

The Celebrant and the Concept of the President

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In the Gospel according to St John, Our Lord describes His chief adversary—the one He seeks to defeat for our redemption—as the ‘*Father of Lies*’, the ‘*liar par excellence*’. We know from the history of salvation and that of the Church how Satan’s deception has manifested itself. In *Genesis*, our first parents are tempted by what is presented to them as true freedom, the true liberation that awaits them if they break free from the stifling constraints arbitrarily imposed on them by their Creator. Throughout history, the Father of Lies has ceaselessly tempted humankind in the same way, by presenting self-destructive rebellion as true freedom and true creativity, and divinely ordained morality as the straitjacket of meagre, restrictive legalism. In the West, one of the most recent manifestations of this suspicion has taken the form of a call to reject God, the enemy of human freedom. Thus, we see that, on the one hand, Feuerbach and Marx, and on the other, Nietzsche and his postmodern heirs, claim that true human freedom stems solely from the ‘death of God’.

However, we see, both in the divinely ordained orders of Creation and of Salvation, that this is a genuine distortion of the truth. The divinely instituted order, when correctly understood, is never the enemy of dynamic freedom and creativity. Quite the contrary: this order is a prerequisite for their realisation. All of nature, including our own, is an ‘Order’, an ‘arrangement’ of elements prior to creation. Thus, in every human being, the physical, biological, psychological and spiritual elements—or, one might say, the ‘arrangements’ of the stages preceding creation—are integrated into a hierarchical being which, as stated in the Creed of the Fourth Lateran Council, is divided into the material and spiritual orders of creation. Our own ordered and hierarchical nature is by no means static; rather, it is free and dynamic. It is for this reason that the hierarchical order—which is our nature—is a prerequisite for the existence of that infinite creativity evidenced by the history of art and music and by discoveries in the worlds of the arts and sciences; it is also a condition for receiving the gift of a new nature through Baptism and for the infinite creativity of the Holy One, who is constantly finding new ways to love and serve his Lord. Thus, the the absence or collapse of all order must not be equated with the notion of freedom but with its opposite. We have the example of countries torn apart by war, where the structures of an essential order have tragically disintegrated and where it becomes impossible to live in a decent and civilised manner.

Naturally, what has just been said requires further exploration. Within the order of the world created by God, the collapse of order, death and decline have a role to play in the emergence and development of new orders and new structures. My physical life will come to an end; plants die and provide the nutrients for a new plant to come to life, whilst new developments emerge in the

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physical world and in human culture. Note, however, that we are not speaking of a total absence of order. In the case of the death of plants that provide nutrients for new plant life, there is continuity within change: the lower-level ‘orders’—namely the chemical substances seeping into the soil—provide what is necessary for new plants to emerge, giving rise to new ‘orders’ of life. The same applies to individuals and cultures. Healthy development is not a succession of annihilations and new creations; if that were the case, we could not speak of progress, since societies would have to perpetually reinvent their own mechanisms and individuals would regularly revert to childhood as they would suffer repeated memory loss. No, genuine evolution implies continuity within change. This holds true for individuals, cultures and the history of the Church. We observe, in the history of the Church, the development of dogmas—a process through which the Holy Spirit helps the Church to discern, within the deposit of faith, truths which it may not previously have grasped precisely, or truths which, in a certain sense, are linked to this deposit of faith. The Church has thus provided further responses to the new challenges, opportunities and threats that have arisen over the centuries. But she has responded precisely as that very Mystical Body founded by Our Lord Himself. Indeed, the permanent aspect that characterises her is not something determined by human wisdom, but willed for her by her Divine Founder; and it is precisely by referring to this permanent aspect that, as history unfolds, she takes up new challenges, guided by her Spirit, the Holy Spirit. Divinely ordained, sacramentally and hierarchically, at her creation, it is its very nature that enables it to bear fruit even in the darkest periods of history through which it must pass.

But you must be wondering what connection there is between all these considerations—which are, to say the least, philosophical and theological—and the liturgical topic I have been asked to address: ‘the celebrant and the concept of the President’. To answer this question, I would say that I very much doubt that the organisers of this C.I.E. conference L. chose this topic as having no connection whatsoever with the confusion that has gripped the Church in the West over the last thirty years or so. The terms ‘Celebrant’ and ‘President’, referring to the Priest and his role in the liturgy, and thus to his entire life as a priest, apparently point to two incompatible visions of the liturgy, the nature of the priesthood and, consequently, the Church. This liturgical question cannot therefore be separated from all the questions of a dogmatic and pastoral nature that have arisen in the wake of the crisis the Church has endured at the end of the second millennium. This is, moreover, inevitable since, as we have learnt from *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, the Mass is both the source and the summit of the whole life of the Church; consequently, confusion and disruption concerning its sacramental source and summit will lead to confusion in every aspect of the Church’s life.

The remarks I made earlier may therefore help us to understand some of the deep-seated cultural confusions lying behind this rejection of the vision of the Church conveyed by the clergy. Just as the sacrament of marriage is the divinely instituted ordination between two people, the purposes and benefits of marriage, the Sacrament of Holy Orders is the one-way ordination of a

person to the service of Our Lord and His Mystical Body. Western culture, which suspects ‘ordinations’ of being ‘restrictions on freedom’, opposes the sacramental ordination of marriage, and therefore opposes in the same way the ordination of a person who receives the Sacrament of Holy Orders.

It is, amongst other things, such cultural suspicions that lie behind the crisis of priestly identity to which we bore witness at the end of the 20th century. These confusions regarding the priest’s identity have led to the use of specific terminology concerning the nature of the priest and his role in the liturgy, and the use of the term ‘president’ as opposed to ‘Celebrant’ clearly shows that some have sought to adopt terminology regarding the Church’s liturgical life that runs counter to her own teachings: teachings that are so evident and intrinsic to the Church’s traditional sacraments and rites.

However, my main argument here will be to show that the use made by some of the term ‘President’ in reference to the role of the priest is typical of what occurs in all instances of heresy and deviation that the history of the Church. In fact, a certain term or idea has been taken out of context—the context in which its use is grounded—and is being employed in such a way as to distort the authentic teaching of the Church. I must therefore argue that the use of the term ‘President’ in reference to the role of the priest, as found in the Church’s most recent magisterium, is well-founded and significant. It is the way in which certain people have used it for ideological reasons that has distorted and misappropriated the meaning of this term from the context in which the term ‘President’, referring to the priest, is used in the texts of the Magisterium. I would add that this traditional and correct context is the one the Church has always taught in the *triplex munera* that the priest receives at his ordination, a teaching handed down by the Church before, during and after the Second Vatican Council. Used in the correct context, the term ‘President’ and references to the priest who ‘presides’ in the liturgy are to be understood in the sense of the hierarchical ordination received as an interior gift by the priest at Ordination. We shall return to this point when addressing the theme of Ordination as the inner ‘ordering’ of a being, which sets that being or person free to serve their Creator and Redeemer with greater vigour.

Celebrant or President?

Addressing the question I raise briefly but incisively, Fr Bruce Harbert wrote the following:

According to current usage, the priest or bishop ‘presides’ over Mass. Etymologically, ‘to preside’ comes from the Latin *praesidio*, which literally means ‘seated in front’, and it is for this reason that he requires a chair. And since, according to the English expression, he presides over an ‘assembly’, he must face it. Thus the priest, from his presiding chair,

dominates and watches over his assembly eye to eye, like a schoolteacher, and controls the celebration.²

Fr Harbert goes on to emphasise that, contrary to what some liturgists believe, the notion of the priest ‘presiding’ over the liturgy is foreign to liturgical history, as confirmed by a computerised search of Western Latin liturgical texts. One source of this confusion stems from an Anglican liturgist, Grégoire Dix, who, in his book on the liturgy – *La forme de la liturgie, published in 1943* – confirms that Justin the Martyr attests to a liturgical presidency in the second century. However, Fr Harbert points out that Justin’s explanation of what is taking place is, to say the least, incomplete and that, when he describes the liturgical actions of the *prohestos*, the Greek text at no point mentions the act of ‘sitting before’ a congregation.

In my view, what is particularly troubling about this emphasis on the priest as ‘President’ is clearly highlighted in Fr Harbert’s quotation: the priest watches over the congregation ‘like a schoolmaster’. I believe that one of the most striking aspects of a priest’s role in the celebration of the Church’s traditional liturgy is that he most often appears as a ‘servant’. He is *in persona Christi*, the one who is in the image of Christ the Mediator in Person (literally, who manifests Him iconically), who is at the heart of the liturgical act. As such, the priest is both the servant of the Church and the servant of Christ, since he peacefully offers the sacrifice of Calvary to the Father. At the same time, and in a deeper sense, he is there ‘for the people’. Bishop Klaus Gamber offers the striking image of the priest ‘pushed up against the altar by the people’ to offer Mass on their behalf and to sanctify them. As such, the priest embodies the image of the ‘suffering servant’ in a personal sense. This is clearly evident in the priest’s apparent ‘self-effacement’, a hallmark of the Church’s classical liturgy. The eastward orientation, the position of the priest’s chair and many other liturgical arrangements all contribute to this liturgical reality. The same applies to the ‘hierarchical order’ of the liturgical vestments worn by the priest. The stole, a symbol of his role as judge and teacher, is worn beneath the final garment to be donned: the chasuble, which traditionally represents Christ’s purple robe of suffering. Thus, the order of the vestments represents – and reminds the priest of – the New Testament teaching that ‘love is the greatest of these’ (Col. 3:14) but also Our Lord’s teaching to the Apostles, telling them that those who wish to reign with Him must first suffer with Him (St Matthew 20:20–3).

Of course, this does not preclude attending celebrations of the *novus ordo* which highlight these symbols of the Church’s liturgical heritage. In this regard, I would mention the manner in which Mass is celebrated in certain monasteries and in the churches of the Oratorian Fathers in the British Isles. However, it is often the case that the *de facto* celebration of the *Novus Ordo* leaves much more to be desired in this respect than in others. As Cardinal Ratzinger emphasised in his writings, there is a temptation in the West regarding the celebration—a temptation absent from the

² P. Bruce Harbert « Postscript de : *Presiding* », le Prêtre et le Peuple, Vol. 10, Mai 1996, P.210.

traditional liturgy — to replace the *Latria* office with a sort of community gathering where the priest takes on the role of a teacher, where the Mass is this community gathering, and where the presider delivers a didactic lesson to the congregation on its activities. The Cardinal has, of course, offered wise counsel to prevent the Mass from being celebrated in this manner in the West (e.g. the use of the crucifix). We must therefore follow more closely the guidance the Cardinal sets out for us. The reduction of the liturgy, of the *Cultus* as the worship of God, and of the Mass as the offering of the Divine Victim, to something ‘demythologised’ in terms of didactic teaching or communal sharing has been a constant temptation throughout the history of liturgical renewal, as Fr Aidan Nichols explains in his book *Looking at Liturgy*, showing that this was an ideal of the liturgical reformers of the Enlightenment in the 18th century.

As for the priest as ‘president’, who seems more inclined to deliver a didactic teaching on the liturgy to the congregation than to lead that same congregation into a liturgical experience centred on the very life of the Trinity, it seems inevitable that the tendency will be towards holding dubious dogmatic notions regarding the role of the ‘president’ of the congregation. Indeed, by giving an erroneous definition of the concept of ‘presidency’ in the liturgical sense, one quickly reaches the point where the priest appears more as a monarch of the liturgy than as its servant. And since such a perception of the priesthood tends to be diametrically opposed to that of those who no longer wish to make an ontological distinction between a priest and a layperson, it is necessary to redefine the concept of ‘presidency’. Nowadays, the concept of ‘presidency’ — which is a far cry from the traditional notion of the priest offering the sacrifice — can be reconsidered as follows: he becomes the ‘organiser’ of the congregation, the ‘the ‘facilitator’ of all the other participants who, in a sense, are on the same level during this liturgical moment.

The obstacle posed by the Church’s liturgical law — which forbids any other person from doing what only one person has the right to do in liturgical terms, coupled with the fact that this person must always be a man — can be overcome, to a certain extent, by ‘excusing’ the exclusivity of this role and stating that ‘someone is in charge of the organisation’ and that the role of the ‘president’ boils down to that. The president, ‘organiser’ and ‘facilitator’, is now regarded as the one who ‘delegates full authority’ to the laity by assigning them all manner of liturgical functions, in preparation for the day when, the Church authorities, having become less rigid, will authorise members of the liturgical assembly to do everything.

How wide is the gulf between this sad vision and the truths of the Catholic faith regarding participation in the liturgy in accordance with a person’s sacramental state within that ordered structure which is the Mystical Body of Christ, this structure which confers real ‘full power’ — the power of grace received as a gift from Our Lord within the sacramental order.

Such a mistaken vision as described above — a vision which, I fear, is familiar to many of us, clearly has other tragic aspects. It may be said that the renewal of Vatican II sought, in part, to put an end to the over-emphasis placed by the Council of Trent on those aspects of the priesthood

relating to worship. It turns out that this view has reduced the priest to a mere ‘thing’ in the liturgy and stifled his personality. If one goes even further down the slippery slope of these sad confusions, one sometimes hears it said that the priest should no longer be regarded as a mere ‘machine for dispensing the sacraments’, as has already happened. This short phrase seems tragic but serves to show that those who use it no longer have an authentic Catholic understanding of the sacraments and the relationship between the sacraments and life. A layperson might be tempted to reply to clergy who use this phrase: ‘If you are not mere machines for dispensing the sacraments, does that mean that, as an uninitiated person, I am not merely a machine for receiving the sacraments?’ By asking this question, I simply wish to emphasise that such a debate is entirely at odds with the Catholic understanding of the sacraments and of life.

I shall return to these pastoral misunderstandings later and provide answers. But I must now explain the true meaning of the terms ‘celebrant’ and ‘presider’ as applied to the priest, as defined by the Magisterium of the Church. We shall then be better placed to answer the question of whether the priest is perceived more as the ‘celebrant’ or the ‘president’ in the liturgy. We shall then return to the question of the priest’s identity in general in order to present the Church’s vision—the one given to us by the Holy Spirit—regarding how the priest perceives himself.

‘Celebrant’, ‘celebration’ and ‘presiding’ according to the Magisterium

It seems to me that the term ‘presiding’, used in reference to the role of the Bishop or the priest according to the Magisterium, appears in the documents of the Second Vatican Council. In *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (41), it is stated that the Bishop presides at the altar, and the footnotes to the official text refer us to the Church’s ancient ecclesiology, as attested to in the letters of St Ignatius of Antioch. The ancient ecclesiological principle, which is omnipresent in the teachings of Vatican II, is as follows: since the Mass is the source and summit of the life of the Mystical Body, it is from Christ’s constitutive Sacramental Sacrifice that it draws its inherent functions and charisms. Thus, the Bishop, successor to the Apostles, is regarded in the liturgy as the centre of unity, and his role as judge and teacher is clearly evident through the rites; hence the importance of the Bishop’s *Cathedra*. However, it is interesting to note that the Council uses the word ‘presiding’ in relation to the priest only in a non-liturgical context. Thus, in the decree *Presbyterium Ordinis*, reference is made to priests ‘presiding’ over the faithful (see Articles 9 and 13) in their role as educators and shepherds of the faithful. It seems to me that it is in the pre-conciliar liturgical instruction of 1964, *Sacrum Liturgiam* (92), that the priest ‘presiding’ over the liturgy is first mentioned, and that reference is made to the arrangement of the priest’s chair, signifying that it is indeed he who ‘presides’ over Mass. The term was subsequently used in the the *General Instruction* of the 1970 Missal and subsequently in other post-conciliar magisterial texts. Thus, in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, it is written that the Bishop or priest ‘presides’ over the liturgy *in persona Christi* (CCC 1348) .

On the other hand, the term ‘Celebrant’, referring to the priest’s unique role during Mass, is also used in post-conciliar magisterial texts. Contrary to common usage, the *General Instruction* of the 1970 Missal refers to the ‘principal celebrant’ in reference to the priest who plays a ‘principal’ role during a concelebrated Mass; he is not referred to as the ‘presider’ or ‘the one who presides’ over the other concelebrants (GIRM 165ff). In his letter to priests, *Dominicae cenae* (1980), His Holiness Pope John Paul II refers to the priest ‘celebrating’ the Sacrifice of the Mass (para. 9) (we shall return to this important reference for our reflections later) . In the *Catechism* (1465), the priest is described as ‘celebrating’ the sacrament of Confession, and in the *Directory on the Ministry and Life of Priests* (whose publication was authorised by John Paul II in 1994), the term ‘celebrate’ is used in reference to the priest’s role during Mass (see the index under the terms ‘celebrate’ and ‘celebration’ in the index).

My aim here is not to pit certain expressions used by the Magisterium against others. Quite the contrary: I believe that the nuances arising from the contexts in which these different expressions are found lead us to synthesise them in accordance with the Church’s traditional teaching on the *triplex munera*—the roles of ‘Educator’, ‘Shepherd’ and ‘Sanctifier’ of the priest, which are hierarchically ordered. Before addressing this point, I should perhaps make a few comments on the terms ‘Celebration’ and ‘Celebrant’ as used in a liturgical context.

As Fr Harbert points out, the term ‘Celebrant’ or ‘one who celebrates Mass’ is not precise enough to denote the ontological distinction between a priest and a layperson, since it merely authorises the former to ‘say Mass’. Indeed, it is expected that the Mystical Body as a whole—the Head and the members—‘celebrates’ Mass. For further clarification on this point, we must refer to what the Church teaches regarding the specific nature of the priest’s role, who acts *in persona Christi*. The classic texts of the Magisterium, which clearly set out the priest’s distinctive role, include Pope Pius XII’s *Mediator Dei*, in which the modes of participation of the priest and the laity in the Sacrifice of the Mass are clearly stipulated. But precisely in the light of what Pius XII teaches us about the participation and the offering of the Victim by the people through the hands of the priest, it would be problematic to try to find a word or a theologically more precise formulation to designate the distinctive role of the priest during Mass in order to replace the term ‘Celebrant’ . Even saying ‘the one who offers the sacrifice’ would not distinguish him from the laity with sufficient precision, since, in a certain sense, the laity also offer the Divine Victim to the Father through him.

Furthermore, it seems to me that one of the most recent magisterial documents mentioned above is rather favourable to the use of the term ‘Celebrant’, precisely in the context of teaching, to dispel misconceptions that might distort the Church’s teaching on the unique and distinctive role of the priest in the Sacrifice of the Mass. Thus Pope John Paul II, in *Dominicae cenae* (1980), tells us

Consequently, the celebrant, the minister of this sacrifice, is the true priest who – by virtue of the specific power of Holy Ordination – performs a genuine act of sacrifice which brings

creation back to God. Although not all those who take part in the Eucharist prepare the sacrament as he does, they offer, together with him, by virtue of the common priesthood, their own spiritual sacrifices... (DC 9)

I would therefore say that there are three good reasons for using the term ‘Celebrant’ to denote the priest’s role during Mass: a) the difficulty of finding a short expression or another word that would summarise what the Church tells us about the priest’s distinctive role in the liturgy; b) the associations that the term ‘Celebrant’ has created in the minds of the faithful, within the traditions of the Church’s liturgy; c) and finally the Magisterium, which, in *Dominicae cenae* 9, clearly prefers the term ‘Celebrant’ in a passage highlighting the priest’s unique liturgical role.

But before considering how we might reconcile the expressions ‘Celebrant’ and ‘he who presides’—taking care not to distort the meaning of the term ‘presiding’ or allow it to be hijacked by unorthodox intentions—let us turn our attention to the use of the term ‘celebration’ in the liturgy, which has also been subject to misuse in recent decades.

It has often been argued that, since the Mass is a ‘celebration’, it must resemble ‘real’ earthly ‘celebrations’ more closely: it must unfold more like an earthly festival in order to be a ‘true celebration’. Such an approach has, amongst other things, been criticised by Cardinal Ratzinger in his book *The Feast of Faith*, in which he denounces the misunderstanding of the ancient notion of ‘celebration’ that leads to an inability to appreciate either the Jewish or the ancient pagan notions of ‘commemorative feasts’. When speaking of a ‘secular feast’ in relation to the liturgical celebration, one must take into account the ‘informal nature’ of the first Mass, the Last Supper. Apart from other theological problems raised by such an approach, one must accept the fact that, firstly, the Last Supper—or Passover meal—was in itself a liturgical event in its very essence, according to expressions derived from the true Hebrew meaning of *anamnesis*: the sense of the reality of participating in the historical event of the Passover, which must not be reduced to a mere ‘psychological’ of a psychological nature. Secondly, even if one accepts that, alongside its formal character, the atmosphere of the Last Supper was also ‘convivial’ and ‘relaxed’, it is precisely this that has been lost from the historical event that was Our Lord’s Last Supper. Indeed, the atmosphere there was fraught, not because of the conviviality and simplicity that prevailed, but rather because of the discussions concerning the bitter betrayal, the departure, the death, and the Sacrifice of the Son: all these discussions disconcerted, troubled and terrified those who were at the Lord’s side.

It is true that, as has often been emphasised, not only does the Mass make present the Sacrifice of Calvary, but it is also imbued with the joy of the Resurrection, the joy of communion with the Lord and the whole Mystical Body; but it is also an act of thanksgiving and a prayer to the Lord. Depending on the season of the liturgical year, the rites are more ‘joyful’ or more ‘sorrowful’ in accordance with the feasts. However, in bringing all these elements together, we must bear in mind what the Church tells us: ‘the Eucharist is, above all, a sacrifice’ (*Dominicae cenae* 9). We learn from the divinely revealed image of what the Liturgy is, and how these ‘joyful’ and

‘sorrowful’ elements must be present in the Mass; this is the Heavenly Liturgy as described in the *Book of Revelation*.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* provides us with a genuine explanation of the word ‘celebration’, drawing on the heavenly liturgy as presented in the Book of Revelation, to introduce the sections devoted to the sacraments and the liturgy of the Church (CCC 1136–1139). In the liturgy as presented here, we see all our earthly joys transcended and carried into a heavenly liturgy where the ‘joyful’ aspect is reflected in the sublime joy of the angels and the saints who worship, with reverence and dignity, the Lamb who is ever victorious yet who ever reminds the Father of the Sacrifice He has accomplished.

The First Epistle of St Clement, dating from the 1st century, teaches us that from the very beginning, the Church has regarded its own liturgy as an insertion into, and a participation in, the heavenly liturgy. St Clement describes the liturgical act of proclaiming the *trishagion*—‘Holy, Holy, Holy’—, and tells us that it is through this hymn of prayer that the Church is united with the angelic host.

Ordination, the ‘ordering’ of the person of the priest

As I noted above, it has often been said that, just as the Council of Trent had confined itself to the ‘liturgical’ dimension of the priesthood, the Second Vatican Council had a duty to restore the balance by emphasising once more the educational and pastoral dimension of the priesthood. I believe this is historically and dogmatically debatable. First of all, even if the Council of Trent did indeed have a duty to affirm certain dogmas to counter the attacks of the Reformers, this was only part of its programme of counter-reforms. The Council’s decrees on reform must be carefully studied to understand the other strategy put in place to stem the crisis caused by the Reformation. In other words, the Council expressed the need to reform the pastoral arrogance stemming from the intellectual, moral and spiritual shortcomings of a large part of the clergy. The seminary is, of course, one of its enduring legacies in this regard.

The *Catechism of the Council of Trent*, which gives us an insight into the mindset of the Church at that time, does not address the question of the priesthood exclusively in terms of worship and sanctification, but adds that, whilst a lesser degree of knowledge suffices to perform the minor sacramental duties, the priest’s own formation must be far more extensive if he is to be a good educator and a good shepherd to his flock. (*The Catechism of the Council of Trent*, (Dublin: Folds and Sons, 1828), p. 321).

The Second Vatican Council then emphasises, particularly in *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, that the priest, in his role as educator, shepherd and sanctifier, merely reaffirms what the Magisterium states regarding the *triplex munera* of priestly ordination. And it emphasises this not by downplaying or setting aside these aspects of the priesthood, but by reaffirming the hierarchical and dynamic ordering of these different roles. The Magisterium is unanimous on this point before,

during and after the Second Vatican Council. B.-D. de la Soujeole, in his theological thesis on the priesthood, ‘*Saint Thomas Aquinas*’, shows that the doctrine of the *triplex munera* on this subject is time-honoured. This is reflected in the Magisterium of the Popes prior to Vatican II.³ In 1935, in his encyclical on the priesthood, *Ad catholici sacerdotii*, His Holiness Pope Pius XI speaks first, in paragraph 16, the greatest *munus* of the priest’s office—the power conferred upon the priest to offer the sacrifice of the Mass—then goes on to discuss the other aspects of the priest’s role as Sanctifier and finally, in paragraph 23, addresses the subject of the *munera*—the roles of Educator and Shepherd assigned to the priest. In this great encyclical, no artificial distinction is made between the ‘liturgical’ and ‘pastoral’ aspects, and the latter is at no point downplayed. On the contrary, the Pope endeavours to demonstrate that it is necessary for the priest to pray and that the world needs good and holy priests—men who identify with the poor and who lead lives that inspire people to aspire to holiness. In *Mit Brennend Sorge* (1937) and *Divi Redemptoris* (1937), the Pope tells us that one of the solutions to stem the crisis in the West, where people have lost their faith to atheism, Nazi paganism and Communism, would be to have good priests. In *Divi Redemptoris* (63), Pope Pius calls on priests to draw inspiration from the humble holiness of holy priests such as St John Bosco and St Jean-Marie Vianney, and says: “A priest who is truly poor and selfless, as presented in the Gospel, must work miracles amongst his flock...”.

The remarkable encyclical on the priesthood by Blessed Pope John XXIII, *Sacerdotti Nostri primordia* (1959), written in the form of a meditation and following the example of St John Mary Vianney, tells us the same thing about the *triplex munera* and their hierarchical order. When he writes that the gift of being able to offer the sacrifice of the Mass, the *munus* of Sanctification, stands at the summit of this hierarchical order of priestly charisms, Blessed Pope John XXIII clearly demonstrates that he respects the teachings of his predecessors, Popes Pius XI and Pius XII (SNP 51–53). The Second Vatican Council continues this tradition. The Council highlights how the charisms of Educator and Shepherd are dynamically ordered towards the *munus* of sanctification and the offering of the Sacrifice of the Mass, in the person of the priest, when it states that,

The ministry of priests is directed towards this action [the offering of the Sacrifice of the Mass] and is perfected through it. They draw the strength and power to exercise their ministry, which has its origin in the Gospel, from the sacrifice of Christ. (PO 1,2)

Since the Mass is the source and summit of the life of the Mystical Body, it is the Sacrifice that gives life to the Church. Thus, the priest’s life and very essence are directed towards this sacrifice, and he carries out his mission as an educator and shepherd in such a way as to lead others to Christ and to sacramental life. This remains true in the post-conciliar magisterium. Pope John Paul II, in *Dominicae cenae* (1980), tells us that ‘*the Eucharist is the principal raison d’être of the*

³ You will find B.-D. de la Soujeole’s essay on St Thomas’s *triplex munera* in *St Thomas Aquinas and the Priesthood* (*Revue Thomiste* 99, 1999); see also the review of this work by Fr Guy Mansini, O.S.B., in *The Thomist*, vol. 64, 2000, pp. 320–24.

Sacrament of Holy Orders. In a certain sense, it has brought us [priests] into being, and we live for it."⁴

The 1994 Directory on the Life and Ministry of Priests also sets out the doctrine of the dynamic ordering of the hierarchical aspects of the priest's person, a doctrine according to which the charisms of 'Educator' and 'Pastor' tend towards and flow from the fundamental *munus*, the power which the priest has to sanctify and offer the Mass, "...*the Eucharist constitutes the source, the means and the end of the priest's ministry... Consecrated to perpetuate the Holy Sacrifice, the priest thus reveals his identity very clearly.*"

The Directory then details the profound existential and pastoral implications for the priest who finds his identity in this power to celebrate this Sacrament:

If the priest offers to Christ, the High Priest before the Lord, his intellect, his will, his voice and his hands to offer... the sacramental sacrifice of the Father's Redemption, he must make the Master's dispositions his own and must, like Him, live out these gifts for his brothers in the faith. He must therefore learn to unite himself intimately with the offering by laying his whole life upon the altar of sacrifice as a sign of his deliberate love for God."
(48)

Through these rich and beautiful words, the Magisterium shows us what constitutes the priest's identity and that, of all his pastoral charisms, it is his charism as a sanctifier that must take precedence—a charism which enables him to 'preside' over the faithful. However, it becomes clear that this schizophrenic attitude described above is tragic for those who perceive a dichotomy between the 'liturgical' aspect and the 'pastoral' aspect. The great holy priests of the Church have, of course, demonstrated that such an approach is mistaken. The lives led by St John Bosco, St Philip Neri, St Jean-Marie Vianney and Blessed Pio of Pietrelcina show us that the priest's identity and spirituality depend on the degree to which he identifies with the Master when He offers himself at Mass. The lives of these Saints illustrate what the Magisterium tells us about the spirituality of the priest *in persona Christi*. For us, the holy priests of the Church are men whom the Mass brought to life and who knew that the finest gift they could offer to others was Christ, through the Sacraments and, supremely, during the Mass. They made their own the words of the Blessed Apostle Peter, the first Pope, to the crippled beggar: '*I have neither gold nor silver, but what I do have I give you; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, go and walk*' (Acts 3:6). It is this priestly spirituality of one

⁴ On the change in the position of the priest's chair, see *Architecture in Communion* by Steven J. Schloeder (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1998), pp. 86–88. According to the 1970 Missal, the priest's chair is distinct from the bishop's *Cathedra*, but Fr Cuthbert Johnson, O.S.B., who served for many years as secretary of the Congregation for Rites, emphasises that the shape and position of the chair must demonstrate that the priest serves, rather than presides over, the liturgy (see his book *Planning for Liturgy*, (with Fr Stephen), (Farnborough: St Michael Abbey Press, 1983, p. 23). Steven Schloeder, a theological architect, elaborates on the implications of Fr Johnson's stipulations and calls on the authorities to continue to address issues relating to this subject. He writes: "...architecturally...one should not even consider placing the chair in the centre of the sanctuary altar, as this location is of paramount importance. This position is traditionally that of the glory..." (Schloeder, p. 88).

who acts *in persona Christi*, illustrated by the priest's conformity to the nuptial reality of Christ's self-giving to the Church, and it is for this reason that the sacrifice of celibacy is 'most suited to the priesthood'.⁵ It is to this priestly spirituality that the Holy Father refers when he says in *Gift and Mystery* (CTS Doubleday, pp. 88–89) that whilst all members of the Mystical Body are called to holiness, priests are also called to it in a very special way.

If this is the doctrine upheld by the Magisterium, found in the tradition of the Church's liturgy and lived out by the holy priests, does this help us to harmonise the terms 'Celebrant' and 'President' in reference to the priest's role in the liturgy? We have seen that, ideologically speaking, the terms 'presiding' and 'president' are not used to refer to the notion of the priest offering the sacrifice, yet we have also seen that the Magisterium does employ them. I do not think it is difficult to reconcile the expressions 'Celebrant' and 'he who presides' if they are used precisely in the light of the hierarchical ordering of the *munera* of the priest's functions. As I said earlier, the term 'presiding' in reference to the priest, as opposed to the Bishop, is used in a non-liturgical context by Vatican II. The aim, I believe, is to help us understand that the term 'presider' is used in reference to the educational and pastoral *munera* of the priest's office, whereas, as Pope John Paul II tells us in *Dominicae cenae* (9), the term 'celebrant' refers solely to the *munus* of sanctifier—that is, the priest's power to offer the sacrifice of the Mass—which the Magisterium regards as standing at the summit of the hierarchical order of the priestly *munera*. It is this *munus* that determines the priest's identity and the order of the other *munera*.

It is therefore legitimate to use the term 'presider' in reference to the priest's role in the liturgy, since all the charisms of the members of the Mystical Body are present in the sacrifice of the Mass. During the Mass, the priest truly fulfils the role of 'one who presides', of 'Educator' and of 'Shepherd' for his flock. Indeed, he has authority over the faithful who are gathered to attend Mass. This is clearly evident when he delivers his homily, since to do so he wears the specific liturgical vestment known as the stole, a symbol of his authority. However, since there is a hierarchical order of the *munera* in the person of the priest, this must be clearly evident during Mass. In this regard, it may be said that whilst the priest is regarded in the liturgy as the one who 'presides', this is solely because he is, first and foremost, the 'Celebrant' of the Sacrifice of the Mass.

This, then, was my main thesis, the conclusion of which is that: *It is correct to speak of the priest presiding at Mass, since he is the Educator and the Shepherd. However, he is not that, nor does he receive this power to 'preside', except because, more fundamentally, he receives the charism of the one who sanctifies, and of the one who offers the Sacrifice of the Mass.*

In the light of these conclusions, the comments made by the Archbishop Pell of Melbourne, during recent interviews, regarding Masses celebrated according to the 1962 liturgical books in his Archdiocese, seem to me particularly welcome, as they are theologically sound.

⁵ The doctrine that 'celibacy is best suited to the priesthood' appears in Andrew Beards' article, 'Celibacy: Discipline or Infallible Doctrine?', *Homiletic and Pastoral Review*, December 1999, pp. 18–28.

In commenting on these Masses, the Archbishop draws a distinction between those Masses which he ‘presided over’ and those in which he was the ‘celebrant’. If we refer to what the Second Vatican Council says about the importance of the role of the Bishop who ‘presides’ in his diocese, it is not correct to speak of the priest-celebrant, during a Mass in the presence of his Bishop—who is fulfilling his official liturgical role as Shepherd of his diocese—as ‘presiding’, a role that would take precedence over that of the Bishop. However, during such a Mass, the priest, and not the Bishop, would be the ‘celebrant’, the one who performs the Sacrament.

Indeed, it is in this sense that pre-conciliar liturgical writers such as A. Fortescue and J. O’Connell use the term ‘presides’, in reference to the Bishop’s liturgical role – when a Bishop, in his episcopal function, attends a Mass said by another priest – the celebrant. One might infer that it was this meaning of the term ‘presiding’ that the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council had in mind when they approved the texts which dealt in a similar manner with the role of the Bishop.⁶

Conclusion

The question of the priest’s liturgical identity as ‘celebrant’ or ‘presider’ is not a matter of abstract semantics. Terminological questions of this kind give rise to wide-ranging discussions on the nature of the priesthood, the sacraments, the Church and, ultimately, to a greater extent, Christology and Creation.

Those who are generally attached to the Church’s traditions regarding the priesthood or traditional liturgical rites (an attachment to which the Holy Father has given his approval) are regarded as outdated and attached to the historically limited ‘Tridentine model’ of the priesthood by those who favour this new conception of the priesthood. In this ideological campaign, the term ‘presider’, referring to the priest’s liturgical role as set out in the magisterial texts of the last forty years, is used to demonstrate that we have now abandoned the notion of the priest as the celebrant who offers the sacrifice of the Mass. From a revisionist perspective, the terms ‘Presider’ and ‘presiding’ now completely replace the liturgical expressions previously used. The priest as ‘President’ becomes a prayer leader, an educator for the community, or a minister in the Protestant mould. But, as we have seen, this is only the first step on this ideological path that leads us away from orthodox Catholic belief. One then quickly comes to conclude that if this liturgical ‘president’ is merely a ‘facilitator’ or an ‘organiser’, any member of the community could do the same.

However, we have seen that it is this ideological distortion of the faith that has been a constant before, during and after the Second Vatican Council. We must, of course, continue to regard the priest as the one who offers the sacrifice; in the magisterium of Pope John Paul II, the term ‘celebrant’ is used primarily in reference to that munus which stands at the summit of the hierarchical order of the priest’s essence: his power to offer the Sacrifice of the Mass as the

⁶ See Fortescue – O’Connell, *The Ceremonies of the Roman Rite Described*, (1962), edited by Scott Reid, (London: St Austin’s Press, 1996), p. 162 (last paragraph).

sanctifier of the People of God. I have said that it is simple to understand the meaning of the term ‘presider’, if one places it in the context of what the Church teaches through the triplex munera of the priesthood and its orders. The priest manifests his nature as Educator and Shepherd in the liturgy precisely within the framework of his liturgical ‘presidency’, but he presides because he is, above all, the Celebrant of the Holy Sacrifice.

At the start of this presentation, we saw a form of contemporary hermeneutics of suspicion, a deception by the enemy which helps to fuel the crisis regarding the priest’s identity in relation to the modern notion of freedom: an absence of order. The term ‘ordination’ implies an ordering of the person receiving this sacrament. If one sets freedom against order, the priest’s liturgical life, particularly in the traditional rites of the Church, is characterised by stifled freedom, a lack of identity. On the contrary, it is said that the liturgy must enable the priest to assert his personal identity and that one must take as a model—amongst many others, even if this model is optional or outdated—the traditional doctrines concerning the priest’s identity as set out in the Church’s dogmatic teaching, liturgical traditions and the lives of her holy priests. We are thus witnessing the sad spectacle of the priest abandoning his role as a ‘sacramental machine’ and no longer taking as his model the Church’s free ‘guide to prayer’, but rather that of a social worker or an amateur psychiatrist.

But we know that these sad confusions are at odds with the orders of Creation and Redemption. For, as we have seen before, the order and organisation of persons, if properly understood, are the conditions for creative freedom to exist. If we ascend the ladder of Creation, we can verify what has just been said. Indeed, the more complex, structured and ordered beings are, the freer they are: take, for example, the difference between an atom and a human being. And in the Divine nature, God—who is the Most Free—is the One who orders everything correctly in relation to his Kingdom.

But if the opposition between freedom and the ‘ordering’ of creatures (their ‘ordination’) does not seem realistic within the order of Creation, it is no more so from the perspective of Redemption. Indeed, the person and their ‘personality’ are not stifled the closer they come to Christ, but rather set free. ‘*Whoever loses his life will find it*’, Our Lord tells us (John 12:25). Priestly ordination is a dynamic hierarchical ordering of the one who receives it, enabling him to enjoy a new creative freedom *in persona Christi*. The lives led by St Edmund Campion, St Francis de Sales, St Maximilian Kolbe, Blessed Pope Pius IX, Blessed Pope John XXIII and Blessed Pio of Pietrelcina bear witness to this; ordination is a ‘configuration’, a configuration to Christ. These holy priests, who rested upon the rock that is Christ, show us the diversity of true priestly holiness. Since they were lifted up towards Christ, their individuality was not stifled but flourished; when they celebrated Mass, it was at the heart of their ascent towards holiness. When we consider how the great holy priests of history celebrated Mass, we realise that it is a mistake to think that the Church’s traditional rites stifled the priests’ individuality. Even the secular world offers parallels

that prove this view to be absurd. Great musicians are called great because they distinguish themselves by their ability to interpret musical works, each bringing a touch of their own musical ‘personality’ to the performance of a piece. Yet these musical works strike us as deliberately transparent because neither the musician nor their personality overshadows the original work. We do not say of ‘a great violinist is great when, right in the middle of Beethoven’s Violin Concerto, he stops playing to tell us a story or an anecdote about his life!

The lives of these priests bear witness to this priestly spirituality, which clearly shows that the Sacrifice of the Mass gives the priest his full identity. Like those who act *in persona Christi*, the holy priests know that they live through the Mass in order to live for others, just like the Divine Victim with whom they so closely identify. Living from the Sacrifice and united to their Lord in Communion, they know that the greatest sign of love they can offer to others—men and women alike—is to lead them, through the purification of Confession, to share in that blessed intimacy with Christ which is found through the Sacrifice and Communion during Mass: an intimacy which is the source of eternal life.