *Les questions liturgiques et paroissiales* 36 (1955), pp. 119-135. See also the short dictionary article: K. Rahner, *Konzelebration II. Dogmatisch*, in *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*<sup>2</sup> 6 (1961), pp. 525. In the same year, Rahner responded to some of his critics (in particular Putz [1955] and Michel [1956]): idem, "Thesen über das Gebet 'im Namen der Kirche'," in *Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie* 83 (1961), pp. 307-324.

<sup>8</sup> K. Rahner - A. Häussling, *Die vielen Messen und das eine Opfer* (Quaestiones disputatae 31), (Freiburg i.Br. 1966<sup>2</sup>).

<sup>9</sup> Rahner - Häussling (1966) 7 (preface by the adapter).

<sup>10</sup> See Rahner - Häussling (1966) 5-6 (author's preface). We quote here the definitive text of 1966, noting, however, some differences with earlier texts. Rahner's publications on the subject are also collected in K. Rahner, *Leiblichkeit der Gnade. Schriften zur Sakramentenlehre*, Sämtliche Werke, 18 (Freiburg im Breisgau, 2003).

On Rahner's doctrine of concelebration, cf. Joseph de Sainte-Marie (1982) 96f; 115; (2015) 110f; 133; Schmitz (1983) 511-518; P. Tirot, "La concélébration et la tradition de l'Église" [Concelebration and the Tradition of the Church], in *Ephemerides Liturgicae* 101 (1987), pp. 33-59; 182-214 (193-203); Rheinbay (1988) 131-244; C. Gouyau, *L'Église instrument du salut*, Croire et savoir 41 (Paris 2005), pp. 377-381; Gherardini (2013) 73-75. Criticisms of Rahner's contribution are cited in Rahner - Häussling (1966) 5f; see also above, note 124.

this effect is at least partly *ex opere operato* and can be applied by the celebrant; 3) every priest receives a special fruit for himself as a minister of Christ (*fructus specialissimus*). If the priest did not celebrate Mass, participation in a Eucharist celebrated by another priest would deprive him of this special fruit of the Eucharistic Sacrifice.<sup>11</sup>

Rahner wants to change the belief that each Eucharistic sacrifice has a specific fruit intrinsically linked to the sacramental act. Quoting the Council of Trent, which describes Holy Mass as a "visible sacrifice" (DH 1740), the German Jesuit asserts that the sacrificial nature of Mass lies in the visible act of worship. According to him, this does not mean that Jesus Christ performs a new act of his sacrificial spirit (*Opfergesinnung*) at each Mass.<sup>12</sup> "What is posited as a new sacrificial act, repeated each time, is done so by the Church."<sup>13</sup> According to Rahner, it is wrong to speak of a "new portion of grace" applied by each Holy Mass<sup>14</sup> : the "measure of grace" is only "determined by the disposition of the person receiving the sacrament."<sup>15</sup> Any "quantitative conception of grace" must be avoided<sup>16</sup> . Participation in Holy Mass should depend only on the benefit of encouraging the faith and devotion of the participants<sup>17</sup> . "There is no *fructus specialissimus* proper to the celebrating priest... [distinct from his subjective devotion]".<sup>18</sup>

The monograph by Rahner and Häussling does not highlight its contradiction with the statements made by Pius XII in 1954 and 1956; Paul VI's statement in his encyclical *Mysterium fidei* (1965) that the priest's individual celebration gives more saving grace to the priest, the participating people, and the whole Church than the priest's participation solely through Holy Communion is interpreted in the sense of greater devotion on the part of the priest.<sup>19</sup>

Rahner has been severely criticised by many authors. His hypothesis that no "new portion of grace" flows from the sacramental act of the Eucharistic sacrifice is at odds with the Council of Trent, which teaches that the sacrifice of the Mass is the memorial, representation and application (*applicatio*) of the sacrifice of the Cross for the remission of sins committed daily (DH 1740). The

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<sup>11</sup> Rahner - Häussling (1966) 12-13. See, for example, L. Ott, *Grundriss der Dogmatik* (Freiburg i.Br. 1952), 473f. (Bonn 2005<sup>11</sup> , 563); J. Pohle - J. Gummersbach, *Dogmatik III* (Paderborn 1937<sup>9</sup>) ; reprinted 1960 , 377f; F. Diekamp - K. Jüssen, *Katholische Dogmatik nach den Grundsätzen des heiligen Thomas III* (Münster 1962<sup>13</sup>) , 221-224 (reprinted Wil, 2013, 987-991).

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 29-30: "It is equally untrue ... that Christ himself performs a new act of sacrifice in every Mass." Cf. ibid. 34f; 38; Idem, *Die vielen Messen* (1955), 98; 100.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 37: "What is set as a new, repeatedly performed act of sacrifice in the Mass lies on the side of the Church."

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 75: "Grace is received more deeply, but not because a new portion of grace is given, so to speak."

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 83: "Thus ... the measure of grace in the sacrament is also solely determined by the disposition of the recipient ...".

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 83: "A contrary view presupposes an ultimately unworkable quantitative conception of grace ...".

<sup>17</sup> Cf. ibidem, 107: "Mass should be celebrated as often as the frequency of the celebration increases the fides and devotio of those celebrating." Cf. ibidem, 109.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 98.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. 121, note 15; Paul VI, *Mysterium fidei* (1965): AAS 57 (1965) 761.

doctrine, formulated since Duns Scotus, of the "fruits of the Mass" implies that each Holy Mass has a certain effect *ex opere operato* for the whole Church, for the living and for the souls in Purgatory. There have been various distinctions concerning the "fruits," but in each case a fruit has generally been recognised for the whole Church (*fructus generalis*), for the intention applied by the priest, for the faithful participants and for the celebrating priest<sup>(20)</sup>, while the reception of these fruits also depends on individual dispositions. The German dogmatist Johannes Brinktrine recalls, for example (against Rahner), that Pope Pius VI condemned the proposal of the pseudo-synod of Pistoia that it would be impossible to apply a particular fruit to someone through the celebration of Holy Mass (DH 2630).<sup>21</sup> Since Rahner does not accept the sacramental fruits of each Mass, Joseph de Sainte Marie and Rudolf Michael Schmitz describe his theory as "sacramental nominalism" (22), while Paul Tirot speaks of "subjectivism" and points out internal contradictions regarding the objective meaning of the sacramental act *ex opere operato*.<sup>23</sup>

Another critical point is the separation between Christ's action and the Church's action in the Sacrifice of the Mass.<sup>24</sup> Systematically, it is not very clear in Rahner that the Eucharistic sacrifice is an act of Christ the High Priest accomplished by the ordained priest. When it is asserted that no "new portion of grace" can derive from the Eucharistic sacrifice itself, the importance of created grace is overlooked, that is, the created effect of the presence of the Triune God, which depends on God's will and the disposition of the faithful.<sup>25</sup>

Rahner's theory, according to which, with regard to sacramental fruits, there is no essential difference between a priest celebrating or concelebrating Holy Mass and a priest participating in it among the faithful, has been accepted and developed in particular by the German theologian Gisbert Greshake. In a collection of various writings in honour of Rahner,<sup>26</sup> Greshake observed that concelebration is problematic because it obscures the representation of the one Christ (by a single

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<sup>20</sup> Cf. N. Gühr, *Das heilige Messopfer dogmatisch, liturgisch und asketisch erklärt*, Freiburg i.Br. 1919, 147-159; A. Michel, *La Messe chez les théologiens postérieurs au Concile de Trente. Essence et efficacité*, in *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique* 10 (1928) 1143-1316 (1291-1304); Brinktrine (1951); A. García Ibañez, *The Eucharist, gift and mystery. Trattato storico-dogmatico sul mistero eucaristico*, Rome 2006, 548-550; Ott (2005) 563; Diekamp (2013) 988-991.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Brinktrine (1951) 265; Rahner (1949) 286, who attempts to interpret the obvious reference to the priest's ministerial intention in the sense of the intention of every participant in the Eucharist.

<sup>22</sup> Joseph de Sainte-Marie (1982) 96; (2015) 110; Schmitz (1983) 514.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Tirot (1987) 193-203; see also Gouyau (2005) 380f.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Michel (1956) 595; Schmitz (1983) 515; Gouyau (2005) 380f.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Schmitz (1983) 518. On the importance of created grace (also against Rahner's interpretation), cf. L. Scheffczyk, *Die Heilsverwirklichung in der Gnade. Gnadenlehre* (Katholische Dogmatik VI), Aachen 1998, 265-275; en. *La realizzazione della salvezza nella grazia. Doctrine of Grace*, Catholic Dogmatics, 6 (Vatican City, 2019), pp. 232-239.

<sup>26</sup> See G. Greshake, *Konzelebration der Priester. Kritische Analyse und Vorschläge zu einer problematischen Erneuerung des II. Vatikanischen Konzils*, in E. Klinger - K. Wittstadt (eds.), *Glaube im Prozess. Christsein nach dem II. Vatikanum* (Freiburg i.Br., 1984), 258-288. These presentations are summarised in Idem, *Fragwürdige Konzelebration*, *Heiliger Dienst* 61 (2007) 238-248.

priest)<sup>27</sup> and because it destroys, through the intervention of several voices during the Eucharistic prayer, the unity of the proclamation of the word of God.<sup>28</sup> In an in-depth study on the priesthood, Greshake describes concelebration as a practice specific to 'clericalism',<sup>29</sup> a 'perversion' which, in its current form, should not be tolerated.<sup>30</sup> His recommendation that priests (who should not celebrate with the faithful) participate in Mass in the manner of lay people<sup>31</sup> is countered by the historical observation that in ancient times, priests participated in the Eucharistic sacrifice in their specific ministerial role (even if they did not pronounce the words of our Lord, as would be necessary for a true sacramental concelebration).<sup>32</sup>

This questioning of concelebration was prepared by Rahner, who had observed that whether the priest celebrates Mass or participates in it, with the same devotion, in the same way as the laity, the effect (of grace) is the same;<sup>33</sup> "concelebration can only be recommended for truly extraordinary exceptions"<sup>34</sup> .

## **1.2 The Thomistic explanation of Joseph de Sainte-Marie OCD and Rudolf Michael Schmitz**

Gisbert Greshake, in the aforementioned German collection devoted to Karl Rahner, observed in 1984: "To my knowledge, there are no longer any objections to Rahner's studies that can be taken seriously today."<sup>35</sup> This hopeful assessment was mistaken. The most detailed presentation of the history and theology of concelebration to date can be found in various articles (1979-1984) by the Carmelite Joseph de Sainte-Marie (1931-1985), who taught at the Faculty of Theology of the Discalced Carmelites in Rome. Most of these articles were collected in a monograph published in 1982.<sup>36</sup> An English translation appeared in 2015, with the support of the

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<sup>27</sup> Cf. Greshake (1984) 267; 271; (2007) 240-242.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Greshake (1984) 275f; (2007) 242-244.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. G. Greshake, *Priestersein in dieser Zeit*, Würzburg 2005<sup>3</sup> , 345-353 ("Klerikalistische Konzelebration ?") [it. *Essere preti in questo tempo*, Brescia 2008 ]; Cf. Idem (1984) 286; (2007) 248.

<sup>30</sup> Greshake (2005) 352. He asserts that concelebration could be accepted, in extraordinary cases, only in the future after a change in its liturgical conditions, eliminating the participation of concelebrants who pronounce the words of our Lord (sic); *ibid.* pp. 348-350.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Greshake (1984) 282-285; (2007) 247f.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. A. Wollbold, *Als Priester leben. Ein Leitfaden* (Regensburg, 2010), 158-160.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Rahner - Häussling (1966) 98f.

<sup>34</sup> Rahner, *Konzelebration* (1955) 88: "... concelebration is only advisable in truly exceptional cases."

<sup>35</sup> Greshake (1984) 263.

<sup>36</sup> Joseph de Sainte-Marie (1982); after this date, there are two other historical studies on canon law (1983) (cf. *supra*, note 115) and liturgical reform (1984) (cf. *supra*, note 101), supplemented by a response to Jean Galot, who had given a presentation similar to Paul Tirot's position (cf. *infra*, point 5.3): *Valeur de la concélébration. Réponse au R.P. J. Galot, S.J.*, in *La Pensée catholique* 212 (1984), pp. 64-65. On Joseph de Sainte-Marie, see also the critical treatises by Tirot (1987) 203-213; Gouyau (2005) 381-386.

renowned Carmelite François-Marie Lethel<sup>37</sup> and a preface by the Benedictine liturgist Alcuin Reid.<sup>38</sup>

In 1981, the Carmelite position was taken up mainly by Rudolf Michael Schmitz in the German journal *Theologisches*,<sup>39</sup> and, from 1983 onwards, in the major Italian handbook on the Eucharist written by Antonio Piolanti (Lateran University)<sup>40</sup> and in several subsequent contributions (1991; 1995).<sup>41</sup>

Joseph de Sainte-Marie highlights the contribution of St Thomas Aquinas, who states: "the oblation of the sacrifice is multiplied in several Masses, and thus the effect of the sacrifice and the sacrament is multiplied".<sup>42</sup> St Thomas emphasises this principle in an article defending the beneficial effects of the Eucharistic sacrifice even for those who do not receive the sacrament. St. Thomas Aquinas' observations on concelebration formally imply that a concelebrated Mass is a single sacrifice, that is, a single sacramental act.<sup>43</sup>

Pius XII, in his 1956 speech, affirms that "the action of the priest who consecrates is the same action of Christ, who acts through his minister."<sup>44</sup> The decisive question (for our theme) is not the fruit of the individual soul participating in the Eucharist, but the nature of the act performed by the priest: does he participate or not in the sacrifice of Christ (in concelebration)?<sup>45</sup> The multiplication of the saving effect in each Eucharistic sacrifice is implicit in the fundamental teaching of the Council of Trent, according to which the "visible sacrifice" of the Mass is the "application" of the Sacrifice of the Cross for the remission of our daily sins.<sup>46</sup>

Only one Mass is offered to God in concelebration. Each Mass, as the sacrifice of Christ, has infinite value; and, with this infinite value, it causes "the redeeming blood of Christ to flow over the Church and the whole world."<sup>47</sup> Each Mass, as such, has infinite value, but the disposition of the

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<sup>37</sup> Joseph de Sainte-Marie (2015) (II).

<sup>38</sup> A. Reid, *Foreword. La concélébration aujourd'hui, hier et demain*, in Joseph de Sainte-Marie (2015) XVII-XXXIX.

<sup>39</sup> R.M. Schmitz, *Zur Theologie der Konzelebration*, in *Theologisches* 139 (1981), pp. 4323-4334.

<sup>40</sup> Schmitz (1983).

<sup>41</sup> R.M. Schmitz, "La concélébration eucharistique : un sacrifice unique" (Eucharistic concelebration: a unique sacrifice), in *Sedes Sapientiae* 36 (1991), pp. 25-39; "La concélébration et les fruits du sacrifice de la Messe" (Concelebration and the fruits of the sacrifice of the Mass), in *Sedes Sapientiae* 38 (1991), pp. 25-36 (corresponds to the Italian publication of 1983); "Incarnation, history and sacrifice of the Mass. The problems of frequent concelebration," in AA.VV., *La Liturgie Trésor de l'Église. Proceedings of the first colloquium of historical, theological and canonical studies on the Roman Catholic rite* (Paris, 1995), pp. 119-139 (German version: "Inkarnation, Geschichte und Messopfer. Die Problematik der häufigen Konzelebration," in *Una Voce Korrespondenz* 26 (1996), pp. 335-352).

<sup>42</sup> Thomas Aquinas, STh III q. 79 a. 7 ad 3. Cf. Joseph de Sainte-Marie (1982) 73; (2015) 81.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Joseph de Sainte-Marie (1982) 13; (2015) 5, with reference to STh III q. 82 a. 2.

<sup>44</sup> AAS 48 (1956) 717.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*; cf. Joseph de Sainte-Marie (1982) 15-16; (2015) 8-10.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Joseph de Sainte-Marie (1982) 92; (2015) 106; DH 1740.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid*, 457; (2015) 553.

faithful to receive its fruits is always imperfect and, for this reason, limited. The number of Masses is therefore important in order to "multiply the fruits of salvation."<sup>48</sup>

Joseph de Sainte-Marie appreciates the possibility of concelebration opened up by the Council for special occasions, but deplores the lack of clarity in the doctrinal statements of Vatican II, for example the absence of a clear statement that only one sacrifice is offered to God in concelebration (although this is affirmed in some post-conciliar documents). The "unlimited expansion of concelebration" after the Council represents "a break with, rather than a homogeneous evolution of, the liturgy."<sup>49</sup> Since the fruits of Redemption are spread throughout the world above all through the implementation of the Sacrifice of the Cross in the Mass, it is "necessary to multiply Masses for the salvation of souls and for the unity of the Church itself. If concelebration manifests this unity and develops the sense of it, the multiplication of Masses contributes even more to building it, by multiplying the outpouring of Christ's grace."<sup>50</sup>

Rudolf Michael Schmitz (\* 1957), currently Vicar General of the Institute of Christ the King Sovereign Priest, states that he "follows the excellent study" by Joseph de Sainte-Marie<sup>51</sup> and gives a concise presentation of the systematic argumentation of Antonio Piolanti's famous dogmatic manual on the Eucharistic Mystery. The first part of his presentation considers "the one sacrifice"<sup>52</sup> and the second "the fruits of the sacrifice"<sup>53</sup>. He quotes magisterial texts which imply that the concelebrated Mass is a single sacramental act that accomplishes a single sacrifice; this doctrine is essentially based on the teaching of St. Thomas Aquinas.

Like Joseph de Sainte-Marie, the author rejects Joseph Kleiner's (1979) argument that concelebration involves "various ministerial implementations of the single sacrifice."<sup>54</sup> It is not possible to separate the sacramental act from the subject who performs it,<sup>55</sup> as is the case with Suárez, cited as an authority by Kleiner.

Schmitz compares concelebration to the Trinitarian procession of the Holy Spirit: it proceeds from the Father and the Son, but only through a single inspiration.<sup>56</sup> As a sacrifice of expiation and intercession, Holy Mass cannot produce infinite effects in the people, even though it has infinite value. It is important to emphasise the importance of the created grace communicated by the

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid, 458; (2015) 553.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, 101; (2015) 117.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, 460s; (2015) 556s.

<sup>51</sup> Schmitz (1983) 501, footnote.

<sup>52</sup> Schmitz (1983) 501–512.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid. 512–520.

<sup>54</sup> Kleiner (1979) 675; cf. Schmitz (1983) 506–510; Joseph de Sainte-Marie (1982) 31–60; (2015) 31–65; see also Kleiner (1980) opposed to Joseph de Sainte-Marie (1982) 60–71; (2015) 65–79.

<sup>55</sup> Schmitz (1983) 207.

<sup>56</sup> Schmitz (1983) 509, with reference to STh I q. 36 a. 4 ad 7.

Eucharistic Sacrifice "ex opere operato". This is why "an unlimited diffusion of frequent concelebration (...) diminishes the well-being of the Church".<sup>57</sup>

In the Italian-speaking world, a position similar to that of Joseph de Sainte-Marie and Rudolf Michael Schmitz can be found in the work of Passionist theologian Enrico Zoffoli (1915–1996), who published a short monograph on the subject in 1991, reissued in 2021 with additional texts by Nicola Bux and Athanasius Schneider.<sup>58</sup>

### 1.3 *The positions of Paul Tirot OSB and Paul Gouyaud*

In two detailed articles in *Ephemerides liturgicae* (1987), Benedictine monk Paul Tirot (\* 1923) provides a historical account and theological evaluation of concelebration. He rejects Rahner's position<sup>59</sup> and critically discusses Joseph de Sainte-Marie's presentations.<sup>60</sup> He shares the analysis and conclusion, confirmed by the decree *Ecclesiae semper* (1965), that concelebration is a single sacramental act.<sup>61</sup>

However, he gives a different explanation of the concelebrants' participation in the single sacramental act. Tirot distinguishes between two different currents from scholasticism to the present day, although the difference between them seems minimal. "The first (school of thought) asserts that there is only one sacramental offering, but that it is offered in its entirety by each priest, and is therefore virtually multiple, that is to say, this offering possesses the virtue and efficacy of a number of offerings equal to the number of concelebrants. The second (current) trend asserts that there are several sacramental offerings that are effectively multiple, but only one intention."<sup>62</sup> According to Tirot, Domingo de Soto represents the first trend and Francisco Suárez the second.<sup>63</sup> "However, the ancient scholastics do not explicitly say that the concelebrated Mass produces the same [...] fruits as individual Masses."<sup>64</sup>

Tirot's central thesis is formulated in the 1924 edition of the book by Jesuit Maurice de la Taille, *Mysterium fidei*: "the oblation is formally one, as the collective action of a single *collegium*,

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<sup>57</sup> Schmitz (1983) 519.

<sup>58</sup> E. Zoffoli, *La Messa unico tesoro e la sua concelebrazione* (Rome, 1991); Idem, *In persona Christi: La Messa unico tesoro e la sua concelebrazione*. ed. Aurelio Porfirio (Hong Kong, 2021). See also the video of the discussion (29 July 2021) on the blog "Return to Ithaca" at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wRnF0N9yQ2A> (cons. 24.4.2023).

<sup>59</sup> See Tirot (1987) 193–203.

<sup>60</sup> See *ibid.* 203–213. On Tirot, see in particular Schmitz (1995); Gouyaud (2005), 390–392.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 204. This analysis and opposition to Joseph Kleiner's presentation is shared by J. Galot's shorter essay, "Valeur de la concélébration" [The Value of Concelebration], *Esprit et Vie* 21–22 (1984), pp. 305–309; reprinted in J. Galot, *L'Eucharistie, amour plein de vie* (Saint-Maur, 2000), 109–122.

<sup>62</sup> Tirot (1987) 56.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 56–58.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

but it is virtually or equivalently multiple."<sup>65</sup> However, Tirot does not accept the French Jesuit's thesis that the growth of spiritual fruits in concelebration depends solely on the individual devotion of the priests.<sup>66</sup>

According to Tirot, the multiplication of sacramental effects in proportion to the number of celebrants dates back to Suárez, who does not oppose St Thomas. However, a clear affirmation of multiple sacramental acts in concelebration can be found in Gabriel Vázquez (1549-1604)<sup>67</sup> and Cardinal Juan de Lugo (1583-1666), a Jesuit from Salamanca, quoted by the future Pope Benedict XIV to justify the fact that concelebrants can also receive a special offering: "If two priests consecrate a host together, there are two oblations, and both may apply the Mass to different (intentions)"<sup>68</sup>. This conviction is found in the main manuals of canon law and moral theology, for example Cardinal Gasparri's treatise on the Eucharist<sup>69</sup> and Benedict H. Merkelbach's *Summa theologiae moralis*.<sup>70</sup>

Tirot thus offers a Jesuit interpretation of Saint Thomas, drawing on certain elements of the doctrines of Francisco Suárez and Maurice de la Taille. He differs from Joseph de Sainte-Marie in his assessment of the ministerial act. He asks: if it is true, as the Carmelite theologian also confirms, that "each concelebrant performs the entire act of the Sacrifice"<sup>71</sup> - why does he reject the consequence that there is the same "special fruit" for the concelebrant as if he were celebrating Mass individually?<sup>72</sup> It is true that the sacramental offering constitutes a moral unity, "but it remains virtually multiple because of the multiplicity of agents and their special virtue." In other words: concelebration is "an action that is actually unique and virtually multiple."<sup>73</sup> If Joseph de Sainte-Marie also admits a certain "special fruit" for concelebration, so that an offering can be accepted by each concelebrant, why does he reject the existence of a "general fruit" attached to concelebration? Is explaining the "special fruits" of concelebrants solely by the infinite value of the Mass not falling back into Karl Rahner's subjectivism?<sup>74</sup> If concelebration does indeed lead to a very serious

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<sup>65</sup> M. de la Taille, *Mysterium fidei* (Paris, 1924), 354f, quoted in Tirot (1987) 183.

<sup>66</sup> See Tirot (1987) 184.

<sup>67</sup> Cf. Tirot (1987) 189, with reference to G. Vasquez, In III P., q. 22, disp. 218, Lyon 1638, vol. VII, 377.

<sup>68</sup> Cf. Tirot (1987) 189; cf. J. De Lugo, *Tractatus de venerabili Eucharistiae sacramento*, disp. 19, sec. 12, n. 252; J.-P. Migne, *Theologiae cursus completus*, vol. 23 (De eucharistia. De sacrificio missae) (Paris, 1840), 801; Benedict XIV, *De sacrosanctae Missae sacrificio*, III,16,10: Migne, op. cit. p. 1185.

<sup>69</sup> P. Gasparri, *Tractatus canonicus de SS. Eucharistiae*, I (Paris - Lyon, 1897), p. 57; 396, quoted in Tirot (1987) 190.

<sup>70</sup> B. Merkelbach, *Summa theologiae moralis*, III, Paris 1933, 279, quoted in Tirot (1987) 190.

<sup>71</sup> Michel (1928) 1295, cited by Joseph de Sainte-Marie (1982) 28; (2015) 25f and by Tirot (1987) 204.

<sup>72</sup> This is the conviction of Michel (1928) 1295, shared by Tirot (1987) 204, but refuted by Joseph de Sainte-Marie (1982) 28; (2018) 25f.

<sup>73</sup> Tirot (1987) 205. A similar position, without the terminology of Maurice de la Taille, can be found in Galot (1984) 308; (2000) 118: "The offering of the Saviour is objectively appropriated to the Church through the ministry of the priest. However, this appropriation is broader in concelebration ...".

<sup>74</sup> Cf. Tirot (1987) 207.

diminution of grace for the Church, does this thesis not mean that the rite of concelebration is, as such, an error committed by the Church?<sup>75</sup> If we consider the virtual multiplicity of the Eucharistic sacrifice, it seems correct to say that in concelebration there are as many actions of Christ as there are concelebrating priests *in persona Christi*.<sup>76</sup>

Tirot's theses received a great deal of support (<sup>77</sup>) but also severe criticism, particularly from Rudolf Michael Schmitz: separating the ministerial offering from the single visible sacramental act leads to a spiritualisation of the sacramental action that does not take the reality of the Incarnation seriously (<sup>78</sup>). Even if there were a virtual multiplicity of Christ's action, how could a subjective application of grace multiply the objective "general fruit" (*fructus generalis*) of the Sacrifice? What would be the effect of a simple virtuality?<sup>79</sup>

This criticism is accepted by Christian Gouyau (\* 1959),<sup>80</sup> priest of the diocese of Strasbourg, in his study on the Church as the instrumental cause of salvation.<sup>81</sup> Gouyau insists that Christ is the only principal efficient cause currently acting through the various principal instrumental actions of the concelebrating ministers. According to this scholar, in the substantial order, there is only one consecration in a concelebrated Mass, but in the operative order, there are several sacrificial actions, that is, several Eucharistic sacrifices.<sup>82</sup> However, this proposition seems problematic: is it possible to link *different* Eucharistic sacrifices to *a single* sacramental act of consecration? The essence of the Eucharistic Sacrifice must therefore be referred to the consecration.<sup>83</sup>

## 2. Systematic evaluation

Having reviewed the main contributions on the sacramental efficacy of concelebration, we must attempt a systematic evaluation.

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<sup>75</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> Cf. Tirot (1987) 214.

<sup>77</sup> See Schmitz (1995) 120 (without sharing this position), and V. Raffa, *Liturgia eucaristica. Mistagogia della Messa: dalla storia e dalla teologia alla pastorale pratica*, Bibliotheca "Ephemerides liturgicae" 100 (Rome, 1998), p. 754 [2003, reprinted 2011, 944], who defines Tirot's theory (a single Mass, but virtually multiple in concelebration) as "the theological assessment that seems most credible and best founded".

<sup>78</sup> Cf. Schmitz (1995) 136f.

<sup>79</sup> Cf. Schmitz (1995) 130.

<sup>80</sup> Cf. Gouyau (2005) 392.

<sup>81</sup> See Gouyau (2005) 323-399.

<sup>82</sup> Cf. Gouyau (2005) 397.

<sup>83</sup> See Van Havre (1992) 211-220; M. Hauke, "What is the Holy Mass? The Systematic Discussion on the 'Essence' of Eucharistic Sacrifice," in G. Deighan (ed.), *Celebrating the Eucharist: Sacrifice and Communion*, (Wells, 2014), pp. 108-134; "Was ist die Heilige Messe? Die systematische Diskussion über das 'Wesen' des eucharistischen Opfers," in *Forum Katholische Theologie* 30 (2014), pp. 6-29.

## 2.1 *The uniqueness of the Eucharistic sacrifice in concelebration*

The first crucial point concerns the sacramental event of concelebration: is it a single sacramental act in which the Sacrifice of the Cross is represented, or merely a synchronisation of several individual celebrations?

Joseph Kleiner, in an article published in 1980, gives the example of a pilgrimage to Lourdes in 1946: there was one bishop and seventeen priests; each of them celebrated Holy Mass at the same time on his own altar; the bishop's altar was in the middle. So there were eighteen synchronised Masses. Today in Lourdes, according to Kleiner, eighteen priests would concelebrate, and there would be "eighteen concelebrated Masses." Only the rite is different, ... "but the signs as such and their effectiveness would not be different."<sup>84</sup>

A similar presentation of concelebration was given in the study by Rahner-Häussling (but not in Rahner's earlier studies): "From a strictly dogmatic point of view, concelebration is properly a synchronised celebration..."<sup>85</sup> Kleiner based his thesis on the scholastic principle, formulated for example by St Thomas Aquinas: *actiones sunt suppositorum*, i.e. every action of an individual nature must be attributed to the acting subject, to the acting person.<sup>86</sup> This is why different concelebrating priests perform different sacramental acts, "different consecrations".<sup>87</sup>

Joseph de Sainte-Marie responds to this argument by distinguishing between the action inherent in the acting subject and the action directed outward.<sup>88</sup> *The actus immanens* is certainly specific to each concelebrating priest, but in *the actus transiens* the priests act jointly. This is true, at least for Thomas Aquinas' presentation of concelebration, but not for Suárez, on whom Kleiner's argument is based.<sup>89</sup> Indeed, the presentation of concelebration, particularly in Pius XII and the decree *Ecclesiae semper*, presupposes a single sacramental act, as described by St. Thomas.

A Spanish doctoral thesis, which carefully examines the discussion that followed Kleiner's proposal, concludes that Kleiner confuses the sacramental nature of the Eucharistic Sacrifice with its oblation by the priest and separates the ministerial action of the concelebrants from the divine virtue that brings about the effect of this action: the concelebrants are united in Christ who

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<sup>84</sup> Kleiner (1980) 552.

<sup>85</sup> Rahner - Häussling (1966) 127, note 23. Rahner himself insists that consecration is only a sacrificial action: Rahner, *Konzelebration* (1955) 91; 93f; 103.

<sup>86</sup> Cf. Kleiner (1979) 677; (1980) 551. In Thomas Aquinas, see for example STh I q. 40 a. 1 ad 3; Margelidon - Floucat (2011) 9.

<sup>87</sup> Cf. Kleiner (1979) 675.

<sup>88</sup> Cf. Joseph de Sainte-Marie (1982) 36f; (2015) 35f, with reference to Thomas Aquinas, STh I q. 54 a. 2. See also D. van Havre, "Unicidad o pluralidad del sacrificio eucarístico en la Eucaristía concelebrada," in *Excerpta e dissertationibus in Sacra Theologia XXI*, Pamplona 1992, pp. 195-255 (217; 235f).

<sup>89</sup> Cf. Joseph de Sainte-Marie (1982) 45-48; (2015) 47-51.

consecrates and offers each Eucharistic Sacrifice.<sup>90</sup> It seems that this conclusion has now been almost universally accepted by specialists in this field.<sup>91</sup>

However, Paul Tirot has proposed a modified presentation of Kleiner's argument: following Maurice de la Taille, he recognises (contrary to Kleiner) that there is only one sacramental act, but he emphasises that it is virtually multiple.<sup>92</sup> We will return to this subject when we discuss the sacramental fruits of concelebration.

It seems that all traditional philosophical approaches to systematic theology can support St Augustine's principle that a sacramental event arises from the conjunction of the word and the material element, which cannot be separated from one another.<sup>93</sup> Cardinal Charles Journet offers an illuminating comparison with baptism for our theme:

Allow me to say a word about concelebration. Imagine that several people gather to baptise a child at the same time. There would be several baptisers but only one baptismal action, *plures baptizantes, una baptizatio*. Similarly, there would be several 'consecrators' in the concelebration, *plures ex aequo consecrantes*, but only one act of consecration, *una consecratio*.<sup>94</sup>

With regard to the sacramental act, it is clear that Christ himself is the High Priest representing his sacrifice on the Cross. According to Rahner, in the Holy Mass there is no real sacrificial act of Christ (a sacrifice that took place on the Cross), but only a virtual offering due to the fact that Jesus Christ instituted the Eucharistic sacrifice at the Last Supper. This is a subject that deserves further study. The Council of Trent illustrates, with regard to the relationship between the Cross and the Holy Mass, the identity of the priest and the victim (Christ offering himself) (DH 1743). However, it does not expressly indicate the identity of *the act of sacrifice*.<sup>95</sup> For this reason, many theologians subsequently spoke of a new sacrificial act of Christ coming from heaven for each Holy Mass, while others observed that it was sufficient to speak of the divine power founded in the Saviour's oblation on the Cross. Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange emphasises the fact that Jesus offers himself in the Eucharist not only virtually but also really, since he maintains the act of offering internally and, in his beatific vision on earth, he already knew about the Eucharistic sacrifices in history.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Cf. D. van Havre (1992) 237-240; García Ibañez (2006) 481.

<sup>91</sup> See, for example, Schmitz (1983) 501–512; Tirot (1987) 206; Raffa (1998) 754 (2011, p. 963); Galot (2000) 114–116; Augé (2001) 484; García Ibañez (2006) 480ff; Derville (2011) 32ff; Gherardini (2013) 69–71. Gouyaud (2005) 397, however, as we have critically mentioned above, speaks of a single sacramental action with a plurality of sacrifices.

<sup>92</sup> Cf. Tirot (1987) 183; 203-214.

<sup>93</sup> Augustine, Comm. in Jo., LXXX, 3 (CCL 36, 529; PL 35, 1840); Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1228.

<sup>94</sup> C. Journet, *Le sacrifice de la Messe*, in *Nova et vetera* 46 (1971) 241-250 (248).

<sup>95</sup> See specific references in M. Hauke, *What is the Holy Mass?* (point 4.).

<sup>96</sup> Cf. R. Garrigou-Lagrange, *De Eucharistia*, Turin - Paris 1943, 290-298, followed, for example, by Piolanti (1983) 489f.

Contemporary theology usually speaks of the numerical unity of Christ's sacrificial act on the Cross and in the Holy Mass.<sup>97</sup> On the other hand, the sacramental action cannot be separated from the distinct operation of Christ, to such an extent that in 1954 Pius XII observed that "with regard to the offering of the Eucharistic sacrifice, there are as many actions of Christ the High Priest as there are celebrating priests..."<sup>98</sup> Two years later, in 1956, he returned to this point a second time<sup>99</sup> against the thesis formulated by Karl Rahner in 1949 that the specific action of the Mass is the sacrifice of the Church (and not the sacrifice of Christ).

The uniqueness of the Eucharistic sacrifice, in any case, can also be preserved in the theory of a virtual action of Christ, although the theory of a distinct sacrificial act may also be the best explanation for the distinct meaning of each Holy Mass. This is also evident in Karl Rahner's statement in 1955 (and 1966): with regard to Christ's sacrificial acts, one Mass and one hundred Masses are not the same thing.<sup>100</sup>

## **2.2 The fruits of concelebrated Masses**

A second important point for a systematic evaluation is that of the fruits of concelebrated Masses. First of all, it must be recognised that there are specific fruits for each Eucharistic sacrifice. This is very clear when St Thomas states that the multiplication of the cause, i.e. the representation of Christ's Sacrifice, also leads to a multiplication of the effects.<sup>101</sup> This aspect is also implicit in the Council of Trent, which defines the Holy Mass as an "application" of the Sacrifice of the Cross (DH 1740). Each Holy Mass, for this reason, has certain sacramental effects, *ex opere operato*. This point was denied by Karl Rahner, although he did not insist on this denial in a short article published a year after Pius XII's declaration in 1954.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> See B. Neunheuser, *Die numerische Identität von Kreuzesopfer und Messopfer*, in Idem (ed.), *Opfer Christi und Opfer der Kirche* (Düsseldorf, 1960), pp. 139–151; K. Rahner – A. Häussling, *Die vielen Messen und das eine Opfer* (Quaestiones disputatae 31) (Freiburg i.Br., 1966<sup>2</sup>), pp. 34-40; a numerical difference, however, is indicated, for example, by J.A. de Aldama et al., *Sacrae Theologiae Summa IV* (Madrid, 1953), 353f; Piolanti (1983) 432f. García Ibáñez (2006) 377-380 notes that the Cross and the Mass contain "the same act of sacrificial offering", citing a message from John Paul II to the Eucharistic Congress in Lourdes, 21 July 1981: Nuntius televisificus iis cui XLII Eucharistico ex omnibus Nationibus Concentui interfuere missus, no. 2: AAS 73 (1981) 551; in the French version read by Cardinal Gantin: "You know very well, dear Brothers and Sisters, that this Eucharistic celebration is not added to the Sacrifice of the Cross; it does not add to it or multiply it. The Mass and the Cross are one and the same sacrifice (cf. *Dominicae caenae*, n. 9). Nevertheless, the Eucharistic breaking of bread has an essential function, that of making available to us the primordial offering of the Cross. It makes it present today for our generation. By making the Body and Blood of Christ truly present under the species of bread and wine, it makes the Sacrifice of the Cross, which remains, in its uniqueness, the pivot of salvation history, the essential link between time and eternity, present and accessible to our generation.

<sup>98</sup> Pius XII, Address *Magnificate Dominum*, 2 November 1954: AAS 46 (1954) 669.

<sup>99</sup> Pius XII, Address "You have asked us" at the International Congress of Pastoral Liturgy, September 1956: AAS 48 (1956) 711-725 (716-718).

<sup>100</sup> Rahner, *Die vielen Messen* (1955) 100s; Rahner - Häussling (1966) 134, note 33.

<sup>101</sup> See STh III q. 79 a. 7 ad 3.

<sup>102</sup> Cf. Rahner, *Die vielen Messen* (1955) 100: "It was clearly stated [by Rahner in 1949/1951] ... that, with regard to Christ's sacrificial act, one Mass and one hundred Masses cannot be 'the same thing!'" Rahner - Häussling (1966), however, do not take the pontifical clarification into account and speak only of the importance of subjective disposition.

It is certainly not possible to provide an almost "mathematical" explanation of a salvific event of grace,<sup>103</sup> although the distinct sacramental event of each Holy Mass and the reality of created grace must be taken seriously. In any case, there is a fusion between *ex opere operato* efficacy and *ex opere operantis* efficacy. In 1955, Rahner drew his readers' attention to a note by Pius XII in his 1954 speech: "Considering this question [i.e., the celebration of Holy Mass by the priest, as opposed to the participation of the faithful], it is not so much a matter of measuring the *fruit* that one derives from celebrating or listening to Mass — it may be true that someone derives greater fruit from a Mass listened to devoutly than from a Mass celebrated in a superficial and careless manner — than to affirm the *nature of the act* of listening to or celebrating Mass, from which the other fruits of the sacrifice derive..."<sup>104</sup> . Rahner concludes: indeed, it may be that the fruits are greater when a hundred priests attend Mass during a liturgical gathering than when Mass is celebrated by them individually in a hasty and careless manner. It is therefore not certain that a hundred Masses celebrated bear more fruit than the Mass of a single priest attended by ninety-nine priests<sup>105</sup> .

However, these observations should not lead us to deny the importance of individual Masses, if they are celebrated in circumstances conducive to the devotion of those attending. It must also be recognised that every Holy Mass is celebrated for the whole Church, for all the living and all the dead; there is a "general fruit" attached to the sacramental event as such.<sup>106</sup> As a Sacrifice, Holy Mass is offered not only for those who participate in it, but also for all humanity destined to be part of the Church.

With regard to the Eucharistic sacrifice,<sup>107</sup> classical theology distinguishes between the glorification of God (in adoration and thanksgiving) and the benefit for humanity (in expiation and intercession). The Council of Trent mentions the expiatory effect of Holy Mass for our daily sins (cf. DH 1740). Every Holy Mass, as such, *in actu primo*, has infinite value, since it is the representation of the Sacrifice of the Cross. *In its effect*, *in actu secundo*, the fruits can also be described as infinite, since the Mass is a Sacrifice of adoration and thanksgiving.

Is the application of the fruits limited, for example, by the intention for which Holy Mass is celebrated and by the will of Christ, or is it unlimited, since it depends only on the disposition of the participants? The first thesis is found, for example, in Bonaventure and Scotus, while the second is defended, for example, by Gaetano and Suárez. Both currents cite Thomas Aquinas. Albert Michel, who offers a historical overview, leans towards the second school of thought, according to which

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<sup>103</sup> Cf. Derville (2011) 25f, footnote 69.

<sup>104</sup> AAS 46 (1954) 669.

<sup>105</sup> Cf. Rahner, *Die vielen Messen* (1955) 96f.

<sup>106</sup> Cf. Granero (1954) 236; Michel (1956) 596f (critique of Rahner's response). See also Thomas Aquinas, Suppl. q. 71 a. 9 resp.

<sup>107</sup> Cf. Michel (1928) 1289-1316; Pohle - Gummersbach III (1960) 370f; García Ibañez (2006) 548-550; Diekamp (2013) 988-991.

only the absence of disposition leads to limitation, while admitting that both positions have their difficulties.<sup>108</sup> Personally, I would emphasise, as a 'measure' of application, the will of Christ and the disposition of the participants. All, however, recommend the greatest possible devotion in order to receive the fruits of the Eucharistic Sacrifice.

Given the specific fruits associated with each Eucharistic Sacrifice, the individual celebration of Holy Mass is to be preferred in many situations. If the priest has only the choice between concelebrating and attending Mass, concelebration is to be preferred: even if the concelebrant does not perform a separate sacramental act, but participates fully in the single consecration performed by all the celebrating priests in the name of Christ, he actualises the operative power, based on the sacramental character of his priesthood, and bases the intention of his offering on the sacramental event. It is therefore also possible for a concelebrated Mass to accept an offering.

### **2.3 The question of the offering (*stipendium*)**

According to the 1983 Code of Canon Law, each concelebrant may accept an offering for Holy Mass, as is possible for individual Eucharistic sacrifice.<sup>109</sup> This had already been affirmed in the 18<sup>th</sup> century by the famous canonist Prosper Lambertini, who later became Pope Benedict XIV. He emphasised this point against a 15<sup>th</sup>-century theologian (Jean Heylin) who had denied the right of newly ordained priests to receive the offering for their first Mass concelebrated with the bishop.<sup>110</sup> This practice certainly shows that the concelebrating priest does indeed perform the sacramental act.<sup>111</sup> It may also be an argument in favour of the identity of the sacramental fruits of a Holy Mass celebrated individually and those of a Holy Mass concelebrated. However, this conclusion would be too hasty. Joseph de Sainte-Marie observes that every Holy Mass, as an action of Christ through his ministers, has infinite value, so that every concelebrating priest can receive his offering.<sup>112</sup>

Nor is it clear that each concelebrant receives a special *stipend* or an offering identical to that of a Mass celebrated individually. The conciliar text *Sacrosanctum Concilium* does not mention anything about the offering in concelebration. In the conciliar debates, this subject was rarely

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<sup>108</sup> Cf. Michel (1928) 1295-1298.

<sup>109</sup> On the meaning of the offering (*stipendium*), which is not only a recognition of the sacramental fruits of Holy Mass, see Meyer (1989) 239 (bibliography); 244-247.

<sup>110</sup> Cf. Tirot (1987) 189; 210, with reference to Benedict XIV, *De sacrosanctae Missae sacrificio*, lib. III, ch. 16, in J.-P. Migne, *Theologiae cursus theologicus*, vol. 23 (De eucharistia. De sacrificio missae) (Paris, 1840), 1181; 1186. The Commission "de sacra Liturgia", preparing Vatican II, noted that the norm of CIC/1917, can. 824, should also be valid for all concelebrants, in relation to the approval of a Maronite synod in 1732 by Benedict XIV (Mansi 38, 125f.): AD II,III,II, 36. We also refer to M. de la Taille, *Mysterium fidei*, Paris 1921, 354-356.

<sup>111</sup> Cf. Kleiner (1979) 678.

<sup>112</sup> Cf. Joseph de Sainte-Marie (1982) 28; 94f; (2015) 26; 107-110.

discussed;<sup>113</sup> one of the fathers proposed that the benefit of a concelebrated Mass should be only half of the normal offering.<sup>114</sup> The Rite of Concelebration published in 1965 stipulated that each concelebrant could receive an offering.<sup>115</sup> In 1966, however, the Congregation of Rites, responding to a question about the offering for a concelebrant in a sung Mass, stated that "the offering belongs only to the principal celebrant and not to the other celebrants"; if the person who offered the offering did not explicitly indicate otherwise, the offering for the sung Mass refers to his individual celebration.<sup>116</sup>

In Eastern Church law, it is "also permissible, if it corresponds to a legitimate custom, to accept offerings for the liturgy of the presanctified and for commemorations of the divine liturgy."<sup>117</sup>

In other words, the possibility of receiving an offering for concelebration does not resolve the systematic debate on the sacramental fruit of a concelebrated Mass.

### 3. Practical consequences

The debate on concelebration over the last few decades shows the importance of the unity manifested by concelebration, but also the need to emphasise the sacramental nature of each Holy Mass. Concelebration is recommended for certain special occasions, but should not be practised indiscriminately. Canon law defends the right of each priest to celebrate individually, and this faculty must be used to offer the faithful a wide opportunity to participate in the celebration of the Eucharist every day.

Theology faces a challenge when practical measures significantly limit the possibility of celebrating Holy Mass individually, as happened in St Peter's Basilica in Rome in 2021. We will not go into the specific details of the local situation here, but it seems appropriate to highlight a position taken by Cardinal Robert Sarah, Prefect of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments from 2014 to 2021. The Prefect Emeritus published a statement in which the Cardinal briefly recounts the importance of the discussion raised in our survey:

Theologically speaking, there are at least two positions currently defended by experts concerning the multiplication of the fruit of grace due to the celebration of Mass.

According to an opinion that developed in the second half of the twentieth century, the fact that ten priests concelebrate the same Mass or that they celebrate ten Masses individually does not change the gift of grace offered by God to the Church and to the world [it seems

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<sup>113</sup> Cf. AS I,II, 11, 215, 273. See also the somewhat cynical intervention by Cardinal Ottaviani that we have already quoted: AD I,II, 20.

<sup>114</sup> Cf. Acta synodalia I,II, 215 (Bishop A. Couderc).

<sup>115</sup> Cf. Giampietro (2011) 114.

<sup>116</sup> Congregation of Rites, *Responsa ad dubia*, 18 April 1966, cited in Kaczynski, *Enchiridion*, 125, note a; Giampietro (2011) 114.

<sup>117</sup> CCEO can. 715 § 2. Cf. Tymister (2018) 188.

that the cardinal is thinking of Karl Rahner's thesis, but it is in fact the opinion of Father Paul Tirot OSB and others cited above].

The other opinion, based among other things on the theology of St. Thomas Aquinas and on the magisterium of Pius XII in particular, maintains on the contrary that the concelebration of a single Mass reduces the gift of grace, because "in several Masses, the oblation of the sacrifice is multiplied and therefore the effect of the sacrifice and the sacrament is multiplied" (Summa Theologiae, III, q. 79, a. 7 ad 3; cf. q. 82, a. 2; cf. also Pius XII, *Mediator Dei*, part II; Address of 2 November 1954; Speech of 22 September 1956) [Pius XII does not explicitly address the distinction between concelebrated Masses and those celebrated individually, but undoubtedly the reference to Thomas Aquinas corresponds to the above interpretation by Joseph de Sainte Marie OCD and others].

I do not intend to decide here which of the two theories is more credible. The second thesis, however, has several points in its favour and should not be ignored. We must not forget that there is at least a serious possibility that, by obliging priests to concelebrate and thus reducing the number of Masses celebrated, there may be a diminution of the gift of grace to the Church and to the world. If this were the case, the spiritual damage would be incalculable.<sup>118</sup>

According to Cardinal Cañizares (Prefect of the Congregation for Divine Worship from 2008 to 2014), a "liturgical reform" should take into account the intentions of *Sacrosanctum Concilium* and *Ritus servandus* (1965) by Paul VI. He recommends limiting the frequency of concelebrations and proposes (especially for religious orders) the example of the Carthusians: every day, the conventual Mass is celebrated by the hebdomadary, while the monks (who are also priests) attend and receive Communion, and then each priest celebrates Mass individually. On Sundays and other feast days, however, only the conventual Mass is celebrated by all the monks.<sup>119</sup>

At the 2005 Synod of Bishops in Rome on the Eucharist, the thorny issue of concelebration by numerous priests at major events was also addressed. The discussions led to a certain limitation of these events:

The synodal assembly considered the quality of participation in large celebrations that take place in special circumstances, where there are also, in addition to a large number of faithful, many concelebrating priests. On the one hand, it is easy to recognise the value of these moments, especially when the Bishop presides surrounded by his *presbyterate* and deacons. On the other hand, in such circumstances, problems may arise regarding the visible expression of the unity of *the presbyterate*, especially in the Eucharistic prayer, and

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<sup>118</sup> R. Cardinal Sarah, "Observations on the new rules for Masses at St. Peter's," 2, in *Exclusive. Cardinal Sarah asks the Pope to lift the ban on "individual" Masses at St. Peter's*, 29 March 2019, in <http://magister.blogautore.espresso.repubblica.it/2021/03/29/esclusivo-il-cardinale-sarah-chiede-al-papa-di-ritirare-il-divieto-delle-messe-%e2%80%9cindividuali%e2%80%9d-in-san-pietro/> (accessed 24.04.2023) (note dated 10.12.2023: the Italian texts of the blog have been temporarily transferred to the French website [www.diakonos.be](http://www.diakonos.be)).

<sup>119</sup> Cf. A. Cardinal Cañizares Llovera, *Presentation*, in Giampietro (2011) 5-9 (8).

regarding the distribution of Holy Communion. Care must be taken to ensure that these large concelebrations do not create dispersion. This can be achieved through appropriate means of coordination and by arranging the place of worship in such a way as to allow priests and faithful to participate fully and effectively. It should therefore be remembered that these are concelebrations of an exceptional nature and limited to extraordinary situations.<sup>120</sup>

Following these provisions of the Apostolic Letter *Sacramentum caritatis* (2007), the Congregation for Divine Worship was tasked with developing guidelines for large celebrations, a text published during the pontificate of Pope Francis in 2014. Among the premises, the text emphasises:

The celebration of Mass presupposes and requires that those who gather in the name of the Lord can feel part of a concrete praying assembly and that the concelebrating priests express the necessary connection with the altar.

For this reason, on certain occasions, it is appropriate to question the appropriateness of Mass or to ask whether, given the circumstances, it might not be preferable to opt for another liturgical celebration or another form of prayer. National and international gatherings can also find an appropriate expression of prayer in the Liturgy of the Hours, in a Celebration of the Word of God, in a solemn procession, in the exposition and blessing of the Blessed Sacrament, or in a prayer vigil, as in famous shrines, especially if it is not a holy day of obligation.<sup>121</sup>

Often, the large number of concelebrants does not allow them to have a place near the altar, which makes them so distant that their relationship with the altar is perplexing. When choosing a concelebrated Mass, it is recommended to limit the number of concelebrants.<sup>122</sup>

The 2005 Synod of Bishops also recommended the individual celebration of the Eucharistic sacrifice, as noted by Pope Benedict XVI:

The Eucharistic form of Christian existence is undoubtedly manifested in a special way in the priestly state of life. Priestly spirituality is intrinsically Eucharistic. ... He [the priest] is called to be constantly seeking God, while remaining close to the concerns of men. An intense spiritual life will enable him to enter more deeply into communion with the Lord and help him to let himself be possessed by God's love, becoming his witness in all circumstances, even difficult and dark ones. To this end, together with the Synod Fathers, I recommend to priests "the daily celebration of Holy Mass, even without the participation of the faithful". This recommendation corresponds above all to the objectively infinite value of every Eucharistic celebration; it then draws from it a reason for particular spiritual

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<sup>120</sup> Benedict XVI, Post-Synodal Apostolic Letter *Sacramentum Caritatis*, 61. Cf. Lang (2017) 187-189.

<sup>121</sup> Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, *Guide to Major Celebrations* (2014), 8.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid*, 9.

effectiveness, because, if lived with attention and faith, the Mass is formative in the deepest sense of the term, in that it promotes conformity to Christ and strengthens the priest in his vocation.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum caritatis*, 80.