

Facing God and facing Godward

"RETURN as soon as possible to a common orientation, of priests and the faithful turned together in the same direction — Eastward or at least towards the apse — to the Lord who comes, in those parts of the liturgical rites when we are addressing God."

That is, **A PRIEST STANDS ON THE PEOPLE'S SIDE OF THE ALTAR**, not facing them across it.

Thus did Cardinal Robert Sarah exhort all priests and bishops during the third annual international conference of *Sacra Liturgia* (Sacred Liturgy), held last month in London, 5th July, 2016.

Cardinal Sarah is Prefect for the Congregation of Divine Worship & Administration of the Sacraments. His brief from Pope Francis is to continue the liturgical reforms of Pope Benedict, and, as he revealed at this conference, to implement the "Reform of the Reform of the Liturgy" (see below).

He did not order it but made a very strong recommendation: "After suitable catechesis," he urged, "aim to start by this Advent, 2016;" and "This practice is permitted by current liturgical legislation. It is perfectly legitimate in the modern rite."

This comes on page 12 of his 15 page speech on the Constitution on the Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (SC) from 1963, the second session of VCI:

1. Liturgical formation is essential for seminarians, priests, laity.

2. "Actual participation" reflects the Latin *actuosa*, "bringing into action" what had been too passive. "Active", *activa*, refers to what is already in action.

3. SC's outcomes were **impaired** by false dependence on the "spirit of the times".

Cardinal Sarah's pp. 1-11 summarized SC and how Bl. Paul VI began its implementation almost at once with a commission under Archbishop Bugnini as secretary. Official documents followed fast.

And the pastoral outcomes show how the implementation was flawed. See *Handouts* n. 79.

On p. 8, he said, "The work of the commission to implement SC was certainly **subject to influences, ideologies and new proposals** that were not in SC."

THE SENSE OF THE SACRED

Cardinal Sarah aims to restore God-centredness, so that priest and congregation **focus on God and not on themselves** as 'community'. Community is secondary: priest and congregation form a visible community when they "face God" together.

This echoes the Extraordinary Synod of Bishops in 1985, called by St John Paul to assess the state of the Church 20 years after the Second Vatican Council:

It is evident that the liturgy must **favour the sense of the sacred** and make it shine forth. It must be permeated by the spirit of **reverence, adoration and the glory of God**.

The Final Report p. 34, St Paul Publications

FACING GOD at Mass

Since God is unseen and everywhere, how can man face towards God? Man's eyes face forward, and need a symbolic direction for God, such as upwards to Heaven, eastward for Christ's new advent.

As God, the Supreme Being, is 'above' His creation, we think of Heaven as 'above': "He *lifted* His eyes to heaven," that is, upward. Similarly with the Coming of Christ, we look to the East, *ad orientem*, the Orient, the direction of the rising-sun, the dawn.

Church buildings traditionally face east. It is not sun-worship but a symbol of expectancy of Christ's Second Coming. Many Anglican churches follow this pre-Reformation practice, whereas in Australia, Catholics lacked the money to be particular about orienting their churches.

Hence the idea of "the liturgical east", the apse, the altar-end of the church, where crucifix and tabernacle are. It counts as "facing east", *ad orientem*. (Tabernacles on altars: see over.)

The Roman Basilicas like St Peter's have a quite unusual orientation. The enormous entrance doors are at the eastern end to let in the morning sunlight. In order to face east, the Pope stands on the far side of the altar from the people.

An objection often made is, "It's rude to talk to people with your back to them." Exactly: so the priest turns to the people for greetings, readings, sermon and bidding prayers. And he turns to face Godward for offering sacrifice to God. So priest and people face God, and not each other.

"Mass facing the people" is NOT in Vatican II.

It came from the 1930s liturgical enthusiasts eager for participation by the people. They were mistaken in thinking it was restoring an ancient practice.

Nor was it even mentioned in the speeches in 1962 and 1963 leading up to SC. Rather, its first mention is the *Instruction of the Proper Implementation of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*:

The main altar should preferably be free-standing, to permit walking around it and celebration facing the people.

Inter Oecumenici n. 91, 26th September, 1964

Meanwhile in 1964 and 1965, VCI continued with the *Constitution on the Church* and other matters.

THE REFORM OF THE REFORM

The first mention of a Reform of the Reform was in two lectures in 1995 by Father Brian Harrison O.S. (Oblates of Wisdom) attended by Father Joseph Fessio S.J., chief of Ignatius Press, who popularized it. Fr Harrison is an Australian still working in USA.

He called for an evaluation of what had actually transpired, done by legitimate authority (or sometimes without) in terms of its **pastoral impact** on people's faith and piety. Again, see *Handouts* nn. 79, also 71.

It could well involve altars, tabernacles, communion rails, fonts, confessionals and pulpits. Quite apart from expense, it will require much tact and catechesis.

Nor did SC or its preliminaries mention Communion standing up, or on the hand or from lay ministers.

PRIEST and MEDIATOR

The priest is a mediator between God and man acting in the Person of the One Mediator, Jesus Christ our Lord. God is represented by the altar, so the priest leads the people to Him and faces the altar from the same side as the people. The people can say to themselves, "He's on our side!" Actually this posture is better for active participation of the people. With the priest on the far side of the altar "facing the people" over it, they tend to watch his face as well as his hands and to become spectators.

THE GENERAL INSTRUCTION OF THE ROMAN MISSAL (GIRM)

Cardinal Sarah's recommendations — authoritative but not mandatory — flatly contradict the "should" in the GIRM issued in Latin 2002, (English 2007 in a book of 142 pp) and now in our 2011 altar Missals:

The altar should be built apart from the wall, in such a way that it is possible to walk around it easily and that Mass can be celebrated at it facing the people, which is DESIRABLE WHEREVER POSSIBLE.

GIRM n. 299

That word "desirable" intensifies the 1975 GIRM:

The altar should be free-standing so that the ministers can easily walk around it and Mass can be celebrated facing the people.

1975 GIRM n. 262

Except for those words after "and", there is no mention whatsoever of 'facing the people' for the Liturgy of the Eucharist in any Missal since VCI. **THE RUBRICS do NOT mention it!**

Distinct from the GIRM, the introduction at the front of the Missal, are the **rubrics**, the red print instructions embedded in the prayers of the Order of the Mass. The GIRM states principles, the rubrics give instructions of what to do, most of which are also in the GIRM (shown in brackets, the next column).

The 'Order' or 'Ordinary' of the Mass is in contrast to the 'Propers', which have the antiphons and prayers for Seasons and Saints, and the 'Commun', for groups of saints, e.g. Holy Men and Women, towards the back of the Missals.

Rubrics are printed in red and prayers in black: "Do the red, says the black."

In Australia, our people's *Sunday Missal* and *Weekday Missal* omit most rubrics. The sanctuary Missals (there are three sizes) have them all, but omit readings in favour of the separate books: Lectionary and Gospel Book.

However, there is at least one *Daily Missal* (Sundays and Weekdays), 2012, with most of the rubrics as well as most of the readings, from Catholic Truth Society, London. They are the publishers of the sanctuary missals. Alas, it has slightly different translations for the responses to the Responsorial Psalms and Alleluia verses, and lacks the five special feast days for Australia, but it does have the rubrics.

SURPRISE!

Rubrics for the priest at the altar tell him when to turn and face the people. **THIS DOES NOT MAKE SENSE IF HE IS FACING THEM ALREADY.** Rubrics 29, 127 and 132 show that the priest's position for the Eucharistic Prayer is **leading the people to the altar**. This utterly ignores GIRM n. 299.

'PRAY, BRETHREN'

Rubric 28 [GIRM n. 145]:

Then the Priest, standing AT THE SIDE OF THE ALTAR, washes his hands, saying quietly...

Rubric 29 [GIRM n. 146]:

Standing in the middle of the altar, FACING THE PEOPLE, extending and then joining his hands, he says: 'Pray, brethren...'

BEFORE THE PREFACE — an apparent exception

Rubric 31 does NOT have "turning to the people" since it begins the Eucharistic Prayer at the altar.

SIGN OF PEACE (Latin simply calls it *PAX*, "The Peace")

Rubric 127 [GIRM n. 154]: The Priest, **TURNED TOWARDS THE PEOPLE**, extending and then joining his hands, adds: 'The peace of the Lord...'

INVITATION TO HOLY COMMUNION

Rubric 132 [GIRM n. 157]:

The Priest genuflects, takes the Host and, holding it slightly raised above the paten or chalice, while FACING THE PEOPLE, says aloud, 'Behold, the Lamb of God...'

This tells him to turn round. Indeed, the next rubric tells him to **turn back to the altar**. **This does not make sense if he is doing so already:**

Rubric 133 [GIRM n. 158]:

The Priest, FACING THE ALTAR, says quietly: 'May the Body of Christ...'

INCONSISTENCIES

The rubrics were poorly edited: 29 and 146 should be followed by rubrics to turn back again, as in 133.

Also there should be a rubric in the Order of the Mass about the priest's gestures with hands extended, raised and extended again, as in GIRM n. 148.

On the reverence to be made by communicants, the Australian rubrical rules in GIRM n. 160 on bowing (though kneeling is permitted) contradict the universal principles in GIRM nn. 274-275 on genuflections and bows.

TABERNACLES ON ALTARS

There is **nothing** in SC about moving the tabernacle off the altar, nor was there any discussion of it for SC in 1962-1963. Rather, it crept in with "Mass facing the people" 1964, 1967, 1975. See *Handouts* n. 53 p. 2 for the Ven. Pius XII in 1956 on keeping the tabernacle on the altar of sacrifice.

Indeed, the 1975 GIRM proposed the tabernacle be sidelined to a side chapel. This was changed in 2002 GIRM nn. 314-315 to allow it on the main sanctuary, even on an old altar, as a first option ahead of a side chapel — an amelioration.

OTHER POSITIVE RECOMMENDATIONS

- Really sacred music and Gregorian Chant — our people's Missals have chant in English and Latin;
- Balance vernacular with some Latin [comment: ditto];
- vestments for all on the sanctuary;
- sense of Adoration, silence, kneeling;
- no mobile phones or cameras in sacristy or on sanctuary.

Finally, read Cardinal Sarah's *God or nothing*.

Father James Tierney