

# The participation of lay people in the Eucharistic liturgy in the early Middle Ages

Joseph Gribbin<sup>1</sup>

## 1. Introduction

In *Assertionum Regis Angliae Defensio*, Saint John Fisher († 1535), Bishop of Rochester and future martyr of the Catholic Church, wrote in an apology for the Mass: "He who would take away this sacrifice (of the Mass) from the Church would bring about a calamity no less than if he would take away the sun from the universe"<sup>2</sup>. As Fisher's statement proves, there is no doubt that the Eucharist occupied a central place in the medieval Church. And yet it is generally believed that the role played by the laity in the *Mysterium fidei* in the Middle Ages was, at best, minimal and, at worst, non-existent. One liturgist went so far as to say that, "over time, Mass had become – not only because of the language barrier but essentially as a result of it – purely the priest's Mass. The people were silent spectators and, although they were not lacking in piety, they were absent from the liturgy (...) In cathedrals, chapters and foundations where the local clergy had their own worship, the offices increasingly separated the liturgy of the clerics from that intended for the people, so that the rood screen that stood in front of the choir was a striking expression of this situation (...) Essentially, medieval liturgy had lost its power to influence popular and private devotion." Another author writes: "The rarity of communion was not the only sign of the gradual decline, during the Middle Ages, of the active participation of the faithful in the Eucharist (...) (for example) the abandonment of the presentation of offerings by the faithful, (...) the proliferation of private Masses, (...) the use of a language increasingly different from that spoken by the people. All these factors made the laity such passive spectators that the liturgical books no longer even mentioned their presence."<sup>3</sup>

While it is true that most of these conclusions were made several years ago, often by specialists with sincere intentions, it seems that in recent years they have gained credibility, at a time when the Church's expressed desire to promote *the actuosa participatio* of the faithful in the liturgy is frequently the subject of tendentious interpretations<sup>4</sup>. In other words, medieval liturgy and the participation of the laity at that time are often considered solely from the perspective of modern liturgy, which may not be entirely well-founded and may be limited by incomplete knowledge or interpretation of historical sources. It is also true that historical research continues to progress, building on the research of previous specialists and sometimes modifying their conclusions. In this presentation, we will attempt to demonstrate that the role of the laity in the Roman Rite Mass in

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<sup>2</sup> "Quo fit ut quisquis hoc sacrificium ab ecclesia tollere molitur, nihilo minorem ei jacturam intentat, quam si mundo solem eripere studuerit", "Assertionum Regis Angliae Defensio" vi. 9: in T.E. BRIDGETT, *Life of Blessed John Fisher*, London, 1888, 40.

<sup>3</sup> J.H. EMMINGHAUS, *The Eucharist: Essence, Form, Celebration*, The Liturgical Press: Collegeville (Minnesota), 1997, 70-73; R. CABIÉ, *The Church at Prayer: The Eucharist*, vol. 2, London: Liturgical Press, 1986, 139.

<sup>4</sup> G. DIEKMANN, "Popular Forms of Participation and the History of Christian Piety", in: *Participation in the Mass: 20th North American Liturgical Week*, University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, Indiana, 23-26 August 1959, Washington, 1960, 52-53. On *actuosa participatio* and Vatican II, see J. RATZINGER, *The Feast of Faith: Approaches to a Theology of the Liturgy*, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1981, 68-75.

medieval Europe was not limited to that of "spectator," that it was not generally characterised by inactivity but rather, essentially, by participation<sup>5</sup>. The evidence we will use to establish this fact will be drawn mainly, but not exclusively, from English sources from the late Middle Ages, which, of course, calls for a number of reservations: indeed, certain regions of Europe had their own specific forms of spirituality, culture and mentality; in addition to linguistic differences, we must also take into account the fact that preferences in matters of devotion varied from one country to another. However, what appears negative at first glance may in fact be illusory. For example, some private prayer texts used in England were also in circulation in other regions of Western Christianity, insofar as faith and religious practices were common throughout<sup>6</sup>.

## II. The *Expositiones missae*

First, we must establish how, in the Middle Ages, theologians and those who spoke about liturgy conceived of the Eucharistic liturgy, and therefore how lay people were to understand and participate in Mass. In the *Expositiones missae*, which were very popular at the time, we most often find allegorical interpretations of each liturgical prayer, vestments and ceremonies, which were generally linked to events in the life and Passion of Christ. This can be seen in particular in the writings of Amalarius of Metz (775-852), which were very influential at the time, and later, among others, in Rupert of Deutz's *De divinis Officiis* (d. 1129), which devoted considerable space to the story of Christ's life, as well as in John Belet's *Summa de ecclesiasticis officiis* (d. 1165), where the influence of Neoplatonism can be felt. The relationship between the Mass and the Passion of Christ is clearly evident in the *Rationale divinarum officiorum* by William Durand (1230-1296), who was the greatest compiler of allegories of the Mass in the Middle Ages. Durand and others owe much to another important work, *De Mysteriis missae* (c. 1195) by Cardinal Lothaire de Segni, the future Pope Innocent III<sup>7</sup>.

In addition to allegorical methods, other writings interpreted the Mass in the context of liturgical texts, particularly in the 13th century. One example is *De Sacrificio Missae* (1270) by St. Albert the Great (c. 1200-1275). He divided the Mass into three parts: first, *the Introitus*, from the beginning to the collects; then *the instructio*, which ended after the *Credo*; and finally *the oblatio*. St. Albert's speculative approach had moral and even mystical connotations, but he disdained

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<sup>5</sup> This article concurs in many respects with the important work recently carried out by Eamon Duffy, and that of T.E. Bridgett, C.S.S.R. in the 19th century, whose attempts have undoubtedly been greatly obscured. For this research, I am indebted to E. DUFFY, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, 1400-1580*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992; T.E. BRIDGETT, *The History of the Holy Eucharist in Great Britain*, 2 vols, London, 1888.

<sup>6</sup> R.N. SWANSON, *Religion and Devotion in Europe, c.1215-1515*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995, xiii-xiv.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. A. WILMART (ed.), "Primum in Ordine", in *Ephemerides liturgicae* 50 (1936), 133-39; AMALARIUS, *Amalarii Episcopi opera omnia*, ed. J.M. HANSENS, 3 vols, Vatican City: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1948-50. The *Expositiones missae* are vol. 1, 283-338; JOHN BELETH, *Summa de ecclesiasticis officiis*, ed. H. DOUTEIL, 2 vols, CCCM 41-41A, Turnholt: Brepols, 1976; WILLIAM DURANDUS, *Rationale divinarum officiorum*, ed. V. D'AVINO, Naples, 1859; INNOCENT III, *De sacro altaris mysterio*, P.L. 217, col. 774-914; J.F. WHITE, "Durandus and the Interpretation of Christian Worship", in G.H. SHIVER, *Contemporary Reflections on Medieval Christian Tradition: Essays in Honour of Ray C. Petry*, Durham (N.C.): Duke University Press, 1974. 41-52.

allegorical explanations<sup>8</sup>. Some works gave literal and "spiritual" interpretations of the Canon missae – this is particularly the case with Gabriel Biel's (c. 1412-1495) *Canonis missae Expositio*<sup>9</sup>. Other authors, while interpreting the Mass in an allegorical manner, paid some attention, varying in degree, to the object or meaning of the liturgical texts. Thus, St. Thomas Aquinas explains that the invocations of *the Kyrie* can refer to each of the persons of the Holy Trinity, and that *the Alleluia* is an expression of spiritual exaltation. He also says that, in the *Creed*, the people approve of Christ's teaching and that, by reading the epistle and the gospel and singing the *Creed*, they are instructed and prepared before moving on to the celebration of the mystery<sup>10</sup>. It should be noted, however, that allegorical interpretations of the Mass continued until the end of the Middle Ages<sup>11</sup>.

As for the laity, we see that most authors presented the liturgy of the Mass to them as a *memoria Passionis* and, fundamentally, as a sacred action performed by the priest. They also affirmed that the Mass was offered on their behalf, whether or not they were physically present. In addition, lay people were asked to pray during Mass in a form close to "affective" prayer. From the time of Amalarius onwards, the *Orate Fratres* was reinterpreted to become an "exhortation" addressed to the people<sup>12</sup>. In his *De Mysteriis missae*, Pope Innocent III explained that "even if only one [i.e. the priest] offers the sacrifice, he nevertheless speaks in the plural: 'We offer', because the priest sacrifices not only in his own name but in the person of the whole Church<sup>13</sup>." In his *Ordo missae* (1502), Jean Burckard stated that even if the people did not understand the priest's words or even a single word of Latin, the faithful "should not recite any other prayer but should pay attention to what the priest says or does and they too should offer in spirit, supplicate and implore with him, except during the time when the sacrament is adored and when, in the canon [at the Memento], he prays quietly for himself; then one may similarly pray for oneself and for all those whom one wishes to commend to God." Burckhard even wanted the congregation to recite the liturgical responses aloud, a practice that had generally fallen into disuse by then – even though, for a long time already, emphasis had been placed on silent prayer by the faithful during Mass<sup>14</sup>.

## II. Understanding liturgical language

As for the methods or aids that lay people could use to pray and meditate during Mass, they were granted a greater or lesser degree of latitude. Before examining this, however, we must consider the following question: if it is true that in the Middle Ages, in general, it was not considered that lay participation in Mass implied a complete understanding of Latin liturgical terms

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<sup>8</sup> J.A. JUNGSMANN, *The Mass of the Roman Rite*, Blackrock (co. Dublin): Benziger Bros, 1986; vol. 1, 113–14; ALBERTUS MAGNUS, *De Sacrificio missae*, in *Alberti Magni Opera Omnia*, ed. A. BORGNET, Paris: Vivès, 1890–99; vol. 38, 1–189.

<sup>9</sup> *Canonis missae expositio*, ed. H.A. OBERMAN and W.J. COURTENAY, Wiesbaden: Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für europäische Geschichte in Mainz, 1963–76; vols. 31–34, 79.

<sup>10</sup> THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa theologiae*, III, 83, 4.

<sup>11</sup> A. FRANZ, *Die Messe im deutschen Mittelalter*, Freiburg, 1902 (repr. Darmstadt 1963), especially pp. 460 ff.

<sup>12</sup> Note that some rites use the formula: "Orate fratres et sorores", and that in some cases the congregation responds aloud. Cf. JUNGSMANN, *The Mass...*, vol. 2, 82–90.

<sup>13</sup> J.L. MURPHY, "The Church Offers the Mass", in: *American Ecclesiastical Review* 141 (1960), 168.

<sup>14</sup> JUNGSMANN, *The Mass...*, vol. 1, 74–76, 85–86, 235–38, 243–44.

or the recitation of liturgical responses aloud, to what extent did the liturgical language constitute an obstacle to lay participation when, clearly, the vast majority of the population could not speak that language fluently or even have a satisfactory knowledge of it? Is it not true to say that, since the people did not understand the liturgical texts, these were a "closed book" to them? While it is true that most people did not understand Latin, there are nevertheless some indications that the laity were still able, to varying degrees, to understand Latin. Although Margery Kempe (c. 1373-1438), a pious woman from King's Linn in Norfolk, could neither read nor write, she was able to recognise and speak a few words of Latin. For example, in a chapter of her biography, which she dictated, it is said that a priest was willing to hear her confession, and that she had to go to him "in the name of Jesus and say her Confiteor"<sup>15</sup>. It also seems that some people in the lower classes understood the meaning of certain Latin liturgical words. Eamon Duffy has shown that, given the importance attached to prayer for the dead in the Middle Ages, lay people must have been familiar with the *Dirige* and *Placebo* from the Office of the Dead. In ancient English wills, we find texts such as this: "Provision made for the poor [and lay people] who are literate to recite both the little office [of the Blessed Virgin] and the *Dirige*." We can therefore see that there were poor people who were able to recite all or part of the vespers for the dead. Even if they were not fully understood, certain liturgical terms were well known because they were associated with certain ceremonies, and Latin texts were considered sacred. The laity were familiar with the prologue to the Gospel according to St John (*In principio*), as it was recited at the end of Mass<sup>16</sup>. Given the effect of repetition, it is likely that the people eventually acquired a very basic knowledge of key liturgical texts and expressions and, as a result, lay people were familiar, to varying degrees, with liturgical ceremonies, especially since many of them attended Mass every day. In the Middle Ages, as in Antiquity, people had a greater capacity to memorise texts because, at that time, great importance was attached to the auditory sense<sup>17</sup>. In Europe, as the proportion of people who could read seems to have increased during the early Middle Ages, and as printing allowed for greater dissemination of written texts, people had more and more opportunities to improve their understanding of Latin texts<sup>18</sup>.

It is likely that catechesis and preaching also contributed to increasing the limited knowledge of Latin among the people. Some sermons even contained explanations and translations into the vernacular of the Latin liturgy and, as we shall see, of biblical texts. A collection of sermons that was very popular at the time, the *Festial* by John Mirk, canon of Lilleshall in Shropshire (c. 1380-?), not only gives moral interpretations of biblical and liturgical texts but also explains certain aspects of the liturgy. For example, in a sermon for Septuagesima Sunday, Mirk says the following about *the Introit*: "To meditate inwardly on death, the Holy Church provides us with an example in the office (i.e. *the Introit*). It says: 'Circumdederunt me gemitus mortis', which means: 'I was

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<sup>15</sup> *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. B.A. WINDEATT, Penguin: Harmondsworth, 1985, 117. On the influence of German spirituality on Margery: U. STARGARDT, "The Beguines of Belgium, the Dominican Nuns of Germany; Margery Kempe," in: T.J. HEFFERNAN (ed.), *The Popular Literature of Medieval England*, Knoxville, (Tenn.): University of Tennessee Press, 1985, 285-308.

<sup>16</sup> DUFFY, *The Stripping...*, 114, 219-22, 215-16.

<sup>17</sup> M.J. CARRUTHERS, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.

<sup>18</sup> R.N. SWANSON, *Religion and Devotion...*, 78, 82; J.A.H. MORAN, *The Growth of English Schooling, 1340-1538: Learning, Literacy and Laicisation in Pre-Reformation York Diocese*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985, especially pp. 171-82.

plunged into the throes of death'." Regarding the penitential nature of Septuagesima, Mirk writes: "The Holy Church (...) suppresses the *Alleluias* and other melodious songs, replacing them with *tracts*, which are songs of mourning, self-reflection and waiting<sup>19</sup> ." Some people who had received a more advanced education, such as Margaret Beaufort, mother of Henry VII of England, and Richard Hill, a London grocer (c. 1520), probably knew more Latin than others lower down the social ladder. Hill's memorandum contains a Christmas poem that quotes the first verse of several hymns from different times of the liturgical year. Saint John Fisher indicates that Margaret Beaufort had "some knowledge [of Latin], particularly the rubrics of the ordinary, so that she could say her prayers (servyce), which she understood very well." Even if Margaret was not fluent in Latin, this did not prevent her from reciting prayers and services in Latin, and she apparently made an effort to improve her Latin<sup>20</sup> .

### III. Books of Hours, Mass Books

How did lay people pray during Mass? Those who could read had a choice of several devotional books. In particular, there were the Latin Books of Hours, also known as *Horae* in England, which were prayer books for lay people. Although their content often varied depending on their place of origin, they mainly contained liturgical or quasi-liturgical prayers, such as the Office of the Blessed Virgin, the seven penitential psalms, the fifteen gradual psalms and the Office of the Dead. Often, those who owned these Books of Hours added a whole series of prayers in Latin or in the vernacular<sup>21</sup> . The emergence of printing allowed for an even wider dissemination of these texts. It has been estimated that, before 1530, there were some 114 editions of *the Horae* in Latin intended for lay people in England alone and that, two generations before the Reformation, there were 57,000 printed *Horae* in circulation in the same region. *Horae* corresponding to the particular liturgy of the Bishopric of Salisbury were printed in London, Paris, Rouen and Antwerp<sup>22</sup> .

There was another category of books intended for use more specifically during Mass, or to prepare for it, which enabled lay people to follow the liturgical ceremonies and express appropriate feelings of piety. Simon of Venlo thus distributed allegorical explanations of the Mass. *Dat Boexhen vander Missen*, by Gherit van der Goude, first printed in Antwerp around 1507, was essentially allegorical, but nonetheless very useful. It included engravings illustrating each stage of the Mass,

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<sup>19</sup> JOHN MIRK, *Festial*, ed. T. ERBE, Early English Text Society, extra series, vol. 96, 1905; R.N. SWANSON, *Catholic England: Faith, Religion and Observance before the Reformation*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993, 58-64. I modernise the texts in medieval English or use the translation given in Swanson's book mentioned above.

<sup>20</sup> M.K. JAMES and M.G. UNDERWOOD, *The King's Mother: Lady Margaret Beaufort, Countess of Richmond and Derby*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992, 15, 184; *Songs, Carols and other Miscellaneous Poems from the Balliol MS. 353, Richard Hill's Commonplace Book*, ed. R. DYBOSKI, Early English Text Society, extra series, vol. 101, London, 1908, 12; DUFFY, *The Stripping...*, 222-23.

<sup>21</sup> H. LECLERCQ, "Livres d'heures", in DTC, vol. 9, part 2, cols. 1836-82.

<sup>22</sup>DUFFY, *The Stripping...*, 50-52, 212-15, 222-25. For examples of Hours, see: C. WORDSWORTH (ed.), *Horae Eboracenses: the Prymer of Hours of the Blessed Virgin Mary According to the Use of the Illustrious Church of York*, Surtees Society, vol. 132, 1919; H. LITTLEHALES (ed.), *The Prymer or Prayer-Book of the Lay People in the Middle Ages*, 2 vols, London, 1891, 1892.

with instructions for the reader<sup>23</sup>. A more elaborate form of missals for lay people can be found in the *Missale vulgare* published in Germany (around the beginning of the 15th century), which includes translations of certain liturgical texts or passages from Scripture<sup>24</sup>. In England, there were various "missals for the laity" or "mass guides," such as, among others, John Audelay's long poem: *De Meritis missae, Quomodo debemus audire missam* (c. 1420); *Interpretation and Virtues of the Mass* (between 1430 and 1450), by the Benedictine John Lydgate; and *Meditations for Ghostly Exercise in the Time of Mass* (between 1520 and 1530), currently believed to have been composed by William Bonde, a Brigittine monk from Syon Abbey<sup>25</sup>. For example, Lydgate's *Interpretation* recommends that lay readers "prepare themselves for the action of the altar in order to understand it properly". The author addresses his explanations of the importance of the priest's gestures, vestments and words to an active and well-informed participant, whom he guides from the moment they enter the church to *the Ite missa est*, with particular emphasis on the consecration. He exhorts both the priest and the lay participant, each receiving instructions on what the other should do and having to follow closely what the other is doing. He encouraged the reader to pray and to adopt a suitable attitude during Mass<sup>26</sup>.

A particularly interesting work is the *Lay Folks' Mass Book*, originally written in French for English readers in the late 12th or early 13th century. It was translated into English and we have several versions, which were still in use at the end of the Middle Ages<sup>27</sup>. This book also allowed participants to follow the main ceremonies of the Mass and to pray during low Masses, for which it was primarily designed. In many ways, this *Lay Folks' Mass Book* brought readers closer to the liturgical texts and ceremonies than other methods of participating in Mass: although quite different from the methods of prayer used by those who could not read, it left plenty of room for private prayer. It also indicated when to stand or kneel. At the Offertory, for example, it exhorts the reader: "Care should be taken to recite the Our Father while the priest prays in a low voice; then the priest will move a little to stand in the middle of the altar. We stand when he calls on the faithful to lift up their hearts and bodies (...) Then he begins: *Per omnia*, and adds: "Lift up your hearts". At the end, he says "*Sanctus*" three times. While it is true that the prayers contained in the missals do not reproduce verbatim all the words spoken by the priest, many of them are clearly derived from the liturgical prayers, and some are translations of the Latin text. This is how the *Confiteor* is presented: "I confess to Almighty God, and to His blessed Mother, the Virgin Mary, and to all the saints present

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<sup>23</sup> M. SMITS VAN WAESBERGHE, "De Misverklaring van Meester Simon van Venlo", in: *Ons Geestlijk Erf* 15 (1941-42), 228-61, 285-327; 16, 85-129, 177-85; P. DEARMER (ed), *Gherit van der Goude: Dat Boexken vander Missen*, Alcuin Club Collections, vol. 5, London, 1903. Some of these books of hours contain illustrations of the Mass and instructions. Cf. WORMALD, *Some Pictures of the Mass in an English XIVth Century Manuscript*, in: *Walpole Society* 41 (1966-68), 39-45.

<sup>24</sup> K. GAMBER, "Missale Vulgare: Ein deutsches Volksmessbuch aus dem Mittelalter", in: *Musik und Kirche* 14, 121 sq.; *The Reform of the Roman Liturgy: Its Problems and Background*, California and New York: Una Voce Press, 1993, 14.

<sup>25</sup> J. WICKHAM LEGG, *Tracts on the Mass*, Henry Bradshaw Society, vol. 27, London, 1904, 19-29; *The Poems of John Audelay*, ed. E.K. WHITING, Early English Text Society, vol. 184, London, 1931, 65-79; JOHN LYDGATE, *The Minor Poems of John Lydgate I*, ed. H.N. MACCRACKEN, Early English Text Society, extra series, vol. 107, London, 1909, 87-115.

<sup>26</sup> M. RUBIN, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in late Medieval Culture*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991, 103-4.

<sup>27</sup> *The Lay Folks' Mass Book*, ed. T.F. SIMMONS, Early English Text Society, original series, vol. 71, 1879. For convenience, I use text B edited in SWANSON, *Catholic England...*, 83-91.

here, and to you, my spiritual father, that I have sinned greatly, in many different ways, in thought, word and deed, in speech and action (...) Therefore I ask Holy Mary and all the saints in heaven (...) and you, the priest (...) to pray for me." In a missal used in the bishopric of Salisbury, which had its own liturgy, the *Confiteor* says: "Confiteor Deo, beatæ Mariæ, omnibus sanctis, et vobis, quia peccavi nimis cogitatione, locutione et opere, mea culpa. Precor sanctam Mariam, omnes sanctos Dei, et vos, orare pro me"<sup>28</sup> . There are also indications that in some regions, in addition to prayers in the vernacular, the laity were, to a certain extent, expected to recite the liturgical responses aloud. When the priest recited the *Pater Noster*, after "temptation", the reader was exhorted to "respond: "And deliver us from evil. Amen." It should not be necessary to remind you of this, for those who do not know it are ignorant. After that, add a special prayer in private. "Our Father" first in Latin, then in English<sup>29</sup> ." We would add at this point that the custom of intercessory prayers on Sundays, called "sermons," was widely attested in England, France, Germany, and Italy<sup>30</sup> .

The *Lay Folks' Mass Book* also invited the reader: "When the priest speaks, or if he sings, listen to him carefully; when he prays in a low voice, then it is time for you to pray." This is an interesting liturgical distinction, albeit a very general one, between the priest's prayers spoken aloud and those spoken quietly. It should also be noted that these missals attest to the fact that the laity followed the priest's actions attentively. Mass was not only celebrated in the choir or sanctuary, but also on side altars, especially on weekdays, and the faithful were then almost within reach. No doubt we must take into account the rood screen that sometimes existed, especially at the entrance to the choir, as well as the particular arrangements in certain regions, but all this did not entirely hide the altar from the view of the people<sup>31</sup> . Thus, the *Lay Folks' Mass Book* indicates what the reader should do during the canon: "The 'Our Father' will be recited while he [the priest] makes the sign of the cross on the chalice: this means that the moment of consecration [i.e. the consecration and elevation] is near. A bell is usually rung; then we will prostrate ourselves before the real presence of Jesus Christ [in the host] (...) We kneel and raise both hands, and thus contemplate the elevation." In the Middle Ages, symbols were extremely important. "They convey knowledge (...) they are charged with emotional elements, (...) they communicate information and provoke inner attitudes that cannot always be expressed in words." This can be applied to the feelings that liturgical ceremonies could arouse in lay people<sup>32</sup> .

#### IV. Popular methods of lay participation

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<sup>28</sup> *Missale ad Usus Insignis et Praeclare Sarum*, ed. F. H. DICKINSON, part 1, Burntisland, 1861, col. 580. That lay people in southern Europe recited the liturgical responses is indicated in G. ELLARD, *The Mass of the Future*, Bruce: Milwaukee, 1948, 103. However, the evidence presented in this article suggests that Ellard's statement that lay people generally did not hear the priest's voice during low Masses – sotto voce – in Northern Europe seems out of place.

<sup>29</sup> For evidence that many of the faithful recited the *Confiteor*, see SWANSON, *Catholic England...*, 84; F. CLÉMENT, "The Liturgical Rites of Meal and Sacrifice", in: *Altar and Sacrifice: the Proceedings of The Third International Colloquium of Historical, Canonical and Theological Studies of the Roman Liturgy*, (C.I.E.L.), London: Saint Austin, 1998, 97.

<sup>30</sup> J.B. MOLIN, "L'Oratio Fidelium – ses Survivances", in: *Ephemerides Liturgicae* 73 (1959), 310-17.

<sup>31</sup> P.J. COBB, "The Architectural Setting of the Liturgy" in: C. JONES, G. WAINWRIGHT and E. YARNOLD (eds.), *The Study of the Liturgy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980, 476–77; DUFFY, *The Stripping...*, 111–12.

<sup>32</sup> RUBIN, *Corpus Christi...*, 6–7.

We must now consider other modes of lay participation, particularly the methods taught to those who could not read. Before and after the Fourth Lateran Council (1215), a whole series of texts in Latin and the vernacular were published for the education of priests so that they could teach the Catholic faith to their flocks. Some manuals helped priests to understand liturgical practice and Eucharistic theology, enabling them to celebrate Mass more effectively and teach the laity: examples include William de Pagula's *Oculum sacerdotis* (c. 1320-1330), Guy de Montrocher's *Manipulus curatorum* (1333), and *the Alphabetum seu instructio sacerdotum*<sup>33</sup>. John Mirk's *Instructions for Parish Priests* (early 15th century), written in the vernacular, and others provided guidance on how to teach the laity to behave during Mass and placed great emphasis on gestures, indicating that a certain external unity in the general attitude of the congregation was envisaged. These gestures allowed the laity to express their piety and thus harmonise the worship offered by their bodies with that offered by their souls. Mirk said that lay people should refrain from earthly vanity and "say *the Pater Noster* here and *the Ave* there (...) kneeling on the ground, praying to God with a humble heart, so that God may grant each of them grace and mercy." At the Gospel, the laity were to "rise and make the sign of the cross, and when *Gloria tibi est* began, kneel". At the elevation, "young and old" were to kneel, raise their hands and pray. The *Pater* and *Ave* were recited on strings of beads resembling our modern rosaries. The laity could also contemplate engravings, especially those depicting the crucifixion of Christ. We must take into account what we said earlier about the laity's basic knowledge of liturgical procedures and the importance given to private prayer<sup>34</sup>. What we know about the forms of piety practised by lay people – whether they could read or not – as well as the evidence we have about the use of prayer books by all classes of society, allows us to conclude with some certainty that, despite individual preferences and the existence of private chapels in many upper-class homes, it is highly questionable to draw a distinction between "elite religion" and "popular religion"<sup>35</sup>. To some extent, the external activity of the laity during Mass contradicts the thesis that their participation was purely internal.

And what about the participation of the laity when they listened to sermons<sup>36</sup>? While the use of written sermons, especially in Latin – some of which were probably just pious texts – should be viewed with caution, in many cases these sermons give us a good idea of the methods used to preach and the content of the preaching, which focused mainly on moral behaviour and *caritas* in the Christian community. Throughout medieval Europe, sermons were preached during Mass and outside of Mass, perhaps frequently, especially on Sundays and feast days<sup>37</sup>. The popular sermons

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<sup>33</sup> RUBIN, *Corpus Christi...*, 82–108.

<sup>34</sup> JOHN MIRK, *Instructions for Parish Priests*, ed. E. PEACOCK and F.J. FURNIVALL, Early English Text Society, old series, vol. 31, London, 1902, 8-10; JUNGSMANN, *The Mass...*, vol. 1, 239-45. Lay people also took part in liturgical processions and other activities, such as Candlemas (feast of the Purification of the Blessed Virgin) and Palm Sunday.

<sup>35</sup> SWANSON, *Religion and Devotion...*, 26–27, 184–88; DUFFY, *The Stripping...*, 121–23, 130–54.

<sup>36</sup> It should be added here that, in addition to the fact that liturgical texts are largely difficult, sacred music has several levels of understanding. Cf. C. BURGESS, "For the Increase of Divine Service: Chancies in the Parish in Late Medieval Bristol," in: *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 36 (1985), 54-59. In 1423, the superior of Saint Alban's Abbey remarked, regarding the appointment of an organist to sing the Mass of the Virgin in his abbey, that "where the divine service is celebrated with greater solemnity, the renown of the Church grows, and the devotion of the faithful increases in intensity." BURGESS, "For the Increase...", 59.

<sup>37</sup> SWANSON, *Religion and Devotion...*, 64–71; J.A.F. THOMSON, *The Early Tudor Church and Society, 1485–1529*, Routledge: London and New York, 1993, 271–72, 315–18; DUFFY, *The Stripping...*, 57–58 and engravings 17–18.

found in John Mirk's *Festial* were adapted to the different times of the liturgical year and provided explanations of the epistles and gospels for Sundays and feast days<sup>38</sup>. Sermons of this kind, in the vernacular, enabled the laity to understand the readings better. To a certain extent, they lifted the veil of Latin from the proclamation of *the Verbum Dei*. Another series of sermons, called the *Mirror*, was translated in 1432 into a local dialect by a Premonstratensian canon from Welbeck Abbey in Nottinghamshire. These were sermons on Gospel texts used from Advent to the 24th Sunday after Pentecost, and the form in which they appear suggests that they were probably intended to be read during Mass. In addition to a commentary on the Latin text of each Gospel, it also provided translations; one example is the Gospel for the seventh Sunday after Pentecost, taken from St Matthew, about false prophets who are wolves in sheep's clothing: "Attendite a falsis (salsis in the manuscript) prophetis". – "Jesus said these words to his disciples: 'Beware of false prophets who suddenly come to you dressed in white like lambs but who, inside, are ferocious wolves'<sup>39</sup>." If we also take into account the other methods used by the Church to convey its biblical message, such as stained glass windows and murals, as well as paraphrases of the life of Christ such as *The Mirror of the Blessed Lyf of Jesus Christ* by the English Carthusian Nicholas Love, one cannot consider that the lack of Bibles in the vernacular in late medieval England – as in the rest of Europe for that matter – was such a "serious weakness"<sup>40</sup>.

At this point, we may wonder whether the texts we cite, written by clerics about the gestures and prayers that lay people were to recite or perform during Mass, accurately reflect reality. To this we can respond by saying that the creation of these texts could not have been completely independent of the liturgical practice and Eucharistic devotion of the laity of that time. It is certain that they would not have continued to be produced throughout the Middle Ages if there had not been some form of demand for them on the part of clerics and lay people. Therefore, these texts were not intended to be something completely new, but rather to reflect to a certain extent the methods of prayer and actions performed by lay people. In addition to the written sources we have mentioned, we also have other texts and illustrations that tell us about the fervour of the laity during Mass: kneeling, raising their hands during the elevation, using 'rosaries' and reading devotional works<sup>41</sup>. This is also confirmed by eyewitness accounts, such as the biography of Margery Kempe or the *Relatio* written by an Italian visiting England in the early 16th century<sup>42</sup>.

While most of what we have presented in this paper confirms the existence of genuine feelings of piety among the laity, there were also cases of individuals or even entire congregations behaving inappropriately, most often through negligence or simply because of human frailty. This is sometimes mentioned in reports of episcopal visits to parishes in England: for example, the bad behaviour reported in the congregations of Wymondham and Kirkby Bellars in Leicestershire, and

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<sup>38</sup> JOHN MIRK, *Festial*, *passim*.

<sup>39</sup> J.A. GRIBBIN, *The Premonstratensian Order in Late Medieval England*; Suffolk: Boydell Press, 2000, 180–82; John Rylands University of Manchester Library MS. Eng. 109, ff. 81–82 v; Matt, chap. 7, vv. 15–21.

<sup>40</sup> DUFFY, *The Stripping...*, 80; N. LOVE, *The Mirrour of the Blessed Lyf of Jesu Christ*, ed. L.F. POWELL, Oxford, 1908. On the limited use of vernacular Bibles, SWANSON, *Religion and Devotion...*, 73–78.

<sup>41</sup> For a selection of illustrations, see RUBIN, *Corpus Christi*, *passim*; P. DEARMER, *Fifty Pictures of Gothic Altars*, Alcuin Club Collections, vol. 10, London, 1910, 86–87, 122–23, 194–95. For the prayers of elevation, see note 44 below.

<sup>42</sup> *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 257; C. HARPER-BILL, *The Pre-Reformation Church in England 1400–1530*, London and New York: Longman, 1989, 97.

the talkative parishioners in Rossendale and Trawden in Lancashire<sup>43</sup>. However, the importance of such misconduct should not be exaggerated. These notable cases – and others – of poor behaviour by lay people were reported to the bishop or his representatives by other lay people, who were clearly embarrassed by them. Although medieval Europe experienced a number of outbreaks of heresy or anticlericalism (a relatively rare attitude in any case), these texts do not necessarily reflect heretical activity or dissatisfaction with the clergy: in the latter case, it was more a matter of the laity's desire to see the sacraments properly administered and the liturgy properly celebrated, with the laity not concerned with the status of priests<sup>44</sup>.

## V. Elevation and the laity

We must now consider the most important means of lay participation in medieval times: the elevation. The priest raised the consecrated host above his head so that the faithful could adore and contemplate it. A bell was rung to signal either that the consecration was imminent or that the elevation was in progress. Torches or curtains were sometimes used, stretched behind the elevated host, to help the people see it better. Hundreds of prayers were composed in Latin and in the vernacular to "welcome" and adore Christ in the Holy Eucharist, and to ask for graces. Here is an example: "Be loved, our King; be blessed, our King; be thanked, our King, for all your graces. Jesus, my whole happiness, you who shed your blood for me and died on [the Cross], you give me the grace to sing you a song of love." The elevation was clearly instituted so that the people could recognise the Presence of Christ under the species of bread. In recent times, some have suggested that it is possible to use the prayers of elevation – as well as other compositions – to pray in an authentic "liturgical spirit". "It can certainly be said that (these prayers were) in a sense, entirely liturgical"<sup>45</sup>. "Contemplating the host" was an important part of the laity's prayer during Mass, which is why, in some regions, it was displayed for longer periods of time in receptacles and repositories designed for this purpose. These "exhibitions" increased popular devotion to the Eucharist outside of Mass<sup>46</sup>. Miri Rubin emphasises the communal and participatory nature of the elevation: "By the early thirteenth century, the importance of Eucharistic consciousness was well established: the elevation was a moment designed to recapitulate and communicate all aspects of the message that the Church wished to convey, a moment that allowed the faithful to participate, to immerse themselves in a communal ritual moment"<sup>47</sup>.

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<sup>43</sup> THOMSON, *The Early Tudor...*, 314.

<sup>44</sup> SWANSON, *Religion and Devotion...*, 249–52, 256. For more detailed studies on the clergy and parish life in Scotland and England, see D. MCKAY, 'Parish Life in Scotland, 1500–1560', in D. MCROBERTS (ed.), *Essays on the Scottish Reformation 1513–1625*, Glasgow: Burns, 1962, 82–115 and P. MARSHALL, *The Catholic Priesthood and the English Reformation*, Oxford: OUP, 1994, passim, particularly p. 99.

<sup>45</sup> SWANSON, *Catholic England...*, 88–89; J. BOSSY, *Christian Life in the Later Middle Ages: Prayers*, Transactions of the Royal Historical Society, 6th series, vol. 1, 1991, 144–46. For other examples of prayers recited during the elevation, notably *Adoro te devote* and *Anima Christi*, cf. RUBIN, *Corpus Christi*, 155–63; A. WILMART, *Pour les Prières de dévotion*, Auteurs spirituels et Textes dévots du Moyen-Age latin: Etudes d'Histoire Littéraire, Paris, 1932, 13–25. The elevation of the chalice did not capture the popular imagination in the same way as that of the host.

<sup>46</sup> C-P. CHANUT, "Concerning Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament," in: *The Veneration and Administration of the Eucharist – The Proceedings of the Second International Colloquium on the Roman Catholic Liturgy*, organised by the Centre International d'Etudes Liturgiques, Southampton, 1997, 95–111.

<sup>47</sup> RUBIN, *Corpus Christi*, 62–63.

Unfortunately, despite the Church's best intentions, many believed they could derive superstitious "benefits" from looking at the host during the elevation and attending Mass, which led to the publication of multiple lists of *Merita missae*. Frequently, these practices went beyond the bounds of healthy devotion. Some individuals – and sometimes even entire congregations – would rush from altar to altar, from church to church, simply to see the host during the elevation. One priest in particular – Lollard – complained in 1407 that, while he was preaching, a number of his parishioners would rush out when they heard a bell ringing to announce the elevation at another altar in the church. This problem was noted in the 13th century by Durand and in the 16th century by Erasmus and Thomas Cranmer<sup>48</sup>. We even find this kind of superstition associated with the contemplation of the host during the elevation in John Mirk's *Instructions*: "Blessed is the man who, once a day, can contemplate the host [can see Him]. For so much good comes from seeing it (...) For on the day when one sees the Body of God, one obtains the following benefits: food and drink according to one's needs (...) One will not fear sudden death on that day." On the day when one saw the host, one did not age and was cured of various ailments<sup>49</sup>. Certain ways of celebrating Mass, such as "cascading" elevations when several Masses were said simultaneously on side altars to avoid coinciding with the elevation of the Mass celebrated on the high altar, deliberately encouraged misguided worshippers to attend as many elevations as possible<sup>50</sup>. There is no doubt that practices of this kind were common in the Middle Ages, as evidenced by the Church's instructions that lay people were required to attend Mass in its entirety. Furthermore, in some parishes, certain ceremonies were used during Sunday Mass – namely the distribution of blessed bread and perhaps the recitation of the prologue to the Gospel according to St John at the end of Mass – to discourage people from leaving after the consecration and elevation, which were the high points of medieval Mass. While emphasising the benefits of listening to Mass, John Lydgate and other authors made it very clear that lay people should remain in church until the end of the *In principio*. Only then – paradoxically – could one enjoy the benefits of Mass<sup>51</sup>.

There is some truth in John Huizinga's assertion that "the excesses and abuses arising from extreme familiarity with sacred things (...) are generally characteristic of periods of unshakeable faith and deeply religious culture." To be fair, however, it should be added that there has been a tendency to generalise certain undesirable aspects of lay devotion in the Middle Ages and to universalise the criticisms made by people such as Jean Gerson, Pierre d'Ailly and Nicolas de Clémanges<sup>52</sup>. Although this problem was common, it is certainly inaccurate to assume that everywhere lay people spent their time running around the church, from one altar to another, to contemplate the host. While it must be acknowledged that this problem existed, it should not be stereotyped. Perhaps it was more common in large cities and towns, where there were many

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<sup>48</sup> BOSSY, *Christian Life...*, 146; DUFFY, *The Stripping...*, 98; P. ADAM, *La Vie paroissiale en France au XIVe siècle*, Sirey: Paris, 1964, 249–51.

<sup>49</sup> JOHN MIRK, *Instructions for Parish Priests*, 10. Some went so far as to believe that consecrated hosts could be used for practical purposes, somewhat like insecticide. These beliefs are found in SWANSON, *Religion and Devotion...*, 182–83.

<sup>50</sup> DUFFY, *The Stripping...*, 97–98.

<sup>51</sup> JOHN LYDGATE, *The Minor Poems...*, 88, 89; RUBIN, *Corpus Christi*, 152; DUFFY, *The Stripping...*, 124.

<sup>52</sup> J. HUIZINGA, *The Waning of the Middle Ages*, Penguin Books: New York, 1959, 151–77; cf. SWANSON, *Religion and Devotion...*, 182–90, 249–52, 256.

churches and multiple altars, than in rural parishes. There was a proverb at the time that echoed the last sentence of a Latin maxim quoted in Lydgate's *Interpretations*: "Qui vult audire missam, non debet abire, donec dicatur et totum perficiatur! Si primo fueris et non in fine manetis, pars tibi nulla datur, quia laus in fine probatur"<sup>53</sup>. In fact, it can be said that, in many cases, the ceremonies that are thought to have been introduced to encourage lay people to stay until the end of Sunday Mass had the desired effect. Moreover, the popularity of these ceremonies in the religious culture of the laity suggests that, in some places, the problem of lay people leaving Mass before the end was less frequent. The laity held the distribution of blessed bread after Sunday Mass in high esteem, and it was already a well-established custom at the end of the 12th century: it therefore predates the institution of the elevation (from the end of the 12th century)<sup>54</sup>. The prologue to the Gospel according to St John was popular with the laity, who regarded it as a "blessing", and it was frequently recited after Mass, especially towards the end of the Middle Ages. According to the *Hortulus animae* (1503), in some regions this text was recited by all those attending Mass. In the 1520s, William Tyndale noted with contempt that "during the Gospel according to St John recited in Latin over the heads of thousands (of people), legions of signs of the cross are made", perhaps to gain the indulgence associated with the words: *et Verbum caro factum est*. From such texts, we can conclude that the faithful attended Mass from beginning to end, and that this was common practice<sup>55</sup>. The same impression is given in the *Lay Folks' Mass Book* and other works that refer to lay people attending Mass every day, and sometimes even several Masses, especially in the upper classes. The parishioners of Spalding, in Lincolnshire, even complained of being disturbed during Mass by the prebendary priests and those of the fraternity who said their own Mass at the same time instead of taking their places in the choir during the ceremony, as the foundation priests were required to do. These parishioners were concerned about being able to participate in parish Mass without being distracted<sup>56</sup>. It has been claimed that, while the elevation was indeed the centre of lay devotion during Mass, the liturgy of the priest and that of the laity only converged "at the supreme moment when Earth and Heaven met in the fragile disc of bread that he [the priest] held above his head"<sup>57</sup>. This statement seems to define the participation of the laity too narrowly, given the modes of participation we have discussed. Modern observers would no doubt criticise the mechanistic approach to the Mass expressed in particular by the *Merita* missae lists, but we should not question the sincerity and genuine fervour of the people, which is so clearly evident, for example, in the prayers of the elevation.

## VI. Receiving Holy Communion

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<sup>53</sup> "Whoever wishes to hear Mass and benefit from it must remain for its entire duration. If you attend at the beginning but do not stay until the end, you will not receive the benefit, because it reaches its full force at the end": RUBIN, *Corpus Christi*, 152. JOHN LYDGATE, *The Minor Poems...*, 89.

<sup>54</sup> RUBIN, *Corpus Christi*, 73–74.

<sup>55</sup> JUNGSMANN, *The Mass...*, vol. 2, 447–51; BRIDGETT, *The History of the...*, vol. 2, 37–38, 50–51; DUFFY, *The Stripping...*, 124–25, 215–16.

<sup>56</sup> THOMSON, *The Early Tudor...*, 312; THE BOOK OF MARGERY KEMPE, 108.

<sup>57</sup> DUFFY, *The Stripping...*, 118.

Considering the great popularity enjoyed by the Holy Eucharist, one must wonder why, in general, lay people did not receive Communion – which was then administered only in the form of bread – more frequently than once a year, as was required of them. Various explanations have been proposed, such as the fear of receiving it in a state of unworthiness or sin, the requirement of sexual abstinence, the belief that the priest received it on behalf of the entire congregation, and the strict rules enacted by the Church to ensure that those who received it were worthy<sup>58</sup>. The reluctance to receive Communion out of "fear" and the measures taken to be free of sin before Easter Communion should not be considered "morbid". Paradoxically, this 'fear' was based on the great respect and love for the Holy Eucharist, which was manifested in a special way during the feast of Corpus Christi. The 'fear' was a consequence of respect (even if it was excessive), it was not the primary motive. It should also be borne in mind that infrequent reception was a very ancient custom<sup>59</sup>. It should also be noted that most lay people, even if they did not actually receive Communion, desired to do so. This is suggested by the "substitutes for Communion" that existed at the time, such as blessed bread, the congregation's custom of kissing the paten, and above all, the contemplation of the host during the elevation. Many authors, such as Durand and John Belet, recognised these substitutes. "Spiritual communion" was also proposed by others, such as Alexander of Hales and St Bonaventure<sup>60</sup>. While we can always say, with hindsight, that in the Middle Ages the laity did not always reap all the benefits of frequent sacramental communion, their veneration of *the Sanctissimum* meant that they were certainly not deprived of grace. It should be noted that the faithful were not forbidden to receive Communion more than once a year and that some people, particularly pious women and devout members of the nobility, received Communion more regularly<sup>61</sup>.

## VII. The Laity and the Sacrifice of the Cross

Before concluding this presentation, I would like to pause on a point that deserves critical attention. While it is true that certain authors – for example, Pope Innocent III and Jean Burckhard – and even liturgical texts affirmed that the laity played a role in offering Christ's sacrifice, it may come as a surprise to learn that, according to some historians, the notion of sacrifice in the Middle Ages was obscured by the importance given to the adoration of the host, leading these authors to question the extent to which lay people were aware of their participation in the offering of Christ's

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<sup>58</sup> RUBIN, *Corpus Christi...*, 64–65, 147–50; CABIÉ, *The Church at Prayer...*, 138.

<sup>59</sup>RUBIN, *Corpus Christi, passim*. Evidence from Flanders may suggest significant absenteeism in parish churches and a low rate of communion in the East, but it cannot be considered typical: J. TOUSSAERT, *Le Sentiment religieux en Flandre à la fin du Moyen-Age*, Paris: Plon, 1963, 128-41, 160-94; cf. DUFFY, *The Stripping...*, 93-94, 99.

<sup>60</sup> RUBIN, *Corpus Christi*, 63-82, 147-55. I believe that the opinion put forward by some, namely that looking at the host during the elevation led to a devaluation of communion, does not hold water: a decline in communion attendance predates this, as evidenced by the obligation of annual communion imposed by the Fourth Lateran Council (*Omni Utriusque Sexus*, 1215).

<sup>61</sup> Margaret Beaufort received communion twelve times a year, and her piety is also apparent in her efforts to translate the fourth book of *The Imitation of Christ*: JONES and UNDERWOOD, *The King's Mother...*, 15, 200. Margery Kempe, in the end, received communion every week: *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 72, 117, 120, 144. In some regions, it was believed that one could receive communion two or three times a year, after preparation: RUBIN, *Corpus Christi*, 147-48.

sacrifice<sup>62</sup>. It is, of course, impossible for us to delve into the consciousness of the majority of lay people in late medieval Europe to see to what extent these assertions are valid. However, external evidence of Eucharistic devotion clearly shows that, for the most part, the laity were certainly aware, to a greater or lesser extent, that they were witnessing the representation of the sacrifice of the Cross during Mass – even if this was unlikely to have been a highly developed theological concept. For example, the crucifix above the rood screen separating the sanctuary or choir from the nave physically illustrated the relationship between Mass and Christ's sacrifice, a notion that was further reinforced when, at the end of the Middle Ages, the image of the suffering Saviour was added to the crosses. We might also mention the representations of sacrifices in paintings, manuscripts and books, which established the same relationship, in particular the popular image of the Mass of St Gregory<sup>63</sup>; and also the many allegorical interpretations that presented the ceremonies of the Mass as a *memoria passionis*; the elevation of the host, which naturally recalled Christ raised on the cross; the numerous requests for Masses to be offered for the souls in purgatory; the more or less explicit references to the Passion of Christ found in many Eucharistic prayers used by many lay people during Mass<sup>64</sup>; the references made in various works of the time to Christ's sacrifice and to the Mass<sup>65</sup>; and finally, explicit allusions and references to the Passion in sermons, not to mention the theatrical representations of the Passion – which frequently referred to the Mass – particularly during the popular dramas presented on the feast of Corpus Christi<sup>66</sup>. When we see how widespread this notion of sacrifice was at all levels of medieval society and note the importance given to the Passion in the spirituality of that period, we can say that the laity had no reason to be unaware of Christ's sacrifice on the cross or of the relationship between that sacrifice and the sacrifice on the altar.

### VIII. Conclusion

It is clear from historical accounts from the Middle Ages that lay people who attended Mass were not passive spectators, but actively participated, mainly through personal prayer – which was sometimes directly influenced by the liturgical texts – and communal forms of prayer. They also participated by attentively following the Mass ceremonies, uniting themselves spiritually, and performing gestures that outwardly expressed their inner dispositions and at the same time emphasised the communal aspect of the laity constituting the people of God gathered for the holy

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<sup>62</sup> W. J. O'SHEA, *The Worship of the Church*, London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1960, 129, 399-400; G. DONALDSON, *The Faith of the Scots*, Batsford: London, 1990, 50

<sup>63</sup> E. MÂLE, *The Gothic Image: Religious Art in France in the Thirteenth Century*, London: Perseus, 1961, 188. The Mass of St Gregory ... "was an image of great theological power, teaching the real presence and unity of Christ's sufferings with the daily sacrifice in every church of Christendom": DUFFY, *The Stripping...*, 108-9.

<sup>64</sup> BOSSY, *Christian Life...*, 146, believes that "the faithful join in sacrifice, praise and thanksgiving... is that not so? There is a similar French prayer, which was to be recited between the elevation and the Pax: "Lord Jesus Christ, who chose to be born in your most holy flesh from the womb of the glorious Virgin Mary, and shed your most precious blood on the tree of the cross for our salvation, and in that glorious flesh rose again and ascended into heaven, and will return in that flesh to judge the living and the dead – deliver us, by your most holy Body, which is now on the altar, from all impurities of mind and body, and from all evil and danger, now and forever – Amen."

<sup>65</sup> "When Abraham saved his brother from his enemies, he met Melchizedek offering bread and wine, as our priest still does, confirming the above... Every day, at the altar, the priest offers nothing less than the Son [i.e., Christ] to his Father." *Songs, Carols and other Miscellaneous Poems*, ed. R. DYBOSKI, London, 1908, 68-69.

<sup>66</sup> D. BEVINGTON, *Medieval Drama*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1975, *passim*, especially 225-658.

sacrifice<sup>67</sup>. When we consider the limited view of the altar imposed on the early Roman Christians by the shape of the basilica church, it is perhaps not too bold to assert that certain aspects of medieval piety and architecture – in particular the side altars – actually allowed for greater participation by the laity in the Mass, rather than the opposite<sup>68</sup>.

In the Middle Ages, it was not because the faithful did not respond aloud to the liturgy or did not fully understand the Latin liturgical texts that their 'external' participation was any less 'participatory'. While, in general, this participation did not include some of the characteristics of the kind encouraged and developed by the modern liturgical movement and the Magisterium, from the medieval point of view, participation was nonetheless, fundamentally, an *actuosa participatio*. Let us remember what Pope Innocent III wrote: "It is not only priests who offer [the holy sacrifice], but all the faithful also offer it; what is accomplished in a special way by the ministry of priests is accomplished in a general way by the desire of the faithful." This sentence was in fact repeated by Pius XII in *Mediator Dei*. Certain passages of this encyclical that speak of how the laity offer the sacrifice of Christ, through the priest and, in a sense, with him, can really be applied to the Middle Ages: "If the people offer at the same time as the priest, [it is] because they unite their vows of praise, impetration, expiation and thanksgiving to the vows and mental intentions of the priest" [p. 60]. While the Pope strongly recommends that the people use missals and "respond in a well-ordered manner to the words of the priest" [p. 66], which was the aim of the instruction *De Musica sacra*, he also emphasises: "These ways of participating (...) are nevertheless in no way necessary to (...) constitute the public and communal character" of the Mass [p. 67]. Demonstrating great pastoral sensitivity, Pius XII goes on to say: "Many Christians, in fact, cannot use the Roman Missal, even if it is written in the vernacular; and not all are able to understand correctly, as they should, the rites and liturgical formulas. The temperament, character and spirit of men are so varied and so different (...) The needs of souls and their tastes are not the same in all (...) Who, then, would dare to say that so many Christians cannot participate in the Eucharistic sacrifice and enjoy its benefits? But these people can certainly (...) piously meditate on the mysteries of Jesus Christ and say other prayers which, although they differ from the sacred rites in form, are nevertheless in harmony with them in their nature<sup>69</sup>." While it is true that knowledge of the liturgical texts and rites, as well as the responses given to the priest, are the primary means of participation for the laity (although not the only ones)<sup>70</sup>, and if we must admit the custom of infrequent communion as well as the undesirable elements and abuses that may have existed in the Middle Ages in matters of Eucharistic devotion and in the field of liturgy in general (and which, moreover, attracted the

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<sup>67</sup> It should not be forgotten that Mass was said for the whole Church, whether a congregation was present or not.

<sup>68</sup> GAMBER, *The Reform of the Roman Liturgy*, 82-84, 157-66.

<sup>69</sup> INNOCENT III, *De Sacro Altaris Mysterio* III, 6; PIUS XII, *Encyclical Mediator Dei*, 1947, nn. 96-115 (numbering from the Catholic Truth Society edition, 1967); SACRED CONGREGATION OF RITES, *Instructio De Musica sacra et Sacra Liturgia ad mentem litterarum encyclicarum Pii Papae XII Musicae Sacrae Disciplina et Mediator Dei*, 3 September 1958, III, "Normae Speciales". n. 28 ff.; SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 4 December 1963, I, 19.

<sup>70</sup> "It is true that liturgical prayer, being the common prayer of the august Bride of Christ, is superior to private prayer – but this superiority does not mean that there is any conflict or incompatibility between them. These two kinds of prayer are harmoniously combined, for both are animated by the same spirit." : PIUS XII, *Mediator Dei*, nn. 41, 111-115, 125; *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, II, 48.

attention of the Council of Trent)<sup>71</sup> , to question *the actuosa participatio* of the laity in the Middle Ages is not only to ignore historical evidence and refuse to see the central importance given to the Eucharist at that time, but also to challenge some of the fundamental notions of participation set out by the Magisterium<sup>72</sup> . From a broader perspective, as Eamon Duffy has aptly put it: "For townspeople and peasants alike, the rhythms of the liturgy, on the eve of the Reformation, remained those of life itself." Liturgical themes were so integral to the lives of the laity that it is "untenable to assert that there was a complete alienation between the laity and the liturgy<sup>73</sup> ."

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<sup>71</sup> R. KNITTEL, "*Deformata Reformare: Erroneous Liturgical Practices and Concerns for Liturgical Reform in the Reform Decrees of the Council of Trent,*" in: *Liturgy, Treasure of the Church: Proceedings of the First Colloquium on Historical, Theological, and Canonical Studies of the Roman Catholic Rite*, C.I.E.L): Paris, 1996, 43-59. The Council of Trent must be credited for its efforts to reinforce the dignity of Eucharistic celebrations. However, the list of liturgical abuses compiled by this council cannot be considered entirely representative of the liturgy of the late Middle Ages.

<sup>72</sup> With regard to liturgical responses, gestures, etc., Pope Pius XII said, very importantly: "The essential goal is to foster the devotion of the faithful and their close union with Christ and his visible ministry." : PIUS XII, *Mediator Dei*, 111-115; SACRED CONGREGATION OF RITES, *Instructio De Musica Sacra...*, III, 22, 28, 29.

<sup>73</sup> DUFFY, *The Stripping...*, 52, 111. For information on liturgical rites among the English gentry and nobility, see, for example: DUFFY, *The Stripping...*, passim, 114-16; M.A. HICKS, "The Piety of Margaret Lady Hungerford", in *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 38 (1987), 1-38.