

“Wherever it is reasonably possible, the altar must be turned toward the people. The seat of the celebrant when possible must be placed in the apse.”

— Cardinal Lercaro, president of the Consilium, NCWC News Service, 6 March 1965, Foreign, p. 5.

But by what authority did Cardinal Lercaro make such a statement? Four (4) experts have said this was merely his private opinion.

The following is from the American Bishops' Newsletter (September, 1965):

The Celebrant's Seat: Documentation

While the location of the celebrant's seat or bench is not precisely determined, the following documentation indicates what is possible and preferably to satisfy the goals of the revised liturgy.

1. “The seat for the celebrant and ministers, according to the structure of individual churches, shall be so placed that it may be easily seen by the faithful and that the celebrant may truly appear to preside over the entire community of the faithful.

“Nevertheless, if the seat is placed behind the altar, the form of a throne is to be avoided, as this belongs to the bishop alone.”—S.R.C., Instruction, September 26, 1964, n. 92.

2. “The seats of those who preside: Since the bishop should appear plainly as the president and leader of the assembly, it is fitting that in cathedral churches the seat of the bishop be placed in the middle of the apse, which is at the head of the church or assembly. On both sides of the bishop's seat, places should be provided for the canons or priests. In other churches, where there is no seat for the bishop, especially in parish churches, this place of honor may be occupied by the plain seat of the pastor or celebrating priest because he presides over the assembly in the name of the bishop whose co-worker he is. But every appearance of a throne should be avoided in the case of those who do not have the right to the use of a throne.”—Explanatory note or “declaration” of the Pontifical Preparatory Commission for art. 128 of the Constitution, submitted to the Council by the Conciliar Commission on the Liturgy.

3. “The celebrant should properly exercise his part as president of the congregation of the faithful not only at the altar but also through the suitable position of his seat. Up to now, the seat of the celebrant and the ministers was understood as the bench at which the priest could conveniently wait while the chants, especially if lengthy, were being sung. Now, however, the same seat must clearly express the office of presiding that is proper to the celebrant. This will be achieved if it is placed, according to the architecture of the particular church, at the head of the church (center of the apse) or another convenient place.”—Carlo Braga, assistant secretary of the Consilium, meeting with presidents of national liturgical commissions, October 26, 1964.

4. “Wherever it is reasonably possible, the altar must be turned toward the people. The seat of the celebrant when possible must be placed in the apse.”—Cardinal Lercaro, president of the Consilium, NCWC News Service, March 6, 1965, Foreign, p. 5.

5. Although the tabernacle can be located in the center of the principal apse of the church, “this solution offers difficulty with regard to the presidential position of the celebrant, when he celebrates Mass *versus populum*. For the celebrant's seat cannot then be placed under the tabernacle, which is not at all becoming.”—*Notitiae* (= *N*) 2-10.

6. “Some priests think that the best place for the celebrant and ministers is behind the altar, in the apse. But, lest the altar hide the celebrant and ministers, they say that the seat must be elevated, by at least three steps, so that the people may see them and the celebrant may truly appear to preside. Can this opinion be sustained?

“Response: Yes, in accordance with the Instruction, n. 92.

“Can this opinion be sustained if a throne for the exposition of the holy Eucharist is placed in the apse?

“Response: If the tabernacle is in the apse or a throne for the exposition of the holy Eucharist is placed there, the presidential seat should be located at the side of the altar and be somewhat elevated.”—*N* 4-138.