

Celebration facing the people: a centuries–old practice

 NOV
26

 Posted by [Jonathan Day](#) in [Art and Architecture](#), [Church Reform](#), [Eucharist](#), [Reform of the Reform](#) | [36 Comments](#)

After the Council, detailed directions for the celebration of the revised form of Mass were drawn up, including an instruction that the priest should celebrate Mass facing the people.

No, I am not referring to the Second Vatican Council or *Inter Oecumenici* or the GIRM. This was the Council of Trent (1545 – 1563), and the relevant documents were prepared under the leadership of St Charles Borromeo, the archbishop of Milan. He had not attended the Council, but he became a major implementer of the disciplinary reforms that the Council promulgated. Many of these were about removing superstitious ceremonial from the Mass; others spoke directly to the conduct of bishops and priests. The former were to avoid silken vestments, expensive furs, rings other than the episcopal ring; the latter were to exhibit restraint in their clothing and personal furnishings. Both were expected to exercise simplicity and moderation in every aspect of their lives. The splendor of faith was to be preferred to ornate display. You might say that St Charles anticipated the call for ‘noble simplicity’ of a later Council.

He also wrote extensively about the construction and furnishings of churches, in a document published in 1577, *Instructiones fabricae et suppellectilis ecclesiasticae*. Chapter 10 speaks about the principal chapel of any church:

The site of this chapel must be chosen at the head of the church, in a prominent place and on an axis with the main entrance. The back part should face east, even if there are houses behind it. It must not face to the east of the summer solstice, but towards that of the equinox.

If this is not possible, the Bishop can decide and permit that it be built facing another direction, but in this case care must be taken at least that if possible it does not face north, but south. In any case the chapel in which the priest celebrates Mass from the high altar facing the people, in accordance with the rites of the Church, must face west.

In Latin:

Situs igitur huius capellae in capite Ecclesiae loco eminentiori, e cuius regione ianua primaria sit deligi debet : eius pars posterior in orientem versus recta spectet, etiam si a tergo illius domicitia populi sint. Nec vero ad solstitialem , sed ad aequino- ctialem orientem omnino vergat.

Si vero positio eiusmodi esse nullo modo potest , Episcopi iudicio, facultateque ab eo impetrata, ad aliam partem illius exaedificatio verti poterit; tuncque id saltem curetur, ut ne ad septentrionem , sed ad meridiem versus si fieri potest, plane spectet.

Porro ad occidentem versus illa extruenda erit, ubi pro ritu Ecclesiae a sacerdote versa ad populum facie Missae sacrum in altari maiori fieri solet.

In other words, *orientem* means simply “east”. When the priest celebrates at the main altar, facing the people, “in accordance with the rites of the Church”, he is to face east.

The historian John O’Malley asserts that Borromeo sought to standardize and promote a number of liturgical practices. Some were broadly adopted

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– for instance, placing the tabernacle in the center of the main altar. Others, which Borromeo had advocated, were not – O’Malley cites celebration with the priest facing the people as an example.

Uwe Lang speaks about Borromeo in his book about the orientation of liturgical prayer:

... the archbishop of Milan says that the *capella major* must be oriented, with the main altar facing east. Where this is impossible, it can be directed towards another cardinal point (except north) but preferable toward the west, ‘as, in accordance with the rite of the Church (*pro ritu Ecclesiae*) the sacrifice of the Mass is celebrated at the main altar by the priest with his face turned towards the people.’

But Lang airily dismisses this as an exception:

Borromeo must have had in mind those Roman basilicas with a westward apse and an eastward entrance, where Mass was celebrated facing the people; this practice was no doubt familiar to him. Still, for Borromeo, the eastward direction was the paramount principle for liturgy and church architecture.

This is not an uncommon move for Lang, whose works I have found generally tendentious; he often lays out different views and interpretations (e.g. of Christine Mohrmann’s claim that ecclesiastical Latin was ‘elevated’) but, often without giving reasons or citing sources, simply chooses the one that accords with his thesis. Joseph Ratzinger described *Turning Toward the Lord* as “delightfully objective and non-polemical”, leaving one to wonder whether the busy cardinal and prefect had time to read the book before blurbing it.

Celebration facing the people did not become normative, as (per O’Malley), St Charles Borromeo had wished it would. But this bit of history seems to give the lie to claims that celebration facing the people was a fabrication of the 20th century liturgical movement, or of misinterpretation of the Second Vatican Council.

SOURCES

J.W. O’Malley SJ, *Trent: What happened at the Council*. Harvard University Press, 2013. (This work, which really is “delightfully objective and non-polemical”, is a must read; it was here, rather than through my own research, that I came across St Charles Borromeo’s instruction that Mass should be celebrated facing the people).

Instructiones fabricae et supellectilis ecclesiasticae; translation by Evelyn Volker (see evelynvolker.com). Latin text available in several locations online, e.g. www.memofonte.it/home/files/pdf/scritti_borromeo.pdf.

Acta Ecclesiae Mediolanensis (Acts of the Church of Milan), see www.openlibrary.org

U.M. Lang, *Turning Towards the Lord: Orientation in Liturgical Prayer*. Ignatius, 2004

Tags: [Ad Orientem](#), [Council of Trent](#), [Fr. John O’Malley SJ](#), [Fr. Uwe Michael Lang](#)

This entry was posted on November 26, 2014, 10:50 am and is filed under [Art and Architecture](#), [Church Reform](#), [Eucharist](#), [Reform of the Reform](#). You can follow any responses to this entry through [RSS 2.0](#). You can [leave a response](#), or [trackback](#) from your own site.

36 Comments

#1 by [Anthony Ruff](#) on November 26, 2014 – 11:11 am

[QUOTE](#) [REPLY](#)



Wow. Great, Jonathan. Once again you’ve dug up stuff I never knew about. Thanks.
awr

#2 by [Karl Liam Saur](#) on November 26, 2014 – 11:27 am

[QUOTE](#) [REPLY](#)



For those who might be curious about “the east of the

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summer solstice" – the text is referring to the azimuth point on the horizon line of the sun at sunrise. Which, at the summer solstice in the middle latitudes, is toward (or even beyond) northeast. (At the winter solstice, the rising point of the sun is toward or even beyond the southeast.)

#3 by Rita Ferrone on November 26, 2014 – 12:43 pm

[QUOTE](#) [REPLY](#)



Robin Jensen gave a wonderful paper at the 2013 Societas Liturgica Congress demolishing the claim (expressed "airily," i.e. without citations or substantiating evidence, in a number of works, including Lang's) that the priest and people always faced the same direction in the early church. She presented archaeological evidence from North Africa to show that you just cannot generalize, and showed how strained the arguments were to the contrary. I am hoping to see that talk in print, but haven't yet seen it published.

Thank you, Jonathan, for this background on Charles Borromeo!

#4 by Adam Wood on November 26, 2014 – 12:53 pm

[QUOTE](#) [REPLY](#)



I'm confused about 'facing the people' in relation to what is also stated about the tabernacle being in the center of the altar. Would that imply actually not in the center of the altar but behind it, in the center of the sanctuary. I'm also a bit perplexed, just practically speaking, about the meaning of "chapel" in relation to "church" and also the "it may be permitted" followed by a "must" which seems to suggest that, actually, it may not be permitted.

Is he advocating an altar "away" from the wall, which the priest would stand "behind"?

Is he advocating this in every case, or only in the one case of the High Altar?

In the English, there's some ambiguity, so can someone explain from the Latin:

- Is "facing the people" a reference to the priest, or to the High Altar?
- Does the statement about facing the people imply, as it seems to me in English, that this wasn't a directive ("do this") but rather a statement ("this is what is done")?
- Is there architectural evidence from his time about how he directed the sanctuary and altar to be arranged in his own church in his lifetime?

#5 by Shaughn Casey on November 26, 2014 – 2:06 pm

[QUOTE](#) [REPLY](#)



@Adam Wood – comment #4:

"Porro ad occidentem versus illa extruenda erit, ubi pro ritu Ecclesiae a sacerdote versa ad populum facie Missae sacrum in altari maiori fieri solet."

Let's break it down bit by bit. The first part:

"Further, [the chapel] must be raised toward the west, where for the rite of the church (pro ritu Ecclesiae), the sacred rite of the Mass (sacrum Missae) is accustomed to be done (solet fieri) on the High Altar (in altari maiori) by a priest (a sacerdote) with [his?] face turned toward the people (versa ad populum facie)."

It's often overstated how little word order matters in Latin, especially later (post-Silver Age) Latin. I would put "versa ad populum facie" with "sacerdote" before I'd put it with "in altari maiori" due to its relative proximity.

If I understand the text correctly, the author is basically saying that when the altar had to be, for whatever reason, on the cardinal west side of the church, the priest would still face East, and thus in this case toward the people. (I'm hardly an expert on late Latin, though. It's a good 1100 years past what I spent most of my time reading.) You'll see that in some early

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churches — where the priest faces Cardinal East regardless of where the people are.

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#6 by Jonathan Day on November 26, 2014 - 2:24 pm

[QUOTE](#) [REPLY](#)



Thanks, Anthony!

Karl, thank you for the clarification on the summer solstice. I was rushing to get this posted, and didn't take time to research it.

#7 by Jonathan Day on November 26, 2014 - 2:25 pm

[QUOTE](#) [REPLY](#)



Adam, thanks for your thoughtful questions.

A bit of context: the two documents were not the sole work of Borromeo but his distillation of synodal meetings in Milan, following the Council of Trent.

My understanding is that 'chapel' refers to the altar and the space around it - including space for the assembly. Chapter 10 refers to the 'major chapel', which in a modern church we would call the principal or high altar. Hence it is to be 'on an axis with the main entrance'.

'Facing the people' clearly refers to the priest. I believe that the document is saying that if the priest does celebrate facing the people (i.e. from behind the altar), then he should be facing east as he faces the people.

Section 11 of the *Instructiones* makes it clear that the altar should normally be away from the wall of the apse. Only when, "because of the extremely limited size of the place, the space available is practically nothing" should the altar moved "much closer to the wall behind it" - not, notice "against the wall behind it".

Finally, almost of these statements are directives - either indicative future verbs ("you will do this") or subjunctives ("you must do this" or "you should do this").

#8 by Jonathan Day on November 26, 2014 - 3:45 pm

[QUOTE](#) [REPLY](#)



Rita, I hope you'll find a way to get Robin's talk onto *Pray Tell* once it is published. It sounds truly interesting.

The *Acta Ecclesiae Mediolanensis* is fascinating. It makes it clear just how deep the reform agenda was during the Council of Trent.

Volker made a decent and idiomatic translation of the *Instructiones*, but I have yet to find one for the *Acta Ecclesiae Mediolanensis*. Does anyone know of one?

#9 by Joshua Vas on November 26, 2014 - 5:05 pm

[QUOTE](#) [REPLY](#)



Jonathan, perhaps you could explain further your interpretation that is different from Lang's? I was reading it and felt a similar interpretation to his i.e. that for Borromeo, facing the people was part of the desire to still face East.

The way I read it was as a descriptive practice: 'when you celebrate facing the people in accordance with the rite of the Church, the sanctuary must face West'. This would comply with the interpretation of the rubric of the 1570 Roman Missal (yes, it may not have been used, but on the other hand, I don't think one can straightaway rule out a link) on the orientation of the priest when celebrating facing the people. It would also seem to be supported by later commentaries on the *Institutiones* in later centuries plus Borromeo himself seems to have privileged the East-facing position in one of his Provincial Councils (see here: <http://books.google.com/books?vid=oq9QAAAACAAJ&pg=PA104#v=onepage&q&f=false>; the passage

beginning "Nova Ecclesiae")

#10 by [Jordan Zarembo](#) on November 26, 2014 - 7:28 pm

[QUOTE](#) [REPLY](#)



Jonathan, could you elaborate on this part of Borromeo's writing?

[...] *e cuius regione ianua primaria* [...]

I don't disagree with your translation of *regione* as "axis". "Axis", at least to me, implies a level of precision which is not based on sight estimation alone. Why is a high level of precision in direction necessary? Maybe I'm missing something here, though.

I suspect that Borromeo desired to build or reorient churches according to the plan of the titular basilicas of Rome. This makes good sense, considering that the standardization of the Tridentine liturgy was also based within the liturgy of the Roman diocese. However, it's also important to note that while the priest-celebrant in titular churches indeed faces East, the deacons and ministers stand behind the altar. People assembled in the great nave, then, might not have seen much of the liturgy taking place on the other side of the altar. Borromeo is silent on this point (at least from the excerpt you have given). I am not sure if his goal in reorienting or building churches in the Roman basilical pattern was to ensure active participation as is understood today.

#11 by [Joshua Vas](#) on November 26, 2014 - 8:57 pm

[QUOTE](#) [REPLY](#)



@[Rita Ferrone](#) - comment #3:

I would be interested in seeing that too. Is there an audio anywhere of the presentation?

It reminds me of when the Chaldeans reformed their liturgy recently (sorry, blanking on the date) - there was an interesting exegesis of some of the early Syriac liturgical commentaries/'rubrical manuals' to defend facing the people for various parts of the liturgy including the Communion Rite.

But I suppose this raises the question of whether the pastoral dimension is sufficient to justify the near-abandonment within the Latin Church of what has been the dominant posture in the apostolic Churches for the better part of a millennium. It is interesting for me to see how the 'malleable' the arguments are, to some degree. I remember reading a Worship article from the 50s defending facing the people on the grounds of the distinction between priest and people in the offering of sacrifice; conversely, some in the 'facing the apse' camp appeal to the 'priest and people together' motif.

#12 by [Luke de Pulford](#) on November 26, 2014 - 9:06 pm

[QUOTE](#) [REPLY](#)



Surely all interpretations of the text are agreed that the priest would face versus populum only by virtue of having to face East?

In the normal course of things (i.e. the Church being properly orientated) the priest would have the appearance of having his back to the people, and there is nothing in the Borromeo quotation to contradict this view - quite the contrary, it reinforces it.

The question of whether the gap between 'liturgical East' and Equinoxial East can be bridged is an interesting one and equally ought not to be 'airily dismissed' as if our Christian forefathers' fixation on East was some spurious accretion. The argument for a common direction of liturgical prayer deserves fairer treatment, I feel.

Moreover the rather uncharitable assertion that Lang's work is often 'tendentious' is succeeded by what appears to me a far more tendentious claim - that Borromeo's rather dogmatic insistence upon East is really a mandate for the versus populum celebration of Mass.

Surely I'm missing something? This cannot be the argument of this piece?

But, if not, is the author suggesting that, on Borromeo's authority, all Eastward facing Churches should reinstate ad orientem worship? This would indeed be an editorial volte face on the part of the Pray Tell team!

#13 by [Gregory Hamilton](#) on November 26, 2014 - 9:16 pm

[QUOTE](#) [REPLY](#)



But isn't the reading making the point that the priest should face east even if the building is not oriented toward that? In other words, the priest normally faces east even if the axis of the building causes him to face the people?

#14 by [Aaron Sanders](#) on November 26, 2014 - 11:00 pm

[QUOTE](#) [REPLY](#)



I can't speak to Lang's whole work, but it does seem to me that his reading is nearer the mark than your characterization as "an instruction that the priest should celebrate Mass facing the people." I see nothing in the passage making versus populum celebration normative; instead, at least if I read things correctly, after mandating that, generally, chapels face east, the text then recognizes that in some places there exists a custom (solet having the force of something customarily or usually done, what one is "used to") that will necessitate orienting a church in the opposite direction so that the priest celebrating Mass still faces east. If versus populum at the high altar were in fact the prevailing custom, shouldn't we find that the general instructions mandate westward-facing construction, with an exceptional clause for the eastward tacked on at the end?

And even if versus populum were the prevailing custom, what text of the passage do you read to make that position of the priest an imperative? Perhaps it would be helpful for you to add in Fr. O'Malley's account of why we see here St. Charles' desire for versus ad populum as opposed to versus ad (verum) orientem.

#15 by [Todd Orbitz](#) on November 26, 2014 - 11:03 pm

[QUOTE](#) [REPLY](#)



This is no surprise and the rubrics of Missals prior to 1570 often direct the same at freestanding altars. This was not a Tridentine creation. However, the principle rubrics both before and after Trent, be they Gallican, Dominican, you name it, all assume a versus apsidem positioning of the Priest. Yes, there are secondary rubrics, but they are not the principle ones.... Hence, the principle rubrics mentioning the "completion of the circle".

#16 by [Daniel Canaris](#) on November 27, 2014 - 2:59 am

[QUOTE](#) [REPLY](#)



Your translation of the last sentence is quite wrong. It simply provides instructions for churches where it is customary (solet) to celebrate Mass facing the people. Everyone knows that this was the practice in the Roman basilicas and perhaps a few other churches modelled on them. There is nothing that suggests that the authors of this passage wanted to normalise this practice. If this were the case, it would contradict what is said above where it states quite clearly that the normative practice is for the church to face east.

#17 by [Jonathan Day](#) on November 27, 2014 - 3:23 am

[QUOTE](#) [REPLY](#)



I will be away from a computer for most of the day, so at this stage will only note that the translations here are not mine but Evelyn Volker's (done, I believe, as part of a PhD thesis) and Fr Lang's. The claim that Borromeo sought to promote celebration facing the people is Fr O'Malley's.

I will reply to the questions and comments in 9 - 15, but not immediately.

I would also like to repeat a question I raised in the earlier post about the Lincoln diocese. In the text I have quoted here, *oriens* clearly means “geographic east” – not “liturgical east”. When did the modern sense of “ad orientem” first appear? Would proponents of this sort of celebration insist on it when the celebrant facing the apse was at the same time facing geographic west?

#18 by Paul Inwood on November 27, 2014 – 4:34 am

[QUOTE](#) [REPLY](#)



@Aaron Sanders – comment #13:

Just on a point of detail, the Latin phrases are *versus populum* [facing the people] and *ad populum*, [towards the people], but not *versus ad* anything.

#19 by Fr. Allan J. McDonald on November 27, 2014 – 4:51 am

[QUOTE](#) [REPLY](#)



@Jonathan Day – comment #16:

At the Basilica of St. Paul Outside the Walls the celebrant faces west (and thus those in the nave face east) toward St. Peter's Basilica. Peter and Paul face each other. The ancient great basilicas all had the celebrant facing the geographical east all the while facing the nave except for St. Paul's. When the Church was able to go public in Rome with St. John Lateran the celebrant facing the geographical east was the earliest tradition for church buildings, but the real question is when did the symbolic “liturgical east” develop? Pope Benedict places the emphasis on the central crucifix on the altar even when the celebrant faces the nave, thus the crucifix becomes the point of the symbolic liturgical east, not necessarily the direction of the celebrant. It seems both traditions in this regard, the central crucifix or celebrant and congregation facing the same direction developed in close proximity. In the immediate aftermath of Vatican II when the altars were repositioned a central crucifix still remained for some years until liturgists decided otherwise somewhere in the very late 1960's or early 70's. They didn't want the elements of bread and wine (consecrated or not) to be in competition with candles and cross or obscured by these let alone the celebrant. The whole concept of competition with what is on the altar and being able to see the bread and wine prior to consecration and afterward seems to be the novelty based upon an over-emphasis on meal to the detriment of sacrifice. In my parish one of our four Sunday (Ordinary Form) Masses is toward the apse for the Liturgy of the Eucharist, but for all Masses there is still a central crucifix although low-flung on the altar serving the purpose that Pope Benedict suggests. And in my church when I face the congregation I am facing geographically eastward and when facing away, geographically westward but all Masses are symbolically eastward. I love ad orientem!

#20 by Luke de Pulford on November 27, 2014 – 4:55 am

[QUOTE](#) [REPLY](#)



It's hard to know what you mean when you say the 'modern sense' of ad orientem.

As far as I can see from the literature academic discussion about whether or not ad orientem can be taken to mean 'common direction of liturgical prayer' is 20th century.

But whatever label we stick on it, it's clear that this notion of liturgical – as opposed to geographical – East has a long history. The advent of the side altar is a good example. While side altars do necessitate a common direction of liturgical prayer, they emphatically do not necessitate Eastward facing celebration. They've been around a while.....

#21 by Fergus Ryan on November 27, 2014 – 5:22 am

[QUOTE](#) [REPLY](#)



@Jordan Zarembo – comment #10:

Up to the 16th century, the large ambones in the body of the church were still present and, presumably, used at solemn

Mass. They were removed from St Peter's Basilica at the Vatican, St Mary Major's Basilica, and the Lateran Basilica, in that century. The subdeacon and deacon would thus proclaim the readings from the relevant ambones at the proper times with the usual ceremony. The remaining ceremony before and after the readings was, of course, on the apse side of the altar, somewhat hidden from the people. BTW, the kinds of ambones in the basilicas I just mentioned are still to be seen at Basilica San Clemente and Basilica Santa Maria in Cosmedin, both in Rome, Italy.

#22 by [Jordan Zarembo](#) on November 27, 2014 - 11:04 am

[QUOTE](#) [REPLY](#)



@[Fergus Ryan](#) - comment #21:

Thank you for this information. I have seen the ambones at San Clemente, and they are certainly formidable parts of the liturgical structure which are clearly designed for the proclamation of scripture. I have always thought that the Tridentine-style proclamation of the epistle and gospel at Solemn Mass is highly contrived and even nonsensical. Why does the subdeacon face liturgical east to proclaim the epistle? Why does the deacon face liturgical north to proclaim the gospel? Yes, the Tridentine-style actions have been allegorized, but that is not sufficient enough historical reason for this practice. Little, if any, allegorization is needed for the ambones in San Clemente.

Would St. Charles Borromeo call for the reinstitution of ambones? A possible Borromeoan support of ambones in liturgical structure and liturgical use would shed quite a bit of light on his notions of altar orientation.

#23 by [Joshua Vas](#) on November 27, 2014 - 11:23 am

[QUOTE](#) [REPLY](#)



@[Jordan Zarembo](#) - comment #22:

Jordan, if you look at the link Jonathan has provided at the end of his post, you will see CB's ideas under Chapter 22 "De Ambonibus".

#24 by [John Henley](#) on November 27, 2014 - 2:18 pm

[QUOTE](#) [REPLY](#)



[Jonathan Day](#) : < My understanding is that 'chapel' refers to the altar and the space around it - including space for the assembly. Chapter 10 refers to the 'major chapel', which in a modern church we would call the principal or high altar. Hence it is to be 'on an axis with the main entrance'.

If 'chapel' refers to the altar and the space around it then we would have that space called in English the chancel including the sanctuary and I am not sure how it would also include space for the assembly.

In other words the area on the altar side of the screen.

I seem to recall seeing drawings of reconstructions of basilican plan churches in which there was a screen (pillars and horizontal beams from which hung curtains) on three of the four sides around the altar (excluding the apse side). IF (big if) the curtains were closed during the Action, (as I believe the Iconostasis doors are still closed in the Eastern tradition) then whether or no the priest was facing / towards the people (does S.Charles mean here by *populum* the *laos*, the holy people of God - i.e.the assembly: that the priest was towards where the people were?) the priest was unlikely to have been able to see the people nor they him? And if he were turning towards the people in order that he was facing geographical east, did the people also turn to face geographic east?

#25 by [Karl Liam Saur](#) on November 27, 2014 - 2:40 pm

[QUOTE](#) [REPLY](#)



A tangent arising from reading an online translation of S Carlo's Instructiones: the other division of the church, between men and women. I am aware of the former canonical

- requirements for this, but don't recall seeing how it was done. The *Instructiones* provide illustrations.

24: THE WOODEN PARTITION USED TO DIVIDE THE CHURCH

Since in line with ancient custom, to which the blessed Chrysostom bears witness, and which was once frequently encountered in many places in this province, that men must be separated from women in church, the criteria for the division of the church can be as follows. A wooden partition will be set up in the church, particularly in the most important, in the middle of the nave, leading in a straight line from the entrance of the main chapel to the principal entrance.

This partition will be affixed to solid small wooden columns, five cubits apart, firmly attached to the floor. If the wooden panels, from which it is constructed, must at times be removed, they will be set into grooves gouged out or made otherwise on either side of the columns. The partition will be about five cubits high. It will begin in the main doorway so that the entrance is divided in half, thus providing for separate access into the church for men and for women.

There will be a few openings in given places in the partition. Closed with door panels and bolts, they will be opened only when it is necessary to go from one side to the other. So that the faithful may more easily and conveniently see the preacher, the partition, in correspondence to the place where the sermon is given, must be considerably lower at this time. The upper part will therefore consist of panels attached with iron hinges and held in place on both sides by small bolts. When necessary, they can be opened and lowered, hanging down from the hinges.....

More at: <http://evelynvoelker.com/>

#26 by [Dennis Smolarski, SJ](#) on November 27, 2014 - 5:37 pm

[QUOTE](#) [REPLY](#)



When the Vatican daily Bulletin mentions the pope's liturgical calendar for the months ahead, Masses celebrated at the "high" altar in St. Peter's usually also are indicated by "CAPPELLA PAPALE" (Papal 'chapel').

#27 by [Jordan Zarembo](#) on November 27, 2014 - 9:26 pm

[QUOTE](#) [REPLY](#)



@[Karl Liam Saur](#) - comment #25:

I am **not** a Judaic Studies scholar, though I have a number of colleagues in the field. I'll soon be in town, and I'll be sure to mention what Karl has noted.

There is a striking resemblance between this partition and the mechitza (pl. mechitzot) of certain synagogues. From what I understand, mechitzot have taken diverse forms over the centuries — there is not archetype mechitzot which defines this feature of Jewish worship. The information found in *Instructiones* 24 is a snapshot in time of a feature of Christian worship that is now, to my knowledge, almost defunct. Like mechitzot, the Christian screen defies suspension in a certain time period.

The inclusion of an instruction to create a partition for the sexes in worship invites a certain healthy suspicion about Borromeo's plans for architectural and liturgical reform. Did Borromeo actually expect such a partition to function fluidly within liturgy? How integral is this partition to his overall liturgical plan? I suspect that the *Instructiones*, just as with its instruction for ambones or pseudo-ambones, offers general guidelines but not always exact metrics. Perhaps this partition is an ideal which, when integrated into the liturgy, did not actually appear as planned.

#28 by [Jonathan Day](#) on November 28, 2014 - 3:43 am

[QUOTE](#) [REPLY](#)



@[Joshua Vas](#) - comment #9:

Joshua, the main difference I have with Lang is that he appears to attribute this practice solely to the Roman basilicas, so that it becomes a curiosity, not widely applicable. But Borromeo and his colleagues were working in Milan.

Facing east (geographic east) was clearly a priority in the *Instructiones*.

#29 by Jonathan Day on November 28, 2014 – 3:48 am

[QUOTE](#) [REPLY](#)



@Jordan Zarembo – comment #10:

Jordan, the Latin is sprawling, with lots of verb doubling — “sit .. *debet*” for instance. But I think you are right: *regione* is something like “direction”.

I don't know whether St Charles Borromeo (and, note well, the other Milanese bishops) sought to achieve active participation. A closer reading of the *Acta* and *Instructiones* would offer clues. I have the impression that there was a desire, during the Catholic reformation, to encourage more frequent Communion and to bring the action of the Mass closer to the people. Look at the architecture of the Church of the Gesù, for instance, built at virtually the same time this piece was written.

#30 by Jonathan Day on November 28, 2014 – 3:51 am

[QUOTE](#) [REPLY](#)



@Luke de Pulford – comment #12:

I read most of this comment as polemical, as though everyone involved needs to come down on the “face the people” or “face the apse” side. If there is an editorial policy about these things on the *Pray Tell* team, I sure haven't heard about it.

Nor do I see St Charles Borromeo's views, however you interpret them, as a mandate for our times. They simply establish that celebration facing the people isn't a strange modern invention.

#31 by Jonathan Day on November 28, 2014 – 3:58 am

[QUOTE](#) [REPLY](#)



@Paul Inwood – comment #18:

Paul, the confusion may arise because of the use of *versus ad populum* in the IGRM, e.g.

§154. Deinde sacerdos, manibus extensis, clara voce dicit orationem Dómine Iesu Christe, qui dixisti; eaque conclusa, extendens et iungens manus, pacem annuntiat, versus ad populum, dicens: Pax Dómini sit semper vobíscum. Popu- lus respondet: Et cum spírítu tuo. Postea, pro opportunitate, sacerdos subiun- git: Offérte vobis pacem.

Some read *versus* here as if it were *conversus*, i.e. “turning toward the people”, and therefore implying that the priest was previously facing away from them. As far as I can see, *conversus ad populum* appears nowhere in the IGRM.

#32 by Luke de Pulford on November 28, 2014 – 4:58 am

[QUOTE](#) [REPLY](#)



@Jonathan Day – comment #30:

I have to disagree, I hope – this time – not too polemically.

The extract establishes that Mass facing East was, for Borromeo, imperative – even when facing East meant facing the people. Which isn't the same thing as what you're saying, it seems to me. You're drawing an equivalence between *ad populum* post 1970 with what Borromeo is describing which is emphatically not *ad populum* worship, but *versus orientem* worship...

As to editorial policy – I look forward to a piece by Uwe Lang!

#33 by Jonathan Day on November 28, 2014 – 7:00 am

[QUOTE](#) [REPLY](#)



@Luke de Pulford – comment #32:

Luke, I can only speak personally, but I'm sure Fr Lang would be welcome as a guest poster here.

Again, personally, I would be happy to see more exchange between Pray Tell, The Chant Café and New Liturgical Movement — both sites listed on this blog's sidebar.

Open, irenic exchange benefits all, even when we disagree ... especially when we disagree. Thanks for your contributions so far!

#34 by Aaron Sanders on November 28, 2014 - 9:39 am

[QUOTE](#) [REPLY](#)



[Paul Inwood](#) : [@Aaron Sanders](#) - comment #13: Just on a point of detail, the Latin phrases are *versus populum* [facing the people] and *ad populum*, [towards the people], but not *versus ad* anything.

Except for when it IS "versus ad" something. Our shorthands for liturgical orientation are *versus populum* and *ad orientem*, and *versus populum* is indeed the way in which the Missal refers to the overall orientation of Mass (IGRM 299), but this adverbial use of *versus* (found once more in the IGRM at 146) is only one possibility, and the vast majority of our rubrical notes (e.g. IGRM 124, 154, 157, 165, 181, 185, 243, 244, 310) and even the originally posted material above from the Instructiones ("versa ad *populum facie*") use the participial form to describe the celebrant's orientation as "*versus ad populum*". Incidentally, this grammatical distinction between *versus populum* (towards the people) and *versus ad populum* (turned to[towards] the people) could reinforce the argument that the Novus Ordo rubrics presume an *ad orientem* orientation, since the priest is not simply facing that way naturally but has "turned" in order to do so (and when the following rubric wants him to face the altar it then says "*conversus ad altare*", again changing his position). At any rate, since I was speaking of Borromeo's theoretical desire I simply copied his language of the Instructiones.

#35 by Jordan Zarembo on November 28, 2014 - 11:54 am

[QUOTE](#) [REPLY](#)



[@Jonathan Day](#) - comment #31:

Here is the rubric immediately before the *orate fratres* in the 1962 Missal:

Postea osculatur altare et, versus ad populum, extendens et iungens manus, voce paululum elevata, dicit:

versus ad populum here is inconclusive, as it is in the IGRM instructions for the priest to offer the Pax. This is stretching it a bit, but let's say a priest is saying Mass on an altar in front of a cloister screen. A few laypersons are attending this Mass, but it is clear that this is the conventual Mass for the monastery. It would make sense that the priest not turn to the few of the laity in attendance but pronounce the *orate fratres* to the screen. This might appear to be *ad orientem* worship, but isn't in practice. The practice outlined here is more akin to what is now called *versus populum*.

However, a celebrant facing *ad apsidem* would likely interpret both the instruction *versus ad populum* from the Tridentine rubrics and the IGRM as a prompt to turn his back to the altar and give the *orate fratres* in the direction of the congregation.

I strongly suspect that even in the Borromeo reforms the dialogue parts of the Mass (i.e. *orate fratres* were addressed to the clergy and ministers in the space between the episcopal throne and the altar, and not to the nave. In other words, the priest-celebrant would turn away from the nave.

[In medieval use it is likely that *conversus* and *versus* are synonymous, as many complex words were "downgraded" to a more simple meaning (i.e. the medieval confusion between *ipse* and *is*, with the former more prominent even if the two pronouns are not synonymous in classical use.) Arguably, *paululum* is a diminutive which has completely lost its force, further reinforcing this phenomenon.]

#36 by Joshua Vas on November 28, 2014 - 12:01 pm

[QUOTE](#) | [REPLY](#)



@Jonathan Day - comment #28:

Thanks for the clarification Jonathan. A follow up question: do you not think, though, that Borromeo was perhaps consciously attempting to copy the practice of the Roman basilicas (similar to how some did in the early liturgical movement)? He seems to refer to their praxis, as if to a normative standard, several times in the course of the Instructions.

I would disagree slightly with you with the idea that facing geographic East was necessarily a priority - Borromeo does not give directions for churches not oriented on an East-West axis. I interpret it more as saying that where the practice of facing the people existed, the orientation had to be toward the geographic East.

As a tangent: Volker has included an interesting extract from Borromeo's correspondence regarding raising the tabernacle of the high altar in the Duomo on pillars to allow for the visibility by the congregation of those seated in the retrochoir (what kind of visibility at that distance is debatable but...) and during the celebration of the Mass.

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