

# The Traditional Latin Mass Movement and the Unity of the Church

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Die von Papst Franziskus in jüngster Zeit eingeführten Einschränkungen in Hinsicht auf die Feier der sogenannten Tridentischen Messform müssen vor dem Hintergrund einer Bewegung gedeutet werden, die die Tridentinische Messe favorisiert und sich antagonistisch auf die kirchlichen und liturgischen Erneuerungen des Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzils bezieht. Eine weitere Interpretationsfolie ist das konsistente Bemühen verschiedener Päpste, die Einheit der Kirche zu bewahren. Die Mitglieder der genannten Bewegung haben oftmals durchaus bedenkenswerte Argumente auf ihrer Seite, aber in der zeitgenössischen Atmosphäre zunehmender Polarisierung hat sich diese Bewegung immer mehr zu einer Gruppe von Extremisten entwickelt. Der päpstliche Vorstoß, so die These des Artikels, soll die Mitglieder dieser Gruppe dazu herausfordern, eine Form von Verehrung aufzugeben, die inzwischen als antiquiert angesehen werden muss, ihre Fundamentalopposition ebenso zu revidieren und stattdessen als eine hellsichtige, wenn auch konservative Reformgruppe innerhalb der katholischen Kirche zu fungieren.

In his *motu proprio*, *Traditionis Custodes*, Pope Francis ordered restrictions on the celebration of what is commonly known as the Traditional Latin Mass (TLM), as found in the 1962 missal issued by Pope John XXIII. Some addenda would follow later, but the 1962 missal was basically the last of several revisions of the 1570 missal issued by Pope Pius V in the wake of the Council of Trent. Francis did not entirely forbid the TLM, and he left many details to be decided by bishops in their own dioceses. Still, he made clear his intention to eventually phase out the TLM as Catholics who are attached to it are gradually weaned off in favor of the 1970 revised mass (RM) issued by Paul VI. This 1970 revision, intended to be translated from its Latin base into vernacular languages, expressed the liturgical and ecclesiological reforms associated with the Second Vatican Council.

In this essay I reflect upon the current controversies in the wake of Francis' instruction. I write as one who strongly supports Pope Francis as well as the basic teachings of the Second Vatican Council. I am inclined that think that Francis made a good decision. I share with TLM-promoters a sadness, even an anguish, over the state of the Catholic Church today, especially in the U. S. and in Europe. I disagree, however, with much of their diagnosis of the problems as well as with the basic path they are pursuing as a solution. I write personally and with some passion because the promoters of the TLM themselves write with a passion that often goes unmatched.

I have a slight reputation for being a moderate and a centrist who tries his best to explore as sympathetically as possible a wide range of positions on various issues. Of course, different people define “centrist” differently. In 2004, I asked Cardinal Avery Dulles (d. 2008) in a public forum whether he saw it as important to find and develop the middle ground between the points on the theological spectrum represented by the right-leaning journal *Communio* and the left-leaning journal *Concilium*. I would then and still now have answered my own question strongly in the affirmative. Somewhat to my surprise, Dulles, whom I deeply admire both personally and professionally, answered that, as he sees it, *Communio* is already the center. He thought that the split in the Church was basically between the traditionalists and the progressives, and that the *Communio* project had been launched in order to bridge the gap. On Dulles’ map, my own views would not be located in the center.

## The Traditionalist Movement

A spectrum of positions regarding TLM can be identified among those who attend it. By no means does every TLM-attender fit neatly into one of these three categories. As with nearly all taxonomies, these categories are intended only for helpful general use. First, there are *radical traditionalists* or, more popularly, “Rad Trads” who have left the official structure of the Catholic Church, such as the followers of the Society of St. Pius X (SSPX). Radical traditionalists openly reject Vatican II and the current leadership of the Catholic Church. Second, there are *conservative traditionalists* who stay within the official structures of the Catholic Church but who remain strongly disappointed with many elements of Vatican II and its implementation. They tend to be “traditionalists” in the sense of believing that true developments need to emerge gradually among the peoples and with respect for existing structures, somewhat along the lines of Edmund Burke’s criticisms of the French Revolution. They judge that Vatican II was revolutionary when it should have been more of an organic evolution. The third group are *conservatives* who may be attracted to the TLM as well as to other older traditions. They more often attend the RM. They affirm Vatican II and church leadership, though they may have some criticisms of Vatican II’s implementation and be a bit nervous about Pope Francis.

Some older conservative Catholics claim a deep, affective connection with the TLM. There are some young people who say that they simply enjoy occasionally attending a Latin Mass.<sup>1</sup> These conservatives complain that Pope Francis is overreacting to a small but loud minority of the hard-core.

Many conservative traditionalists make the same complaint. They tend to see the difference between themselves and the radical traditionalists as massive insofar as they themselves remain within the Church, merely disagreeing with elements of Vatican II

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<sup>1</sup> Compare *Jonathan Culbreath*, I Love Latin Mass and Pope Francis. Please Don’t Let a Few (Very Loud) Traditionalists Ruin It for the Rest of Us, in: *America.org* (27.07.2021), accessed at <https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2021/07/27/pope-francis-latin-mass-traditionis-custodes-241121> (12.08.2021).

without openly rejecting it. They have, in their estimation, patiently and respectfully tried to co-exist with the majority that consists, in their minds, of loosely committed cafeteria-style Catholics.

The distinction between the conservative traditionalists and the radical traditionalists, however, is by no means in every way absolute. Yes, the conservative traditionalists have made compromises and have stayed within the official Church. These points of difference with the radical traditionalists are immensely important. Still, it remains true that the conservative traditionalists and the radical traditionalists share deeply many points of ideology.<sup>2</sup> They both believe that Vatican II was generally more problematic than helpful, and that the RM is grossly inferior to the TLM. Both groups judge that Vatican II and the RM represent the imposition of the opinions of incompetent experts upon the faith of the common people. They agree that the church of today, including its leadership, is more conformed to the culture than to the gospel. They both hold that those who regularly attend TLM are better Catholics than the average Catholic because they take their faith seriously and keep the rules. Both groups hold that the TLM represents the future of the church. It is the common hope of both groups that a future pope will return the Catholic Church to its true traditions.

In a recent interview, Archbishop Joseph Di Noia of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith has identified a “TLM movement,” which is alive and growing primarily in England, France, and, above all, the U. S.<sup>3</sup> Most of the organizations that support this movement operate within the official structures of the Catholic Church. Like their radical counterparts, these conservative traditionalists fervently support not just the maintenance but the urgent expansion of the TLM. There is no one organized TLM movement with a single headquarters and a public spokesperson, but there are many organizations with an address, a website, and leadership that promote the TLM. The *Coalition in Support of Ecclesia Dei* lists on its website several hundred sites and times of approved TLMs in the U. S. and Canada.<sup>4</sup> The Latin Mass Directory, a lay initiative in England and Wales, lists TLMs to be found throughout the world.<sup>5</sup> The website of the New Liturgical Movement regularly publishes articles that give detailed explanations of why the TLM is vastly superior to the RM.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> *Martin Madar* makes a similar point in *Pope Francis Should Correct His Predecessor on Another Point*, in: *La Croix International* (09.08.2021), accessed at <https://international.la-croix.com/news/religion/pope-francis-should-correct-his-predecessor-on-another-point/14761> (12.08.2021).

<sup>3</sup> From an interview by Archbishop Joseph Di Noia, speaking as a theologian and not in his official capacity as a member of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, in: *Cindy Wooden*, *Traditional Latin Mass ‘Movement’ Sows Division, Archbishop Says*, in: *Catholic News Service* (20.07.2021), accessed at <https://www.nrcnline.org/news/parish/traditional-latin-mass-movement-sows-division-archbishop-says> (27.07.2021).

<sup>4</sup> See *Coalition in Support of Ecclesia Dei*, accessed at <http://www.ecclesiadei.org/masses.cfm> (13.08.2021).

<sup>5</sup> See *Latin Mass Directory*, accessed at <https://www.latiRMassdir.org/countries/> (13.08.2021).

<sup>6</sup> See *New Liturgical Movement*, accessed at <https://www.newliturgicalmovement.org/2021/07/mythbusting-how-much-of-1962-missal-is.html#.YRWcyPKSmUn> (14.08.2021).

## The Vision of the TLM Movement: A Critic's Attempt to Be Fair

Some of the leaders of the TLM movement are intelligent and knowledgeable. Some of their web-posted articles and podcasts generally sound calm and reasonable.<sup>7</sup> I believe that, unlike many other right-wing media ideologues of today, the best among them are basically honest. If there is any deception, it is self-deception. They believe in a package that, once one buys into it, is internally consistent and can explain mostly any and all phenomena. They sell the package with great enthusiasm. They make many negative comments about the appalling state of the world as well as the inconsistencies and weakness of the general state of Catholicism today. They contrast themselves with a liberal Catholicism that they associate with the desire for married priests, women priests, same-sex marriage, and artificial birth control.

The longing for the TLM is connected with a longing for the preconciliar Catholic Church. On the eve of the Second Vatican Council, the Catholic Church in the U. S. was thriving. Seminaries were full. Religious orders were growing. Catholic schools were booming. The majority of Catholics attended mass weekly. They had their children baptized and confirmed. They very rarely divorced. Saturday confession lines could be long. High school basketball players blessed themselves before each foul shot.

Catholics had many identity markers that helped to distinguish them from other people and even from other Christians. In the U. S., Catholics formed a distinctive subculture. There were plenty of rules and regulations. Catholics did not eat meat on Fridays. They fasted during Lent. They made their Easter duty at least once per year. They married in the Church. They wore scapulars and prayed novenas. They had St. Christopher medals attached magnetically to the dashboards of their cars. They would bury a statue of St. Joseph upside-down on their lawn if they needed supernatural help in selling their house quickly.

For over a century, Catholics comprised about 25 % of the U. S. population. In recent decades, those numbers were maintained due to the large influx of Hispanic Catholics. In recent years, the Catholic population has dipped toward the 20 % mark. Traditionalists, both radical and conservative, emphasize the continuing deterioration of ordinary Catholicism starting with Vatican II up through the present time. They frequently cite a survey (constructed and interpreted by a TLM-supporter) that shows that, in contrast with ordinary Catholics, TLM-attenders are much more likely to attend mass weekly, stay married, have large families, give generously to the Church, and agree with church teachings regarding abortion, birth control, transubstantiation, and LGBTQ marriage.<sup>8</sup> They point out

<sup>7</sup> I recommend as one example a highly sophisticated podcast of the Latin Mass Society, Iota Unum Podcast No. 8, *After Traditionis Custodes*, by the society's chairperson, *Joseph Shaw*, accessed at <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/iota-unum-podcast-no-8-after-traditionis-custodes-by/id1544053355?i=1000531187153> (08.08.2021). I would classify Shaw, an Oxford professor, as a conservative traditionalist. A number of relatively reasonably argued podcasts by a radical traditionalist, *Anthony Stein*, can be found at the website of "Return to Tradition", accessed at <https://returntotradition.org/author/returntotradition527909108/> (07.08.2021).

<sup>8</sup> See *Donald Kloster et al.*, National Survey Results: What We Learned about Latin Mass Attendees, in: *Liturgy Guy* (2019), accessed at <https://liturgyguy.com/2019/02/24/national-survey-results-what-we-learned-about-latin-mass-attendees/> (09.08.2021); see also *Steve Skojec*, New Survey Shows Disparity of Beliefs Between Latin Mass, *Novus Ordo Catholics*, in: *One Peter Five*, accessed at <https://onepeterfive.com/new-survey-shows->

that the TLM movement is producing a significant number of vocations to the priesthood and to religious life. They also refer regularly to a 2019 Pew Research Center Study that shows that only half of U. S. Catholics know Church teaching on transubstantiation and only 31 % agree with the teaching.<sup>9</sup>

What many traditionalists tend to highlight about Vatican II and its aftermath is a weakening of Catholic identity and a lack of clarity about the rules. To them, the RM is part of a package that fostered assimilation and desacralization. Where there had been a clear teaching about individual salvation through the one true Church, there now appeared to be a fuzzy picture of pop psychology / spirituality combined with hollow slogans about peace and social justice.

Many in the TLM movement believe that the main cause of the sex abuse crisis is the worldliness of the church that resulted from Vatican II's surrender to the culture of the 1960's. This view stands in contrast to that of many progressives who think that the sex abuse crisis resulted from the clericalism that continued to place priests upon pedestals and that empowered bishops to protect them and the church as above the criticism of mere lay mortals.

Voices in the TLM movement complain that those to whom they refer as "conciliar Catholics" regularly go overboard when they speak of Catholicism before the council, as if nothing good should ever be admitted about the preconciliar Catholic Church. Traditionalists have had some grounds for being upset about presentations of Vatican II as purely a before and after story in which the preconciliar church and the postconciliar church are depicted as two entirely different and even opposed entities. A fundamental continuity in the identity of the Catholic Church before and after the council needs to be acknowledged. The obvious differences between the preconciliar church and the postconciliar church constitute a distinction within a deeper unity and identity. Both continuity and change need to be accounted for.

One does not have to be a traditionalist to find flaws either in the RM or in the overall implementation of the council. In the years immediately following Vatican II, some great Catholic intellectuals became disillusioned, among them most famously Jacques Maritain, Henri de Lubac, and Hans Urs von Balthasar. Even the centrist scripture scholar, Raymond Brown, would write as late as 1984,

"I [...] while enthusiastic for what was introduced into Catholicism by Vatican II, see no need for the concomitant losses, e. g., of inner-Catholic loyalty, obedience, and commitment to the church; of dignity in liturgy; of Gregorian chant; of a knowledge of the Latin tradition reaching from Augustine through Thomas to the Middle Ages. To try now to recoup some of those losses while still advancing the gains of Vatican II would be an act of eminent good sense."<sup>10</sup>

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disparity-of-beliefs-between-latin-mass-novus-or-do-catholics/#:~:text=The%20findings%20on%20key%20questions%20were%20informative%3A%201,%E2%80%9Cgay%20marriage%E2%80%9D%20as%20opposed%20to%2067%25%20of%20NOM (09.08.2021).

<sup>9</sup> See *Gregory A. Smith*, Just One-third of U. S. Catholics Agree with their Church that Eucharist is Body, Blood of Christ, in: Pew Research Center (2019), accessed at <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/08/05/transubstantiation-eucharist-u-s-catholics/> (12.08.2021).

<sup>10</sup> *Raymond Brown*, *The Churches the Apostles Left Behind*, Mahwah (NJ) 1984, 118.

In the early 1990's, Thomas Day wrote two humorous, satirical books that made fun of postconciliar Catholic liturgies for their poor taste, terrible music, egocentric posturing, lack of a sense of the sacred, and outright rejection of all things traditional, including Latin hymns and Gregorian chant.<sup>11</sup> Day's non-serious approach included no appreciation of the wonderful elements of the RM that reflected the liturgical movement and a renewed ecclesiology, but the truth contained in many of his barbs could not be ignored.

### An Extreme Case?

Not everyone in the TLM movement is as sophisticated as the top-tier leaders. In the wake of controversy following Pope Francis' restrictions, *The Cincinnati Enquirer* ran a story about Ed Miller, 59, who drives across the Ohio River with his wife to attend an officially sanctioned TLM in Park Hills, Kentucky.<sup>12</sup> Miller refers to himself as a "trad". He will only attend a mass in English for a special occasion such as a wedding, but afterward he will say the rosary to apologize for what has been done to Christ's service. At one time, this twice-divorced man was away from the Church. A business partner explained to him that Vatican II had ruined the Church through its ecumenism, openness to other religions, and changing the mass to the vernacular. Ed watched hours of traditionalist YouTube videos and decided that if he were to die that day he would go to hell. He now tries to covert nearly everyone he talks with to TLM-style Catholicism. He regularly reminds old acquaintances as well as his own three children that in their current state they are bound for hell. He holds negative views of gays, Jews, race reparations, and NBA basketball. He has a 750-pound statue of Jesus in his back yard as well as a Trump lawn sign. He prays every day for humility.

I recognize the ideological package that was sold to him. It is very similar to the package that I was sold as a child in Philadelphia in the late 1950s and early 1960s. In those days, the package still had some strong roots within a tightly knit U. S. Catholic subculture. A great deal of focus was placed upon the question of where you as an individual will go when you die. You would go to heaven if you died in a state of grace, and staying in a state of grace meant keeping the rules. The sacraments and the commandments had been given by God as aids to help you with your salvation. The Church was the keeper of the sacraments and the commandments. The truly lucky person would be the one who received the last rites shortly before death.

Of course, my description of a preconciliar Catholic package itself misses many important elements. The package was itself part of a multidimensional Catholic world with many wonderful and glorious spiritual treasures. The fear-based system that focused on whether you would achieve salvation, however, always seemed to be lurking underneath. Salvation came through faithful membership in the Catholic Church. I remember one of

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<sup>11</sup> See *Thomas Day*, *Why Catholics Can't Sing*, New York 1991 [revised and updated 2013]; *Thomas Day*, *Where Have You Gone Michelangelo? The Loss of Soul in Catholic Culture*, New York 1993.

<sup>12</sup> See *Keith Biery Golick*, *The Gospel According to Ed, the Devout Catholic Who Says You're Worshiping Wrong*, in: *The Cincinnati Enquirer* (12.08.2021), on-line version accessed at <https://www.cincinnati.com/story/news/2021/08/13/latin-mass-pope-francis-struggle-traditional-catholics/7616323002/> (13.08.2021)

my teachers in grade school, a religious sister, telling our class that if one is walking down the street and is coming upon a Protestant church, one should cross to the other side of that street when passing in order not to come too close to the building. I could easily recognize the mentality of Ed Miller as being connected with the world in which I had been raised.

There is one huge difference, however. That world no longer exists. The U. S. Catholic subculture of the time before the council basically collapsed, with few exceptions. Most of the Catholics in my urban neighborhood were of the working class. We were the third or fourth generation of immigrants from Ireland, Italy, Germany, Poland, and various Eastern European countries. We would be the first in our families to attend college. Our religious faith bonded us together in the face of a hostile Protestant world becoming ever more secularized. Our deeply communal form of everyday social life took the edge off our individualistic view of eternal salvation.

In the preconciliar church, the religious worldview, what I am calling “the package”, operated in an integral manner to sustain a complex everyday lifeworld. When any worldview becomes detached from its lifeworld, it becomes an ideology, a set of ideas ripped from its proper context and kept alive by an artificial support system. Already in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Roman Catholicism in the United States was functioning more and more like an ideology. Catholics who tried to balance their characteristic stand that faith and reason ultimately cannot contradict each other with a church leadership that rejected any application of historical and social science methods to the church itself were finding that they just could not do it anymore. Amid the tension between the anti-modernist Catholic Church and the modern world, something had to give. With Vatican II, the dam finally burst. Vatican II was not so much a direct cause of the widescale cultural changes that impacted U. S. Catholics in the 1960’s, but it rather accompanied them. Without Vatican II, social forces would still have brought about drastic changes in the church, but they would have lacked the guidance of church leadership. Now over fifty years later, the retro Catholicism of Ed Miller no longer informs a way of life. It functions more as a package of ideas and practices that cuts him off from reality and puts him into a fantasy world.

In recent years, social conditions in the U. S. have become even more problematic due to the culture wars and the accompanying polarization. U. S. journalist Ezra Klein has drawn upon a range of sociological and cultural studies to document the emergence of political and other forms of polarization in the U. S. over the past seventy years. The changes that can be measured sociologically are the homogeneities within each of the two major parties and the identitarian nature of partisan commitments. In contrast with the past, the political parties now stand in direct ideological opposition to each other. Many U. S. citizens draw their most basic identity from their political affiliations. Other identity markers and cultural attachments align in constellations around this political core. Often an individual’s deep embrace of a political identity stems less from an admiration for the ideals of their own party than from a disgust with what they perceive to be the values of the other party. Respect for those with different ideas and approaches has been replaced with smug superiority and even hatred.

Expressions of smug superiority and hatred for the political other can be found throughout U. S. history. Only in recent decades, however, has it become a rare event that a person of one party would vote for a candidate of the other party (with elections being decided by the growing number of Independents<sup>13</sup>). Only in recent years have great numbers of U. S. citizens used the terms “Republican” or “Democrat” to express the deepest core of who they are.

### An Extreme Movement

The TLM movement has become connected with political extremism in the U. S. Catholic Church. Miller may represent a most extreme case, but he is not unique. I have mentioned that some of the leaders of the TLM movement are intelligent and respectful. There are also many others in the movement, both leaders and followers, who occupy a wide spectrum of positions. The TLM movement as encountered on a variety of websites, podcasts, YouTube videos, discussion threads, and on-line commentaries often mirrors the world of far-right politics with its inciteful rhetoric and conspiracy theories. Their attacks on postconciliar Catholicism resemble the attacks of conservative radio hosts who play upon the resentments of their listeners.

Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI had called the TLM the extraordinary form of the Roman rite as distinct from the ordinary form. His use of “extraordinary” indicated that its celebration would be relatively rare and considered to be the exception to the ordinary form. He hoped that the small number of TLMs and the usual, ordinary way of celebrating would mutually enrich each other. Many in the TLM movement interpret the word “extraordinary” to mean the glorious and excellent way, which was never Benedict’s intention. Neither Benedict nor St. John Paul II ever envisioned or supported a movement to greatly expand the use of the TLM *in competition against* the RM. Doing so has been a gross violation of the letter and the spirit of Benedict’s *Summorum Pontificum*. As Archbishop Di Noia commented, “the TLM (Traditional Latin Mass) movement has hijacked the initiatives of John Paul II and Benedict XVI to its own ends.”<sup>14</sup>

Missing from the TLM package is any acknowledgement that the many challenges posed to the Church by the rise of the modern world are real and need to be taken seriously. Historical and social scientific studies pulled the rug out from under the reactionary anti-modernist stance of the preconciliar Catholic Church. Leading into Vatican II were studies that supported movements in patristics, scripture, liturgy, ecumenism, and inculturation. In the wake of World War II, the connections of the Catholic Church with authoritarian regimes, global colonization, and so-called history-based anti-Semitism could no longer be ignored. A defense of unchanging Catholic truth as being immune from historical and scientific study could no longer be sustained. The relatively new development

<sup>13</sup> A Pew study has shown that Independents can be sharply divided between Democratic-leaning and Republican-leaning. Of the now 38 % of voters who are Independent, only 9 % of voters indicate no lean at all. See *Pew Research Center*, 6 Facts about U. S. Political Independents (15.05.2019), by John Laloggia, accessed at <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/05/15/facts-about-us-political-independents/> (14.08.2021).

<sup>14</sup> *Di Noia*, quoted in Wooden, Traditional Latin Mass ‘Movement’ (as in footnote 3).



of Catholic social teaching had to be brought to the fore. Vatican II's engagement with the modern world, which can be criticized in its decisions and implementations, addressed in a substantial way matters that needed to be addressed.

### Vatican II: Blending Liturgy and Ecclesiology

*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, was the first document issued by Vatican II. Theologian Massimo Faggioli explains how liturgical reforms were directly linked with an ecclesiological vision that laid the groundwork for many of the developments found in the later documents. Rejection of the liturgical reforms cannot be completely separated from rejection of the overall teachings of the council.<sup>15</sup>

The initial and most profound impact of Vatican II on the Catholic laity came through the changes in how the mass was celebrated. These changes, some of which were introduced prior to the 1970 revision of the rite, were intentionally designed to spark reform in the church. The altar came out from the wall. The priest faced the people. Nearly everything was in the vernacular language. There was a much greater emphasis placed upon the readings from scripture. Most homilies were now rooted in the readings. The people were called upon to bring the realities of their everyday lives to be sacrificed upon the altar along with the elements of bread and wine. The priest invoked the help of the Holy Spirit to transform the gifts. A greater focus was placed upon the overall participation of the people. The Holy Spirit was to make them holy and transform them into the Body of Christ. The communion rail disappeared. The Eucharist was distributed both as host and as cup. The host was placed in the hand of the layperson. Those who were gathered were sent forth to live holy lives in the world. The world itself was to be transformed. The teachings of this document represented not only a reform of the liturgy but also a renewed vision of the Church.

Anyone with any degree of historical consciousness can appreciate the TLM in its own time. It is indeed a cultural treasure. Just as any student of English literature should have some familiarity with the King James Version of the Bible, so students of Roman Catholicism should be aware of the TLM. In our present time, however, only certain small groups of fundamentalist Christians would actually use the KJV in worship services, acting as if that highly inaccurate translation is the one and only true Word of God.

Today, in comparison with the RM, the TLM is like a trunk without a head, arms, or legs. It is so focused on the moment of transubstantiation and the power of the priest as to downplay severely the overall participation of the people, the reading of Scripture, the epiclesis of the Holy Spirit to transform the elements, the second epiclesis of the Holy Spirit to transform the congregation into the Body of Christ, and the sending forth of the people to transform the world. The TLM worship service is performed by the clergy for the benefit of a barely participating laity who are worshipping the God who is far off. The

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<sup>15</sup> See Massimo Faggioli, *Sacrosanctum Concilium and the Meaning of Vatican II*, in: *Theological Studies* 71 (2010) 437–451, here 437. See also Massimo Faggioli, *True Reform: Liturgy and Ecclesiology in Sacrosanctum Concilium*, Collegeville (MN) 2012.

rejection of the RM can be linked with a rejection of the Church as the people of God, of ecumenism, of openness to world religions, of inculturation, of dialogue with the world, and of new roles for the laity.

A central problem regarding TLM-promotion from the point of view of Catholic Church leadership is the ongoing recruitment of young people into the TLM movement. What is it in the TLM that young people are attracted to? Some say that it is the atmosphere of reverence, the solemnness, the sense of the sacred. I have read testimonies of TLM-attenders who claim to have a true experience of prayer and of being in the presence of God.<sup>16</sup> I acknowledge that such a personal experience may be authentic for some. This testimony must be taken seriously, though not without critical questioning.

In our time of social media propaganda, political polarization, and rapidly growing extremist groups, the link between the expansionist goals of the TLM movement and the proliferation of the TLM cannot be ignored. Somewhat like Scotch, TLM is an acquired taste. A small number of young people who attend TLMs grew up in traditionalist families. More often, they have been invited and encouraged to cultivate a taste for TLM. Evangelization based on the promotion of the TLM as a superior form of worship violates the stated intentions of both St. John Paul II and Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI in loosening the restrictions.

Many supporters of the TLM, however, claim that the older way is oriented toward the worship of God and the RM is oriented toward celebrating ourselves. This argument strikes me as manipulative and insulting. I hesitate to add my own testimony because I do not want to contribute to the culture wars. I overcome my hesitation because if attention is to be given to testimonies, my own should be in the mix. A couple of years ago I attended a TLM. It was mainly out of curiosity. If I remember correctly, I had to pick up an exchange student after mass from the school across the street from the church. There were people of all ages there, including some small children. They were mostly if not exclusively white and affluent. I had no trouble following the Latin which I had learned when I was an altar boy. There was an obvious atmosphere of reverence, perhaps too obvious. I felt uncomfortable throughout the mass. I had the impression that everything was forced and manufactured. My sense was that the deep reverence was accompanied by a deeper sense of righteous superiority and self-satisfaction. To me the TLM seemed like an event artificially ripped out of time in order to make a statement.<sup>17</sup>

### Vatican II Addressing the Question: Who Is the Church?

Contemporary promotion of the TLM goes hand in hand with promotion of the pre-Vatican II understanding of the Church. Among the documents to follow *Sacrosanctum Concilium* would be the 1964 *Lumen Gentium*. In 1962, Bishop Emile de Smedt had cri-

<sup>16</sup> See *Judy Roberts*, What Draws Parishioners to the Traditional Latin Mass, in: National Catholic Register (15.07.2021), accessed at <https://www.ncregister.com/news/traditional-latin-mass> (12.08.2021).

<sup>17</sup> See also the negative personal testimony of *Zita Ballinger Fletcher*, The Latin Mass Becomes a Cult of Toxic Tradition, in: National Catholic Reporter online (05.11.2019), accessed at <https://www.ncronline.org/news/opinion/latin-mass-becomes-cult-toxic-tradition> (28.07.2021).

ticized the first draft of what would become *Lumen Gentium* for its triumphalism, clericalism, and juridicism.<sup>18</sup> The final version addressed these problems in many ways. I will draw upon these categories to express ways in which Vatican II addressed the question: Who Is the Church?

*Overcoming Juridicism: The Church is the Body of Christ*

Catholicism could never be completely reduced to a set of rules and regulations, but there was enough focus on them to make the accusation of juridicism (or legalism, or institutionalism) appear credible. In a sense, one could say that before addressing the question of “Who Is the Church”, there was a need to establish that the Church is not simply a WHAT. The Church is also a WHO. Already in 1943, Pope Pius XII had issued the encyclical, *Mystici Corporis*, emphasizing that the Church is not merely a juridical institution, but is also and indeed the Body of Christ. When Vatican II opened, this personalist, relational approach was thought to be the most prominent theme that the council would address. Few people if anyone could have predicted that the People of God and other related images would achieve even greater prominence.

Some progressives wanted to contextualize the image of the Body of Christ within the context of other images. That the Church is not only a juridical institution but also the Body of Christ could be said in reverse: the Church that is the Body of Christ is also a juridical institution. Left on its own, the image of the Body of Christ could remain essentialist and ahistorical. Still, the Body of Christ image helped to bring about a development that was later called “communion ecclesiology”. There was a new focus on the local church as a Eucharistic community made up of Christians who loved God and each other through Christ and the Holy Spirit. Laypeople are fully included in the Body of Christ. Each local Eucharistic community or diocese is connected with all other local Eucharistic communities through the communion of bishops throughout the world with each other. The new focus on bishops helped to balance out the overemphasis on the authority of the pope left over from the First Vatican Council. The unity of the Church does not necessitate a strict uniformity but can allow for and even require a great deal of diversity. Communion ecclesiology connected well with a new appreciation of inculturation and a negative assessment of colonization. Although conservative church leaders who greatly favor the Body of Christ over other images of the Church tend to oppose the current push for a “synodal way”, the synodal way owes much to the image of the Body of Christ.

*Overcoming Clericalism: The Church is the People of God*

In the years before the council, every lay Catholic had a quick and easy answer to the question “Who Is the Church”. It was *them*, the clergy and the religious. *They* were the Church, and the laypeople were the ordinary Catholics. The brothers, sisters, and priests took care of educating the lay people. The priests were there for weddings, confessions,

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<sup>18</sup> The text can be found in Acta synodalia Sacrosancti Concilii Oecumenici Vaticani II, 5 vols., multiple parts, Vatican City 1970–1978, vol. I/IV, 142–144; ET in Vincent A. Yzermans, A New Pentecost: Vatican Council II: Session 1, Westminster 1963, 204–207.

baptisms, and the last rites. The bishop showed up for confirmations. Catholics did not wear their religion on their sleeves like the Protestants. We had the clergy and religious to take care of the church; we were free as Catholics to go about living our lives.

The postconciliar changes in the mass accompanied an underlying thrust of the council to combat clericalism and to enhance the role of the laity. The main intention was not to demote priests but rather to lift laypeople up. From a progressive viewpoint, the priest was being freed from the rather limited role of the confector of the Eucharist in order to become a pastoral leader among, not just above, the community. From a more traditional viewpoint, however, priests were being demoted, both in relation to the bishops and in relation to the people. There was a loss of status. Prior to the council, the highpoint of the sacrament of Holy Orders was the ordination of the priest. Vatican II identified the episcopacy as the fullness of the sacrament of Orders. The priest was labelled the bishop's helper. Fairly soon would come a surge of laypeople into churchly ministries. Having been pulled down from their sacred pedestals, priests found it more difficult to perform a sacred ministry in a church and world that were becoming more and more desacralized. By 1970, a great exodus from the seminaries of the first world had already taken place.

Vatican II declared to the laity: *you* are the Church. The Church is the People of God. Within the People of God there is a hierarchy made up of people who give their lives in the service of God and the Church. This ecclesiological vision is performed in the RM when the people of God arrive bringing with them the material of their everyday lives to be offered up at the altar by the priest who now faces them, who asks the Holy Spirit to transform them into the Body of Christ, who, along with lay ministers, distributes communion in both forms, placing the host in their hands, and who sends them forth to transform the world.

#### *Overcoming Triumphalism: The Church is the Communion of Saints*

The mass of my childhood, especially the high mass, did a good job of evoking a sense of the presence of the heavenly church, then called the church triumphant, celebrating along with the members of the earthly church, then called the church militant. Statues and frescos helped to remind us that we were in the presence not only of God but also of the angels and saints. We tended in those days to think of the Communion of Saints as being identical with the heavenly church. What is called triumphalism, the idealized perception of the church as perfect, glorious, and beyond all criticism, applied not only to the heavenly church but also to *them*, the clergy and the religious, who represented the church and cared for the souls of the laypeople. Triumphalism and clericalism thus went hand in hand. Practically speaking, for many Catholics the answer to "Who Is the Church" was the clergy and the religious along with the saints in heaven.

Vatican II taught that the Communion of Saints consists in the heavenly church and the earthly church combined. They made it clear that the Communion of Saints includes the People of God insofar as they are living lives of holiness now. They labelled the earthly church a pilgrim, a church on a journey, a church that is not yet finished. This pilgrim

church is ever in need of reform and renewal. The council's teaching on the pilgrim church helped eventually to lead to a series of apologies made by John Paul II starting in the 1990's, a new tradition that has carried through until today.

## **Popes, the TLM, and the Unity of the Church**

### *Paul VI*

When Pope Paul VI issued the new Roman rite in 1970, he forbade the celebration of the TLM. Why? The Eucharist is both a cause and a sign of unity. Catholics come together to celebrate the mass. Paul's fear was that allowing there to be two forms of the Roman rite would cause a division in the Church. The worshipping community would be split in two. There was to be no choice. Everyone was to adapt to the new rite. Paul's hope was that Catholics who pray together will stay together.

The Eastern Orthodox have a deep understanding of church unity and a practice to go along with it. For any particular congregation, there is only one Sunday celebration of the Divine Liturgy. The Eucharistic assembly is precisely the gathering of the entire community. Having multiple masses for one community would not make any sense. If more people show up for the liturgy than can fit inside the church, the overflow will stand outside. If such happens on multiple Sundays, a new congregation must be planned. The Eucharistic bread begins as one loaf and is not cut up until after the consecration. The chalice is a large one, since every member of the community will drink from the one cup. There is one bread and one cup and one community who by partaking become the one Body of Christ.

Many of these practices are mentioned in the writings of the church fathers of both East and West, and many can be found codified in ancient sources of canon law. Catholic practices eventually became for practical reasons more varied. Parishes offer multiple masses every weekend. Priests can be called upon to say mass multiple times upon the same altar or on different altars in different churches. In large cities such as Los Angeles, masses will be offered in many different languages. Yet the fundamental concept of one bread, one body remains central to Catholic faith.

It was Paul VI's judgment in 1970 that a split in worship would constitute a serious blow to the unity of the church. Paul VI expressed great respect for what we now call the TLM, but he considered it urgent that the Roman Catholic Church remain one body with one bread. Paul VI's decision and the reasoning behind it need to be kept in mind when reflecting upon Pope Francis' recent restrictions.

The great majority of Catholics accepted Paul VI's decision. A small number rejected it and eventually left the Catholic Church. Among those who accepted it were a minority who remained but were unhappy about the repression of the TLM.

*John Paul II*

John Paul II surveyed the bishops in 1981 and found that the “problem” of the TLM was practically non-existent. In 1984, thinking that the threat of schism had passed, he gave permission through the Congregation for Divine Worship for the restricted use of the Roman Missal of 1962 under certain clear conditions, including:

- a) “That it be made publicly clear beyond all ambiguity that such priests and their respective faithful in no way share the positions of those who call in question the legitimacy and doctrinal exactitude of the Roman Missal promulgated by Pope Paul VI in 1970.”
- b) “Such celebration must be made only for the benefit of those groups that request it; in churches and oratories indicated by the bishop (not, however, in parish churches, unless the bishop permits it in extraordinary cases); and on the days and under the conditions fixed by the bishop either habitually or in individual cases.”<sup>19</sup>

John Paul’s stated concern was for the unity of the church. In 1988, after Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre, founder of the traditionalist Church of the Priestly Fraternity of Pius X, had ordained four bishops, John Paul included in his condemnation of this schismatic act the point that “respect must everywhere be shown for the feelings of all those who are attached to the Latin liturgical tradition, by a wide and generous application of the directives already issued.”<sup>20</sup> It was clear that John Paul was trying to accommodate a small number of Catholics still attached to the TLM who might otherwise be tempted to exit the church with Lefebvre. He was not trying to establish or promote a perpetual minority group.

*Benedict XVI*

Among those who had disagreed with Paul VI’s 1970 decision to repress the TLM was Joseph Ratzinger, who later became Pope Benedict XVI. In the late 1960’s, Ratzinger was one of the founders of the journal *Communio*, which was dedicated to forging a middle path between the progressives and the traditionalists in the ongoing implementation of Vatican II. Ratzinger was not a traditionalist and would never be a separatist, but he judged Paul VI’s decision to be unnecessary in that the Tridentine mass-goers could remain a small loyal minority without causing a schism. He thought the complete banning was too harsh on those deeply attached to the older rite. Also, he wondered how it could be that something held to be so sacred for so long could suddenly become inappropriate?

Benedict XVI’s relaxation of restrictions in his 2007 *Summorum Pontificum* took a very different direction than that of either Paul VI or John Paul II. He declared that

“The Roman Missal promulgated by Pope Paul VI is the ordinary expression of the *lex orandi* (rule of prayer) of the Catholic Church of the Latin rite. The Roman Missal promulgated by Saint Pius V and revised by Blessed John XXIII is nonetheless to be considered an ex-

<sup>19</sup> *Congregation for Divine Worship*, Letter *Quattuor abhinc annos*. 3<sup>rd</sup> October 1984, in: AAS 76 (1984) 1088–1089.

<sup>20</sup> *John Paul II*, Apostolic Letter *Ecclesia Dei*. 2<sup>nd</sup> July 1988, accessed at [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/motu\\_proprio/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_motu-proprio\\_02071988\\_ecclesia-dei.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/motu_proprio/documents/hf_jp-ii_motu-proprio_02071988_ecclesia-dei.html) (28.08.2021).

traordinary expression of the same *lex orandi* of the Church and duly honoured for its venerable and ancient usage. These two expressions of the Church's *lex orandi* will in no way lead to a division in the Church's *lex credenda* (rule of faith); for they are two usages of the one Roman rite."<sup>21</sup>

Benedict had never thought that permitting the celebration of TLM would lead to schism. In fact, he believed the opposite. His loosening of restrictions was done expressly in regard for the unity of the church.

Sacramental theologian William Johnston reads *Summorum Pontificum* against the background of Benedict's writings on the liturgy as well as within the context of various commentators.<sup>22</sup> Benedict frequently expresses the need to emphasize the continuity between the postconciliar church and the preconciliar church in the face of those who exaggerate the reforms as providing a complete break. Although he never conveys agreement with those who promote the older rite as superior, he does acknowledge important specific elements of the older rite that seem to be lacking in the newer one. Moreover, he expresses concern that the 1970 revision was implemented during a period of experimentation and desacralization. His stated hope was that ultimately the two forms of the one rite "can be mutually enriching"<sup>23</sup>. Benedict's identification of the 1970 revision as the ordinary form of the rite and of the 1962 Missal as the extraordinary form of the rite can thus be interpreted as an attempt to set up a dialectic between the two forms, each being expected to have a positive impact upon the other. In short, those who prefer the extraordinary form should be exposed to the advantages of contemporary Catholic ecclesiology; the great majority who regularly attend the ordinary form should open themselves to a renewed sense of the sacred.

Even those who disagree sharply with Benedict's decision on a practical level should appreciate the intention that lay behind it. Benedict's proposed dialectic between the two forms of the one rite reflected his goal as a founder of *Communio* of mediating between the concerns of the progressives and the concerns of the traditionalists. Perhaps the experiment could have worked if it had been diligently implemented by Catholics of good will. Or perhaps it was always an impractical idea that was doomed to failure, among other reasons because it put forth a position that many Catholics regarded as conservative as if it were a centrist, mediating stance.

Benedict frequently criticized in his personal writings those who treated Vatican II as a new beginning that was discontinuous from earlier councils. In the end, however, he did not approve of a "hermeneutics of continuity" to be applied to Vatican II, as many conservatives wanted him to and as some still claim that he did. In his "Christmas Address to the Curia" in 2005, Benedict rejected both the "hermeneutics of continuity" and the

<sup>21</sup> *Benedict XVI*, Apostolic Letter *Summorum Pontificum*. 7<sup>th</sup> July 2007, accessed at [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/motu\\_proprio/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_motu-proprio\\_20070707\\_summorum-pontificum.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/motu_proprio/documents/hf_ben-xvi_motu-proprio_20070707_summorum-pontificum.html) (28.08.2021).

<sup>22</sup> See *William H. Johnston*, *A Study of Summorum Pontificum and the Extraordinary Form of the Roman Rite*, Collegeville (MN) 2013, 40–67.

<sup>23</sup> *Benedict XVI*, Letter to the Bishops on the Occasion of the Publication of the Apostolic Letter 'Moto Proprio Data *Summorum Pontificum*'. 7<sup>th</sup> July 2007, accessed at [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/letters/2007/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_let\\_20070707\\_lettera-vescovi.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/letters/2007/documents/hf_ben-xvi_let_20070707_lettera-vescovi.html) (28.08.2021).

“hermeneutics of discontinuity and rupture” in favor of what he called a “hermeneutics of reform.”<sup>24</sup> A hermeneutics of reform respects the need for the council to distinguish between truths and the forms in which truths are expressed. It recognizes the need for the council to recast the relationship between the church and the modern in the face of many challenges. It understands how any *aggiornamento* (updating) of the church is accompanied by *ressourcement* (return to the sources) insofar as new developments draw deeply upon the wells of Catholic tradition.

### *Francis*

Pope Francis has made the judgment that Pope Benedict’s experiment failed. Francis mentions the troubling results of a survey concerning the TLM that he had conducted among the bishops, without disclosing the actual data. In *Traditionis Custodes* and an accompanying letter to the bishops, Francis reinstated restrictions similar to those that John Paul II had put in place and that Benedict XVI had removed. Like his predecessors, he cites his concern for the unity of the church as the basis for his decision. Permission to celebrate the TLM must be sought from the local bishop. The TLM should generally not be offered in parishes, though exceptions can be made. Priests will no longer be authorized to establish personal parishes centered around the TLM. Current seminarians who want to celebrate the TLM once they are ordained need to seek permission from Rome. The reason for permitting the TLM is to meet the pastoral needs of those who remain affectively attached to it, although the ultimate goal is to transition all Roman Catholics to accept and worship God through the RM.

The most obvious difference between the decisions of 2007 and 2021 is that of the leader making the decision. In the first case, it was Pope Benedict XVI reaching out to the traditionalists in order to heal divisions and to avoid further schism. Benedict had thought all along that Pope Paul VI’s mandate that forbade the celebration of the older form of the rite had been harsh and misguided. In the more recent case, it was Pope Francis striking a blow against adversaries who cast doubts about the legitimacy of his papacy and who scorn the implementation, if not the very documents, of the Second Vatican Council. Francis was calling out and naming an already existing schism, a so-called silent schism, between Catholics who accept Vatican II along with the current revision of the Roman rite and those who reject postconciliar Catholicism and who want to revive a traditionalist Church with the Tridentine mass at its center.

An exclusive focus on the differences between the two popes, however, is dangerously misleading. A common response in the TLM movement is to claim that Pope Francis is acting like a bully by arbitrarily reversing the permissions granted by his two predecessors. It needs to be pointed out, however, that Francis’ current position is much closer to that of John Paul than to that of Benedict. Among the three popes, Benedict is the odd man out in this case. In addition, it must be noted that Benedict put forth his attempt at achieving a mutually enhancing dialectic as a kind of experiment, one that he himself

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<sup>24</sup> *Benedict XVI*, Address to the Roman Curia Offering Them His Christmas Greetings, 22<sup>nd</sup> December 2005, accessed at [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2005/december/documents/hf\\_ben\\_xvi\\_spe\\_20051222\\_roman-curia.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2005/december/documents/hf_ben_xvi_spe_20051222_roman-curia.html) (28.08.2021).



said would require further assessment. Finally, and in my judgment most importantly, the situation being addressed in 2007 is markedly different from the present time in which political and social polarization have greatly increased amid wildly raging culture wars.

Even greater than the papal preferences, then, has been the exponential growth of the amount, degree, and intensity of political radicalization, extremism, and polarization in the world over this period. The situation faced by Francis is markedly different from the situation that Benedict had faced. The connections between the TLM movement and the present-day culture wars might be enough to warrant fully Francis' decision to restrict and eventually eliminate the TLM. His decision appears even more sound, however, when one adds consideration of the TLM movement's continuing violations of the expressed desires of both John Paul and Benedict that the TLM not be placed in competition with the RM or be associated with the positions of those who disparage Vatican II and the current leadership of the Catholic Church. Never have I encountered in my research on the TLM movement the slightest hint that any of the participants stand open to being enriched by the RM and postconciliar Catholicism even as they themselves contribute to the enrichment of others.

The Catholic Church needs internal reform movements. My fellow Catholics who stand within or are attracted to the TLM movement make many legitimate points about the current state of the Catholic Church. Still, I think that Pope Francis is justified in placing limits upon the celebration of the TLM. In my view, the TLM movement has been promoting the TLM as a magical rite that casts a dark spell upon postconciliar Catholicism. It is my hope that most of these Catholics can drop their fetishizing of the TLM while otherwise keeping alive in creative and open-minded ways Pope Emeritus Benedict's vision of a mutually enriching dialectic between the old and the new. The unity of the Church demands it.

Pope Francis' recently imposed restrictions on the celebration of the Traditional Latin Mass need to be understood in relation to the emergence of a Traditional Latin Mass movement, that movement's antagonism toward the liturgical and ecclesial reforms of the Second Vatican Council, and important points of consistency in the efforts of various popes to safeguard the unity of the church. Those in the movement often offer valid points of critique, but in our present age of polarization they have become ever more an extremist group. They are encouraged to give up their devotion to a now antiquated form of worship, drop their oppositional attitudes, and function as an open-minded conservative movement of reform with the larger Catholic Church.