

The Possibility of Reconciling the Liturgical Calendars of the Extraordinary Form and the Ordinary Form

The Calendar

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Vox populi Vox Dei

I want to express my gratitude to his Excellency Bishop Edward Slattery, for inviting me to share my thoughts with you regarding the possibility of reconciling the Liturgical Calendars of the Extraordinary and Ordinary Forms. I am afraid that my conference this morning is going to give rise to more questions and discussion than being a definitive solution or answer to the topic at hand. Addressing this topic though is clearly a necessity and within this time and context is a very positive sign of understanding. For the past several decades this has been a closed topic. Surely the interest which is now being shown in this and other related issues is due almost completely to the reign of Pope Benedict XVI and especially to the issuance of the motu proprio *Summorum Pontificum*, which clearly states the importance and sacrality of the so-called Extraordinary Form of the Latin Rite Liturgy. With the motu proprio and the placing of the Extraordinary Form back in the mainstream church, there is necessitated a very thoughtful and prayerful, and one would say cautious, look at how to reconcile both practices: namely, the *Novus Ordo Missae* and its new calendar and three year cycle of the liturgy and the Ancient Use, or Extraordinary Form, with its old calendar and its one year ever recurring liturgical cycle.

No one is able to deny that there are two different usages. One may no longer hold that the Ancient Use is no longer relevant or has any part to play in the Church's liturgy. With the advent of the *Novus Ordo Missae* in the fall of 1969 the Church saw not only a change in its liturgy, but its calendar and many of its devotions. The Ancient Use, or as it's called today, the Extraordinary Form, saw a complete demise throughout the Catholic world except in a small congregation founded in 1970 by Monsignor Marcel Lefebvre called the Society of St. Pius X, which had houses throughout the world in various places and which adhered strictly to the 1962 liturgical books and calendar. The use of the old rite and calendar was practically forbidden to all after 1969. The only Indult was given by Pope Paul VI to England, humorously called the Agatha Christi Indult. This was given due to a request by Cardinal Heenan who stated that it would seem odd to English Catholics to forbid use of such a Rite shortly after having canonized the English Martyrs who gave their very lives for this very Rite. This Indult was very limited and even in England only the Brompton Oratory applied it faithfully over the years. Little more was heard of the Extraordinary Form until 1984 when Pope John Paul II issued *Quattor Abhinc Annos*, which with the bishops permission and a special, particular, written indult a particular priest in particular circumstances would be allowed to offer the Extraordinary Form.

Then, in 1988, due to Monsignor Lefebvre consecrating four bishops in order to carry on his work of preserving the Extraordinary Form, Pope John Paul II wrote a letter excommunicating him but at the same time allowing a greater freedom to the Extraordinary Form. This letter is called *Ecclesia Dei Adflicta*. Both of these letters of Pope John Paul II had very little practical effect in freeing the Extraordinary Form from its place on the shelf of, though beautiful and ancient, a no longer useful liturgy of the Catholic Church.

All of this dramatically changed in 2007 when Pope Benedict XVI issued a motu proprio called *Summorum Pontificum*. The Extraordinary Form is now clearly endorsed by the reigning pontiff and has been given an authority direct to himself.

This reinstating of the Extraordinary Form has given rise to great interest throughout the Catholic world. And it is clear that it is not only a passing nostalgia. Not only does this interest seem profound and committed, but it pertains to the use of the liturgy and calendar as lived in the Catholic Church in the Western, or Latin, Rite since the time of Pope Gregory the Great in the 7th Century (540-609). Clearly, then, this is of profound significance. There are now in the Latin Rite Church 'two' Rites and 'two' Calendars, with the majority of believers benefiting from the New Rite and Calendar and a minority benefiting from the Old Rite and Calendar.

It is clearly the mind of the present Holy Father that more and more the Old Rite is to be more readily, wholly and positively available. This brings with it the very practical question of the use of the two different Calendars and feasts of the Saints and the Liturgical Cycle.

From what has briefly been laid out here in these notes, I think it is clear that the Old Calendar, or what is the common name for it today, “The 1962 Calendar,” has the more ancient use and its devotees are clearly committed to it remaining in the ancient format. On the other hand, the New Calendar, which has been around since only the early 1970s, clearly does not have as venerable a use nor are its devotees adverse to change.

With regard to the new calendar, the Holy Father as Cardinal Ratzinger, in his book *Feast of Faith*, had this observation to make: “one of the weaknesses of the postconciliar liturgical reform can doubtless be traced to the arm chair strategy of academics, drawing up things on paper which, in fact, would presuppose years of organic growth. The most blatant example of this is the reform of the calendar: those responsible simply did not realize how much the various annual feasts had influenced Christian people’s relation to time {...} they ignored a fundamental law of religious life”.

I would like to place emphasis on his statement of “organic growth”. According to sound principles of liturgy and even theology and according to *Sacrosanctum Concilium*: a thing is to be changed only if it benefits the whole, and the good effected outweighs the evil of the change itself. It (the change) must also arise out of a, shall we say, popular feeling or desire of the laity. Many of the changes which we have experienced over the last forty years have not been a result of these principles, but rather the consequence of an intellectual elite dictating what in their estimation is beneficial for the masses. His Holiness again expresses this in his preface to a book written by the great liturgist Klaus Gamber called *The Reform of the Roman Liturgy*: “It is difficult to say briefly what is important in this quarrel of liturgists and what is not. But perhaps the following will be useful. J.A.Jungmann, one of the truly great liturgists of our century, defined the liturgy of his time, such as it could be understood in the light of historical research, as a ‘liturgy which is the fruit of development’...”

What happened after the Council was something else entirely: in the place of liturgy as the fruit of development came fabricated liturgy. We abandoned the organic, living, process of growth and development over centuries and replaced it—as in a manufacturing process—with a fabrication, a banal, on-the-spot, product.” Gamber, in his own preface to this book, laments:

In our time it is not uncommon to have a pastor despise the traditional forms of liturgical worship outright, spurning them as outdated. After all, priests seem to say, nobody wants to look as if he missed the boat. And yet, many of the faithful cling to the traditional forms; and the forms themselves live on because of the fundamental piety contained within them. Our zealous reformers fail to recognize the obvious connection between Catholic teaching and piety. For many among the faithful, changes in the traditional liturgy also mean a change of faith itself.

Those in positions of power in the Church hierarchy did not listen to the voices counseling caution, voices which again and again urged that the traditional *Missale Romanum* should not be abolished, and the new liturgy should be allowed only on a limited basis and only *ad experimentum*. Today, we are witnessing the sad spectacle of so many bishops accepting, without comment, almost any new liturgical experiment while, when the opportunity arises, severely punishing priests who, either for practical reasons or as a matter of personal conscience, prefer to offer the traditional Mass.

Nobody objects to the Church leadership adapting liturgical forms to the realities of our time, if this is really necessary, but it has to be done with discretion and great care; in any case, without a break with Tradition. Even the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* cautions us on this point, where in Article 23 it says, “there must be no innovations unless the good of the Church genuinely and certainly requires them.”

With the introduction of the new Mass liturgical texts, and even more so because of the aforementioned practice of the hierarchy to acquiesce in giving almost complete license for the redesigning of the liturgy, the break with Church tradition is now complete. At the same time, there is no convincing evidence to show that the change in liturgy has brought about substantial improvement in the pastoral care of the faithful. Rather, what we are witnessing today is a large-scale decline in religious life (for a number of reasons). What we can say categorically is that the hopes that had been tied to liturgical reform have not been realized.

Though his statement regarded the liturgy itself, as opposed to the calendar, I think that we can apply it *mutatis mutandis* to the calendar.

In a letter to His Holiness Pope Paul VI on September 25, 1969, Cardinals Ottaviani and Bacci, comment on the original Latin text of the new liturgy:

Most Holy Father,

Having examined, and presented for the scrutiny of others, the *Novus Ordo Missae* prepared by the experts of the *Consilium ad exsequendam Constitutionem de Sacra Liturgia*, and after lengthy prayer and reflection, we feel it to be our bounden duty in the sight of God and towards Your Holiness to put before you the following considerations:

1) The accompanying critical study of the *Novus Ordo Missae*, the work of a group of theologians, liturgists, and pastors of souls, shows quite clearly in spite of its brevity that if we consider the innovations implied or taken for granted, which may of course be evaluated in different ways, the *Novus Ordo* represents, both as a whole and in its details, a striking departure from the Catholic theology of the Holy Mass as it was formulated in Session XXII of the Council of Trent. The “canons” of the rite definitively fixed at that time provided an insurmountable barrier to any heresy directed against the integrity of the Mystery.

2) The pastoral reasons adduced to support such a grave break with tradition, even if such reasons could be regarded as holding good in the face of doctrinal considerations, do not seem to us sufficient. The innovations in the *Novus Ordo* and the fact that all that is of perennial value finds only a minor place, if it subsists at all, could well turn into a certainty the suspicion already prevalent, alas, in many circles, that truths which have always been believed by the Christian people can be changed or ignored without infidelity to that sacred deposit of doctrine to which the Catholic faith is bound forever. Recent reforms have amply demonstrated that fresh changes in the liturgy could lead to nothing but complete bewilderment on the part of the faithful, who are already giving signs of restiveness and of an indubitable lessening of faith.

Louis Bouyer, an expert liturgist and a member of the concilium, had this stinging criticism to make of the new calendar: “I prefer to say nothing, or so little, about the new calendar, the handiwork of a trio of maniacs who suppressed, with no good reason, Septuagesima and the Octave of Pentecost, and who scattered three-fourths of the Saints ‘higgledy-piggledy’, all based on a notion of their own devising. Because these three hotheads obstinately refused to change anything of their work and because the Pope wanted to finish up quickly to avoid letting the chaos get out of hand, their project, however insane, was accepted.”

Perhaps this quote from F. Gerald Calvet, O.S.B., the abbot of the Monastery of St. Madeleine, in Le Barroux, France, will help show the importance of this organic growth necessary for true reform: “Since the Council, we have witnessed a break in tradition. Instead of a homogeneous and harmonious development of the rites, as was always the case until then, a ‘manufactured’ liturgy has been established.” “Liturgy is, by its very nature, transcendent. The stability of the rites must reflect the immutable celestial liturgy, and should detach man from a ceaselessly changing universe, in order to associate him with the canticle of the angels: the liturgy ought to be a native land for the faithful.”

These learned men see that not only have the “reforms” which we see around us, particularly in the liturgy, not been what Vatican II desired nor seemingly have they been beneficial to the piety of the faithful or the good of the Church at large. I think it indisputable that Pope Benedict XVI desires a reform of the “reform”. How this will involve the new calendar is difficult to say. The history, tradition, and natural harmony of the one year cycle is clearly evident from the innumerable authors who have written on it: from the time of the Fathers up to the great liturgists of the twentieth century who preceded, by a brief space of time, Vatican Council II. There is a monumental amount of material showing the principle *lex orandi, lex credendi*. Perhaps it seems to some that with the new translation of the Roman Missal, coming out in Advent of the year 2011, that the time is opportune to make an amalgamation or harmony between the two calendars. It is this author’s thought that this would perhaps not be the wisest or most prudent action at this time. We must apply the principles of sound liturgy, which is the organic growth and piety of the people, both of which would be offended by this endeavor. It is clearly necessary to study this question with greater research and understanding of the necessary organic development of the liturgy. The fear is that if any changes are made the same complaint made about the previous “reformers” will be rightly made about us as well.

I would like to make one clarification regarding this presentation and that is regarding Monsignor Lefebvre and the Society of St. Pius X. The reason for this is that we must see the liturgy and tradition of the church as a living entity and thus cannot hold that because the church at large “gave up” for more than forty years now, the old Mass and calendar that it is now considered to have been dead and that we are resurrecting something gone and forgotten or that we are “digging up” the past. My claim is that the old Mass and calendar has thrived among the people (although few in number) as it has for the past millennia and has continued to nurture their spirituality as it has always done in the past. Thus, the closest “reconciliation” that this author sees regarding the Old with the New Calendar is that there will remain in the church of the West two Liturgies and two Calendars.

There is in the sense of the faithful who follow the Ancient Use a desire to honor the recently canonized saints of popular devotion by inserting them in the calendar, which is a practice that has been done throughout the history of the Church. The insertion of these saints, namely St. Maximilian Kolbe, St. Padre Pio, and St. John Neuman, ought to be done as has commonly been done in the past, i.e. not removing any popular saint or feast, but rather placing them on what is called a ferial day or placing them in the 1st place of a little known or venerated saints who is then simply commemorated on that day. The Mass, which would be composed in honor of this saint, must then follow the classic lines and piety of the Ancient Liturgy.

This seems to be the mind of The Church at the present and thus it seems that the Commission Ecclesia Dei has been issued an imperative to this effect.

Research Authors include but are not limited to:

Dom Geuranger, The Liturgical Year
Pius XII, Mediator Dei
Pius Parsch, The Year of Grace
Dom Beudeaun, Liturgical Piety
Dom Odo Casel
Fr. Brian Harrison