



TRIDENTINE MASS

On October 3, 1984, the Sacred Congregation of Divine Worship issued a letter concerning the limited use of the Tridentine Mass. This is the text of the letter:

Four years ago, at the direction of Pope John Paul II, the bishops of the entire Church were invited to submit a report on the following topics:

The manner in which the priests and the people of their dioceses, in observance of the decrees of Vatican Council II, have received the Roman Missal promulgated by authority of Pope Paul VI;

Problems arising in connection with the implementation of the liturgical reform;

Opposition to the reform that may need to be overcome.

The results of this survey here reported to all the bishops (See *Notitiae*, No. 185, December 1981).

Based on the responses received from the bishops of the world, the problem of those priests and faithful who had remained attached to the so-called Tridentine rite seemed to have been almost completely resolved.

But the problem perdures and the pope wishes to be responsive to such groups of priests and faithful.

Accordingly, he grants to diocesan bishops the faculty of using an indult on behalf of such priests and faithful. The diocesan bishop may allow those who are explicitly named in a petition submitted to him to celebrate Mass by use of the 1962 Roman Missal. The following norms must be observed:

A. There must be unequivocal, even public evidence that the priest and people petitioning have no ties with those who impugn the lawfulness and doctrinal soundness of the Roman Missal promulgated in 1970 by Pope Paul VI.

B. The celebration of Mass in question must take place exclusively for the benefit of those who petition it; the celebration must be in a church or oratory designated by the diocesan bishop (but not in parish churches, unless, in extraordinary instances, the bishop allows this); the celebration may take place only on those days and in those circumstances approved by the bishops whether for an individual instance or as a regular occurrence.

C. The celebration is to follow the Roman Missal of 1962 and must be in Latin.

D. In the celebration there is to be no intermingling of the rites or texts of the two missals.

E. Each bishop is to inform this congregation of the concessions he grants and, one year from the date of the present indult, of the outcome of its use.

No development coming from the Second Vatican Council has been more misunderstood or misrepresented in the press than the *Novus Ordo Missae* and the so-called Tridentine Mass. When the Holy Father, Pope John Paul II, granted permission

for limited use of the former liturgy on special occasions with permission of the local bishop, publication of this privilege was the occasion of more misunderstanding in the press reports. Old errors continue to recur, so perhaps the truth should be explained at least once more.

The so-called Tridentine Mass is that celebrated according to the missal of Pope Pius V, who put into effect the decrees of the Council of Trent for the reforms to be made in the Mass. It dates to 1570, although there were subsequent revisions, including those of Pope Pius X.

The *Missale Romanum* of Pope Paul VI replaced the former *Missale Romanum* of Pius V in 1969. Changes in the calendar and in the prayers of the offertory and the beginning of the Mass were the most obvious reforms, but the possibility of many options introduced a freedom, even a license, into the manner in which Mass was celebrated. Despite the restrictions of the council itself, which forbade priests to make their own variations in the liturgy, many and grave innovations appeared on private authority. The end product was often far removed from the intentions of the council fathers and even from the subsequent reformers who brought out the new *Missa normativa*. It was these abuses that turned many Catholics against the reforms of the liturgy.

Pope Paul VI was at pains to establish the fact that the Mass is the same. The changes are incidental to the substance. This was not the first time that the Mass had been revised, either by elimination of elements or the addition of rites and texts. The fact is that when one speaks of the "old" Mass, it is difficult to know just what period in the on-going development of the liturgy is being referred to. Even after the decrees of the Council of Trent and the publication of the missal of Pius V, the Church continued to make changes and add and remove feasts, prayers and ceremonies.

It is true that many of the changes introduced in the name of the Second Vatican Council did indeed surprise even the fathers of the council. It is true also that the introduction to the first edition of the missal of Pope Paul VI had to be withdrawn because it so poorly expressed the true nature of the Mass as a sacramental sacrifice. The representation of Christ's sacrificial death on Calvary was not clearly stated. There seems little doubt, also, that many of the changes brought about by the new missal were greatly influenced by an ecumenical viewpoint that leaned heavily on Protestant sources. Chief among the objections raised against the new missal was the introduction of new prayers at the offertory. Equally opposed was the elimination of the Masses of the octave of Pentecost and Easter and other revisions of the calendar that resulted in so many ferial days. Unfortunately, the objections often overshadowed many good revisions, e.g. the end of the celebrant's repeating of words sung by the choir or the congregation; the addition of many new scripture readings; the end of the secret inaudibility of the celebrant's prayers; the demand for a more active role of the congregation; the simplification of many ceremonial details, etc.

The greatest problem of the new missal, at least in English-speaking countries, lay in the miserable translation that was imposed upon priests and people. Many prayers were so mistranslated that a student of first-year Latin would have done better. The vulgarity in the scriptural texts was resented. Some translations, especially of the *Credo*, were even theologically suspect. An obvious effort to promote certain doubtful theological positions colored the English language editions of the missal of Paul VI and weakened the whole reform in the judgment of many good Catholics.

Worst of all was the determination on the part of those who wished to promote the reforms to outlaw immediately the old missal, as if they were fearful that it would be a competition to the new and perhaps even prove to be too powerful a competition with the result that the new books would not be accepted. After all, there had never been a grass roots ground-swell for the vernacular; the Catholic people had not

demanded liturgical reforms; the reforms came chiefly from the clergy, and at that, only a small percentage of the world's priests or bishops. Imposition of the new, therefore, required in the minds of some the immediate destruction of the old. How many convents, schools and even parishes burned the old *Missale Romanum* of Pius V as if it were a bad book!

Along with the rejection of the Mass of Pius V came an unreasonable and totally irresponsible attack on the Latin language, without any foundation in the decrees of the council or the documents that followed. (Cf. Entry "Latin" in the index of *Documents on the Liturgy, 1963-1979*, Liturgical Press, Collegeville, MN 56321.) Latin was said to be prohibited. Music set to Latin texts was forbidden, despite all the legislation to the contrary. This totally false notion continues to be widespread among both clergy and people despite its lack of any basis in authoritative legislation.

Another fable introduced by the promoters of a new rite was the error that the new Mass had to be celebrated *versus populum* at a table altar erected near the congregation. Old altars were removed, even against the wishes of the people; new table altars were set up, some very poorly designed and even unworthy of the Mass celebrated on them. To promote the use of the altar *versus populum*, the English translation of the new missal of Paul VI even mistranslates the Latin original or leaves out entirely the rubrics of the *Missale Romanum* which in at least five places indicates that the priest should turn toward the people to say "The Lord be with you," "Pray brethren," "This is the Lamb of God," etc. The Latin has *sacerdos conversus ad populum dicit*, but the English takes no notice of *conversus* which clearly means "having turned toward the people." The norm for the new missal of Pope Paul VI is the priest at an altar which is not *versus populum*. Furthermore, the altar *versus populum* is not a new idea brought in by the reforms of Paul VI. The Mass could always be celebrated with the priest facing the people, as indeed it was in Rome and in many other places for centuries. True, it was not the usual way, but it did exist.

Now, part of the conspiracy against the Mass of Pius V and the Latin language involved a confusing of priests and people. The effort was made, and still continues, to associate Latin exclusively with the Mass of Pius V. The altar *versus populum* is associated with the missal of Paul VI. Latin is called "old," and *versus populum* "new." The over-simplification causes error and misunderstanding.

The truth is that the new Mass of Pope Paul VI may be celebrated in Latin or in the vernacular; it may be celebrated at an altar *versus populum* or at an altar of traditional construction. So also, the old Mass of Pius V was often celebrated in Latin and in the vernacular; it was celebrated both *versus populum* and at traditionally oriented altars. There cannot be a reduction of Latin to "old" and the vernacular to "new." There cannot be an equation of *versus populum* with "new" and the traditional altar with "old."

At the Church of Saint Agnes in Saint Paul, Minnesota, solemn Mass is celebrated each Sunday according to the missal of Pope Paul VI, in the Latin language and at the traditionally oriented high altar. The music is the Gregorian chant and the Masses of the Viennese composers with orchestra. This is the "new" Mass. It is in a direct line with the development through the centuries of the *Missa Romana cantata*, which was the will of the council fathers who wanted to purify the liturgy of accretions meaningless to our age and present to us the unencumbered gem that the Roman liturgy is, adorned with the beauty that all centuries have contributed but not overgrown with unnecessary accumulations.

It is to be regretted that the implementation of the reforms of the Second Vatican Council and the missal of Pope Paul VI in this country, at least, was accompanied by the kind of methods employed by the liturgical establishment. Truth and sincerity

were not always well served. But the truth should be known and honored. With it will come understanding. We hope.

It is, of course, impossible to predict what effect the Holy Father's letter allowing for the limited use of the old rite will have on the celebration of Mass in this country. Nor can one say what effect this might have musically, especially in the promotion of Gregorian chant, since the Latin language is mandated for use in the Tridentine Masses. However, it is encouraging to note the great concern and sympathy the Holy Father has expressed for those who wish to use the venerable ceremonies of the earlier missal, and it is equally encouraging to note that the liturgical establishment has not succeeded in erecting a monolithic conformism to their rigidly imposed innovations. Judging from the strident cries from so many areas, the action of the Holy Father has been considered by some to be a weakening of their position. The same people who call for pluralism in theology seem reluctant to admit a pluralism in liturgical practices.

That this letter is but the beginning of further adjustments is, of course, mere speculation. The indult is closely restricted and carefully guarded. Occasions for its use in the United States seem to be rather few if all the requisites are observed. As had been suggested earlier, the chief areas of discontent with the *Novus ordo* have been the removal of the prayers at the foot of the altar and the new offertory prayers. With so many options now allowed in the *Novus ordo*, it would have been a simple solution to have permitted the old prayers at the foot of the altar and the old offertory prayers as options along with the many others given in the new books. But the indult does not permit any mixing of the two, and at least for the present, the introduction of the old forms into the new rite is forbidden. It would have been good to have permitted those who wished, to use some of the old along with the new, since it would have given the best of both. But perhaps such a solution may still be possible if the Holy Father continues to show such fatherly concern for all his children.

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