

Liturgical Unity, Liturgical Diversity, and the Catholicity of the Church

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Abstract. — *With the apostolic letter Traditionis custodes, issued motu proprio in July 2021, Pope Francis severely curtailed the circumstances in which the pre-conciliar form of the Roman Rite may be celebrated, reversing the position of his predecessor, Benedict XVI. For some so-called traditionalist commentators, this was an inappropriate restriction upon liturgical diversity. This article will review the development of the understanding of liturgical diversity and unity in the magisterium since the council, and explore how Francis' restrictions restore the model for diversity developed out of Sacrosanctum Concilium. This article will then propose a theological reading where the tension between diversity and unity contribute to a liturgical demonstration of the catholicity of the church.*

Despite Pope Francis having been considered generally less interested in liturgical matters than his predecessor, his apostolic letter *motu proprio, Traditionis custodes* given in July 2021 has attracted great interest.¹ In this article, I will examine the balance between diversity and adaptation of the liturgy on the one hand and preserving the essential unity of the Rite on the other, and where authority rests in this balancing.² Ultimately, I will propose that the liturgy offers insight into what it means for the church to be catholic.

1. *Traditionis custodes* will be referred to as *TC*, with quotations taken from Pope Francis, "Traditionis Custodes: On the Use of the Roman Liturgy Prior to the Reform of 1970" (The Holy See, July 16, 2021), https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/motu_proprio/documents/20210716-motu-proprio-traditionis-custodes.pdf; here see Kevin W. Irwin, *Pope Francis and the Liturgy: The Call to Holiness and Mission* (New York: Paulist Press, 2020), ix-x; and see the number of items tagged as related to *TC* on a website such as Catholic News Agency, "Catholic News Agency: Traditionis Custodes," 2022, <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/tags/8585/traditionis-custodes>; for a more historical perspective on this *motu proprio*, see Alexander Turpin, "The Tridentine Genius of Traditionis Custodes," *Ecclesia Orans* 38, no. 2 (2021): 235-255.

2. An earlier version of this article was presented at the 2022 conference of the European Academy of Religion. Thanks are due to the Academy, to the *Academische Stichting Leuven*, and to the Leverhulme Trust for supporting attending that conference and the research behind this article.

To do so, in the first part of this article, I will examine the position laid down by the Second Vatican Council in *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, and how this unfolds through the five Instructions for the Right Application of that Constitution. I will then turn to the question of the use of the pre-conciliar missal, sometimes somewhat inaccurately called the Tridentine Missal or the Latin Mass, both in the establishment of the system of indulgences developed under the pontificates of John Paul II and Benedict XVI and in the changes to this effected by *Traditionis custodes*.³ I will consider the way the documents portray the goal of the liturgical reform, diversity and unity in liturgical practice, and the question of authority over the development of practice. Through this, I will argue that diversity is essential to the understanding of the unity of the Roman Rite portrayed by the documents, and that the limitations on the usage of the pre-conciliar rites by Francis are entirely in keeping with the direction of movement determined by the council, and generally followed since.

In the second part of this article, I will offer a theological framework for the place of diversity-in-unity within liturgical practice, and argue that it is inherent that the liturgy, to be catholic, must exhibit diversity. Drawing on the approach to culture and liturgy developed by Edward Kilmartin,⁴ and others, this article will conclude by considering how such a model of diversity and unity in liturgical practices performs the catholicity of the church.

3. *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (SC) and the other council documents are quoted from the translation of Norman P. Tanner, ed., *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, vol. 2 (London: Sheed & Ward, 1990); the first three Instructions for the Right Application of the Constitution, *Inter Oecumenici* (IO, 1964), *Tres Abhinc Annos* (3AA, 1967), and *Liturgicae Instaurationes* (LI, 1970) from Thomas C. O'Brien, ed., *Documents on the Liturgy, 1963-1979: Conciliar, Papal, and Curial Texts* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1982), 88-110, 135-140, 159-167 respectively; the fourth Instruction *Varietatis Legitimae* (VL, 1994) from the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, "Varietatis Legitimae: The Roman Liturgy and Inculturation. The Fourth Instruction for the Right Application of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy of the Second Vatican Council," 1994, <http://www.cultodivino.va/content/cultodivino/it/documenti/istruzioni/varietatis-legitime/english.html>; and the fifth Instruction *Liturgiam Authenticam* (LA, 2001) from Peter Jeffery, *Translating Tradition: A Chant Historian Reads Liturgiam Authenticam* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2005), 123-165.

4. Edward J. Kilmartin, *Culture and the Praying Church: The Particular Liturgy of the Individual Church*, ed. Mary M. Schaefer (Ottawa: Publications Service, Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1990).

1. Sacrosanctum Concilium and Its Implementation

1. Sacrosanctum Concilium

The council fathers, from their very first words in *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, made clear that adaptation, development, and reform of the liturgy were on the council's agenda. *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (and thus the whole *acta* of the council) begins:

It is the intention of this holy council to improve the standard of daily christian living among Catholics; to adapt those structures which are subject to change so as better to meet the needs of our time; to encourage whatever can contribute to the union of all who believe in Christ; and to strengthen whatever serves to call all people into the embrace of the church. It therefore, and with quite special reason, sees the taking of steps towards the renewal and growth of the liturgy as something it can and should do (SC, 1).

Implicitly, this rejects the idea of the liturgy as fixed and invariable for all time. However, it is equally clear that there are limits to the possibilities for change. As the document repeats later: "the liturgy consists both of a part that cannot be changed, insofar as it has been divinely laid down, and also of parts that are subject to modification, parts which in the course of time can vary" (SC, 21).

The ultimate objective of the conciliar mandate for liturgical reform can be seen in two oft-cited remarks. First: "The liturgy is ... the high point towards which the activity of the church is directed, and, simultaneously, the source from which all its power flows out" (SC, 10). And second: "The church very much wants all believers to be led to take a full, conscious and active part in liturgical celebration" (SC, 14).

While parameters are laid down that seek to preserve the "fundamental unity of the Roman rite," "room is to be left ... for legitimate variations and adaptations to meet the needs of different gatherings" (SC, 38). The way that the council mandates the preservation of unity is through the laying out of who has the authority to change and innovate in the liturgy. In all matters, the authority of the church itself is exercised by the Apostolic See; this is the exercise of ultimate earthly authority. At the local level, this is shared in by the local bishop, and the bishops of a region collaborating with each other, chiefly through the episcopal conferences, but also across the borders of these where appropriate (e.g., where a cultural or language question transcends the national boundaries that shape most episcopal conferences).⁵ On no grounds does the council

5. Although episcopal conferences are a relatively recent innovation, with the current form emerging in the nineteenth century, in many ways the Constitutions of the

grant authority to the individual priest or community to “add, remove or change anything in the liturgy on his or her own” (SC, 22).

The reference the council made to the need for the reform to arise “organically” (SC, 23) from earlier forms is often quoted by those taking issue with some aspect of the post-conciliar liturgy.⁶ To do so is to overstate fundamentally the significance of this single reference. It must be read alongside directions such as “the church has no desire ... to impose a rigid monolithic structure ... it cultivates and encourages the gifts and endowments of mind and heart possessed by various races and peoples”. (SC, 37). Furthermore, it permits that “in some places ... there may arise a pressing need for a more radical adaptation of the liturgy” (SC, 40). While this openness for adaptation is never unconditioned, provided the levels of authority exercise their mandates diligently, the Constitution permits the liturgy be adapted, and thus can diverge from prior forms. The ultimate test is pastoral: that “the christian people can more surely obtain the abundance of graces in the liturgy” (SC, 21), and that “In the liturgy on earth, we are sharing by anticipation in the heavenly one” (SC, 8).

2. *The Early Instructions*

Against such apparently radical openness, it could be suggested that the initial Instructions for the Right Implementation of the Constitution issued by the Sacred Congregation of Rites are more restrictive. The first, *Inter Oecumenici* (1964), repeats often the limitations that experimentation is not an individual project, but to be undertaken within and by the authority of the whole church. Thus, with reference back to SC, 22, “no-one ... is to act on individual initiative in this matter, thereby, as might well happen doing harm to the liturgy and to its reform under competent authority” (IO, 20). Instead, it is the responsibility of the “competent, territorial ecclesiastical authority” (IO, 10): “The bishop has the authority to regulate the liturgy within his own diocese” (IO, 22).

Yet even within this framework, this First Instruction encourages the movement forward in the direction mandated by the council in an

Council take their existence for granted. They are commended in broader terms in the Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops, *Christus Dominus*, 36-38. On their development and authority, see Francis Aloysius Sullivan, “The Teaching Authority of Episcopal Conferences,” *Theological Studies* 63, no. 3 (September 2002): 472-493, DOI: 10.1177/004056390206300302.

6. Cf. e.g. Alcuin Reid, *The Organic Development of the Liturgy: The Principles of Liturgical Reform and Their Relation to the Twentieth-Century Liturgical Movement Prior to the Second Vatican Council* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius, 2005).

expansive way. The primary framing for this is in terms of the use of vernacular languages, and as an example we can see that the Constitution's direction that: "There may well be a suitable place for the local language in masses celebrated with a congregation – especially in the readings, the "common prayer," and, if circumstance warrant, in the parts which call for the people to join in" (SC, 54) is interpreted as: "the competent, territorial ecclesiastical authority [with confirmation from Rome] ... may introduce the vernacular into: (a) the proclaiming of the lessons, epistle, and gospel; the universal prayer or prayer of the faithful; (b) ... the chants of the Ordinary of the Mass ... as well as the [Proper Chants]; (c) acclamations, greeting, and dialogue formularies, ... the Lord's Prayer" (IO, 57). Beyond a slight extension to the permitted texts in the vernacular, including among others the Canon of the Mass, the Second Instruction, *Tres Abhinc Annos* (1967), neither makes any major steps forward nor offers any critique of the process of adaptation as it had happened to that point (cf. 3AA, 28).

The Third Instruction, *Liturgicae Instaurationes*, in a sense ends the initial period of the interpretation and reception of the conciliar liturgical reform. Published in 1970, seven years after the Constitution and in the same year as the first typical edition of the revised missal, and with the Fourth Instruction not published for another 24 years, it summarises the initial movement and confirms the onward direction of travel. There are hints within this Instruction that all has not gone smoothly, in that "some have received the changes grudgingly," but also in the concern expressed over individuals' innovations, which have "obstructed the cause of genuine liturgical renewal or made it more difficult" (LI, Preamble). Thus, the Instruction restates the responsibility of the bishop to oversee the process of liturgical reform and adaptation in the diocese.

Nonetheless, it can also be said that this Third Instruction is overly optimistic about the possibilities that had already been created, especially when it claims:

The many options regarding texts and the flexibility of the rubrics are a great advantage to a living, pointed, and spiritually beneficial celebration, that is, one adapted to local conditions and to the character and culture of the faithful. There is, then, no need for purely personal improvisations (LI, Preamble).

The scope and flexibility provided may be advantageous, but perhaps the fact that the paragraphs of *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (37-40) dedicated to inculturation and local adaptation were the subject of the Fourth Instruction, indicates that more work was needed.

3. *Varietatis Legitimae*

One of the most noticeable traits of this Fourth Instruction, *Varietatis Legitimae* (1994), is the shift in language that has occurred in the time between the Third and Fourth Instructions. While *Sacrosanctum Concilium* and the first Instructions spoke primarily of “adaptation” of the liturgy to a particular culture, *Varietatis Legitimae* speaks of “inculturation.” Within the document, this shift is acknowledged; the Instruction suggests it is a change of language of the Magisterium more generally and implies by its references that the shift has come during the then-current pontificate of John Paul II. The shift is also justified on the grounds that

“inculturation” is a better expression to designate a double movement: by inculturation, the Church makes the Gospel incarnate in different cultures, and at the same time introduces peoples, together with their cultures, into her own community (VL, 4; quoting John Paul II, *Redemptoris missio*, 7).

Reference is also made in the Instruction at this point to *Gaudium et Spes*, and the call made there to “deepen understanding of Christ’s message and give it more effective expression” (VL, 4; quoting *Gaudium et Spes*, 58).

Despite the shift in language, *Varietatis Legitimae* is nonetheless clear over the need for the liturgy to be shaped by (though of course also *to shape*, see VL, 19) the surrounding culture. The inculturation of worship “constitutes one of the aspects of the inculturation of the Gospel, which calls for true integration in the life of the faith of each people, of the permanent values of a culture” (VL, 5).

While never moving away from the frequent reminders of the earlier documents of the need for proper authority over liturgical innovations to ensure that they are in unity with the whole church,⁷ there is a definite emphasis that further inculturation (and accordingly, adaptation!) of the liturgy is for the good of the church and the good of the faithful concerned. There is also a clear understanding that this extends beyond simply the use of the vernacular that was dominant in the earlier Instructions.

In this way, the ultimate ends for *Varietatis Legitimae* remain those of *Sacrosanctum Concilium*: the full participation of all the faithful in an earthly liturgy that foreshadows the heavenly; in *Varietatis Legitimae* this means “the Liturgy of the Church must not be foreign to any country,

7. Thus: “The process of inculturation should maintain the *substantial unity* of the Roman Rite” (VL, 36); “Adaptations of the Roman Rite, even in the field of inculturation, depend completely on the *authority* of the Church” (VL, 37).

people, or individual” (VL, 18). In this way, the shift of language to speak to that of inculturation is perhaps a realization of the nature of the task, beyond merely local customs of celebrating the liturgy to a fuller expectation of liturgical celebration established such that it is not foreign to any.

4. *Liturgiam Authenticam*

It is beyond the scope of this article to judge whether the shift between the optimism of *Varietatis Legitimae* and the Fifth Instruction *Liturgiam Authenticam* seven years later in John Paul II’s pontificate is typical of a wider shift in the perspective of the Magisterium. Certainly between these texts though, there is a shift into a much more negative, centralizing tone.

In the Anglophone world, *Liturgiam Authenticam* (2001) mostly attracts rejoicing or derision depending on one’s view on whether or not the principles to be applied in translating the liturgy into English are correct or not.⁸ While this Instruction focuses chiefly on translation, the change in position on authority is pronounced. While prior Instructions repeated the local bishop’s responsibility for the liturgical life of his diocese, here, along with the extensive instructions over fine details even down to the proper use of capital letters (in *LA*, 33) the emphasis is on the series of permissions that should be sought from the Apostolic See (see, e.g., *LA* 15, 22).

Additionally, the understanding of the goal of the conciliar mandate for liturgical reform has shifted. No longer is the concern that all the faithful may participate actively, fully, and consciously. Instead, the Instruction begins with a reminder that: “The Second Vatican Council strongly desired to preserve with care the authentic Liturgy, which flows forth from the church’s living and most ancient spiritual tradition” (*LA*, 1). Furthermore, “the Roman Rite is itself a precious example and an instrument of true inculturation” (*LA*, 5). While the Instruction indicates that the principles laid down in *Varietatis Legitimae* remain in force (*LA*, 8), it is clear that any inculturation must take a backseat to the preservation of the established norms.

8. Such questions have previously been discussed at great length elsewhere, see, for example, Jeffery, *Translating Tradition*; Gerald O’Collins, *Lost in Translation: The English Language and the Catholic Mass* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2017).

5. *The Pre-conciliar Missal and the Current Situation*

In the background of these shifts in the authorized interpretation of the Liturgy Constitution, there was a small resistance to any liturgical reform. Despite the clear intentions of the council and Paul VI, indults were granted for the continued use of the pre-conciliar missal. Initially, this was only for “Elderly priests who celebrate Mass without a congregation and who might encounter serious difficulty in taking up the new Order of Mass ... may, with the consent of their Ordinary, keep to the rites and texts now in use.”⁹ Overall Paul VI was unambiguous though: “Use of the new *Ordo Missae* is in no way left up to the choice of priests or people ... The new *Ordo Missae* was promulgated in place of the old after careful deliberation and to carry out the directives of Vatican II. For a like reason our predecessor St. Pius V, after the Council of Trent, commanded the use of the Roman Missal revised by his authority.”¹⁰

Despite this clarity from Paul VI, there were some local or specific indults granted during his pontificate for the wider use of the pre-conciliar rites. The first general permission, however, did not come until 1984, when, with the authority of Pope John Paul II, the Congregation for Divine Worship directed that bishops could authorize the use of the 1962 Missal for groups who petitioned to do so. This limited use however was to be targeted and pastorally necessary, and with explicit concern that it should not be part of a questioning of the council or the reformed liturgy’s legitimacy.

As with the shift to the position taken up with *Liturgiam Authenticam*, the general permission to use the 1962 Missal granted by Pope Benedict XVI with his apostolic letter *motu proprio Summorum Pontificum* in 2007 is outside the general trend.¹¹ The novel tension Benedict constructs in *SP*, 1, between an ordinary and an extraordinary form of the Roman Rite is unprecedented. Furthermore, the assertion on which that division is based, that Paul VI had “never abrogated” the pre-conciliar rite (*SP*, 1), is only credible to the degree that Paul VI nowhere obviously used the word “abrogate” in this regard, merely describing it

9. Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship, Instruction *Constitutione Apostolica*, 19. Issued 20 October 1969, see O’Brien, *Documents on the Liturgy*, 534–537, at 537.

10. Paul VI, Address to a consistory, II.2.a, given on 24 May 1976, see O’Brien, *Documents on the Liturgy*, 176–180, at 178.

11. Henceforth *SP*, quotations from Pope Benedict XVI, “Summorum Pontificum: On the Use of the Roman Liturgy Prior to the Reform of 1970,” July 7, 2007, https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/motu_proprio/documents/hf_ben-xvi_motu-proprio_20070707_summorum-pontificum.pdf.

as an “unlawful practice.”¹² It raises significant questions about how papal authority functions through documents such as this if the argument depends on inaccurate statements of fact.

If instead of Benedict’s strange argument, the use of the 1962 Missal is addressed as a question of adaptation of the Roman Rite in line with the framework for other adaptations given by *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, as interpreted by the Instructions for its implementation, then the shift in focus on the question of authority over that adaptation is substantial. According to *Summorum Pontificum*, both the local Ordinary and the regional episcopal conference have almost no input whatsoever into the decision. All authority rests either in Rome or with the individual preferences of a priest or group of the faithful. The only way a bishop can intervene is if a parish priest refuses the request of a group of lay faithful (*SP*, 7). Furthermore, the authority of the Pope in these matters is not exercised vicariously, as with all other matters relating to the liturgy, by the Congregation for Divine Worship, but rather by the commission *Ecclesia Dei*, established by John Paul II chiefly to oversee the so-called traditionalist groups in varying states of informal and formal disobedience and schism from the Apostolic See. Such a perspective on authority is in stark contrast to the sharing in the authority of the church by the Apostolic See and the local bishop – and, where appropriate, the episcopal conference – laid down in *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (especially *SC*, 22).

Similarly, the requirement for careful and considered experimentation and gradual introduction that were common themes of the Constitution and the Instructions are nowhere to be seen. There is no expectation in Benedict’s *motu proprio* for the education of the faithful that “they know what is going on,” nor any aim that “they will receive benefit” (per *SC*, 11). Instead, it seems more akin to the “purely personal improvisations” rejected by the whole process of the liturgical reform following the council (*LI*, Preamble).

Finally, the only hint towards the double movement of inculturation, which was the explanation given for the need for adaptation in *Varietatis Legitimae* (e.g. *VL*, 4) is that “the earlier liturgical forms ... had deeply shaped their culture” (*SP*, Preamble). The assumption seems to be that the process has been completed, and no further changes to culture will occur and thus no further inculturation is necessary.

When understood within this background, the decision of Pope Francis, expressed in *Traditionis custodes* cannot be seen as surprising. He

12. Paul VI, *Cum te* to Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre, 11 October 1976, see O’Brien, *Documents on the Liturgy*, 182-189, at 186.

aims to restore authority over the liturgy used in a diocese to the bishop (*TC*, 2), in accordance with the principles laid down by the council, and developed in the subsequent Instructions. Francis does not address legitimate variations, but is concerned for unity, which he locates in post-conciliar liturgical books as the “unique expression of the *lex orandi* of the Roman Rite” (*TC*, 1). It seems deliberate that this framing parallels and even is in direct contradiction to the way *Summorum Pontificum* considers “These two expressions of the Church’s *lex orandi*” (*SP*, 1).

This does not imply that Francis is disinterested or even opposed to liturgical diversity. Instead, his other major magisterial teaching on the liturgy, the earlier apostolic letter *motu proprio Magnum Principium* also speaks in accordance with the general trend of the development of the conciliar teaching.¹³ There, Francis reminds the church that following the “great principle” of the council, the church has “willingly opened the door so that these versions [i.e., the vernacular, adapted liturgical books of each place], as part of the rites themselves, might become the voice of the celebrating the divine mysteries” (*MP*, 2).

With this, it is easy to see that Francis has neither innovated nor departed from the teaching on liturgical reform of the Second Vatican Council, but has continued to develop it in the same direction as the principal Instructions for its Right Implementation. This aims for a liturgical unity centred around the Roman Rite, but instantiated in every culture, permitting diversity so that that unity may be fostered. The departure from this position lies not with Francis’ limiting the use of the pre-conciliar liturgical books, but in the excessive centralisation in Rome and Roman control over the use of the pre-conciliar liturgy seen in the later years of John Paul II’s papacy, and in the papacy of Benedict XVI. Only by bringing together ever more fully into a united but multivocal *lex orandi* the diversity of the voices of all the faithful through the world, can the church advance the liturgical reforms mandated by the council.

2. Liturgical Diversity-in-Unity and the Catholicity of the Church

Prior to the Second Vatican Council, from the perspective of the Roman Rite of the Catholic Church, the claim could be made that the existence

13. Henceforth *MP*, quotations from Pope Francis, “Magnum Principium: By Which Canon 838 of the Code of Canon Law Is Modified,” September 3, 2017, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/motu_proprio/documents/papa-francesco-motu-proprio_20170903_magnum-principium.html.

of a single liturgical rite spoke strongly of the unity of the church. It is beyond the scope of this article to examine thoroughly the historical accuracy of this claim, though there is sufficient evidence that it cannot be taken as uncontentious. However, one can say that the claim can definitely not be made for the church today as there is such great diversity actively encouraged by the officially sanctioned interpretation and implementation of the post-conciliar rites.

However, while the church has claimed to be “one,” this does not imply that there is no diversity within it. Any claims for unity and uniformity in the liturgy prior to the council can only be made when the Roman Rite is considered alone. Any such claims are weakened by the existence of the other Latin rites; and, albeit in limited areas, the Ambrosian and Mozarabic rites continue to this day. These claims are completely vanquished by the existence of the Eastern Rite churches, who preserve a number of distinct, living liturgical traditions each individually stretching back to the early church.¹⁴ Many of those present noted that this had an impact on the openness to the universality and diversity of the church for the council fathers at Vatican II.¹⁵ More recently, John Paul II used the image of east and west as the “two lungs” of the church, both needed for the vibrancy of its life.¹⁶

The council’s call for active participation in the liturgy is itself a call for a renewed sense of liturgical catholicity. The call for the whole people of God, and not merely the clergy, to have a good understanding of the rites and prayers (per *SC*, 48) and to “take a full, conscious and active part in liturgical celebration” (*SC*, 14) is a recognition that, as the work of the church catholic, the whole people of God must share in the action. As Cardinal Rugambwa (Rutabo, Tanzania) intervened in the debate on the Constitution, “it offered non-Western cultures the chance to express themselves in prayer to God and to catechize our people in a manner that suits our culture.”¹⁷ Taken together, these give liturgical shape to the catholicity which is described in *Lumen Gentium* as “the individual parts bring their own gifts to the other parts and to the whole church, in such a way that the whole and individual parts grow greater through the mutual communication of all and their united efforts towards fullness in unity” (*LG*, 13).

14. This also leaves aside hugely significant ecumenical questions, where both Orthodox and Protestant churches have their own distinctive living traditions.

15. See Massimo Faggioli, *True Reform: Liturgy and Ecclesiology in Sacrosanctum Concilium* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2012), 63.

16. *Ut unum sint*, 54.

17. *Acta Synodalia*, vol. 1, bk. 1, 333 (22 October 1962), quoted in Faggioli, *True Reform* 82, translation adapted from Faggioli’s.

Such a liturgical catholicity, then, as intended by the council, and developed by the main thrust of the magisterium since, is attentive to both diversity and unity, without requiring uniformity. As Laurent Villemin argues, the work for liturgical unity is not the goal in itself: “La réforme liturgique est une réforme qui veut souligner l’unité de la liturgie pour souligner l’unité du Mystère pascal et l’unité de l’Église.”¹⁸ It encompasses all orders of the church, not just the hierarchy; instead the emphasis is placed on the participation of the whole people of God. It is a catholicity that through legitimate diversity seeks wholeness, rather than an imposed singular uniformity.

The liturgical questions reflect a significant underlying question regarding the interplay of unity, diversity, and authority in the nature of the church. Traditionally, Catholic ecclesiology has begun with the institutional church, and accordingly has often emphasised unity over diversity, and has applied a highly centralized understanding of authority. But in the contemporary world, where the media and social media rapidly draw more people into the affairs of the institution, the primary experience of the church, as church, for the majority of the faithful and indeed for the majority of the world, is at a more local level.

This experience is reflected in the description of the council fathers in *Lumen Gentium*: “in and from these particular churches there exists the one unique Catholic Church” (*LG*, 23). Both in the council documents and in subsequent reflection, there is a variety of language used. In the main, the council spoke of the “particular” church, while theologians have generally preferred to speak of the “local” church. At times, the language of “individual” church has been used.¹⁹ Canonically speaking, sometimes this basic unit includes various exceptional forms of prelature and vicariate, but normatively speaking the reference is to the diocese: a church with specific geographic reach under the oversight of a bishop.²⁰

Even leaving aside the wider experience of the church, and speaking only in liturgical terms, this definition does not entirely match up with the lived experience of faithful Christians. For most, the primary encounter with the church as the *ekklesia* called together to celebrate the liturgy is at

18. Laurent Villemin, “Principes ecclésiologiques de la réforme liturgique de Vatican II,” *Lumière et vie* 279 (juillet-septembre 2008): 71-79, at 78.

19. Kilmartin, *Culture and the Praying Church*, vii-ix.

20. See Hubert Muller, “How the Local Church Lives and Affirms Its Catholicity,” *The Jurist* 52, nos. 1-2 (1992): 340-364, at 340-341. The distinction that, for example, Henri de Lubac makes between the “local” and the “particular” church demonstrates the terminological complexity here, see Henri de Lubac, “Particular Church and Local Church,” in id., *Motherhood of the Church*, trans. Sergia Englund (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius, 1982), 190-211.

the level of a distinct worshipping community – which in many cases is not even the parish, but those who go to the liturgy at a specific time and in a specific space within the parish. Such a loss of the sense of the “local church” surely plays its part in many of the current disputes over the liturgy: if the church is those with whom we gather than it is surely for us to adapt its liturgy, either in so-called progressive or traditionalist directions.

For Kilmartin, “A strictly theological understanding of the Church requires that it be conceived as both universal and particular.”²¹ A view focused narrowly on the specific gathering can never maintain the aspect of universality. The local church must be big enough and comprehensive enough in its identity and mission to be an effective symbol of the universality of the church if we are to speak of it as “church,” and yet not so expansive that it cannot be also seen as particular: set in a specific place, time and context, and culture.

It is generally considered indisputable that the Gospel, as self-revelation of God, is not bound to a particular culture, but that it can only be articulated within one. To do so, one requires knowledge of that culture, which can only be fully known from within, by lived experience. Set in its specific environment, it is the local church that is able to do so. This will inevitably create difference between local churches. Nonetheless, the only way “the universal values and structures of the world church are lived in their fullness” is “when [they are] given a home within the spirit, values and forms of expression of local cultures.”²² Only then can one say that “among the churches of God which are everywhere registered in the dwelling place of Christ, there is nothing distant, nothing is considered foreign.”²³

For the inculturation of the liturgy, Kilmartin proposes that certain basic principles must be maintained. For him, these include the hierarchical structure of the church; namely, the subject of the liturgy is the community of the baptized, the purpose of the liturgy is the deepening of communion with the Father, in Jesus Christ, through the Holy Spirit; and the celebration of the paschal mystery.²⁴ While these would be generally accepted, ecumenical discussions would suggest that the precise nature of the hierarchy of the church remains a topic for discussion, but that the need for one is accepted.²⁵

21. Kilmartin, *Culture and the Praying Church*, 9.

22. *Ibid.*, 63.

23. Pope Celestine I, Letter 14, quoted *ibid.*, 15.

24. Kilmartin, *Culture and the Praying Church*, 63–64.

25. As starting point, see World Council of Churches, *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry*, Faith and Order Paper, no. 111 (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1982), para. 53.

Principles of this order allow significant scope for diversity in liturgical praxis. Unity, according to Kilmartin, should be maintained by the principle that “The liturgy of a local church ought to be acceptable to the whole communion of churches.” Further, “where differences arise about the orthodoxy or effectiveness of liturgical practices, the churches involved should enter into open dialogue, in readiness to learn from one another.”²⁶

In his 2022 apostolic letter *Desiderio desideravi*, Pope Francis returned to the question of the liturgy, and in particular the task of liturgical formation. The influence on Francis of Romano Guardini is clear in this document.²⁷ Among his reflections, Pope Francis refers to the divisions he had sought to address in *Traditionis custodes*, and notes that “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). For Francis, then, the opposition to the reformed liturgy is an opposition to the vision of the church set forth in that liturgy.

Francis suggests the fundamental question is “how can we recover the capacity to live completely the liturgical action?” (*DD*, 27). Here, he is clearly influenced by Guardini, who in a letter to the Mainz Liturgical Congress in 1964, asked the same question, “how best to celebrate the sacred mysteries so that modern man [sic] can grasp their meaning through his own approach to truth?”²⁸ Francis notes, “The challenge is extremely demanding because modern people – not in all cultures to the same degree – have lost the capacity to engage with symbolic action, which is an essential trait of the liturgical act” (*DD*, 27).

It is highly improbable today that a uniform liturgy can recover this. What capacity for symbolic action that remains will, self-evidently,

26. Kilmartin, *Culture and the Praying Church*, 96.

27. The apostolic letter will henceforth be referred to as *DD* and cited from Pope Francis, “Desiderio Desideravi: On the Liturgical Formation of the People of God,” June 29, 2022, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_letters/documents/20220629-lettera-ap-desiderio-desideravi.pdf; on some of the major points on which Francis turns to Guardini, see Timothy P. O’Malley, “Pope Francis and Romano Guardini: The Next Stage of Liturgical Renewal” (NCR, July 6, 2022), <https://www.ncregister.com/commentaries/pope-francis-and-romano-guardini-the-next-stage-of-liturgical-renewal>; Andrea Grillo, “Liturgia, stupore e formazione nella rilettura di ‘Desiderio desideravi’” (Munera, July 7, 2022), <http://www.cittadellaeditrice.com/munera/liturgia-stupore-e-formazione-nella-rilettura-di-desiderio-desideravi>.

28. Romano Guardini, “Letter to the Liturgical Congress at Mainz,” *Herder Correspondence* 1, no. 8 (August 1964): 237-239, at 239; originally published as Romano Guardini, “Der Kultakt und die gegenwärtige Aufgabe der liturgischen Bildung: Ein Brief,” *Liturgisches Jahrbuch* 14, no. 2 (1964): 101-106.

be tied to the symbols proper to particular cultures. As Kilmartin describes it,

Human beings, embodied spirits, gain knowledge of themselves and of the world of things and other persons by going out of themselves through the body, and by allowing the surrounding reality to penetrate their inner being in a bodily way ... To accomplish this task a world of symbols is developed.²⁹

Kilmartin places this sense of the world of symbols alongside Clifford Geertz's well-known definition of culture: culture "denotes an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men [sic] communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes towards life."³⁰

While in many places in the West, the capacity for symbolic action is indeed diminished, nowhere has the concept of the symbolic been lost altogether, if such comprehensive loss is even possible. It may be incoherent, undeveloped, or eroded, and may differ vastly between subcultures. But when inculturated, the liturgical act is possible by renewed engagement with the symbolic language that persists in a given context.

3. Towards a Liturgical Catholicity

The liturgy offers a yet more fundamental model for the catholicity of the church. At the level of the specific liturgical assembly, and all the more so at the level of the local church under its bishop as the totality of several such assemblies, diversity-in-unity and unity-in-diversity are inherent. As Susan Wood notes, "The liturgical assembly reflects the diversity of the people of God as an ordered communion according to the various charisms and offices of that people."³¹ Wood's phrase, "as an ordered communion" points to the existence of a hierarchical structure. In this sense, the bishop's authority is fundamentally grounded not in a mandate from the bishop of a distant see, no matter the significance of that see, nor in being ordained to the episcopacy. Instead, the bishop's

29. Kilmartin, *Culture and the Praying Church*, 49.

30. Clifford Geertz, "Religion as a Cultural System," in *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 87-123, at 89; quoted in Kilmartin, *Culture and the Praying Church*, 50.

31. Susan K. Wood, "Liturgical Ecclesiology," in *A Church with Open Doors: Catholic Ecclesiology for the Third Millennium*, ed. Richard R. Gaillardetz (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2015), 138-158, at 138.

authority is as the one who presides over the liturgical assembly, leading it in prayer. In this regard, it is clearly not an unconstrained authority: the liturgy in which the bishop presides is not the bishop's own private affair, but belongs to all members.

The diversity of the assembled body, when viewed at the level of the local church, encompasses the fullness of the church in the institutional terms of the diversity of offices and minsters, and in the charismatic terms of the plenitude of God's gifts. The assembly is also united, "sharing one prayer at one altar" (*SC*, 41), and in each member of the assembly's receiving of Christ in the eucharist, each, as Augustine describes, becomes what they see and receives what they are: the one, undivided body of Christ.³²

If divorced from the experiences and lives of the human individuals that make up the assembly, this risks becoming abstract, and consequently meaningless. When God calls together the liturgical assembly, of which Hans Küng observes "the *congregatio fidelium* only exists as *con-vocatio Dei*,"³³ it is the embodied human beings with all the cultural knowledge and formation who are called together. If those so-called are to take "a full, conscious and active part in liturgical celebration" (*SC*, 14) as "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people" (1 Pet 2:9), then it must be a liturgical celebration that respects and relates to their culture and experience. Only within that cultural world in which God's gifts are given can those gifts be exercised.

This requires that the liturgical celebration recognises not just the variety of cultures that are brought together in the catholicity of the church, but also the variety of the individuals too. Cultures do not exist independently of the people who belong to them. The worshipping assembly of the church certainly does not exist except as the *con-vocatio* of the embodied persons belonging to it.

There is a degree to which the church, and by extension, the liturgy exists beyond the immediate assembly. The liturgy does not fully exist outside its celebration, but by virtue of sharing in the tradition, it is not simply the creation of the moment, or of the specific assembly, or of the culture of a place. Furthermore, as the embodied celebration of the liturgy is also divine action, it cannot be reduced to a simple human event.

Edward Foley has recently suggested that just as *Sacrosanctum Concilium* is not strictly a liturgical document, *Desiderio desideravi* is not,

32. See his Sermon 272.

33. Hans Küng, *The Church* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1967), 86; quoted in Wood, "Liturgical Ecclesiology," 151.

properly speaking, a liturgical document.³⁴ Indeed, both the documents, and the liturgy when celebrated according to the pattern developed by *Sacrosanctum Concilium* and the post-conciliar documents, are ecclesiological, this must be affirmed. As Foley concludes:

The reformed liturgy does not simply supply official texts and rubrics, but an ecclesial pathway for becoming the people of God faithfully and authentically. The liturgy, in this sense, at its heart is a spiritual technology: rehearsing and nourishing the path to and through God's reign marked by communion, participation, and mission.

At the beginning of this article, I argued that there is a continuous development in the principal elements of the magisterial teaching beginning in the direction for the reform of the liturgy mandated by *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, and carried through in the Instructions for its Right Implementation whereby the liturgy is to be adapted to allow for the full, active, and conscious participation of all the faithful in the liturgy. This adaptation is not on individual whim but done together by the local church in communion with the universal church. It must respond to and be engaged in the cultural world in which the liturgy is celebrated, and the members of the church live. It is on this basis that, by Pope Francis, the use of the pre-conciliar forms of the Roman Rite has been rejected, while contextually located developments have been encouraged to flourish.

Further, I have argued that this magisterial development asks us to consider how the catholicity of the church is located in the liturgy. Diversity of necessity arises from the different cultures in which the Gospel takes root, and thus in the celebration of the liturgy in those cultures. Acknowledging this of the liturgy requires that it be acknowledged ecclesologically. The reform, initiated by the council and developed by the magisterium since, for the liturgy, and for diversity and inculturation in its celebration, is a means of renewing and reencountering the catholicity of the church, as the diverse body of Christ in which the gifts of many cultures and many individuals are brought together, and by their full, active, and conscious participation, becomes what it is, a unity-in-diversity and a diversity-in-unity, which is to say fully catholic.

34. The suggestion was made by Foley in a paper to the Catholic Academy of Liturgy in January 2023. A revised version of his paper has been published as Edward Foley, "Looking through the Wrong End of the Telescope: Desiderio Desideravi and Pope Francis' Ecclesial Vision" (PrayTellBlog, January 8, 2023), <https://www.praytellsblog.com/index.php/2023/01/08/looking-through-the-wrong-end-of-the-telescope-desiderio-desideravi-and-pope-francis-ecclesial-vision>; this is a reference to the interpretation of SC by Faggioli, *True Reform*.

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