

The Novus Ordo Mass and Divine Law

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Many traditional Catholics have become satisfied with objecting to the New Mass on the obvious ground that it does not express the Catholic Faith in its beauty and integrity as does the Old Latin Mass. Some of these Catholics will even admit the New Mass accommodates a Protestant spirit and actually suppresses the Church's Eucharistic theology.[1] These objections, of course, are sound and valid. However, if the *Novus Ordo* Mass is a "new rite" of Mass – conceived, as it was, by a liturgical commission following Vatican II – then we have a bigger problem: Such a rite of Mass would be unlawful to celebrate, notwithstanding individual preferences or affinities. Why? Because, as we will see, Catholics must celebrate only the "received and approved rites" of the Church as a *matter of Divine Law*.

God revealed this truth in Scripture through St. Paul. Before St. Paul teaches the Corinthians liturgical and theological details concerning the Holy Mass (consecration formula, Real Presence), he prefaces his teaching by affirming: "For I have *received* of the Lord that which I also *delivered unto you...*" (1Cor 11:23). St. Paul says again: "For I delivered unto you first of all, which I also received" (1Cor 15:3). In these and other verses, St. Paul emphasizes that we must believe and practice only what we have "received" from Christ and the apostles which has been "delivered" unto us, and which includes the liturgical rites of the Church. This is a divinely revealed truth and a matter of Faith.

The Church has taught this divine truth throughout her history. For example, in the Papal Oath of Coronation, which originates at least as far back as Pope St. Agatho in 678 A.D. (and which was set aside by Paul VI), every Pope swore to change nothing of the "*received tradition*." Pope Pius IV's Tridentine Profession of Faith, which is binding on the souls of all Catholics, likewise expresses this principle by requiring adherence to the "received and approved rites of the Catholic Church used in the solemn administration of the sacraments." [2] The "received and approved rites of the Church" originate from the Spirit of Christ and the traditions of the apostles which have been handed down to us through the ages.

Because the "received and approved rites" are part of the Church's infallible

expression of the unchanging Deposit of Faith, as inspired and nurtured by the Holy Ghost, they cannot be set aside or changed into new rites. This is why the Ecumenical Council of Trent (1545-1563) infallibly declared:

"If anyone says that the *received and approved rites of the Catholic Church, accustomed to be used in the administration of the sacraments, may be despised or omitted by the ministers without sin and at their pleasure, or may be changed by any pastor of the churches to other new ones, let him be anathema.*"[3]

Because the Council declares anathema (that is, condemned, or severed from the Body of Christ) anyone who would set aside or change into new rites the already "received and approved rites" of the Church, proves that adherence to the "received and approved rites" is a matter of Divine Law. The absolute necessity to preserve the substance of the Church's ancient liturgical rites is a requirement of the Faith because the rites preserve and express that Faith. To hold that the Church's rites can change implies a belief that the Church's doctrines can change, because the rites preserve and express the doctrines. Hence, those who do not preserve the Church's rites (by omitting or changing them) are objectively *anathema* because they sin against the Faith itself.[4]

In light of the foregoing condemnation, the Holy Council of Trent directed that the Roman Missal be restored so that the faithful would know once and for all what is the "received and approved rite" of Mass. To that end, Pope St. Pius V issued his papal bull *Quo Primum Tempore* to legally codify "the decrees of the Holy Council of Trent" and render a definitive application of the Divine Law dogmatized by the Council. This judgment mandated a single usage of the Roman rite for the Latin Church, with some minor exceptions for usages greater than 200 years old, "in order that what has been handed down by the most holy Roman Church, the Mother and Teacher of the rest of the churches may be accepted and observed by all everywhere." [5] Hence, the sainted Pope declared the oft-called "Tridentine Mass" to be the "received and approved rite" of the Church, and which precluded the creation of any "new rite" of Mass in the future.[6] Further, because *Quo Primum* is an infallible application of Divine Law (that is, we must use only the "received and approved rites"), St. Pius V rightly declared the decree to be irreformable and valid forever.[7]

This brings us to the inevitable and troubling question: Is the *Novus Ordo* a "new rite" of Mass that comes under the *anathema* of the Council of Trent, as definitively

interpreted by St. Pius V in *Quo Primum*? The name of the rite itself (*Novus Ordo* which means “new order” or “new ordinary” of the Mass) certainly suggests the same. More importantly, so do the words of Pope Paul VI. In his November 19, 1969 General Audience address, Paul VI refers to the *Novus Ordo* as a “new rite” of Mass several times, for example: “We wish to draw your attention to an event about to occur in the Latin Catholic Church: the introduction of the liturgy of the *new rite of the Mass*.” [8] He also says, “In the new rite you will find the relationship between the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist...”[9]

We also consider the statements of the members of Paul VI’s liturgical commission that created the New Mass, such as the secretary and head of the commission, Fr. Annibale Bugnini, who said: “It is not simply a question of restoring a valuable masterpiece, in some cases it will be necessary to provide *new structures for entire rites*...it will truly be a *new creation*.”[10] Bugnini’s assistant, Fr. Carlos Braga, also stated that the New Mass has “an entirely *new foundation* of Eucharistic theology” and whose “ecumenical requirements” are “in harmony with the Church’s *new positions*.”[11] Fr. Joseph Gelineau, one of the most influential members of the commission, also said: “To tell you the truth, it is a different liturgy of the Mass. This needs to be said without ambiguity: *the Roman rite* as we knew it *no longer exists*.”[12] Therefore, both Paul VI and his appointed authors of the *Novus Ordo* admitted that the New Mass is not the rite “received” from tradition, but rather a rite created by innovation – an entirely unprecedented act in the history of the Church.

But we should not rely on these statements alone. While they may reveal the intent of the innovators, it is still necessary to look at the substance of the *Novus Ordo* rite itself. As we have seen, the Council of Trent and St. Pius V intended to preserve the substantial identity of the Roman rite forever. If the New Mass does not preserve this identity, then it cannot be considered the “received and approved rite” of the Catholic Church no matter what anyone says. Even the Second Vatican Council, which did not (and could not) mandate the creation of a new rite of Mass, recognized this truth by directing that the rites “be revised carefully in the light of sound tradition” with “due care being taken to *preserve their substance*.”[13]

The Council of Trent’s condemnation of omitting or changing the “received and approved rites” into “new rites” is best understood by referring to one of the oldest maxims of the Church’s sacred theology: “*legem credendi statuit lex orandi*.” This is a Latin phrase which means “the rule of prayer determines the rule of faith” (often referred to as “*lex orandi, lex credendi*”). In other words, the way we pray

determines what we believe. If a liturgical tradition which expresses a doctrine of the Faith is altered or removed altogether, the underlying doctrine will necessarily be compromised. This is why the “received and approved rites” must be faithfully preserved and never transformed into “other new ones” as declared by Trent.

It is very helpful to refer to the terminology of Thomistic metaphysics (substance, accidents, quantity, quality) when addressing this question. While changes to the rubrics of the Roman Missal may occur as regards their quantity or quality (improvements to what already exists), they cannot change as regards their substance (or identity). This is because such a change will compromise the underlying doctrine which the rite must express. Any changes which are not merely accidental, but which corrupt the identity of the rite (in other words, the rite does not retain its original substance) results in a “new rite” and is thus a condemnable innovation according to the Council of Trent.

For example, minor additions, such as the inclusion of St. Joseph’s name to the canon of the Mass (as was done to the *Communicantes* by Pope John XXIII), may be viewed as improving both the quality and quantity of saintly veneration. Such an accretion certainly retains the substance of the doctrine of intercessory prayer and the Communion of Saints. Subtractions from the rubrics work the same way, for example, shortening the *Confiteor* or making the Last Gospel optional (while some view such modifications as highly problematic, they do not dilute the Mass to the point of changing the substantial identity of the Roman rite; it is still the same “received and approved rite” of Mass).[14]

However, the *Novus Ordo Missae* deviates from the Roman Missal of St. Pius V to such an extent that it no longer retains the substantial identity of the Roman rite.[15] Even before the introduction of such abuses as audible canons, vernacular and *versus populum* (toward the people) celebrations, lay ministers, Communion under both species, Communion in the hand to standing communicants and the like, Cardinals Ottaviani and Bacci advised Paul VI that “the *Novus Ordo* represents, both as a whole and in its details, a striking departure from the Catholic theology of the Mass as it was formulated in Session XXII of the Council of Trent.”[16] Consequently, Cardinal Ottaviani (who, as head of the Holy Office, was responsible for safeguarding the doctrine of the Faith), in his famous intervention, concluded that the *Novus Ordo* was indeed a different rite of Mass.

For example, Ottaviani says: “To abandon a liturgical tradition which for four centuries stood as a sign and pledge of unity in worship, **and to replace it with**

another liturgy which, due to the countless liberties it implicitly authorizes, cannot but be a sign of division – **a liturgy which teems with insinuations or manifest errors against the integrity of the Catholic Faith** – is, we feel bound in conscience to proclaim, an incalculable error.”[17] He also says, “It is obvious that the *New Order of Mass* has **no intention of presenting the Faith taught by the Council of Trent**. But it is to this Faith that the Catholic conscience is bound forever.”[18] Accordingly, Ottaviani appealed to Paul VI “not to deprive us of the possibility of continuing to have recourse to the *integral and fruitful Missal of St. Pius V*, so highly praised by Your Holiness, and so deeply venerated by the whole Catholic world.”[19] Therefore, both *the critics and the creators* of the New Mass, including Paul VI himself, agree that the *Novus Ordo* differs in *substance* from the Tridentine Missal and, hence, constitutes a “new rite” of Mass.

In his July 7, 2007 *Motu Proprio “Summorum Pontificum,”* Pope Benedict XVI finally declared what faithful Catholics have always maintained: The “Tridentine Mass” of St. Pius V was “never abrogated.” Of course, that is because the Tridentine Mass is the “received and approved rite” of the Latin Church according to St. Pius V and thus can never be abrogated. However, in his decree, Pope Benedict also said that St. Pius V’s Missal and Paul VI’s Missal “are, in fact, to usages of the one Roman rite.”[20] With all due respect for the Holy Father, his statement, which is not protected by any note of infallibility, is at odds with those of Pope Paul VI who gave us the New Mass, and more importantly, cannot overrule Pope St. Pius V’s infallible application of Divine Law which holds that there is one single expression of the Roman rite in the Latin Church and not two.[21]

Further, Pope Benedict’s assertion contradicts the statements he made as Cardinal Ratzinger, while Prefect for the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith, when he said the *Novus Ordo* Mass was “a fabrication, a banal on-the-spot product.”[22] While we are very grateful for the Holy Father’s efforts to redress the liturgical wreckage of the Latin Church and restore some sanity back to our worship, to say that the “fabricated, banal on-the-spot product” of the *Novus Ordo* is a usage or expression of the ancient and venerable Roman rite codified by St. Pius V does not comport with the objective facts. It is inconsistent with the Pope’s prior statements, the statements of Paul VI and his liturgical experts, and the reality that the New Mass does not retain the identity of the Tridentine Mass, in either substance or form. As St. Thomas says, “against a fact there is no argument” (*contra factum non argumentum est*). The Holy Father’s statement could have only been made to save the sinking ship of the post-conciliar reform, which has already sunk.

Finally, Our Lord tells us “by their fruits you shall know them” (Mt 7:16,20). If the *Novus Ordo* Mass were truly a “received and approved rite” of the Church, then it could not have produced the rotten fruits we have seen since its introduction. This is most assuredly why the Vatican has suppressed the Third Secret of Fatima – because in the Secret Our Lady warns of these changes to the Holy Mass, and those in the Vatican share responsibility for them.[23] Pope Pius XII, before his election to the papacy, revealed Our Lady’s prophecy as follows: “I am worried about the Blessed Virgin’s messages to Lucy of Fatima. This persistence of Mary about the dangers which menace the Church is a divine warning against the suicide of altering the Faith, in her liturgy, her theology and her soul.”[24]

This “altering of the Faith in her liturgy” can refer only to the creation of the *Novus Ordo Missae*, which changed the rite of Mass to such a degree that it altered the Faith itself. This is why the Church has suffered unprecedented mass apostasy since the liturgical “renewal” of Vatican II. This is also why the *Novus Ordo* Mass is not a revised Missal of St. Pius V, but a “new rite” of Mass subject to the infallible prohibitions of the Council of Trent.[25] Let us continue to pray for our Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI – who has already reversed some of the damaging liturgical decisions of his immediate predecessors – that God may move him to not only fully restore the traditions of the Church, but also usher in the Triumph of the Immaculate Heart of Mary through the Consecration of Russia to that same Heart.

Notes:

1. The New Mass also engenders sacrilege through its various abusive practices (e.g., lay Eucharistic “ministers”; Communion in the hand). However, we leave that objection aside because the *Novus Ordo Missae* as originally promulgated did not prescribe these abuses. Rather, they were subsequently introduced by unlawful decisions of Roman dicasteries and bishops’ conferences.
2. *Iniunctum Nobis*, November 13, 1965. In *Auctorem Fidei* (August 28, 1794), Pope Pius VI also referred to “the present order of the liturgy, *received* and *approved* by the Church” (No. 33).
3. Canons on the Sacraments in General, Session 7, Canon 13 (March 3, 1547). Obviously, Trent recognized that not even the Pope is immune from changing the received rites into new rites, for it includes “any pastor” within its condemnation. The Second Council of Nicea also declared: “We declare that we defend free from any innovations all the written and unwritten ecclesiastical traditions that have been entrusted to us”; “If anyone rejects any written or unwritten Tradition of the Church, let him be anathema.” The Church’s ecclesiastical traditions include her liturgical rites which have been handed down both orally and in writing as recorded in her sacramentaries.
4. In other words, such innovators are excommunicated, by an act of heresy (rejecting the Divine Law which requires the celebration only of the received and approved rites), if not an act of schism (separating from the unity of liturgical worship in the Roman rite, and rejecting the authority of the Pope to mandate a single usage of the Roman Missal, by whose oath he swears to uphold and preserve the received and approved rites).
5. The Pope declared, *inter alia*, “This Missal [the Old Latin Mass] is to be used by all Churches” and “let Masses not be sung or read according to any other formula than that of this Missal published by Us.”
6. As many scholars such as Jungmann, Fortescue and Knowles have demonstrated, the Roman Missal of St. Pius V in 1570 originated with the apostles and was already compiled in its essentials by the time of Pope St. Damasus (in the

4th century) and Pope St. Gregory the Great (in the 6th and 7th century; often referred to as the Damasian/Gregorian sacramentary). As the “received” rite of the Church, the Roman Missal was “delivered” through the ages and codified once and for all by St. Pius V.

7. While a Pope cannot bind his successors to decrees on matters of discipline and governance, he certainly can do so in matters of Faith, which is what St. Pius V did in *Quo Primum*. The principle *par in parem potestatem non habet* (“equal over equal power has not”) applies to a Pope only in matters of discipline and ecclesiastical governance, but not in matters of Faith and a predecessor’s definitive application of Divine Law.

8. General Audience, November 19, 1969, paragraph 1. Pope Paul VI made these statements in introducing the new rite to the Church, which the Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship promulgated the following year.

9. Paragraph 13. In his Apostolic Constitution *Missale Romanum* (April 3, 1969), Paul VI also refers to the *Novus Ordo* as “the new Roman Missal, not the revised Missal or rite (*Nota Bene*: The Pope did not promulgate the *Novus Ordo* in this document; he decreed only that three new Eucharistic prayers and a revised form of consecration be printed in the Missal). Further, on March 26, 1970, in promulgating the *Novus Ordo*, the Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship under Cardinal Gut refers to the “new Missal” and “Order of Mass established...by Pope Paul VI” (new rites are “established” while existing rites are revised). (*Nota Bene*: Even if *Quo Primum* were purely an ecclesiastical law, a Cardinal Prefect of a Roman Congregation (Cardinal Gut) has no authority to abrogate the solemn decrees of a Roman Pontiff (St. Pius V) according to the ancient legal principle “*inferior non potest tollere legem superioris*.”

10. *La Documentation Catholique*, no. 1493.

11. Braga, ‘Il Proprium de Sanctis’, *Ephemerides Liturgicae*, 84, 1970, p.490.

12. *Demain La Liturgie*, Paris, 1976, pp.9-10. For more information, please see Fr. Paul Kramer’s *The Suicide of Altering the Faith in the Liturgy*, Terryville, CT: The Missionary Association, 2006.

13. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, Nos. 40 and 23 respectively.

14. Note that when future Popes made minor modifications to the Roman Missal after St. Pius V’s decree (e.g., Popes Clement XIII, Urban VIII and St. Pius X), their sacramentaries always referred to *Quo Primum* and the revisions being undertaken to the Mass of St. Pius V. Paul VI made no such references in his new Missal, further revealing a belief that his was a “new rite” of Mass, with no deference to the divine injunctions of Nicea II/Trent/*Quo Primum* and no tie to the historical patrimony of the Tridentine/Gregorian/Damasian rite.

15. While providing all the evidence for this conclusion is well beyond the scope of this article, suffice it to say that removing the prayers *Judica Me*, the double *Confiteor*, *Aufer a nobis*, *Oramus te Domine*, *Suscipe sancte Pater*, *Suscipe Sancta Trinitas*, *Suscipe te rogamus*, *Corpus tuum*, *Placeat tibi*, invocation of saints from the *Libera nos*, the Last Gospel, and Leonine prayers; providing the option of replacing the Roman canon with Protestant sounding “Eucharistic Prayers”; divesting the Offertory and Secret prayers of sacrificial language; modifying the *Haec commixtio*; removing the eastward facing high altar made of stone, among other things, not only fails to retain the identity of the Roman rite but is an overt attack upon it. For a thorough treatment of this topic, see Michael Davies’ *Pope Paul’s New Mass* (The Angelus Press, 1980) which demonstrates that the *Novus Ordo* follows in substance the 1549/1552 liturgy of the apostate “Archbishop” of Canterbury Thomas Cranmer (1489-1556).

16. Letter of September 25, 1969, No. 1.

17. Critical Study of the *Novus Ordo Missae*, Section VIII.

18. *Ibid.*, Section VI.

19. Letter of September 25, 1969, No. 3.

20. *Summorum Pontificum*, Article 1. The Pope says that the Missal of Paul VI is the “ordinary expression” of the Law of Prayer (*lex orandi*) while the Missal of St. Pius V is the “extraordinary expression.”

21. Noting, of course, St. Pius V’s exceptions for rites older than 200 years, such as the Ambrosian rite.

22. Ratzinger, Joseph, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2000, pp. 165-166.

23. For more background on the liturgical and theological revolution of Vatican II which is at the heart of the suppressed Third Secret of Fatima, please see John Salza and Robert Sungenis’ new book *The Consecration of Russia: How Seven Popes Failed to Heed Heaven’s Command and Brought Turmoil to the Church and the World* (November 2012) which will soon be available at Salza’s website <http://www.johnsalza.com/>

24. Quoted in Msgr. Georges Roche’s book, *Pius XII Devant L’Histoire*, pp. 52-53.

25. In response to the sedevacantists, one cannot prove that Pope Paul VI willfully rejected Trent’s teaching on the necessity of using the “received and approved rites” of the Church. Sometimes he spoke of the *Novus Ordo* as a “new rite” while other times he said it was a revision of the Tridentine rite. At a minimum, Paul VI gave confusing, equivocal and contradictory statements on the question. More importantly, Paul VI claimed to be implementing the directives of Vatican II, and Vatican II did not mandate the creation of a new rite, but only revisions to the existing Roman Missal. For these and other reasons that are beyond the scope of this article, one cannot prove Paul VI was a formal heretic (hence, we reject the thesis of sedevacantism).