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## Numerus concebrantium

According to the earliest information on the Eucharist, coming from between 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries, the celebration in Christian communities was presided by the bishop surrounded by his presbyterium.<sup>1</sup> At that time there were no fixed texts or rubrics for the celebration of the Mass, therefore the bishop improvised the anaphora, during which he said the words of consecration and his presbyters put hands on consecration gifts.<sup>2</sup> This kind of celebration of the Eucharist is referred to as ceremonial or silent,<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See L. Beauduin, *Concélébration eucharistique*, “Les Questions Liturgiques et Paroissiales” 7 (1922), p. 275–285; 8 (1923), p. 23–24; J. M. Hanssens, *De concelebratione eucaristica*, “Periodica de re morali, canonica, liturgica” 16 (1927), p. 143–154, 181–210; 17 (1928), p. 93–127; 21 (1932), p. 193–219; L. Beauduin, *La concélébration*, “La Maison-Dieu” no. 7 (1946), p. 7–26.

<sup>2</sup> See B. Botte, *Note historique sur la concélébration dans l’Eglise ancienne*, “La Maison-Dieu” no. 35 (1953), p. 11; B. Neunheuser, *La concélébration dans la tradition de l’Eglise occidentale*, [in:] B. Neunheuser [et al.], *Théologie et pratique de la Concélébration*, [Tours] 1967, p. 13–18; P. Tirot, *La concélébration et la tradition de l’Eglise*, “Ephemerides Liturgicae” 101 (1987), p. 33–59, 182–214.

<sup>3</sup> G. Mattheeuws, *La concélébration co-consécratoire et la prière eucharistique*, “Questions Liturgiques” 82 (2001), p. 192, describes it as “concébration silencieuse.” F. Vandenbroucke, *La concélébration, acte liturgique communautaire*, “La Maison-Dieu” no. 35 (1953), p. 54–55, also differentiates between the sacramental concelebration, which he refers to as “formulé” and silent concelebration: “La concelebration, dans la tradition et la pratique, se distingue en deux types, formulé et silencieux.” He emphasises that they are different from “la messe communautaire, dite improprement concelebration cérémonielle.”

as the sacramental words were only said by the bishop.<sup>4</sup> Source texts do not mention the number of presbyters concelebrating with the bishop. We can only assume that all the priests who could be present during the Mass concelebrated it with him. With time, especially in Rome, concelebrations like that came to be reserved for festival days and other solemn occasions.<sup>5</sup> Since the beginning of the 8<sup>th</sup> century the presbyters gathered around the altar and recited the canon words. This form of concelebration of the Holy Mass is referred to as Sacramental.<sup>6</sup> In the medieval period the con-

<sup>4</sup> During the Mass presbyters were silent up till the 8<sup>th</sup> century (“des concélébrants muets”): “le silence des concélébrants s’est maintenu jusqu’au à la fin du VIII siècle”; Ph. Rouillard, *Les divers types de concélébration eucharistique au long des siècles*, “Ecclesia Orans” 18 (2001), p. 228–229. Distant concelebration was also recognised (“la concélébration à distance”) – a piece of the consecrated Hostia from the papal Mass, the *fermentum*, was sent to communities outside the city, as a sign of unity with the Bishop of Rome; see P. Nautin, *Le rite de fermentum dans les Eglise de Rome*, “Ephemerides Liturgicae” 96 (1982), p. 510–522; A. Chavasse, *A Rome l’envoi de l’eucharistie, rit unificateur de l’église locale*, “Revue bénédictine” 97 (1987), p. 7–12; Cz. Krakowiak, *Fermentum – sancta*, [in:] *Encyklopedia katolicka*, vol. 5, Lublin 1989, col. 136.

<sup>5</sup> See B. Neunheuser, *La concélébration dans la tradition de l’Eglise occidentale*, op. cit., p. 20–22.

<sup>6</sup> According to Pius XII sacramental concelebration only takes place when the priests say the consecration words; cf. *Magnificate Dominum mecum* (2 November 1964): “tot sunt actiones Christi, Summi Sacerdotis, quo sunt sacerdotes concelebrantes”; “Acta Apostolicae Sedis” 46 (1956), p. 669. He presented a similar attitude in his letter for the Liturgical Congress in Assisi (1956) – if the priests do not say the words of the consecration, the concelebration is ceremonial, not sacramental: “les célébrants doivent eux-mêmes dire sur le pain et le vin: Ceci est mon Corps, Ceci est mon Sang, sinon, leur célébration est pur cérémonie”; Pius XII, *Vous Nous avez demandé*, “Acta Apostolicae Sedis” 48 (1956), p. 718. The standpoint of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith is similar (23 May 1957) – for the worthy celebration (of the Eucharist), one must say the words of the consecration: “ex institutione Christi, ille solus valide celebrat, qui verba consecratoria pronuntiat”; “Acta Apostolicae Sedis” 49 (1957), p. 370; see P. Tirot, *La concélébration et la tradition de l’Eglise*, p. 33–59; G. Mattheeuws, *La concélébration co-consécratoire et la prière eucharistique*, p. 227–235.

celebration only took place on certain feast days and at the ordination of priests.<sup>7</sup> Following the representatives of the Liturgical Movement, some advocated the return to the practice of concelebration of Mass both in the 19<sup>th</sup> and the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>8</sup>

During that period the concelebration of Mass was restricted by law to particular occasions,<sup>9</sup> what is more, if there were many priests, only one presided and others took the Holy Communion from him.<sup>10</sup> Even at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, e.g. during a papal conclave, by virtue of the Apostolic Constitution of Pius X *Vacante Sede* (25 December 1904), the cardinals “listened” to the Holy Mass and took Communion.<sup>11</sup> It was Pius XI who allowed the cardinals to celebrate the Eucharist privately during conclave.<sup>12</sup> The practice of the so-called synchronised Mass, con-

<sup>7</sup> See B. Neunheuser, *La concélébration dans la tradition de l’Eglise occidentale*, op. cit., p. 22–26.

<sup>8</sup> See B. Xibaut, *La concélébration dans le Mouvement liturgique et dans l’œuvre de Concile*, “La Maison-Dieu” 2004 no. 224, p. 7–78; L. Beauduin, *La concelebration*, op. cit., p. 7–26.

<sup>9</sup> “Non licet pluribus sacerdotibus concelebrare, praeterquam in Missa ordinationis presbyterorum et in Missa consecrationis Episcoporum secundum Pontificale Romanum” (*Codex iuris canonici*, Roma 1917, can. 803); “Praemissio quod concelebratio sacramentalis in latina casibus limitatur a iure statutis” (*De musica sacra* no. 38, “Acta Apostolicae Sedis” 50 (1958), p. 444).

<sup>10</sup> See *Note de la Commission épiscopale de Pastorale et de Liturgie*, “La Maison-Dieu” no. 234 (1953), p. 145–147; A. M. Roguet, *La pratique des messes dites „communautaire*, ibidem, p. 148–158; P. Jounel, *La concélébration et la concélébration de la messe*, “La Maison-Dieu” no. 83 (1965), p. 176–177.

<sup>11</sup> “Mane sequenti, post clausum praecedenti nocte Conclave, [...] conveniunt Cardinales in eo praesentes, qui infirmitate non sunt impediti, induti super vestem crocea aut mozzeta violacea [...] ad designatum Sacellum, et ibi celebrata consueta Missa, et facta Cardinalium Communione, ac postea recitato Hymno Veni Creator Spiritus cum oratione de Spiritu Sancto, statim ad negotium electionis procedere debent” (Pius X, *Vacante Sede*, no. 44).

<sup>12</sup> “ut liceat cuilibet Cardinali sacrum facere; qui vero, quavis de causa, se a sacro peragendo abstinuerim is in designato sacello et consueta Missa ad sacram Synaxim accedat”; Pius XI, *Motu proprio Cum proxime ex occasione Conclavis*, “Acta Apostolicae

sisting in simultaneous celebrations of the Holy Mass at a few side altars, when different priests say the same words and make the same gestures as the priest presiding at the main altar, was also quite common. This way of celebrating the Eucharist was banned by the Instruction on Sacred Music and the Sacred Liturgy *De musica sacra* no. 39 (9 March 1958).<sup>13</sup> During the Second Vatican Council, by virtue of the Constitution *Vacantis Apostolicae Sedes* of Pius XII, during conclave the cardinals participated in one Holy Mass and received Communion, if, for some reason, they could not celebrate privately.<sup>14</sup>

## 1. The Issue of Mass Concelebration during the Second Vatican Council

In bishops' *vota* for the Second Vatican Council only few proposals concerned the return to the practice of Mass concelebration. Out of a total of 9384 *Propositiones*, 1855 concerned liturgical issues, and only 15 con-

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Sedis" 14 (1922), p. 146; see A. Honoré, *Les rites concélébrés dans la liturgie latine actuelle*, "La Maison-Dieu" no. 35 (1953), p. 56–71.

<sup>13</sup> "Prohibentur vero sic dictae «Missae synchronizatae», illae scilicet Missae hoc peculiari modo celebratae, quod duo vel plures sacerdotes, in uno vel pluribus altaribus, ita simultanee Missam celebrant, ut omnes actiones et omnia verba uno eodemque tempore et peragantur et proferantur, adhibitis quoque, praesertim si numerus sacerdotum ita celebrantium magnus sit, modernis quibusdam instrumentis quibus absoluta haec uniformitas seu «synchronizatio» facilius obtineatur" ("Acta Apostolicae Sedes" 50 (1958), p. 445); see A. M. Roguet, *Les messes synchronisées*, "La Maison-Dieu" no. 35 (1953), p. 76–78.

<sup>14</sup> "Mane sequenti, post clausum praecedenti nocte Conclave, ac post solitum campanulae sonum, conveniunt Cardinales in eo praesentes, qui infirmitate non sunt impediti, ad designatum Sacellum, et ibi celebrata consueta Missa, et facta Cardinalium Communionem, qui se a Sacro peragendo quavis de causa sponte abstinerint ac postea a Sacrista..." (Pius XII, Constitutio Apostolica *Vacantis Apostolicae Sedes*, "Acta Apostolicae Sedes" 38 (1946), p. 85).

cerned Mass concelebration.<sup>15</sup> The Central Commission of the Second Vatican Council in the Schema *De sacra Liturgia* already included some rules concerning Holy Mass concelebration. The Commission stated that the conciliar *vota* postulated Mass concelebration during gatherings of the clergy, e.g. during the retreat, formation meetings, pilgrimages, etc., especially when there is difficulty to celebrate individually.<sup>16</sup> Then it concerned mostly solving practical problems.

In the first Schema *De sacra Liturgia* on Mass concelebration the following issues were discussed: when Mass concelebration is allowed, what rites to follow, what is the accepted number of concelebrants.<sup>17</sup> Whether particular circumstances called for Mass concelebration and the number of concelebrants depended upon the decision of the ordinary.<sup>18</sup> Similar rules were repeated in the second Schema discussed on 23 June 1962.<sup>19</sup> In Schemata III and IV the number of concelebrants was omitted.<sup>20</sup> During all discussions on the Schema of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, during five General Congregations between 29 October and 6 November 1962, 27 utterances concerned Mass concelebration. 28 Fathers supported the return to Mass concelebration, 9 were against. 7 motions concerning allowing concelebration were presented. They concerned extending permission for concelebration during the Chrism Mass on Holy Thursday, synods, abbot blessings, convent and solemn masses, clergy gatherings and when the choice

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<sup>15</sup> See B. Xibaut, *La concélébration dans le Mouvement liturgique et dans l'œuvre de Concile*, op. cit., p. 16–17.

<sup>16</sup> “Ad conventus sacerdotum, uti sunt exercitia spiritalia, cursus studiorum, pregrinationes, etc., praesertim ubi singulae Missae incommodo celebrari nequeunt” (*De sacra Liturgia*, art. 44).

<sup>17</sup> See *Acta et Documenta Consilio Oecumenico Vaticano II apparando*, Series I (Praeparatoria), vol. II, pars III, Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis 1964–1969, p. 107–109.

<sup>18</sup> “De opportunitate concelebrationis et de numero concelebrantium, in singulis casibus, Ordinarii loci erit iudicare” (ibidem, p. 109).

<sup>19</sup> See *Acta Synodalia Sacrosancti Concilii Oecumenici Vaticani II*, vol. I, pars I, Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis 1970–1980, p. 281.

<sup>20</sup> See ibidem, vol. II, pars II, p. 286; vol. II, pars IV, p. 578–579.

of private celebration is preserved. The motions were voted on on 10 October and 22 November 1963. During these debates the number of concelebrants was no longer discussed.<sup>21</sup> The text of the Constitution concerning Mass concelebration, adopted by the Council Fathers almost unanimously, emphasises that it manifests the unity of the priesthood; presents cases when concelebration is allowed; indicates when concelebration is dependent upon the decision of the ordinary; and points out that the regulation of the discipline of concelebration in the diocese pertains to the bishop (*Sacrosantum Concilium* no. 57).<sup>22</sup> During the Council the decisions concerning Mass concelebration were made with the hope to enable the priests' communal celebration of the Eucharist, especially during councils, synods, congresses, in sanctuaries, as well as as seminars and orders.

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<sup>21</sup> See *ibidem*, vol. I, pars I, p. 262–303, especially p. 280–281. Out of a total number of 2178 voters 2158 Conciliar Fathers voted for points 57 and 58 of the Constitution, concerning Mass concelebration; see S. Madeja, *Il problema della concelebrazione nel suo sviluppo storico dagli inizi del movimento liturgico*, Roma 1982, p. 36–40.

<sup>22</sup> Due to the fact that the end of the second conciliar session was planned for the 8 December 1963, when the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy has already been approved, C. Vagaggini addressed a letter to Pope Paul VI in which he suggested allowing at least the bishops' representatives, the Council participants, to concelebrate with him. He also expressed his opinion on the number of concelebrants, consistent with the later *Ritus servandus*: "Numerus concelebrationum ita limitetur ut actio suam dignitatem obtineat et omnes concelebrantes possint feliciter decenterque verba dicere et titus peragere quae sibi a presenti decreto praescribuntur. Ratio itaque sedula habeatur de dispositione ecclesiae et altaris, de sacra suppellectile prompta, de requisitis ministris et concursu populi. Immo numquam accipitur plures concelebrantes quam quinquaginta, donec aliter a Commissione de Liturgia postconciliari provideatur" (C. Braga, *Una concelebrazione mai realizzata*, "Ephemerides Liturgicae" 118 (2004), p. 6–7). C. Braga mentions that the letter has never been published.

## 2. Mass Concelebration after the Proclamation of *Sacrosanctum Concilium*

In accordance with the instructions included in the Constitution on Liturgy,<sup>23</sup> the Congregation for Divine Worship prepared and, by the virtue of the *Ecclesiae semper* (7 March 1965)<sup>24</sup> decree, proclaimed the rites for concelebrated Mass and the rites for the Holy Communion in both forms.<sup>25</sup> During the works on the schema *Ritus servandus in concelebratione Missae* different proposals concerning the number of concelebrants were made. A. Bugnini writes that the Pope initially agreed for 20 to 25 concelebrants. There were concerns that a larger number of concelebrants will make orderly and worthy celebrations impossible, that is why the number cannot be larger than 50, and one criterion still needs to be followed: the proximity of the altar.<sup>26</sup> If, under some par-

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<sup>23</sup> According to the Instruction *Inter Oecumenici* (26 September 1964), the priests who are not obliged to celebrate for the sake of the faithful, may concelebrate on more solemn occasions.

<sup>24</sup> Sacra Rituum Congregatio, *Decretum generale quo ritus concelebrationis et Communionis sub utraque specie promulgantur*, "Acta Apostolicae Sedis" 57 (1965), p. 410–412. On the theology of concelebrated Mass see P. Thion, *De la concélébration eucharistique*, "Nouvelle Revue Théologique" 86 (1964), p. 579–607; R. Zielasko, *Teologiczny sens koncelebracji eucharystycznej*, [in:] *Wprowadzenie do liturgii*, red. F. Blachnicki [et al.], Poznań 1967, p. 338–344; J. F. Chiron, *Les enjeux symbolique de la concélébration*, "La Maison-Dieu" 2004 no. 224, p. 107–137; J. Kobiaenia, *Koncelebra – liturgiczny znak jedności*, "Liturgia Sacra" 8 (2002) no. 1, p. 11–22.

<sup>25</sup> Sacra Rituum Congregatio, *Ritus servandus in concelebratione Missae et ritus Communionis sub utraque specie*, Città del Vaticano 1965; see F. Greniuk, *Przepisy rubryczystyczne dotyczące koncelebry*, [in:] *Wprowadzenie do liturgii*, op. cit., p. 344–353; F. Dell'Oro, *Aspects juridiques et rituels de la concélébration*, [in:] *Théologie et pratique de la Concélébration*, op. cit., p. 239–268; S. Madeja, *Il problema della concelebrazione nel suo sviluppo storico dagli inizi del movimento liturgico*, op. cit., p. 52–53.

<sup>26</sup> "Ut concelebrantes circum altare stare possint" (*Ritus servandus*, no. 4); see: G. Boselli, *Les débats sur la concélébration après Vatican II*, "La Maison-Dieu" 2000 no. 224, p. 29–59.

ticular circumstances, the number of concelebrants is larger than 50, the Holy See has to be informed.<sup>27</sup> In *Praenotanda*, following *Sacrosantum Concilium* no. 57, the days on which concelebration of the Holy Mass is permitted were listed, with emphasis put on the fact that only one concelebration a day was allowed in a church or oratory, to stress the unity of the priests. Only when the number of priests is very large (*magnus numerus sacerdotum*), the ordinary or his superior may grant permission for a few (*pluries*) celebrations of this type at different times.<sup>28</sup> They are responsible for moderating (*moderari*) concelebration on their territory.

Eventually, the number of concelebrants allowed was completely omitted in *Ritus servandus*, since it depends on different circumstances (*singulis in casibus*). Firstly, it depends on the church and the altar at which the priests concelebrate. It is required for the concelebrants to surround the altar from the sides in such a way that the altar is well visible for the faithful, although many of the concelebrating priests will not be able to touch it.<sup>29</sup> *Ritus servandus* contains an important rule: concelebrants should stay close to the altar, so that they can stand around it (*circum stantes*).<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> “Concelebrantes tamen plus quam quinquaginta. In casibus peculiaribus, res Apostolicæ Sedi proponatur” – Schema from 20 December 1964; A. Bugnini, *La riforma liturgica (1948–1975)*, Roma 1997, p. 137. A. G. Martimort, *Le rituel de la concélébration eucharistique*, “Ephemerides Liturgicæ” 77 (1963), p. 168, held an opinion that the number of concelebrants should not exceed 60–80, provided that the venue is big enough. According to him, it should generally be between 12 and 25 priests: “ne pourra jamais dépasser soixante à quatre-vingts concélébrant dans une sanctuaire exceptionnellement vaste. Généralement, douze à vingt-cinq sera le chiffre le meilleure.”

<sup>28</sup> *Ritus servandus*, no. 1–2.

<sup>29</sup> “Numerus concelebrantium, singulis in casibus, definiatur ratione habita tam ecclesiae quam altaris in quo fit concelebratio, ita ut concelebrantes circum altare stare possint, etsi omnes mensam altaris immediate non tangent. Provideatur tamten ut sacer ritus a fidelibus bene conspici queat: quare opportunum erit ut concelebrantes circa latus altaris, quo versus populum respicit, non consistant” (*Ritus servandus*, no. 4).

<sup>30</sup> “Tunc Episcopus celebrans principalis una cum ceteris concelebrantibus ad altare accedit, debitam reverentiam facit et cum presbytero assistente altare ascendit idque osculatur. Ceteri concelebrantes, facta debita reverentia, in plano, circa altare consistunt, ita



Since then legal norms and liturgical regulations included in *Ritus servandus* became effective in the whole Church.<sup>31</sup> However, meetings of priests on the occasion of e.g. congresses, synods and others were connected with the participation in the concelebrated Mass, regardless of the number of concelebrants. This decision was supported by the argument that if the number of concelebrants had been limited, it would not have been in agreement with the spirit of the renewed liturgy and the return to Mass concelebration. At the same time, in this way the problem of the so-called individual celebrations and the communal dimension of the Eucharist, advocated by the Liturgical Movement, was emphasised.

Initially, Mass concelebration was permitted only under strictly specified circumstances.<sup>32</sup> With time, Church documents not only started to allow the concelebration of the Eucharist,<sup>33</sup> but even encouraged it, since “concelebration of the Eucharist aptly demonstrates the unity of the sacrifice and of the priesthood. Moreover, whenever the faithful take an active part, the unity of the People of God is strikingly manifested, particularly if the bishop presides.”<sup>34</sup> The Instruction *Eucharisticum mysterium* emphasises the importance of Mass concelebration for priests stating that it

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tamen ut impedimento non sint in ritibus ad offerorium peragendis. Si vero opportunum videtur, concelebrantes ad altare accedere possunt antequam celebrans principalis cantet orationem super oblata” (*Ritus servandus*, no. 29)

<sup>31</sup> “Normae quae sequuntur servari debent quotiescumque Missa iuxta ritum romanum concelebratur...” (*Ritus servandus*, no. 6).

<sup>32</sup> “Hoc mode sane, per ritum concelebrationis veritates magni momenti, quae vitam spiritualement et pastoralement sacerdotum atque christianam fidelium institutionem respiciunt, vivide proponuntur et inculcantur” (Decree *Ecclesiae semper*, [in:] *Ritus servandus*, p. 7).

<sup>33</sup> Instruction *Tes abhinc annos* (4 May 1967), no. 27, with reference to Mass concelebration, reminds that all concelebrants ought to be clad in liturgical vestments – cf. *Ritus servandus*, no. 12. However, if there is an important reason, e.g. if the number of concelebrants is larger than the number of vestments available, concelebrants, except for the presiding one, do not have to use the chasuble, they are, however, obliged to wear the alb and the stole.

<sup>34</sup> Congregation for the Divine Worship, Instruction *Eucharisticum mysterium* (25 May 1967), no. 47, “Acta Apostolicae Sedis” 59 (1967), p. 565.

“both symbolizes and strengthens the brotherly bond of the priesthood” (cf. *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church* 28; *Decree on the Ministry and the Life of Priests* 8).<sup>35</sup> The concelebrated Mass becomes an ordinary form of Eucharistic celebration “unless it conflicts with the needs of the faithful.” According to this Instruction “it is desirable that priests should celebrate the Eucharist in this eminent manner” and “should welcome visiting priests into their concelebration.” The competent superiors should, therefore, facilitate and encourage concelebration,<sup>36</sup> and where there is a great number of priests, the competent superior may give permission for concelebration to take place even several times on the same day, but at different times or in different sacred places.<sup>37</sup> In this way the Holy Mass becomes a symbol and sacrament of Church unity and builds this unity in a more effective manner. When concelebrated, the Holy Mass shows the unity of the presbyterium of the local Church, especially if presided by the bishop. If the concelebrated Mass is presided by a presbyter, he also represents the bishop, and other presbyters concelebrating with him experience the unity of their priesthood. Concelebration understood and experienced in this way not only symbolizes, but also helps to strengthen the bond among presbyters, as well as the bond between the presbyters and the bishop.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>36</sup> “Hinc superiorem competentes faciliorem reddant, immo foveant concelebrationem” (ibidem).

<sup>37</sup> “Ubi tamen magnus habetur numerus sacerdotum [...] etiam pluries eodem die fiat, sed temporibus successivis, vel in locis saris diversi” (ibidem, p. 566).

<sup>38</sup> See S. Hartlieb, *Koncelebra a przeżycie wspólnoty*, “Collectanea Theologica” 44 (1974) z. 4, p. 86–89; A. Franquesa, *La concélébration dans les communautés sacerdotale*, [in:] *Théologie et pratique de la Concélébration*, p. 189–220; R. Falsini, *La concélébration dans les réunions du clergé*, ibidem, p. 221–237; G. Boselli, *Concelebrazione eucaristica e ministero presbiterale*, “Rivista Liturgica” 97 (2010), p. 67–80.

### 3. Mass Concelebration after the Publication of the Missal of Paul VI

The ordinary form of Mass celebration in the *Missal of Paul VI* published in 1970 is the Holy Mass with the people (*Missa cum populo*). However, when the priests are not obliged to celebrate “for the good of the Christian faithful” or, for different reasons, individually, concelebration is advised (*Missa concelebrata*). Detailed instructions concerning Mass concelebration are included in the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* from 1970.<sup>39</sup> What is more, in order to emphasise “the significance of the rite or of the festivity,” under some clearly determined circumstances, there is a possibility of multiple (*pluries*) concelebrations on the same day.<sup>40</sup> It is also accepted to celebrate more than one Holy Mass on the same day not only “for the benefit of the faithful,” but also for the spiritual good of the priesthood<sup>41</sup> and for emphasising the significance of a particular rite or solemnity. Concelebrations in which the priests of each diocese concelebrate with their own Bishop at stational Masses, especially on the more solemn days of the liturgical year, are held in high regard.<sup>42</sup> No edi-

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<sup>39</sup> *General Instruction of The Roman Missal* 1970, no. 153–208; 1975, 2002 and 2008, no. 199–251.

<sup>40</sup> *General Instruction of The Roman Missal* 1970, no. 158; 2008, no. 204.

<sup>41</sup> *General Instruction of The Roman Missal* 1970, no. 157; 2008, no. 203. For the concelebration not to become an opportunity for financial profit, the Congregation for the Divine Worship in their Declaration *De concelebratione* (7 August 1972) included the following rule: “Sacerdotibus, qui in bonum pastorale fidelium celebrant et alteram Missam concelebrant, nullo titulo pro Missa concelebrata stipendium percipere licet” (“Acta Apostolicae Sedis” 64 (1972), p. 563). It means that the only reason for multiple concelebrations can be the need of spiritual progress and a fuller sign of participation. In the Declaration only the second concelebration (*altera*) is mentioned; see: P. Majer, *Non licet sacerdoti plus semel in die celebrare. Znaczenie normy kan. 905 § 1 o jednokrotnym sprawowaniu Eucharystii w ciągu dnia*, „Wiadomości Archidiecezji Lubelskiej” 73 (1999), p. 957–972.

<sup>42</sup> *General Instruction of The Roman Missal* 2008, no. 203.

tion of the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* introduces limitations on the number of concelebrants.

In the last years the practice of Holy Mass concelebration was popularised, especially under the guidance of Pope John Paul II (1978–2005), during his pastoral visits, in which thousands of priests participated. Similarly, the World Youth Day not only gathered hundreds of thousands of young Christians, but also thousands of priests accompanying them (presbyters and bishops), who concelebrated with the Pope.<sup>43</sup> A similar practice took place during the celebrations of Paschal Triduum and during canonization Masses, especially in a Jubilee. During Eucharistic congresses, national and international, the Masses were concelebrated by thousands of presbyters in local Churches as well.

Such enormous Eucharistic gatherings in which thousands of presbyters concelebrate present the unity of priesthood and the common ministry of the faithful, as well as the unity of the Church as the ministerial People of God, but they also generate great practical problems. That is why this issue was discussed during the Synod of Bishops concerning the Eucharist in 2005. The Synodal gathering of Bishops passed the problem on to the Pope in the form of a *propositio*, suggesting the analysis of the widespread practice of large-scale concelebrations.<sup>44</sup> Benedict XVI addressed this issue in the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum caritatis* (22 February 2007).<sup>45</sup>

The Pope first emphasises the great importance of this kind of Mass concelebration, “especially when the Bishop himself celebrates, surrounded by his presbyterate and by the deacons.” Then he points out that “it is not always easy in such cases to give clear expression to the unity of the pres-

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<sup>43</sup> In 1997 in Paris – about 4 thousand. A similar situation took place in Cologne in 2005 during the World Youth Day, when Benedict VI presided and 15 thousand presbyters concelebrated with him; see A. Kiciński, *Historia Światowych Dni Młodzież. Historia Papieskiej Szkoły Modlitwy*, [in:] *Modlitwa w katechezie*, red. S. Kulpaczyński, Lublin 2002, p. 331–381.

<sup>44</sup> “Si chiede, pero, agli organismi competenti che studino meglio la prassi della concelebrazione quando il numero dei celebranti è molto elevato” (*Propositio* no. 37).

<sup>45</sup> Benedict XVI, Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum caritatis*, no. 61.

byterate, especially during the Eucharistic Prayer and the distribution of Holy Communion.” That is why he suggests that it is important to make sure these kind of celebrations do not lose their proper focus, which “can be done by proper coordination and by arranging the place of worship so that priests and lay faithful are truly able to participate fully,” at the same time making it clear that he is speaking of “exceptional concelebrations, limited to extraordinary situations.”

The problem of Holy Mass concelebrations when a large number of the faithful is present (*Celebrazione della Santa Messa in presenza di grandi assemblee di fedeli*) was discussed during the working session of the consultants of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments and some other experts, mostly professors of Catholic universities in Rome (10 March 2007).<sup>46</sup> A few months later (7 June 2007) the Congregation for Divine Worship held a meeting with the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, the Office for the Liturgical Celebrations of the Supreme Pontiff, the Pontifical Council for the Laity, the Pontifical Committee for International Eucharistic Congresses and the Pontifical Council for the Family, during which some indications were formulated.<sup>47</sup>

The Congregation emphasises the great ecclesiastical importance of such celebrations, especially if presided by the Pope, and when the participants are well prepared in the liturgical, catechetical and spiritual sense. The most important element is the contact between the concelebrants and the people, in the spirit of the active participation principle (*actiosa participatio*) of all participants, who cannot merely act as a “crowd” (*folla*), but should be a community (*comunità*). Participation of a large number of the faithful cannot be limited to external manifestation only; it needs to be a real celebration, manifested by bodily postures and internal deeds of the liturgy participants. The Congregation holds an opinion that Eucharistic celebration in such a way is the best form of prayer (*il rito più*

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<sup>46</sup> See F. Arinze, A. M. Ranjith, *Le grandi celebrazioni: una riflessione in corso*, “Notitiae” 43 (2007), p. 535.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 537–542.

*idoneo*) and that is why it should be limited to extraordinary situations, especially when presided by the Pope or the diocesan Bishop.<sup>48</sup>

Another problem is the celebration venue itself. The indications of the Congregation are as follows: the participants should be able to see the altar and the pulpit well, in order to share the sense of participation in the celebration, even though it takes place in the open air. Therefore, if it is possible, enclosed spaces should be chosen for celebrations.

There are situations in which the Congregation suggests limitations on the number of concelebrants.<sup>49</sup> Everything depends on the appropriate preparation of the presbyterium where the celebration is supposed to take place, on the number of liturgical vestments available, etc. The concelebrants should be able to keep good contact, at least eye contact, with the altar, and should be able to take the Communion in both forms. Sacred vessels with the Communion bread should be kept close to the altar. Liturgical gestures of the presiding priests and concelebrants must be visible for the faithful. The unity of the whole gathering around Christ, present at the altar and in the Eucharistic bread is then possible.<sup>50</sup> With this aim in mind, the Congregation suggests establishing (*ad hoc* and *ad tempus*) appropriate offices (*uffizi*) in dioceses or for the whole country, which will organise and prepare the Holy Mass liturgy for large-scale celebrations with a large number of concelebrating priests.<sup>51</sup>

In the light of the currently binding general regulations and the more detailed Church indications concerning Mass concelebration it must be stated that it is the preferred form of celebration of the Eucharist when there are at least a few priests ready to participate. The concelebrated Mass has priority over individual celebration.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 537–538.

<sup>49</sup> “La limitazione – almeno in alcuni casi – del numero dei concelebranti secondo precisi parametri” (*ibidem*, p. 539).

<sup>50</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 539–540.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 541; see D. Lebrun, *Difficultés de la concélébration et ministère du prêtre*, “La Maison-Dieu” no. 224 (2004), p. 67–85.

<sup>52</sup> In this context an important instruction concerns inviting visiting priests to common concelebration, as they are sometimes encouraged by local pastors to participate in

A real problem appears only if there is a very large number of priests who are willing to concelebrate the Mass. Both Pope Benedict XVI and some suggestions of the Roman Dicasteries seem to advocate limiting the number of concelebrating priests. The regulations of the *Ritus servandus*, published in 1965, requiring that the concelebrants stay in the presbyterium and surround the altar, are being brought to attention. In such case, the number of concelebrating priests will depend on the size of the church presbyterium or chapel, or the venue chosen for the priests during large-scale concelebrations.

The presence and participation of the lay faithful is also connected with the number of concelebrating priests. Since the celebration of the Eucharist is supposed to be the manifest of the unity of the priesthood, the sacrifice and the Church as the people of God, it should also be visible during concelebrated Mass. It is sometimes the case that the number of concelebrating priests is larger than the number of lay faithful present at the Mass, and sometimes there are no lay faithful present at all. The question then arises what image of the Church is formed during a concelebrated Mass when the number of presbyters is larger than the number of the faithful attending.

This issue is discussed in the Instruction of the Congregation for the Eastern Churches for the *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches*.<sup>53</sup> Following the *Constitution on Divine Liturgy* no. 57, that concelebration with the Bishop or other presbyter is a way of manifesting the unity of the priesthood, the Instruction suggests that sometimes concelebration should not be performed. It concerns situations in which the number of the concelebrants is disproportionate to the number of lay faithful. It is the second important criterion for deciding on the number of concelebrants permitted. Concelebration, being iconic of the Church, should respect the hierarchical nature of the community, which consists not only of ministers, but all the people living in Christ as well. The number of concelebrants should not be so big that they are forced to occupy places

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the Eucharist and take Communion with the lay faithful (*modo laicorum*).

<sup>53</sup> Congregazione per le Chiese Orientali, *Istruzione per l'applicazione delle prescrizioni liturgiche del Codice dei canoni delle Chiese Orientali*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana 1996.

intended for the faithful, which means they are outside the presbyterium and make worthy celebration more difficult.<sup>54</sup>

The return to Mass concelebration by virtue of the Constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium* in the Latin Church and accepting this form of celebration as ordinary when there are many priests was well received by both the clergy and the laity. Not only does concelebration solve the problem of individual celebration, it also emphasises and strengthens the unity of ministry. The theological value of this form of celebration is even more important. The concelebrated Mass shows the Church of Jesus Christ, which, united in faith, at one altar, presided by a priest (bishop or presbyter), offers the Holy Sacrifice as one community (of the clergy and the laity), which consists of different offices, ministries and charisms.

It can be noticed that the Holy See has recently been presenting a tendency to limit the number of concelebrants in a way that enables all of them to stay close to the altar. It seems impossible in situations when the presbyterium of the Bishop wants to concelebrate liturgy with him, or during pastoral meetings in which hundreds of priests participate. Since neither the *Constitution on Divine Liturgy* nor *Ritus servandus* officially limit the number of Mass concelebrants, the hitherto practice is in accordance with the regulations in force.

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<sup>54</sup> “Vi possono essere ragioni che sconsigliano però la concelebrazione, in particolare quando il numero dei concelebranti sia sproporzionato rispetto a quello dei laici presenti. La concelebrazione liturgica, in quanto «icona» della Chiesa, deve rispecchiare la natura di comunità gerarchicamente articolata, comprendente non solo i ministri sacri ma tutto il gregge di coloro che, sotto la loro guida, vivono in Cristo. Si abbia cura che i concelebranti non siano in quantità tale da prendere posto nella navata dove stanno i fedeli, e quindi al di fuori del santuario in modo tale da impedire lo svolgimento dignitoso del rito” (ibidem no. 57, p. 49–50).



## Summary

### Numerus concelebrantium

The concelebration of Mass restored in the Latin Church by the Constitution on Divine Liturgy (no. 57–58) was initially permitted only in specific situations. One of the requirements was for the Bishop or his Delegate to preside. In the process of concelebration rite preparation the Congregation for Divine Worship attempted to determine the permitted number of concelebrants. However, in *Ritus servandus*, published in 1965, we can only find information that the number of concelebrants is dependent on the particular circumstances in which concelebration is taking place, such as the size of the presbyterium. *Ritus servandus* indicates that the concelebrants need to surround the altar, at the same time not obscuring the view for the faithful. Currently, the concelebrated Mass can be presided by any presbyter. This form of Mass celebration has become ordinary practice and is advised when there are many priests and there is no need for individual celebration for the sake of the faithful. In recent years a tendency to limit the number of concelebrants can be noticed.

## Keywords

Eucharist, concelebration, presbyters, priesthood, liturgy renewal, Eucharistic community, number of concelebrants

## Streszczenie

### Numerus concelebrantium

Msza św. koncelebrowana przywrócona w Kościele łacińskim przez Konstytucję o liturgii (nn. 57–58) początkowo była dozwolona jedynie w uściślonych przypadkach. Wymagano także, aby przewodniczył jej biskup lub jego delegat. W procesie przygotowywania przez Kongregację Kultu Bożego obrzędów koncelebry próbowano określić także liczbę koncelebrujących kapłanów. Jednak w wydanym w 1965 r. *Ritus servandus* zaznaczono jedynie, że zależy to od konkretnych warunków, w których ma

miejsce koncelebracja Mszy św. Najważniejszym kryterium jest wielkość prezbiterium, aby koncelebrujący mogli otaczać ołtarz, nie zasłaniając go wiernym. Obecnie Mszy św. koncelebrowanej może przewodniczyć każdy prezbiter. Taka forma sprawowania Mszy św. stała się zwyczajną praktyką i jest zalecana zawsze wtedy, gdy jest wielu kapłanów i nie ma konieczności indywidualnej celebracji dla dobra wiernych. W ostatnich latach zauważa się tendencję do ograniczania liczby koncelebrujących, zachowując wskazania *Ritus servandus*. Potwierdza to podejmowanie tego problemu przez Kongregację Kultu Bożego, która przypomina i uzasadnia wcześniejsze przepisy Kościoła. Podkreśla się, że powinny być one zachowane, zwłaszcza w wielkich koncelebracjach i poza zwykłymi miejscami sprawowania Mszy św. Każda bowiem Msza św. koncelebrowana powinna ukazywać i w znakach wyrażać jej teologiczne znaczenie, tzn. jedność kapłaństwa, jedność Ofiary Chrystusa i jedność ludu Bożego.

## Słowa kluczowe

Eucharystia, koncelebra, prezbiterzy, kapłaństwo, odnowa liturgii, wspólnota eucharystyczna, liczba koncelebransów