

FROM THE EDITOR

Guest Editorial

Just after I sent the last issue to press, I saw a letter to the editor in the January Catholic World Report dealing with the very question my editorial had—the *versus apsidem* position. I received permission to reprint it, and I would be curious to know what Latinists think of this man's argument. K.P.

As merely an Anglican, I hesitate to intrude into the family games of others. But as a teacher all my life of Latin, I must protest against an illiterate translation, reported in your October number (“Which Way to Turn: A Tale of Two Citations”), of a paragraph—bearing on the Mass *ad orientem* in the new *General Instructions for the Roman Missal* (GIRM).

Would you like a Latin lesson? Consider the phrase: *quod expedit ubicumque possibile sit*. *Quod* is neuter. So it cannot possibly have as its antecedent *celebratio* (*versus populum*), which is feminine. *Quod* clearly refers to the preceding sentence as a whole, where the crucial term is *possit*. In GIRM this verb is commonly used for things which are genuinely optional—as in the preceding two and following two paragraphs (297-298 and 300-301).

Paragraph 299 says:

The High Altar [not, be it observed, every altar] should be constructed away from the wall, so that the option is open [*possit*] of walking easily around it and using it for Mass facing the people. This [i.e., having the altar free-standing so that the options are open] is desirable wherever possible.

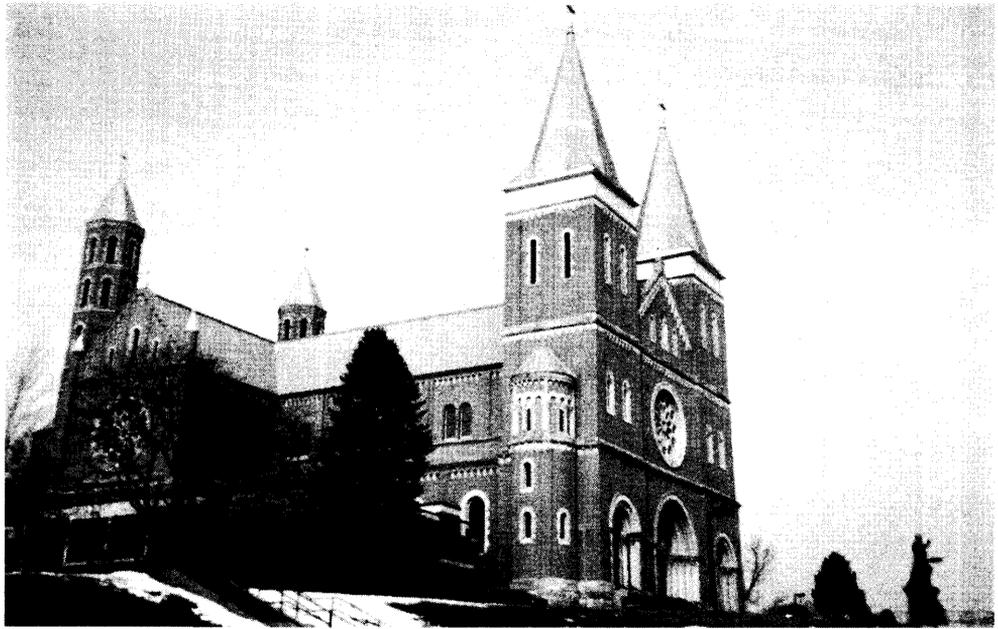
GIRM continues—see paragraph 277—to accept that there will be churches where keeping the options open in this way is not “possible.” And notice that according to the Oxford Latin Dictionary, *ubicumque* means only *wherever*.

You rightly point out that the new GIRM repeats the instruction that, at certain points, the priest (or deacon) must be “turned to the people” (*versus ad populum*), clearly implying that he may lawfully be turned away from them at other times. You could have mentioned that these are not merely careless repetitions from earlier versions of the GIRM; I have noticed three places (Paragraphs 154, 181, 195) where the phrase is now *added* to the text of the *Editio typica prima*, and these paragraphs occur in the description of a normal Sunday community Mass, celebrated perhaps with a deacon.

Incidentally, I suspect that a redaction critic, asked why the *quod . . .* clause has been added, might surmise that the addition was intended to emphasize the need for flexibility in the placing of the altar (it's a good idea [*expedit*] to have a free-standing altar where this doesn't cause too much trouble), rather than to discourage *ad orientem*.

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It is with great sadness that I report the death of our long-time member and past President, Dr. Theodore Marier (♣Feb. 24, 2001). There will be more on this man's life and contributions to American Catholic Church Music in a future issue.



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