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On June 29 of this year, Pope Francis released a new Apostolic Letter, *Desiderio Desideravi*, devoted to the subject of "the Liturgical Formation of the People of God". He explains that this letter, described by him as a follow-up to *Traditionis Custodes* (July 16, 2021), is his way of sharing with the whole Church "some reflections on the liturgy, a dimension fundamental for the life of the Church." His reflections are based on his "desire to offer some prompts or cues for reflections that can aid in the contemplation of the beauty and truth of Christian celebration" (DD, 1).

In multiple ways, though, it seems that the letter's true purpose is to defend "the liturgical reform born out of [Vatican II's] *Sacrosanctum Concilium*" (DD, 31), as well as to further advance the endgame of *Traditionis Custodes*, namely, the suppression of the Traditional Latin Mass "in due time".[1]

Desiderio Desideravi contains a plethora of problematic statements. From claiming that the Last Supper is "made present in the celebration of the Eucharist" (DD, 4),[2] to saying that "the garment of faith" is all that is required for admission to the "the supper of the wedding of the Lamb (Rev. 19:9)" (DD, 5),[3] to asserting that "[w]e owe to the Council [Vatican II] … the rediscovery of a theological understanding of the Liturgy and of its importance in the life of the Church" (DD, 16),[4] the document is riddled with what José Antonio Ureta has rightly identified as "doctrinal deviations" stemming from "the new theological orientation assumed by the constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium* of Vatican II."[5]

A detailed analysis of all the problems with *Desiderio Desideravi* is well beyond the scope of this article.[6] Instead, we will focus our attention on one argument made by Pope Francis with which traditional Catholics can surely agree:

> "It would be trivial to read the tensions, unfortunately present around the celebration, as a simple divergence between different tastes concerning a particular ritual form. The problematic is primarily *ecclesiological*." (DD, 31, emphasis added)

In other words, "the tensions" which exist between Catholics who embrace "the liturgical reform" and those who resist it are based not on "different tastes" but on *divergent ecclesiologies* — that is, on fundamentally different doctrinal positions about the Church's

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very nature (the object of ecclesiology). And the ecclesiology which corresponds to the new liturgical rites (and all their inherent novelties), according to Francis, is "the vision of Church so admirably described in *Lumen Gentium*" (DD, 31), Vatican II's Dogmatic Constitution on the Church.

The problem is that this Conciliar text — "dogmatic" in the sense that it reiterates various already-defined dogmas, not because it contains any new dogmatic definitions — contains some harmful novelties regarding the definition of the Church and supposed connections that non-Catholics have to her.

Lumen Gentium's Flawed Ecclesiology

Prior to Vatican II, the definition of the Church was very simple: The Church of Christ *is* the Catholic Church. Less than 20 years before the Council, Pope Pius XII taught in *Mystici Corporis Christi* (1943): "If we would define and describe **this true Church of Jesus Christ — which *is* the One, Holy, Catholic, Apostolic and Roman Church** — we shall find nothing more noble, more sublime, or more divine than the expression 'the Mystical Body of Christ' — an expression which springs from and is, as it were, the fair flowering of the repeated teaching of the Sacred Scriptures and the Holy Fathers" (n. 13, emphasis added).

Seven years later the same Pontiff noted in *Humani Generis* (1950), an Encyclical issued to combat errors associated with the *nouvelle théologie* ("new theology," i.e., resurgent Modernism): "Some say they are not bound by the doctrine, explained in Our Encyclical Letter of a few years ago [*Mystici Corporis Christi*], and based on the Sources of Revelation, which teaches that **the Mystical Body of Christ and the Roman Catholic Church are *one and the same thing*.** Some reduce to a meaningless formula the necessity of belonging to the true Church in order to gain eternal salvation" (n. 27, emphasis added).

But then, in 1964, Pope Paul VI promulgated *Lumen Gentium*, a document which claims that "the one Church of Christ … ***subsists in*** the Catholic Church" (art. 8, emphasis added), thus implying that "the Church of Christ" is something distinct from, and more comprehensive than, the Catholic Church. After discussing "the Catholic faithful" (art. 14), the document outlines the novel teaching that Holy Mother Church is somehow "linked with" all manner of non-Catholics (art. 15), the latter being "related in various ways to the people of God" (art. 16): non-Catholic Christians, Jews, Muslims, "those who in shadows and images seek the unknown God," and even "those who, without blame on their part, have not yet arrived at an explicit knowledge of God" ("without blame," despite the contrary teaching of Romans 1:18-20 and Vatican I's Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Filius* on the Catholic Faith, Ch. 2, art. 1).

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And although *Lumen Gentium* does teach that "the Church … is necessary for salvation" (art. 14), one is forced to wonder if the affirmation is reduced to what Pius XII called "a meaningless formula" since the document also teaches that virtually all of humanity, regardless of religious affiliation (or lack thereof), is connected to the Church in varying degrees in some nebulous way.

Regarding the ambiguous phrase "subsists in", the former Congregation (now-Dicastery) for the Doctrine of the Faith has had to attempt to clarify its meaning on four occasions spanning over three decades due to the ongoing confusion and errors it has caused (and continues to cause),[7] both within and outside the Church. A prime example is supplied by Albert C. Outler, an official Protestant observer at the Council who referred to *Lumen Gentium* as "the masterpiece of Vatican II." He articulated his thoughts on the document shortly after the Council as follows:

> "Here, in welcome contrast to the polemical tempers of Trent and Vatican I, we have a vision of the Church that enlivens the prospects of effective ecumenical dialogue. … That it should have turned out this way was very far from certain — or even hopeful — at the beginning of the Council. The first text submitted to the bishops in the summer of 1962 was an ominous sample of what has been called 'the siege mentality of pre-conciliar Rome.' … To speak of the Church as mystery [Chap. I of *Lumen Gentium*] is to confess God's constant sovereignty and to remind all Christians that we 'belong to the Church' — the Church does not belong to us! It also implies that the whole Church is mysteriously present in each local congregation but that **no congregation (or 'denomination' for that matter) exhausts the fullness of the Church catholic.** … There is much here to ponder, much to recognize as integral in our common history as Christians, much to appropriate in the various parts of divided Christendom. **The Orthodox, who would have rejected out of hand a restatement of the ecclesiology of Florence and Vatican I, may find here a valid basis for new and fruitful colloquy with Rome. Protestants (and Anglicans) who would have braced themselves defiantly before new *anathemata* (in the vein of Trent) will find little here that offends and much that edifies**."[8]

The fact that a Protestant recognizes a stark contrast between the infallible definitions of previous Councils and *Lumen Gentium*, as well as his assessment that it contains "little that offends and much that edifies," should be more than sufficient proof that the document is seriously flawed. And yet, this flawed ecclesiology is "the vision of the Church" (DD, 31) that Pope Francis and his allies want all Catholics to embrace — specifically, by abandoning

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what the Council of Trent calls "the received and approved rites of the Catholic Church"[9] (especially the Traditional Latin Mass) and embracing what Francis calls "the liturgical reform born out of *Sacrosanctum Concilium*" (DD, 31).

Francis Confirms What Cupich and Roche Have Said

Earlier this year, I wrote about how two of the Pope's closest allies have made the case that it was necessary for Francis to issue *Traditionis Custodes* precisely because the Traditional Latin Mass is incompatible with the new ecclesiology expressed by Vatican II, since it is permeated with the "old" ecclesiology.[10] In light of the Pope's confirmation of their position in *Desiderio Desideravi*, their statements are worth revisiting.

Cardinal Blase Cupich outlined his reasons for zealously supporting *Traditionis Custodes* last November in an article published by *America* Magazine. "The pope's letter," says Cupich, "is a reminder to bishops that, as successors of the apostles, they, with all the bishops in union with and under the pope (*cum Petro et sub Petro*), share responsibility for the whole church. That reminder puts into perspective what is at stake and why bishops must take seriously the Holy Father's letter, as it is an essential teaching document that needs to be fully embraced by all in the church."

He goes on to state that

> "failing to promote a return to a unitary celebratory form in accord with the directives of 'Traditionis Custodes' will further call into question the authority and value of the council [Vatican II] as an integral part of Catholic tradition.
>
> For this reason, Pope Francis calls on all Catholics to recognize that Vatican II and its reforms are not only authentic actions of the Holy Spirit but also are in continuity with the tradition of the church. Sadly, there is ample evidence that many of those rejecting the reformed liturgy in earlier and even later years also expressed **opposition to the council and its teachings, including those on *the nature of the church*, the modern world, religious freedom, ecumenism and interreligious dialogue**; nor were these objections restricted to the ways those teachings were being interpreted." (Emphasis added)

Ironically, in the same paragraph in which Cupich asserts that "Vatican II and its reforms are … in continuity with the tradition of the church," he lists precisely those novel Conciliar teachings which have been challenged by eminent bishops, theologians and scholars as

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being very difficult (if not impossible) to reconcile with Tradition,[11] including the Council's teaching on "the nature of the church" (ecclesiology).

Further on, he returns to the subject of ecclesiology, claiming that "the very nature of the church and her mission is at stake. The council fathers described the church as a 'pilgrim people,' a term rooted in Scripture, to develop the image of the church previously understood as a perfect society and a world power to be contended with."

Here we see quite clearly that, according to Cardinal Cupich, the Traditional Latin Mass is fundamentally incompatible with "the very nature of the church" as conceived by Vatican II — a "pilgrim people" rather than "a perfect society". For Cupich, as for Francis, the Traditional Mass represents (and makes present) "the church previously understood," and that is unacceptable to them. Clearly, Cardinal Cupich cannot tolerate all the prayers and gestures of the ancient and approved rites which portray the Church as the triumphant Kingdom of God on earth that knows where the people of God should be going. Whereas the ancient liturgy portrays the people of God on a pilgrimage to salvation (hence, all the prayers making them aware of the danger of sin and their need for grace), it distinguishes the Church as the Kingdom of God that leads those pilgrims to the certain goal, as well as the Church Militant that fights "the good fight of faith" (1 Tim. 6:12). Cardinal Cupich, on the other hand, wants to portray the Church herself as a wandering and compliant pilgrim (e.g., his compliance with the COVID-19 regime) seeking her end without engaging in any spiritual warfare.

Being reminded of "the church previously understood" is equally unacceptable to now-Cardinal Arthur Roche, Prefect of the Dicastery for Divine Worship. During an interview with Catholic News Service this past January, he echoed several of the same points made by Cardinal Cupich. The interviewer summarized Roche's remarks as follows:

> "The differences between the pre-Vatican II and post-Vatican II Masses, he said, are not simply the use of Latin, chant, silence and the direction the priest faces.
>
> ***The promotion of the pre-Vatican II liturgy* as somehow more holy or prayerful than the current liturgy 'is not basically a liturgical problem, it *is an ecclesial problem*,' the archbishop said. *The current Mass*, with a richer selection of prayers and Scripture readings, *reflects and reinforces the church's understanding of itself as the people of God*.**
>
> '**That which was given to us by the council, which classified, concretized the teaching of the church about itself** and its understanding of the role of

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> the baptized and the importance of the Eucharist and the sacramental life of the church, is not without significance for the future of the church,' he said." (Emphasis added)

Once again, as in Cardinal Cupich's article, we see a clear emphasis on *ecclesiology* ("the church's understanding of itself") according to Vatican II. We also see that, according to now-Cardinal Roche, the New Mass makes manifest the new ecclesiology of the Council ("That which was given to us by the council … the teaching of the church about itself"). Thus, it makes sense why these Modernist prelates are so bent on eliminating the Traditional Latin Mass — because they are bent on replacing the Church's traditional ecclesiology with the novel ecclesiology found in *Lumen Gentium*.

Hence, Francis says towards the end of *Desiderio Desideravi*:

> "We are called continually to rediscover the richness of the general principles exposed in the first numbers of *Sacrosanctum Concilium,* grasping the intimate bond between this first of the Council's constitutions and all the others. For this reason, we cannot go back to that ritual form which the Council fathers, *cum Petro et sub Petro,* felt the need to reform, approving, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and following their conscience as pastors, the principles from which was born the reform. … For this reason I wrote *Traditionis custodes,* so that the Church may lift up, in the variety of so many languages, one and the same prayer capable of expressing her unity.
>
> As I have already written, I intend that this unity be re-established in the whole Church of the Roman Rite." (DD, 61)

Translation: He intends to suppress the Traditional Latin Mass "in due time", just as he wrote in his Letter to Bishops attached to *Traditionis Custodes*.

What Will the Synod Bring?

I will conclude with a bit of speculation about a potential connection between the endgame of *Traditionis Custodes* and the current Synod on Synodality (Oct. 2021–Oct. 2023).

As I demonstrated in another article earlier this year, the current Synod is clearly intended to be an extension of the Second Vatican Council — a major push to more fully implement the flawed "ecclesiology of Vatican II" throughout the universal Church. The phrase

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"ecclesiology of Vatican II," as I explained, comes from a 2018 document produced by the International Theological Commission (ITC), *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church* (SLMC), which the Synod's Preparatory Document makes a point of "highlight[ing]" (n. 3) as particularly relevant to the current Synod.

The ITC document describes the relationship between synodality and the Council's ecclesiology thus:

> "Although synodality is not explicitly found as a term or as a concept in the teaching of Vatican II, it is fair to say that *synodality is at the heart of the work of renewal the Council was encouraging*. [Emphasis added]
>
> The ecclesiology of the People of God [obviously referring to *Lumen Gentium*, Chap. II] stresses the *common dignity and mission of all the baptized*, in exercising the variety and ordered richness of their charisms, their vocations and their ministries." (SLMC, n. 6)

Unlike the Traditional Latin Mass, which bears witness to the Church as a divinely constituted and perfect society with a necessary hierarchy and clear distinctions between clerical and lay roles (traditional ecclesiology), the New Mass definitely reflects the Council's "ecclesiology of the People of God," with its reduction of ceremonies emphasizing the unique role of the priest and permitting laity to ascend the pulpit as "lectors" and invade the sanctuary as "Eucharistic ministers". The egalitarian dimensions of the New Mass also correspond to what Pope Francis emphasized at the opening of the Synod (Oct. 9, 2021):

> "If we want to speak of a synodal Church, *we cannot remain satisfied with appearances* alone; we need content, means and structures that can facilitate dialogue and interaction within the People of God, especially between priests and laity. *This requires changing* certain overly vertical, distorted and partial visions of the Church, the priestly ministry, the role of the laity, ecclesial responsibilities, roles of governance and so forth."

I have no doubt that the Traditional Latin Mass qualifies as "overly vertical" and "distorted" in the mind of Francis, especially since it does not give pride of place to "the role of the laity," nor is it open to "changing … roles of governance" in the Church. Thus, I have a strong hunch that he will somehow use the Synod on Synodality as a pretext for accelerating his efforts to eliminate the Traditional Mass from the life of the Church, just as

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he and his allies have used previous synods to advanced predetermined agenda items.[12]

Francis closes *Desiderio Desideravi* by stating: "Let us abandon our polemics to listen together to what the Spirit is saying to the Church. Let us safeguard our communion" (DD, 65). My guess is that, by the end of the Synod (Oct. 2023), he and his allies will inform us that "the Spirit is saying" the time has come for all Catholics to "return" to the New Mass.

Conclusion

When this happens — and, short of a miracle, it *will* happen "in due time," as Francis has indicated — then we would do well to recall the following words of Dr. Peter Kwasniewski and act accordingly:

> "Let us be absolutely clear about this: to attack the traditional Latin Mass (or any of the traditional liturgical rites) is to attack the Providence of God the Father; to reject the work of Christ, the King and Lord of history; to blaspheme the fruitfulness of the Holy Ghost in the Church's life of prayer. It is contrary to the practice of every age of the Church, of every saint, council, and pope prior to the twentieth century. It contradicts several key virtues of the Christian life, most notably religion, gratitude, and humility. It implies the rejection of the dogmatic confession of faith in the traditional Latin *lex orandi* in its organic unfolding over at least 1,600 years, which is contrary to the theological virtue of faith; it implies the rejection of the communion of the saints in a common lineage and patrimony of ecclesiastical worship, which is contrary to the theological virtue of charity. In all these ways and more, the postconciliar liturgical reform, its subsequent ruthless implementation, and Pope Francis's renewed efforts to extinguish the preceding tradition are unreasonable, unjust, and unholy, and therefore cannot be accepted as legitimate or embraced as the will of God. As St. Thomas Aquinas famously says: unjust laws 'are acts of violence rather than laws … Wherefore they do not bind in conscience.' [ST I-II, q. 96, a. 4] A repudiation of our Catholic liturgical patrimony is tantamount to disobedience to God; and we will be obedient to God through our 'disobedience' to the revolutionaries."[13]

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[1] In his Letter to Bishops attached to *Traditionis Custodes*, Francis clearly implied that the eventual suppression of the Traditional Latin Mass is his plan when he said that "those who are rooted in the previous form of celebration … **need to *return in due time*** to the Roman Rite promulgated by Saints Paul VI and John Paul II…" (emphasis added).

[2] "We need to be present at that Supper," writes Francis (DD, 11), yet Our Lord's purpose at the Last Supper was to make present His Sacrifice on the Cross, "in order," as the Council of Trent teaches, "to leave to His beloved Spouse the Church a visible sacrifice (as the nature of man demands) — by which the bloody sacrifice that He was once for all to accomplish on the Cross would be re-presented, its memory perpetuated until the end of the world, and its salutary power applied for the remission of the sins that we daily commit…" (Session XXII, Decree on the Sacrifice of the Mass, ch. 1; D.H. 1740). Hence, the Mass is the re-presentation of His Sacrifice on the Cross, not the re-presentation of the Last Supper.

[3] Faith alone does not suffice. We must also "put on Christ" (Gal. 3:27) through baptism, which is "the laver of regeneration and renovation of the Holy Ghost" (Tit. 3:5). In addition to faith and baptism, we must also have charity, as Pope St. Gregory the Great (r. 590-604) taught: "But since you owe to the bounties of the Lord to have already entered the house of the wedding, that is to say in the holy Church, take care, my brothers, that the King, on entering, find nothing blamable in the habit of your soul. Indeed, we must consider with great fear what the text adds immediately after: 'The king entered to see those who were at the table, and there he saw a man who was not wearing the nuptial dress.' [Matt. 22:11] **What symbolism shall we attribute, dear brothers, to this nuptial dress?** Shall we say that it represents baptism or faith? But who could have entered the wedding hall without baptism or faith? For he who has not yet believed is by the very fact outside [of the Church]. **What must we understand by the nuptial dress, if not charity?** He indeed enters for the wedding, but he enters without the nuptial robe, the one who is in the holy Church and has faith, but lacks charity. … **All of you who belong to the Church and believe in God have already entered the wedding hall, but if they did not keep the grace of charity, they did not come with the bridal dress.**" (*Homily 38 on the Gospels*, 9, emphasis added).

Furthermore, a group of over 50 Catholic clerics (including four bishops), scholars, and journalists issued a statement on Sept. 16, 2022 to publicly correct the grave error that faith alone suffices for admission to the "the supper of the wedding of the Lamb (Rev. 19:9)" (DD, 5), a claim which implies that faith alone is necessary for the worthy reception of Holy Communion. This author is honored to be among the signatories.

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[4] On the contrary, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* was the only schema to survive the Modernist *coup* at the beginning of the Council, precisely because, as Roberto de Mattei explains, SC was "the product of the work of the one [preparatory] commission that was dominated by progressives, the Liturgical Commission, made up primarily of exponents of the central European liturgical movement." (*The Second Vatican Council: An Unwritten Story* [Fitzwilliam: Loreto Publications, 2012], pp. 213-214). Regarding the contents of SC, Christopher Ferrara has rightly observed that the document "constitutes a 'blank check' for liturgical reform, with the amount to be filled in depending entirely upon who is wielding the pen." ("*Sacrosanctum Concilium: A Lawyer Examines the Loopholes*," *Latin Mass Magazine*, Fall 2005 edition). For a summary of the Modernist *coup* at the beginning of the Council, see Romano Amerio, *Iota Unum: A Study of Changes in the Catholic Church in the XXth Century* (Kansas City: Sarto House, 1996), pp. 84-89.

[5] See José Antonio Ureta, "A Brief Study of Certain Theological Deviations in *Desiderio Desideravi*," a five-part series recently published by *OnePeterFive*.

[6] See Mr. Ureta's series (*ibid*.) for a thorough critique.

[7] See *Mysterium Ecclesiae* (Declaration in Defense of the Catholic Doctrine on the Church Against Certain Errors of the Present Day) (June 24, 1973), n. 1; Notification on the book "Church: Charism and Power" by Father Leonardo Boff, O.F.M (Mar. 11, 1985), under heading "Structure of the Church"; *Dominus Iesus* (Declaration on the Unicity and Salvific Universality of Jesus Christ and the Church) (Aug. 6, 2000), n. 16-17, footnote 56; Responses to Certain Questions regarding Certain Aspects of the Doctrine of the Church (June 29, 2007), Q. 2 and 3.

[8] Walter M. Abbott, S.J. (Gen. Ed.), *The Documents of Vatican II* (New York: The America Press, 1966), pp. 102-103, 105.

[9] Council of Trent, Session VII (Mar. 3, 1547), Canons on the Sacraments in General, can. 13 (D.H. 1613).

[10] Matt Gaspers, "Cupich and Roche Confirm: Traditional Mass is Incompatible with Vatican II's New Ecclesiology," *Catholic Family News*, March 2022 edition.

[11] See, e.g., Bishop Athanasius Schneider, *Christus Vincit: Christ's Triumph Over the Darkness of the Age* (Brooklyn: Angelico Press, 2019); Brian M. McCall (ed.), *A Voice in the Wilderness: Archbishop Carlo Maria Viganò on the Church, America, and the World* (Brooklyn: Angelico Press, 2021); "50 Petition Pope for Vatican II Re-examination" (Sept. 2011).

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[12] The most glaring example is certainly the 2014-2015 Synods on the Family and their end result, *Amoris Laetitia*, which allows divorced and civilly "remarried" Catholics (i.e., those who habitually engage in adulterous relations) to receive Holy Communion "[i]n certain cases" (n. 305, footnote 351).

[13] Peter Kwasniewski, *True Obedience in the Church: A Guide to Discernment in Challenging Times* (Manchester: Sophia Institute Press, 2021), pp. 52-53. For a review of Dr. Kwasniewski's book, see here.

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