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A Theological Analysis of Catholic Liturgies Celebrating Those with Disabilities

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A Theological Analysis of Catholic Liturgies Celebrating Those with Disabilities



Honors Thesis

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Department: Religious Studies and Theology

Advisors: Ethan Smith, Ph.D. and Tim Gabrielli, Ph.D.

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Abstract

The Catholic Church is at a moment of receiving those with disabilities through catechetics, liturgical accommodations, and structured ecclesial guidelines; the Church realizes that the reception of Catholics with disabilities is necessary. Throughout his pontificate, Pope Francis has utilized the two poles of Neo-Pelagianism and Gnosticism to speak about this liturgical fragmentation, or “spiritual worldliness”. Working from this insight from the Holy Father, this paper applies these terms to the current reception of Catholics with disabilities in the Mass. In this paper, Neo-Pelagianism is characterized as the temptation to receive those with disabilities in the Mass solely through human means apart from the gift of divine grace. Docetism, which replaces Pope Francis’ Gnosticism for the sake of this paper, is characterized by an ignorant trust in the liturgy that dismisses the embodiment of those with disabilities and neglects accommodations they may need. The presence of these temptations within disability ministry is objectively explored through analysis according to a ritual studies approach and according to the *Roman Missal* in three separate Masses that were celebrated explicitly for those with disabilities. Although there are isolated signs of Docetism, the analysis shows that Neo-Pelagianism, as a temptation, is prevalent in disability ministry. The presence of Neo-Pelagianism is seen throughout the liturgy as abnormal amount of lay involvement, excessive and unscripted commentary, outright changes of liturgical rubrics or practice, and greetings that are not aimed towards God. The presence of Docetism, which was more isolated, is seen primarily through long and complex homilies. The paper will then end with a reflection on Mary’s virginity as the antithesis to Docetism and neo-Pelagianism temptations in the Church.

Acknowledgements

To my one true teacher, Jesus Christ, and to His Mother, the most blessed and gentle Virgin Mary.



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Let us abandon our polemics to listen together to what the Spirit is saying to the Church.

Let us safeguard our communion. Let us continue to be astonished at the beauty of the

Liturgy. The Paschal Mystery has been given to us. Let us allow ourselves to be embraced by the desire that the Lord continues to have to eat His Passover with us.

All this under the gaze of Mary, Mother of the Church.¹

¹ Pope Francis, *Desiderio Desideravi*, (Vatican: June 29, 2022), par. 65.

1. Introduction

The Church is currently in a mode of receiving those with disabilities in the Mass in a large scale, ecclesial manner. Given this large-scale inclusion, this paper will analyze this reception of those with disabilities within the Mass based on two temptations given by Pope Francis in *Desiderio Desideravi*, Gnosticism and neo-Pelagianism. These temptations will be theologically examined by analyzing three different Masses intended for those with disabilities. The analysis will be based on a ritual studies approach and an analysis according to the *Roman Missal*. This reflection shows Docetism in long and complex homilies that seemed to ignore the embodiment that is necessary during the homily, especially when intended for those with disabilities. Neo-Pelagianism is noted through abnormal lay involvement, excessive commentary, and the outright altering of liturgical rubrics and norms. It was also seen, through ritual analysis, in a greeting that did not prepare the congregation for the liturgy but simply welcomed them through human means. These findings show the prevalence of neo-Pelagianism and the isolated occurrences of Docetism in welcoming those with disabilities in the Mass. This paper will then seek to explain why abnormal lay involvement, excessive commentary, the outright altering of liturgical rubrics and norms, and certain greetings before the Penitential Act are neo-Pelagian. In response to this prevalence of neo-Pelagianism and isolated occurrences of Docetism the Church ought to embrace a Marian posture. As will be explained, Mary has been a long-time type for the Church; this is something the Church must rediscover while pursuing ministry for those with disabilities. Specifically, the Church must embrace the virginity of Mary. It is through her virginity that she was able to purely love God and do God's will while on earth. In this same, unblemished

manner, the Church must have a pure love for God while accommodating and loving those with disabilities.

2. Liturgical State of the Church

2.1. People with Disabilities in the Mass

The Catholic Church is beginning to encounter people with disabilities and genuinely ministering to them. This shift is due to movements in the secular, academic, and ecclesial realms, such as the American Disabilities Act of 1990, the genesis of the field of disability studies, and the USCCB's 2017 document, "Guideline for the Celebration of the Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities." The Catholic Mass, being within the Church and within the world, is following suit by slowly recognizing and ministering to people with disabilities. In some cases, the Mass is being altered according to the special needs of people with disabilities, rather than solely ministering towards able-bodied Catholics and expecting disabled Catholics to adjust.

Examples of this inclusion come in different varieties. First and foremost, people with disabilities are at Mass; they are not shunned to an asylum or forbidden from church. Additionally, those with disabilities are greeted not as a nuisance or disturbance to the congregation but as a gift. Additionally, the Church is making itself physically accessible by slowly implementing ramps, accessible pews, and tolerance of service dogs. Some other cases, more rare in occasion, are the special celebration of *Ephphatha* Sunday, in which the gospel reading of Jesus encountering a deaf person is read, the use of ASL during the liturgy, the implementation of sensory friendly music, and the adorning church structures with Catholic art featuring those with disabilities.² With this said, although it

² Audrey Seah, "Praying as One with the Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing: From Accommodation to Inculturation," *Pastoral Liturgy* 53, no. 6 (Nov-Dec 2022): 6-8,

may be coming in different forms and speeds, the Church is moving towards recognition and inclusion for those with disabilities within the Mass. But why do this? Why recognize and minister to those with disabilities within the Mass? These questions may seem irrelevant given the general move towards inclusion in the world, but they are not. Exclusion and doubt towards those with disabilities still exists and for that reason, it is ever important to defend the place of those with disabilities within the Church, and specifically, within the Mass. This defense can serve to silence skeptical voices, whether from within or outside the Church, and shed further light on the dignity of those with disabilities.

The theological defense of including those with disabilities in the Mass comes through many different academic facets. T.H. Case, in his article “The Messy Table: A Place for Those with Developmental Disabilities to Belong”, utilizes 1 Corinthians 11:17-34 to bid for the inclusion of people with disabilities in the Mass. He argues that the division of rich and poor in Corinth mirrors the division of abled and disabled in the modern Church.³ Case goes on to say that in Corinth, the rich, or “privileged”, would eat in the triclinium and the rest of the community would eat in atrium.⁴ This would create a physical division among the community; this is what St. Paul is referring to when he says, “Therefore, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for one another.”⁵

<http://libproxy.udayton.edu/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=cookie,ip,shib,uid&db=reh&AN=ATLAI FZK230213000332&site=eds-live&scope=site>. Seah argues that these examples of inclusion follow the model of “inculturation” rather than “accommodation.” According to Seah, “accommodation” is “a bridge between the disabled and nondisabled, by allowing disabled people access to the liturgy.” While “inculturation” is “the process by which the power of the Gospel is brought into the very heart of cultures.”

³ Travis Hamilton Case, “The Messy Table: A Place for Those with Developmental Disabilities to Belong,” *Journal of Disability and Religion* 23, no. 2 (2019): 115, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23312521.2018.1530078>

⁴ Case, “The Messy Table: A Place for Those with Developmental Disabilities to Belong,” 111.

⁵ 1 Cor 11:33 (NAB)

This separation, between rich and poor, or between abled and disabled, creates a physical tear or break in the Body of Christ, and rather than the Body of Christ being whole, it is split into pieces. The Body of Christ surely does not look like a certain group of people in one room and the other group of people in a different room, it looks like everyone in the same room.

In line with this reflection on the Body of Christ, social worker Ellen McBride states:

Each person, each parish, and each diocese has a responsibility to greet, welcome, and encourage one another to join in active participation in church life. Without all, the church is diminished and broken. Without persons with disabilities, we languish for wholeness. It is like missing a part of the body—an eye, an ear, a voice. The body of Christ without all its parts and members is not whole. The church needs everyone and should seek the gifts of all to celebrate as one.⁶

McBride argues that the Church is not whole when it excludes those with disabilities.

Human inclination seems to be that inclusion is first out of kindness or pity, but McBride theologially furthers this from pity to necessity. She says that the Church “languishes” without those who have disabilities. Moreover, Maliszewska, a theologian in Poland, argues for the inclusion of those with disabilities specifically within the liturgy. She does this by reorienting the Church’s encounter with the liturgy, reminding her readers that the liturgy refers to a “public service” or “public work” and “does not consist in the individual prayer of its participants.”⁷ In the spirit of the liturgy being a “public service” it is the Body of Christ’s obligation to include, “young children, elderly who may have

⁶ Ellen McBride, “Languishing for Wholeness: The Catholic Church and Persons with Disabilities,” *Liturgy*, 23, no. 2 (February 2008): 43, <https://doi.org/10.1080/04580630701870366>

⁷ Anna Maliszewska, “The Invisible Church: People with Profound Intellectual Disabilities and the Eucharist—A Catholic Perspective,” *Journal of Disability and Religion* 23, no. 2 (February 2019): 205-206, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23312521.2018.1483789>

lost their use of reason, and those with intellectual disabilities.” The goal of the liturgy, as Maliszewska claims, is not individual prayer time but a communal service towards God. This fact challenges the idea of casting crying babies into the narthex; they are a part of the Body of Christ. Crying is not an unnecessary nuisance to worship but a reality of the wholeness. Maliszewska’s theological claim makes it difficult to exclude a boy with autism who is making constant noise or an adult woman with down syndrome who may not pay attention to the Gospel. The casting out, whether conscious or unconscious, makes the Mass about oneself but as Maliszewska put it, the Mass is a “public service” that ought to include all members of Christ’s Body.

The last point to be made to defend the inclusion of those with disabilities is quite simple: everyone is made in the image and likeness of God. We are made by God and for God, but because of the fall of humanity and continued existence of sin, we need the grace of God’s love through the holy Church and the sacraments. There is no such thing as “‘automatic’ salvation,”⁸ as Maliszewska calls it, for someone with a disability, even those with intense intellectual disabilities. People with disabilities are not innocent bystanders on this earth, they are sinners in need of salvation, just like everyone else; to truly include is to treat them in a way that recognizes that universal need for salvation. Although there are still individual cases of exclusion for those with disabilities within the Church’s liturgy, the case for inclusion is strong. The theoretical idea of inclusion has passed into the “fleshy” reality of inclusion. By that I mean the very act of accommodating people with disabilities, instructing priests on certain liturgical

⁸ Maliszewska, “The Invisible Church: People with Profound Intellectual Disabilities and the Eucharist—A Catholic Perspective,” 199.

accommodations, and educating catechists on how to form those with disabilities for the sacraments.

This mode of inclusion has created a posture of reception from the Church. Given this reception and inclusion I will now take a step further and examine how this reception takes form, specifically within the Catholic Mass. To simply acknowledge and receive those with disabilities in the Church is not sufficient on its own, it must be ordered properly towards God. This proper ordering demands examination and, if necessary, critique that is constantly pointed towards the spiritual formation of those with disabilities.

3. Analysis and Commentary

In his recent letter on liturgical formation, Pope Francis uses the poles of neo-Pelagianism and Gnosticism to describe two temptations in contemporary Christian life to which the liturgy responds. Taking this cue, this section of the paper will apply those same poles to the current reception of those with disabilities within the Mass. This will proceed with a ritual and theological analysis of three different Masses throughout the U.S. that were explicitly intended for those with disabilities. After this, a commentary is given on whether neo-Pelagianism, or Docetism, or both, or neither is present within the reception of Catholics with disabilities within the Mass.

3.1. *Desiderio Desideravi*

In 2022, Pope Francis, offered the apostolic letter, *Desiderio Desideravi* as a follow up to the motu proprio *Traditionis Custodes* as well as to “offer some prompts or cues for reflections” on the Christian liturgy.⁹ This document is publicly noteworthy for being the

⁹ *Desiderio Desideravi*, par. 1.

follow-up to *Traditionis Custodes*, which restricted the use of the 1962 Roman Missal but to end there would be ignorant of the Holy Father's true thesis. Pope Francis' intention in *Desiderio Desideravi* is to contemplate the Church's encounter with the liturgy that Christ has entrusted to the Church.¹⁰ He desires the Church to rediscover or recover the liturgical act through "serious and vital liturgical formation."¹¹ He expounds upon this point through speaking of symbols,¹² claiming that "formation for the Liturgy and formation by the Liturgy" is necessary,¹³ and by noting the *ars celebrandi* needed by all within the Church.¹⁴ According to Pope Francis, *ars celebrandi*, which means "the art of celebrating," is the balance of unfolding the dynamism and restrictions that exist within the liturgy, which is a form of art.¹⁵ Generally, the Holy Father notes a problem within the Church—a lack of liturgical formation—and offers reflective remedies to it.

One point of reflection for the Holy Father is something he terms "spiritual worldliness."¹⁶ This is a term he first used in *Evangelii Gaudium*, "Spiritual worldliness... consists in seeking not the Lord's glory but human glory and personal well-being."¹⁷ He goes on to explain that it can often appear as faithfulness to Christ and "even love for the Church," but it is subtly fueling one's own interests.¹⁸ According to Francis, spiritual worldliness can find expression in two manners: Gnosticism and neo-Pelagianism, two ancient heresies. Gnosticism is "a purely subjective faith whose only interest is a certain experience or a set of ideas and bits of information which are meant to

¹⁰ *Desiderio Desideravi*, par. 16.

¹¹ *Desiderio Desideravi*, par. 26-27.

¹² *Desiderio Desideravi*, par. 27-28.

¹³ *Desiderio Desideravi*, par. 34.

¹⁴ *Desiderio Desideravi*, par. 48.

¹⁵ *Desiderio Desideravi*, par. 48-60.

¹⁶ *Desiderio Desideravi*, par. 17.

¹⁷ Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* (Washington, DC: Liberia Editrice Vaticana, 2013), par. 93.

¹⁸ *Evangelii Gaudium*, par. 93.

console and enlighten, but which ultimately keep one imprisoned in his or her own thoughts and feelings.”¹⁹ Neo-Pelagianism is characterized by, “those who ultimately trust only in their own powers and feel superior to others because they observe certain rules or remain intransigently faithful to a particular Catholic style from the past.”²⁰ The Holy Father employs these same terms in *Desiderio Desideravi* whilst reflecting on the liturgy. He claims that Gnosticism ignores the “symbolic language of the body” within the liturgy and aims the action of the celebration towards “one’s own reasoning and one’s own feeling.”²¹ This sort of thinking ignores the Christocentric and communal nature of the liturgy and focuses on the individual experience of the liturgy, to a fault. On a different note, Neo-Pelagianism treats the liturgy as an act of one’s own achievement or effort rather than a priceless gift from God.²²

Taking this cue from the Vicar of Christ, I will employ these same terms to the act of receiving those with disabilities in the Mass. Disability ministry is susceptible to these temptations that Pope Francis has explained. While referencing these insights from the Holy Father, I will adjust them slightly for the sake of the present reflection. Instead of Gnosticism as a heretical descriptor, I will use Docetism. Although these are quite similar, I believe the change is necessary when referencing disability ministry. One of the primary temptations in disability ministry is to ignore the embodiment of those with disabilities—this is slightly different from what Pope Francis notes. He is speaking of an individual ignorance of the rites of the liturgy for the sake of one’s own preference or feeling, whereas I am speaking of ignorance of the body of those with disabilities for the

¹⁹ *Evangelii Gaudium*, par. 94.

²⁰ *Evangelii Gaudium*, par. 94.

²¹ *Desiderio Desideravi*, par. 19.

²² *Desiderio Desideravi*, par. 20.

sake of one's own comfort. I will then utilize neo-Pelagianism to speak of the temptation to trust one's merits or abilities so much so that the liturgy is no longer received as a gift but rather as a reward achieved by effort. This may seem unrelated to Pope Francis's description of neo-Pelagianism. In *Desiderio Desideravi* and *Evangelii Gaudium* he speaks of it as preoccupation with certain doctrines or certain aspects of the liturgy at the expense of "any concern that the Gospel have a real impact on God's faithful people."²³ Plainly, he is criticizing those in the Church who hold on to certain liturgical and ecclesial practices while resisting change; these members of the Church are often labeled as "traditionalists."²⁴ This is quite different from what I am reflecting on in terms of neo-Pelagianism. I am speaking of an overemphasis of human action and intervention within disability ministry that results in ignoring or denying the divine grace of Jesus Christ within the Mass. Although different on the surface, these two descriptions are related. Pope Francis is explaining a neo-Pelagianism that trusts one's own preferences and opinions more than what the Church is offering. Similarly, I am explaining a neo-Pelagianism that trusts one's own ability and knowledge more than what the Church is offering. There are different subjects at hand, but they are both rooted in a trusting of one's own preference or ability so much so that divine grace is refused. This characteristic makes it a clear example of neo-Pelagianism.

Prior to applying these heretical temptations to the reception of those with disabilities within the Mass, a proper background and understanding of each is necessary.

²³ *Evangelii Gaudium*, par. 95. See *Desiderio Desideravi*, par. 20 for a similar but less detailed explanation of neo-Pelagianism.

²⁴ This is in quotations because the label "traditional" is incorrect for Church affairs. It is a political term that has been stamped on the Church. Additionally, the word "tradition" does not refer to something that is from the past, tradition is ecclesial action of allowing the Holy Spirit to act within the Church.

3.2. The Two Temptations

3.2.1. Neo-Pelagianism

Pelagianism is a 5th century heresy named after Pelagius, who was a priest and monk. Its pertinent teaching, which would later be ruled as heresy, was that humans do not need divine grace to do good things, and when divine grace is given by God, it is done so in accordance with one's merits.²⁵ Pelagianism concludes that original sin does not exist, because Adam's sin does not affect the human race. Further, Christ's Redemption does not give life to all humans because humans did not lose life in the first place.²⁶ Overall, Pelagianism assumes that "man could acquire even a relative degree of justice by his own unaided efforts."²⁷

Neo-Pelagianism²⁸ can be noted in the reception of Catholics with disabilities within Mass by anything that favors the actions of humans so much so that it minimizes the divine grace of God. The trend is characterized by the belief that good and fulfilling ministry can be done solely through human, natural means. This temptation also views the liturgical celebration as achieved by one's own efforts; rather than a priceless gift from God, it is a feat achieved by humans that is worthy of a pat on the back. As Pope Francis comments, "neo-Pelagianism intoxicates us with the presumption of a salvation earned through our own efforts."²⁹

3.2.2. Docetism

²⁵ S.J. McKenna, "Pelagius and Pelagianism," in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, ed. Thomas Carson and Joann Cerrito, 2nd ed., vol. 11, (Detroit: Thomson and Gale, 2003), 60-61.

²⁶ McKenna, "Pelagius and Pelagianism," 61.

²⁷ McKenna, "Pelagius and Pelagianism," 61.

²⁸ Neo-Pelagianism instead of Pelagianism to be congruent with the Holy Father.

²⁹ *Desiderio Desideravi*, par. 20.

Docetism refers to the “appearance or representation of something not existing in reality.”³⁰ It is an early Church heresy claiming that Jesus only appeared to be human. The origins could be found anywhere from the belief that the corporeal is evil to “the scandal given by the bodily weaknesses exhibited by Christ while on earth, and more particularly his ignominious death on the cross.”³¹ Generally, Docetism dismisses the teaching that Jesus took flesh and did human things, based on the supremacy of his divinity: it is the complete destruction of embodiment. The *New Catholic Encyclopedia* summarizes the consequences of Docetism as such: “Docetism is a danger for all who do not admit the Son of God became man in everything similar to all men, except sin, and refuse to draw the practical conclusions from this fact.”³²

Docetism within disability ministry can be noted in anything that neglects the embodiment of those with disabilities based on the loftiness of God, and the liturgy. Furthermore, Docetic thinking ignores whether someone remotely comprehends the liturgy based on the complete focus on the spiritual aspects of it; Docetism forces the spiritual aspects of the Mass to never take flesh in the corporeal bodies of those in congregation.

3.3. Analysis of Masses

To objectively analyze the presence of Docetism and neo-Pelagianism in the reception of Catholics with disabilities within the Mass, I have analyzed three separate

³⁰ A. Humbert, “Docetism,” in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, ed. Thomas Carson and Joann Cerrito, 2nd ed., vol. 4, (Detroit: Thomson and Gale, 2003), 796.

³¹ Humbert, “Docetism,” 797.

³² Humbert, “Docetism,” 797.

Masses³³ that were explicitly celebrated with the intent of receiving those with disabilities:

	Year	Type	Celebrant	Setting
Archdiocese of Chicago ³⁴	2023	Small scale parish Mass specifically intended for those with disabilities.	Priest	Queen of Apostles Parish
Diocese of Scranton ³⁵	2024	Large scale diocesan Mass to celebrate those with disabilities.	Bishop	The Cathedral of St. Peter
Archdiocese of Washington ³⁶	2024	Large scale diocesan Mass to celebrate those with disabilities.	Bishop	St. Rose of Lima Parish

For each Mass I will offer three parts: an introduction to the Mass, an analysis according to ritual, and an analysis according to the Missal. Theological commentary will be offered overall at the end.

For the analysis according to ritual I will employ a ritual studies approach.³⁷ This section will be quite simple in that it will explore only one question: What is said in between the Introductory Rites and the Penitential Act?³⁸ This question is set to facilitate

³³ Similar Masses from the Archdiocese of Philadelphia and the Diocese of Greensburg were analyzed but will not be included due to the capacity to fully research each Mass in the time given for this thesis: Deaf Catholic Philly, “Mass for Persons with Disabilities from the Cathedral Basilica of Saints Peter and Paul, Philadelphia[a],” April 24, 2022, YouTube livestream, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eF_W-eGiTiA. Our Lady of Grace Parish, “Disabilities Mass (Interpreted for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing),” November 1, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pwkhDd4ZPMo>.

³⁴ Queen of Apostles Chicago, “9am Sunday SPRED Mass on the 23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time,” September 10, 2023, YouTube livestream, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=41vOPDofY7E>.

³⁵ Diocese of Scranton, “Mass for Persons with Disabilities 2-11-24,” February 11, 2024, YouTube livestream, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KU5v6-j-8q0&t=4338s>.

³⁶ Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Washington, “14th Annual White Mass, Deaf and Disabilities Ministry, Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Washington,” October 15, 2023, YouTube livestream, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DR4CbTRRxWE&t=4430s>.

³⁷ Ronald L. Grimes, “Mapping the Field of Ritual,” in *Beginnings in Ritual Studies: Revised Edition*, ed. Frederick M. Denny (South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 1995), 24-39.

³⁸ Often this is where celebrants will briefly introduce the liturgy to the congregation according to Michael S. Driscoll and J. Michael Joncas, *The Order of Mass: A Roman Missal Study Edition and Workbook* (Archdiocese of Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 2011), par. 3 and United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *The General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (Washington, DC: USCCB Publishing, 2011), paragraph 31.

the “felt experience” of the ritual as much as possible, while avoiding bias.³⁹ This part of the analysis will be less theological focused but rather focused on the experience of the ritual. The question at hand will *not* be driven by rubrics, tradition, or any other ecclesial knowledge.

The analysis according to the Missal is an objective comparison of each Mass to the instructions given to the Church and by the Church through the *Roman Missal and General Instruction of the Roman Missal*. This analysis, driven by the Missal, will serve to clearly layout what the Church intends in the Mass and what is being done in each of these cases. The four points that will be highlighted are the abnormal involvement of the laity within the liturgy, occurrences of excessive commentary, long and complex homilies, and the outright changing of liturgical rubrics or norms. These four points of analysis are chosen based on common trends found upon analyzing each Mass. These points are not necessarily shared by all three liturgies but are considered pertinent for the topic at hand because of their differing from the Missal and connection to either neo-Pelagianism or Docetism.

These three case studies offer a synopsis of the present state of the reception of Catholics with disabilities in the Mass given that these dioceses are not only large-scale representatives of the Church in the U.S., but they also show initiative for receiving those with disabilities. This analysis is by no means exhaustive or all-encompassing for the sake of ministry to those with disabilities in the Church, but it does offer a pulse of the current state of affairs in the domestic Church. All but one of the Masses being analyzed were presided over by a bishop and recognized, to some extent, as a diocesan-wide day to

³⁹ Grimes, “Mapping the Field of Ritual,” 24.

celebrate those with disabilities within the Church. The only one removed from this categorization is the Mass from the Archdiocese of Chicago, which was an ordinary parish Mass presided over by a priest and specifically intended to accommodate those with disabilities.

3.3.1. Archdiocese of Chicago

a. Mass

The Mass from the Archdiocese of Chicago was a Sunday within Ordinary Time that was presided by a priest and deacon, along with a concelebrant priest. The Mass was modeled after the SPRED program⁴⁰ that was started in Chicago and continues to fuel its disability ministry.

b. Analysis According to Ritual

i. What is Said in Between the Introductory Rite and the Penitential Act?⁴¹

The priest, with his hands outstretched towards the congregation and a very lively voice, says “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all,” and then the congregation replies with “And with your spirit.” The priest then greets the congregation as friends and points to the “Eucharistic table” and the ambo as important places for the sake of the liturgy. Continuing in a conversational tone, the priest welcomes all those with disabilities who are joining the congregation. He labels it a joy to welcome this certain community. The priest then orients the congregation to how this particular Mass will be different: the

⁴⁰ Special Religious Development is a catechetical program that was founded in 1960 by Father James McCarthy in the Archdiocese of Chicago. This organization has also developed a structure for accommodating the Mass for those with disabilities that is rooted in the sacramental theology and symbolic method of Father Jean Mesny. Website: <https://www.spred-chicago.org/>

⁴¹ This video starts late so the Sign of the Cross is not shown but it is assumed that it took place.

readings are animated by interpretive dancing, the homily is shortened, and the altar is prepared by the laity. The priest then, continuing in the same tone and with similar hand gestures, acknowledges that all within the congregation are recipients of God's grace and in need of pardon, peace, and forgiveness. Towards the end of this section of the greeting his tone becomes quieter and more inward rather than outwards towards the congregation. The Penitential Act then begins.⁴²

c. Analysis According to the Missal

In the Mass from the Archdiocese of Chicago, there were some occurrences of the liturgy differing from the Missal. To reiterate, these differences will be noted through four different points: abnormal involvement of laity, occurrences of excessive commentary, long and complex homilies, and the outright changing of liturgical rubrics or norms.

Firstly, there was a noteworthy number of lay people involved in the liturgy. This was seen in two interpretive dancers in the sanctuary for the First Reading and four dancers for the Gospel⁴³; similarly, there were ten people that gathered in front of the sanctuary during the Psalm⁴⁴. During the First Reading and the Gospel, the dancers acted out the readings in an interpretive way. During the Psalm, ten of the laity stood in a circle in front of the sanctuary while holding hands. As the Psalm was sung, the ten raised and lowered their hands, the congregation followed suit.

Next, prior to the Liturgy of the Eucharist, seven of the laity went into the sanctuary and prepared the altar.⁴⁵ They lit the candles and laid the corporal on the altar.

⁴² Queen of Apostles Chicago, 0:00-1:43.

⁴³ Queen of Apostles Chicago, 6:36; 14:48.

⁴⁴ Queen of Apostles Chicago, 10:19.

⁴⁵ Queen of Apostles Chicago, 26:00.

Following that, nine of the laity brought the gifts up.⁴⁶ Of the nine, four people brought flowers to lay in front of the altar while five people brought the bread and wine into the sanctuary and placed in upon the altar. All of this considered, thirty-two lay people were involved in the Mass from the beginning of the Liturgy of the Word to the beginning of the Liturgy of the Eucharist.⁴⁷ This number is not daunting based on its own merits but because it contradicts the Missal. The dressing of the altar by the laity within the Mass contradicts the GIRM, which reserves that action for either the priest, deacon, or acolyte.⁴⁸ Nowhere in the GIRM does it permit for the laity to be the ones who dress the altar prior to the Liturgy of the Eucharist. Additionally, the interpretive dancing during the Liturgy of the Word contradicts tradition in the Western Church. Although this is surely meant to animate and enhance Sacred Scripture for the faithful with disabilities it does contradict the norms of Holy Mass in the West. The Congregation for Divine Worship and Discipline of the Sacraments (formerly the Congregation for the Sacraments and Divine Worship) released a document that recognized the good that can come from certain liturgical dancing but also noted that liturgical dance has never been an “integral part of the official worship of the Latin Church.”⁴⁹ The document goes on to argue that that some cultures dance is both prayerful and reverent but the same cannot be said of the Western Culture. In the West, dancing is linked “with love, with diversion, with profaneness, and with unbridling of the senses.”⁵⁰ In conclusion, religious dance may be

⁴⁶ Queen of Apostles Chicago, 27:30.

⁴⁷ Not including lectors or cantor, whose presence is called for and necessary according to the Roman Missal.

⁴⁸ *The General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, par. 190.

⁴⁹ Congregation on the Sacraments and Divine Worship, “The Religious Dance, an Expression of Spiritual Joy,” (1982), from “Dance in the Liturgy,” EWTN, Accessed on March 6, 2024, <https://www.ewtn.com/catholicism/library/dance-in-the-liturgy-2167>.

⁵⁰ “The Religious Dance, an Expression of Spiritual Joy.”

welcomed in the West prudentially, but it cannot take place during the liturgy. The dancing which took place during the Mass from the Archdiocese of Chicago strictly contradicts this, even if it was in the name of good ministry.

Additionally, there was excessive commentary which was seen during the Preface to the Eucharistic Prayer when the celebrant added the words "...and in fact your sacrifice."⁵¹ This was seemingly to emphasize the role of the laity within the Mass. A similar action was taken during the Communion Rite when the celebrant said, "Behold Jesus, who invites us to love," prior to him saying, "Behold the Lamb of God."⁵² This is seen as excessive or contradictory because it undermines the serious priestly task of presenting Christ to others in the liturgy.⁵³ The Church offers how the priest ought to do that through the Missal, so to substantively stray from by adding words to the middle of prayers is considered excessive commentary.

The homily at this Mass was neither long nor complex. It lasted a short five minutes and provided insight that was objectively digestible to most in the audience. In fact, the priest gave two homilies. First, he gave a homily in a typical manner (i.e. standing in the sanctuary and giving insight to the readings). Then he gave a homily intended for those with disabilities in which he repeated a two-sentence thesis in different parts of the congregation.⁵⁴

Lastly, the only occurrence of the priest straying from the liturgical rubrics or norms in the Mass from the Archdiocese of Chicago (besides those already noted) is

⁵¹ Queen of Apostles Chicago, 30:46.

⁵² Queen of Apostles Chicago, 41:18.

⁵³ *The General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, par. 93.

⁵⁴ Queen of Apostles Chicago, 15:30-20:00. This raises all sorts of questions considering the social model and medical model of disabilities, given the fact that the priest plainly gave an able-bodied homily and a disabled body homily (to put it into disability studies terms). For the essay at hand, all that can be considered is that the homily was *neither* complex *nor* long.

when the priest left the sanctuary and entered the congregation both during his homily and the Rite of Peace.⁵⁵⁵⁶ During the homily, he does this to go to different sections of the congregations; presumably to be better heard and seen by the faithful. This is somewhat permissible given that the GIRM allows the homily to be given from the chair, ambo, or “another worthy place,” but there are moments in which he is a couple rows within the congregation, which could be considered not a worthy place.⁵⁷ During the Rite of Peace, he enters the congregation to shake the hands of the laity within the first couple rows. During the Rite of Peace, the GIRM states, “... it is appropriate that each person, in a sober manner, offer the sign of peace only to those who are nearest.”⁵⁸ The celebrant exiting the sanctuary to greet those in the first couple rows objectively exceeds the regulation given by the word “nearest.”

3.3.2. Diocese of Scranton

a. Mass

The Mass from the Diocese of Scranton was a Sunday in Ordinary Time and was presided by the local bishop and deacon, as well as two concelebrating priests. The Mass took place in the Cathedral of St. Peter.

b. Analysis According to Ritual

i. What is said in Between the Introductory Rite and the Penitential Act?

In this Mass the bishop starts with the Sign of the Cross and then says, “Peace be with you,” with his hands stretched out towards the congregation. He then welcomes everyone, in a conversational tone, to the space they are in, the Cathedral of St. Peter, and

⁵⁵ Queen of Apostles Chicago, 19:30.

⁵⁶ Queen of Apostles Chicago, 39:54.

⁵⁷ *The General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, par. 136.

⁵⁸ *The General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, par. 82.

orients everyone to the time of the year by stating that it is the Sixth Sunday of Ordinary Time. He then gives a “very special welcome” to all who are present and especially those who are there for the celebration of developmental disabilities. He then mentions that he is honored by the presence of those with disabilities and grateful for what is taught by their lives. The bishop’s mood and facial expression changes after this from conversational and cheery to more scripted and monotone. He faces downward more often and therefore makes less eye contact with the congregation. Amidst this change he urges the congregation to give thanks to God and to ask for the Lord’s mercy and forgiveness for their sins. Then the Penitential Act begins.⁵⁹

c. Analysis According to the Missal

In this Mass there were no occurrences in terms of abnormal involvement of the laity within the liturgy. One moment that ought to be noted because it may be an example of the abnormal involvement of the laity is when five people brought up the gifts, many of them having visible physical disabilities.⁶⁰ The GIRM does not give a precise number but simply states that the purpose of the act is for the faithful to present the gifts to the priest and deacon.⁶¹ It is from here that one must discern whether a certain community uses this point of the liturgy to show a symbolic sign of the congregation’s offering, as the Missal calls for, or to simply increase the amount of people physically involved.

Furthermore, there was one occurrence of commentary. Prior to reciting the Creed, the bishop invited all by saying, “together.”⁶² This is not considered excessive

⁵⁹ Diocese of Scranton, 25:56-26:46.

⁶⁰ Diocese of Scranton, 57:37.

⁶¹ *The General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, par. 73

⁶² Diocese of Scranton, 51:40.

commentary given that it was a one-word invitation for the congregation to join him in prayer.

The bishop's homily may be considered long and complex, especially given the fact that this Mass was intended for those developmental disabilities. Standing at about 10 minutes long and utilizing a typical level of vocabulary and syntax it may seem questionable to consider this homily long and complex, but the context must be considered.⁶³ The bishop is speaking to many Catholics who may struggle to focus for a long time or may not understand a typical level of vocabulary. The bishop seems to go about the homily as usual while not altering the length or content of his words very much. For this reason, it may be appropriate to consider this long and complex.

Other than the moments listed prior, there were no occurrences of the liturgy wholly contradicting the rubrics or norms of the Mass.

3.3.3. Archdiocese of Washington

a. Mass

This Mass was a Sunday in Ordinary Time was labeled as a "White Mass" for the sake of recognizing the dignity of those who are deaf and have disabilities and to appreciate the promises made in the Sacrament of Baptism. This Mass was presided by the local bishop and many concelebrating priests.

b. Analysis According to Ritual

i. What is said in between the Introductory Rite and the Penitential Rite?

In this Mass, the bishop does the Sign of the Cross and then says, "Peace be with you." The congregation then answers, "And with your spirit." After this the focus

⁶³ Diocese of Scranton, 39:46.

switches to a concelebrating priest who begins speaking at the ambo. He begins in a soft and conversational voice by welcoming everyone to the space and introducing himself to the congregation. He then recognizes that the parish they are at has welcomed those with disabilities for many, many decades. After this he welcomes the visiting bishop and concelebrating priests, who have come to celebrate this specific Mass. He then welcomes all the regular parishioners as well as guests. The priest then explains the significance behind the White Mass as being “an acknowledgement and celebration of the different gifts of persons who are deaf and living with disabilities.”⁶⁴ He then acknowledges the Baptismal promises made by all Catholics and how they apply to matter at hand, Mass for those with disabilities. He then acknowledges that priests in all other parishes throughout the diocese are wearing green on this given Sunday, but they are all wearing white to celebrate the Sacrament of Baptism in the context of the dignity of those with disabilities. After this, the priest looks up from his notes and intently looks towards the bishop to thank him again for coming to lead the prayer at “this uniquely meaningful Mass today.”⁶⁵ The bishop then receives his regards and continues in a conversational tone by telling a joke about his shared last name with the priest at the ambo. The bishop then gives thanks to a couple of people and acknowledges the gift of Baptism and how the gift comes in different “ways and forms”.⁶⁶ The bishop then continues in a conversational tone and tells a joke about the local pastor becoming a bishop next year, as happened to him. This conversational and joking tone is then immediately brought into the next stage

⁶⁴ Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Washington, 14:30.

⁶⁵ Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Washington, 16:48.

⁶⁶ Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Washington, 17:20.

as the bishop grows silent, signals to the altar server for the Roman Missal, and continues with the liturgy.⁶⁷

c. Analysis According to the Missal

During this Mass there were about thirty of the laity who processed into the church prior to the ordained ministers and servers, many of them with disabilities. Upon processing into the church, they swung streamers above their head and bowed before the altar before departing for their seat. Later, there were four people who proclaimed the Universal Prayer. And after that, there were nine people that presented the gifts to the bishop at the altar. The presence of thirty or so laity within the procession of the Mass from the Archdiocese of Washington contradicts the GIRM which only calls for the priest, deacon, and ministers to be a part of the entrance.⁶⁸ Additionally, the presence of four people to proclaim the Universal Prayer contradicts the GIRM, which call for one person to announce the prayer. It states that the prayer ought to be announced by, “the Deacon or by a cantor, a reader, or one of the lay faithful.”⁶⁹

Excessive commentary is seen in the Mass from the Archdiocese of Washington where there was five minutes of explanation from a concelebrant in between the Introductory Rite and the Penitential Act.⁷⁰⁷¹ The announcement mostly consisted of welcoming the visiting Bishop and priests by name, welcoming those with disabilities, explaining the purpose of the Mass, and explaining the grace of Baptism. The Roman Missal allows for an announcement at this point of the Mass but intends for it to be a

⁶⁷ Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Washington, 12:41-18:00

⁶⁸ *The General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, par. 47.

⁶⁹ *The General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, par. 71.

⁷⁰ This Mass did not have a penitential act because they replaced it with the blessing and sprinkling of water in remembrance of one's baptism. This is allowed according to GIRM, par. 51.

⁷¹ Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Washington, 12:30.

sentence or two that orients the congregation to the Mass of the day.⁷² The announcement from this priest consisted of much more than is permitted by those guidelines.

The homily from this Mass could be considered complex because of similar reasons to that of the Diocese of Scranton Mass. This homily lasted about seventeen minutes and used a typical level of vocabulary. Again, the context of the situation must be considered, especially given the audience at hand. The bishop seemed to alter his speech very little and went on to use a typical level of language and vocabulary.

Also, in the Mass from the Archdiocese of Washington all the ordained ministers wore white instead of green (the color intended for a Sunday within Ordinary time) because of the Mass being labeled as a “White Mass.” This label is given because the celebration is intended as a moment for all to renew their baptismal promises. This occurrence is in contradiction to the Roman Missal and the GIRM. The GIRM reserves white vestments for the liturgical seasons of Easter, Christmas, and many other solemnities pertaining to Jesus Christ, the Blessed Virgin Mary, the saints, and evangelists.⁷³ Although an argument could be made for certain celebrations allowing for alternative colors of vestments, it is unclear whether an annual Mass for those with disabilities would be considered a sufficient reason.⁷⁴

3.3.4. Commentary

Given the insight from both the ritual and Missal analysis, the Masses can be assessed as either neo-Pelagianism or Docetism, or neither. These points of critique are not necessarily pinning anyone as heretics or Masses as invalid but serve to critique

⁷² Driscoll, *The Order of Mass*, footnote of par. 3.

⁷³ *The General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, par. 346, ‘a’.

⁷⁴ *The General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, par. 346, ‘g’.

certain actions or liturgical choices as having temptations of neo-Pelagianism or Docetism. This section of commentary will first explore the analysis according to ritual and then the analysis according to the Missal and then end with a conclusion of the section.

3.3.4.1. Analysis According to Ritual

The first point of analysis that is worth commenting on is the ritual analysis. To reiterate, in this part of the analysis I am not referencing the Roman Missal or GIRM, I am solely describing the felt experience of the ritual; the point here is to feel the energy in between the Introductory Rite and Penitential Act in an unbiased manner. With that said, it is quite clear that two of the Masses followed one pattern while the third followed another. The Mass in the Archdiocese of Chicago and the Mass in the Diocese of Scranton both had a moment of greeting and introduction in a comfortable, conversational tone and then switched (either gradually or abruptly) to a more scripted, serious tone to introduce the Penitential Act. The Mass in the Archdiocese of Washington did not follow this pattern; this Mass maintained a conversational, comfortable tone throughout the entire greeting and did not switch before the Penitential Act. This not only created a relaxed feeling before continuing the liturgy but also created a void between the conversational greeting and scripted Penitential Act. This was not seen in the other Masses because the celebrants bridged the two by saying something like, “Now, let us remember God’s mercy.”

This liturgical decision from the Archdiocese of Washington is an example of a neo-Pelagian temptation in Mass for those with disabilities. This is because the celebrants relied on human achievement throughout the entire greeting rather than divine grace. The

focus was on the conversational and calm rhetoric of the celebrants and then quickly shifted back into the rubrics of the Mass. This sort of greeting created a deep divide between the conversational commentary and the scripted rubrics of the Mass. Rather than the Mass flowing from one point to another, whether it be unscripted commentary or scripted rubrics, the Mass from Washington was very choppy. It felt that the scripted rubrics were disruptions for the unscripted commentary of the celebrants. This sort of choppy relationship between commentary and rubrics is very neo-Pelagian because it creates an unnatural relationship between human commentary and scripted rubrics. It views human commentary as separate and important on its own merit, apart from the scripted Missal. A quick look at the Masses from Chicago and Scranton shows the difference; there is no feeling of separation in these Masses, it seems that the celebrant's whole greeting is ordered towards recognizing God's presence and eventually asking for His forgiveness in the Penitential Act. In the Mass from Washington the greeting leads to nowhere other than creating a warm setting for those present. It is completely human oriented rather than God oriented.

3.3.4.2. Abnormal Lay Involvement

The abnormal involvement of laity within the liturgy is the first example of neo-Pelagianism that can be noted from the analysis according to the Missal. This was noted in two of the three Masses, the Mass from Washington and Chicago. Between these two Masses there was seventy-five laity involved in the liturgy.⁷⁵ The reason this is considered neo-Pelagian is because it favors what humans can achieve in the Mass through physical involvement. To have the laity dress the altar prior to the Liturgy of the

⁷⁵ This does not include alter servers, cantors, choir, lectors, extraordinary ministers of holy Communion. The positions I counted are considered extra roles that the laity stepped into.

Eucharist or to have thirty of the laity process in at the beginning of the Mass are outward actions that take the Mass away from God and place it into human hands. For something to be neo-Pelagian it must seek grace and good actions through human achievement, apart from the divine grace of Jesus Christ. These moments of lay involvement are in the danger zone of doing this; they are attempting to achieve the Mass on their own merits and forgetting that it is a priceless gift from God.

These moments of the Mass also ignore the participation that naturally exists for the layperson. They seem to define participation as physically being involved in the liturgy (proclaiming the Universal Prayer, dressing the altar, bringing up the gifts) while ignoring the other ways a layperson may participate. The more visible participation is welcomed in moderation, but it is secondary to the participation that is done through song, responses, and silent prayer.⁷⁶ Pope Benedict XVI speaks of this when he says, “Unfortunately, the word [active participation] was very quickly misunderstood to mean something external, entailing a need for general activity, as if as many people as possible, as often as possible, should be visibly engaged in action.”⁷⁷ In the Masses from Chicago and Washington, with seventy-five lay people involved we see this phenomenon that Pope Benedict XVI is explaining; the visible involvement of the laity seems to merit the title of participation while staying in the pew is of a lesser form of participation. This sort of hindsight is deeply contrary to the intentions of the Church and is rooted in neo-Pelagian thought.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Pope Paul VI, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, (Vatican: December 4, 1963), par. 30, “To promote active participation, the people should be encouraged to take part by means of acclamations, responses, psalmody, antiphons, and songs, as well as by actions, gestures, and bodily attitudes. And at the proper times all should observe a reverent silence.”

⁷⁷ Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *The Spirit of the Liturgy* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2000), 185.

⁷⁸ See *Desiderio Desideravi*, par. 52 where Pope Francis speaks about silence within the liturgy, which “occupies a place of absolute importance.”

3.3.4.3. Excessive Commentary

The section of analysis according to rubric on excessive commentary is another example of neo-Pelagianism. This is best seen in a comparison of all three Masses. One might notice that all three Masses have instances of commentary in one form or another, as is the norm in most Catholic Masses. The difference between these instances of commentary is what is said and when it is said; this ultimately decides whether the commentary is excessive or not. In the Mass from the Diocese of Scranton the celebrant said, “together” prior to reciting the Creed. The purpose of this from the celebrant is to invite the congregation into prayer prior to a scripted part of the Mass. He is not making any commentary or altering any written part of the Mass. In the Mass from the Archdiocese of Chicago the celebrant added words within the Eucharistic Prayer and the Communion Rite. Contrary to Scranton, these words were not merely an invitation to the congregation but a concrete stamp on the liturgy. To add the words, “Behold Jesus who invites us to love,” to the middle of the Communion Rite is a substantive claim that deviates from the Missal. There is a clear difference in intentions here; one is supplementing the lived experience of the liturgy while the other is usurping the Missal. This is neo-Pelagian because the Mass from Chicago does not trust the Missal given by the Church; they see the words of the Mass and believe they must be added to or even switched to be truly welcoming to all. Similar to this, the Archdiocese of Washington has five minutes⁷⁹ of commentary in between the Introductory Rites and Penitential Act, despite the Church only calling for a brief greeting.⁸⁰ Although this commentary does not interject a scripted part of the Mass, it shows a need for human control and commentary

⁷⁹ Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Washington, 12:45-18:00.

⁸⁰ Driscoll, *The Order of Mass*, footnote of par. 3.

prior to the liturgy proceeding. In a similar vein to Chicago, they are forgoing the Missal in favor of achieving the Mass on one's own merits.

3.3.4.4. Long and Complex Homilies

The presence of long and complex homilies is the only sign of Docetism that is noted throughout the analysis. This was noted in the Mass from the Diocese of Scranton and the Mass in the Archdiocese of Washington. The reason these homilies are considered Docetic is because they seem to ignore the embodiment of the congregation, which is predominantly those with disabilities. For something to be Docetic it must ignore and dismiss the fact that the spiritual takes flesh in the corporeal; these homilies fit that description because neither of the homilists altered the length of the homily, the vocabulary, the speed of speech, etc. The homilists seemed to carry on with a homily as typical in a situation that was not typical. The reality of disabilities means that the embodiment of a homily for one person may look quite different for another. If someone has ADHD, a low IQ, or a limited vocabulary (especially in theological terms), then the homily may need to be adjusted in order for it to be truly embodied.⁸¹ These homilies did not do so, and therefore seemed to ignore the embodiment of the congregation.

3.3.4.5. Changing of liturgical rubrics or norms

⁸¹ This specific topic is difficult for a multitude of reasons. Firstly, quite bluntly, it could be considered judgmental and narrow-minded to claim that a homily is "above" an entire population of humans. Secondly, this inches towards a conversation on the medical and social model of disabilities. The medical model of disability would argue that homilies do not need to be altered, rather, people need to work their way towards understanding the homilies. The social model of disability would argue people do not need to work towards understanding the homilies, rather, the homilies need to be adjusted so that the people can understand them. These two models are at odds with one another. In the scenario at hand, I am arguing for the social model of disabilities solely given the fact the fact that the Mass was intended for those with disabilities. A Mass of this sort ought to accommodate all of those in attendance, even during the homily. It is when there is a single person with a disability at an ordinary parish Mass that this question becomes difficult.

The occurrences of changing the liturgical rubrics or norms are considered neo-Pelagian because of similar reasons to the other examples: it is rooted in humans attempting to achieve the liturgy apart from the divine grace of Jesus Christ. The norms and rubrics of the liturgy “take us by the hand” and lead us, as Pope Francis says, so to usurp them (like stepping into the congregation for the Rite of Peace) is a sign of trusting one’s own judgment over that of the Church.⁸²

3.3.4.6. Conclusion of Section

Overall, the presence of neo-Pelagianism overruled the presence of Docetism. The presence of Docetism was only seen in long and complex and homilies while the presence of neo-Pelagianism was seen in the greeting before the Penitential Act, abnormal amount of lay involvement, excessive commentary, and the outright altering of liturgical rubrics or norms.

There is a clear difference between neo-Pelagianism and Docetism that affects the visibility of each to any observer. Neo-Pelagianism is the outright attempt to achieve grace on one’s own merits, which is often visible. Docetism is the ignorance of the spiritual taking flesh in the body of each person, which is often invisible. Docetism is not so much that ministers or celebrants *do* something but that they *do not* do something. For this reason, there may have been Docetic tendencies that were simply unnoticed during research. I do not believe this is substantive enough to say that the presence of neo-Pelagianism and Docetism may be more equal than I observed; I believe, based on the analyses, that there is a prevalence of neo-Pelagianism.

⁸² *Desiderio Desideravi*, par. 19.

The reason for this presence of neo-Pelagianism within Masses for those with disabilities is many. It could be because we live in a post-modern, individualistic Western society, or because the *novus ordo* Mass is susceptible to these kinds of errors, or because the Church is attempting to emphasize a certain aspect of the liturgy. These reasons are quite possible and deserving of their own papers, but they do not address the fact that these Masses were aimed for those with disabilities.

Why is it that Masses for those with disabilities have a prevalence of neo-Pelagianism? I believe the answer to this question comes down to one word: trust. The daunting and newly explored task of intimately ministering to those with disabilities within the Mass has been solely entrusted to the hands of humans rather than to God through the hands of humans. The structure of the Mass, which has been handed down through many, many years of Tradition, has been deemed incapable of truly welcoming those with disabilities. It must be changed to be truly effective; namely by involving the laity, adding commentary, and altering the liturgical rubrics and norms.

4. A Marian Remedy

A remedy to these tendencies of Docetism and neo-Pelagianism within Masses for those with disabilities is the Virgin Mary. These heretical tendencies share the desire for the human will rather than the will of God. Docetism seeks to stay in an artificial realm of spiritualism while neglecting the body. Neo-Pelagianism seeks to exploit the capabilities of humans while neglecting divine grace. The Virgin Mary does neither of these. She allows the spiritual to be embodied in her, namely through giving flesh to the Son of God. She also consistently relies on the grace of Jesus Christ while not presuming it to be given based on her merits or actions. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states, “By

her complete adherence to the Father's will, to his Son's redemptive work, and to every prompting of the Holy Spirit, the Virgin Mary is the Church's model of faith and charity."⁸³ The Virgin Mary, through faith, fully trusts in God and gives freely in response to this; this is how the Church ought to act.

This Mary-Church relationship is further developed by priest and theologian Father John L. Nepil, in his book *A Bride Adorned: Mary-Church Perichoresis in Modern Catholic Theology*. In his book Fr. Nepil explains the history of Mary as a type for the Church.⁸⁴ From this history he draws implications that the Mary-Church relationship has on the modern Church. Of the many claims Fr. Nepil makes, the one pertinent to the present study is his claim on the virginity of Mary. He states, "Mary's virginity is not just a *pre-partum* reality, but a perpetual, physical signification of her entire spirit—the posture of total and complete receptivity, pure and unblemished love of God."⁸⁵ This same virginity has existed and must continue to exist for the Church. The Church must be receptive and have a "pure and unblemished love of God." For this reason, it could be said that the Church must have a Marian posture; a posture that is rooted in the *fiat*, completely receptive, and purely in love with God in both a spousal and maternal manner.

Neither the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* or Fr. Nepil were talking about Mass for those with disabilities, yet their conclusions on the Mary-Church relationship are intrinsically related to the topic at hand. The Mary-Church relationship must be kept in

⁸³ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (New York: Doubleday, 1995), par. 967.

⁸⁴ John L. Nepil, *A Bride Adorned: Mary-Church Perichoresis in Modern Catholic Theology* (Stuebenville, OH: Emmaus Academic, 2023), 10-11. Fr. Nepil points to St. Ambrose as the first to acknowledge Mary as a type for the Church.

⁸⁵ John L. Nepil, *A Bride Adorned*, 257.

mind when venturing down the path of disability ministry. The Church is very young in this admirable push to justly welcome those with disabilities. As this path continues, we must do it with a Marian posture. The *fiat*, the spousal love, the maternal love, the virginity, the pure and unblemished fidelity to God all must be kept in mind as we accommodate the children of God that have disabilities.

Neo-Pelagianism, which is prevalent in Mass for those with disabilities, is in direct contrast to a Marian posture. Rather than being receptive, it is closed off and subsequently self-reliant. The Virgin Mary was never self-reliant; from the moment of Christ's birth to His death and Resurrection she was present in a pure and receptive manner. She could have gone off and achieved a "good" life on her own merits, but she relied on divine grace and stayed intimately close to her Son. So too must the Church be as we accommodate those with disabilities. We must stay intimately close to Christ. We must rely on Christ and the liturgy He has given us to accommodate those with disabilities. The liturgy does not need to be significantly altered to accommodate those with disabilities; to do that is to show God impure and doubt-filled love. Although it is tempting to grasp at any opportunity to make those changes in order to make those with disabilities feel more welcomed, fidelity to Christ and His Church must first be discerned.

As with most things, there is an extreme that exists on the other end of things. This Marian posture for the Church could be misunderstood to mean that the Church must ignore the needs of those with disabilities and receive the Mass as it is. As has been explained prior, this is Docetism. If neo-Pelagianism is the ignorance of God's presence in the liturgy, then Docetism is the ignorance of man's presence in the liturgy; this ignorance can be especially harmful for those with disabilities. A Marian posture towards

the liturgy does not invite blind adherence to the Missal with no care for accommodation or alteration; that would be categorized as a unconscious consumption rather than a Marian reception.

The extremes of neo-Pelagianism and Docetism are seen here in the need for the Church to have a Marian posture. Neo-Pelagianism is the complete ignorance of any Marian receptivity while Docetism is the usurping of receptivity into an unconscious consumption that ignores the body. The middle of these two things is nothing other than the Virgin Mary herself. She is the perfection of relying on divine grace and embodying it in a wonderfully real manner.

5. Conclusion

The Church is currently in a mode of receiving those with disabilities in the Mass in a large scale, ecclesial manner. This receptivity is shown through ecclesial documents addressing the accommodation of those with disabilities and is strengthened by theological works that defend the need for universal accommodation. This receptivity in the Mass has signs of both Docetism and neo-Pelagianism, terms used given the insight of the Holy Father. Docetism was seen in long and complex homilies that seemed to ignore the embodiment that is necessary during the homily, especially when intended for those with disabilities. Neo-Pelagianism was seen through abnormal lay involvement, excessive commentary, and the outright altering of liturgical rubrics and norms. It was also seen, through ritual analysis, in a greeting that did not prepare the congregation for the liturgy but simply welcomed them through human means. Given these findings within the three Masses that were analyzed it was made clear that neo-Pelagianism is more prevalent than Docetism in accommodating the Mass for those with disabilities. This is

because the abnormal lay involvement, excessive commentary, alteration of liturgical rubrics or norms, and the misguided greeting all share a neo-Pelagian tendency to attempt to achieve the Mass through human means rather than receiving it as a gift from God. Given this prevalence of neo-Pelagianism and isolated occurrences of Docetism the Church must embrace Her Marian posture in accommodating those with disabilities. This Marian posture for the Church is the antithesis to anything that is rooted in neo-Pelagian or Docetic tendencies. Mary is neither self-reliant nor ignorant of her body, as neo-Pelagianism and Docetism are; she is completely receptive and reliant on God while also fully embodying the work of God in her. Given this, not only should the Church be aware of these neo-Pelagian and Docetic tendencies within disability ministry, but it should also be seeking a Marian posture wholeheartedly. It is through a Marian posture that the Mass can truly usher those with disabilities to her Son, and our Savior, Jesus Christ.

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