

Saint Charles Borromeo Seminary  
Overbrook

**Bishop, Priest, or Presider:  
A Historical and Theological Survey of the Chair**

A Thesis Submitted to  
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by  
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## Abbreviations

|      |   |
|------|---|
| CE   | <i>Caeremoniale Episcoporum</i>               |
| DOTL | Documents on the Liturgy                      |
| GIRM | General Instruction of the Roman Missal       |
| LG   | <i>Lumen gentium</i>                          |
| PO   | <i>Presbyterorum ordinis</i>                  |
| RG   | <i>Rubricae generales Missalis Romani</i>     |
| RS   | <i>Ritus servandus in celebratione Missae</i> |
| SC   | <i>Sacrosanctum Concilium</i>                 |
| SRC  | Decree of the <i>Sacra Rituum Congregatio</i> |

## 1 Introduction

“Together with the altar and ambo, the celebrant’s chair is considered one of the three principle liturgical furnishings in the sanctuary of every Catholic church,” begins Dr. Denis McNamara in an article dedicated to the “role of the celebrant’s chair in the life of the church.”<sup>1</sup> McNamara, respected Associate Director of the Liturgical Institute at Mundelein Seminary, goes on to describe the theological significance of the celebrant’s chair in the Sacred Liturgy according to the notion of “presiding,” which he deems to be “the Liturgical Movement’s theologically rich word for the nature of priestly activity.”<sup>2</sup> Yet as beautiful as Dr. McNamara’s exposition is, it is presented with little historical context. It may surprise many readers to learn that the appearance of the ubiquitous *presider’s chair* in our churches following the postconciliar reforms of the Liturgy might easily be considered an innovation. In addition to providing a place for the celebrant to sit, the design, location, ritual use, and provenance of these furnishings underscores significant changes in the structure of the rite of the Church in the Latin West as well as shifts in theological perspectives concerning the role of the priest at Mass.

McNamara draws heavily on the relationship between the presider’s chair and the Bishop’s *cathedra* to paint a fuller theology of the “chair.” Indeed, the former’s relation to the latter plays a significant role in communicating the theological relationship between the priest and the Bishop inbuilt and ritually expressed in the Roman Rite. But the rapid appearance of the presider’s chair in our sanctuaries means that this relationship has been recently reconsidered, at least ritualistically. And in the absence of much authoritative teaching on the role of the chair

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1. Denis R. McNamara, “That Other ‘Seat of Wisdom’ - The Role of the Celebrant's Chair in the Life of the Church,” *Adoremus* (blog), March 11, 2017, <https://adoremus.org/2017/03/seat-wisdom-role-celebrants-chair-life-church/>.

2. *Ibid.*

since its debut beyond simple rubrics, any theologizing regarding its meaning requires either heavy research or heavy speculation. Dr. McNamara's confident explanation, therefore, may prove overly ambitious.

### 1.1 *Status quaestionis*

While it may appear too zealous to ascribe such significance to something as commonplace as a chair, one needs only to recall that the Catholic Church sets aside an entire liturgical day (and, until the reform of the Roman Calendar, two days) in honor of the chair of Saint Peter. Of course, this feast is focused on honoring not a specific piece of furniture alone, but, rather, who was believed to have sat and reigned from said chair. The relationship between Peter and his chair is important, and so too the connection between the presider's chair and he who sits upon it. By looking at the former we will better understand the latter.

Dr. McNamara's brief commentary is useful and may accurately paint the theological picture that the reformers wished to communicate with their decision to introduce the presider's chair into our sanctuaries. Unfortunately, however, little information is available as to what their intentions were and even less has been written about the topic of the presider's chair since the reforms. Stephen Schloeder treats the chair briefly in his work, *Architecture in Communion: Implementing the Second Vatican Council through Liturgy and Architecture*. He, like McNamara, connects the presider's chair to the *cathedra*:

Recently, the importance of the celebrant's chair has been emphasized, perhaps to clarify the distinction between the ministerial priesthood and the lay priesthood expressed in the idea of the people of God. The priest's chair is derived from the *cathedra* and likewise is given a place of importance so that "the celebrant when seated should appear as truly presiding over the whole gathering."<sup>3</sup>

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3. Steven J. Schloeder, *Architecture in Communion: Implementing the Second Vatican Council through Liturgy and Architecture* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press), 1998, 88.

However, in what is perhaps a more honest treatment, he adds, “There is still more work to be done in considering the seating for the ordained ministers, and, while the present guidelines are to be respected and followed, the issue deserves further consideration by the appropriate authorities so that the symbolic statement can more accurately reflect the intended message.”<sup>4</sup>

## **1.2 Intention of Paper**

Keenly aware of the need for said further consideration, I intend to offer a theological and historical investigation of the priest as *presider* vis-à-vis the phenomenon of the *presider’s chair*. This will include a historical survey of the development of the Roman Rite in regard to ritual posture and sanctuary design; an exploration of the post-conciliar reforms that produced the Ordinary Form of the Roman Rite and, with it, the presider’s chair; and a brief theological commentary on the distinction of priestly and episcopal orders so as to ascertain to what extent the current arrangement illuminates or obfuscates this distinction.

## **2 Historical Development of Posture in the Roman Rite**

Before examining the current arrangement, it is first necessary to explore the historical development of the Roman Mass and to what extent the rites called for the celebrant to sit. This investigation is limited to the sanctuary, as postures for the faithful were not rubricized until recently and, while the congregation would also sit for portions of the Mass, standing was the normative posture for the laity at least until the Middle Ages. Rather than repeatedly introducing new vocabulary, this section will make use of anachronistic, liturgical nomenclature where needed. While some ritual actions may not have been originally known under these names, their

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4. Schloeder, 88.

ritual identity is the same, e.g., “Offertory” for the preparation rituals after the Liturgy of the Word, “Postcommunion” for the final oration of the Mass, etc. Further, while the Roman Rite encompasses a large family of rituals (e.g., the Divine Office, the various Sacraments), the focus of this study will be the Holy Mass.

## 2.1 Early Liturgies

The earliest Eucharistic liturgies, or Masses, as they are now commonly referred to in the Latin Church, were not offered by priests, or *presbyters*, but by the Bishop of a local church. The local clergy of these churches, analogous to today’s dioceses, would join their Bishop for the weekly celebration of the Lord’s Supper. Insofar as priests participated, these liturgies would be considered concelebrations in the general sense and the importance of the Bishop as high priest was a focus of these early liturgies: “The unity of the Church as expressed in the one altar, one bishop and one sacrifice was ... a favourite theme of St. Ignatius of Antioch (d. c. 107)...”<sup>5</sup> While theologians debate whether these were “sacramental concelebrations,” wherein the priests, vested and surrounding their Bishop, actually took part in co-consecrating the species, overwhelming evidence indicates, rather, a “ritualistic” concelebration that involved ritualistic cooperation but *no* co-consecration. The answer to this *dubium* is not germane to this paper, but it is true that sacramental concelebration was not completely unknown in the West, at least at papal liturgies in Rome.

Regardless, the unity of the local Bishop and his clergy was on display at these early celebrations, a time when Mass offered by a priest apart from his Bishop was likely rare, something that continued in the West beyond the first centuries of the Church:

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5. Archdale A. King, *Concelebration in the Christian Church* (London: A. R. Mowbray & Co., 1966), 6.



The conception of the one Mass at the one altar was so inherent in fifth-century thought that St. Leo the Great (d. 441) had found it necessary to write to Dioscorus, patriarch of Alexandria, to tell him that pastoral considerations made it perfectly legitimate for a priest to offer a Mass for those who had been unable to attend the bishop's Mass.<sup>6</sup>

At these episcopal, or *pontifical*, liturgies, the celebrating Bishop was periodically seated along with his clergymen. An early Church order text, the *Didascalia Apostolorum*, self-attributed to the Apostles, but which scholars date from the third century, attests to this: "For thus it is required that the presbyters shall sit in the eastern part of the house with the bishops..."<sup>7</sup> As Fortescue notes, liturgical practices throughout the first three centuries of the Church were all based around "a practically universal, but still vague, rite used at least in all the chief centres [sic]..." He continues, "From the fourth century this older fluid rite is crystallized into four parent liturgies, those of Antioch, Alexandria, Rome and Gaul. All others are developments of these types."<sup>8</sup>

## 2.2 Roman Stational Services

As one traces the development of the Roman Rite, the Roman stational services of the seventh century become an important fixed point of reference. This is for two reasons, as the Reverend Joseph Jungmann, S.J. notes, firstly, because "the service achieved a moment of stability, when all its component elements were set down in writing ... and secondly, by the very fact that this solemn service was written down in a definite and determined form and thus could easily be transmitted to other territories."<sup>9</sup> The liturgical books which were written during this

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6. King, 20.

7. *Didascalia Apostolorum*, quoted in (and translated by) Marcel Metzgar, *History of the Liturgy: The Major Stages* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1997), 39.

8. Adrian Fortescue, *The Mass* (1912; repr., Albany, NY: Preserving Christian Publications, 1999), 108.

9. Joseph A. Jungmann, *The Mass of the Roman Rite* (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1959), 52.

period are known as the *Ordines Romani*, which were critically compiled by Michel Andrieu in the early twentieth century and give insight into subsequent liturgies: “The result of his life’s work is set out in his monumental critical edition of the Ordines... From the way Andrieu had chosen to arrange the texts in his edition, we can get a clear picture of all those matters for which the Roman *libelli* and their immediate successors made regulations.”<sup>10</sup> While the original *Ordines* were “copied over and over again, especially in places other than the Eternal City” and “resulted in frequent alterations of the original text,” they nevertheless serve as a critical touchstone for studying the rite of Rome.<sup>11</sup>

According to *Ordines I-X*, those dealing with Masses celebrated by the Pope, a *cathedra* located in the center of the apse, was employed in the following way:

1. The Pope moves to the *cathedra* after reverencing the altar for the *Kyrie* and remains there, standing and facing East, for its duration; the *Gloria* (if called for), facing East; the greeting, facing the people; and the opening Collect, facing East.
2. The Pope remains at the *cathedra*, seated, for the chanting of the Epistle, Gradual, Tract, Alleluia, etc., and, standing, for the Gospel.
3. After the offertory collection and procession, the Pope remains at the *cathedra*, seated, for the preparation portion of the Offertory and then proceeds to the altar.<sup>12</sup>

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10. Theodor Klauser, *A Short History of the Western Liturgy: An Account and Some Reflections*, 2nd ed., trans. John Halliburton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 59.

11. Ibid.

12. Klauser, in *A Short History*, 60, reports that the Pope took part in the collection of gifts from the aristocracy but, unlike Jungmann, Klauser makes no mention of the Pope sitting during the Offertory. It stands to reason that he could have returned to the throne after the collection and approached the altar once it was prepared. Jungmann makes specific mention of his sitting during the first portion of the offertory, viz., the preparation of the altar.

4. The Pope returns to the *cathedra* immediately after the fraction rite and communicates there; after the distribution of Communion, the Pope prays the Postcommunion oration at the altar, not the *cathedra*.<sup>13</sup>

### 2.3 The Mass of a Priest

While Christianity came into being as an urban religion, the growth of the worshipping community within the city and the need for worship outside its walls undoubtedly arose at some early point in history. The first issue is attested to in a second century letter of St. Ignatius to the Smyrnaeans, as Metzger explains, "...with the growth of communities and the multiplication of churches, presbyters were more and more often called upon to preside at the Eucharist in places where the bishop could not be present. ... The same letter of Ignatius already mentioned that a delegate of the bishop presided at the Eucharist."<sup>14</sup>

The second issue is attested in the context of the *fermentum*, i.e., the practice whereby a fragment of the Eucharist from the Mass of the Bishop was brought to churches within the city walls who celebrated Mass with a priest. Here a distinction is drawn between "two kinds of churches: those inside the walls of Rome, called 'titles,' and those outside the walls of the city, in the cemeteries ... and in the country."<sup>15</sup> In a fifth century letter, Pope Innocent I addresses whether the *fermentum* should be extended to distant parishes within the diocese. He responds, "I do not think that this practice should be adopted in the rural regions of the diocese because the sacrament should not be carried any great distance. For our part, we do not send the *fermentum*

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13. Klauser, 63; Jungmann, 55.

14. Metzger, 79-80.

15. Ibid., 84.

to the priests appointed to the churches established in cemeteries.”<sup>16</sup> *Fermentum* or not, it is clear that priests, not only bishops, were celebrating the Eucharist both within and without the city walls early in the history of the liturgy.

### 2.3.1 *Missa Sollemnis*

The Roman *Ordines* provide additional context for the historical development of the Roman Liturgy insofar as these papal stational services would become the basis for broader development of the Rite. Due in part to the availability of these written rituals, a logic began to form whereby stational Masses offered by anyone other than the Pope followed the same pattern enumerated in the *Ordines* but with certain adaptations:

In fact, one Roman insertion suggests that bishops should perform everything the Pope does, and that the bishop who replaces the Pope at the Roman stational service has only a few changes to make. This latter direction, it goes on to say, also holds good for a presbyter who offers the stational Mass, aside from the rule that he might not intone the *Gloria* except on Easter.<sup>17</sup>

As it has been established, in antiquity, the Bishop celebrated Mass with his clergy present, a schema which continued into the Romanization of the Mass. This Bishop’s Mass, or *pontifical* Mass, therefore, sees the local Bishop offering Mass alongside his clergy with the papal ritual as its basis and according to this logic. It follows, then, that when a priest carried out the ritual duties in place of a Bishop he did so with some additional modifications. Jungmann, above, continues, “It did not require any bold exegesis to turn this slight suggestion into a definite direction for every case when a priest had to conduct a solemn service in larger surrounds...”<sup>18</sup>

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16. Innocent I, *Letter to Decentius*, 27-29, quoted in Metzger, 84.

17. Jungmann, 150.

18. *Ibid.*

What is described here is the shape of the Roman Solemn Mass, or *Missa Sollemnis*, offered by a priest. Jungmann notes that, “the solemn high Mass of a simple priest, which one might well have expected would be explained as an elaborate growth of the presbyter Mass, proves rather to be a late simplification of the pontifical service.”<sup>19</sup> From this seed blooms the modern, preconciliar Solemn (High) Mass. In it there is an intelligibility which only comes to light when one understands the pontifical (and papal) rites from which it developed. Note that this logic pervades the preconciliar Roman Mass: the simplest form of Mass is always to be understood, in part, as a simplification of the most elaborate forms; the Low Mass only makes sense in light of the Solemn Mass; the Solemn Mass of a priest in light of the Solemn Mass of a Bishop.

### **2.3.2 Presbyter Mass**

Jungmann points out another form of Mass celebrated by priests which had a quasi-parallel development with the *Missa Sollemnis* in response to the needs of remote “parish” churches, spread beyond the walls of the city, which gave rise to permissions for priests to offer Mass on their own when they and their people could not attend the Mass of the Bishop, especially when these fell on Sundays: “This was the Mass of the presbyter, which we must look upon as the second original basic type for the celebration of Mass, a type which survives in the [preconciliar] *missa cantata*, the simple sung Mass.”<sup>20</sup> He notes that although little was written of the presbyter Mass, due to its comparative simplicity in relation to the directives of the Roman *Ordines*, it utilized, besides the priest, “a second cleric ... as a rule” who was typically a

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19. Jungmann, 149.

20. Jungmann, 153.

deacon.<sup>21</sup> Although this Mass was much simpler, the aforementioned logic of the Roman Rite applied, as it was “subject to the trend of borrowing as much as possible from the episcopal service.”<sup>22</sup> With this, it must be noted that although the preconciliar Solemn Mass and sung Mass have their roots in two parallelly developed liturgies, both draw from the pontifical liturgy as their reference point.

### 2.3.3 Posture of the Priest

While scant evidence may be available as to the exact order of Mass followed in any of these *priestly* liturgies, enough is available to extract information pertaining to the posture of sitting, particularly in contrast to the practice of the Bishop. Of the preconciliar Roman Rite in general, Jungmann notes:

Just as the bishop during the fore-Mass takes his place at his *cathedra*, so one who does not use a *cathedra* should take his place at the right side of the altar, according to an old rule that goes back to the old Roman stational arrangements. Here he should stay till the choir finishes singing the introit, and even for everything which he himself sings or says right up to the Epistle. The exception, which came in only gradually, was the practice of transferring *Kyrie*, *Gloria*, and *Dominus vobiscum* to the center of the altar.<sup>23</sup>

Here, fore-Mass refers to the portion of the Mass prior to the Offertory (the Mass of Catechumens, analogous now to the Liturgy of the Word). This contrasts from the stational service directive whereby the Pope returns to the *cathedra* after reverencing the altar. He stays there throughout the *Kyrie*, etc., and even prays the Collect there, as mentioned in section 2.2. Therefore, the “old rule” which restricts the priest to the altar because he does not make use of a

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21. It is interesting to note that while Jungmann sees the Presbyter Mass as surviving in the sung Masses of his day, the reforms following the Second Vatican Council restored the use of the deacon without a subdeacon and, in effect, brought the *presbyter* Mass back to life as the normative postconciliar Mass.

22. Jungmann, 155.

23. *Ibid.*, 222.

*cathedra* is critical. When it is considered that the Pope prayed the closing oration (Postcommunion) at the altar in the stational service, there is no reason to believe that the priest would not do the same. And, indeed, in the Roman Rite's preconciliar usage, the Bishop and priest do likewise.

It is possible that this rule applies not to the altar itself but to a faldstool set up on the Epistle side of the altar, as was done for lesser prelates even before the Second Vatican Council, but that Jungmann notes that the *Kyrie*, etc. was eventually transferred to the center of the altar would suggest otherwise, considering the priest would need to go to the faldstool after reverencing the altar, pray the Introit, and immediately return to the altar for the *Kyrie*, etc. Furthermore, with the *Dominus vobiscum* eventually transferred to the center of the altar, it stands to reason that the Collect which followed it was prayed at the Epistle side, just as in the preconciliar rite—it would be extreme to greet the people at the altar and then go to the faldstool for the Collect.

## **2.4 Charlemagne to Trent**

In the next major stage of development, the Roman liturgical books are disseminated throughout the Holy Roman Empire, a process which sees the pure Roman Liturgy embellished with elements from Frankish and Gallican rites. While this presents a fascinating period for liturgical scholars, it will suffice to make only a few comments for the purpose of this exploration. Fortescue notes that this next stage is “the gradual supplanting of the Gallican rite by that of Rome throughout the West,” a process that begun “long before the time of Charles the Great,” insofar as Roman books and rituals, adapted to local use, were to be found in various

places from the sixth to the eighth century.<sup>24</sup> Charlemagne furthered the spread of the Roman Liturgy, a process inaugurated by Pippin the Short in the mid-eighth century, as he was “anxious to have uniformity in his kingdom and chose for its basis the Roman Rite:”<sup>25</sup>

Charlemagne asked Pope Hadrian (722-795) to send him a purely Roman sacramentary (collection of Mass formularies). The request was granted only after a certain delay. The pope sent a version of the sacramentary called “Gregorian”—although it was put together after the time of Gregory the Great (590-604). The book was placed in the library of the royal palace in Aachen in order to serve as a model. It was copied immediately by many scribes and diffused throughout the Carolingian Empire.<sup>26</sup>

It is during this time, Metzger notes, that written liturgical sources replaced oral traditions: “By imposing a written work, which had come from elsewhere, Charlemagne and his advisers made the book the obligatory reference and the norm for future times.”<sup>27</sup> From this period emerges a Roman Rite that has traveled the kingdom and bears the marks from its journey. The liturgical books made their way back to Rome over the centuries and returned with Gallican flourishes previously unknown and “there displaced the pure Roman Sacramentary;”<sup>28</sup> it is posited that this period of development ends with the *Missale Romanum Lateranense* of the eleventh century.<sup>29</sup>

Fortescue notes that these “Gallican,” non-Roman, influences (foreign additions “not to be understood as meaning that they are all taken from the old Gallican rite”) are “the decorative processions, blessings, and much of the Holy Week ritual.”<sup>30</sup> Later additions also include the

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24. Fortescue, 177.

25. Ibid., 178.

26. Metzger, 116.

27. Ibid., 118.

28. Fortescue, 182.

29. Archdale A. King, *Liturgy of the Roman Church*, (Milwaukee, WI: Bruce, 1957), 36; Fortescue, 182.

30. Fortescue, 182.



Prayers at the Foot of the Altar, the *Gloria* at all Masses, the Creed, the Offertory Prayers and *Lavabo*, the *Placeat*,<sup>31</sup> the blessing at the end of Mass, and the Last Gospel. Little will change following further dissemination of the Roman Rite save local variations, orations, and devotions. With this, the Roman Rite enters a period of stability. The medieval period is then seen as a period of liturgical decline and will be met with complete liturgical uniformity achieved by the reforms of Pope Pius V at Trent:

The bull *Quo primum tempore* [1570] announced the appearance of a new missal, reformed ‘according to the custom and rite of the holy fathers,’ which was declared to be obligatory henceforth for all the priests of the Roman rite, unless they were following a liturgy which had been in continuous use for at least 200 years. The aim of the reform was a return to Roman simplicity, although humanism set its mark on the book in the correction and refinement of words and phrases, as well as by the introduction of the four Greek doctors into the calendar.<sup>32</sup>

Fascinatingly, the liturgy imposed at Trent, while subject to various minor reforms,<sup>33</sup> will see little overall modification up to the contemporary preconciliar period and from the time of the pure Roman Mass, the Roman core of the liturgy remained constant and, therefore, the postures assumed at various points in the liturgy are likewise unaffected in principle.

## 2.5 Extraordinary Form of the Roman Rite

Until the reforms of the Second Vatican Council, the Roman Liturgy had seen growth and adaptation, but these were relatively organic.<sup>34</sup> Because of this, and in part due to the

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31. In the preconciliar usage, the *Placeat* is the prayer said by the priest at the altar after the *Ite* and before the blessing in which the priest asks the Holy Trinity to accept the Mass just offered both for his good and the good of those for whom he has offered it. It was added by Pius V in his missal of 1570.

32. King, *Liturgy*, 43.

33. King (44-45) notes the following: revisions under Clement VIII (1592-1605) and Urban VIII (1623-44) which simplified rubrics, a revision under Leo XIII (1878-1903) which simplified the calendar, the reforms inaugurated by Pius X (1903-1914) with a focus on restoring the Sunday liturgy to its primacy of place. At the time of his writing, the pontificate of Pius XII was underway with some of his liturgical changes having taken effect.

34. For a work devoted to demonstrating this development see Alcuin Reid, O.S.B., *The Organic Development of the Liturgy* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005).

uniformity imposed at Trent, the Mass as it will come to exist in the typical edition of the 1962 Roman Missal becomes an indisputable point of reference. The reasons for this are threefold. Firstly, while this Mass is not identical to the pure Roman Mass of the station services, its intelligible Roman core is preserved throughout all its travels and accretions. Secondly, while the books of 1962 are not identical to those codified by Pius V at Trent, subsequent reforms and modifications were minimal compared to the preserved whole. Of note are the reforms of Pius XII, which include the revised Holy Week of 1955<sup>35</sup> and the reforms of John XXIII promulgated in 1960<sup>36</sup> which include the simplification of the calendar and the simplification of rubrics.

Thirdly, the modifications to the Roman Liturgy after the Second Vatican Council were carried out by a novel process, viz. that of liturgical committees. Consequently, these reforms caused the books of 1962 (now known as the Extraordinary Form of the Roman Rite) to be a liturgical monument which connects the contemporary Church to the organic descendant of the classical Roman Rite. While the Ordinary Form of the Roman Rite (the typical edition promulgated after the council) is certainly Roman, its identity is something of a bestowed title rather than an inherited one:

J.A. Jungmann ... defined the liturgy of his time, such as it could be understood in light of historical research, as a "liturgy which is the fruit of development" .... What happened after the Council was something else entirely: in the place of liturgy as the fruit of development came fabricated liturgy. We abandoned the organic, living process of growth and development over centuries, and replaced it—as in a manufacturing process—with a fabrication, a banal on-the-spot product.<sup>37</sup>

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35. Pius XII, *Maxima Redemptionis nostrae mysteria* (November 16, 1955).

36. These changes to the rubrics in 1960 were extensive when compared to the previous centuries of modifications. For this reason, some traditional groups argue for a return to the pre-1955 rites, thus avoiding the Holy Week changes as well as John XXIII's reforms. While the rubrical changes were considerable, they do not alter the Order of the Mass itself. Any significant discrepancies germane to this study will be noted where applicable. John XXIII, *Rubricum instructum* (July 25, 1960).

37. Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, from the preface to the French edition of Klaus Gamber, *The Reform of the Roman Liturgy: Its Problems and Backgrounds*, trans. Klaus D. Grimm, (Fort Collins, CO: Roman Catholic Books, 1993).

The intention of this study is not, of course, a sweeping critique of postconciliar liturgy, but it stands to reason that the unique circumstances from which the postconciliar Mass sprung forth make the Extraordinary Form an indispensable point of reference.

### 2.5.1 Posture of the Bishop

In a pontifical Extraordinary Form Mass, a distinction is made ritualistically whether Mass is offered at “the throne” versus “the faldstool” (the rubrical and historic aspects of these types of furniture will be discussed later). The throne is the privilege of an ordinary anywhere where has jurisdiction; the faldstool, where he does not have jurisdiction or when a higher prelate is present. Besides where he sits, are no ritual differences in these two types of Masses in the posture of the Bishop. The main difference is that the throne (whether fixed, as the *cathedra*, or portable) is placed on the Gospel side of the sanctuary, opposite the *sedilia*, whereas the faldstool is set up on the Epistle side of the sanctuary, facing the people.

Regardless of whether a pontifical Mass is at the throne or faldstool, the Bishop carries out the following ritual actions in the following locations (exclusive of the vesting rites, the Prayers at the Foot of the Altar, and the Last Gospel; here “throne” will be used to denote either throne or faldstool). The Bishop:<sup>38</sup>

1. reverences the **altar** and book of the Gospels, incenses the **altar**, and is incensed at the **altar**
2. goes to the **throne** where he reads the Introit, recites the *Kyrie* with those around him (he may sit after if the sung *Kyrie* is long), intones the *Gloria* facing the altar, and recites it with those around him (then sits)

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38. Adrian Fortescue, J.B. O'Connell, and Alcuin Reid, *The Ceremonies of the Roman Rite Described*, 15th ed. (London: Bloomsbury, 2009), 209-225.

3. stands at the **throne** to greet the people, facing them, (“*Pax vobis*”), then sings the Collect(s) facing the altar
4. sits at the **throne** during the Epistle, while he blesses the subdeacon after, while reading the Gradual and Alleluia, (or Tract or Sequence), and for the blessing of incense and the deacon before the Gospel
5. stands at the **throne** during the singing of the Gospel, while kissing the book of the Gospels, and while being incensed after it has been sung
6. sits at the **throne** to preach (a faldstool can be set up for this even at Masses at the throne) or while someone else preaches
7. intones the Creed at the **throne**, standing and facing the altar, recites it, and sits when finished (while he is seated the deacon takes the corporal to the altar in its burse and spreads it on the *mensa*)
8. stands at the **throne** to greet the people, facing them, (“*Dominus vobiscum*”), sings *Oremus*, facing the altar, recites the Offertory antiphon, and sits after to have his gloves removed and hands washed
9. goes to the **altar** for the Offertory and remains there for the Canon, Communion, the hand washing after Communion, the recitation of the Communion antiphon, the greeting of the people (*Dominus vobiscum*, facing the people, at the center of the altar) and the singing of the Postcommunion prayer(s) (Epistle side), the *Ite*, the *Placeat*, and the blessing

Of note in the pontifical rituals are elements that were present in the Roman stationary Masses, e.g., the orientation of prayer at the throne, the reverencing of the book of the Gospels at the

beginning of Mass, and the concluding prayers and blessing taking place at the altar rather than the throne.

### **2.5.2 Posture of the Priest**

Compared to the pontifical rite, Solemn Mass offered by a priest according to the 1962 Missal is simplified and the liturgical action is now focused at the altar where the priest celebrant carries out the following ritual actions:<sup>39</sup>

1. reciting the Introit privately (Epistle side) during/after its chanting by the choir
2. reciting the *Kyrie* privately with the deacon and subdeacon (Epistle side) during/after its chanting by the choir (and people)
3. intoning the *Gloria* and reciting it privately with the deacon and subdeacon (center)
4. singing the greeting (“*Dominus vobiscum;*” center) and Collect(s) (Epistle side)
5. listening to the Gospel, which is chanted by the deacon facing north in the sanctuary beyond the Gospel side; the celebrant stands at Epistle side, facing the deacon
6. intoning the Creed and reciting it privately with the deacon and subdeacon (center)
7. the Offertory and Canon
8. reciting the Communion antiphon privately during/after its chanting by the choir (Epistle side)
9. singing the greeting (“*Dominus vobiscum;*” center) and Postcommunion (Epistle side)
10. singing the *Ite*, the *Placeat*, and the blessing (center)

The rubrics also see the priest seated at a *sedilia*—a bench for the priest which will be explored in greater detail later—for the following:

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39. Fortescue, *Ceremonies*, 142-156.

1. the *Kyrie* and/or *Gloria* if the length of the sung pieces demands it (after his private recitation has been completed)
2. Epistle (the Epistle is chanted by the subdeacon facing East or West, *versus populum*); meanwhile, the celebrant is seated<sup>40</sup>
3. the Gradual if the length of the sung piece demands it<sup>41</sup>
4. the Sequence [if there is one] if the length of the sung piece demands it (after his private recitation has been completed)
5. the Creed (after his private recitation has been completed); while the priest celebrant is seated, the deacon brings the corporal to the altar in its burse and spreads it on the *mensa*

Numbers 1, 4, and 5 are derived from the following rubric from the *Rubricae Generales Missalis*

*Romani*:

523. In a solemn Mass the celebrant may sit between the deacon and the subdeacon near the altar at the epistle side while the *Kyrie, eleison, the Gloria in excelsis, the sequence and the Credo* are being sung. The rest of the time he stands at the altar, or genuflects, as above. These rules apply also to a sung Mass that is not solemn.<sup>42</sup>

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40. This was a change from previous practice since the time of Pius V, at least, whereby, the priest celebrant read both the Epistle and Gospel privately while they were being sung. The revised rubrics indicate that the celebrant “omits what is pronounced by the sacred ministers or by a lector (*omittit ea quae ministris sacris vel a lectore proferuntur*).” “Rubricae generalis,” *Missale Romanum* (1962) IX, 513. The *Ritus servandus* was likewise updated, now calling for the priest to “sit and listen (*quam celebrans sedens auscultate*)” rather than standing at the altar with the deacon at his right, reciting the Gospel in a low voice (“*quam celebrans interim submissa voce legit, assistente sibi Diacono a dextris*”). “Ritus servandus,” *Missale Romanum* (1962) VI, 4; SRC 9, 6 as in *Decreta Authentica Congregationis Sacrorum Rituum*, vol. 1 (Rome: Typographia Polyglotta S.C. de Propaganda Fide, 1898). He had been permitted to sit after finishing reading the Epistle.

41. SRC 9, 6 as in *Decreta Authentica*, vol. 1.

42. “In Missa solemnī celebrans, medius inter diaconum et subdiaconum, sedere potest ad latus Epistolae, iuxta altare, dum cantantur Kyrie, eleison, Glória in excelsis, sequentia et Credo; alio tempore stat ad altare, vel genuflectit, ut supra. Haec valent quoque in Missa cantata.” Trans. Kevin R. Seasoltz, *The New Liturgy: A Documentation* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1965), 381.

Notably, the use of the *sedilia* by the priest in the Extraordinary Form is relegated to practical purposes only, viz., the accommodation of longer chanted or polyphonic pieces. No liturgical action takes place at it.

A strict distinction is made between Solemn Mass and Low Mass. The Solemn Mass is of greater interest to this investigation because the Low Mass is a more simplified form of the rite. Nevertheless, for the purpose of comparison, here is listed the ritual actions at the altar at Low Mass (exclusive of the Prayers at the Foot of the Altar and Last Gospel):<sup>43</sup>

1. Introit (Epistle side), the *Kyrie* and *Gloria* (center)
2. greeting (“*Dominus vobiscum;*” center) and Collect(s) (Epistle side)
3. Epistle (read at Epistle side)
4. Gospel (read at Gospel side)
5. Creed
6. Offertory, and Canon
7. Communion antiphon (Epistle side)
8. greeting (“*Dominus vobiscum;*” center) and Postcommunion (Epistle side)
9. *Ite, Placeat*, and blessing (center)

The rubrics do not call for sitting at Low Mass (unless for a purely practical purpose, e.g., a guest preacher).

Both Solemn and Low Mass descend from the Roman stational service with varying degrees of modification. Likewise, the sung Mass, or *Missa cantata*, which Jungmann sees as an authentic descendant of the presbyter Mass,<sup>44</sup> fits somewhere between Solemn and Low Mass

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43. Fortescue, *Ceremonies*, 68-87.

44. See section 2.3.2.

ritualistically. For the priest celebrant, the postures at it are similar to that of Solemn Mass, save the Epistle and the Gospel, which has the priest celebrant proclaims at the altar as at Low Mass.

## 2.6 Interim Period

After the promulgation of *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, a group known as the *Consilium* for the Implementation of Constitution on the Liturgy was established to reform the liturgy and produce the new Order of the Mass<sup>45</sup> under the leadership of its secretary Annibale Bugnini. This group would go on to produce the *Ordo Missae* of 1970, or the Ordinary Form of the Roman Rite, as it has now come to be known. The release of this typical edition of the Roman Missal made the Ordinary Form obligatory for the Latin Church. It has since been followed by two subsequent typical editions in 1975 and 2002.

However, this marked the culmination of an “interim period” during which the *Consilium* introduced successive changes to the Order of Mass. These were enacted by virtue of two major decrees in 1965 and 1967: *Inter Oecumenici* and *Tres abhinc annos*, respectively. The first modified the typical edition of the 1962 Missal which had itself realized John XXIII’s revised Code of Rubrics of 1960. It called for several changes which were themselves realized and augmented in the transitional 1965 *Ordo Missae*. Firstly, all recitation by the priest celebrant of prayers that were being sung or read by another minister or the choir was eliminated:

32. Parts belonging to the choir or to the people and sung or recited by them are not said privately by the celebrant. ...

33. Nor are readings that are read or sung by the appropriate minister said privately by the celebrant.<sup>46</sup> ...

48a. The celebrant is not to say privately those parts of the Proper sung or recited by the choir or the congregation. ...

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45. Vatican Council II, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (December 4, 1963), §58.

46. This instruction seems redundant, given John XXIII’s earlier revision.



48b. The celebrant may sing or recite the parts of the Ordinary together with the congregation nor choir.<sup>47</sup>

Now that the priest celebrant was no longer to recite the Epistle, Gradual, *Alleluia*, etc., he is directed to stay at the chair for their duration. He is also permitted to lead the restored Universal Prayer at the chair. This change appears to be the first to introduce any regular liturgical action at the chair for the priest at Holy Mass.<sup>48</sup>

52a. In solemn Masses the celebrant sits and listens to the lessons, the epistle, and chants. After singing or reading the epistle, the subdeacon goes to the celebrant for the blessing. **At this point the celebrant, remaining seated, puts incense into the thurible and blesses it.** During the singing of the *Alleluia* and verse or toward the end of other chants after the epistle, the celebrant rises to bless the deacon. From his place he listens to the gospel, kisses the Book of the Gospels, and, after the homily, **intones the Credo**, when prescribed. At the end of the *Credo* he returns to the altar with the ministers, unless he is to lead the prayer of the faithful. ...

52b. The celebrant follows the same procedure in sung or recited Masses in which the lessons, epistle, intervening chants, and the gospel are sung or recited by the minister mentioned in no. 50 [a qualified reader or server]. ...

56. In places where the universal prayer or prayer of the faithful is already the custom, it shall take place before the offertory, after the *Oremus*, and, for the time being, with formularies in use in individual regions. **The celebrant is to lead the prayer at either his chair**, the altar, the lectern, or the edge of the sanctuary.<sup>49</sup> (emphasis added)

Lastly, the following directives are given for the layout of the church building:

92. In relation to the plan of the church, the chair for the celebrant and ministers should occupy a place that is clearly visible to all the faithful and that makes it plain that the celebrant presides over the whole community.

Should the chair stand behind the altar, any semblance of a throne, the prerogative of a bishop, is to be avoided.<sup>50</sup>

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47. *Inter Oecumenici*, International Commission on English in the Liturgy, *Documents on the Liturgy: 1963-1979* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1982), 94.

48. The Holy Week reforms of Pius XII contained some ritual action at the *sedilia* on Good Friday.

49. *IO*, 94.

50. *Ibid.*, 98.

This indicates that some liturgical action was not merely being transferred to the priest's bench, but a new design for the sanctuary was being put forth containing a new piece of furniture: the presider's chair.

Although *Inter Oecumenici* never specified a change in location for the Introit, *Kyrie*, and *Gloria*, the 1965 *Ordo* preferred that they be said at the chair: "In sung Masses and in recited Masses celebrated with the people, after kissing the altar or its incensation, the celebrant goes to the chair, unless, according to the disposition of each church, it is seen more suitable to remain at the altar up to the prayer, inclusive."<sup>51</sup> and, for Solemn Masses, "The incensation having finished, the celebrant with the ministers [deacon and subdeacon] go to the chair, and, the *Kyrie* having been sung, intones the *Gloria*, not saying it privately, but sings it with the people or the schola."<sup>52</sup> It seems indisputable that the introduction of the presider's chair was no afterthought in the postconciliar reforms. While unearthing the reasons for this demand even more focused research, a *dubium* and its response from 1966 shed light on this newfound liturgical element:

Query: If the first part of the Mass is carried out at the altar, may the celebrant remain at the middle of the altar, just as the arrangement is for the end of Mass? Reply: The right course is that churches be gradually furnished with a presidential chair, "making it plain that the celebrant presides over the whole community" (*InterOec* no. 92), and with a place for fitting proclamation of the word of God. The point is that the "intrinsic nature and purpose of the several parts of the Mass, as also the connection between them, may be more clearly manifested" (*SC* art. 50). To these requirements for the current and future reforms even the buildings for worship must be made to conform. ... If, however, the readings are done from the altar (no. 47), they may be read facing the people from one and the same side of the altar. Thereby at least some sort of distinction between the two parts of the Mass is maintained: *Not 2* (1966) 29, no. 91.<sup>53</sup>

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51. "In Missis cantatis et in Missis lectis cum populo celebratis, post osculatum altare aut ipsius incensationem, celebrans ad sedem accedit, nisi, iuxta cuiusque ecclesiae dispositionem, aptius videatur ut ad altare maneat usque ad orationem inclusive." *Ritus servandus in celebratione Missae* (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1965), 23.

52. "Incensatione peracta, celebrans cum ministris vadit ad sedem, ibique, *Kýrie* decantato, inchoat, si dicendum est, *Glória* in excelsis Deo, quod privatim non dicit, sed potest una cum populo vel schola cantare." *RS* (1965), 31.

53. International Commission on English in the Liturgy, *DOTL*, 99.

This last part, perhaps, offers some insight into the desire to introduce the presider's chair: not only to emphasize the priest as "presider," but also to more strongly distinguish between what will once again be termed the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist: "A clear and natural distinction was made between the two main parts of the Mass: the liturgy of the Word and the liturgy of the Eucharist. This distinction involved a distinction of places: the first part was to take place preferably at the celebrant's chair or the lectern, the second at the altar..."<sup>54</sup>

## 2.7 Ordinary Form of the Roman Rite

The liturgical changes of the interim period came to full maturity in the *Ordo Missae* promulgated in the Apostolic Constitution *Missale Romanum* on April 3, 1969 with the first typical edition being promulgated in 1970. This introduced a new order of Mass that, at least from the perspective of posture, sees its most novel feature in the newly created "Introductory Rites." These take the changes introduced during the interim period with respect to the beginning of Mass and melds them with a newfound Penitential Act that, with the *Kyrie*, *Gloria*, and Collect "have the character of a beginning, an introduction, and a preparation."<sup>55</sup> This comes after the veneration of the altar and its incensation and takes place entirely at the presider's chair.

Perhaps one of the greatest changes in the Ordinary Form is one which goes unnoticed by many observers, viz., the so-called "normative Mass" of the reform. From its earliest days, the various forms of the Roman Rite took as its archetype the pontifical or, more strictly speaking, papal, liturgy. The *Consilium*, however, turned this logic on its head:

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54. Annibale Bugnini, *The Reform of the Liturgy: 1948-1975*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1990), 116.

55. International Commission on English in the Liturgy, "General Instruction of the Roman Missal," *The Roman Missal English Translation According to the Third Typical Edition* (2010), 46.

The point of departure for the reform should not be “private” Mass but “Mass with a congregation”; not Mass as read but Mass with singing. But which Mass with song—the pontifical, the solemn, or the simple sung Mass? ... Given the concrete situation in the churches, the answer can only be: Mass celebrated by a priest, with a reader, servers, a choir or cantor, and a congregation. All other forms, such as pontifical Mass, solemn Mass, Mass with a deacon, will be amplifications or further simplifications of this basic Mass, which is therefore called “normative.”<sup>56</sup>

In this way, although desirous that each parish have a “full” liturgical experience at as many Masses as possible, the *Consilium* places in the history of the development of the Roman Rite a breach. From henceforth, the lesser forms of the Roman Mass are no longer derived from the most solemn, pontifical forms. These, rather, will be mere embellishments of the priest’s Mass without a deacon.

### **2.7.1 Posture of the Priest**

With that in mind, the posture of the priest, not Bishop, in the Ordinary Form will be examined first. In it, the priest celebrant carries out the following ritual actions, standing, at the chair:<sup>57</sup>

1. the Introductory Rites
  - a. the Sign of the Cross and the greeting, facing the people
  - b. the Penitential Act
  - c. reciting/singing the *Kyrie*, reciting/singing the *Gloria*
  - d. praying the Collect
2. the Homily (may optionally be preached at the chair, standing)

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56. Bugnini, *Reform of the Liturgy*, 340.

57. *GIRM*, III; “Order of Mass,” *The Roman Missal English Translation According to the Third Typical Edition* (2010).

3. reciting/singing the Creed
4. introducing and concluding the Universal Prayer
5. the Prayer after Communion, facing the people, which ends the Communion Rite
6. the Concluding Rites, facing the people
  - a. the greeting, blessing
  - b. the dismissal (or by deacon if present)

The Prayer after Communion and the Concluding Rites may also take place at the altar,<sup>58</sup> an option *not* provided for the Introductory Rites unless Mass is offered without a congregation (with only one minister): “If he wishes, the Priest may remain at the altar; in which case, the Missal is also prepared there.”<sup>59</sup> In this way, the liturgy takes a cue from the stational Masses of old and the preconciliar pontifical liturgies wherein the final action take place at the altar, not the throne/faldstool. However, the directionality of prayer at the *cathedra* from the stational services was not carried over, as the priest in the Ordinary Form is either instructed to face the people for the greetings and prayers or no indication is given. The celebrant is seated at the chair during the following:<sup>60</sup>

1. the Liturgy of the Word, for the readings, Responsorial Psalm, and homily (if another preaches)
2. after the homily for a moment of silence

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58. *Order of Mass*, 1, 139.

59. Although the *GIRM* only permits the Introductory Rites at the altar when Mass is said with only one minister (basically, private Mass with a server), daily Mass with a congregation is routinely celebrated in the United States, and likely elsewhere, at the altar due to lack of servers. While this contradicts the norms, it avoids the need to put a lectern at the chair, a practice whose merits are up for debate, but nevertheless do not find a corollary in history: solemn Vespers in the preconciliar rite are carried out at the *sedilia*, often with the use of a lectern, and pontifical liturgies always required servers to hold the book at the throne/faldstool. *GIRM*, 256.

60. *GIRM*, III.

3. the beginning of the Offertory, until the altar has been prepared sufficiently for him to approach and begin the Offertory prayers
4. after Communion for a moment of silence

The rest of the liturgical action of the Mass takes place at the altar, viz., the Liturgy of the Eucharist from the remainder of the Offertory through the distribution of Holy Communion.

### 2.7.2 Posture of the Bishop

The current pontifical rites of the Church were not fully expressed until the revised typical edition of the *Caeremoniale Episcoporum* was promulgated in 1984, completing work that had resumed in February of 1971.<sup>61</sup> An amended reprint was promulgated in 2008. Because the pontifical Mass follows upon the reforms carried out by the *Consilium* with regard to the “normative Mass,” the postures of the Bishop and priest are nearly altogether similar besides the additional pontifical rituals (e.g., standing at the chair for the veneration of the Book of the Gospels which, in the Ordinary Form, is granted to the Bishop alone, and sitting at the chair for the second washing of hands after Communion). Because of this, it is sufficient to note that the previously mentioned ritual actions and their respective postures hold for the Bishop celebrating Mass in the Ordinary Form as well.<sup>62</sup>

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61. Prior to this, the existing pontifical rites had been simplified according to the instruction *Pontificalis ritus* of 1968. C.f. Bugnini, *Reform of the Liturgy*, 821.

62. One possible objection to this is that the Bishop remains seated at the *cathedra* or chair while incense is imposed and the deacon is blessed prior to the Gospel procession whereas, in practice, priests stand for this. However, there is nothing in the current rubrics which call for the priest to stand while imposing incense and giving the blessing. Rather, it seems to have developed rather organically based on the intuition that it is the prerogative of the Bishop to carry out *any* ritual action while seated. Nevertheless, Peter Elliot in his *Ceremonies of the Modern Roman Rite: the Eucharist and the Liturgy of the Hours*, 2nd ed. calls for the priest to remain seated for both blessings. Both his suggestion and current practice are at odds with the interim directive from *IO*: “At this point the celebrant, **remaining seated**, puts incense into the thurible and blesses it. During the singing of the *Alleluia* ... the celebrant **rises** to bless the deacon. [emphasis added]” *DOTL*, 99. Additionally, only a Bishop is permitted to preach while seated.

### 3 Sanctuary Seating in the Western Church

Development of liturgical rites occurred alongside developments in the architectural layout of churches in the West including such practical elements as seating for clergy. While many have devoted themselves to an in-depth study of these developments, the present investigation will be limited to aspects that correspond to movement and posture within the sanctuary itself followed by an overview of definitions and legislation before and after the reforms of the *Consilium*.

#### 3.1 Historical Development

There is a contested and dim history of liturgical space prior to the Constantinian era, but the generally accepted trajectory is that of first gathering in homes of community members prior to the advent of Constantinian basilicas. The interim stages, L. Michael White argues, are marked by the adapted *domus ecclesiae* and, later, the *aula ecclesiae*, a more formal pre-basilical structure. As time went on, this second category, depending on the local and social circumstances, coexisted with the basilica whose “emergence ... appears to have been scattered, and often quite late ... [in] other areas of the empire, especially outlying regions of the provinces.”<sup>63</sup> In early liturgies, as it has been noted, the Bishop and priests sat in the Eastern part of the church building<sup>64</sup> and, in the *aula ecclesiae*, “such formality, combined with the articulation of space ... might lead quite naturally to further provisions for the chancel and the Bishop’s cathedra well before the advent of the basilical form.”<sup>65</sup>

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63. L. Michael White, *The Social Origins of Christian Architecture: Building God's House In the Roman World: Architectural Adaptation Among Pagan, Jews, and Christians* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1990), 24.

64. Marcel Metzgar, 39.

65. White, 138.

By the 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> century, basilicas appear to be the dominant ecclesial building style and it was in these in that the Roman Rite was born and where the Bishop, with his clergy, pontificated. As they became the building *de riguer* of Christian worship, a generalized layout began to take place:

The oldest surviving monuments are the basilicas built under Constantine, but we should remember that the interior of these buildings has been changed considerably over the centuries. Arguably, the Constantinian plan can be discerned most clearly from the Lateran basilica. Here, the bishop's *cathedra* was placed at the end of the apse, which corresponded to the seat of honor occupied by the magistrate in the secular basilicas, which were used as court or market halls ... In the early Roman basilicas, the altar stood either at the entrance to the apse or in the central nave, its sacred character being marked by its exalted position, by the steps leading up to it, and by a ciborium, a superstructure that was particularly apt to emphasize the altar's importance.<sup>66</sup>

In most of these basilicas, "a stone bench or *subsellium* was constructed on each side of the bishop's throne (*cathedra*) against the semicircular apsidal wall. This ensemble is generally referred to as the *synthronon*, a Greek word meaning 'communal seat.'"<sup>67</sup> This area behind the altar became to be known as the *presbyterium*. In some contemporary cases, the space behind the altar in larger churches is still known as such and, as in some cathedrals and larger churches, seats concelebrating priests during Mass.

This area is somewhat distinct from the clergy "choir" where those participating at Mass and other liturgies, though not functioning as sacred ministers, sat. The development of choir benches or stalls in front of the altar coincided with the increase in duties related to the Divine

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66. It is important to note that this *ciborium* likely obscured a direct view of the *cathedra* in the apse, as can still be observed in certain Roman basilicas; nor it is given that worshippers necessarily occupied the nave as they now do—certainly not the face-to-face arrangement advocated by some today. U. M. Lang, *Turning Towards the Lord: Orientation in Liturgical Prayers* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), 72-73.

67. Justin E. A. Kroesen, *Staging the Liturgy: The Medieval Altarpiece in the Iberian Peninsula*, trans. Stephen Taylor (Leuven: Peeters, 2009), 159-160.



Office as well as the reduction of numbers of sacred ministers at Mass to celebrant, deacon, and subdeacon (or celebrant and deacon):

At this point a distinction came to be made between priests directly involved in the altar ritual – the celebrant and two deacons – and those responsible for the singing of hymns and canticles. For the former, a bench or *sedilia* was placed near the altar; the area around the altar and *sedilia*, furnished for the ritual of the Eucharist, is known as the sanctuary or presbytery. The second group was accommodated in a separate ‘ante-choir’. This domain usually included two or four rows of seats facing each other on the east-west axis. Some characteristic examples are to be found in Rome, in the basilicas of Sta. Maria Antiqua (c. 700) and San Clemente (c. 1150).<sup>68</sup>

The general movement of the clergy from behind the altar, in the apse, to in front of the altar continued with the growth and development of the liturgical choir, or ante-choir, which eventually came to be enclosed or separated (often by a rood screen) from the part of the church inhabited by the laity—“the great majority of rood screens in the Europe were pulled down in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries under the influence of the Reformation and Counter Reformation ... encouraged by an endeavor to improve visibility of the administration of the Sacrament at the high altar.”<sup>69</sup> This trend also occasioned the movement of the Bishop’s fixed *cathedra* from the apse behind the altar to the choir, typically on the Gospel side, facing liturgical South.

The *genus* of ecclesial architecture developed according to a trajectory in two main *species*: that of the cathedral or collegiate church,<sup>70</sup> and that of the parish, or *rusticana*, church.<sup>71</sup> Cathedrals housed the *cathedra* of the Bishop and needed to accommodate large groups of clergy. Both cathedrals and collegiate churches needed to accommodate the clergy dedicated to

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68. Kroesen, *Staging*, 160.

69. *Ibid.*, *Staging*, 164.

70. Collegiate churches are those which house a college of canons devoted to the Divine Office but are not the seat of a diocese.

singing the hours of the Divine Office. Parish churches, on the other hand, while loosely following the architecture of the basilica model, would be typically smaller and, due to their size, it stands to reason that they were combined places of devotion and liturgical action. In such church buildings, the tabernacle, when its use became widespread at the end of the medieval period,<sup>72</sup> began to be placed in or on the main altar as the parish church had to accommodate both liturgy and private prayer and did not have the luxury of a separate chapel and altar for reservation of the Blessed Sacrament as did large basilicas. And while there was a semblance of a liturgical choir in some parish churches<sup>73</sup> they often featured only a small “sanctuary” which contained the altar and seating for the sacred ministers.

The apsidal arrangement of the *cathedra* and *subsellium* persisted until at least the eleventh century. In the middle ages, however, *sedilia* began to be literally incorporated into physical structure of parish churches, though this was not the rule and would be short lived:

Usually they [*sedilia*] are located in a niche in the wall, with the seats often separated by small columns or piers. In the late Middle Ages most *sedilia* were made of wood, common in Germany in particular. These were freestanding, generally with canopies but sometimes without. Occasionally wooden *sedilia* are part of a row of choir stalls and in that case they also have book desks.<sup>74</sup>

Throughout the post-Tridentine period, some liturgical choirs would be moved into the apse as altars again were moved forward to increase visibility, yet the place for the Bishop as well as the priest remained in front of the altar: the *sedilia* at the Epistle side and the throne at the Gospel side. In implementing the reforms of Trent in his own cathedral, Charles Borromeo moved the

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72. Joseph Braun, “Tabernacle,” *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. XIV (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1912), 424.

73. Kroesen, *Staging*, 162.

74. Justin Kroesen and Regnerus Steensma, *The Interior of the Medieval Village Church* (Louvain: Peeters, 2004), 148. The use of canopies will be later prohibited by law.

main altar to a more central position, in turn placing the liturgical choir partially behind the main altar and returning the *cathedra* to the ancient position in the center of the apse—thus recreating something of *synthronon* with choir stalls rather than benches. However, “Borromeo supplied himself with two chairs: one in the traditional position at the back of the main chapel; the other, to the left of the main altar known as a faldstool which he would use when celebrating Mass, or during his participation in a liturgical ceremony that required his presence near the altar.”<sup>75</sup> Even in restoring the use of the apsidal *cathedra*, Borromeo’s layout had a clear ante-choir for clergy during Mass and his choice to provide two chairs in his cathedral emphasizes the importance of the transverse positioning of the *cathedra*. This fore-altar seating arrangement, while not the rule, will remain common throughout the post-Tridentine era until the reforms of the Second Vatican Council.

### 3.2 Definitions and Legislation

Having arrived at the contemporary era, the following explains the four types of sanctuary seating germane to this investigation. For each, a basic definition will be presented alongside ecclesial legislation and documentation. Where applicable, a distinction will be drawn between current legislation and legislation prior to the reforms following the Second Vatican Council due to the comparative scale of the changes which ensued. This will provide a picture not only of the significance of each item in recent and current liturgical usage, but also the degree with which each was affected by the reforms of the *Consilium*.

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75. Evelyn Carole Voelker, *Charles Borromeo's Instructiones Fabricae et Supellectilis Ecclesiasticae, 1577: A Translation with Commentary and Analysis* (1976), 132. The chair used for Mass was likely not a faldstool properly speaking, but, even if not permanently fixed, a *cathedra* similar to the one in the apse: the former for Mass, the latter for the Divine Office. See section 3.2.2.

### 3.2.1 *Cathedra*

The *cathedra* is the normative chair for a bishop in his own territory. Developed from the chairs used by bishops prior to the age of the basilica, the *cathedra* has consistently been a “sign of his teaching office and pastoral power in the particular Church, and a sign also of the unity of believers in the faith that the bishop proclaims as shepherd of the Lord’s flock.”<sup>76</sup> The earliest examples are of wood or stone and, as O’Connell notes, were at first “simple in form, but gradually—even from the 5<sup>th</sup> century ... grew more and more elaborate. Often ... made of precious metals, or of ivory, richly ornamented, jewelled [sic], carved, etc.”<sup>77</sup> These were often fitted with a baldachin or canopy, a feature which also dates as early as the 5<sup>th</sup> century as referred to by Saint Augustine.<sup>78</sup> Although originally in the apse as part of the *synthronum*, the *cathedra* moved to its more recognizable, transverse position “as early as the 9<sup>th</sup> or 10<sup>th</sup> century in some places.”<sup>79</sup> The *Caeremoniale* of 1886 (the last edition prior to the postconciliar reforms) notes that the *cathedra* should be “approached by three steps,” be “very high and sublime,” and made of wood, marble, or another material.<sup>80</sup> There are also rules in *Caeremoniale* which pertain to the

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76. International Commission on English in the Liturgy, *Ceremonial of Bishops* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1989), 42.

77. J. B. O’Connell, *Church Building and Furnishings: The Church’s Way* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1955), 93.

78. Ibid.

79. O’Connell, 94, attributes the movement of the *cathedra* to changes in the form of the altar as celebration of Mass facing the people declined. While this move logically accompanied changes in the layout of the sanctuary, such as the moving of the altar deeper into the apse and the extension of the choir, O’Connell is likely relying on scholarship of his day in asserting that Mass facing the people had been the norm in the more ancient basilical arrangement. Recent scholarship, however, shows that the question of *versus populum* and *ad orientem* in the ancient Liturgy is anything by straightforward and that *versus populum* celebrations as the Church has come to know were likely practiced very rarely before the modern era. Louis Bouyer articulates this opinion as early as 1967. For more on the topic, see U.M. Lang, *Turning Towards the Lord*.

80. “...tribus gradibus ad eam ascendatur... Forma sedis eit praealta et sublimis, sive ex ligno, sive ex marmore, aut alia materia fabricata in modum cathedrae et throni immobilis...” Leo XIII, *Caeremoniale Episcoporum* (1886), I, XIII, 3.

fabrics and cushions which ought to cover the *cathedra* depending on the liturgy and the rank of the celebrant. In a cathedral, the *cathedra* is fixed and, prior to the postconciliar reforms, portable *cathedras* were set up in parish churches and other places when the Bishop would offer pontifical Mass in his own territory. Since the time of the reformed *Caeremoniale* of 1984, no unique seat is called for when a bishop offers a Stational Mass within or without his diocese outside of the cathedral, such as at a parish visitation; rather, it merely directs the Bishop to “take the most direct way to the chair” after incensing the altar.<sup>81</sup>

According to current legislation, the *cathedra* should “stand alone and [be] permanently installed” and its positioning “should make it clear that the bishop is presiding over the whole community of the faithful.”<sup>82</sup> Two points of reform associated with the *cathedra* are the elimination of its baldachin and that only one *cathedra* is to be set up in the cathedral church for additional prelates or bishops (certain occasions used to call for an additional, temporary *cathedra* set up opposite the fixed one, e.g. for the Nuncio or Apostolic Delegate). Also of note is that *Pontificalis ritus*—a document dealing with the simplification of pontifical ceremonies in the interim period—contains a chapter entitled “Chair or Throne of the Bishop” that starts, “The honored and traditional name of the chair of the bishop is the *cathedra*.”<sup>83</sup> This is likely in response to the tendency to refer to a *species* of pontifical Masses as “at the throne;”<sup>84</sup> popular

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81. *CE* (1984), 52.

82. *Ibid.*, 47.

83. *Pontificalis ritus*, 10, as in International Commission on English in the Liturgy, *DOTL*, 550, 4467.

84. See section 2.5.1.

sources mentioned the term *thronus* alongside *cathedra* and *sedes episcopalis*<sup>85</sup> and this was likely deemed overly regal sounding.

### 3.2.2 Faldstool

The faldstool is a portable, foldable chair which was used by bishops and other prelates on certain occasions and serves a largely practical function. It has fallen out of use in the postconciliar liturgy as it is no longer specifically called for by the rubrics. O’Connell surmises that it began to be used in the “8<sup>th</sup> century, when the bishop preached from it on the footpace, instead of from his throne.”<sup>86</sup> This was likely occasioned by the movement of the *cathedra* to its transverse position in the choir. It would have been hard to speak to the congregation when seated at the *cathedra* in this position and the Bishop could easily preach with greater visibility facing the congregation from a faldstool set up on the steps of the altar. This practical use remains in the preconciliar liturgy if circumstances suggest a seat at the altar rather than the *cathedra*, such as during the rites of ordination.<sup>87</sup> Interestingly, the faldstool was used for kneeling prelates as well, rather than a *prie-dieu*, with a cushion placed on it for the hands and another on the floor for the knees. There seems to be nothing preventing its use in the Ordinary Form either for kneeling or for sitting as circumstances suggest: e.g., in the ordination of priests.

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85. Joseph Braun, “Throne,” *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. XIV (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1912), 709.

86. O’Connell, *Church Building*, 244.

87. *Pontificale Romanum* (Rome: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1962), Pars Prima, De Ordinatione Presbyterorum.

While these usually take place in the Bishop's cathedral, the *Roman Pontifical* directs that "the Bishop, if necessary, goes to the seat prepared for the Ordination."<sup>88</sup>

A second, less practical, use of the faldstool in the preconconciliar liturgy is for Masses celebrated by a bishop outside of his diocese or in the presence of a superior prelate within his diocese (such as when a Cardinal is present). In these cases, when use of the *cathedra*, fixed or movable, is not called for or permitted, Mass is said from the faldstool just as from the *cathedra* rather than in the manner of a priest at the altar. The faldstool is also used by prelates who are not bishops but who possess the privilege to make use of one (such as higher ranking *monsignori*).

### 3.2.3 *Sedilia*

The *sedilia* (plural of *sedilium*, such as the niches in medieval church sanctuaries were called; as a single piece of furniture it is referred to in the plural) is the bench upon which the priest celebrant and other sacred ministers for the liturgy sit. It is often referenced in documents using the Latin *scamnum* and is referred to in the *Caeremoniale Episcoporum* (1886) as "scamnum oblongum,"<sup>89</sup> or an "oblong bench." It was a virtual necessity for any sung or Solemn Mass offered in the preconconciliar Roman Rite and was present in both cathedrals and parish churches. It is still used in the Extraordinary Form of the Roman Rite and, in practice, has become the "presider's chair" in many churches that did not wish to dispose of their liturgical

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88. International Commission on English in the Liturgy, *The Roman Pontifical* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2011), 120.

89. *CE* (1886), I, XII, 22.

furniture after the Council; in this case they are now either oriented toward the congregation or remain in their transverse position facing liturgical north.

*Sedilia* are typically movable, not fixed. (This allows them to be easily moved for things such as pontifical functions.) O’Connell suggests that medieval style niches may be used, so long as they are not at different heights for each minister or are canopied—he adds, however, that while a “pleasing architectural feature ... they are not very comfortable in a cold a damp climate.”<sup>90</sup> (Plus, these would have proven difficult to use with the stiffer style of vestments common in the 18<sup>th</sup> to early 20<sup>th</sup> century which are easily draped over the low back of the *sedilia*.) The *sedilia* is to be on the floor (not approached by steps).<sup>91</sup> They are typically without arms and with only a low back, but in practice there are often dividers and a decorative rear panel in addition to the low back (with space between the two for vestments to fall).

According to the preconiliar *Ceremoniale*, they are to be without canopies (a diversion from late medieval practice) and placed at the Epistle side of the sanctuary. They are to be covered with a cloth corresponding to the liturgical color of the day, or green, and have no cushion, which is the prerogative of a prelate. There are at least eight decrees and responses to *dubia* issued by the Congregation for Sacred Rites (precursor to the Congregation for Divine Worship and Discipline of the Sacraments) stretching back to 17<sup>th</sup> century that address the *sedilia*. The most recent is that of March 14, 1908 in response to a *dubium* which inquires, “Whether the continued, aged custom of using *sedes cameralis* equipped with arms and support for the shoulders, in place of oblong benches (*scamni oblongi*), can be permitted or tolerated for

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90. O’Connell, *Church Building*, 68.

91. SRC 2135, 2; 2027, 2 as in *Decreta Authentica Congregationis Sacrorum Rituum*, vol. 1 (Rome: Typographia Polyglotta S.C. de Propaganda Fide, 1898).



the celebrant and ministers at Mass and Vespers with singing?”<sup>92</sup> The Congregation responds with two citations from the *Caeremoniale* and four past decrees/responses from the S.R.C.

spanning a variety of points that are summarized here:

1. The *scamnum oblongum* is placed on the Epistle side upon which the priest celebrant, deacon, and subdeacon sit.<sup>93</sup>
2. Sung Vespers are celebrated at the bench on the Epistle side or the first place in the choir stalls.<sup>94</sup>
3. Canons may not occupy seats with arms and backs whether or not they are in the presence of the Bishop, in or out of the Cathedral, during private ecclesiastical functions, and instead must use *scamni* or *scabellis* as they would usually when the Bishop is Pontificating (regardless of the contrary practice seen in the Cathedrals of Spain).<sup>95</sup>

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92. “An, attenta vetusta consuetudine, permitti aut tolerari possit sedes cameralis, instructa brachiis et fulcimento pro humeris, loco scamni oblongi, pro Celebrante et Ministris in Missis et Vesperis cum cantu?” SRC 4214 as in *Decreta Authentica Congregationis Sacrorum Rituum*, vol. 6 (Rome: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1912).

93. “...itemque satis erit scamnum oblongum, coopertum aliquo tapete, aut panno, aptari a latere Epistolae, in quo sedeat sacerdos celebrans cum diacono et subdiacono.” *CE* (1886), I, XII, 22.

94. “Canonicus vero paratus celebrans, accedit ad scamnum, panno coopertum, in cornu Epistolae praeparatum, vel ad stallum, seu primam sedem chori ab ea parte, quae eidem illa hebdomada obtigerit...” *CE* (1886), II, III, 4.

95. “An liceat, praesente Episcopo, eisdem Dignitatibus et Canonicis intra vel extra Ecclesiam Cathedrallem abhibere in privatis functionibus ecclesiasticis Sedes cum brachiis et subselliis; aut solum uti debeant scabellis vel scamnis, quemadmodum utuntur, Episcopo Pontificalia exercente? ... <<Negative...>> ... An liceat eisdem Dignitatibus et Canonicis occupare easdem Sedes cum brachiis, absente Episcopo, in functionibus ecclesiasticis intra Ecclesiam. Non obstante non usu in contrarium in Cathedralibus Hispaniarum? ... <<Netgative>>.” SRC 2289, 3, 4, as in *Decreta Authentica Congregationis Sacrorum Rituum*, vol. 2 (Rome: Typographia Polyglotta S.C. de Propaganda Fide, 1898).

4. The abuse, which has grown common, whereby the celebrant sits in *sedes cameralis* adorned with silk damask and the ministers use similar benches in place of *scamni* covered with fabric is reprovved and condemned.<sup>96</sup>
5. Despite the custom continuing (in Chile), Canons may not sit in *sedibus cameralibus* when celebrating or ministering to the Archbishop.<sup>97</sup>
6. No one holding honor in the chapter may sit for the *Gloria* and *Creed* in a chair equipped with arms or support for the shoulders across from the Throne when celebrating Mass in which the Bishop assists from the Throne.<sup>98</sup>

Although the exact meaning of *sedes cameralis* begs deeper research, it seems to have indicated a seat with a canopy,<sup>99</sup> perhaps such as those seen in certain medieval churches or used by nobles. However, since this word was used as recently as 1908, and according to context, it is possible that the term began to refer, in ecclesial language, to chairs with arms and backs. Notwithstanding, the decrees make clear that the use of any sort of chair other than a bench is undesirable over and above any customs that had developed or medieval usages that lingered. In general, they appear to forbid the use of individual chairs for the sacred minister or chairs that resembled those typically used in homes—O’Connell notes that “the former are reserved for

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96. “An tolerandus sit abusus, qui nimium invaluit, adhibendi in Missis solemnibus pro Celebrante, loco scamni cooperti tapete, Sedem cameralem serico damasceno ornatam, et pro Ministris similia scabella; vel potius reprobandum atque damnandum? ... <<Negative, ad primam partem; affirmative, ad secundum>>.” SRC 2621, 6 as in *Ibid.*

97. “Num attendenda consuetudine, Canonice, celebrantibus vel Archiepiscopo ministrantibus, liceat sedere in Sedibus cameralibus? ... Ad IV Negative.” SRC 3104, 4 as in *Ibid.*

98. “Num Episcopo assistente in Throno Missae celebratae ab aliquo qui habeat dignitatem in Capitulo, possit hic sedere ad Hymnum Gloria et ad Credo contra Thronum Episcopi in Sella instructa brachiis et fulcramento pro humeris? ... <<Obstant Decreta>>.” SRC 3804, 11 as in *Decreta Authentica Congregationis Sacrorum Rituum*, vol. 3 (Rome: Typographia Polyglotta S.C. de Propaganda Fide, 1900).

99. “Coadjutor episcopi debetur primum stallum in choro, sive sedes cameralis.” SRC 14 January 1623 as in Tossani Josephi Romsée, *Collectio Decretorum Authenticorum Sacrae Rituum Congregationis Cum Notis; Studio et Opera* (C. Bourguignon, 1816), 33. A note after reads, “Sedes Cameralis, seu sedes cum umbella.”

higher prelates, and the latter are unsuitable for liturgical use.<sup>100</sup> (Of note is how ubiquitous ornate, dining room-style chairs are in contemporary sanctuaries.) While these decrees pertain to chapters of canons, those cited above apply for the priest celebrant in general as indicated by S.R.C. 4214.

Of further note is that the *sedilia*, while not a place of liturgical action in the Mass of a priest prior to the postconciliar reforms, *does* find itself the contrary during solemn Vespers according to the rubrics of 1962 and earlier insofar as the priest intones the antiphons, sings the chapter, is incensed during the *Magnificat* (after having incensed the altar), and prays the collects of the Office there. A lectern is typically placed in front of him at the bench for such purpose.

### 3.2.4 Presider's Chair

The presider's chair, celebrant's chair, or "president's chair," is a key feature in the postconciliar liturgical norms and ensuing architecture. It appears to be an innovation insofar as it is related to the *sedilia* as its immediate predecessor but is more closely related to the episcopal *cathedra* in its form and function. According to the recent edition of the General Instructions of the Roman Missal (GIRM),

The chair of the Priest Celebrant must signify his function of presiding over the gathering and of directing the prayer. Thus the more suitable place for the chair is facing the people at the head of the sanctuary, unless the design of the building or other features prevent this: as, for example, if on account of too great a distance, communication between the Priest and the congregation would be difficult, or if the tabernacle were to be positioned in the center behind the altar. In any case, any appearance of a throne is to be avoided. It is appropriate that before being put into liturgical use, the chair be blessed according to the rite described in the Roman Ritual.<sup>101</sup>

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100. O'Connell, *Church Building*, 68.

101. *GIRM*, 310.

The GIRM adds, “The seat for the Deacon should be placed near that of the celebrant.”<sup>102</sup> From this, one gathers that the presider’s chair is its own entity, and not a bench, as the deacon’s chair is “near” it and not part of it. Recalling the instruction from *Inter Oecuminici* from which GIRM 320 is derived:

In relation to the plan of the church, the chair for the celebrant and ministers should occupy a place that is clearly visible to all the faithful and that makes it plain that the celebrant presides over the whole community. Should the chair stand behind the altar, any semblance of a throne [*throni*], the prerogative of a bishop, is to be avoided.<sup>103</sup>

These do not differ significantly from the current directives for the episcopal *cathedra* except that steps are not explicitly called for as they are for the chair of the Bishop. The rubrics take for granted, perhaps, that it was precisely arms, seat backs, etc. which had, in the past, given the appearance of a throne, thus requiring the priest’s bench to have neither. In practice however, episcopal thrones of old could be highly ornate and perhaps this is the spirit in which the guidelines for the presider’s chair were developed insofar that the chair of the priest celebrant is not to be overly embellished. But without detailed directives or precedents, achieving this can be somewhat difficult, as demonstrated by the many presider’s chairs in today’s churches that appear throne-like either in style or in their positioning in sanctuary. Nor can the canopy or baldachin be relied upon to differentiate the chair of the priest from that of the bishop as current legislation forbids both. If one looks to the *Caeremoniale* for guidance in how this is achieved in a cathedral it notes, “The chair for a priest celebrant should be set up in a place separate from the site of the bishop’s chair.”<sup>104</sup> While this shows that they are two separate furnishings, no

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102. *GIRM*, 310.

103. *IO*, 92 as in *DOTL*.

104. *CE* (1984), 47.

indication is given as to what sets them apart; one must rely upon tradition and the expertise possessed by architects or designers.

One could argue that, in the mind of the reformers, each individual church would be outfitted with a presider's chair analogous to how the cathedral is outfitted with its *cathedra*, for in both, the chair demonstrates the celebrant's role as "presiding" over the members of the faithful gathered therein. A *dubium* and its response in 1965 supports this theory:

Some priests think that, lest the celebrant and ministers be hidden by the altar, the best place for them is behind it in the apse, but that the chair should be raised on at least three steps, in order that the people may see all the ministers and it is clear that the celebrant truly presides. In this opinion admissible, especially if in the apse there is a throne for the exposition of the Blessed Sacrament?<sup>105</sup>

The *Consilium* responded in the affirmative to the first section and of the second it said, "If the tabernacle is in the apse or there is a throne for exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, the presidential chair is to be placed, somewhat raised, at the side of the altar."<sup>106</sup> The second option has become, as of recent, the preferable place for the chair as more churches have begun to move their tabernacles back into the apse.

A case study of the Cathedral of Saint Catharine of Siena in Allentown anecdotally supports how the reforms collapse the reality the *cathedra* and presider's chair into one. The 1954 parish church building underwent a major interior renovation from 1972 onward in order to make it more suitable for use as a cathedral, both aesthetically and functionally. The result was an enlarged sanctuary with a freestanding altar behind which stood, in the apse, the Bishop's *cathedra* built of marble and surrounded by marble benches for deacons and concelebrating clergy, itself a veritable return to the *presbyteria* of the ancient basilica. Most interesting,

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105. *DOTL*, 108, R29, Not 1 (1965) 138, no. 9.

106. *Ibid.*

however, is that the *cathedra* was likewise used by any priest celebrating Mass without the presence of the Bishop. It is not unreasonable that, at least according to the directives of *Inter oecumenici*, the GIRM, and *Pontificalis ritus*, what had been erected perfectly fulfilled both the requirements of the *cathedra* and the presider's chair. With the arrival of the 1984 *Caeremoniale*, however, this would prove undesirable in the case of the cathedral, where the "chair for the priest celebrant should be set up in a place separate from the site of the bishop's chair."<sup>107</sup> In 2005, a new *cathedra* would be erected in the transverse position on the "Gospel side" of the sanctuary and the tabernacle returned to the center of the apse, although still surrounded by the benches of the *presbyterium*.<sup>108</sup>

Without a developed theology of the presider's chair or detailed legislation on its realization, architects, liturgical designers, artists, pastors, building committees, and all those tasked with church renovations and construction must rely on a robust understanding of the Roman Mass in order to plan how to best to outfit their sanctuaries for Divine Worship. Surely, one's understanding of the postconciliar reforms of the Sacred Liturgy, and how one ought to interpret said reforms in light of tradition, will play a significant role in shaping these decisions.

#### **4 The One Who Offers Mass**

Having established a historical and rubrical foundation for the chair as used in the Roman Liturgy, the investigation now turns to those who occupy said chair, viz., priests ("of the second rank") and Bishops. Rather than dwelling on the development of doctrine regarding these grades of Holy Orders, the focus will be the common teaching of the Church, principally as it has been

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107. *CE* (1984), 47.

108. For a history of the Cathedral of Saint Catharine of Siena, Allentown, with additional sources listed, see <https://www.cathedral-church.org/history.html>

expressed in the documents of the Second Vatican Council and recent Magisterium. This will serve to uncover how the priesthood of each is expressed through the rites of the Holy Sacrifice, specifically with regard to the chair and its historical usage. This chapter rests on the authoritatively expressed teaching of the Second Vatican Council on the sacramental nature of the episcopacy: "...the Sacred Council teaches that by Episcopal consecration the **fullness of the sacrament of Orders is conferred**, that fullness of power, namely, which both in the Church's liturgical practice and in the language of the Fathers of the Church is called the high priesthood, the supreme power of the sacred ministry. [emphasis added]"<sup>109</sup> This concrete teaching of the Council comprised the only newly expressed, definitive teaching from an otherwise pastoral council and put an end to doubts, following upon the opinion of the Scholastics, that episcopal orders were a matter of legislative power, the unbinding of a *sacra potestas*, rather than an objective sacramental order which bestows additional *potestas*.

This teaching did not come as a surprise. Even in the years before the council, it was commonly held among theologians, founded upon a more patristic understanding of Holy Orders. This is expressed in Ludwig Ott's well-known manual of Dogmatic Theology from the era:

The Apostolic Constitution "*Sacramentum Ordinis*" of Pius XII presupposes the sacramental nature of the consecration of bishops, which was denied by most Scholastic Theologians, but overwhelmingly affirmed by the post-Tridentine theologians ... The objection of the Scholastic Theologians that the consecration of a bishop confers no new power over the *corpus Christi reale*, that is, the Eucharist, is not to the point, since the consecration of a bishop confers the power of communicating the power of consecrating the Eucharist to others.<sup>110</sup>

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109. Vatican Council II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Leumen gentium* (November 21, 1964), §21.

110. Ludwig Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*, trans. Patrick Lynch (St. Louis, MO: B. Herder, 1957), 453.

That the Council would make it a point to express this teaching renders any liturgical reforms from the selfsame Council that directly affect the distinction between the Mass of a priest and that of a bishop worthy of study. What do these reforms, specifically as they apply to the Bishop's *cathedra* and the priest's chair, communicate about the two highest ranks of Holy Orders? What can historic usages of the chair teach us about the same? This chapter seeks to answer these questions.

#### 4.1 Holy Orders as Exercised at Mass

Priests and bishops, though possessing differing powers by virtue of their differing ranks of orders, both possess the power to confect the Eucharist as is done at every Mass, whether celebrated by a priest in the silence of a private chapel or by a bishop in the full ceremonial grandeur of his cathedral. This shared *ministerial* priesthood is a specific and real share in Christ's own priesthood that differs in essence from the priesthood of the baptized: "The ministerial priest, by the sacred power he enjoys, teaches and rules the priestly people; acting in the person of Christ, he makes present the Eucharistic sacrifice, and offers it to God in the name of all the people."<sup>111</sup> Acting *in persona Christi* constitutes a real participation in the priesthood of Christ by virtue of Holy Orders. The ministerial priesthood in the ordained is said to operate as an instrument of grace through the administration of the Sacraments *in persona Christi capitis*, i.e., in the person of Christ who is the Head of the Church. In this way, the ministerial priesthood at Mass, as in all the Sacraments, articulates leadership or headship. More than simple governance, however, this headship has real spiritual significance and instrumental causality:

...the sacrament of Holy Orders is crucial to the sacramental economy, because the priest is the sacramental link between the conjoined instrument—the humanity of Christ—and the

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111. *LG*, §10.



other extrinsic instruments of the Godhead in the application of grace to souls. The priest, as one who acts in the person of Christ, enables Christ to realize the other sacraments through the ordained minister and apply them to souls.<sup>112</sup>

This crucial link provided by the priest in the administration of the Sacraments is more powerfully manifested at Holy Mass because of the preeminent and unique way in which Christ is made present in the Holy Eucharist: "The Eucharist is unique among the sacraments because it does not function merely as a separated instrument wielded by Christ through the ministry of His priests, but on account of the substantial presence of Christ's humanity in the sacrament, the Eucharist *alone* functions as a *conjoined* instrument."<sup>113</sup> The unique nature of the Eucharist is such that the humanity of Christ, hypostatically united to the Godhead, is truly present under the guise of bread and wine: more than causing mere sacramental effect, the Eucharist *is* sacramental effect. This means that in confecting the Eucharist, both priests and bishops, according to their *ministerial* priesthood, act *in persona Christi* in a particular and eminent way insofar as the Eucharist, Christ's Real Presence, is a sacrifice, and sacrifice belongs to the priesthood:

...this means more than offering "in the name of" or "in place of" Christ. *In persona* means in specific sacramental identification with "the eternal High Priest" who is the author and principal subject of this sacrifice of His, a sacrifice in which, in truth, nobody can take His place. Only He—only Christ—was able and is always able to be the true and effective "expiation for our sins and ... for the sins of the whole world." Only His sacrifice—and no one else's—was able and is able to have a "propitiatory power" before God, the Trinity, and the transcendent holiness. Awareness of this reality throws a certain light on the character and significance of the priest celebrant who, by confecting the holy Sacrifice and acting "*in persona Christi*," is sacramentally (and ineffably) brought into that most profound sacredness, and made part of it, spiritually linking with it in turn all those participating in the eucharistic assembly.<sup>114</sup>

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112. Lawrence Feingold, *The Eucharist: Mystery of Presence, Sacrifice, and Communion* (Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Academic, 2018), 189. He notes this is not the case for Baptism and Matrimony.

113. *Ibid.*, 190.

114. John Paul II, Letter on the Mystery and Worship of the Eucharist *Dominicae cenae* (February 24, 1980), 8.

The priest at Mass *offers* and *is offered*. For this reason, the headship which the priest and Bishop realize at Holy Mass is not merely legislative, but truly spiritual; both “teach and rule” the Body of Christ assembled in prayer, not as one chosen *by* the community, but chosen *from* the community *by* God with sacramental power dispensed by God, accordingly.

This touches upon language popularized after the Council regarding the role of the priest as “presider” or “president” of the gathered “assembly.” This language is taken up by the translator of John Paul II’s treatment of the unique role of the ordained at Mass:

The ministry of priests who have received the sacrament of Holy Orders, in the economy of salvation chosen by Christ, makes clear that the Eucharist which they celebrate is *a gift which radically transcends the power of the assembly (communitatis)* and is in any event essential for validly linking the Eucharistic consecration to the sacrifice of the Cross and to the Last Supper. The assembly (*communitati*) gathered together for the celebration of the Eucharist, if it is to be a truly Eucharistic assembly (*vera eucharistica convocatio*), absolutely requires the presence of an ordained priest as its president (*qui ei praesideat*).<sup>115</sup>

While these choices in translation could suggest a Protestant notion of the role of the ordained as mere “worship leader,” its use here is understood in a Catholic context insofar as the One who “leads” worship, i.e. presides, is Christ, and acting *in His person* is the priest who presides as Head of the worshipping members of the Body. In popular usage, however, this tends not to be the case, at least in English-speaking circles, where “presider-assembly” language lingers as a throwback to a waning, postconciliar theology of the Mass which purposely downplayed the role of the priest. For this reason, the “presider’s chair” continues to be a touchstone for differing interpretations of the reforms of the Liturgy in the wake of the Council. In the minds of some, the exalted place of the priest in the presider’s chair is not one of sacramental headship but horizontal leadership: the priest is merely the first among many, one who is called to lead others

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115. John Paul II, Encyclical on the Eucharist in its Relation to the Church *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* (April 17, 2003), 29.

in prayer. For others, the priest is exalted due to his ordination as teacher and ruler, but this exaltation is not as sacramental *instrument*, but sacramental *manager*: his ordination is significant, perhaps as priest, but not as *victim*. Yet, the Church, even in her recent emphasis on the universal priesthood of the Baptized, especially in their co-offering the Holy Sacrifice in union with and by virtue of the priest, continues to see Her priests' role as head primarily as an identification with Christ who bridges the gap between the Eucharist and Calvary:

[Priests] exercise their sacred function especially in the Eucharistic worship or the celebration of the Mass by which, acting in the person of Christ and proclaiming His Mystery, they unite the prayers of the faithful with the sacrifice of their Head and renew and apply in the sacrifice of the Mass until the coming of the Lord, the only sacrifice of the New Testament, namely, that of Christ offering Himself once for all a spotless Victim to the Father.<sup>116</sup>

Any project to preserve or restore this language, therefore, requires diligence. As to whether “presider” is “the Liturgical Movement’s theologically rich word for the nature of priestly activity,”<sup>117</sup> as McNamara claims, remains to be seen.

## 4.2 The Sacramental Relationship of Bishop and Priest

The Second Vatican Council’s articulated teaching on episcopal orders does not, of course, stress the known similarities of their shared ministerial priesthood, but rather, the difference that exists between them as a matter of sacramentality. In order to understand what constitutes this difference beyond nebulous ontology, some practical realities must be drawn out. Firstly, bishops differ in their rank according to their being true successors of the Apostles. This succession, while realized in the individual bishop, is more properly understood collegially: the

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116. *LG*, §28.

117. McNamara, “That Other ‘Seat of Wisdom.’”

college of bishops succeeds, in space and time, the college of the Apostles, chosen and commissioned by Christ. The Bishop is in the image of the High Priesthood of Christ and receives in his consecration “together with the office of sanctifying, also ... the office of teaching and of governing, which, however, of its very nature, can be exercised only in hierarchical communion with the head and the members of the college.”<sup>118</sup> In this threefold *munera*, the bishop “in an eminent and visible way sustains the roles of Christ Himself as Teacher, Shepherd and High Priest.”<sup>119</sup>

As regards the Eucharist, the Bishop is a steward of its grace, which, according to *Lumen gentium*, “he offers **or causes to be offered**” (emphasis added) insofar as “every legitimate celebration of the Eucharist is regulated by the bishop, to whom is committed the office of offering the worship of Christian religion to the Divine Majesty and of administering it in accordance with the Lord’s commandments and the Church’s law.”<sup>120</sup> Priests of the second rank, therefore, are “dependent on the bishops in the exercise of their power” although they share in their “*sacerdotal* dignity ... in the image of Christ the eternal high Priest.”<sup>121</sup> Priests, in relation to their bishop, exercise “the office of Christ, the Shepherd and Head, and according to their share of his authority, ... in the name of the bishop, gather the family of God together as a brotherhood enlivened by one spirit.”<sup>122</sup> Although priests are not true high priests, as are bishops,

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118. *LG*, §21.

119. *Ibid.*

120. *Ibid.*, §26.

121. *Ibid.*, §28.

122. Vatican Council II, Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests *Presbyterorum Ordinis* (December 7, 1965), §6.

they, as coworkers of their Bishop, make him present locally, in an analogously sacramental fashion:

Priests, prudent cooperators with the Episcopal order, its aid and instrument, called to serve the people of God, constitute one priesthood with their bishop although bound by a diversity of duties. Associated with their bishop in a spirit of trust and generosity, they make him present in a certain sense in the individual local congregations, and take upon themselves, as far as they are able, his duties and the burden of his care, and discharge them with a daily interest. And as they sanctify and govern under the bishop's authority, that part of the Lord's flock entrusted to them they make the universal Church visible in their own locality and bring an efficacious assistance to the building up of the whole body of Christ.<sup>123</sup>

The priest then, especially while acting *in persona Christi capitis*, also acts in the person of his bishop, as his instrument, in carrying out sacramental ministration on an even more localized level. Even though each priest has a direct, sacramental instrumentality by virtue of his *sacra potestas*, this relies upon the fullness of the priesthood as it exists in his Bishop, a juridical and sacramental relationship. “Priests, never losing sight of the fullness of the priesthood which the bishops enjoy, must respect in them the authority of Christ, the Supreme Shepherd. They must therefore stand by their bishops in sincere charity and obedience.”<sup>124</sup> In this relationship exists a twofold instrumentality on the part of the priest: the Bishop is made present and, therefore, Christ, both by means of the Bishop’s *munera*, which the priest participates in, and in the priest’s actual *potestas*. Likewise in this relationship there also exists a twofold *potestas* on the part of the Bishop who, as Ott articulates above, exercises power over the Eucharist directly and by means of ordaining those who share in this power.

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123. *LG*, §28.

124. *PO*, §7.

### 4.3 This Relationship Expressed Ritualistically and Architecturally

The reforms of the Liturgy regarding the presider's chair and the newfound ritual action which takes place at it seem to bespeak an unwritten—though implied—intention on the part of the *Consilium* to highlight the shared priesthood of the priest and Bishop, at least insofar as each Mass is true worship offered to the Father by all present regardless of the rank of the celebrant. In choosing the priest's Mass as the normative Mass of the reforms, the priesthood of Christ expressed in the ministerial priesthood comes to the fore: He, in the person of His minister, presides over the community of believers “at the twofold Table of the word and of the Bread of Life.”<sup>125</sup> In this way, the advent of the presider's chair presents an opportunity to recover the corporate nature of Holy Mass as offered by all the faithful and sacramentally in the person of the priest by highlighting his role as head of the body assembled, not mere slavish, sacramental arbiter. That both priests and bishops, true coworkers, act *in persona Christi capitis* at Holy Mass is more evident—with a stress on ruler and teacher during the Liturgy of the Word and as priest and victim during the Liturgy of the Eucharist. Recovering this aspect of the Roman Liturgy is welcomed, when considered in proper measure, as the Church had seen an over-clericalization of the Liturgy throughout its second-millennial history to the detriment of the full, active participation of the laity. Any reminder of the exalted role of the Baptized as a “royal priesthood,” (1 Peter 2:9 *RSVCE*) therefore, helps to remind the Church of its common goal: salvation as achieved by means of God's grace available in the Sacraments, especially the Most Holy Eucharist.

In light of the historical praxis of the Church, however, this shift obscures some important distinctions between the order of priests and of bishops. That exercising power over

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125. John Paul II, Apostolic Letter on Keeping the Lord's Day *Dies Domini* (May 31, 1998), §39.

the Eucharist by a priest of the second rank is radically dependent on the existence of a bishop, both as source of that power conferred in ordination and in cooperating with the bishop's own ministry, is underscored insofar as each priest now sits, in a way, upon his own *cathedra*. While the law of the Church forbids, of course, that the presider's chair resembles a *cathedra*, clearly the prerogative of a bishop, little guidance on how to achieve this, coupled with overly similar guidance on the placement and significance of both the *cathedra* and presider's chair, makes for little difference in practice. In churches that have tall or ornate presider's chairs, only the addition of episcopal heraldry would be needed to render such a cathedral. And in churches where the place for the celebrant is successfully realized, this tends to resemble a *sedilia*. While these might be individual chairs or stools rather than true *sedilia*, they tend to be low-backed, unadorned, and do not communicate an overly exalted role. In some churches, in fact, these are permanently fixed, a vague return to the niches of the medieval parish church. Inasmuch as these allow the priest celebrant to visibly fulfill his role during the Liturgy of the Word, they fulfill the liturgical role of the presider's chair. And with the tabernacle slowly returning to the center of our sanctuaries, common sense (as well as the interim directives of the *Consilium*<sup>126</sup>) dictates that the chair is not placed in front of it.

Considering that all priests participate in the threefold *munera* of their Bishop, the chair highlights the way in which said priests symbolically make present their Bishop in smaller communities of the diocese. Both priest and Bishop sit upon a seat of authority. Both make present, in varying degree, Christ the High Priest. To what extent, however, a Bishop is able to manifest his *particular* role as high priest in this arrangement seems unclear. With the pontifical Mass reduced to a series of ceremonial addons, no longer the standard from which the various

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126. *DOTL*, 108, R29, Not 1 (1965) 138, no. 9.

instantiations of the Mass of the Roman Rite draw their meaning, the “*Pax vobiscum*” of the Bishop loses some of its savor. Once uttered by the High Priest of a local Church, the one upon whose authority the sacramental ministry of a diocese is carried out, who alone possessed the privilege to *pontificate* from a place in the church other than the altar, these words now serve as one of only a few distinctions leftover for the Bishop. But that he still utters, “Peace be with you,” making the words of Christ his own, while his priests say, “the Lord be with you,” cannot be without significance. The reality of Christ the Head is more palpably present than before when a priest offers Mass from the chair, but the reality of Christ the High Priest is now less apparent than before when a Bishop offers Mass in the same way. The ancient practice of the Roman Rite, whereby a Bishop, when offering Mass in his diocese at a church other than his cathedral, would bring a portable “throne,” now only finds an analog in Eastern liturgical traditions, such as the Ukrainian, in which each church is outfitted with a permanent *cathedra* left vacant when the Bishop is not present: “In the building plan of any new church or oratory provision must be made for the placing of the Bishop’s *cathedra* and the *sedilia* of the clergy at the rear wall of the sanctuary.”<sup>127</sup> Each parish is furnished with a seat for the local Bishop, one that is used *only* when the local bishop is present. Yet the reforms realized in the Latin Church appear to have set aside a substantial contribution to the visible symbol of unity of the local Church in the person of its Bishop, the high priest, in favor of a greater emphasis on the corporate nature of the Mass as worshipping Body, priest and people, head and members.

While the short-term effects of this seem laudable, the Church herself appears to be discerning a return of the tabernacle to the heart of Her sanctuaries in place of the presider’s

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127. The Archeparchy of Philadelphia, The Eparchy of Stamford, The Eparchy of St. Nicholas in Chicago, and the Eparchy of St. Josaphat in Parma, *Pastoral Guide of the Ukrainian Catholic Church in the United States of America* (Philadelphia, 1999), art. 439.



chair. Although this goes against the Church's rubrical preference,<sup>128</sup> it draws from Her traditional practice as well as the *sensus fidelium*—many pious churchgoers readily intuit that the Blessed Sacrament's rightful place is in the center, or heart, of the church. With this comes a recognition that the priest has perhaps enjoyed too much ritualistic limelight over the past half-century, seated upon his presider's chair, center-stage, more of a seat of personality than of wisdom, a temptation to hubris rather than signifying "his function of presiding over the gathering and of directing the prayer."<sup>129</sup> People tend not to balk at the idea that the Bishop, who for millennia had been associated to a lesser or greater degree among civil dignitaries, carries with his person an authority befitting of a place of honor. Perhaps this is mere cultural conditioning, yet the priest, himself worthy of honor as sacramental minister, does not seem worthy of like honors to the Bishop and deserves a humbler place within the sanctuary and a humbler seat upon which to sit. It is possible, then, that the intended symbolism of the presider's chair will always compete with a more apparent, unintended symbolism: the chair is a special and particular place of honor. Further, with the word "presider" fresh on the lips of the Church, one must ask whether the Bishop, by virtue of his office, presides in such an eminent fashion over the community of believers that he alone should be considered a true presider. For this reason, "celebrant," a term neither too clerical nor too novel, might be a better semantic option moving forward in order to 1) abandon the theological baggage associated with "presider" and "assembly," 2) refocus on the role of the priest as head *and* victim, 3) restress that Christ the High Priest is made manifest in the shared ministerial priesthood but not as fully and eminently as in the person of the Bishop, and 4) continue to affirm that all the faithful gathered at Mass

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128. *GIRM*, 310.

129. *Ibid.*

“offer the divine Victim, though in a different sense [than the priest]”<sup>130</sup> in that they “unite their hearts in praise, impetration, expiation and thanksgiving with prayers or intention of the priest, even of the High Priest himself, so that in the one and same offering of the victim and according to a visible sacerdotal rite, they may be presented to God the Father.”<sup>131</sup>

## **5 Practical Application According to Present Legislation and Tradition**

Language alone, however, will not effect significance change. Therefore, while the ritual makeup of the Ordinary Form of the Roman Rite places a return to a purely utilitarian seating arrangement for the priest out of reach, the history of the seating and posture for the celebrant in the Roman Rite can provide an important lens through which to interpret current legislation. For while the Church is within Her competency to promulgate new forms, She cannot erase the memory of those which came before and—unless these forms are abrogated—they will (and some might say, ought to) affect how the Church receives and interprets Her own norms. Accordingly, this brief chapter seeks to offer some practical considerations on how those charged with care for the Sacred Liturgy, clergy and laity alike, can take tradition into account when planning for and carrying out Holy Mass.

### **5.1 The Location of the Chair and the Priest’s *Ars Celebrandi***

The Church legislates elements of church design and how sanctuaries are to be outfitted: there is a clearly stated preference for the presider’s chair at the head of the sanctuary.<sup>132</sup>

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130. Pius XII, Encyclical on the Sacred Liturgy *Mediator Dei* (November, 20, 1947), §85.

131. *Mediator Dei*, §93.

132. *GIRM*, 310.

However, the Church has also begun to embrace the aforementioned trend of returning the tabernacle to the same position. This has been catechetically expedient—placing the Blessed Sacrament at the center of (parish) churches fosters devotion and belief in the Real Presence, a belief which has significantly waned in successive generations of Catholics, likely unaided by the exiling of tabernacles from sanctuaries in the years following the Council. As the location of the presider’s chair is communicated as a preference, not a mandate, the return of the tabernacle to the center of the sanctuary is not contrary to law. Therefore, it begs an interpretation of the law in light of tradition and, while the basilical model as it exists in large cathedrals offers something in the way of a separate chapel for Eucharistic reservation, the parish church, in practice, continues to be a place of blended devotional and liturgical space. Placing the priest at the center and the Eucharist to the side (as opposed to a separate chapel) is a confusing didactic, *homo super Deum*, worse when the presider’s chair is *in front of* the tabernacle.

To correct this didactic, placement of the presider’s chair in the *sedilia*’s traditional, transverse location in the sanctuary facing liturgical North with the tabernacle in the East<sup>133</sup> could serve to again enshrine the Real Presence in the heart of the parish (both spiritually and spatially). It would highlight the role of the priest, not only as head (symbolically apparent in the rites of the Ordinary Form themselves) but also as sacramental instrument—one who bridges the gap between God and man in the person of Christ at Mass. In this position, the priest can easily turn toward the people to address them, turn back, facing North, to recite or sing with them the prayers of the Penitential Rite, the *Kyrie*, the *Gloria*, the Creed, etc. He can also face North for

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133. The sanctuary from the point of view of the worshipping congregation is known as “liturgical East.” This method of identifying directionality in worship came about as many churches were once built facing actual East which has a cosmic and soteriological significance: the Church turns toward the Lord, the rising Sun and Light of all nations. Where churches were not built oriented Eastward, the priest and people often faced East for parts of the liturgy. Eventually, facing the altar was considered “liturgical East” regardless of the actual orientation of the church. Worship *ad orientem* derives its name from this phenomenon as *oriens* is Latin for East.

the Collects of the Mass which, as he is neither facing East or West exclusively, helps indicate that they are directed towards God, not man, but offered on man's behalf. Standing and sitting looking across the sanctuary, both altar and people in view, he literally bridges the gap between God and man and can still more than adequately lead the assembled Body of Christ during the Liturgy of the Word while keeping his attention on the ambo. This placement allows for an easily discernable geography of the sanctuary: Christ at its apex in Sacrament and altar followed by the priest who functions as intermediary, head *and* victim. Furthermore, with the renewed and growing interest in returning to Mass offered *ad orientem*, or facing liturgical East, placing the *sedilia* to the side rather than the center avoids the confusing arrangement where Mass is offered facing the presider's chair from the opposite side of the altar.

In churches that do not have traditional sanctuaries, either built semi-circularly, in the round, or with a sanctuary that protrudes into the nave, creativity demands an arrangement that avoids placing the chair in too conspicuous a location while still allowing the priest to carry out his role as the rites envision. In many churches—even in those with a traditional floorplan—the chair is canted slightly toward the people, not facing them entirely nor perpendicular to them as advocated above. This is a fair compromise and might be expedient from a practical point of view, but to the extent that the priest's chair is turned *away* from the Blessed Sacrament, in the case of reservation in the center of the sanctuary, it risks removing the priest from the body of believers who look upon the Eucharistic Lord when seated in church. Even though the focus of the Liturgy of the Eucharist is Christ's presence at the altar, insofar as it is a symbol of Christ, and in the Real Presence which comes about upon it, the same Presence in the reserved Sacred Species is inseparably linked to the Liturgy and should not be ignored just because Mass is underway in its proximity. Angling of the chair toward the people and away from the altar also

puts the altar out of the priest's view during other liturgies such as Eucharistic Adoration. For this reason, an unfixed chair could be preferable, as it allows placement in the sanctuary tailored for specific liturgies. The interim directives do note that the presider's chair should be raised up even when it is placed to the side of the altar.<sup>134</sup> While this may prove overly restrictive, it could be a useful way of making a humbler presider's chair (or traditional *sedilia*) stand out in the sanctuary. Finally, in churches where the chair is "behind" the altar yet still not centered, the celebrant usually has both the altar and the people in view. However the tabernacle, if placed in the center, is usually and unfortunately out of view of the celebrant.

## 5.2 The Design of the Chair

In addition to the chair's placement, its design should not be overlooked. While choice in material, style, and ornamentation belongs in part to architects and liturgical artists working in harmony with the style of a church, some basic principles gathered from historical analogs might be of assistance. Firstly, there appears to be no need to have an exaggerated back for the presider's chair. Historically this would have connoted a *cathedra*, something the Church continues to enjoin against. Churches that employ such chairs, if they do not resemble small cathedrals, tend to have a meeting hall aesthetic—not quite secular, yet not quite Eucharistic. A typical back seems preferable, if not a low back as on a *sedilia*. Secondly, while there seems to be no reason to avoid arms and backs entirely, it could be useful to avoid a presider's chair that merely resembles a household chair, no matter how liturgical the fabric or materials are. The Church's historic usage and desire to keep the chair the prerogative of the bishop creates an opportunity to design chairs for the contemporary Roman Rite that are at once liturgical, non-

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134. *DOTL*, 108, R29, Not 1 (1965) 138, no. 9.

regnal, and non-domestic. This has been successfully realized in presider's chairs that resemble something of a single choir stall or an ample stool with a back. These neither give off a dining room aesthetic nor an episcopal one. Thirdly, wood continues to be a fitting material for the chair. It communicates noble purpose when properly executed. However, other more permanent materials, such as stone and marble, could also be employed so long as tend more toward that of a stool or bench than that of a throne. They should not be so meager as to imply a merely utilitarian function, but they ought to not over the top either.

Seating for the deacon(s) at Mass should be in harmony with that of the celebrant. Insofar as simple stools are employed alongside a grand presider's chair, a *cathedra* aesthetic is again communicated to ill-effect. In the Roman Mass, the deacons who assist the bishop and sit on either side of him differ from those who minister at the same Mass, there being at least three deacons present for a pontifical Mass. The two deacon "chaplains" function as true assistants, those lesser to one who is greater. At the Mass of a priest, the deacon, though in lesser orders, assists the priest, but *both* attend to the Sacrifice at the altar. It is not a case of mere assistance but two grades of orders each with their own liturgical responsibilities. Reducing the deacon's place alongside the presider's chair to mere stools seems to deemphasize their role. A better arrangement might be seating of similar style to the presider's chair that is not completely subordinate, and certainly not lowered from it by one or more steps. If the presider's chair has a back, there is no reason the deacon's chair cannot also, but all three should avoid the appearance of merely ornamented, domestic style chairs.

When these things are kept in mind, there still exists ample room for a creative manner of construction of the presider's chair that recognizes the new way in which it is being called into liturgical use and strives to be obedient to the legislation of the Church with due regard for

tradition. There is not anything, of course, which forbids the use of traditional *sedilia* in our churches, many of which were executed with fine artistry and were sufficiently ornamented and styled so as not to be lost in the sanctuary as stray furniture. Many were crafted to indicate the liturgical role they played, however different from current usage, and reflect the dignity of those who sat upon them. Nothing, therefore, should stop their being used again so long as they are employed in accord with the rubrics and effectively so during the Liturgy of the Word. After all, there are likely still many *sedilias* around, sitting in hallways, sacristies, and warehouses, waiting to be used as liturgical furniture once again.

## **6 Conclusion**

The history and function of the celebrant's chair in the Roman Mass, encompassing the pre-Constantinian church, the great Roman basilicas, medieval niches, and the Tridentine *sedilia*, offer something in the way of a hermeneutic for understanding the function of the modern presider's chair. This paper only represents a superficial treatment of the topic, but one, we hope, that helps to further the conversation, not only of the chair itself, but of the role of the priest at Mass especially in light of the reforms which took place after the Second Vatican Council. It is true that, according to the Church's method of keeping time, we find ourselves only moments after the Council, still grasping at the reforms and their long-term effects. Studies such as this serve to enrich the conversation by providing touchstones, in this case something as simple as a chair or bench, to serve as a concrete framework for nebulous ideas.

It is one thing to speak in theological and philosophical categories alone, but these ideas are enriched when elucidated by current and historical praxis and when practical considerations are drawn out. This is not to suggest that a fuller understanding of the presider's chair will bring

the Sacred Liturgy into perfect form, but that its novelty (for better for worse) makes it an excellent candidate for said touchstone. As the research appears to show, the chair is not completely without precedent, but it does suggest that the way in which the postconciliar reformers desired it to be used stands out as a relative novelty against the backdrop of historical usage. Time will tell to what extent this reinterpretation of the role of the celebrant at his chair has benefitted corporate worship. In some ways this has already come to light, as the Church continues to reflect upon the Sacred Liturgy not only in her laws but also in the hearts and minds Her members, the return of the tabernacle to the center of the sanctuary as only one example.

The positive effects of the presider's chair, e.g., Christ the Head in the person of the priest now more clearly manifest, must be weighed against the negative effects, e.g., a collapsing of the ritual distinction between the Bishop and his priests and, to some lesser degree, an overemphasis of the role of the priest as head to the possible deemphasis of his role as victim. Each one of these theological points, of course, is important. But, again, the Church's historic emphasis must come into play when understanding Her current praxis. If the intention of locating certain liturgical actions at the chair was to more clearly show how the priest makes present the shared ministry of his Bishop, then a drawn-out catechesis is needed to back it up. If, however, this relationship is merely expressed *per accidens*, then this too deserves some concrete explanation, especially regarding the priest as "presider" rather than one who offers Mass at the altar alone, as was seen historically.

Furthermore, with the loss of a robust "liturgical directionality," not only in that Mass is now overwhelming offered at the altar *versus populum*, but also in that the Liturgy of the Word is now (intentionally) carried out facing the people, the ritual actions at the chair demand some geographic consideration. Inasmuch as the actions of the priest at the chair are relatively without



set direction (aside for the rubrics that indicate when he should face the people) indicates that the introduction of the presider's chair is *not* a mere facsimile of the historical and ancient role of the bishop's *cathedra*. What, for the bishop, was prayer offered at the *cathedra* or faldstool facing East is now, for both bishops and priests, prayer offered at the chair without indication of what direction he should face. And while the rubrics as they are written could indicate that these prayers are said facing the people, or at least whatever direction the chair faces, a recovery of the directionality of liturgical prayer is sorely needed. This pursuit must include the directionality of prayer offered at the chair.

The future of the ongoing reform of the Liturgy does not rest solely upon the presider's chair, but it would be rash to consider the lesser elements of liturgical worship incapable of significant contributions to larger themes. Insofar as the priest's bench has given way to the priest's chair, however, the lesser has indeed given way to the greater. It is our hope, therefore, that the Church will continue, in light of past decrees and usages, to reflect upon the symbolism of the chair in Her reformed Liturgy and to articulate what is contained therein. It is true that symbols speak for themselves and reveal symbolic merits and demerits when what is spoken is compared to the intended meaning. But all symbolism is aided by concrete catechesis and, although the future of the Sacred Liturgy does not rest upon the chair, the person of the priest does. Insofar as the priest acts in Christ's person, no amount of apt catechesis is exhaustive. Fully discovering the way in which the priest ministers *in persona Christi* to the people as Head to members in the Mystical Body, the way in which he offers sacrifice to the Father as Victim and Priest, and the way in which these realities are carried out symbolically in the Roman Rite of the Mass, relies upon, to some extent, understanding where he sits when he does so.

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