

THE TROUBLE WITH *SUMMORUM PONTIFICUM*

“If anyone shall say that the received and approved rites of the Catholic Church customarily used in the solemn administration of the sacraments may be disparaged, or be omitted at pleasure by the ministers without sin, or be able to be changed by whomsoever pastor [any pastor whatsoever] of the churches into other new rites: let him be anathema.”

Council of Trent, Session 7, Canon XIII (March 3rd, 1567)

The anticipated publication of a document under the hand of Pope Francis which will limit the effect of the Apostolic Letter *Summorum Pontificum* (dated July 7th, 2007; published September 14th, 2007) of Pope Benedict XVI, has caused a flurry of concern among orthodox Catholic faithful committed to the rite of Mass laid down in the Roman Missal of 1570. Many of them may be surprised to find that the faithful attached to the *Society of St Pius X* do not share their concerns. The *Society* has never sought to rely on recent papal authorisations for its members' entitlement to celebrate, or to attend, the 'old' rite of Mass. If the worriers would but study the terms of the 1570 Bull *Quo primum* of Pope Pius V, they will see why.

A copy of the Bull, in English, is Appendix B. The original Latin may be viewed via the link shown in the footnote below.¹ For the purposes only of navigating through each we have added numbers to the paragraphs; these should not be regarded as part of the text. Let the reader study the Bull and see if he disagrees with this summation of its terms.

- After its coming into force, Holy Mass is not to be offered otherwise than in accordance with its prescriptions. (4)
- Nothing is to be added to the Missal it authorises; nothing is to be omitted; nothing whatsoever is to be changed. (5)
- Mass offered by a priest in any church is to be said rigorously in accordance with its prescriptions; he will do so freely and lawfully, without scruple of conscience, or fear of penalty, judgement or censure. (7)
- The constitution established by the Bull is to have force now, and forever. (5)
- It cannot be revoked or modified; it will remain always valid and in force. (8)
- No one, no matter who he may be, is permitted to alter it. (12)

It is hard to imagine how a Church command could have been expressed more forcefully.

Pius V codified the form of Mass for the Church's Latin rite as he had been instructed by the Fathers of the Council of Trent, and his Bull echoes the Council's Canon set out in the epigraph. Its strength of expression is reflected in the closing passage of Pius V's Bull, rendered here in homely terms:

No one, no matter who he is, may contravene this declaration, nor may he act against it; but should he do so, let him be in no doubt that he will incur the wrath of Almighty God and of His holy Apostles Saints Peter and Paul.

¹ [Quo primum-latin.pdf](#)

Given the burden of two anathemas, the one of the Council of Trent, the other that of Pius V, it would take a bold pope to ignore them. That bold pope was, of course, Paul VI.

Here we have the issue:

- on the one hand, the direction of the Fathers of the Council of Trent to Pius V to codify the form of Mass, and Pius V's Bull carrying out that direction; the support of thirty three of the popes who followed (manifest in the absence of any challenge to the terms of *Quo primum* by thirty of them, and the active endorsement of its terms in supplementary Bulls by three others, Clement VIII in 1604, Urban VIII in 1634, and Pius X in 1911); and,
- on the other, the agitation of the bishops of Vatican II for change, manifest in the radical changes proposed in *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, December 4th, 1963; the initiative of Paul VI in his Apostolic Constitution *Missale Romanum*, April 3rd, 1969, which gave birth to the *novus ordo missae*; and the endorsement of his initiative by the four popes who have succeeded him.

How is the faithful Catholic to know which of these conflicting lines of authority he should follow? The weight of authority is with Pius V and *Quo primum*—weight of numbers (the 33 popes are listed in Appendix A) & weight of constancy in Church teaching and practice over 400 years. The moral force, however, manifest in the attitude of 95% of the Church's current bishops, is with Paul VI and his successors in their embrace of the novelties of Vatican II.

There are features of the respective documents which assist. The vehemence of expression in *Quo primum* that its terms *will be forever* in force is matched by a lacuna in the publication of *Missale Romanum*. Paul VI omitted to promulgate it; that is, he omitted to give it the force of law. Much as recent popes have chosen to insist that the document, and the *novus ordo missae* it purports to authorise, are in force, *Missale Romanum* is of no legal effect.²

But the most telling point is whether a Church document addressing the mode of celebration of Holy Mass, the central mystery of the Catholic faith, is one that concerns the faith, or one that concerns discipline only. If it is a matter of faith, *Quo primum* resembles a papal definition, and is immutable.³ If it is only a matter of discipline, it may be altered by a later pope. The Council of Trent, Pope Pius V and the thirty three popes who followed him thought it a matter of faith. The bishops of Vatican II, Pope Paul VI and his four successors, have treated it as no more than a matter of discipline. If this issue was simply a matter of opinion, which of these opinions would you, Dear Reader, be inclined to follow? Yet the truth of the matter depends not on human opinion but on reality.⁴ We have considered it at length elsewhere endorsing, in the process, the arguments and conclusions of the late Fr Gregory Hesse S.T.D., S.J.D.⁵

² Fr Gregory Hesse argues that this lapse demonstrates the intervention of the Holy Spirit to protect the Church.

³ Like the definitions of the *Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin* (Pius IX, *Ineffabilis Deus*, December 8th, 1854) and of her bodily *Assumption into heaven* (Pius XII, *Munificentissimus Deus*, August 15th, 1954).

⁴ Truth, logical truth, is the identity between what is asserted, and what is (i.e., reality).

⁵ *The Status of the Novus Ordo Missae* at https://www.superflumina.org/PDF_files/status-novus-ordo.pdf

Fr Hesse's view is in harmony with the position taken by the late Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre and the members of the *Society of St Pius X* which he founded. It is that a faithful Catholic is entitled to ignore every attempt that has been made by the bishops of Vatican II, by Pope Paul VI, Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI to ignore *Quo primum's* codification of the rite of celebration of Mass in the Latin rite. Their declarations are ineffectual and may be categorised as no more than theses of the Church's counterfeit, *the Synodal church of Vatican II*.

Here, then, is the trouble with *Summorum Pontificum*. It is grounded on a false premise, that the Church's solemn canonisation of the manner of celebration of Mass may be varied at will. In *Summorum Pontificum* Benedict XVI joined in the error common to John Paul II (in *Ecclesia Dei*), to Paul VI (in *Missale Romanum*) and to the bishops of Vatican II (in *Sacrosanctum Concilium*).

No doubt Pope Francis will continue the tradition. In which event his attempt will be as ineffectual as those of his predecessors—and may be safely ignored.

Michael Baker

June 18th, 2021 — *St Ephraem, Doctor of the Church*

APPENDIX A

The Popes who followed Pius V

<i>Pope</i>	<i>Dates</i>	<i>Document endorsing Quo primum</i>
Gregory XIII	1572 – 1585	
Sixtus V	1585 – 1590	
Urban VII	1590 – 1590	
Gregory XIV	1590 – 1591	
Innocent IX	1591 – 1591	
Clement VIII	1592 – 1605	Cum sanctissimum Eucharisticae Sacramentum
Leo XI	1605 – 1605	
Paul V	1605 – 1621	
Gregory XV	1621 – 1623	
Urban VIII	1623 – 1644	Si quid est in rebus humanis
Innocent X	1644 – 1655	
Alexander VII	1655 – 1667	
Clement IX	1667 – 1669	
Clement X	1670 – 1676	
Innocent XI	1676 – 1689	

Alexander VIII	1689 – 1691	
Innocent XII	1691 – 1700	
Clement XI	1700 – 1721	
Innocent XIII	1721 – 1724	
Benedict XIII	1724 – 1730	
Clement XII	1730 – 1740	
Benedict XIV	1740 – 1758	
Clement XIII	1758 – 1769	
Clement XIV	1769 – 1774	
Pius VI	1775 – 1799	
Pius VII	1800 – 1823	
Leo XII	1823 – 1829	
Pius VIII	1829 – 1830	
Gregory XVI	1831 – 1846	
Pius IX	1846 – 1878	
Leo XIII	1878 – 1903	
Pius X	1903 – 1914	Divino afflatu compositos
Benedict XV	1914 – 1922	
Pius XI	1922 – 1939	
Pius XII	1939 – 1958	
John XXIII	1958 – 1963	

APPENDIX B

Quo primum

PIUS, BISHOP OF ROME, SERVANT OF THE SERVANTS OF GOD; IN PERPETUAL
MEMORY OF THE ISSUE

From the very first, upon Our elevation to the chief Apostleship, We gladly turned our mind and energies and directed all our thoughts to those matters which concerned the preservation of a pure liturgy, and We strove with God's help, by every means in our power, to accomplish this purpose.

1. For, besides other decrees of the sacred Council of Trent, there were stipulations for Us to revise and re-edit the sacred books: the Catechism, the Missal and the Breviary. With the Catechism published for the instruction of the faithful, by God's help, and the Breviary thoroughly revised for the worthy praise of God, in order that the Missal and Breviary may be in perfect harmony, as fitting and proper (for it is most becoming that there be in the Church only one appropriate manner of reciting the Psalms and only one rite for the celebration of Mass) We

deemed it necessary to give our immediate attention to what still remained to be done, namely, the re-editing of the Missal as soon as possible.

2. Hence, We decided to entrust this work to learned men of our selection. They very carefully collated all their work with the ancient codices in Our Vatican Library and with reliable, preserved or emended codices from elsewhere. Besides this, these men consulted the works of ancient and approved authors concerning the same sacred rites; and thus they have restored the Missal itself to the original form and rite of the holy Fathers.

3. When this work has been gone over numerous times and further emended, after serious study and reflection, We commanded that the finished product be printed and published as soon as possible, so that all might enjoy the fruits of this labour; and thus, priests would know which prayers to use and which rites and ceremonies they were required to observe from now on in the celebration of Masses.

4. Let everyone everywhere adopt and observe what has been handed down by the Holy Roman Church, the Mother and Teacher of the other churches, and let Masses not be sung or read according to any other formula than that of this Missal published by Us. This ordinance applies henceforth, now, and forever, throughout all the provinces of the Christian world, to all patriarchs, cathedral churches, collegiate and parish churches, be they secular or religious, both of men and of women, even of military orders, and of churches or chapels without a specific congregation in which conventual Masses are sung aloud in choir or read privately in accord with the rites and customs of the Roman Church. This Missal is to be used by all churches, even by those which in their authorisation are made exempt, whether by Apostolic indult, custom, or privilege, or even if by oath or official confirmation of the Holy See, or have their rights and faculties guaranteed to them by any other manner whatsoever. This new rite alone is to be used unless approval of the practice of saying Mass differently was given at the very time of the institution and confirmation of the church by Apostolic See at least 200 years ago, or unless there has prevailed a custom of a similar kind which has been continuously followed for a period of not less than 200 years, in which most cases We in no wise rescind their above-mentioned prerogative or custom. However, if this Missal, which we have seen fit to publish, be more agreeable to these latter, We grant them permission to celebrate Mass according to its rite, provided they have the consent of their bishop or prelate or of their whole Chapter, everything else to the contrary notwithstanding.

5. All other of the churches referred to above, however, are hereby denied the use of other missals, which are to be discontinued entirely and absolutely; whereas, by this present Constitution, which will be valid henceforth, now, and forever, We order and enjoin that nothing must be added to Our recently published Missal, nothing omitted from it, nor anything whatsoever be changed within it under the penalty of Our displeasure.

6. We specifically command each and every patriarch, administrator, and all other persons or whatever ecclesiastical dignity they may be, be they even cardinals of the Holy Roman Church, or possessed of any other rank or pre-eminence, and We order them in virtue of holy obedience to chant or to read the Mass according to the rite and manner and norm herewith laid down by Us and, hereafter, to discontinue and completely discard all other rubrics and rites of other missals, however ancient, which they have customarily followed; and let them not in celebrating Mass presume to introduce ceremonies or recite any prayers other than those contained in this Missal.

7. Furthermore, by these presents, in virtue of Our Apostolic authority, We grant and concede in perpetuity that, for the chanting or reading of the Mass in any church whatsoever, this Missal is

hereafter to be followed absolutely, without any scruple of conscience or fear of incurring any penalty, judgment, or censure, and may freely and lawfully be used.

8. Nor are superiors, administrators, canons, chaplains, and other secular priests, or religious, of whatever title designated, to be obliged to celebrate the Mass otherwise than as enjoined by Us: We likewise declare and ordain that no one, whosoever he be, is to be forced or coerced to alter this Missal, and that this present document cannot be revoked or modified, but remains always valid and retain its full force notwithstanding previous constitutions and decrees of the Holy See, as well as any general or special constitutions or edicts of provincial or synodal councils, and notwithstanding the practice and custom of the aforesaid churches, established by long and immemorial prescription – except, however, if of more than two hundred years' standing.

9. It is Our will, therefore, and by the same authority, We decree that, after We publish this constitution and the edition of the Missal, the priests of the Roman Curia are, after thirty days, obliged to chant or read the Mass according to its terms; all others south of the Alps, after three months; and those beyond the Alps either within six months or whenever the Missal is available for sale.

10. Wherefore, in order that the Missal be preserved incorrupt throughout the whole world and kept free of flaws and errors, the penalty for non-observance for printers, whether mediately or immediately subject to Our dominion, and that of the Holy Roman Church, will be the forfeiting of their books and a fine of one hundred gold ducats, payable ipso facto to the Apostolic Treasury. Further, as for those located in other parts of the world, the penalty is excommunication *latae sententiae*, and such other penalties as may in Our judgment be imposed; and We decree by this law that they must not dare or presume to print, to publish, to sell or in any way to accept, books of this nature without Our approval and consent, or without the express consent of the Apostolic Commissaries of those places, to be appointed by Us. The said printer must receive a standard Missal and agree faithfully with it and in no wise vary from the Roman Missal in its large type.

11. Accordingly, since it would be difficult for this present pronouncement to be sent to all parts of the Christian world and simultaneously come to light everywhere, We direct that it be, as usual, posted and published at the doors of the Basilica of the Prince of the Apostles, also at the Apostolic Chancery, and on the street at Campo Flora; furthermore, We direct that printed copies of this same edict signed by a notary public and made official by an ecclesiastical dignitary possess the same indubitable validity everywhere and in every nation, as if Our manuscript were shown there.

12. Therefore no one, whosoever he be, is permitted to alter this notice of Our permission, statute, ordinance, command, precept, grant, indult, declaration, will, decree, and prohibition; nor is he allowed temerarily to act against it.

Accordingly, should anyone presume to commit such an act, let him know that he will incur the wrath of Almighty God and of the Blessed Apostles Peter and Paul.

Given at St. Peter's in the year of the Lord's Incarnation, 1570, on the day preceding the Ides of July (July 14th), in the Fifth year of Our Pontificate.