

Pope Benedict's Motu Proprio Summorum Pontificum allowing the continued use of the 1962 Missal

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The following comments are based on Pope Benedict's *Motu Proprio* Summorum Pontificum (SP), his letter to bishops accompanying the *Motu Proprio* (LB) Pope Paul VI's Apostolic Constitution (AC) promulgating the New Order of the Mass (NOM), and Pope John Paul II's *Motu Proprio Ecclesia Dei* (ED) 1988.

References to the "1962 Missal" are to the Missal promulgated by Pope St Pius V following the Council of Trent and "brought up to date" by several Popes since then, including Pope John XXIII in 1962 (see SP). More major reforms were carried out in the fourth century (when it was translated from the older liturgical language, Greek, into the language of the people, Latin) 13th and 16th centuries. The 1962 Missal is the one that was further revised following the Second Vatican Council, and is referred to as the New Order of the Mass (NOM).

When Pope Paul VI approved the NOM he did not "abrogate" the 1962 Missal. This is a juridical term meaning that he did not *cancel* or *repeal* it. Therefore, the continued use of the 1962 Missal is still "permissible" (SP, 1), and

in parishes where there is a stable group of faithful who adhere to the earlier liturgical tradition, the pastor should willingly accept their requests to celebrate Mass according to.... the Missal published in 1962.... (SP, n.5).

Pope John Paul II had already allowed its continued use (ED, 1988) in circumstances approved by local bishops. Pope Benedict has extended this to a general permission in order "to free bishops from constantly having to evaluate anew how they are to respond to various situations" (LB).

The aim of both Popes was to meet the special need of people who are deeply and spiritually attached to the earlier Missal. And Pope Benedict was particularly motivated by a desire to bring about "interior reconciliation" at the heart of the Church (LB). [It is for the same reason that am dialoguing with the Society of St Pius X. His action has enhanced the climate for dialogue by confirming the view that the 1962 Missal was never abrogated. At the same time, he is aware that the reasons for Archbishop Lefebvre's break with the Church were "at a deeper level" (LB).]

By allowing the continued use of the 1962 Missal for the reasons given, Pope Benedict was not revoking the Apostolic Constitution by which Pope Paul VI approved the NOM in 1969. The last paragraph of that Constitution makes it clear that Pope Paul intended the NOM to *include* and *supersede* the 1962 Missal. Consistent with that, Pope Benedict has said that the NOM is – both juridically and in practice – the "ordinary" form of the Roman rite. He also describes it as the "normal" form of Eucharistic liturgy (LB).

Given the teaching of all three of these Popes, and given Pope Benedict's special concern to bring about reconciliation, any form of competition between advocates of either edition of the Missal would be out of place; (cf SP, n.5). To recruit Catholics in order to

increase the numbers requesting 1962 Missal would be to ignore the Pope's intention which was to meet a special need. We are not being invited to induce a need, but to meet an existing need. Nor would such recruiting assist the Pope's effort to bring about "reconciliation at the heart of the Church".

Much less may the 1962 Missal be promoted as superior. The reasons why the 1962 Missal needed to be revised are well summarised in Pope Paul's Apostolic Constitution. Those reasons led to the Revised Missal which Pope Benedict has endorsed as the ordinary form of the Mass.

For the same reasons, liturgical formation should be based on the revised form of the Roman rite. The revised form is promoted; the unrevised form is "allowed". Neither form of the Missal is without imperfections, but neither of them is defective as an expression of Catholic faith. Both can nurture faith.

With all the pressures priests are under, especially today, it is not possible for them to meet every need, and so they are justified in prioritising the calls made upon them. In the event that a diocese is not able to provide Mass according to the 1962 Missal – and presupposing that there is "a stable group" of the faithful wanting it, a bishop "may refer the problem to the Pontifical Commission Ecclesia Dei. [This Commission, whose name was given to it by the Pope, is not in any way connected to the group of faithful who have called themselves the Ecclesia Dei Society, NZ, after Pope John Paul II's *Motu Proprio*.] In the event of the situation of the priests of the St Pius X being regularised, and a "personal parish" created (c. 518), they could celebrate the 1962 Missal on behalf of the diocese.

What of the long term? Based on the way the Church has carried out major reforms of the Missal at different times in its history, it has rightly been said that "the Roman Church typically preserves the 'riches of the past' by creating a new synthesis, rather than by resurrecting old forms" (N Mitchell). Similarly, Pope John Paul II explained that it is in and through a *living* Tradition that we preserve the riches of the past.