

A Brief Study of Certain Theological Deviations in *Desiderio Desideravi*

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The Need for Careful Examination

Up to now, comments in traditionalist circles on the apostolic exhortation *Desiderio Desideravi* have been limited to lamenting its repetition that the Mass of Paul VI is the only form of the Roman rite and to denying that the new ordinary of the Mass is a faithful translation of the wishes for reform expressed by the Council Fathers in the constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium*.

No theological critique of the principles Pope Francis developed in his meditation on the liturgy has reached my hands. I see with concern that some articles while condemning the two aforementioned failures of *Desiderio Desideravi*, imply that positive results would be achieved if the pope's principles and some of his comments were put into practice in parishes. "In fact, much of Pope Francis's liturgical advice could be read as a rallying cry for liturgical traditionalism," writes a prominent traditionalist leader. After quoting excerpts from the exhortation on the richness of symbolic language, he adds: "If diocesan liturgists took these statements to heart, we would see a world-wide transformation of the Catholic liturgy, in a traditional direction."¹

For their part, biformalist priests of the Versailles diocese who direct the *Padreblog* affirm that "many elements of the letter have in common the fact that they are neither specific to the missal of 1962 or the 1970 missal." They conclude that "what is best in the missal of Saint Pius V will naturally find its place in the liturgical development the Holy Father has requested."²

The chaplain of the traditional Mass I regularly attend (belonging to an *Ecclesia Dei* community) seems to be of the same opinion. At the end of a recent sermon, he suggested one should get over *Desiderio Desideravi*'s unsavory paragraph 31 and take advantage of the European summer vacations to nourish oneself spiritually by reading the papal document.

Worried that this welcoming stance might spread in traditionalist circles, I intend to show the doctrinal deviations that underpin Pope Francis's meditations on the liturgy. Such deviations result from the new theological orientation assumed by the constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium* of Vatican II. I compare the vision of the liturgy taught in the last pre-conciliar document on the subject, that is, Pius XII's encyclical *Mediator Dei*, with the one contained in *Desiderio Desideravi*. I will conclude that the latter deserves at least the criticism that Cardinal Giovanni Colombo made of *Gaudium et Spes*: "That text has all the right words; it is the accents that are wrong."³ Unfortunately, from the pope's recent text, readers will draw more wrong accents than right words.

The comparison between Pius XII's vision and that of Francis will focus on four specific points: (1) the purpose of liturgical worship, (2) the Paschal mystery as the center of the celebration, (3) the memorial character of the Holy Mass, and finally, (4) the presidency of the liturgical assembly. All four of these points are tightly interrelated, as we shall see thanks to the startling candor of the Jesuit liturgist Fr. Juan Manuel Martín-Moreno, an unsurpassed guide to the thinking of the current liturgical intelligentsia who stand behind *Desiderio Desideravi*.

¹ <https://onepeterfive.com/pope-francis-liturgical-longing/>

² <https://www.la-croix.com/Debats/Au-dela-querelles-liturgiques-pape-nous-fait-contempler-souffle-doit-habiter-toute-liturgie-2022-07-06-1201223716>

³ <http://chiesa.espresso.repubblica.it/articolo/1347506.html>

1. An Imbalanced Account of Worship

Liturgy's Primary Purpose: Paying Homage to the Triune God

Mediator Dei establishes with total clarity that Catholic worship has two main purposes that intersect and support each other: the glory of God and the sanctification of souls. Evidently, its primary purpose is to pay homage to the Creator.⁴

After explaining that “It is unquestionably the fundamental duty of man to orientate his person and his life towards God”, acknowledging His supreme majesty and giving him “due worship to the One True God by practicing the virtue of religion” (n° 13), Pius XII recalls that the Church does so by continuing the priestly function of Jesus Christ (n° 2 & 3) and concludes with this definition: “The sacred liturgy is, consequently, the public worship which our Redeemer as Head of the Church renders to the Father, as well as the worship which the community of the faithful renders to its Founder, and through Him to the heavenly Father. It is, in short, the worship rendered by the Mystical Body of Christ in the entirety of its Head and members” (n° 20).

Even the liturgy's secondary end (in fact, primary from another point of view) of sanctifying souls has the glory of God as its ultimate end: “Such is the nature and the object of the sacred liturgy: it treats of the Mass, the sacraments, the divine office; it aims at uniting our souls with Christ and sanctifying them through the divine Redeemer in order that Christ be honored and, through Him and in Him, the most Holy Trinity, *Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost*” (n° 171).

This relationship between the glorification of God and the sanctification of souls in the liturgy was reversed due to the influence of theologians with the so-called “Liturgical Movement” whose ideas were collected in *Sacrosanctum Concilio*.

The Systematic Inversion of the Ends of Worship

In his *Apuntes de Liturgia*⁵ [Notes on Liturgy] for the course he taught at the Pontifical University of Comillas (of the Society of Jesus) from 2003-2004, the Jesuit theologian Fr. Juan Manuel Martín-Moreno explains it in a very pedagogical way:

A double dimension to the liturgical act has always been recognized. On the one hand, its objective is glorifying God (ascensional or anabatic dimension), and on the other hand, the salvation and sanctification of men (descensional or catabatic dimension). ...

Liturgical theology prior to Vatican II started from the concept of worship conceived anabatically. The liturgy was primarily the glorification of God, the fulfillment of the Church's obligation as a perfect society to render public worship to God, thereby attracting His blessings. Conversely, for Vatican II, the descending dimension prevails. The divine Trinity is manifested in the Incarnation and in the Passover of Christ. The Father delivering his Son to the world in the Incarnation, and his Spirit in the fullness of Easter, communicates his Trinitarian communion to us as a gift. This double gift of the Word and the Spirit is given to us in the liturgical service for our liberation and sanctification. ...

The anabatic conception of the liturgy focused on man's service to God, while the catabatic conception focuses on the service offered by God to man. The criticism of worship, understood as man's service to God, is based on the fact that God does not actually need these

⁴ Citations and numbers of the apostolic exhortation correspond to the version posted on the Holy See's internet site: https://www.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/es/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xii_enc_20111947_mediator-dei.html.

⁵ https://www.academia.edu/34752512/Apuntes_de_Liturgia.doc

services from man.... If the liturgy were basically worship, it would be superfluous. But if the liturgy is the way in which man can enter into the possession of God's salvation, the way in which salvific action becomes truly present here and now for man, it is clear that man still needs the liturgy.⁶

In reality, the catabatic dimension *also* has the anabatic purpose of leading men to God and making them glorify Him. We might note that the view that “the liturgy...would be superfluous” if it were “basically worship” would in effect wipe out most of the content of traditional Christian rites, Eastern and Western, as if the Catholic Church had been in error about the nature of divine worship for most of her history.

Pope Francis Follows This Inversion

In *Desiderio Desideravi*,⁷ Pope Francis emphasizes almost exclusively this primarily catabatic conception of the liturgy, while leaving in the shadow the glorification of God, which for Pius XII is its primordial element.

His meditation begins with the opening words of the Last Supper's account: “I have ardently desired to eat this Passover with you.” Such words, he stresses, give us “the surprising possibility of intuiting the depth of the love of the persons of the Most Holy Trinity for us.” (No. 2). “The world still does not know it, but everyone is *invited to the supper of the wedding of the Lamb* (Re 19:9) (n° 5),” the pontiff adds. However, “Before our response to his invitation—well before!—there is his desire for us. We may not even be aware of it, but every time we go to Mass, the first reason is that we are drawn there by his desire for us” (no. 6). The liturgy, then, is above all the place of the encounter with Christ, because it “guarantees for us the possibility of such an encounter” (n° 11).

Here, the liturgy's catabatic and descending meaning—entering into possession of salvation—is very well highlighted. But the fact that the first priestly function of Christ is to worship the Eternal Father in union with His Mystical Body, highlighted by Pius XII in the already cited text already, was entirely omitted.

This one-sidedness is reiterated in another paragraph dealing specifically with the ascending anabatic aspect, that is, the glorification of the divinity by the assembled faithful. The following text insinuates that the glory of God is secondary insofar as it adds nothing to what He already possesses in Heaven, whereas His presence on earth and the spiritual transformation that it produces is what really counts:

The Liturgy gives glory to God not because we can add something to the beauty of the inaccessible light within which God dwells (cf. 1Ti 6:16). Nor can we add to the perfection of the angelic song which resounds eternally through the heavenly places. The Liturgy gives glory to God because it allows us—here, on earth—to see God in the celebration of the mysteries, and in seeing Him to draw life from his Passover. We, who were dead through our sins and have been made be alive again with Christ (cf. Eph 2,5)—we are the glory of God (n° 43).

These words are correct because man truly gives to God a merely “accidental” glory. But it was God Himself who wanted to receive it from man when creating him. However, due to their one-sidedness, the accents lead the faithful to a mistaken position that easily degenerates into the cult of the golden calf, that is, “a feast that the community gives itself, a festival of self-affirmation,” an attitude denounced by then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger.⁸

⁶ *Op. cit.*, p. 47-48.

⁷ Citations and numbers of the apostolic exhortation correspond to the version posted on the Holy See's internet site: https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_letters/documents/20220629-lettera-ap-desiderio-desideravi.html

⁸ <https://www.newliturgicalmovement.org/2008/03/pope-on-community-worship-and-golden.html>

2. *Decentering the Mass from the Redemptive Passion*

The Paschal Mystery as the Center of the Celebration

In the encyclical *Mediator Dei*, Pius XII underlines the centrality of the Passion in the life of Our Lord Jesus Christ and in our Redemption (hereinafter, all highlights in bold are ours).

In the sacred liturgy, the whole Christ is proposed to us in all the circumstances of His life, as the Word of the eternal Father, as born of the Virgin Mother of God, as He who teaches us truth, heals the sick, consoles the afflicted, who endures suffering and who dies; finally, as He who rose triumphantly from the dead and who, reigning in the glory of heaven, sends us the Holy Paraclete and who abides in His Church forever; “Jesus Christ, yesterday and today, and the same forever.” [149] Besides, the liturgy shows us Christ not only as a model to be imitated but as a master to whom we should listen readily, a Shepherd whom we should follow, Author of our salvation, the Source of our holiness and the Head of the Mystical Body whose members we are, living by His very life (no. 163).

However,

Since His bitter sufferings constitute the principal mystery of our redemption, it is only fitting that the Catholic faith should give it the greatest prominence. This mystery is the very center of divine worship since the Mass represents and renews it every day and since all the sacraments are most closely united with the cross (no. 164).

Later, Pius XII refers to the purposes of the Eucharistic sacrifice (adoration, thanksgiving, propitiation and impetration). When describing the third purpose, Pope Pacelli once again highlights the role of the Passion and Death of the divine Redeemer, summarizing in a few lines the doctrine of Saint Anselm on the vicarious atonement of Jesus Christ on the cross:

The third end proposed is that of expiation, propitiation and reconciliation. **Certainly, no one was better fitted to make satisfaction to Almighty God for all the sins of men than was Christ. Therefore, He desired to be immolated upon the cross “as a propitiation for our sins, not for ours only but also for those of the whole world (1 Jn 2:2)” (n° 73).**

When describing the fruit of the divine sacrifice, he reiterates that traditional teaching by quoting Saint Augustine:

For the merits of this sacrifice, since they are altogether boundless and immeasurable, know no limits; for they are meant for all men of every time and place. This follows from the fact that in this sacrifice the God-Man is the priest and victim; that His immolation was entirely perfect, as was His obedience to the will of His eternal Father; and also that He suffered death as the Head of the human race: “See how we were bought: Christ hangs upon the cross, **see at what a price He makes His purchase . . . He sheds His blood, He buys with His blood, He buys with the blood of the Spotless Lamb**, He buys with the blood of God’s only Son. **He who buys is Christ; the price is His blood; the possession bought is the world** (St. Augustine, In psalm. 147; P.L. 37, 1925)” (n° 76).

Reinterpreting the Redemption through the Resurrection

This insistence on the centrality of the sacrifice of the cross for the Redemption of the human race was a response to the lucubrations of the most radical theologians of the Liturgical Movement who, already at

that time, placed it in the shadows, by emphasizing the triumph and Resurrection of Christ and in His present glorious state.

Once again, the Jesuit Fr. Martín-Moreno will serve as a guide to clarify the change of accent introduced by the innovators:

Western theology is in the process of freeing itself from this Anselmian model of redemption, which has so negatively affected the liturgy. In reality, truly, salvation has been an initiative of the Father who already loved us when we were still sinners (Rm 5:10). It was the Father's initiative to send us his Savior Son as the head of a new Humanity. Jesus did not die because he himself sought death, nor because the Father demanded it of him. The Father did not send him to die, but to live. The Father's action is not to kill his Son but to resurrect him, accepting his loving offering...

The cruel way in which Jesus suffered his death is not the consequence of an ineluctable destiny set by God the Father, but rather the consequence of the cruelty of men who could not tolerate the presence of the Just One in their midst. When we say that Jesus died "for our sins," we mean that he died because sinful humanity could not help but kill him. He died because we were sinners. If we had been just, we would never have killed him, and Jesus would not have suffered that death. It is not the Father who wants the death of Jesus on the cross, but sinful humanity.

Jesus dies because he was faithful to the line of conduct that had been marked out for him, showing us the true face of the Father. In this sense, we can say that he died for the fulfillment of the will of God.... Because he died in the fulfillment of his mission, and assumed our human nature to the ultimate consequences by dying a death similar to ours, that is why the humanity of Jesus was resurrected by the Father. With this, the door of resurrection and eternal life was also opened for all of us. ... Our salvation is the effect of his incarnation, his life, his death, his resurrection and the gift of his Spirit.⁹

It could not be clearer: the door of resurrection and eternal life was opened to us, not so much because of the Precious Blood shed on the cross, but because the humanity of Jesus was resurrected by the Father.

This paradigm change, which Fr. Martín-Moreno described pedagogically, ceased to be mere speculation of theologians and began to be taught by ecclesiastical chairs even before the beginning of the first conciliar session when the preliminary outline of the constitution on the liturgy was being prepared. The original title of the chapter on the Eucharist, approved on August 10, 1961, was *De sacro sancto Missae sacrificio*; but in November 15 session of the same year, it became *De sacro sancto Eucharistiae misterio*.¹⁰

How This View Entered the Liturgy Constitution

As they began debating the liturgy schema—the only one that was not rejected outright at the council, due to its intentionally moderate innovative character, which enabled it to be accepted and amended¹¹—Bishop Henri Jenny, then auxiliary bishop of Cambrai and member of the preparatory commission on the liturgy (and later, a member of the Consilium that elaborated the new Mass), observed that the scheme was missing an essential thing: a doctrine on the mystery of the liturgy. A subcommission was then

⁹ *Op. cit.*, p. 43-44.

¹⁰ <https://www.cairn.info/revue-recherches-de-science-religieuse-2013-1-page-13.htm>

¹¹ <https://www.crisismagazine.com/2021/sacrosanctum-concilium-the-ultimate-trojan-horse>

established that drafted the first chapter of *Sacrosanctum Concilium*,¹² whose content became the doctrinal core not only of that conciliar constitution, but also of Paul VI's liturgical reform and the whole post-conciliar magisterium on the liturgy.

That first chapter of *Sacrosanctum Concilium* dilutes the centrality of the death on the cross into the whole "paschal mystery":

The wonderful works of God among the people of the Old Testament were but a prelude to the work of Christ the Lord in redeeming mankind and giving perfect glory to God. **He achieved His task principally by the paschal mystery of His blessed passion, resurrection from the dead, and the glorious ascension**, whereby "dying, he destroyed our death and, rising, he restored our life." For it was from the side of Christ as He slept the sleep of death upon the cross that there came forth "the wondrous sacrament of the whole Church" (n° 5).¹³

There is no doubt that the expression *paschale sacramentum* ("paschal mystery") frequently occurs in the texts of the Church Fathers and in the prayers of the traditional missal. But in all of them, the expression was understood within the traditional conception of the Redemption as a ransom operated mainly by the Blood shed in the Savior's Passion and Death (see, for example, the Good Friday prayer: "Remember your mercies, O Lord, and with your eternal protection sanctify your servants, for whom Christ your Son, by the shedding of his Blood, established the Paschal Mystery" (*per suum cruorem, instituit paschale mysterium*)).

Nevertheless, in its modern meaning, the paschal mystery came to be understood primarily as the full revelation of the Father's love, expressed above all in the Resurrection of Jesus: "When we switch from redemption to the paschal mystery, the emphasis shifts completely. Whoever speaks of redemption thinks first of the Passion and then of the Resurrection as a complement. He who speaks of paschal mystery thinks first of the risen Christ,"¹⁴ wrote the Dominican Aimon-Marie Roguet in famous article published by the Parisian magazine *Maison-Dieu*, a bulwark of the Liturgical Movement.

Francis Downplays the Redemptive Death of Christ

This one-sided emphasis on Easter to the detriment of the Passion (contrary to the traditional balance) transpires through all pores of *Desiderio Desideravi*. The document does not use even once the words "Redemption," "Redeemer," "redeem," which evoke liberation from sin through the payment of a debt. It always uses "salvation," which does not have that connotation, and preferentially associates it with Easter, cited no less than 29 times while the Resurrection is mentioned 14 times, and the Lord's death is evoked only 6 times.

The text's very definition of Liturgy suffers from this bias. For Francis, it is "the priesthood of Christ, revealed to us and given **in his Paschal Mystery**, rendered present and active by means of signs addressed to the senses (water, oil, bread, wine, gestures, words), so that the Spirit, **plunging us into the paschal mystery**, might transform every dimension of our life, conforming us more and more to Christ" (n° 21).

¹² http://www.fraternites-jerusalem.ca/wordpress_sdssm/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/Présentation-Sacrosanctum-Concilium.pdf

¹³ https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19631204_sacrosanctum-concilium_en.html

¹⁴ <https://www.la-croix.com/Culture/revue-Maison-Dieu-liturgie-coeur-2020-11-29-1201127197>

Speaking of respect for the rubrics, he says that it is necessary not to rob the assembly of what it is owed, “namely, the **paschal mystery** celebrated according to the ritual that the Church sets down” (n° 23), which should arouse the astonishment of participants, described as “marveling at the fact that the salvific plan of God has been revealed in the **paschal deed** of Jesus (cf. Eph 1:3-14), and the power of this paschal deed continues to reach us in the celebration of the ‘mysteries,’ of the sacraments” (n° 25). Later, he affirms that “the celebratory action is the place where, through the memorial, **the Paschal mystery is made present** so that the baptized, by virtue of their participation, can experience it in their lives” (n° 49).

This change of emphasis poses the risk that (what remains of) the faith of the faithful be deformed in two dimensions. On the one hand, they can be led to think that the work of salvation should be attributed more to the Father and the Holy Spirit than to Jesus, the Incarnate Word, son of Mary, who shed his Precious Blood for our sins. On the other hand, they could be led to think that Jesus Christ is not exactly the Redeemer but rather the “place” in which God saves us, since the Father’s love is revealed to us in Christ’s Passover. In their pious practices, the faithful might also be led to underrate all traditional devotions that encourage them to atone for their sins and those of humanity, and induce them to claim that they are saved only by faith in God’s salvific plan without having to “complete in [their] flesh what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ” (Col 1:24); or, worse still, to believe in a universal salvation because of God’s unbreakable Alliance with the human race.

3. From Sacrifice of Calvary to Memorial of Presence

The Holy Mass as a True and Proper Sacrifice

When dealing with the Eucharistic sacrifice, *Mediator Dei* reiterates the teaching of the Council of Trent that the Holy Mass is a proper and true sacrifice and not just a memorial of the Passion or the Last Supper:

Christ the Lord, “Eternal Priest according to the order of Melchisedech,” (Ps 59:4) “loving His own who were of the world” (Jn 13:1), “at the last supper, on the night He was betrayed, wishing to leave His beloved Spouse, the Church, a visible sacrifice such as the nature of men requires, that would re-present the bloody sacrifice offered once on the cross, and perpetuate its memory to the end of time, and whose salutary virtue might be applied in remitting those sins which we daily commit, . . . offered His body and blood under the species of bread and wine to God the Father, and under the same species allowed the apostles, whom he at that time constituted the priests of the New Testament, to partake thereof; commanding them and their successors in the priesthood to make the same offering (Council of Trent, 22, 1). (no. 67)

The august sacrifice of the altar, then, is no mere empty commemoration of the passion and death of Jesus Christ, but a true and proper act of sacrifice, whereby the High Priest by an unbloody immolation offers Himself a most acceptable victim to the Eternal Father, **as He did upon the cross**. “It is one and the same victim; the same person now offers it by the ministry of His priests, who then offered Himself on the cross, the manner of offering alone being different (Council of Trent, 22:2).” (no. 68)

The reason for the latter is that, given the present glorious state of the human nature of Jesus Christ, the shedding of blood is now impossible, so the sacrifice of Christ is manifested outwardly by the separation of the Eucharistic species under which He is present, and which symbolize the bloody separation of His Body and the Blood. “Thus the commemorative representation of His death, which actually took place on Calvary, is repeated in every sacrifice of the altar, seeing that Jesus Christ is symbolically shown by separate symbols to be in a state of victimhood” (no. 70).

Reformers Shift Emphasis to the “Memorial”

This traditional presentation was not to the taste of the innovators, who began to put the accent on the commemoration (although without the *nuda commemoratio* connotation of the Protestant reformers). Rather, they gave it the meaning of an objective and real memorial that “re-presents” what happened historically and communicates it here and now effectively.

From this new perspective, R. Gerardi explains, “the memorial [celebration] expresses the reality of the event, the ‘objective updating’ and presence of what is commemorated. **It is not that it repeats itself, since the event was set historically once for all** (*ephápax*); but it is present. The act of Christ makes its effect felt here and now, committing those who remember it. **The sacrifice of Christ was historically performed only once: the Eucharist is his memorial** (in the fullest sense of the word), a living presence of grace.”¹⁵

The aforementioned Jesuit Fr. Martín-Moreno explains why it is not a question of a multiple reiteration of the unique sacrifice of Christ:

It is not that the time of salvation repeats itself here and now, but rather that **man here and now enters again and again into communication with a permanent presence that is beyond elapsed time**. ... In the liturgy, the point of intersection of time and eternity is reached. There, **the participant becomes a contemporary of biblical events**. Man becomes a contemporary witness of what happened then. Christ is born at Christmas, [and] rises at Easter. Is anamnesis man’s work or God’s? Man is the one who commemorates, but as a human act, his action of remembering cannot transcend time; it cannot enter the time tunnel to return to the past. **The divine action alone, transcending time, brings the mysteries to our here and now**. That is why the liturgy, before being an action of man, is the action of God.¹⁶

The path had been opened by the pioneering theses of the then Fr. Charles Journet (later created cardinal by Paul VI) and the French philosopher Jacques Maritain, for whom the real presence of Jesus Christ would double as a kind of real presence of His sacrifice.¹⁷

This theological option in favor of the memorial, which omits that the Mass is a bloodless *renewal* of the sacrifice of Calvary and affirms that the latter only *becomes present* during the celebration, offers a weak interpretation of the dogma of faith proclaimed by the Council of Trent. According to this dogma, **each Mass is “a proper and true sacrifice”** performed in sacramental form because transubstantiation causes the Divine Victim’s Body and Blood to be truly present and symbolically separated.¹⁸

Francis Opts for an Extreme Memorializing Concept

Desiderio Desideravi clearly and insistently adopts this theological option of the Mass as a memorial that has the sacrificial aspect only secondarily to the extent that it is a commemoration. Already at the beginning, describing the Last Supper the Lord wanted to eat with the Apostles, Francis says:

¹⁵ Entry *Memorial* in *Diccionario Teológico Enciclopédico*:
<https://apps.ideologia.org/index.php?r=sagradaTeologia/view&id=16>

¹⁶ *Op. cit.*, p. 46.

¹⁷ Philippe-Marie Margelidon O.P., en « La théologie du sacrifice eucharistique chez Jacques Maritain », in *Revue Thomiste*, enero-marzo 2015, pp. 101-147.

¹⁸ Ver Claude Barthe, *La Messe de Vatican II—dossier historique*, Via Romana, Versailles, 2018, p. 181.

He knows that he is the Lamb of that Passover meal; he knows that he *is* the Passover. This is the absolute newness, the absolute originality, of that Supper, the only truly new thing in history, which renders that Supper unique and for this reason “the Last Supper,” **unrepeatable**. Nonetheless, his infinite desire to re-establish that communion with us that was and remains his original design, will not be satisfied until every man and woman, *from every tribe, tongue, people and nation* (Ap 5:9), shall have eaten his Body and drunk his Blood. And for this reason **that same Supper will be made present in the celebration of the Eucharist until he returns again** (n° 4).

Incidentally, note that, in the document’s first paragraph describing the Mass, in addition to the theory of the one unrepeatable action, the pope affirms that the Mass is a representation of the *Supper* and not of the sacrifice on Calvary *per se*. This is reminiscent of the original (defective and subsequently changed) Protestant-leaning definition of the Mass given in the General Instruction on the Roman Missal, to which Ottaviani and Bacci objected so forcefully in their *Short Critical Study*. It is also worthy of note that this paragraph suggests that every man and woman should or shall eat of the Eucharist, which suggests a soteriological universalism and fits in with Pope Francis’s pragmatic support of any and all Christians—Catholic or not, in a state of grace or not, living by the Decalogue or not—receiving the Eucharist.

Returning to the main theme: *Desiderio Desideravi* has some references to the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, but at no point does it say that sacrifice is renewed in a bloodless way at each Mass. On the contrary, while one of the first paragraphs affirms that “the content of the bread broken is the cross of Jesus, his sacrifice of obedience out of love for the Father,” it goes on to say that, after participating in the Last Supper’s ritual anticipation of his death, the Apostles “could have understood what He meant by ‘body offered’, ‘blood poured out’. **It is this of which we make memorial in every Eucharist**” (n° 7). That would have been the most appropriate time to teach that the Mass is not only a memorial but an unbloody renewal of the sacrifice of Calvary, sacramentally represented in the separation of the Eucharistic species. Pope Francis chose to omit that truth of faith and refer only to the memorial.

A few paragraphs later, the document insists that the Liturgy is not a memorial of the Apostles’ remembrances, but a true encounter with the Risen One (an idea repeated 9 times throughout the document). He continues: “The Liturgy guarantees for us the possibility of such an encounter. For us a vague memory of the Last Supper would do no good. **We need to be present at that Supper**, to be able to hear his voice, to eat his Body and to drink his Blood. We need Him. In the Eucharist and in all the sacraments we are guaranteed the possibility of encountering the Lord Jesus and of having the power of his Paschal Mystery reach us. The salvific power of the sacrifice of Jesus, his every word, his every gesture, glance, and feeling reaches us through the celebration of the sacraments” (n° 11). Again, note that the emphasis is placed on participation in the Supper and not on being spiritually united to Jesus who offers himself to the Father in sacrifice at each Mass—an aspect entirely left out.

Mass as Remembering the “Gift” Jesus Gave at the Last Supper?

When speaking of the correct understanding of the dynamism of the Liturgy, Francis uses words already quoted in the previous section, which make it clear that, for him, the sacrificial character of the Mass results from the commemoration of the Passover of Jesus: “The action of the celebration is the place in which, **by means of memorial, the Paschal Mystery is made present** so that the baptized, through their participation, can experience it in their own lives” (n° 49).

Later, this idea becomes more explicit when referring to the central nucleus of the Mass:

In the Eucharistic prayer—in which also all of the baptized participate by listening *with reverence and in silence* and intervening with the acclamations (*Institutio Generalis Missalis Romani*, nn.

78-79)—the one presiding has the strength, *in the name of the whole holy people, to remember before the Father the offering of his Son in the Last Supper, so that that immense gift might be rendered newly present* on the altar” (n° 60).

The text not only completely omits Christ’s offering during the Passion (of which the Supper was a ritual anticipation) and avoids saying that the sacrifice is renewed, but even leaves out the very word “sacrifice” by calling it an “immense gift.”

Add to all of the above the fact that nowhere in *Desiderio Desideravi* are found expressions such as “transubstantiation,” “real presence,” or analogous formulations indicating that “the Eucharistic Food contains, as all are aware, ‘truly, really and substantially the Body and Blood together with soul and divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ,’” as Pius XII says in his encyclical (No. 129), citing the Council of Trent (sess. 13, can. 1.). Nor does it contain anything resembling *Mediator Dei*’s exhortation that pastors should not allow the faithful to neglect “the adoration of the august Sacrament and visits to our Lord in the tabernacles” and should not allow “churches [to] be closed during the hours not appointed for public functions”—a viewpoint defended by some “who are deceived under the pretext of restoring the liturgy or who idly claim that only liturgical rites are of any real value and dignity” (n° 176).

These unilateral actions are responsible for the disastrous loss (or at least the serious dilution) of faith in the real presence of Our Lord Jesus Christ under the Eucharistic species, confirmed by opinion polls in several countries. The most expressive is by the Pew Research Center, which found that “just one-third of U.S. Catholics agree with their church that Eucharist is the body, blood of Christ.”¹⁹

4. From Priests of Sacrifice to Presidents Over Assemblies

The Unique Role of the Priest in the Mass

In *Mediator Dei*, Pius XII explicitly teaches: “Only to the apostles, and thenceforth to those on whom their successors have imposed hands, is granted the power of the priesthood, in virtue of which they represent the person of Jesus Christ before their people, acting at the same time as representatives of their people before God” (no. 40). But, he adds, in the Holy Mass

the priest acts for the people only because he represents Jesus Christ, who is Head of all His members and offers Himself in their stead. Hence, he goes to the altar as the minister of Christ, inferior to Christ but superior to the people (Saint Robert Bellarmine, *De missa* II c.l.). **The people, on the other hand, since they in no sense represent the divine Redeemer and are not mediator between themselves and God, can in no way possess the sacerdotal power** (n° 84).

The rites and prayers of the eucharistic sacrifice “show no less clearly that the oblation of the Victim is made by the priests in company with the people” (n° 87), since “by the waters of baptism, as by common right, Christians are made members of the Mystical Body of Christ the Priest, and by the ‘character’ which is imprinted on their souls, they are appointed to give worship to God. Thus they participate, according to their condition, in the priesthood of Christ” (n° 88).

How do people participate in the acts of Christ’s priesthood?

Now the faithful participate in the oblation, understood in this limited sense, after their own fashion and in a twofold manner, namely, because they not only offer the sacrifice by the hands of

¹⁹ <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/08/05/transubstantiation-eucharist-u-s-catholics/>

the priest, but also, to a certain extent, in union with him. It is by reason of this participation that the offering made by the people is also included in liturgical worship (no. 92).

But Pius XII feels obligated to reiterate once again that “that the faithful participate in the eucharistic sacrifice does not mean that they also are endowed with priestly power” (n° 82). This insistence is justified because even then, in 1947, some liturgists believed “that the command by which Christ gave power to His apostles at the Last Supper to do what He Himself had done, applies directly to the entire Christian Church,” and asserted that “they look on the eucharistic sacrifice as a ‘concelebration’” (n° 83).

Against this error, *Mediator Dei* taught that “the unbloody immolation at the words of consecration, when Christ is made present upon the altar in the state of a victim, **is performed by the priest and by him alone, as the representative of Christ** and not as the representative of the faithful” (n° 92). These offer the sacrifice by the hands of the priest

from the fact that the minister at the altar, in offering a sacrifice in the name of all His members, represents Christ, the Head of the Mystical Body. Hence the whole Church can rightly be said to offer up the victim through Christ. But the conclusion that the people offer the sacrifice with the priest himself is not based on the fact that, being members of the Church no less than the priest himself, they perform a visible liturgical rite; for this is the privilege only of the minister who has been divinely appointed to this office: rather it is based on the fact that the people unite their hearts in praise, impetration, expiation and thanksgiving with prayers or intention of the priest, even of the High Priest himself, so that in the one and same offering of the victim and according to a visible sacerdotal rite (n° 93).

Pius XII draws a logical conclusion by explaining that private Masses without the participation of the people cannot be condemned, nor the simultaneous celebration of several private Masses on different altars, on the false pretext of “the social character of the eucharistic sacrifice.” The reason is that the holy sacrifice of the Mass “necessarily and of its very nature, has always and everywhere the character of a public and social act, inasmuch as he who offers it acts in the name of Christ and of the faithful, whose Head is the divine Redeemer, and he offers it to God for the holy Catholic Church, and for the living and the dead.” Hence, “it is in no wise required that the people ratify what the sacred minister has done” (n° 96). Furthermore, “although it is most desirable that the people should also approach the holy table, this is not required for the integrity of the sacrifice” (n° 112); the view of those who “consider the general communion of all present as the culminating point of the whole celebration” (n° 114) should therefore be rejected.

The Reformers Reject Sacerdotalism in Favor of a “Communal Celebrant”

Egalitarian reformers naturally found unbearable this hierarchical distinction between the celebrant and the faithful—made clear by the communion rail, which separated the presbytery (reserved for the ministers of the altar) from the nave (where the faithful remained). To reduce it as much as possible, they resorted to the stratagem of “rediscovering” the “liturgical assembly.” In a lengthy but extremely revealing passage, the Jesuit liturgist Fr. Martín-Moreno explains:

Pre-conciliar liturgy was perfectly visible in the ecclesiology that started from the division between clergy and laity. The choirs of canons were located in the privileged part of the cathedrals, isolated from the others by grills. The presbytery was located on the heights, separated from the faithful by a grandiose staircase. In this way, by having the priest located up there, halfway between heaven and earth, they highlighted his mediating function. But *Lumen Gentium* starts from the consideration of the People of God before speaking of the different ministries in

the Church. The ecclesiology of communion²⁰ that Vatican II embraced will be reflected in the great importance the assembly acquires in the liturgy. This is perhaps one of the most emblematic features of the liturgical reform.

The mediating role between God and men is no longer played by the priest but by the assembly, within which the priest exercises his function. We do not oppose priest to assembly just as we do not oppose head to body. The head is also part of the body. There is no body without a head. There is no assembly without ministries. **But there are [also] no ministries without an assembly.** The ultimate origin of the ministry is not the assembly, but Christ; but, as Borobio says, “the ministry does not originate apart from or without the community.” The minister does not receive his mandate directly from Christ, as did the apostles or Paul. ...

The assembly is the translation of *qhl*, which in Greek is translated as *ekklesia* or *synagoge*. These words designate the convocation, the act of gathering, and the gathered community. *Qahal* is the general assembly of the people. In its semantic evolution it has designated the call, the levy, the meeting, the gathered community, the Church. *Ecclesia* is not just Church, but Church convened and gathered in a specific place and at a precise time to celebrate the mysteries of worship. ...

It is this Church or assembly, which includes the bishop, priests, and deacons, **which directly and formally participates in the priesthood of Christ.** The gathered assembly is the reflection and expression of the Church. In it, the Church is incarnated and made visible; in it and through it it is projected to the world, especially in the local Church, which celebrates presided over by the bishop. The council does not want thereby to exclude the existence of other manifestations of the Church. The liturgy is the most visible expression of the Church, but not the only one. The Church also manifests itself in the charitable action of Christians and in many other ways.

The foundation of this participation is found, as we have already said, in the common priesthood of the faithful. In the Eucharist the people offer the gifts together with the president. In SC 48 it is said that the faithful should “learn to offer themselves by offering the immaculate host not only by the hands of the priest but together with him.” On this point, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* goes beyond *Mediator Dei*, which used the expression *quodammodo*, ‘in a way.’ This expression was suppressed by the council. From thence arises the awareness that liturgical actions are not private but have a community character (SC 26). It is necessary to return to the body of the Church what had always been its heritage; **the assembly must recover the leading role it had lost due to abusive clericalism...**

This insistence on the community character of the celebration is what motivates the recovery of concelebration, which has contributed to de-privatize the Mass and to highlight the unity of the priesthood and the Eucharistic sacrifice (SC 57). From this perspective, **it is incomprehensible today that in the pre-conciliar liturgy, different simultaneous liturgies could be celebrated in the same church**, and that some faithful attended one and others another. Therefore, **today we can no longer speak of an assembly that attends Mass but of an assembly that celebrates Mass. The bishop or priest who presides over the celebration can no longer be called the “celebrant”—because they are *all* celebrants—but rather the “president.”** This, which was already hinted at in SC 26, is expressly stated in the GIRM [*General Instruction of the Roman Missal*] 1 and 7. The popular expression “hearing Mass” has been banned forever....

²⁰ Allow us a little detour to highlight the vagueness of the concept of “ecclesiology of communion,” found on all lips after the 1985 Extraordinary Synod of Bishops’s unsuccessful attempt to resolve the conflict between the traditional concept of the Church-perfect-and-hierarchical-society and the egalitarian Church-People-of-God, of the Basic Christian communities. Fr. Juan Manuel Martín-Moreno is perhaps right to include such a concept within his vision of the liturgical assembly...

This ecclesiology of communion ends up influencing even the smallest details of the liturgical reform. It greatly influences the architecture of post-conciliar churches, where the presbytery is only barely raised above the assembly so that its actions can be seen by all. The grills, the communion rails have been eliminated. The center of the Church is the altar and not the tabernacle, which has now been moved to a side chapel. The layout of the nave is no longer rectilinear, like a tram, but semicircular so the faithful see each other better and feel more a part of one another. Side altars attached to the naves have been removed. The choir located at the back of the church has disappeared. The ministry of singing cannot be situated outside the assembly, but as part of it.²¹

Reducing Priest to President, Elevating Laity to Co-celebrants

Desiderio Desideravi emphasizes that the celebrant is the entire assembly and reduces the minister of the altar to the condition of the president while omitting entirely that he alone performs the bloodless immolation of the Eucharistic sacrifice *in persona Christi*.

In the original Spanish version [of *Desiderio Desideravi*], the word “priest”—which precisely defines the one who performs and offers the sacrifice—appears only three times²², two of which only refer to an ordained cleric. But the expression “presbyter”—which in its Greek and Latin origin means only “the oldest,” the “dean”—is used 15 times. Whereas “presidency” and the verb to preside (or its conjugations) appear 14 times, the expression “celebrant” appears only once, with the insinuation that it applies to the entire assembly: “Let us always remember that it is the Church, the Body of Christ, that is the celebrating subject and not just the priest” (n° 36). Later on, he affirms it explicitly: “The priest also is formed by his **presiding in the celebrating assembly**” (n° 56).

The document recognizes that the priestly office “is not primarily a duty assigned to him by the community but is rather a consequence of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit received in ordination which equips him for such a task.” But when defining that task, he does not say that it is the priestly task of sacramentally sacrificing the Victim; rather it is the task of presiding over assemblies: “The priest lives his characteristic participation in the celebration in virtue of the gift received in the sacrament of Holy Orders, and this is expressed precisely in presiding” (n° 56).

In the following paragraph, he offers an exclusively anabatic and descending interpretation of the priest’s mediating mission while omitting that he offers the sacrifice to God on behalf of the whole Church:

For this service to be well done—indeed, with art!—it is of fundamental importance that the priest have a keen awareness of being, through God’s mercy, a particular presence of the risen Lord. The ordained minister is himself one of the types of presence of the Lord which render the Christian assembly unique, different from any other assembly (cf. SC n. 7). This fact gives “sacramental” weight (in the broad sense) to all the gestures and words of the one presiding. The assembly has the right to be able to feel in those gestures and words the desire that the Lord has, today as at the Last Supper, to eat the Passover with us (n° 57).

²¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 60-62.

²² This is not the case in the English version, because the word “presbyter” never became common among English speaking Catholics to refer to priests. It is only used as an adjective in expressions like “presbyteral ministry”, “presbyteral council”, etc.

Individuality Merged into the Collectivity

On the other hand, this almost total immersion of the ordained minister in the “assembly” is attested to by the fact that the latter term is mentioned 18 times, highlighting its celebratory function and collective character, which often makes it difficult for each member of the faithful to render to God a truly interior worship by personally offering himself to the Christ-victim, in intimate union with Him:

I think of all the gestures and words that belong to the assembly: gathering, careful walking in procession, being seated, standing, kneeling, singing, being in silence, acclamations, looking, listening. There are many ways in which the assembly, *as one body* (Ne 8:1), participates in the celebration. Everybody doing together the same gesture, everyone speaking together in one voice—this transmits to each individual the energy of the entire assembly. It is a uniformity that not only does not deaden but, on the contrary, educates individual believers to discover the authentic uniqueness of their personalities not in individualistic attitudes but in the awareness of being one body (n° 51).

How much more judicious is this recommendation of Pius XII!:

So varied and diverse are men’s talents and characters that it is impossible for all to be moved and attracted to the same extent by community prayers, hymns and liturgical services. Moreover, the needs and inclinations of all are not the same, nor are they always constant in the same individual. Who, then, would say, on account of such a prejudice, that all these Christians cannot participate in the Mass nor share its fruits? On the contrary, they can adopt some other method which proves easier for certain people; for instance, they can lovingly meditate on the mysteries of Jesus Christ or perform other exercises of piety or recite prayers which, though they differ from the sacred rites, are still essentially in harmony with them (n° 108).

It would be necessary to ask whether the desertion from Sunday Mass that followed the liturgical reform does not come largely from the displeasure of many faithful at the “assemblyist” and collectivist character with which the new rite was celebrated in most parishes, leaving no room for individual piety.

Above all, one would have to ask if the vertiginous drop in admissions to seminaries is not due to the fact that some of those who may sense a vocation do not respond positively because the image of an ordained minister reduced to “president of the assembly” does not match the traditional image of the priesthood, one in which personal sacrifice finds its model and fulfillment in the sacrificial reality of the Holy Mass.

5. *The Mass “of Another Faith”?*

An Uncomfortable Question

In the four aspects we have analyzed in the preceding parts—(1) the purpose of liturgical worship, (2) the Paschal mystery as the center of the celebration, (3) the memorial character of the Holy Mass, and finally, (4) the presidency of the liturgical assembly—it has become quite clear that *Desiderio Desideravi*’s vision of the Liturgy is one-sided. Although its words, considered individually, may seem fair to the point of deserving praise from some traditionalists (even among the most educated), it only succeeds in stressing the wrong syllables. What seems to be emphasized are the theories and preferences of modern liturgists, not the traditional doctrine of the Church.

A detailed analysis shows that the letter is ultimately a presentation of the sacramental life of the Church, and particularly the rite of Holy Mass, that does not seem to be harmonious, as a whole, with the

principles and pastoral advice of the last great liturgical encyclical prior to the Second Vatican Council, namely *Mediator Dei* of Pope Pius XII.

We must, therefore, ask an uncomfortable question: Do these two very different ritual forms correspond to the same Faith?

The answer from most advanced innovators is clear. They openly say that these are two incompatible liturgical stances that correspond to two incompatible dogmatic stances. One is the faith that permeates the traditional rite, the other is the faith that permeates the new rite. That is why the Jesuit we have been quoting, Fr. Martín-Moreno, so vehemently insists that the “new Mass” definitively supplants (and, it must be said, repudiates) the theological orientation and stance of the old Mass.

Yesterday’s Mass “Can No Longer Be the Norm” for Today’s Faith

In February of this year, halfway between the controversial *motu proprio Traditionis Custodes* and the latest apostolic exhortation, a married couple who are directors from the self-proclaimed Catholic Conference of the Francophone Baptized published an eloquent article in the newspaper *La Croix*. Taking advantage of the fact that, in French, the old Mass is sometimes referred to as *la messe d’autrefois* (in times past), and that the expressions *autrefois* and *autre foi* (another faith or a different faith) are pronounced exactly the same, they conveyed their opinion with a pun: “*La fin des messes d’autre ‘foi’, une chance pour le Christ !*”²³ (The end of Masses of another faith, a chance for Christ!).

Aline and Alain Weidert’s article has the merit of calling things by their name and being logical in its conclusions. Here are some long selected excerpts that speak for themselves:

Without discernment, the spirit of the liturgy of another “faith,” its theology, the norms of yesterday’s prayer and Mass (the *lex orandi* of the past), can no longer continue to be the norms of today’s faith, or its content (our *lex credendi*). One’s reluctance [in the face of disputes] might dictate that we should not think too much about this content so as not to further destabilize the Church.

Quite the contrary! A faith that would still derive from yesterday’s *lex orandi*, which made Catholicism the religion of a perverse god who causes his son to die to appease his wrath, a religion of perpetual *mea culpa* and reparation, would lead to a counter-testimony of faith, to a disastrous image of Christ. Proof if any: the still too frequent activation of indulgences, linked among other things to sacrifices, redemptions for sins.

Unfortunately, our [traditional] Masses are always imbued with a strong “expiatory” sacrificial character, having a “propitiatory” purpose to annihilate sins (mentioned 20 times), so as to bring about our salvation and save souls from divine vengeance. “*Propitiation*,” which Ecclesia Dei communities defend tooth and nail together with their priest-sacrificers, who are formed to use the words *the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass*, a true immolation...

We must continue to emerge from this submerged part of the Tridentine Mass, a historical drift curiously passed over in silence (taboo?) in current debates. Since Vatican II, we have made a lot of progress in recovering the initial datum of a positive Eucharist, a “*Do this in memory of me!*” where all are invited to be a daily Sacrament of the Covenant: “Just as this water mixes with wine for the sacrament of the Covenant, may we be united to the divinity of Him who took our humanity.” Sacrament of the Covenant, a new concept in this prayer since Vatican II...

If we want to be able to offer a tasty Christian faith and practice in the future, we must venture, *by reflection and formation*, to discover an as yet unexplored (untapped) font of salvation opened by Jesus, not first by his death against (“on account of”) sins but by his existence as

²³ Aline y Alain Weidert, in *La Croix*, 10-02-2022.

Covenant. “For His humanity, united with the person of the Word, was the instrument of our salvation” (Vatican II, *Sacrosanctum concilium* 5). The choice is clear! It is not between different religious sensitivities and aesthetics but between endless sacrifices to erase sins and Eucharists [*sic*] that seal the Covenant/Christ.

At least here, things are said clearly and without semantic detours!

Suppose we were to place the magnetic needle of *Desiderio Desideravi* between the two visions of the liturgy and of the Mass described by the Weiderts. In that case, we fear the needle would quickly jump to the “Covenant” pole. Indeed, the proof is already to hand: the same Alain Weidert has just published in *La Croix* a new article excited about the content of the exhortation.²⁴

The Perennial Faith and the New Theology Are Incompatible

At any rate, the goals Pope Francis set for himself with the publication of his latest apostolic exhortation, that is, that we should “abandon our polemics” (n° 65) and that the beauty of the Christian celebration is “not to be spoiled by a superficial and foreshortened understanding of its value or, worse yet, by its being exploited in service of some ideological vision” (n° 16), are far from being achieved.

The pontiff himself explains the reason why: “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” (n° 31). Precisely. Modernist hot-heads consider that the rite of St. Pius V is the Mass “of another faith” mainly for theological reasons. Likewise, it is for theological reasons that traditionalists consider that the rite of Paul VI departs from the traditional teachings on the Mass on essential points. In the name of the perennial faith, they do not and cannot accept that the new rite is “the unique expression of the *lex orandi* of the Roman Rite,” as *Traditionis Custodes* claims and *Desiderio Desideravi* reiterates (n° 31).

If the recent apostolic exhortation sought to give a theological foundation to that claim, we must confirm, after this brief analysis, that the shot seems to have backfired. Its unilateral nature only confirms the conviction of the traditionalist flock that the new *lex orandi* does not correspond to the *lex credendi* the Church received in deposit. And the argument Pope Francis invokes as an *ultima ratio*, that traditionalists must accept the new Mass because it corresponds to the teachings of the Second Vatican Council, is not susceptible to making them change their minds precisely because the Constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium* itself, the subsequent liturgical magisterium, and *Desiderio Desideravi* also merit the same theological objections.

In any case, here is an invitation to theologians and specialists in Liturgy to address the subject and to analyze, in a more profound and scientific way, the contribution *Desiderio Desideravi* has made to the ongoing debate. So far from “burying the hatchet,” it seems to have opened a new front in the battle.

²⁴ <https://www.la-croix.com/Debats/Francois-lurgence-dune-formation-liturgie-2022-07-08-1201224067>