

PAIX LITURGIQUE

Letter 109 published 22 May 2020

ROMAN SURVEY ON THE TRADITIONAL MASS

Much ado...

The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith is now directly in charge of the motu proprio *Summorum Pontificum*: one of its sections fulfills the duties that used to fall to the Ecclesia Dei Commission. In that capacity it has addressed to all the presidents of episcopal conferences throughout the world a letter dated 7 March 2020 and signed by Cardinal Ladaria, Prefect of the Congregation (and erstwhile President of the Ecclesia Dei Commission by virtue of the restructuring ordered by Benedict XVI). This letter is to be distributed to all the bishops in the world, who will have to fill in a nine-question survey on the application of the motu proprio *Summorum Pontificum* in their dioceses. The CDF sent it out to the bishops on 30 April 2020.

The letter was made public on the American website *Rorate Caeli* on 24 April 2020 (<https://rorate-caeli.blogspot.com/2020/04/breaking-important-summorum-under.html>). It soon set ablaze the traditional world on all continents—granted, not a difficult world to set ablaze—which immediately took it as a threat to *Summorum Pontificum*.

Paix liturgique, which is hardly new to this postconciliar business, is naturally always prudent and circumspect about any possible attack on the rights of the faithful to the traditional Mass. Nevertheless, Paix Liturgique believes that this survey—as surprising as it is—ought to be considered in an entirely different light.

Where does this survey come from?

As the well-known joke goes, the “absolute” secrecy that theoretically covers Curial business is actually a matter of open secrets. Except when the treatment of an affair is limited to a small number of persons, which was evidently the case here, since the simple “officers” of the section in charge of *Summorum Pontificum* were not made aware of it.

Furthermore, a great number of decisions taken by the Congregation on sensitive issues are in fact inspired by directives emanating from the Secretariat of State, with varying degrees of precision. Such, for example, was the strange decree that Cardinal Sarah felt compelled to sign on 25 March 2020, which ordered that Holy Week ceremonies should be celebrated without a congregation in all countries affected by the Coronavirus. Yet Cardinal Ladaria’s letter does not seem to follow a request from the *Terza Loggia* (the floor in the apostolic palace where the Secretariat of State is located): it seems to have been in response to a request from Santa Marta, i.e., from the Pope.

In this connection it is important to remember the reactions that had greeted the two recent decrees actually prepared by officers of the CDF section in charge of *Summorum Pontificum*. These sought to allow a certain “enrichment” of the traditional form (seven new *ad libitum* prefaces plus the permission, also *ad libitum*, to celebrate more saints, particularly recently canonized saints). They had received the Pope’s approbation on 5 December 2019, were dated to 22 February 2020, and made public on 19 February 2020. These decrees, for which see our forthcoming analysis, precipitated (as we reported in our Letter 740 on 8 April 2020) an outcry from the most determined enemies of the traditional liturgy. These opponents, led by Professor Andrea Grillo (who teaches at the Pontifical University San Anselmo), seized this opportunity to launch an extremely virulent petition on 1 April 2020 asking that this liturgy should stop having an exceptional status and that it should be fully subject to the diocesan bishops and to the Congregation for Divine Worship. In other words, they were once again asking for it to be controlled by the bishops, then eliminated. Cardinal Ladaria did not take this attack well, and requested a juridically argued response from Msgr. Markus Graulich, Undersecretary of the Pontifical Council for Legislative Texts (<https://www.riposte-catholique.fr/archives/155420>).

It goes without saying that this pressure group, which numbers highly-placed allies, got the Pope’s ear. The latter has notoriously expressed no particular interest in the traditional Mass: neither approval nor hatred. When he arrived in Rome it was, for him, a very marginal phenomenon that only took on some consistency through its connection with the SSPX, in which, on the other hand and for complex reasons, he takes an evident “political” interest. He has on several occasions

said that the older rite, to which in his view Benedict XVI had paid too much attention, was cultivated by a few old nostalgic persons and that it ought to be allowed to die a natural death. It is noteworthy, however, that these sweeping judgments were given during *ad limina* visits of bishops complaining about the “difficulties” caused by the old-style celebrations in their dioceses. Noteworthy too is the fact that on each of these occasions the Pontiff substantially answered: no one touches *Summorum Pontificum* (such, for example, was his answer to the bishops of Apulia, in May 2013).

Also, a large group of Italian bishops is well-known for its hostility to the spread of this liturgy, unlike some French, British, and American bishops (among others) who have cut their losses and, despite their lack of sympathy for the traditional form, have found a way to live with it. Needless to say, of course, these Italian prelates, who hound the Tridentine liturgy, do not waste a single opportunity of presenting their recriminations to the Pope and his associates.

This has gone on to such an extent that Pope Francis has ended up realizing that this marginal liturgy actually exists, since it provokes such an irritated exasperation. And this, when all is said and done, is not without displeasing him. His style of government is to insist that those who consider themselves to be closest to him ought not to imagine that they are settled in a comfortable ideological situation. The favors granted to the SSPX and the status that has been preserved for the extraordinary form are tailor-made to remind them of the fact...

Yet he, or his personal secretarial staff, thought that it might be worthwhile to obtain detailed information on this traditional Mass that elicits so much wrath, and also on how all the bishops of the world (as opposed to a few of them) perceive it. Also, whenever one seeks to “lay a question to rest,” one names a commission and initiates an administrative investigation procedure. In Argentina, the following commonplace has been attributed to Perón: “If you want an issue to drag on forever, name a committee of inquiry.” Let us not forget that Pope Francis is an Argentine. . . . An inquiry then provides a way to answer “that the matter is under investigation” to those who come complaining. Still, following the Curia’s classic *modus operandi*, Cardinal Ladaria’s letter is dated to March 7, before Grillo’s petition, to avoid giving the impression that the latter provoked the former.

So the matter is being dealt with, though without excessive haste. Cardinal Ladaria’s letter asks that the bishops’ responses—so long as they take the trouble to answer—are to come in by July 31: exactly when the Curia goes into its deep summer slumber. Then, when work picks up again in the autumn, the little *Summorum Pontificum* section of the CDF will have to spend long months collating, studying, summarizing an enormous mass of responses in all languages (supposing that 2500 of the 3100 ordinaries of the world answer the nine questions, there will be over 20,000 answers to deal with, some of which could be long).

The questions posed to the bishops.

There are nine questions, among which are the found questions on the extraordinary form of the Roman rite that are usually posed to the bishops during their *ad limina* visits. They seek to discover two facts:

-what is the current situation of the extraordinary form in the diocese?

-what does the bishop think of *Summorum Pontificum*?

The author(s) is (are) trying to be objective and exhibit(s) good will towards the traditional liturgy, as question 5 indicates: “Does it occur to you that, in your diocese, the ordinary form has adopted elements of the extraordinary form?” This alludes to the oft-observed fact that the celebration of the extraordinary form leads those diocesan priests who use it to an improved and “enriched” celebration of the ordinary form, in a word, to a kind of “reform of the reform.”

On the other hand, the second question is awkward and hard to understand: “If the extraordinary form is practiced there, does it respond to a true pastoral need

or is it promulgated by a single priest?” This is unfortunate, because it touches—albeit lightly—on the basic procedure of *Summorum Pontificum*: certainly, there is nothing in the spirit or the letter of *Summorum Pontificum* to prevent a priest from taking the initiative, but normally it is groups of faithful who put requests for Masses to their pastors (not to their bishops), who in turn are free to grant them.

The sixth question (“For the celebration of the Mass, do you use the Missal promulgated by Pope John XXIII in 1962?”) most likely alludes to the fact that in certain places a sort of hybrid Missal is used, inspired by the so-called 1965 rubrics, which is against the letter of *Summorum Pontificum*.

Here is the questionnaire:

- 1- What is the situation in your diocese with respect to the extraordinary form of the Roman Rite?
- 2- If the extraordinary form is practiced there, does it respond to a true pastoral need or is it promoted by a single priest?
- 3- In your opinion, are there positive or negative aspects of the use of the extraordinary form?
- 4- Are the norms and conditions established by *Summorum Pontificum* respected?
- 5- Does it occur to you that, in your diocese, the ordinary form has adopted elements of the extraordinary form?
- 6- For the celebration of the Mass, do you use the Missal promulgated by Pope John XXIII in 1962?
- 7- Besides the celebration of the Mass in the extraordinary form, are there other celebrations (for example Baptism, Confirmation, Marriage, Penance, Unction of the sick, Divine Office, Easter triduum, funeral rites) according to the liturgical books prior to Vatican Council II?
- 8- Has the *motu proprio Summorum Pontificum* had an influence on the life of seminaries (the seminary of the diocese) and other formation houses?
- 9- Thirteen years after the *motu proprio Summorum Pontificum*, what is your advice about the extraordinary form of the Roman Rite?

The traditional liturgy needs no permission to exist.

Whenever these questions of a Roman authorization to celebrate the traditional liturgy are brought up, it is important not to go down the road of “it’s just a permission, it could always be revoked...”, and to think that the traditional liturgy’s existence depends on these permissions. As a matter of fact, the Tridentine

Mass was forbidden by the reform of Paul VI. Yet despite this prohibition, thanks to some faithful, some priests, and two bishops, it lived on and spread to such an extent that the “moderate” wing of conciliar Rome, particularly in the person of Cardinal Ratzinger, later Benedict XVI, incrementally acknowledged its legitimacy in 1984, 1988, and 2007. It is, then, because those who practiced it were convinced, in the name of the *sensus fidei*, that the traditional liturgy was legitimate that the postconciliar authorities finally acknowledged its legitimacy.

Of course, these successive texts allowed it to spread even further—especially *Summorum Pontificum*, which brought the use of the Tridentine missal from an ill-defined status of ‘privilege’ to that of a right. Paix Liturgique has demonstrated in great detail that within ten years, i.e. until 2017, the number of ‘authorized’ traditional worship venues doubled throughout the world: in the USA, 530 traditional worship venues against about 230 in 2007; in Germany 153 against 54; in Poland, 45 against 5; in England and Wales, 147 extraordinary form venues in 2017 against 26 in 2007; in France, 104 traditional worship venues in 2007, 235 in 2019, to which add over 200 Society of Saint Pius X Mass venues (Source: our Letter 601 [16 July 2017] plus more recent data).

Thanks are due to Benedict XVI for this free development, but thanks are also due to what came before and made it possible for the multitude of ‘resister’ faithful, thanks are due to the host of traditional priests, to Archbishop Lefebvre, to Bishop de Castro Meyer. Those people, to speak only of France (but one might also speak of the traditional liturgy’s place in the USA, with 1% of Mass venues and a laity well under the median age), provide a yearly “yield” of 15-20% of priests that function more or less as diocesan priests. Add to this men’s and women’s religious communities that are specified by this liturgy, and a whole network of independent schools whose chaplains celebrate the traditional Mass. As for future development, one can evaluate it with the series of survey polls Paix Liturgique commissioned between 2006 and 2016 (*Eleven Surveys for History*, Les Dossiers d’*Oremus—Paix Liturgique*, 2018).

So if bishops worldwide provide honest answers to this CDF questionnaire, they will confirm (and to tell the truth, the very fact that this questionnaire was sent out confirms it) a massive fact: fifty years into the liturgical reform, traditional worship, while in the minority, is certainly part of the landscape. It coexists with the new rite with a surprising vitality. With irreducible vitality, in fact.