

# PAIX LITURGIQUE

Letter 34 published 11 February 2013

## 25 YEARS BEFORE THE MOTU PROPRIO'S ACTUAL PROMULGATION, ARCHBISHOP LEFEBVRE AND CARDINAL RATZINGER HAD ALREADY ANNOUNCED IT!

Paul VI promulgated his liturgical reform in 1969. It was without precedent in the history of the Church in both its innovative content and in the room it left to the celebrant's personal initiative. It immediately aroused attitudes of reticence and resistance, from the highest levels of the Church --Cardinals Ottaviani and Bacci communicated [their intervention](#) to Paul VI a few weeks before the new Missal was to become normative-- and from simple laymen. It also provoked a reaction on the part of many personalities in the artistic, literary, and scientific worlds. They were worried by the cultural step backwards the reform represented and they expressed their concern in the *Times* on 6 July 1971; this was the origin of the so-called "Agatha Christie" indult.

In point of fact, by the time Paul VI passed away barely ten years later, it was already clear--even to its promoters--that this reform had not met its goals and had even begun to empty out the churches.

And so at the beginning of the 1980s a common-sense reaction manifested itself more and more clearly: why not leave the older liturgical forms available to those who found their sacramental spiritual nourishment in them? Since everything now seemed to be free and allowed, why not also freely allow what had been done before? After all, hadn't Paul VI himself made a strong and meaningful gesture by relegating Archbishop Bugnini, author of the reform, to Tehran? Hadn't the Pope understood that the Mass that was forever to bear his name and which was intended to be a brightly shining sign of the conciliar springtime turned out to be a ferment of division in an ever-weakening Church?

**As soon as John Paul II's papacy began, the question of freedom for the pre-conciliar Mass emerged. Although it took thirty years for it to find an answer in Benedict XVI's Motu Proprio Summorum Pontificum, it had in fact been foreshadowed at the time by the two personalities who were to go down in history as the key figures in the solution to the liturgical fracture, namely Joseph Ratzinger and Marcel Lefebvre--like it or not and whatever judgment one may have regarding one or the other of them.**

I - ARCHBP LEFEBVRE: A 1979 "PROPHECY" ABOUT THE FREEDOM OF THE MASS



On 11 May 1979, Archbp. Lefebvre made the following declaration to his seminarians at Écône:

*"If in fact the Pope gives the traditional Mass a place of honor in the Church, well then you know, I think we'll be able to say that the essential part of our victory has been won. The day when the Mass truly becomes the Church's Mass once again, the Mass in parishes, the Mass in the churches--oh, there'll still be difficulties, there'll still be quarrels, there'll still be oppositions, there'll still be all sorts of things--but still, the Mass of all time, the Mass that is the heart of the Church, the Mass that is the essential thing in the Church, that Mass will take its place back, perhaps it won't have enough place yet, obviously it will need to be given an even greater place yet, but still and all, the very fact that every priest who wants to will be able to say that Mass, well I think that it would have enormous consequences in the Church.*

*I believe that we would have been of service for such a time, if truly it ever came to pass . . . Well, for my part, I believe that the Tradition is safe. The day when the Mass is saved, the Church's Tradition is safe, because along with the Mass there are the sacraments, along with the Mass there's the catechism, along*

with the Mass there's the Bible, and all the rest of it . . . . After all, the seminaries and the Tradition would be saved. I believe that one could then almost say that one saw morning dawning in the Church; we'd have made it through a mighty storm, we'd have been in complete darkness, beaten by every wind and every tornado, yet still at last there on the horizon the Mass had risen again, the Mass that is the Church's sun, our life's sun, the sun of every Christian's life . . . .”  
(source: Credidimus Caritati [website](#))

“The very fact that every priest who wants to will be able to say that Mass, well I think that it would have enormous consequences in the Church”: is this not precisely the fundamental contribution of the 2007 Motu Proprio? The SSPX greatly rejoiced over this liberating text through Bishop Fellay's statements--which was only fair since its founder had announced it as a “*morning dawning in the Church*”!

## II - CARDINAL RATZINGER: THE PRINCIPLE OF FREEDOM OF THE MASS LAID DOWN IN 1982

This liturgical freedom was in the air at the beginning of John Paul II's pontificate. It is now known that as soon as he had been named Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (and unofficially put in charge of the file on liturgical disputes by Pope John Paul II), Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger was organizing a meeting on 16 November 1982 at the Palazzo del Sant'Uffizio “*regarding liturgical questions*”(1), namely regarding both the liturgical problem as such and the problem of the SSPX.

1982. Exactly a quarter of a century before Summorum Pontificum, therefore. During this meeting, Cardinal Ratzinger had obtained that every participant without exception (2) state as common-sense evidence that, “*independently from the ‘Lefebvre issue’, the Roman Missal in the form it had until 1969 must be allowed in the whole Church for Masses celebrated in the Latin language.*”

The prelates in attendance had also spoken about the question that was related to the liturgical question, namely the question of the SSPX, and deemed that its resolution ought to begin with a canonical visit (which in fact occurred five years later).



## III - LEFEBVRE/RATZINGER: A SHARED VISION FOR THE SPREAD OF LITURGICAL FREEDOM

This liberation process of the unreformed liturgy--a process as incredible as the Bugnini reform itself--has progressed in specific steps throughout the quarter century since Cardinal Ratzinger made his stance known.

In practice, this process turns out to be closely linked to the canonical settlement of questions concerning the SSPX, even though everyone officially maintains that these are two distinct issues.

a) On 18 March 1984, Secretary of State Cardinal Casaroli, at the request of Cardinal Ratzinger, writes to Cardinal Casoria, Prefect of the Congregation for Divine Worship, to ask him to prepare the first act restoring the use of the traditional missal: “*Absolutely forbidding the use of the abovementioned Missal can be justified neither theologically nor juridically.*” On 3 October 1984, Cardinal Casoria's successor at Divine Worship, Bishop Mayer, therefore addressed to the presidents of episcopal conferences worldwide the circular letter [Quattuor abhinc annos](#), the so-called “1984 indult” authorizing celebration according to the 1962 Missal “for the benefit of those groups that request it.”

b) On 30 October 1987, the last day of the Synod on the laity's “*Vocation and Mission in the Church and in the World*,” Cardinal Ratzinger announces to the bishops that an Apostolic Visitor has been appointed to Marcel Lefebvre's work: the Canadian Cardinal Édouard Gagnon, president of the Council for the Family. After this visit, which took place in April and May 1988, came the negotiations between Cardinal Ratzinger and Archbp. Lefebvre. These resulted in the 5 May agreement that Archbp. Lefebvre would eventually denounce--basically because of its lack of guarantees regarding the nomination and consecration date of another bishop for the Society. Indeed Archbp. Lefebvre then goes ahead with the consecration of four bishops at Écône on 30 June 1988. Rome, in reaction to this act, publishes the Motu Proprio “*Ecclesia Dei*” on 2 July 1988. While condemning Archbp. Lefebvre, it institutes a Pontifical Commission for “*the purpose of facilitating full ecclesial communion of priests, seminarians, religious communities or individuals*” attached to the 1962 Missal and to oversee the bishops' implementation of the 1984 indult.

c) In January 2002, the failed 1988 agreement between Archbp. Lefebvre and Rome is made in favor of Bishop Licinio Rangel, successor to Bishop de Castro Meyer, the head of the traditional community of the Campos diocese. A personal ordinariate is created and, in June of the same year, Rome accepts for a coadjutor to be designated to succeed to Bishop Rangel automatically. A community numbering over 20,000 laymen, about twenty priests, and as many schools thereby returns to full communion with Rome while fully retaining its preconciliar liturgical uses.

d) On 7 July 2007, to crown this process, Pope Benedict XVI promulgates the Motu Proprio Summorum Pontificum, which restores to every priest the private use of the 1962 Missal and invites pastors to give a favorable answer to stable groups of the faithful who wish to benefit from it. This text, which the superior of the SSPX hailed, is an “*universal Church law*” (Universæ Ecclesiæ instruction) and promotes contacts between Rome and Écône. It

will also prepare the ground for January 2009, when the excommunications of the bishops who had been consecrated in 1988 were lifted.

#### IV - LITURGICAL LIBERTY / THEOLOGICAL LIBERTY: JOSEPH RATZINGER'S JULY 1988 SPEECH ON ARCHBP LEFEBVRE

In our French 4 June 2010 Letter (PL 233) on Mgr. Brunero Gherardini book, *The Ecumenical Council Vatican II: A Much Needed Discussion* (Casa Mariana Editrice, 2009), we mentioned a very significant speech that Cardinal Ratzinger had given on 13 July 1988 before the bishops of Chile and Colombia (3). In that allocution, the future pope examined the responsibilities of all and sundry in the light of the episcopal consecrations that had taken place at the hands of Archbp. Lefebvre at Écône on 30 June 1988.

Now this speech includes two statements that are essential for a proper understanding of the current pontificate:

**a)** *“The truth is that this particular Council defined no dogma at all, and deliberately chose to remain on a more modest level, as a merely pastoral council; and yet many treat it as though it had made itself into a sort of superdogma which takes away the importance of all the rest.”*

**b)** *“It is a necessary task to defend the Second Vatican Council against Archbp. Lefebvre, as valid, and as binding upon the Church.”*

Hence an as yet unresolved difficulty that has been weighing on the recent discussion between the SSPX and Rome: how “binding” on the faith can teachings be that were expressed “on a more modest level” than that of the Creed?

This parallel may sound shocking to some: why not apply to the Council what the Holy Father applied to the liturgy? In order to relativize the new Mass's character as a “superliturgy”, the Pope, in the MP Summorum Pontificum, recalled that the older Mass had never been forbidden and he gave its free use (in theory at least) back to priests and the faithful.

#### V - THE REFLEXIONS OF PAIX LITURGIQUE

1) The declaration that Archbp. Lefebvre made on 11 May 1979 is surprising not only because of its early date but also because it sets the Écône prelate in a light different to that which is usually applied to him. Nothing is vehemently polemical or rigid or even ‘sectarian’ in these 1979 words. They express a hope concerning the Church's concrete life. This is “pastoral Lefebvre” in the sense given to the term during the Council, but with a different content: that of an intraecclesial ecumenism with a concrete experiment of freedom for the traditional Mass at the parish level with a view to fostering liturgical, spiritual, and doctrinal renewal.

The founder of the SSPX expresses his hope to see the traditional Mass freely become “*the Mass in parishes, the Mass in the churches.*” Of course, he grants that “*there'll still be difficulties, there'll still be quarrels, there'll still be oppositions, there'll still be all sorts of things.*” But he goes straight to brass tacks in a very concrete manner: “*that Mass will take its place back, perhaps it won't have enough place yet.*” He thus assigns a set goal to his work, especially since it seems so modest: “*The very fact that every priest who wants to will be able to say that Mass, well I think that it would have enormous consequences in the Church. I believe that that we would have been of service for such a time, if truly it ever came to pass.*” Archbp. Lefebvre then develops the theme of the coherence between liturgy and doctrine: “*along with the Mass there are the sacraments, along with the Mass there's the catechism, along with the Mass there's the Bible, and all the rest of it . . .*”

2) As for the process of liberation that Cardinal Ratzinger initiated in 1982, it is just a pastoral and concrete. One may speak of an “homogenous evolution,” just as in the case of dogma, except here applied to the practical liberalization of the Mass that is now called extraordinary:

-Quattuor Abhinc Annos circular letter, 3 October 1984: the traditional Mass may be authorized by the bishops, but under certain conditions and not in parish churches;

- Motu Proprio Ecclesia Dei Adflicta on 2 July 1988: bishops are invited to allow it more widely and more generously in their dioceses (in theory);

- erection of the Saint-Jean-Marie-Vianney Personal Apostolic Administration in Campos, January 2002: it may be the only source for a large community's Eucharistic life;

- Motu Proprio Summorum Pontificum, 7 July 2007: the decision is now up to the pastors for their own parishes (in theory); most importantly this Mass is declared never to have been abolished and its private celebration becomes a right for every Roman rite priest, without restriction;

- logically, a text will eventually come out acknowledging pure and simple freedom, a “normal” freedom as Cardinal Cañizares put it, to celebrate the extraordinary Mass in every church. The “Mass of all ages” would then become the “Mass of all places” for the Roman rite.

3) The hurdle that needs to be overcome for this last step is the fact that there was a move from the non-dogma of Vatican II to a “superdogma”, which also applies to the liturgy of Vatican II: there was a move from a non-infallible council that does not engage the faith to a tyrannical so-called “Spirit of the Council.”

which seeks also to dogmatize the new forms of divine worship.

**All in all, what needs to be defended is a healthy freedom, a true theological freedom, not to question Catholic dogma but to explain it and even to help it “progress”--i.e. to advance its proper understanding.**

This freedom is closely intertwined with a healthy liturgical freedom, not a freedom for all sorts of abuse, but a freedom to illustrate, defend, and advance the faithful’s faith in Eucharistic transubstantiation, their faith in the sacrifice of atonement that the celebration of the Mass reproduces, their faith in the sacramental and hierarchical priesthood that Jesus Christ instituted.

Is it not paradoxical that these days everything is freely allowed, but that one single freedom is restricted: that which wishes to be exercised along the traditional paths, which is refused by those who still control many levers of power, and which is so restricted by them that it is in fact rendered null, all in the name of a “spirit” of a Council that sought to be, or was sought to be, a “liberating” council?

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(1) “Nel 1982 neanche l’alleanza Ratzinger-Casaroli riuscì a sdoganare la Messa tridentina,” *Il Foglio*, 19 March 2006.

(2) Besides Cardinal Ratzinger as Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, there were: Cardinal Sebastiano Baggio, Prefect of the Congregation of Bishops; Cardinal William W. Baum, Archbishop of Washington; Cardinal Agostino Casaroli, Secretary of State; Cardinal Silvio Oddi, Prefect of the Congregation of the Clergy; Archbishop Giuseppe Casoria, then pro-Prefect of the Congregation of Sacraments and Divine Worship.

(3) Bishop Müller, new Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, while bishop of Regensburg, undertook the publication of the complete works of Joseph Ratzinger in 16 volumes. In the volumes published so far, there is no hint of this 13 July 1988 speech, which could have been placed in volume 7 on the teaching of Vatican II, its formulation and its interpretation, or again in volume 11 on the theology of the liturgy. To be continued . . .

(4) Abbé Claude Barthe, “Rome/Fraternité Saint-Pie X : où en sommes-nous ?” *L’Homme nouveau*, 5 January 2013.