At the heart of the Catholic Church, the liturgy has always been a visible sign of the unity of the faithful in Christ. However, the *Motu Proprio* **Traditionis Custodes**, promulgated by Pope Francis on July 16, 2021, has caused a deep division among Catholics, especially among those who feel profoundly connected to the traditional liturgy. This document, which restricts the use of the 1962 Missal (known as the Tridentine Mass), has been met with confusion, pain, and even indignation by many faithful and priests who see it not as an act of pastoral care, but as an imposition that seems to ignore the spiritual and theological richness of the Church's liturgical tradition.

In this article, we will critically examine the *Motu Proprio* **Traditionis Custodes**, exploring its context, implications, and potential consequences for the unity of the Church. From a traditional Catholic perspective, we will analyze whether this document truly promotes unity or, on the contrary, deepens divisions.

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## The Historical Context: From Summorum Pontificum to Traditionis Custodes

To understand the impact of **Traditionis Custodes**, it is necessary to go back to 2007, when Pope Benedict XVI promulgated **Summorum Pontificum**. This document recognized that the 1962 Missal had never been abrogated and allowed priests to celebrate the Tridentine Mass without special permission. Benedict XVI sought to heal the wounds caused by the post-conciliar liturgical reform and promote a "hermeneutic of continuity," that is, an interpretation of the Second Vatican Council that did not break with the preceding tradition.

**Summorum Pontificum** was received with hope by many faithful who, after decades of feeling marginalized, saw in it a recognition of the legitimacy of their liturgical spirituality. However, with **Traditionis Custodes**, Pope Francis revokes these provisions and returns to bishops the authority to regulate the use of the 1962 Missal. According to the Pope, this decision seeks to "promote concord and unity in the Church." But is this really what it has achieved?

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## A Controversial Decision: Unity or Exclusion?

Since its publication, **Traditionis Custodes** has been the subject of strong criticism by many traditional Catholics. These faithful argue that the document not only limits their access to

the liturgy they love but also stigmatizes them by suggesting that their attachment to the Tridentine Mass is incompatible with the magisterium of the Second Vatican Council. In his letter accompanying the *Motu Proprio*, Pope Francis states that groups attending the Tridentine Mass "reject the Church and its teaching." This generalization has been perceived as unfair and dismissive by many faithful who, far from rejecting the Church, simply seek to live their faith in full communion with Rome.

Moreover, the implementation of **Traditionis Custodes** has varied significantly depending on the diocese. While some bishops have applied the document with moderation, others have used this authority to completely prohibit the Tridentine Mass in their jurisdictions. This has led to a sense of arbitrariness and has left many traditional faithful feeling abandoned and persecuted by the very Church they wish to serve.

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## Theological Reflection: What Does Tradition Mean for the Church?

The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches that tradition is "the living transmission of the Gospel message in the Church" (n. 78). This tradition is not a set of fossilized rites but a dynamic reality rooted in divine Revelation and expressed in the life of the Church throughout the centuries. The liturgy, as an essential part of this tradition, is not merely a matter of personal preference but a privileged means to glorify God and sanctify the faithful.

From this perspective, the Tridentine Mass is not merely an "ancient rite" but a deeply rooted expression of the Catholic faith that has nourished generations of saints and faithful. Restricting its use not only limits the liturgical diversity of the Church but also seems to ignore the spiritual and theological value of this form of worship.

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## A Critique of Pope Francis's Approach

One of the most concerning aspects of **Traditionis Custodes** is its tone and approach. Instead of seeking fraternal dialogue with traditional faithful, the document seems to impose a uniform vision of the liturgy that leaves little room for diversity. This is particularly striking in the pontificate of Pope Francis, who has repeatedly emphasized the importance of mercy, inclusion, and the "smell of the sheep."

Why, then, does this same Pope seem to show so little understanding toward the faithful who

feel deeply connected to the traditional liturgy? Should not the Church, as a mother, welcome all her children, even those with a different liturgical sensibility? Instead of promoting unity, **Traditionis Custodes** has exacerbated tensions and left many traditional faithful feeling marginalized and scorned.

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## Pastoral Consequences: Who Benefits from Traditionis Custodes?

From a pastoral perspective, it is difficult to see how **Traditionis Custodes** benefits the Church. Instead of healing divisions, the document has created new wounds. Many traditional faithful, feeling rejected by Rome, have chosen to attend independent chapels or even schismatic communities, such as the Priestly Fraternity of St. Pius X. This not only weakens the unity of the Church but also jeopardizes the faith of these faithful.

Furthermore, the document seems to ignore the fact that the Tridentine Mass has been a powerful tool of evangelization, especially among the youth. In an increasingly secularized world, many find in the beauty and solemnity of the traditional liturgy a refuge and a source of spiritual depth. By restricting access to it, the Church risks losing a generation of faithful who could have been its best evangelizers.

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## Conclusion: A Call to Reflection and Dialogue

**Traditionis Custodes** is undoubtedly one of the most controversial documents of Pope Francis's pontificate. While its stated intention is to promote unity, its implementation has had the opposite effect, generating division and discontent among many traditional faithful. Instead of imposing restrictions, the Church should seek fraternal dialogue that recognizes the legitimacy and value of the traditional liturgy.

As Catholics, we are called to live in communion, but this communion cannot be built on exclusion or imposition. As St. Paul wrote: "Be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind" (Philippians 2:2). May the Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church, intercede for us and guide us on this path of unity and charity, so that, as Psalm 133 says, "How good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity!"

In times of confusion and division, let us remember that the Church is guided by the Holy Spirit, who leads us to the full truth (John 16:13). May our faith not be based on liturgical

disputes but on Christ, "the same yesterday, today, and forever" (Hebrews 13:8).