

# SOCIETAS LITURGICA Paris 2025

Problématique du Congrès / Congress statement / Konferenzerklärung

## The liturgical assembly in its spaces

The 2025 Congress of the Societas Liturgica will be held in Paris, in the wake of the reopening of Notre Dame Cathedral after five years of work following the fire on April 15, 2019. Notre Dame de Paris, in the complexity of its architectural, liturgical and political history, enables a focus for the questions we wish to address in this Congress, at the fertile crossroads between the theology of liturgy and the planning of celebration space; in connection with the various underlying liturgical, ecclesiological, political and social representations.

As part of the liturgical movement's profound renewal of tradition in the twentieth century, liturgists - particularly in ecumenically aware circles - re-evaluated the baptismal priesthood as the theological foundation for the active participation of the baptized in liturgical action. In this way, the concept of the congregation as the integral subject of liturgical action gradually took hold. The reception of this evolution has been continual, often very partial and diversified according to traditions, communities, geographical areas and the different components of liturgical action. As a result, the overall emphasis on the celebration space is an important marker of the Church's conception of itself in liturgical action.

*Notre Dame de l'Arche d'Alliance, Paris (Architecture Studio)*



From the outset, the space of Christian liturgical celebrations has been subject to tensions, constantly recomposed in highly variable contexts, and playing out throughout the history of Christianity. Thus, a form of “rejection” of the cultic model of the temple (Greco-Roman or Jewish) by the first communities can be interpreted as a sign of the subversion, already initiated by certain Jewish currents, of the traditional conception of the sacred place as *Domus Dei*. The successive models of the Church house, *Domus Ecclesiae*, the basilica-baptistry system that came to the fore with the peace of the Church, the development of partitioned spaces in the Middle Ages,

the generalization of open spaces based on the differentiated models of the university hall and the theater within the Protestant and Catholic reforms, right up to the contemporary megachurch, all reveal strongly differentiated liturgical ecclesiologies in tension. History thus reveals a complex system, with multiple polarities: between spaces reserved for ministers and those for the assembly, between spaces dedicated to “religious” activities and “secular” pursuits, between conceptions valorizing fraternity (Augustinian model) or transcendence (pseudo-Dionysian model), between spaces allowing mobility and spaces fixing the assembly, etc. In Christianity, these systems of tension constantly subvert and reconfigure the old notions of sacred and profane. The reimagined function and use of space continues into the 21st century, probably with a heightened sensitivity to the diversity of cultures, affiliations, genders, etc. within liturgical assemblies.

The 2025 Congress of the Societas Liturgica will address the question of the relationship between the celebration space and liturgical ecclesiology. The aim is to examine, through a focus on celebration spaces, the ecclesiological and political representations at work in the choices made. The question can be considered in two ways, as if in mirror image: if the preservation of space is such an ecclesiological marker, what theology of the liturgical assembly is a celebration space the symptom or manifestation of? Conversely, how do new conditions in which the Church celebrates and inhabits its liturgical spaces lead to changes in their organization?

These two complementary ways of looking at the link between ecclesiology and the space of our assemblies invite the contributors to the Congress to start either from theological conceptions or associated representations, or from the concrete spaces of celebration, but never one without the other. After nearly a century of the Liturgical Movement, the ambition of this Congress is to re-imagine for today this link between the theology of the assembly and the space of celebration. Participants in Congress 2025 of the Societas Liturgica are therefore invited:

- to revisit the question of the articulation between liturgical celebration space and ecclesiology, taking into account and drawing consequences from the partial nature of the reception of this articulation of the work and insights of the Liturgical Movement by concrete celebrating communities;
- to take up again, for today, the founding insights of the Liturgical Movement, in particular active participation, to envisage celebration spaces that avoid the all too frequent a-theological or functionalist reductions in their understanding and/or conception.

The questions that follow can help us to identify, in stages, the issues that our Congress aims to address:

- 1-What does the general arrangement of our celebration spaces offer us to see and experience in terms of liturgical ecclesiology?*
- 2-How does the liturgical assembly engage with its space? How does the assembly shape its celebration space and allow itself to be shaped by it?*
- 3-How do our spaces welcome assemblies in the diversity of liturgical actions: celebrations of the Word (including the Liturgy of the Hours), celebrations of the Word and sacramental celebrations, from the “baptism-eucharist” core to the seven sacraments of the scholastic models, and by means of other celebrations...*
- 4-How do devotional and/or memorial spaces relate to assembly spaces? What do our celebration spaces reveal outside liturgical celebrations? How do they welcome visitors, tourists and pilgrims? How do the latter inhabit them?*
- 5-What is the relationship between our church buildings and other “liturgical places”: open spaces, domestic or virtual spaces?*
- 6-How do spaces dedicated to worship demonstrate their openness to creation and the world?*
- 7-Is the economy of space conducive to the full participation of all in liturgical action, or does it impose barriers to participation, movement, understanding, sensory experience, etc., for members of*

*the congregation? How do our spaces promote, or inhibit, the sense, and reality, of belonging to the celebrating body. Are they inclusive? Do they help to express the diversity of our assemblies?*

*8-How do liturgical spaces influence the exercise of effective plural ministry within liturgical assemblies? And vice versa.*

*9-How does the aesthetic dimension of space support or interfere with liturgical action? How does space manifest and enhance the musical dimension of liturgical action?*

*10-How does the space of our assemblies articulate and manifest the horizontal and vertical dimensions of liturgical action? How does it integrate the memory of the past and future that make up liturgical anamnesis? How does it open onto the heavenly liturgy?*

Participants are invited to submit contributions from a wide range of disciplinary perspectives (biblical, historical, systematic theology, ecumenism, pastoral, ritual and intercultural studies, etc.), at the confluence of which the theology of liturgy is developed.

Contributions will fall into one of the following four research areas:

*1 - **Liturgical and ecclesiological**, articulating different theologies of liturgical space and the celebrating assembly;*

*2 - **Historical**, understanding the evolution of the relationship between celebratory space and the ecclesiological and/or political representations we have inherited;*

*3 - **Ritual and anthropological**, taking into account and interpreting the concrete experiences of the celebration space by those who inhabit it, during or beyond the liturgical action;*

*4 - **Phenomenological and architectural**, identifying and questioning the concrete relationships between theology, culture and space.*