

2023 Cardinal's Forum
Synod on Synodality
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Instaurare Omnia in Christo: Principles vs Preferences

In the fall of 2009, coming off a professional tour as a classical pianist, I changed careers, if you will. Serving as a college adjunct professor and performing musician, I chose to follow God's call back to my home diocese of Sioux Falls, South Dakota, accepting a position as Assistant to the Bishop and Diocesan Master of Ceremonies. It was my absolute honor to serve in the restoration/rededication of the stunning Cathedral of St. Joseph, the "beacon of hope" on the hill. A profound love of Sacred Music and Liturgy became my daily study, my ora et labora. It afforded me a unique outlook, viewing music and liturgy from the altar, rather than simply the choir loft. I am so grateful for this experience, which has lead to many beautiful opportunities and experiences serving and teaching.

We are a people of principles and preferences. It is our duty and responsibility as a people of God to humbly receive that which is given to us, and in prayerful humility, pass it on to the next generation. One might call this "traditional" yet it is simply handing on the faith. *Trádere* means "to surrender, to hand or pass down." It is not our place, as the 1990s song says, to "create a new church into being." We must surrender our preferences to Christ.

Through the eyes of the Chancery, one learns that there are many viewpoints in the church. The viewpoint of the Bishop, Cathedral rector, Vice-Rector, Chancellor, parish priest, deacon, religious, heads of departments, secretary, maintenance staff, and indeed the laity in the pews. It is impossible to please all. Yet it is not impossible to act with patience, kindness, and needed clarity on the Church's principles. It is easy for a Bishop or person in authority, to prefer a course of "comfortability", a status-quo, a "no-rock-the-boat" mentality. Oftentimes, this person, clergy or not, works under the attitude that nothing

important needs to be done unless it rises to the level of “a problem.” In my own way, this is what I think Pope Francis is addressing in statements on clericalism and lack of missionary outreach, as he said:

“Bishops, Priests, Deacons, Consecrated men and women, and all those who exercise a ministry need formation to RENEW the ways of exercising authority and decision-making processes in a synodal key, and to learn how to accompany community discernment and conversation in the Spirit.”ⁱ

I find we are quick to view Sacred music and the Liturgy, for example, as a problem instead of a solution. We need not apologize for our faith! Our Petrine and Pauline faith enables us to a renewal of mind and spirit. Our richness of forms, languages and rituals provide a steady compass within the turbulent seas of preference and opinion.

Much of the issues we find ourselves discussing today have already been clearly proclaimed for centuries, from the highest sources of Scripture and Magisterium. We err when we question moral and spiritual principles by asserting our own preferences. What is the source of this error? Sin and self-centeredness. And we know the wages of sin is death. To combat this egocentric outlook, God gave us the Most Holy Eucharist so that we may know Him, love Him, and serve Him and one another toward our heavenly goal. Our heavenly Liturgy is key. Our simple acts of adoration, rosaries, love for one another should help break the shackles of sin and free us from this err.

Rather than attend church, I can instead prefer to stay home each Sunday, sleep in and then watch all football games. Yet, the Church tells us to “Keep Holy the Sabbath”. I can prefer to celebrate Mass only in my own comfortable vernacular language, in our case English, yet the Church gives us clear principles that Hebrew, Latin and Greek are to be used, just as written on our Saviour’s cross. Again using the words of the Synod’s introduction, “[we are] ...**to renew the language used by the Church** in its liturgy, preaching, catechesis, [and] sacred art...”ⁱⁱ I believe we have misused the word “renew” for decades. Many of us can remember the RENEW initiative in the 1980s and 90s. It actually began in 1967 with Catholics attending a protestant worship service. But to renew something is to restore, or

“to resume after an interruption.” In our case, we want to restore all things in Christ. Latin Gregorian chant and Sacred choral music are the “treasure of inestimable value, greater than any other art.” It is our language, a universal expression of our one, holy, Catholic and apostolic faith. In most cases, these highly Scriptural pieces ARE the Mass, yet our current human preference is to sing random secular songs in their stead. We water down the faith by replacing what the Saints and holy ancestors have given us, holy prayer, with trivial and often heretical texts.

A quick example would be a comparison of the hymns and chants of St. Thomas Aquinas, such as the 13th century Pange Lingua written for the Feast of Corpus Christi, vs. many of the modern hymns that instead tend to question Eucharistic theology. What we sing in our pews directly effects our belief, *Lex orandi, lex credendi, lex vivendi...*

As a prominent Deacon in our church has said, “As for the music of the Catholic Church, its story is one that touches most aspects of the Church’s life: her public worship, her piety, her morality, her teaching, ... and her struggle to fulfill Christ’s mission, that is, to use earthly tools to accomplish a heavenly command...Indeed, the story of the Church’s music is so intertwined with the story of the Church itself that the two cannot be fully separated without injustice to one or the other.”ⁱⁱⁱ

I propose that we return to the basics: Restore all things in Christ. Just as Duncan Stroik worked with my home diocese’s little chancery staff on the Cathedral of St. Joseph, we are all called toward restoration and renovation of our hearts into the mind and soul of the Church’s Liturgy. It is easy to think that we need a new approach, to “sing a new church” into being, to change the Church to meet the times, or to change our Liturgy to meet people where they are at. Yet, this has all been tried and tried again with epic failure. We are not called to change the prayer of the church, but renew it in a life of faithful service to Christ the King, and we are called to action by being missionary disciples, passing down the Truths of the Catholic Faith. Of course, this can be done in new and exciting and formative ways, such as joining choir, starting a schola, and forming a bridge between parishes by commonalities. We are

creatures of habit, *repetitio mater memoriae*, we like what we know. The trouble is, as a Catholic body of believers, we have largely forgotten the musical and liturgical tenets of our faith: that “music accompanies the liturgical action, allowing the people to fully participate in the purpose of the liturgical words and actions”.^{iv} The requiem, the Reproaches and Miserere Mei of Holy Week, the Puer Natus of Christmas, the Pascha Nostrum of Easter, to name a few; the church’s treasury is full of emotional praise, joy, trembling, sorrow, solemnity and silence. By replacing it with silly songs with trivial or even mediocre songs, we are truly missing the mark. We are replacing the very prayer of the Church, in most cases the Psalms of David, with the preferences of a sinful and secularized society.

The Holy Father’s desire for a “Synodal church animated by...conversion and sustained by adequate formation” is a tall order. We must step up to the task with courage and fortitude, piety and reverence, knowledge and fear of the Lord. Yet we must not forget the quintessential Wisdom of the Church, her principles, who ask us to surrender, to pass down the faith from generation to generation. We are not called to dialogue with sin. Pope Francis has called us to do as missionary disciples of Christ: to look at the Church from other viewpoints, to learn, but then to act in truth and to open our hearts toward a heavenly vision rather than simply a worldly one. God be praised.

ⁱ Introduction to *Instrumentum Laboris*. Cf. [Link](#)

ⁱⁱ Ibid.

ⁱⁱⁱ Schaefer, Edward. [Catholic Through the Ages](#).

^{iv} GIRM, i.e. 47, 74, 83-84, 87. [Link](#)