

# Jesuits and Eucharistic Concelebration

James J. Conn, SJ

---

*Following Vatican II, the delegates of GC 31 encouraged concelebration in Jesuit houses. Since then, however, the practice has become controversial. The author points out that the current predominant custom of Jesuit priests attending Mass modo laico is contrary to the norms of the church and has various negative consequences. For example, Jesuits today who wish to concelebrate sometimes have to compromise their consciences lest their communities regard them as divisive.*

---

It is hardly a secret among Jesuits that it is a disputed question whether or when they—or, for that matter, any priests—should concelebrate at the eucharistic celebration. Full disclosure requires me to admit that my own position on the question has changed over time. Ordained in 1974, I initially followed the practice that since has become typical in our communities. Later, my studies in canon law (1980–1983) changed my opinion to the one that I will elaborate shortly. My present practice, when not presiding at a scheduled mass for the benefit of the faithful, is to concelebrate at the daily mass at St. John’s Seminary, where I teach, or with a willing confrere at home. I attend the weekly prescribed community Mass, but I refrain from concelebrating, since I prefer not to be a source of distraction in a community where no one else concelebrates, whether he might like to or not.

I first wrote these observations in the summer of 2006 as a personal exercise that I passed on to individuals seeking my opinion on the subject. I was invited by the leadership of the Jungmann Society of international Jesuit liturgists to present the paper

at their plenary meeting in June 2008 at the Abbey of Montserrat. It was subsequently published by the Jungmann group in Spanish translation but has not yet been published in English.<sup>1</sup> The text that follows is almost identical to the 2008 version.

## I. A Historical Perspective

The rite of eucharistic concelebration was extended in the Latin Church during and after the Second Vatican Council. The practical context of the council made the extension of the rite particularly timely. Concelebration was a means of accommodating the large number of bishops and priests present for the council and eliminated the need for them to celebrate Mass individually.<sup>2</sup> It should be recalled that the daily celebration of—not attendance at—Mass by priests in the Latin Church has long been and remains the presumption and preference of the church’s spiritual tradition and discipline. Canon 904 has as its source the Vatican II Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests, *Presbyterorum Ordinis* (1965), which affirms that especially at Mass the priest acts in the person of Christ.<sup>3</sup> The canon reads as follows:

Remembering always that in the mystery of the eucharistic sacrifice the work of redemption is exercised continually, priests are to celebrate frequently; indeed, daily celebration is recommended earnestly since, even if the faithful cannot be present, it is the act of Christ and the Church in which priests fulfill their principal function.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> James J. Conn, SJ, “Los Jesuitas en la concelebración eucarística” in *Jesuitas, Sacerdocio y Liturgia: III Congreso de la Asociación Internacional Jungmann para Jesuitas y Liturgia. Abadía de Montserrat–Cataluña, España. Junio 23–28 de 2008* (Mexico City: Obra Nacional de la Buena Prensa, 2010), 57–76.

<sup>2</sup> Sacred Congregation of the Rites, *Ecclesiae Semper* (March 7, 1965), in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* [AAS] 57 (1965): 410–12. The decree asserts that the theological reasons, “much more than any at a purely practical level,” are the ones that explain why concelebration in one form or other has always been accepted by the church (p. 411).

<sup>3</sup> *Presbyterorum Ordinis* (December 7, 1965), 13, [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_decree\\_19651207\\_presbyterorum-ordinis\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651207_presbyterorum-ordinis_en.html) (hereafter cited as *PO*).

<sup>4</sup> Canon 904; *Codex Iuris Canonici auctoritate Ioannis Pauli PP. II promulgatus* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1983); trans. *Code of Canon Law: Latin-English Edition*,

Conciliar teaching in *Sacrosanctum Concilium* acknowledged the theological grounding to this practically useful rite—namely, its appropriate manifestation of the unity of the priesthood (SC 57). This conciliar text and the postconciliar liturgical reform called for concelebration on certain occasions—to wit, priestly ordination and the Masses of Holy Thursday and the Easter Vigil, when individual, or so-called private, celebration of Mass is forbidden. Discretion for its more extensive application was left to local authority.

The widespread practice of concelebration in the Latin Church was probably not foreseen by the council. The pattern of eucharistic practice then as now was envisioned as that of individual priests celebrating Mass for assemblies of the faithful in parishes and other churches and oratories. Religious communities and other residences of priests—for example, seminaries and colleges—were viewed as exceptional situations in which concelebration would be practiced on a more frequent and even daily basis. Not only did concelebration eliminate the need for multiple individual celebrations, but it provided these communities with a new means of celebrating their unity in faith and grace around one table of word and sacrament.

The right to celebrate Mass individually—not privately, since all liturgy is by definition public, and not without at least one member of the faithful present (canon 906)—was guaranteed by the documents first extending concelebration and later by the Code of Canon Law (c. 902). One may reasonably presume that this conciliar provision was made to accommodate older priests or those with problems of conscience over such matters as the moral simultaneity of pronouncing the words of consecration. The celebration of Mass individually—that is, without an assembly—remains widely practiced in some quarters of the Society of Jesus. In such celebrations, liturgical norms may or may not be carefully observed. The same is probably true of the requirement that at least one of the faithful be present.<sup>5</sup>

---

*New English Translation* (Washington: Canon Law Society of America, 1999), 295. All citations of the code refer to the former edition, and all translations to the latter, hereafter cited as CLSA (1999), followed by the page number.

<sup>5</sup> The faculty of celebrating Mass “in a case of necessity . . . without a server” is included in the 1963 *Elenchus Facultatum*, appendix seconda, n. 9. It is not clear whether

The Society welcomed the rite of concelebration at the time of the 31st General Congregation, and for about a decade thereafter widely practiced that rite in our communities, especially in houses of formation. The congregation cited the provisions of *Presbyterium Ordinis* 13 and *Sacrosanctum Concilium* 57 noted above, declaring that “Concelebration, by which the unity of the priesthood is appropriately manifested, is encouraged in our houses when allowed by the proper authority, while each priest shall always retain his right to celebrate Mass individually.”<sup>6</sup> Proper authority here meant the universal and local authority of the Apostolic See, the episcopal conference, and the diocesan bishop or local ordinary.

During this same period, many other liturgical reforms were legitimately introduced, such as the gradual use of the vernacular in the celebration of Mass and the other sacraments, the simplification of many rites in the celebration of the Eucharist according to the first typical edition (1970) of the *General Instruction on the Roman Missal* (*GIRM*), several new eucharistic prayers, and the option of the faithful receiving Holy Communion in the hand and under both kinds.<sup>7</sup> While competent ecclesiastical authority eventually mandated these innovations, Jesuits often had anticipated them within the more secluded context of their religious houses.

At the same time, Jesuits also introduced other unapproved practices, some of the less outrageous of which were the elimination of the lavabo, abandoning some or all of the required liturgical vesture, alternate postures for both celebrants and assembly, and using unapproved texts. The anticipation of reforms before their official approval or im-

---

celebrating “without a server” is the same as celebrating without at least one of the faithful present.

<sup>6</sup> GC 31, d. 14, no. 10; *Jesuit Life and Mission Today: The Decrees and Accompanying Documents of the 31st–35th General Congregations of the Society of Jesus*, ed. John W. Padberg, SJ (St. Louis, MO: The Institute of Jesuit Sources [IJS], 2009), 103.

<sup>7</sup> *Institutio Generalis Missalis Romani*, in *Missale Romanum ex Decreto Sacrosancti Oecumenici Concilii Vaticani II Instauratum Auctoritate Pauli PP. VI Promulgatum, Editio Typica* (Città del Vaticano, 1970), 15–92. Hereafter, editions of this document are cited in the text and notes of this essay as *GIRM*, followed, where applicable, by year of promulgation and paragraph number.

plementation and the spontaneous introduction of other innovations gradually eroded the careful if simple liturgical observance formerly common among Jesuits and compromised the consensus that the rites and texts of the liturgical books were normative.

Such general relaxation of liturgical observance created a ready context for unauthorized changes in the rite of concelebration in Jesuit communities, including the reduction or elimination of vestments, words, or gestures on the part of concelebrants. Eventually, some Jesuits appropriately refrained from this kind of minimalism in the rite of concelebration; but instead of celebrating individually, they began simply to assist *modo laico* at masses celebrated by only one member of the community.<sup>8</sup> An article published by Fr. John Baldovin (UNE) in *Worship* in 1985 provides a certain scholarly justification for this practice.<sup>9</sup> Reflecting on the practice of the so-called “private mass” in religious communities of priests, he writes, “Given the nature of the eucharist as a communal act symbolizing the church’s unity, it seems to me that concelebration in such circumstances is far preferable to individual celebrations with or without a server.”<sup>10</sup> With this, I fully agree.

Alas, however, Fr. Baldovin’s praise is faint, for he goes on to assert, “Frankly, although I think that concelebration can be an effective sign of the unity of the church, there are circumstances in which priests should assist at the eucharist in the same manner as lay people and that ritual concelebration should be extremely rare.”<sup>11</sup> He bases his position on the notion that lay persons feel that the distinction between priests and assembly somehow highlights disunity in the church, and on the concept that priests sometimes need more to be ministered unto than to minister. He further asserts, “Another occasion which seems to warrant priests refraining from concelebration is the frequent or daily

---

<sup>8</sup> Here and elsewhere in this essay, the verb *assist*, when referring to a person at Mass, means “to attend” rather than “to give support or help.” And when referring to a priest, it implies that he is not concelebrating. —Ed. note.

<sup>9</sup> John Baldovin, “Concelebration: A Problem of Symbolic Roles in the Church,” *Worship* 59 (1985): 32–47.

<sup>10</sup> Baldovin, “Concelebration,” 43.

<sup>11</sup> Baldovin, “Concelebration,” 44.

Eucharist. Here no sacramental or ecclesial purpose is served by the outward manifestation of the unity of the priesthood, especially when there may be a very small minority of unordained people present.”<sup>12</sup> On this point we disagree. I for one have been deeply moved by the truth of the one priesthood I share with the other priests with whom I have concelebrated at a daily Eucharist. Furthermore, I suspect that the brothers and scholastics present are not inclined to dismiss that sign so easily. Unfortunately, the unavailability of concelebration may have resulted in some priests resorting to the liturgically less preferable choice of celebrating Mass individually.

Perhaps back in 1985, Fr. Baldovin’s discomfort with concelebration may have been more deeply motivated by its poor implementation along the lines of his comments at the end of the article. There he raises several valid questions on such issues as voice volume, vesture, spatial arrangements, and the like. Perhaps these neuralgic points are troubling enough to an attentive liturgist that refraining from concelebration is for him the best solution.

On that note, he admits that his view is at odds with the 1972 declaration on concelebration of the then Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship.<sup>13</sup> That document bases its contrary position on the well-known principle that “in liturgical celebrations each person, minister or layman, who has an office to perform, should do all of, but only, those parts which pertain to his office by the nature of the rite and the principles of liturgy” (SC 28). The declaration on concelebration applies this principle to concelebration when it says:

Because of the distinct sacrament of orders, priests exercise a function peculiar to them in the celebration of the Mass when, either individually or together with other priests, by a sacramental rite they bring about the presence of Christ’s sacrifice, offer it, and through communion share in it.

---

<sup>12</sup> Baldovin, “Concelebration,” 44.

<sup>13</sup> Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship, *In Celebratione Missae* (August 7, 1972), in *AAS* 64 (1972): 561–63.

Consistent with this, priests should celebrate or concelebrate in order to take part in the Mass more fully and in their own distinctive way; nor should they receive communion in the manner proper to the laity.<sup>14</sup>

The declaration does not articulate a new norm. It is rooted in the notion of the priest acting *in persona Christi* (PO 13), and it found early expression in the postconciliar instruction *Eucharisticum Mysterium* of the Sacred Congregation of Rites.<sup>15</sup> This 1967 document similarly commends to priests the exercise of the order proper to them by celebrating or concelebrating “and not simply receiving communion like the laity.”<sup>16</sup> Not only does it confirm the council’s teaching that concelebration “aptly expresses the unity of the sacrifice and the priesthood,” but it adds another dimension—namely, that concelebration “symbolizes and strengthens the fraternal bond between priests.”<sup>17</sup> The instruction further extends the permission for the use of concelebration, especially in communities of priests. It adds the following practical provision: “Those who live in community or serve the same church should gladly welcome visiting priests to concelebrate with them.”<sup>18</sup>

While in more recent years Jesuits have eliminated other unauthorized liturgical practices in many places, it has nonetheless become the almost universal practice in Jesuit houses in the US that priests do not concelebrate but rather simply assist at daily Mass. While local or house policies may or may not permit concelebration, the practice of concelebrating at daily Mass in our houses has nearly disappeared. By way of exception, many but not all Jesuits do concelebrate at ordinations, first masses, funerals, masses of religious profession, and certain masses on special occasions celebrated in schools and universities. Also, some priests still celebrate individu-

---

<sup>14</sup> Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship, *In Celebratione Missae*, 561; trans. Thomas C. O’Brien, *Documents on the Liturgy 1963–1979: Conciliar, Papal, and Curial Texts* (Collegeville MN: Liturgical Press, 1982), 563.

<sup>15</sup> Sacred Congregation of Rites, *Eucharisticum Mysterium* (May 25, 1967), in AAS 59 (1967): 539–73 (hereafter cited as *EM*).

<sup>16</sup> *EM* 43.

<sup>17</sup> *EM* 47.

<sup>18</sup> *EM* 47.

ally in “private” chapels. Others, of course, celebrate Mass for the Jesuit community, for groups of students, in our own and other parish churches, for religious sisters and brothers, and so forth.

Although Fr. Baldovin does not argue this point in this *Worship* article, except perhaps indirectly by his use of the term *ritual concelebration*, there is a certain widespread belief, often mentioned but not readily documented, that any time a priest takes part in the celebration of the Eucharist, he does so as a priest and therefore, in a sense, “concelebrates.” This notion, however, is not easily reconciled with the long tradition, carried out before and since the Vatican II extension of concelebration beyond ordination masses, of priests assisting at the Eucharist in choir, which suggests a clear distinction between the roles of celebrant or concelebrants and assisting though not concelebrating clergy.

On May 23, 1957, the Holy Office published a response, approved *in forma communi* by Pope Pius XII (1876–1958), to a *dubium de valida concelebratione* that had been submitted to it.<sup>19</sup> The question posed in the doubt was whether several priests validly concelebrate the sacrifice of the Mass if only one of them pronounces the words of consecration over the bread and wine while the others do not but, with the knowledge and consent of the celebrant, have and manifest their intention of making his words and actions their own. The response was “negative, because by the institution of Christ, he alone celebrates validly who pronounces the words of consecration.”<sup>20</sup>

## II. The Current Situation

To my mind, most US Jesuits would agree with the facts of the current practice of eucharistic concelebration as stated above. There is probably less agreement about the reasons for the practice, its relationship to the law of the church, or its consequences. Observations

---

<sup>19</sup> Supreme Sacred Congregation of the Holy Office, *Dubium de Valida Concelebratione* (May 23, 1957), in *AAS* 49 (1957): 370.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

on each of these follow. Note, however, that I base what I say about the reasons for the current practice primarily on my own experience of watching and listening to our confreres. And some of these comments are hypotheses that may need further testing.

### **A. Reasons for the Current Practice**

1. Many Jesuits appear to imitate uncritically the practice of others. Specifically, many of our elders abandoned their former practices because, some forty years ago, the young—including superiors—set a new pace. Likewise, some younger men today observe the practice they learned in houses of formation, whether they have reflected carefully on it or not. Other younger men do not accept their elders' practice regarding the Eucharist, though some are more vocal about the matter than others.
2. It is probable that many Jesuits do not know the pertinent liturgical norms. Some of our men have extensive knowledge, but some appear to have only partial or selective knowledge. For a variety of reasons, disputes in this area are very difficult to settle; and of all arbiters, Jesuits rarely consider the opinions of canonists authoritative.
3. Some Jesuits may believe that liturgical practice is simply a matter of taste, style, and opinion. From this perspective, they might view the dominant practice of rare concelebration as simple, comfortable, and informal. These are subjective values that many Jesuits wish to cultivate in their lives, and they apply them to liturgical practice. This is a positive or neutral interpretation of behavior that the more censorious might attribute, perhaps too rashly, to sloth or irreverence.
4. Some Jesuits may have a mistaken understanding of how ecclesiastical law, including liturgical law, is properly interpreted and of how the canonical concept of custom is applied to situations regulated by liturgical law.
5. Some Jesuits tend to equate concelebration with liturgical solemnity, which they feel has its place but is not for every day. This is a line of argument that can be inferred from Fr. Baldovin's article.

6. For some Jesuits, the dominant practice reflects a notion of the priesthood that may be characterized as functional, in that it views the ministerial priesthood as a service of liturgical leadership offered to the community. From this perspective, when a priest is entrusted with “leading” or “presiding at” the Eucharist on a certain occasion, it is then that he fulfills a priestly role; otherwise, he remains a member of the assembly in the manner of the lay faithful. In this spirit, some Jesuits are uneasy with the term *priest* and prefer *minister* or *presider*.

Their critics would characterize this functional notion as neglectful of the principle that the priesthood is an ontological reality and that the ordained priest acts at Mass *in persona Christi Capitis* whether he is principal concelebrant or not. Opponents of the dominant practice also appeal to the principle cited above from the constitution on the liturgy that at the Eucharist each should do all and only what is appropriate to his or her condition in the church (SC 28). They further recall the close connection made in the encyclical *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* between the priesthood and the Eucharist, and John Paul II’s (1920–2005) repeated emphasis on the distinction between the common priesthood of all the faithful and the ministerial priesthood of the ordained.<sup>21</sup>

7. Some Jesuits seem to view concelebration as an exercise in clericalism whereby those who are ordained display their superiority over those who are not. In response, their opponents appeal to the principle of equality in dignity but difference in condition (canon 208). Moreover, some Jesuits refrain from concelebration because of the antipathy

---

<sup>21</sup> John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* (April 17, 2003), 28–30, [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/special\\_features/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_20030417\\_ecclesia\\_eucharistia\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/special_features/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_20030417_ecclesia_eucharistia_en.html). Regarding the distinction, see John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici* (December 30, 1988), 21–23, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_exh\\_30121988\\_christifideles-laici.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_30121988_christifideles-laici.html); *Pastores Dabo Vobis* (March 15, 1992), 13–15, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_exh\\_25031992\\_pastores-dabo-vobis.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_25031992_pastores-dabo-vobis.html); and the interdicastrial instruction approved *in forma specifica*, *Ecclesiae de Mysterio*, “On Certain Questions Regarding the Collaboration of the Non-Ordained Faithful in the Sacred Ministry of Priests” (August 15, 1997), “Theological Principles 1: The Common Priesthood of the Faithful and the Ministerial Priesthood,” [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cclergy/documents/rc\\_con\\_interdic\\_doc\\_15081997\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cclergy/documents/rc_con_interdic_doc_15081997_en.html).

toward it displayed by some women in the church for whom it highlights their exclusion from holy orders, and with whom some Jesuits wish to be in solidarity. Opponents of this view point to the definitive character of the apostolic letter *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* of John Paul II.<sup>22</sup>

## B. Current Ecclesiastical Discipline

Unlike the preceding seven points, which are conjecture, the comments that follow are based on juridically-binding texts and their proper interpretation.

First, the 1983 Code of Canon Law permits rather than requires concelebration, providing as follows:

Unless the welfare of the Christian faithful requires or suggests otherwise, priests can concelebrate the Eucharist. They are completely free to celebrate the Eucharist individually, however, but not while a concelebration is taking place in the same church or oratory.<sup>23</sup>

The source of this norm is *Mysterium Eucharisticum*, the 1967 instruction cited above. Here, the “welfare of the faithful” that limits concelebration is obviously the need of the faithful for masses to be celebrated for their pastoral advantage. In other words, priests should not, for the sake of concelebrating Mass, neglect their pastoral obligation to celebrate Mass at times and in places convenient to the faithful. This hardly presents a problem in Jesuit contexts, and even if pastoral duties required a Jesuit to celebrate Mass for the faithful, the discipline of canon 905 §1 on bination would allow him to concelebrate at a community mass on the same day.

It should be noted, however, that this norm on its own strength establishes no right to concelebrate; rather, it guarantees a priest the right to celebrate Mass individually. In view of the reason for this norm,

---

<sup>22</sup> John Paul II, *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* (May 22, 1994), [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost\\_letters/1994/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_apl\\_19940522\\_ordinatio-sacerdotalis.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_letters/1994/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_19940522_ordinatio-sacerdotalis.html).

<sup>23</sup> Canon 902; trans. CLSA (1999), 295.

“individually” here probably means “without an assembly”; in other words, it is not within a priest’s rights to exclude concelebrants, since it is the function of the superior of a community or the rector of a church to “facilitate and encourage” concelebration.<sup>24</sup>

Note here that the code establishes no right to concelebration, although other sources of law favor it. On the other hand, the third typical edition of the *GIRM* (2002) contains new material on concelebration that is relevant to this discussion. The relevant provision appears in the document’s fourth chapter, which deals with the different forms of celebrating Mass. Regarding masses presumably celebrated in religious institutes and societies of apostolic life, the *GIRM* reaffirms the faculty of priests who belong to such communities and have already celebrated Mass on a given day “for the pastoral benefit of the faithful” to binate by concelebrating the conventual or community Mass.<sup>25</sup> But this new edition of the text goes a step further than its earlier versions, stating:

For it is preferable that priests who are present at a Eucharistic Celebration, unless excused for a good reason, should as a rule exercise the office proper to their Order and hence take part as concelebrants, wearing the sacred vestments. Otherwise, they wear their proper choir dress or a surplice over a cassock.<sup>26</sup>

Note that the phrase “should as a rule” implies the imposition of a duty, from which follows the corresponding right to fulfill that duty. And so, this provision not only affirms a preference for concelebration, but also suggests the right of a priest to concelebrate, at least in the context of special groups like religious communities.

By way of commentary, I suggest that this new norm responds to a mistaken ideology and abusive practice whereby concelebration is perceived as a sign of clericalism and as somehow offensive to the non-ordained members of a clerical religious institute, to

---

<sup>24</sup> *EM* 47.

<sup>25</sup> *GIRM* (2002), 114; trans. International Commission on English in the Liturgy [ICEL], *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, Liturgical Documentary Series 2 (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2003), 54. See also canon 905 §1.

<sup>26</sup> *GIRM* (2002), 114; trans. ICEL, 54.

laypersons generally, or to women specifically. By contrast, the norm simply applies the principle of *Sacrosanctum Concilium* 28 cited above—namely, that each person is to carry out all and only those parts of the liturgy that are proper to him.

The 2004 Instruction *Redemptionis Sacramentum* provides a still broader norm—that is, one not limited to concelebration in religious communities—and adds a final proscription:

Holy Mass and other liturgical celebrations, which are acts of Christ and of the people of God hierarchically constituted, are ordered in such a way that the sacred ministers and the lay faithful manifestly take part in them each according to his own condition. It is preferable therefore that “Priests who are present at a Eucharistic Celebration, unless excused for a good reason, should as a rule exercise the office proper to their Order and thus take part as concelebrants, wearing the sacred vestments. Otherwise, they wear their proper choir dress or a surplice over a cassock.” It is not fitting, except in rare and exceptional cases and with reasonable cause, for them to participate at Mass, as regards to externals, in the manner of the lay faithful.<sup>27</sup>

This clarification seems to reinforce the notion of a right to concelebration consequent to the duty that this norm imposes. One should keep in mind, however, that the needs of the faithful for Mass, the norms regarding bination, and other practical considerations may limit concelebration in particular circumstances. These considerations may include, among other things, time, vessels, vesture, common language, and the configuration of the worship space. Very clearly, however, this norm precludes the restriction of concelebration arising from an ideological antipathy toward it, and identifies as its foundation the principle that the church’s hierarchical constitution is reflected in its liturgical action.

Furthermore, the 2002 *GIRM*, to the degree that it establishes a right to concelebrate, trumps the code’s silence on the matter. And

---

<sup>27</sup> Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, *Redemptionis Sacramentum* (March 25, 2004), 128, [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/ccdds/documents/rc\\_con\\_ccdds\\_doc\\_20040423\\_redemptionis-sacramentum\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccdds/documents/rc_con_ccdds_doc_20040423_redemptionis-sacramentum_en.html). The internal quotation is from *GIRM* (2002), 114.

*Redemptionis Sacramentum*, while an instruction and therefore of lesser juridical moment than the *GIRM*, is nonetheless a source of law (*ius*) and, following canon 34, normative, unless it contradicts an ecclesiastical law (*lex*). Moreover, *Redemptionis Sacramentum* and its proscription of priests participating at Mass *modo laico* in any but rare and exceptional cases has the effect of reprobating and extinguishing a non-legal custom contrary to the law (canons 23–26), as some may wish to categorize the dominant practice in many Jesuit communities.

### III. A Note on Jesuit Norms

Daily Mass has long been the norm for all Jesuits. As noted above, GC 31 affirmed the universal norm of *Presbyterorum Ordinis* encouraging daily eucharistic celebration by priests. It further encouraged concelebration when the law permitted it, and by the time of GC 32, concelebration was more widespread in both the church and the Society. Accordingly, the congregation provided that: “all of our members should consider daily celebration of the Eucharist as the center of their religious and apostolic life.”<sup>28</sup> It adds that “Concelebrations are encouraged, especially on days when the community can more easily gather together.”<sup>29</sup> The *Complementary Norms* repeat these words, except that “Concelebrations” is replaced by “Communitarian celebrations.”<sup>30</sup> Perhaps that change in terminology was intended to include in a clearer fashion non-ordained members; regardless, the universal law still would apply to members who are priests.<sup>31</sup>

---

<sup>28</sup> GC 32, d. 11, no. 35; *Jesuit Life and Mission Today*, ed. Padberg, 348.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> *Complementary Norm 227, 2; The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus and Their Complementary Norms: A Complete English Translation of the Official Latin Texts*, ed. John W. Padberg, SJ (St. Louis, MO: IJS, 1996), 259.

<sup>31</sup> In Ignatius’s time, as the *Constitutions* indicate, the practice was different: “The frequentation of the sacraments should be highly recommended; and Holy Communion or the celebration of Mass should not be postponed beyond eight days without reasons legitimate in the opinion of the superior.” See *Constitutions* 584; ed. Padberg, 254.

## IV. Consequences of the Practice

What are or may be the consequences of Jesuits in the US and perhaps elsewhere neglecting the rite of concelebration? Here are some suggestions:

1. Numerous bishops and diocesan clergy view Jesuits who violate norms of liturgical discipline as giving scandal and undermining ecclesiastical discipline more broadly. In short, they perceive them as not thinking with the church, which endangers our reputation and the effectiveness of our ministries.
2. In violating this *lex orandi* (“rule of prayer”), Jesuits run the risk of eroding the *lex credendi* (“rule of belief”)—in this case, the authentic church doctrine on the nature of the priesthood.
3. Policies in Jesuit houses that prohibit concelebration—or even customary dispositions, upheld by superiors, against concelebrations—create problems of conscience for observant Jesuits. From this perspective, at least permitting liturgical discipline to be observed would better serve unity in religious communities. Then, violations happen as a function of freewill and personal choice rather than as a function of a general imposition of policy.
4. The prohibition of concelebration makes our retreat centers unattractive and unfriendly to many diocesan priests who properly desire to celebrate Mass daily while on retreat.
5. The view of the priesthood and the antipathy toward concelebration that this current practice promotes discourage men whom a Jesuit vocation might otherwise attract. I make this observation based on anecdotal evidence from conversations with men aspiring to the priesthood and consecrated life over the course of my twenty-seven years in the ministry of priestly formation.
6. The Society runs the risk of promoting or committing grave injustice by accepting stipends from the faithful for a Jesuit’s mere assistance at Mass or for his marginal concelebration. For this reason, Jesuits who are priests should review the norms that govern this matter.

## Epilogue

When I began my academic and professional formation as a canonist in 1980, I probably did so with eyes half shut, thinking that I could remain in the mainstream of Jesuit life and work, even in the increasingly secular context of university ministry. I soon learned that teaching diocesan seminarians in Baltimore, then future canon lawyers at the Gregorian, and, most recently, younger Jesuits and lay students in Boston, was to be my sphere of ministry, along with many kinds of *ad hoc* service at various levels of ecclesial life.

I learned too that, at least in the United States, I would have very few Jesuit companions in my field. While I have noted with delight that a good number of my Jesuit students have found their few required credits in canon law to be quite useful in their early years of ministry, I have no illusions that, in Jesuit circles in years to come, my discipline is likely to be anything but marginal. However, our recent congregations have affirmed that we Jesuits are supposed to be working at the margins — which is where other Jesuits know to find us canonists when they need us.

Finally, I have lived happily as a Jesuit for over fifty-two years, and I look forward to more of the same. Even if I find myself in the minority on a variety of controversial issues, I always have treasured the respect of my brother Jesuits. For this reason, I hope that what I have written here will not imperil that friendship but rather provoke further study, reflection, and good conversation.

