

[Response of the Cardinal President of the Pontifical Commission “Ecclesia Dei” to certain questions](#)

By Shawn Tribe

As promised, a complete (unofficial) translation of "Response of the Cardinal President of the Pontifical Commission “Ecclesia Dei” to certain questions" mentioned yesterday on the NLM.

Since frequent questions have come to the Pontifical Commission “Ecclesia Dei” regarding the Motu Proprio “Summorum Pontificum”, of which many have been based on the prescriptions of the document “Quattuor abhinc annos” from the Congregation for Divine Worship to Presidents of Episcopal Conferences on the 3rd October 1984, the President of the Commission, His Eminence Dario Card. Castrillon Hoyos has felt it opportune to give the following responses:

Q. Is it acceptable to refer to the letter “Quattuor abhinc annos” to regulate questions regarding the celebration of the Extraordinary Form of the Roman Rite, that is, according to the Roman Missal of 1962?

A. Evidently not. This is because, with the publication of the Motu Proprio “Summorum Pontificum,” the regulations for the use of the Missal of 1962, previously given in “Quattuor abhinc annos” and thereafter in the Motu Proprio of the Servant of God, John Paul II “Ecclesia Dei adflicta” have become obsolete.

In fact, “Summorum Pontificum” itself, even from Art.1, explicitly affirms that “the conditions of the use of this Missal, regulated in the previous documents “Quattuor abhinc annos” and “Ecclesia Dei”, have been replaced. The Motu Proprio lists the new conditions of its use.

Therefore, it is no longer possible to refer to the restriction fixed by those two documents, regarding the celebrations according to the Missal of 1962.

Q. What are the substantial differences between the latest Motu Proprio and the two previous documents with regard to this subject matter?

A. The first substantial difference is certainly that now it is licit to celebrate the Holy Mass according to the Extraordinary Rite without the need for a special permission, called an ‘indult.’ The Holy Father, Benedict XVI, has established, once and for all, that the Roman Rite consists of two Forms, to which he has given the names “Ordinary Form” (the celebration of the Novus Ordo, according to the Missal of Paul VI of 1970) and “Extraordinary Form” (the celebration of the Gregorian Rite, according to the Missal of Blessed John XXIII of 1962), and has confirmed that the Missal of 1962 was never abrogated. Another difference is that in Masses celebrated without the faithful, every Catholic priest of the Latin Rite, diocesan or religious, may use either Missal (Art. 2). Furthermore, in Masses with or without the people, it pertains to the Parish Priest (Pastor) or rector of the church in which one intends to celebrate, to give permission to those priests who present a “Celebret” from their own Ordinary. Should he deny that permission, the Bishop, in accordance with the norms of the Motu Proprio, should ensure that permission is given (cf. Art. 7).

It is important to know that already on 12th December 1986 an “ad hoc” Commission of Cardinals (composed of the Eminent Cardinals: Paul Augustin Mayer, prefect of the Congregation for Divine Worship, Agostino Casaroli, Bernardin Gantin, Joseph Ratzinger, William W. Baum, Edouard Gagnon, Alfons Stickler, Antonio Innocenti) was formed “by the will of the Holy Father, with the task of examining the steps needed to remove the inefficiency of the Pontifical Indult “Quattuor an hinc annos” (regarding the renewal of the so-called “Tridentine Mass” in the Latin Church with the Roman Missal in the Typical Edition of 1962) given by the Congregation for Divine Worship, Prot. N. 686/84 of the 3rd October 1984.” This commission had proposed to the Holy Father John Paul II, even then, many substantial elements to achieve this purpose that have been recovered in the Motu Proprio.

I shall give a review of the report which presents the words of the Eminent Cardinals, to show how the later documents substantially reflect the vision that such an important Commission of Cardinals had so soon after “Quattuor abhinc annos”.

It was affirmed that:

- “the desire and mind of the Holy Father (John Paul II) was to promote the internal harmony of the Church, and through this, the edification of the faithful.”
- “This must be achieved also through the primary re-composition of Communion, in the practice of ‘lex orandi’, which is the healthy actualization of liturgical reform, but with the necessary respect for the legitimate needs of minority groups, who however, are distinguished not just by full theoretical orthodoxy, but also by a truly exemplary Christian way of life and a sincere and devoted attachment of the Apostolic See.”
- “Therefore, it must be the task of all: Bishops, priests and faithful, to remove the scandalous arbitrary actions, which misunderstood “creativity” has produced, producing “Wild Masses” and other desecrations which have greatly harmed those faithful, alienating them from being able to welcome the liturgical reform and the new liturgical books, including the Missal, since unfortunately it has erroneously appeared that, because of these unedifying actions of desecration, these (i.e. liturgical books) have been the cause of them.”

The same Commission proposed that:

- “It should be repeated, by the competent Dicastery, that the Pope wishes the internal peace of all the faithful of the local Churches, through the concrete use of the concessions given by him in the Indult.”
- “The bishops must do the will of the Supreme Pontiff, putting themselves in harmony with his intentions.”
- The Bishops must give an adequate response to those who wish to discourage the use of the Indult, who present it as a reason for division rather than reunification. Such a response must not be polemical, but

pastoral, explaining with delicacy and patience, the letter and spirit of the Indult.”

Furthermore, it was authoritatively affirmed that:

- “The real problem in question does not appear to be so much the artificial conflict that the Indult intended to resolve, as rather what was shown by it and was the cause of it, that is, the conflict between a correct actualization of the liturgical reform and the tolerated abuses produced by uncontrolled imagination. Therefore, apart from the Indult, action of the Holy See on a very different level is required to eliminate the noted abuses which deform that conciliar liturgical reform.
- “The Indult, as it is presented, on the one hand, gave the impression that the Mass in Latin, the so-called ‘Tridentine Mass’ was an inferior reality, of a secondary order, which was renewed only by a tolerant pity by those who gave it, and on the other hand, gave the impression, due to the heavy conditions the Indult contained, that the Holy See also thought this and would not have given the Indult unless forced to do so.”
- “It is necessary to repeat and make clear to Bishops to true will of the Holy Father, which consists, not in a negative sense, of a toleration, but positively, in a real and proper pastoral initiative, undertaken not to calm the reaction to abuses, but to re-harmonize the disagreement into reconciliation.”
- “It is necessary to remove all the conditions contained in the Indult, to eliminate the impression of the Bishops, that the Holy See did not want the Indult and the impression on the part of the faithful, that they were asking for something only poorly tolerated by the Holy See.”

In the discussions of the Commission, it emerged that:

- “the Commission was in favour of granting the Indult to all the faithful and priests who wished to use it “for edification” and not for anti-conciliar purposes.”

- “it was necessary to make known to the Bishops that the Indult did correspond to the will of the Pope that it be used and to the faithful that they should respectfully ask for the realization of the will of the Pope, such that Bishops, faced with a respectful requests, would have no more reason to refuse.”
- “It ought to be asked whether, in order to favour reconciliation, it was really necessary to have the agreement of the Bishop to celebrate the Holy Mass in Latin.”
- “As a general principle, the rigour of the limiting conditions of the Indult and all additional Episcopal conditions ought to be lessened.”
- “Regarding the reservation to Groups, since the Indult was intended for this, this should be maintained, but iuxta modum, that is, on one hand not making a group three or four people, but on the other, not prohibiting, that for groups who have received permission, others might join them in the permission given.”

The Commission noted that:

- “There was no difficulty in permitting the reading in the vernacular.”
- “Regarding the optional choice of the Lectionary, there was some reserve, fearing confusion due to the differences in the calendars of the two Missals, while seeing no difficulty in allowing the use of the prefaces of the new Missal.”
- “Additional conditions of the Bishop and those in the Indult regarding non-parochial churches and groups should be removed.”
- “Having stated that Latin, as a sign of unity should not and must not disappear from the Church and desiring that Bishops, should be ‘helped’ rather than ‘respected’ in their prerogatives, we should achieve this by reducing the complex casuistry around the Indult to criteria of greater simplicity. One might also thereby eliminate the impression that the Holy See, by this Indult, was trying to ‘give with one hand and take with the other.’ To do this, we should show the coherence with pontifical directions and development (up to the Indult) so as to prevent contradictory interpretations.”

Quoting no.23 of Sacrosanctum Concilium “regarding the criteria which must be observed in the reconciliation between tradition and progress in the liturgical reform, and no. 26 of the same Council document, regarding the norms which should take precedence in said reform, as deriving from the hierarchical and communitarian nature of the liturgy, it was proposed that, in an eventual document revising the Indult, to emphasize the objective and non-arbitrary nature of the implementation of the liturgical reform; to make known how to consider in the light of said criteria both the use of Latin, and the use of either edition of the Roman Missal; and to grant permission, at least in the major cities, that on Feast days, in every church one Mass in Latin may be celebrated, with free choice allowed between the typical editions (1962 or 1980 [sic]) of the Roman Missal.”

- “It is also proposed to widen the concession of the Indult also to Ordinaries, Superior generals, religious Provincials and others.”
- “Regarding the agreement or otherwise of the Bishop for the celebration of Holy Mass in Latin, it is to be remembered that Paul VI, had said that, in se, the priest, when celebrating privately, should do so in Latin, since the concession of the use of the vernacular was of the pastoral order, to allow the faithful to understand the content of the Rite and so participate better.”
- “The necessity of allowing a free choice in the use of either Missal for the celebration of Holy Mass in Latin is confirmed.”
- “Regarding the type of intervention required, a new pontifical document is preferred, in which, focusing on the real situation of liturgical reform, the free choice between the two Missals in Latin would be clearly presented, presenting one as a development and not as in opposition to the other and eliminating the impression that each Missal is the temporary production of each historical epoch.”
- “Referring to the desires previously expressed, it is reaffirmed that it ought to be shown that there is a clear logical line of development between the documents of the Church and the free choice of the two Missals for the celebration of Holy Mass and it is proposed that we show they are not to be considered other than as a development of the one from the other, since

liturgical norms, not being true or proper ‘laws’ cannot be abrogated, but ‘surrogated’: the earlier into the later.”

All this was made known to the Holy Father.

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