

## The history of *versus populum* since the 1920s and 1930s

Claude Barthe<sup>1</sup>

The history of the *versus populum* celebration in the 20<sup>th</sup> century is interesting and complex: this mode of celebration became almost universally established in the Roman rite without there ever having been, strictly speaking, any legislation to make it mandatory. There were two motivations for this: firstly, the desire for a "return to antiquity," specifically a return to the ancient papal Mass, which predominated at first, and secondly, the search for a stylistically modern *actuosa participatio*, which prevailed later on.

### Liturgical visibility for the edification of the faithful in the post-Tridentine era

It is important to consider the contemporary phenomenon of *versus populum* in the 20<sup>th</sup> century in relation to developments in the modern era, beginning in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. It can be argued that the Protestant Reformation and the Catholic Counter-Reformation, in their opposing and even contradictory implementations, pursued a goal that 17<sup>th</sup>-century France would describe as *edifying* the faithful through a better understanding of the texts of the Bible and the Missal, and at the same time through greater visibility of ceremonies. Jean-Jacques Olier, one of the central figures of what has been called the French School of Spirituality, in his *Explication des cérémonies de la grand'messe de paroisse selon l'usage romain*<sup>2</sup>, emphasizes this *edifying* value contained in the unfolding of ceremonies with their actors, costumes, and decorations. However, the *drama* of the liturgy must be explained through preaching and catechesis, which must also be visible to the faithful.

The evolution of Catholic religious architecture at that time is linked to this concern. Did architecture and liturgy really become more militant, as is often said, after the Council of Trent, in order to affirm the dogma that was under threat? We would like to think that one of the great innovations of the Counter-Reformation was the "theatricality" of worship and its splendor. In reality, it already existed—and in a very direct way—with, for example, the inclusion of plays, sequences, and sacred mimes in the liturgy. And the liturgical pomp of the Gothic and early Renaissance periods could be particularly sumptuous. While the post-Tridentine liturgical style particularly exalted the worship of the Eucharist, it should be remembered that the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries saw the emergence of particularly solemn Eucharistic ostensions and processions.

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<sup>1</sup> Lecture given at the 12th CIEL Colloquium in Rome, February 20, 2023.

<sup>2</sup> See Jean-Jacques OLIER, *L'esprit des cérémonies de la messe Explication des cérémonies de la grand'messe de paroisse selon l'usage romain*, critical edition by Claude Barthe, Paris: Le Forum, 2004.

It could perhaps be argued that the art of the Counter-Reformation, Baroque art, continued the traditionally dazzling aspect of divine worship and its decor, but favored a more direct and sensitive access to sacred realities for the faithful. It showed the mystery in its dazzling power and also in its tangible proximity. It built altars no more sumptuous than those of the Middle Ages, but made them more visible, more "expressive" to the eye; it erected altarpieces and statuary that were more directly legible and demonstrative.

In this movement, the solemn liturgy of cathedral chapters and the pontifical liturgy of the bishop surrounded by his *senate*, the cathedral chapter, were now held in full view of the people, for their *edification*. Until then, the people had been restricted to either low Masses (very numerous in large churches and cathedrals) or the Sunday High Mass in parishes. However, in many regions, it was difficult for them to follow the ceremonies taking place in the choir, behind the rood screen. Ultimately, the greater visibility that Protestantism sought for the Lord's Supper was also evident in Catholic worship, but with an emphasis on its most majestic aspects, the solemn liturgy of the cathedral chapter and the pontifical liturgy of the bishop surrounded by his adorned chapter.

This movement began in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, and even earlier, particularly in Italy, where the cathedral choir was often open, following a layout derived from that of the apse of basilicas, around which ran a presbyteral bench placed behind the altar. It reached France somewhat later, like a fashion coming from Rome, which was generally resisted at first by *reactionary* cathedral chapters. It was during the period from the very end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century to the Revolution that French cathedrals were redesigned: most of the rood screens separating the choir from the nave disappeared and were replaced by high grilles or by open rood screens with two sections, each bearing an ambo for the readings of the Office, the singing of the epistle and the gospel, and on which two altars were supported, one of which was often dedicated to the Virgin Mary, for the celebration of parish masses<sup>3</sup>. The new layout, and this is very important to note, was said to be "Roman in style," which was especially true when the altar was covered with a baldachin similar to Bernini's, as in the Cathedral of Verdun or the Church of Val-de-Grâce in Paris, and placed in front of the choir, possibly as far as the transept crossing. This movement, which can be described as architectural Romanization, came to an end in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but in a medieval style that was then in vogue: in cathedrals where the choir had not been opened up, the closed choir, known as the "grand choir," was doubled by another choir visible to the faithful.

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<sup>3</sup>. With some resistance: the cathedrals of Auch, Albi, and Saint-Bertrand de Comminges kept their choirs closed behind the rood screen. See: Bernard CHEDOZEAU, *Chœur clos, chœur ouvert. De l'église médiévale à l'église tridentine (France XVII<sup>e</sup> -XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle)*, Paris: Cerf, 1999; Jean-Baptiste LEBRUN-DESMARETTE, *Voyages liturgiques de France ou recherches faites en diverses villes du royaume (1718 édition)*, Paris: Hachette, 2012; Mathieu LOURS, *L'autre temps des cathédrales. Du concile de Trente à la Révolution française*, Paris: Picard, 2010.

The Eucharistic cult itself became more solemn and visible. To encourage piety, the furniture used to store the Eucharistic reserve became, if not more monumental and ostentatious, at least more accessible for the distribution of communion, in the form of tabernacles, cabinets inserted and lowered to the level of the altar steps, usually in the high altar. This was a formula particularly supported by St. Charles Borromeo, the preeminent disseminator of the Tridentine spirit<sup>4</sup> .

It is important to note that this entire architectural evolution was known as "Roman style."

### ***Papal celebrations, between tradition and privilege***

The *versus populum*, which could be described as *traditional*, is precisely what characterized the solemn papal liturgy in Roman basilicas<sup>5</sup> . Was the *versus populum* widespread after the peace of the Church on the confessional altars (surmounting a raised martyr's tomb) that were quite common in Italy? In this case, the liturgical layout of the papal basilicas would be evidence of the form of celebration that confessional altars implied when they were located quite far forward in the nave. Unless it is the place of the throne at the back of the apse that implies, since the clergy traditionally remain behind the pontiff they assist, a somewhat accidental *versus populum*.

The question of the orientation of Mass and prayer has been widely discussed in other contributions to this symposium. In addition to the strict orientation and position of the clergy behind the pope, who approaches the altar from the back of the apse, did the *versus populum* preserved in papal basilicas also serve the purpose of improving visibility? This is debatable: although the faithful could see the pope better when he was at the altar (which was, however, equipped with seven candlesticks, a cross, and large reliquaries), it was much more difficult for them to follow the entire ceremony and the movements of the ministers taking place behind the baldachin, between the altar and the throne.

Indeed, in such ceremonies, the Roman pontiff was only *de facto* "facing the people," and not intentionally. We must never forget that the Tridentine Missal is the missal of the papal court: it is undoubtedly because of this form of celebration in Roman basilicas that the *Ritus servandus in celebratione Missæ* provided, after explaining that the priest turns toward the people to say *Dominus vobiscum* before the collection (and that he is therefore not facing the people), that a different case could arise: "If the altar faces east, towards the people, the

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<sup>4</sup>The proceedings of the 4<sup>th</sup> Provincial Council of Milan in 1576 are among the most common references for the arrangement of the Eucharistic reserve.

<sup>5</sup>According to Cyrille Vogel, the inculturation of the Roman rite in Frankish countries led to a strict orientation in Roman churches, and generally in Europe: Cyrille VOGEL, "*Versus ad Orientem. Orientation in the Ordines romani of the Early Middle Ages*," *Studi medievali*, 3<sup>rd</sup> series, vol. I, 1960, pp. 447-469. Reprinted in *Maison-Dieu*, 70/2 (1962), pp. 67-99.

celebrant does not turn his back on the altar to say *Dominus vobiscum*" (V, 3). The wording, as is often the case in the rubrics, is both precise and allusive: we understand that, in the case in question, the altar happens to face the people in order to be truly turned towards the geographical East, and not just towards the symbolic East, which is often sufficient; in this case, the priest does not turn around for the *Dominus vobiscum*.

In fact, this type of celebration was used for papal chapels, i.e., for the pope's pontifical masses, when they were celebrated in major basilicas (St. Peter's Basilica, St. John Lateran Basilica, and St. Mary Major Basilica are *roughly* west-facing). The throne was set up at the back of the apse, in the basilica style<sup>6</sup>, making it easier and more majestic to move from the throne to the altar without having to go around the altar, with the clergy remaining behind the pontiff. On the other hand, when the pope held chapel in the Sistine Chapel, he celebrated on an altar against the apse wall, with his clergy behind him and the throne set up on the left.

It was mentioned above that the new layouts of French cathedrals during the Baroque period, where the baldachin altar reminiscent of Bernini's in St. Peter's could be placed up to the transept bay, were said to be "Roman in style." This is an opportunity to note that the papal Mass required the presence of the people not only in front of the altar, but also to the right and left, with the presbytery behind, between the altar and the throne. The very particular manner of elevating the host and chalice in the solemn papal Mass attests to this, the principle being that the sacred species must be seen by the people in order to be adored by them: the pope raised the host and chalice to eye level (and not above his head, as in other Masses, so that the people behind him could see the sacred species), then he turned a quarter turn to the right towards the epistle side, for a display in front of the left transept of the basilica, then he did the same towards the gospel side for a display towards the right transept of the basilica, and finally placed the host/chalice on the altar<sup>7</sup>.

This basilica-style celebration by the pope was not (or no longer) necessarily linked to strict orientation (at St. Paul Outside the Walls, a building that has been geographically oriented since the 4<sup>th</sup> century, at least since its reconstruction after the fire of 1823, the pope

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<sup>6</sup>The bishop's throne is positioned in different ways, depending on the location of the altar in front of which it is to be erected. Either the altar is in the center [between the nave and the choir], separated from the wall, so that the choir occupies the space thus formed; then the throne is placed against the wall, facing the altar, so that the seated bishop looks directly at the center of the altar, with the seats of the canons on either side (*Cæremonial Epsicoporum*, I 1, c 13, n. 1 – translation: *Le Cérémonial des Evêques*, ed. André Philippe MUTEL and Peter FREEMAN, Paris: Institut du Christ-Roi - Hora Decima, 2006, p. 74). Until the 20<sup>th</sup> century, except in special cases (such as altars between the choir and the nave, which allowed celebrations in both directions, for example for cloistered monks and nuns, canons on the one hand, and the faithful on the other), it seems that the location of the altar between the nave and the choir only led to celebrations *versus populum* for the pope and in Roman basilicas.

<sup>7</sup>Pierre Joseph RINALDI-BUCCI, *Cæremoniale missæ quæ a Summo Pontifice Ecclesiæ Universalis ritu solemniter celebratur*, Ratisbonne, 1889. Pars secunda, § 14, p. 41: [*thuriferarius hostiam thure adolet*] 1° *dum Summus Pontifex eam hostiam elevat a mensa usque ad oculos*; 2° *dum ostensionis semicirculum facit in cornu epistolæ*; 3° *dum eundem circulum facit in cornu evangelii*.

still celebrated *versus populum*). It therefore seems to have become a kind of pontifical privilege. Thus, during his trip to visit Emperor Joseph II in Vienna, Pius VI was seen solemnly celebrating towards the nave in St. Stephen's Cathedral on Easter Sunday 1782, with the altar set up for the occasion in front of the choir *and* the throne at the back of the apse, all in accordance with the adage, "where the pope is, there is Rome"<sup>8</sup>. On the other hand, during the coronation of Napoleon I at Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris on December 2, 1804, Pius VII, as shown in David's painting, celebrated toward the apse, his throne being on the Gospel side, as during papal celebrations in the Sistine Chapel.

Further evidence that *versus populum* had become a pontifical privilege is that it was one of the liturgical honors granted to the Patriarch of Lisbon by Pope Clement XI in 1716 and by custom, along with the *sedia gestatoria*, the *flabelli*, the triple miter evoking the tiara, the *mantum*, the *falda*, the fanon, etc.: he could celebrate pontifically "in the Roman style" in his cathedral, with his throne at the back of the apse and the altar facing the people (even though the cathedral is oriented towards the east: the patriarch therefore celebrated facing west).

### ***The "return to ancient usage" during the Liturgical Movement***

The idea of a "Roman-style" celebration, that is, imitating the solemn Masses of the pope, themselves supposed to be the last vestige of an ancient practice, was certainly reflected in the arrangement of certain pontifical ceremonies. Thus, in 1927, Bishop Harscouet of Chartres, who was very favorable to the Liturgical Movement, obtained an indult allowing him to celebrate pontifically, on certain solemn feasts, at the crossing of the transept, *versus populum*.

We should also mention the pontifical Mass celebrated by Nuncio Angelo Roncalli, the future John XXIII, at Notre-Dame de Paris on April 24, 1948, to celebrate the recent canonization of Saint Catherine Labouré. The nuncio described the arrangement in his memoirs: "Throne at the back of the altar, as in Rome. Altar facing the people."<sup>9</sup> We can assume that the intention was to offer the nuncio a kind of papal Mass, rather than to sacrifice to an archaeological novelty, knowing that the chapter and ceremonies at Notre Dame were most traditional<sup>10</sup>.

On the other hand, the pontifical Mass *versus populum* celebrated on August 20, 1953, by Bishop Haas of Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA, at the Civic Auditorium on the occasion of the National Liturgical Conference, is undoubtedly in the style of the Liturgical Movement:

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<sup>8</sup>This is attested to by an engraving by the famous Viennese engraver Carl Schütz (1745–1800).

<sup>9</sup>Angelo Giuseppe RONCALLI, *Journal de France I 1945-1948*, Paris: Cerf 2006, p. 494.

<sup>10</sup>And the lavish liturgies at Notre Dame (see the pontifical midnight Mass on Christmas Eve in 1948 at Notre Dame, celebrated by Cardinal Suhard, which was the first Mass to be televised: [Historic Christmas](#)).

the altar is placed on the auditorium stage facing the people, the bishop's throne is behind it, but only a few meters from the altar, due to the narrowness of the space.

References to the aspiration for a celebration *versus populum* are relatively rare in articles and conferences relating to the rather complex liturgical movement<sup>11</sup>. However, an important article by Canon Maurice Michaud, professor at the Catholic faculties of Lyon, was published in the second issue of the journal *La Maison-Dieu*, the organ of the Centre de Pastorale liturgique<sup>12</sup>, an article on "The celebration of Mass facing the people"<sup>13</sup>, which reports the common idea at the time that celebration *versus populum* was the norm until the 6<sup>th</sup> century.

A return to antiquity, then. "Between the 1930s and the Council," noted Cardinal Jean-Marie Lustiger, "liturgy specialists generally held up as a model the basilical liturgy of the Belle Époque, between the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries: that was the ideal that had to be reconstructed! And so we reconstructed it"<sup>14</sup>. In French seminaries, one text played a major role in this regard: Dom Henri Leclercq's gloss on *the Ordo romanus primus*, in the *Dictionnaire d'Archéologie chrétienne et de Liturgie*<sup>15</sup>, later reprinted in *L'Église en prière*, a manual compiled under the direction of Aimé-Georges Martimort<sup>16</sup>, which was extremely widespread in seminaries. *The Ordo primus* described, for use in Frankish countries, a papal station Mass, that of Easter morning at Saint Mary Major, towards the end of the 7<sup>th</sup> century, which bore witness, with Frankish modifications, to the Roman rite in its ancient state. Dom Leclercq's gloss thus provided a kind of ritual that 20<sup>th</sup>-century clerics naively dreamed of reproducing, not in the overwhelming splendor of the worship of ancient basilicas, but filtered through the religious tastes of the 1930s and 1950s. However, there was one small detail: because the text of *the Ordo primus* was adapted to Frankish needs, it did not describe a celebration *versus populum*<sup>17</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> Traces of discussions on the canonical possibility of celebrating *versus populum*, based mainly on *Ritus servandus in celebratione Missæ* V 3, can be found in a series of articles by Dom Rombaud VAN DOREN in *Les questions liturgiques et paroissiales*, Abbaye du Mont-César, Louvain, April 1938, pp. 93-98, August 1932, pp. 199-204, October 1931, pp. 295-297.

<sup>12</sup> Institute founded in 1957, as part of the Catholic Institute of Paris, directed by Dom Botte, assisted by Fathers Gy and Dalmais and Bishop Pierre Jounel.

<sup>13</sup> *La Maison-Dieu* 1945/2, pp. 93-123.

<sup>14</sup> See Jean-Marie LUSTIGER, *Le choix de Dieu. Entretiens avec Jean-Louis Missika et Dominique Wolton*, Paris: Le Livre de Poche, 1987, p. 429.

<sup>15</sup> Letouzey and Ané, 1936, "Ordines romani," vol. 12, col. 2417 ff.

<sup>16</sup> See Aime-Georges MARTIMORT, *L'Église en prière. Introduction à la liturgie*, Paris: Desclée, 1961, pp. 291 ff.

<sup>17</sup> "The pope [arriving before the altar during the singing of the Introit] prays on a prie-dieu that has just been brought in; at *Sicut erat* he rises and goes to his place standing before the *cathedra*, facing the East, *stat versus ad Orientem*": the indication suggests that the editor-proofreader is thinking of an oriented Frankish church, and not a Roman basilica in which the Pontiff, seated at the back of the apse, will look at the people and face the East.

Thus, even before World War II, experiments with "facing the people" began to develop, especially in Belgium, Germany, and France, based on the desire to reproduce the ancient papal Mass and, legally, on the mention of the celebration *versus populum* existing in the *Ritus servandus*. "It is the bishop alone who has the authority and control in his diocese over a movement tending towards celebration facing the people," Maurice Michaud stated, without further explanation. But the bishops were generally not in favor of it. Some priests, however, insisted on requesting permission, or celebrated in this manner without requesting it.

Because celebration facing the people required the installation of an altar detached from the wall, experiments took place mainly in the context of Masses celebrated on an altar set up for the occasion, at pilgrimage stops, in rural activities of youth movements, especially within Scouting<sup>18</sup>, or, from the 1950s onwards, in new churches where the altar was detached from the apse wall so that this form of celebration was possible—quite often, but not always —<sup>19</sup>.

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 people. Being able to walk around the altar (to incense it), a novelty typical of the Liturgical Movement's return to antiquity, is thus closely linked to the petition of Mass facing the people. Was the ancient incensing of the altar done by walking around it? This is what the rites of consecration of the altar in the Roman Pontifical might indicate, which attest to incense being offered while walking around the altar, both for the pontiff (*Pontifex circuit ter altare ad dexteram continue thurificando*) and for the priest in surplice who, until the typical edition of the Pontifical of 1961, took up the censer between the various incense offerings by the pontiff and continued the incense offering continuously throughout the consecration, circling the altar (*continue altare circuit, incensendo, donec consecratio perficiatur*). This was the case when the altar was detached from the wall; otherwise, the pontiff and the thurifer priest would pass to the epistle side and then to the gospel side, in the usual manner. However, the incensing of the altar during the Mass following its consecration was carried out in the usual manner on three sides of the altar: the side of the celebration and the epistle and gospel sides. Similarly, in the papal Mass *versus populum*, the altar was incensed on only three sides<sup>20</sup>. The possibility of incensing the

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<sup>18</sup>Fr. Doncœur's initiatives are often cited in this regard. In 1943, the little handbook of liturgy in the camp gave a sketch of the altar, the priest, and the servers with the assistants facing the altar (Louis V.M. FONTAINE, *La mémoire du scoutisme*, Paris: Publications L.F., 1999, p. 249).

<sup>19</sup>"The Altar in the Sanctuary," *L'Art sacré*, November-December 1955, no. 3-4. The journal *L'Art sacré*, published by the Dominican Fathers, was founded by Joseph Pichard in 1935 and taken over in 1937 by Éditions du Cerf. It was edited by Fathers Marie-Alain Couturier (1897-1954) and Pie-Raymond Régamey (1900-1996), and cultivated a modern and minimalist aesthetic in architecture, statuary, and religious objects. It had a great influence on the French clergy. See Sabine de LAVERGNE, *Sacred Art and Modernity. Les grandes années de la revue L'Art sacré*, Paris: Culture et vérité, 1992.

<sup>20</sup>The *Cæremoniale missæ quæ a Summo Pontifice Ecclesiæ Universalis ritu solemnè celebratur* does not consider it useful to celebrate it. But the complete filmed record of the coronation Mass of John XXIII on November 4, 1958, bears witness to this: *The Coronation of Blessed Pope John XXIII*.

altar by going around it, which did not theoretically exist in the rubrics of the Tridentine Missal, according to which the altar is incensed on only three sides, was introduced in the rubrics of the last typical edition of the Tridentine Missal, that of 1962: to the traditional scheme for *the Ordo incensationis altaris juxta rubricas missalis romani* is added an *Ordo incensationis altaris quod commode circui postest*. Although we have not found any documentation on the subject, it is likely that this method of incensing was already practiced when the configuration of the altar allowed it.

### ***The search for an actuosa participatio***

In the aforementioned article, Maurice Michaud also included this type of celebration *versus populum* in the set of measures intended "to revive the spirit of our 'average Christians' at Holy Mass." He thus linked the possible development of Mass facing the people to that of dialogued Mass: "Currently, the trend is to involve the faithful more actively in 'low Mass'. This is the so-called 'dialogued' Mass. This type of Mass tends to lead to celebration facing the people, if certain conditions are met."

For the practical implementation of this form of celebration, Maurice Michaud insisted on the utmost caution, because "in the eyes of the faithful, given the almost universal use of the altar arranged for celebration with its back to the people, the return to the ancient discipline appears to be an innovation. " We are familiar with Paul Claudel's reaction to this in a famous article in *Le Figaro littéraire* on January 29, 1955: "La messe à l'envers" (Mass in reverse)<sup>21</sup>. 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.

In addition, in the new churches whose photos were published in the magazine *L'Ars sacré*, efforts were made to "return" to the single altar (or almost: they generally included a high altar and an altar of the Blessed Sacrament for weekday Masses), an arrangement that was thought to have been the norm before the proliferation of private Masses. The altar, which allowed the celebration to face the people, without steps supporting the candlesticks and the cross, also harmonized naturally with concelebration. Thus were designed emblematic churches such as those of Aron in Mayenne (1955), Plateau d'Assy (1946), Lyon-Vaise (1955), etc.

During large gatherings, such as the JAC gathering in 1950 at the Parc des Princes, which brought together 70,000 participants, it became customary to place the altar in the center of the assembly. Similarly, in the underground Basilica of St. Pius X in Lourdes, designed by Pierre Pinsart and completed and consecrated in 1958, the altar was built in the middle of the nave, which necessarily meant that part of the congregation faced the altar

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<sup>21</sup>Paul Claudel, "La messe à l'envers" (The Mass in Reverse), *Supplement to the Complete Works*, vol. 1, Paris: L'Âge d'Homme, 1990, pp. 294-295.

during the celebration. In addition, the new basilica had only two altars, the central altar and an altar in the Chapel of the Blessed Sacrament.

At the same time, there were attempts at concelebration<sup>22</sup>, which involved an altar facing the people, or even in the midst of the people. Thus, synchronized Masses were celebrated, for example during pilgrimages or large Catholic Action gatherings: pilgrimage of prisoners and deportees to Lourdes on September 8, 1946; pilgrimage of the Catholic Action Women's League to Lourdes in August 1952; student pilgrimage to Chartres, beginning in 1945<sup>23</sup>; gatherings on the occasion of the pilgrimage of the statue of Our Lady of Boulogne to Colombes and Rouen in 1946. In these synchronized Masses, a number of priests individually said Mass at various altars gathered *in unum*, or at least very close together, "synchronizing" their gestures with those of the main celebrant in the central position. But this practice was prohibited by the instruction *De Musica sacra* of September 3, 1958.

### ***Facing the people at the beginning of the liturgical reform***

From the death of Pius XII in 1958 to the beginning of liturgical reform in 1964, celebrations facing the people became extremely common. We witnessed our first Mass celebrated facing the people in a village in the diocese of Auch in October 1958. Following the Pope's death, a huge catafalque was erected in the sanctuary, obscuring the main altar. Another temporary altar was then set up at the height of the communion table, where celebrations during the mourning period were *versus populum*.

During the coronation of Paul VI on June 30, 1963, for the first time, Mass was celebrated on the parvis of St. Peter's (until then, Mass had been celebrated in the basilica, followed by the actual coronation in the loggia). The internal configuration of the basilica was reproduced outside, with the throne at the top of the steps leading into the basilica and the altar facing the people below.

To continue recounting our own experience, upon entering the Pius XI Seminary attached to the Catholic Institute of Toulouse in 1964, we were able to attend Mass facing the people every weekday, while the solemn Sunday Mass, with a deacon and subdeacon, was still celebrated at the high altar, with the celebrant facing the apse<sup>24</sup>. Then, in 1965, the altar was placed in the center of the seminarians' choir.

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<sup>22</sup>The aspiration for concelebration is well documented in numerous articles and contributions to symposiums related to the Liturgical Movement. See on ancient concelebration and new concelebration: Claude BARTHE, "La nouvelle concélébration et le ministère sacerdotal" (The new concelebration and the priestly ministry), in *Divinitas*, single issue (2021), pp. 137-160.

<sup>23</sup>See: Samuel PRUVOT, *Monseigneur Charles, aumônier de la Sorbonne: 1944-1959*, Paris: Cerf, 2002.

<sup>24</sup>In December 1965, we attended a concelebration facing the apse, presided over by Archbishop Gabriel-Marie Garonne of Toulouse, upon his return from the fourth session of the Council, on the occasion of an ordination.

As a result, the conciliar reform did not even have to deal with *the versus populum*, as celebration facing the people had become established within the transition to the new liturgy.

The instruction *Inter œcumenici* of September 25, 1964 states in n. 91: "It is good to build the main altar separate from the wall, so that it can be easily walked around and so that Mass can be celebrated facing the people." This is echoed in the *General Introduction to the Roman Missal*: "Wherever possible, the altar should be placed at a distance from the wall so that it can be easily circumambulated and celebrated facing the people" (no. 262 in the 1970 typical edition of the new missal, no. 299 in the 2002 typical edition).

The enthusiasm was such that some bishops tried—in vain—to curb it. Thus, Bishop Garrone, one of the major architects of Vatican II, warned his priests in *La Semaine catholique de Toulouse* on February 28, 1965: It is clear from these articles [nos. 91 and 95 of *Inter œcumenici*] that the celebration of Mass facing the people is not, however, required. There may indeed be cases where the physical layout of the choir and the architecture expressly advise against it. He then quoted Bishop Jenny, auxiliary bishop of Cambrai and member of the Consilium for the implementation of the conciliar constitution on the liturgy: "The priest now deliberately turns toward the faithful during the readings and the calls he addresses to them: it is not without interest that he is occasionally turned, like them, toward the Lord whom we adore and pray to."

Similarly, the Diocesan Commission for Sacred Art of the Diocese of Paris, in a document dated July 20, 1965<sup>25</sup>, made the following observation: "While the priest must be able to celebrate facing the people, it is not essential that he do so every day. When he celebrates during the week without an assembly, he may legitimately wish to celebrate without having an empty nave before his eyes. It is therefore advisable to provide a footstool on both sides of the altar that is large enough to allow celebration in both positions."

<sup>26</sup>Some even believed that the indications in the *General Introduction* could be interpreted as considering *versus populum* to be an exception to the rule (it is true that Mass facing the Lord was practically the rule for private Masses in Rome until recently). But in the

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<sup>25</sup>Cf. Episcopal Commission for Liturgy of Paris, *Liturgical Renewal and the Layout of Churches*, 1965. [Churches - DiocesanSacredof Paris - Diocese of Paris \(dioceseparis.fr\)](http://Churches - DiocesanSacredof Paris - Diocese of Paris (dioceseparis.fr)).

<sup>26</sup>See Cyrille DOUNOT, "Plaidoyer pour la célébration *ad orientem*" (A Plea for Celebration Ad Orientem), in *L'Homme nouveau*, December 3, 2016, p. 11. The *General Introduction*, notes C. Dounot, specifies that, for certain acts, the priest must turn toward the people: after the entrance hymn, "turning toward the people and extending his hands, the priest greets them with one of the proposed formulas" (n. 86, typ. ed. 1970, n. 124, ed. typ. 2002); at the end of the Offertory, "the priest, turning toward the people and extending and then joining his hands, invites the people to prayer by saying: *Orate, fratres*" (n. 107, ed. typ. 1970, n. 146, ed. typ. 2002); after the *Pater*, "he extends and then joins his hands and says, turning towards the people, *Pax Domini sit semper vobiscum*" (n. 112, ed. typ. 1970, n. 154, ed. typ. 2002); before receiving Communion, "the priest genuflects, takes the consecrated host from the same Mass and, holding it slightly raised above the paten or chalice, facing the people, says: *Ecce Agnus Dei*" (n. 115, typ. ed. 1970, n. 157, typ. ed. 2002); but to receive Communion himself, the priest does so "facing the altar," *stans ad altare conversus* (n. 116, typ. ed. 1970, n. 158, ed. typ. 2002); after the communion chant, "the priest, facing the people, says, with his hands joined: *Oremus*, then he pronounces, with his hands extended, the prayer after communion" (n. 122, ed. typ. 1970, n. 165, ed. typ. 2002).

end, we have arrived at a situation in which the rule and the exception are reversed in relation to the old legislation: while the old *ritus servandus* mentioned Mass facing the people as a possibility, the instruction *Inter œcumenici* of September 25, 1964, and the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* of April 3, 1969, assume that celebration facing the Lord is a possibility.