

Healing the Wounds of Liturgical Participation

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I. Introduction

In July of 2021 Pope Francis issued an apostolic letter *motu proprio*, entitled “*Traditionis Custodes: On the Use of the Roman Liturgy Prior to the Reform of 1970.*” The organizers of the Southwest Liturgical Conference have asked me to present a paper about this letter in light of the overall theme of the study week this year, “Bearers of Hope: Renewing the Body of Christ.” After a lengthy and difficult period of isolation because of the pandemic, the organizers offered this theme to evaluate priorities in worship as the community of believers reconvenes.

Many of the talks today concern mercy and reconciliation. I’ve been asked to address the pope’s apostolic letter within that framework. I’ll read you the title and summary of this presentation from the program booklet, and I’ll return to it at the end of this talk.

“Healing the Wounds of Liturgical Participation. On July 16, 2021, Pope Francis issued a *motu proprio*, *Traditionis Custodes* regarding the celebration of Mass according to the Roman Missal of 1962, commonly referred to as the Extraordinary Form. Fr. Paul Turner will discuss the Extraordinary Form in light of the Second Vatican Council and open our hearts to what Pope Francis is saying in this current teaching.”

Earlier today the organizers asked me to address more broadly, “What Kind of Reconciliation Do Catholics Need?” I offered many examples. This talk deals with only one area of division that disturbs Catholics and seeks a pastoral way forward.

The liturgical landscape on this division is confusing, and even the vocabulary people use to describe the situation is commonly imprecise. Consider, for example, these three expressions: “Latin Mass,” “*Novus ordo*,” and “Extraordinary Form.”

“Latin Mass” has become a shorthand way of referring to the celebration of the Mass before the reforms of the Second Vatican Council. I was nine years old when the council opened, so I learned the Latin responses to serve as an altar boy in my parish, St. Therese Little Flower in Kansas City, Missouri. Today you could theoretically encounter three different Latin Masses in your diocese: An unauthorized celebration of the previous Mass with a priest of the Society of St. Pius X, an authorized celebration of the same Mass with a priest possessing

permission from his bishop, and a celebration of the post-Vatican II Mass in Latin instead of in English, Spanish, Vietnamese or another vernacular language. The pope traditionally celebrates liturgies at the Vatican in Italian, but he uses Latin each year for the Chrism Mass on Holy Thursday. So when people use the expression “Latin Mass,” it isn’t clear if they mean the former Mass without authorization, the former Mass with authorization, or the contemporary Mass celebrated in Latin.

“*Novus ordo*” is how many people refer to the ceremonies promulgated after the Second Vatican Council. Because those two Latin words mean “new order” in English, some have coopted it to argue that the Mass today is indeed something new and therefore inconsistent with the tradition. However, the Roman Missal never calls itself the *novus ordo*. It calls itself the Roman Missal. It is the latest publication of a missal first assembled in 1474, itself based on sacramentaries and orders of service centuries older. A revised missal appeared after the Council of Trent in 1570. That missal underwent further revisions, most recently in 1962. The post-Vatican II missal appeared in 1970. Even so, “*novus ordo*” is a misnomer. We do have a reformed order of service, but it is found within the latest edition of the same Roman Missal.

“Extraordinary Form” is a term Pope Benedict coined to identify the order of service that predated the 1970 revisions that he called the “Ordinary Form.” Pope Francis has discontinued that terminology. The imprecise use of all three of these terms—“Latin Mass,” “*novus ordo*,” and “Extraordinary Form”—has confused some of the people of God.

Surprising to many, some young Catholics feel drawn to the pre-1970 liturgy. The persistence of the earlier form initially seemed yoked to nostalgia, but young Catholics have no personal experience of parish life before 1970. Even without that personal memory, many of them resonate with the earlier form of the Mass. They may state a number of reasons for this, all of them values worthy of respect: They encounter the mystery of God through Latin, a language they do not fully comprehend, but that carries a certain mystique, in the same way that you don’t have to understand the principles of music theory to encounter greatness inside Beethoven’s Eroica Symphony. Young people also find a sense of community with others their age who gather for a common purpose, willing to set aside the noisiness of the world around them and the addictive increase of electronic media, in order to observe relative silence and comparative inactivity in a ceremony that envelops them with its sense of order and purpose. They also find appealing the various ministers’ attention to ritual details. The complexity of the rite and the precision of its execution demand great attention worthy of great mystery. All of this expresses personal and communal faith, a respect for tradition, and a desire to worship God.

For young and old, the love of something forbidden creates its own frisson. The defiance of authority in favor of something of great personal worth makes the forbidden more desirable and the authority more questionable. Those who are told not to have something they like may even speak with contempt about those trying to take it away.

The experience of those who favor the pre-1970 form has led some people to scratch their heads over Pope Francis's apostolic letter. "What could be wrong with the old ceremony?" they wonder. "Why not let some Catholics use it?" That's where we stand today and perhaps why the Southwest Liturgical Conference wanted to frame this dilemma within a desire to heal wounds of liturgical participation.

II. Recent History

A review of recent history will show how we got where we are. The first document of the Second Vatican Council was its Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, which asked that "the rites be revised carefully in the light of sound tradition, and that they be given new vigor to meet present-day circumstances and needs" (4). Put on a ballot, the constitution passed by a nearly unanimous consent of the bishops at the council: 2,147 voted yes; 4 voted no.

The following month, Pope Saint Paul VI established a Consilium to implement the constitution. This consultative body of bishops established dozens of study groups to bring the vision of the council to fruition. They began their work even while the council remained in session, and the results started coming forward within a few years after the council closed. The missal was ready in 1970 and translated from Latin into many vernacular languages right away. The same year Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre founded the Society of St. Pius X, which became a vanguard in preserving the previous liturgy without authorization from the Vatican.

In 1984 Pope Saint John Paul II permitted a limited return to the 1962 missal. His Congregation for Divine Worship issued a brief Circular Letter to the Presidents of the Episcopal Conferences, called *Quattuor Abhinc Annos*. After consulting the bishops of the world, Pope John Paul learned that some priests and faithful continued to cling to the so-called "Tridentine" Mass, that is the one following the missal issued after the Council of Trent, which the congregation's letter called a "problem." It granted permission to use the 1962 missal under these circumstances: that the priests and faithful make it "publicly clear beyond all ambiguity" that they do not question the legitimacy of the 1970 missal (a point that Archbishop Lefebvre's followers were not conceding), that celebrations not use parish churches except in extraordinary cases, that they use the 1962 missal in Latin, that they not interchange texts and rites of the two missals, and that each bishop send a report at year's end to the Vatican.

In 1988, Archbishop Lefebvre unlawfully ordained four priests bishops, which prompted Pope John Paul II to write his apostolic letter *motu proprio* called *Ecclesia Dei*. He denounced the ordinations as a schismatic act constituting an excommunication. He established a commission to facilitate the full ecclesial communion of those who had been linked to Lefebvre but now desired unity with the Pope. He also wrote—and this pertains to the theme of this Southwest Liturgical Conference study week, "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 some time ago by the

Apostolic See for the use of the Roman Missal according to the typical edition of 1962.”

Some priests of the unauthorized Society of St. Pius X then broke from it to form the Priestly Fraternity of St. Peter, which kept its ties to the Vatican while preserving the 1962 liturgy. That is why you may have in the same city today two identical Masses using the same 1962 missal, one approved and one not approved. The reason has to do not with the liturgy but belief in the authority of the church to change the Mass.

Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger had been closely involved in this “problem”. As Pope Benedict XVI, after consulting with cardinals, he issued his own apostolic letter *motu proprio* in 2007, “*Summorum Pontificum: On the Use of the Roman Liturgy Prior to the Reform of 1970.*” The opening article declared that the missal of 1970 is the ordinary expression of the *lex orandi*, or the church’s rule of praying. He considered the missal of 1962 an extraordinary expression of the same *lex orandi*, “and duly honored for its venerable and ancient usage.” He considered these to be two usages of the same rite, two expressions of the same belief. He replaced the two previous documents *Quattuor Abhinc Annos* and *Ecclesia Dei* with this one, articulating several points:

Any priest could celebrate Mass without a congregation using either missal without permission from the Vatican or his own diocese. However, if a congregation spontaneously showed up for Mass with the 1962 missal, they could remain. Religious communities had a similar permission. Pope Benedict asked competent parish priests to offer the 1962 Mass for stable groups of the faith who requested it on weekdays, Sundays and special celebrations such as weddings, funerals, and pilgrimages. He permitted the proclamation of readings at that Mass in the vernacular languages. If the parish priest declined to use the 1962 missal, the lay faithful were to appeal to the bishop or the *Ecclesia Dei* commission. The parish priest was also permitted to use the older ritual for baptism, marriage, penance and anointing the sick. Bishops could use the former pontifical for confirmation. Ordained clerics could use the previous breviary. The local Ordinary could erect a personal parish for the purpose of celebrating the earlier forms. The commission received authority to enact the decrees.

Pope Benedict sent an accompanying letter to bishops, explaining his *motu proprio*. He desired unity within the church. He acknowledged the argument from nostalgia, that some familiar with the previous rite from childhood were still attached to it. He acknowledged the problem with the movement of Archbishop Lefebvre, which was not about a missal but about not accepting the binding character of the Second Vatican Council. He cited personal experience that not all celebrations of the 1970 missal were faithful to its requirements. Regarding the previous missal, Pope Benedict also noted the number of young people who “felt its attraction and found in it a form of encounter with the Mystery of the Most Holy Eucharist, particularly suited to them.”

He issued norms that *Ecclesia Dei* had not needed. In doing so, he envisioned that divisions would ease not crystallize. He wrote about

exaggerations and social aspects unduly linked to the attitude of the faithful attached to the earlier tradition. Then, noteworthy for our study week, he wrote to the bishops, “Your charity and pastoral prudence will be an incentive and guide for improving these.”

In that context he made a more cited declaration, “the two Forms of the usage of the Roman Rite can be mutually enriching.” Some adherents of the 1970 missal therefore felt free to incorporate rubrics from the 1962 missal. However, the examples Pope Benedict gave were these: “new Saints and some of the new Prefaces can and should be inserted in the old Missal.” He showed how the 1962 missal would be enriched by insertions from the missal of 1970, not the other way around. He then asked those using the 1970 missal to demonstrate more powerfully “the sacrality which attracts many people to the former usage.” He begged for celebrations of “great reverence in harmony with the liturgical directives. This will bring out the spiritual richness and the theological depth of this Missal.” He hoped that the sacrality of the 1962 missal would influence celebrations of the 1970 missal.

Pope Benedict pleaded for “an interior reconciliation in the heart of the Church.” He wrote, “Let us generously open our hearts and make room for everything that the faith itself allows.” He asked everyone to preserve the riches of the church, and that those who celebrate the previous form not do so exclusively. He asked the bishops to send him a report in three years so that the Holy See could remedy any difficulties.

Pope Francis then consulted bishops before writing his own *motu proprio* in 2021, *Traditionis Custodes*. He gave it the same subtitle as Pope Benedict’s *Summorum Pontificum*, “On the Use of the Roman Liturgy Prior to the Reform of 1970.”

Pope Francis opened with a reminder that the bishops in communion with the pope constitute the foundation of unity. He cited the work of Saint John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI “to promote the concord and unity of the church.” He declared that he too was pressing on “ever more in the constant search for ecclesial communion.”

Pope Francis called the liturgical books issued in conformity with the Second Vatican Council “the unique expression of the *lex orandi* of the Roman Rite.” He reassigned the competency to authorize the use of the 1962 missal to bishops, away from individual priests. He asked bishops to verify that those using that missal do not deny the validity and legitimacy of the liturgical reform, and to designate locations for celebration apart from parish churches and new personal parishes, and days of celebration. Bishops were to ensure that readings be proclaimed in the vernacular, to appoint a priest suited to the responsibility with a lively pastoral charity and “a sense of ecclesial communion,” to evaluate parishes canonically erected for the purpose of using the 1962 missal, and not to authorize new groups. Any priest ordained after *Traditionis Custodes* and seeking to use the previous missal would require authorization from his bishop and from the Vatican. Priests already using the 1962 missal needed to seek authorization

from the bishop in order to continue. Religious orders have their own competent authorities. Previous norms are abrogated.

Pope Francis restated many of the principles first articulated in 1984, so his letter aims to stop trends that developed after the permissions Benedict had granted. As Benedict had done, Francis wrote his own accompanying letter. He aimed to continue the healing of the schism of Archbishop Lefebvre, whose name continues to haunt these documents. He appreciated Benedict's desire to regulate a form of worship returning even among the young. However, the noble intentions of Benedict gave way to a situation that Francis said preoccupied and saddened him. He said that the pastoral objective of his predecessors "has often been seriously disregarded." The attempt to recover unity of a body with diverse liturgical sensibilities "was exploited to widen the gaps, reinforce the divergences, and encourage disagreements that injure the Church, block her path, and expose her to the peril of division." He admitted that the 1970 missal has also been subject to abuses, but the solution of using the 1962 missal was

often characterized by a rejection not only of the liturgical reform, but of the Vatican Council II itself, claiming, with unfounded and unsustainable assertions, that it betrayed the Tradition and the 'true Church'.... To doubt the Council is to doubt the intentions of those very Fathers who exercised their collegial power in a solemn manner *cum Petro et sub Petro* in an ecumenical council, and, in the final analysis, to doubt the Holy Spirit himself who guides the Church.

Francis restated the goal of the council: the full, conscious, active participation of the people in the liturgy. He sought unity through acceptance of the Church's authority and liturgy.

Several months later, the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments issued answers to questions on certain provisions of *Traditionis Custodes*. Addressed to the presidents of the conferences of bishops, it treated concerns such as the location for the celebration, the use of the previous Roman Ritual and Roman Pontifical for other sacraments, priests who do not recognize the validity and legitimacy of concelebration, the source of vernacular scripture readings, the authority for granting the faculty to use the 1962 missal, and several other matters.

III. The Question of Healing

With that background, I return to the title and summary of my talk for this study week. Regarding the summary, the program says that the Roman Missal of 1962 is "commonly referred to as the Extraordinary Form." I should have caught this before the program was published, but it's more accurate now to say that the missal of 1962 was "previously referred to as the Extraordinary Form" because Pope Francis has not used that terminology and in fact set it aside. The term has some difficulty in English because we use the word "extraordinary" to mean something exceptionally fine, whereas the Vatican uses the word to mean "something apart what is ordinary, though permitted" as in the expression "extraordinary ministers of holy communion." I humbly concede that many of the

extraordinary ministers in my parish are exceptionally fine and better than their priest in many aspects of their life. But all the term means is that they are not ordinary ministers of communion—those are the priests and deacons. A better translation of “extraordinary form” might have been “secondary form” or “auxiliary form” to show its proper relationship to the ordinary form. Now it doesn’t matter, the pope has said that there is only one expression of the *lex orandi* of the Roman Rite.

The title of this talk, “Healing the Wounds of Liturgical Participation,” sets a high goal, as does this part of the summary of my talk in the program: “Fr. Paul Turner will... open our hearts to what Pope Francis is saying in this current teaching.” We’ve seen how the recent popes have defended faithfulness to the Second Vatican Council, demanding it even of those who feel attracted to the previous form of the Mass. However, opening hearts to what Pope Francis is saying and healing the wounds of liturgical participation are both tall orders.

Adherents to the preconciliar liturgy are not all the same. Those in the camp of Archbishop Lefebvre have denied the validity of the post-Vatican II Catholic Mass. The popes have yearned to achieve reconciliation with this group, but the followers in question have given no ground. To reconcile, they would have to concede that the council had the authority to reform the Mass, which is against the foundational principles of their movement. The popes have learned to their utter disappointment that reconciliation cannot happen when the theological viewpoints on this question of authority are so far apart.

In another group are those who do accept the authority of the Vatican, but who feel that the reformed liturgy it produced is so poorly done that a return to the preconciliar liturgy is in the best interests of the universal church. Perhaps there is some hope for reconciliation with this group, but it will require more perspicacity and goodwill on both sides of the line. On one side, the unrelenting arguments that nothing about the post-Vatican II liturgy is good become wearisome and ineffective. They show a lack of honest analytical ability, probably because so much is at stake in the way one prefers to worship. On the other side, there is a similar belief among many adherents to the post-Vatican II liturgy that nothing about the preconciliar liturgy has value. Many of them look condescendingly upon others with incomprehension. Many younger priests who found some spiritual benefit in the preconciliar form find that older Catholics prejudge them based on minimal evidence such as their age, their dress, or how they fold their hands. Many older Catholics have not taken the time to visit with younger Catholics to learn about their faith, what motivates their prayer, and how the young and the old might experience their own mutual enrichment.

A third group is people who consider themselves ordinary Catholics but feel drawn to the earlier form because of its ceremonies and an atmosphere that they commonly describe with a single comparative adjective: “more reverent.” This takes a swipe at the celebrations of the contemporary Mass in many parishes where some of the buildings fail to inspire devotion, where presiders read words but seem not to pray, where preaching is ill-prepared, and where musicians offer what limited gifts they have to produce sound on inadequate

instruments purchased on a small budget. The post-conciliar liturgy can look, sound and smell equally and more reverent than a pre-conciliar liturgy, but it all depends on what you mean by “reverent”.

Every priest I know approaches the liturgy with reverence, so does every Catholic. They would not be there otherwise. In the end, reverence is something interior. It has exterior manifestations, and the call of the council to full, conscious, active participation was a call to show on the outside the reverence that dwells within. It would be prejudicial to assume that a priest whose chasuble doesn't hang straight or who accidentally chose the wrong vestment color at a daily Mass is thereby irreverent. These may be external signs of carelessness, but it is naive to say that a priest who dressed with more care is therefore more reverent. Reverence is something more than externals.

This third group, then, thirsts for a spiritual encounter with the Mass, but that can be achieved in various ways, including charitable judgments of other people. Yet even those who possess that charity may still ask, what's the problem with liking two ways to worship? Why not promote both the vernacular and Latin, both silence and participation, both old and new rubrics? This group may not grasp something that these papal documents did not explore thoroughly, and that is the renewal within the eucharistic theology of the postconciliar Mass. Many Catholics assumed that the only difference between the two is the language and the direction that the presider faces. But the reform of the liturgy took a broader path based on theological principles. Here are some examples:

The liturgy of the word. The reform embraced a dynamic revolution in the importance of the bible for Catholics. The sheer number of readings proclaimed at Sunday and weekday Masses grew exponentially. A commitment to regular proclamation from the Old Testament shone a light on a major part of God's word that Catholics had virtually ignored for centuries. Proclamation in the vernacular languages has activated a love for the scriptures that influences preaching, catechesis and art.

The eucharistic prayer. Prior to the reform, the Roman Canon was the only Eucharistic prayer allowed, even though the history of the early liturgy shows plain evidence for dozens more. The reform of the Mass introduced nine more eucharistic prayers than the Roman Rite allowed for many centuries. The new prayers all include an epiclesis, an appeal for the coming of the Holy Spirit, and they have refined our theology of sacrifice, offering, real presence, and communion.

The participation of the people. The council reaffirmed our belief that all the baptized are members of the priestly people of God, and therefore have rights and responsibilities when they gather to celebrate the eucharist. They take the lead in the universal prayer, also called descriptively the prayer not “of the priest,” but “of the faithful.” The people engage in the dialogues, they sing the chants, and they listen attentively to the eucharistic prayer because these also express their thanksgiving and offering, not just that of the priest. This is most eloquently expressed when the faithful receive communion from the bread and

wine consecrated at the Mass at which they are participating, rather than from the previously consecrated hosts in the tabernacle. As they offer the gift of their lives at the altar together with the priest, so they are to receive communion from the table of the altar together with the priest. That communion is integral to their full, conscious, active participation, to their right and duty as God's priestly people.

These are only a few examples of reforms in the liturgy that underscored a mature eucharistic theology. Better catechesis on the Mass will surely help all Catholics understand that the former liturgy is not simply a matter of finding reverence through silence and ritual, but a mode of expression that the Church aimed to improve by engaging the people of God in active participation, helping them connect their week's work to the Sunday offering, and guiding their lives through a more ample encounter with the bible. When people ask, "What's the problem with liking two ways to worship?" they overlook this enhanced theology of the eucharist that draws them into the sacrifice of the Mass and prepares them to live the demands of the Christian life. A more intentional celebration of the Mass by priests, ministers and musicians will bring these principles to better fruition.

The people can help too. Their full, conscious, active participation will be manifest when they register with a parish, make Sunday worship a habit, arrive early for Mass, sit in the front instead of the back, silence and put away their cellular devices, sing all the music assigned to them—even at communion, pay full attention to the readings and the eucharistic prayer, observe postures in unity, hold charity in their hearts for all other worshipers, stay for the end of Mass, contribute generously to their parish so that the music budget can increase, and form community with other parishioners. This spiritual platform will allow the 1970 missal to express more fully the beauty it contains.

Some wounds don't heal very well. A lot depends on the nature of the wound and the DNA that comes with birth. One talk at one study week cannot alone heal wounds of liturgical participation, but I do believe that the Southwest Liturgical Conference organizers are correct that we need to be thinking about how to heal. It's one thing to celebrate the Mass as the source of our unity; it's another thing to live in unity, to seek actively the reconciliation that will let us all draw closer to the altar with integrity.

Decades ago I heard scripture scholar Raymond Brown give a lecture at the North American College in Rome on John chapter 6. He was one of the foremost experts on the fourth gospel, and he spoke about Jesus' famous discourse on the bread of life. I remember him saying even then how ironic it was that even though the eucharist is the source of our unity, we have fought over nearly every aspect of it throughout our history: the recipe for bread and wine, the posture to take when receiving communion, the use of one's hands, the terms for excluding and including individual communicants, the merits of silence and song in the procession and after receiving—and so on. The source of unity has become the source of division. We cannot let that continue.

To that end, it is good to recall how each of the Vatican's documents dealing with the use of the missal before the 1970 reforms makes its own appeal for reconciliation, for healing wounds. In 1984, *Quattuor Abhinc Annos* said that the concession to use the previous missal was “indicative of the common Father's solicitude for all his children.” In 1988, *Ecclesia Dei* pleaded that “respect must everywhere be shown for the feelings of all those who are attached to the Latin liturgical tradition.” In his letter accompanying *Summorum Pontificum* in 2007, Pope Benedict XVI declared it his intention “to make every effort to enable for all those who truly desire unity to remain in that unity or to attain it anew.... Let us generously open our hearts and make room for everything that the faith itself allows.” Pope Francis wrote in *Traditionis Custodes* that it was his intention “to press on ever more in the constant search for ecclesial communion.”

These are indeed lofty goals, and each of us can pursue them especially through the twin means of catechesis and charity. A better familiarity with the history of the Roman Rite will enhance our understanding of the celebration of the Eucharist, the reforms it has ordained over the centuries, and the refinements it has pursued. A better expression of charity will avoid prejudicial assumptions about those who favor one form of the Mass over another. A more charitable assumption is that all who participate at Mass seek to give thanks to God, to offer their lives in sacrifice, and to share in the fruits of holy communion, which includes a building up of the very body of Christ in love. It is that respectful charity that will provide the best medicine to heal the wounds of liturgical participation.