

Chapter 1

Old Mass or New Mass: What's the Fuss About?

ON 7 JULY 2007 Benedict XVI issued the Motu Proprio *Summorum Pontificum*, which allowed priests everywhere to celebrate the “old” or “Tridentine” Latin Mass, using the 1962 Missal, the last version in force before the Second Vatican Council (1962–5).

Catholics who for one reason or another were dissatisfied with the post-Vatican II liturgical changes, and in particular, with the new Order of Mass (*Novus Ordo Missae*) promulgated by Paul VI in 1969, greeted the Motu Proprio with joy. Benedict’s action also gave a great boost to Vatican-approved priestly societies (the Fraternity of St. Peter, the Institute of Christ the King, etc.) that had already been using the old rite in their apostolates.

Websites promoting the old Mass proliferated, filled with the latest photos of Solemn High Masses in the old rite, conducted in Roman basilicas by clergy wearing eye-popping Baroque vestments — venues where an attempt to mount such a production ten years earlier would probably have prompted the sacristan to summon the *carabinieri*. Old-style church furnishings connected with the old rite, which were once nearly impossible to find, are available from church goods suppliers once again. Ditto, the old liturgical books and rubrical guides.

The Motu Proprio likewise attracted the attention of a younger, more conservative generation of clergy, both diocesan and religious, who had been using the reformed, post-Vatican II rites in their sacramental ministrations. Organizations that promoted the use of the pre-Vatican II rites conducted seminars and produced videos to teach priests like these how to offer the old Mass correctly.

Articles appeared in the press quoting young priests who spoke enthusiastically about the experience of offering Mass in the old rite — its dignity, the reverential atmosphere that surrounds its celebration, its ordered symmetry and beauty, its deep roots in the tradition of the Church, and so on. In reading such statements, one could sense the depth of the sincerity behind them.

One could also sense something else that was perhaps unintended: the implication that the Mass of Paul VI, in comparison, does *not* possess all these admirable qualities.

This logically leads to a question: Why?

The answer to that question, together with its consequences, is the subject of this book. In brief it will be this: the *doctrinal* presuppositions behind the new rite are different from the doctrinal presuppositions behind the old rite. This difference in turn affected the externals of the new rite: its prayers and ritual gestures. So if one perceives, for instance, that in the old rite the treatment of the Blessed Sacrament is more respectful, the actions of the priest are more dignified, and the atmosphere is more other-worldly when compared with the new rite, this is so because the new rite is based on a new *theology* of the Real Presence, of the priesthood and of the general purpose of the Mass.

If the theology behind the Mass of Paul VI is substantially different — if it does not, in a word, reflect Catholic doctrine — the practical consequences are obvious. A Catholic cannot merely *prefer* the old rite to the new; he must also *reject* the new rite in its entirety. The faith obliges him to do so.

In circles where the old Mass is celebrated under the auspices of a Vatican-approved priestly organization or a diocesan bishop, the doctrinal problems that the Mass of Paul VI presents seem to be either unexplored, ignored, treated obliquely or regarded as a high-voltage third rail which one dare not touch. Instead, motives like beauty or preference are offered for adhering to the old Mass.

DOCTRINAL MOTIVES

This is extremely ironic. These organizations exist — and indeed, diocesan-sponsored “*Motu Proprio*” Masses exist — only because the Vatican could not stamp out the ongoing traditionalist resistance to the New Mass that began in the 1960s. And from the beginning, the reasons that traditionalists offered for adhering to the old liturgy and rejecting the liturgical reforms had little to do with beauty or with preference — they were almost exclusively *doctrinal* and *moral*:

(1) *Doctrinal*. The Mass of Paul VI was Protestant, modernist, non-Catholic, destructive to the Catholic faith, a vehicle for doctrinal revolution, and generally, represented a new religion. Hence, a Catholic was obliged to reject the New Mass and seek out a Mass that *was* Catholic, i.e., the “old” or “Tridentine” Mass.

(2) *Moral*. The Mass of Paul VI was grossly irreverent and sacrilegious (it treated sacred things in an unworthy and disrespectful manner) or even invalid (it lacked sacramental efficacy because the meaning of the essential words in the rite had been changed). Hence, a Catholic was obliged to seek out a Mass that treated sacred things reverently and that was unquestionably valid, i.e., a “Tridentine” Mass.

The most well-known critic of the New Mass was, of course, Archbishop

Marcel Lefebvre, founder of the Society of St. Pius X, who ordained priests like me and sent them throughout the world to offer the traditional Latin Mass. From 1969 onwards, when the Mass of Paul VI first appeared, the archbishop considered it a threat to the integrity of Catholic doctrine and the salvation of souls.

Though later, in connection with his efforts to “regularize” the status of the Society of St. Pius X, the archbishop would ask the Vatican to permit an “experiment in tradition” (*la expérience de la tradition*) for those Catholics who preferred it,¹ his earliest pronouncements on the liturgical reform concentrated almost exclusively on condemning its doctrinal errors.

Thus, in a 1971 conference in Rome, Lefebvre denounced the Mass of Paul VI as Protestant, modernist, potentially invalid, embodying a new conception of the Mass and the priesthood, and profaning churches throughout the world.² In a 1975 lecture in Florence, he drew parallels between the New Mass and the liturgical reforms of Luther. Since “the law of praying is the law of believing,” the archbishop said, “the fact of imitating Luther’s reform in the liturgy of the Mass must infallibly lead to the gradual adoption of the very ideas of Luther.”³

Repeatedly in conferences to us seminarians at Ecône in the 1970s, Archbishop Lefebvre denounced the New Mass as inimical to Catholic doctrine on the Mass, destructive to the Catholic priesthood, and a slow poison for the faith of Catholics who participated in it. Most famously, in his Declaration of 21 November 1974, he said:

It is not possible profoundly to modify the *lex orandi* [law of praying] without modifying the *lex credendi* [law of believing]. To the New Mass, there corresponds a new catechism, a new priesthood, new seminaries, new universities, the charismatic and Pentecostal Church — all opposed to orthodoxy and to the age-old magisterium of the Church.⁴

The Latin expression that Archbishop Lefebvre used, *lex orandi, lex credendi* (the law of praying is the law of believing), appeared in many of the earliest traditionalist critiques of the New Mass. It is a time-honored formula

1. See the archbishop’s account of his 11 September 1976 audience with Paul VI: “When I also said to him that I was, in fact, basing myself on ‘pluralism,’ I said: ‘But, after all, with the present pluralism how would it be to let those who also want to keep Tradition be on the same footing as the others? It is the least that could be granted us.’” Quoted in Michael Davies, *Apologia pro Marcel Lefebvre: Part One* (Dickinson TX: Angelus Press 1979), 283.

2. Marcel Lefebvre, *A Bishop Speaks* (Edinburgh: Una Voce 1976), 94–7.

3. *A Bishop, Speaks*, 198.

4. *A Bishop Speaks*, 190.

used in papal pronouncements, theological works and liturgical commentaries to express the reciprocal relationship between liturgy and dogma.⁵

Put simply, it means that liturgical prayer both *reflects* common beliefs, and *affects* common beliefs. Changes in the doctrinal content of liturgical prayers, therefore, will inevitably change the beliefs of the worshippers. And therein, traditionalists believed, lay the danger of the New Mass.

In the two decades immediately following the introduction of the Vatican II liturgical reforms, traditionalists produced countless books, tracts and articles making essentially this same argument.⁶

In 2001, after interest in the old rite had become more widespread, the Society of St. Pius X raised the doctrinal issue once again in *The Problem of the Liturgical Reform: A Theological and Liturgical Study*.⁷ This perceptive and scholarly work systematically analyzed some of the main theological errors behind the reform of the Mass,⁸ and concluded that the new rite constitutes a “dogmatic rupture with tradition” and a danger for the faith.

Adherence to the old Mass, then, was bound to the firm rejection of the Mass of Paul VI as inimical to the faith, sacrilegious and potentially invalid. These two themes were inseparable, and were repeatedly sounded, with countless variations, by priests, writers and publications in the traditionalist orbit.

5. It first appears in the fifth-century *Indiculus de Gratia Dei*, DZ 246, in a passage which appeals to the Church’s liturgical prayers as a refutation of the Pelagian and semi-Pelagian errors on grace. “Traditionally, this epigram was a way of saying that the prayer of the Church is one of the places to which we can go to find out what the Church believes.” Thomas Richstatter OFM, *Liturgical Law: New Style, New Spirit* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald 1977), 11.

6. Many short works drew their inspiration from the *Short, Critical Study of the Novus Ordo Missae* that Cardinals Ottaviani and Bacci submitted to Paul VI in 1969, a work known in English-speaking countries as *The Ottaviani Intervention*. (See below, Chapter 6.) Among the longer works published were: Father James Wathen’s *The Great Sacrilege* (1971), Louis Salleron’s *La Nouvelle Messe* (early 1970s), Arnaldo Xavier da Silveira’s *La Nouvelle Messe de Paul VI* (first published in Portuguese, 1970–1), Myra Davidoglou’s *Analyse du Nouveau Rite* (1978), Michael Davies’s *Pope Paul’s New Mass* (1980), Daniel Raffard de Brienne’s *Lex Orandi: La Nouvelle Messe et la Foi* (1983), Dominique Michel Morin’s *Le Sacrifice de la Messe* (1985) and Rama Coomaraswamy’s *The Problems with the New Mass* (1990). For the most part these works limited the scope of the material they examined to the Ordinary of the Mass, and did not delve into the changes in the Propers of the Mass (the variable prayers, chants and readings assigned to various feasts and seasons).

7. (Kansas City: Angelus Press 2001).

8. The work even drew well-deserved praise from a theological adversary in the modernist camp. “Nowhere else have I seen what is at stake with the post-Vatican II reform of the liturgy so clearly outlined and so well understood... Nothing seems to escape their attention... In all of this [understanding the theological principles behind the reform] they are completely on target. That is, these are the issues that are at stake in the reform of the liturgy. The reformed liturgy does represent a radical shift in Catholic theology and piety.” John F. Baldovin, *Reforming the Liturgy: A Response to the Critics* (Collegeville MN: Liturgical Press 2008), 138–9.

OR MERE PREFERENCE?

Vatican officials were therefore acutely aware that the underlying basis for traditionalist objections to the Mass of Paul VI was doctrinal. Hence, the 3 October 1984 Indult allowing, under limited circumstances, the celebration of the old Mass according to the 1962 Missal, specified that those who availed themselves of this permission should make it clear that they in no way shared the positions of those who called into question the “doctrinal correctness” of the Missal of Paul VI.⁹ This was the price of admission, as it were.

But if it is impermissible for a priest or layman to adhere to the old Mass and reject the Mass of Paul VI on *doctrinal* grounds, what *other* motive could be offered to explain why some Catholics wanted the old Mass? What’s the fuss about? The Vatican decided that this would have to be portrayed as mere personal preference or sentiment.

Hence, beginning with the 1984 Indult, pronouncements from the Roman Curia and high-ranking Vatican officials frame the motives for adhering to the old rite in terms of subjective categories like “feelings,” “enjoyment,” “cultural expressions,” “attachment,” etc.¹⁰

In an October 1998 address to the members of the Fraternity of St. Peter, John Paul II spoke of “legitimate diversity and different sensibilities, worthy of respect... stimulated by the Spirit who makes all charismata come together in unity.”

In his Motu Proprio *Summorum Pontificum*, Benedict XVI took the same tack. He spoke of the old Mass as a “mark of identity... a form of encounter” for many Catholics that is “particularly suited to them.” The old rite possesses “a sacrality which attracts many people,” who adhere to it because of “attachment,” “affection,” “culture,” “personal familiarity,” etc.

9. SC Divine Worship, Epistula *Quattuor Abhinc Annos* (3 October 1984), *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 76 (1984), 1088–9. “Sine ambiguitate etiam publice constet talem sacerdotem et tales fideles nullam partem habere cum iis qui legitimam vim doctrinalemque rectitudinem Missalis Romani, anno 1970 a Paulo VI Romano Pontifice promulgati, in dubium vocant.”

10. The 1984 Indult *Quattuor Abhinc*: Catholics who are “attached” to the Tridentine Mass. John Paul II’s letter *Ecclesia Dei* (1988): The old Mass is part of a “richness for the Church of a diversity of charisms, traditions of spirituality and apostolate, which also constitutes the beauty of unity in variety; of that blended ‘harmony’ which the earthly Church raises up to Heaven under the impulse of the Holy Spirit.... Respect must be shown for the feelings of all those who are attached to the Latin liturgical tradition.” John Paul II, 1990 address to the Benedictines of Le Barroux: The traditional Mass is permitted because the Church “respects and fosters the qualities and talents of the various races and nations.... This concession is meant to facilitate the ecclesial union of persons who feel attached to these liturgical forms.” Cardinal Mayer, 1991 letter to the U.S. bishops: “diversity” and respect for “feelings.” Cardinal Ratzinger, 1998 address in Rome to traditionalists: “Different spiritual and theological emphases... that richness which pertained to the same single Catholic faith.” Cardinal Castrillon-Hoyos, May 2007: “ritual expression enjoyed by some... this sensibility.”

As a strategy, this was extremely clever. It sidestepped the doctrinal question entirely. There *is* no doctrinal problem — it's all just choice and options. And if you suspect there *may* be a problem, please don't be so ungrateful to the Holy Father as to mention it...

Moreover, enshrining personal preference as the underlying norm co-opted traditionalist opposition by bringing it under the big tent of post-Vatican II diversity, with its guitar and piano Masses, recycled Lutheran chorales, communion in the hand, occasional Gregorian chants, altar girls, lay Eucharistic ministers, Hindu and African “inculturated” liturgies and Mariachi music. Allowing the old Mass thus became what one Vatican official involved in drafting *Summorum Pontificum* called an “extension of options,” so that by availing himself of the old Mass under the auspices of the 2007 Motu Proprio, a priest or layman implicitly acknowledges the legitimacy of all the *other* approved options as well.

The prospect of *explicitly* doing so would make many of these priests and laymen profoundly uneasy, because as a group they tend to be of a conservative bent, people for whom the liberal mantras of choices, diversity and personal preferences produce nothing but bad karma. But in this system, one choice is as good as another.¹¹

But to opt for the old rite over the new on the terms under which it is offered — sentiment, preference, heritage, wooly “sacrality,” etc. — is to fall straight into an Anglican-like High Church-ism, where gorgeous ceremonial replaces faith, and distracts participants from the reality that the officially-sanctioned rite of Mass *most* of their co-religionists attend was designed to destroy large chunks of Catholic doctrine and piety.

To take the bait by reducing the issue, even implicitly, to “preference” and a “sacrality which attracts,” moreover, is also to fall unwittingly into the very modernism that many enthusiasts for the Motu Proprio Masses profess to abhor. Many in this camp would no doubt applaud the eloquent argument made against the vernacular and for the traditional Latin High Mass on the grounds that:

with all its suggestion of mystery, faith and reverence, [the old Mass] speaks more fully and directly to the spirit of man; does more for the right attuning of his soul, than could the most exquisitely balanced theological discourse on the sacrifice of the altar.

11. Once a neo-conservative or “reform of the reform” movement emerged in the 1990s and gained popularity among the younger clergy, some began to express reservations about the official liturgical reforms. Adherents engaged in a criticism of the Mass of Paul VI based, variously, on the tenets of modern philosophy, liturgico-historical theories, modernist theology, sociology, or anthropology. For an overview, see Baldwin, *Reforming the Liturgy*. None of these critiques, needless to say, treated the new rite as inimical to Catholic doctrine or as intrinsically irreverent.