

Pros and Cons of *Summorum Pontificum*

Editor’s Note: This article originally appeared in the September 2017 print edition of *Catholic Family News* (subscribe [HERE](#)). It is reprinted today on the occasion of the eleventh anniversary of *Summorum Pontificum*, Benedict XVI’s Apostolic Letter issued *Motu Proprio* (“on his own initiative”) concerning the traditional Latin Mass.

The year of Our Lord 2017 is an anniversary year for several historic events, including the Protestant revolt (500th), the founding of Freemasonry (300th), Our Lady’s Fatima apparitions (100th), and the Bolshevik (Communist) Revolution in Russia (100th). It also marks the tenth anniversary of Pope Benedict XVI’s [Summorum Pontificum](#), the famous document in which he affirmed what traditional Catholics have always held, namely, **(1)** that the traditional Latin Mass was “never abrogated” (art. 1) and **(2)** that “any Catholic priest of the Latin rite, whether secular or regular” may offer it and “needs no permission from the Apostolic See or from his own Ordinary” (art. 2) to do so. This landmark clarification will surely go down as one of the most significant acts of Benedict’s pontificate, for while it was not a perfect document (as we shall see), *Summorum Pontificum* has done more to expand the Church’s traditional liturgy than any other papal initiative since the imposition of the *Novus Ordo Missae* (New Order of Mass).

Ten years after its publication, however, some of the problematic contents of Benedict’s *Motu Proprio* are being emphasized in a concerning manner by the current Prefect of the Congregation for Divine Worship and Discipline of the Sacraments (CDW), His Eminence Robert Cardinal Sarah, an African prelate from Guinea. In recent lectures and writings, Cardinal Sarah, known for his outspoken support of worship *ad orientem* (priest and people together facing “liturgical East” towards the Lord), has unfortunately been sounding the alarm against those who use the traditional Mass as a means of questioning (or worse, *resisting*) the Second Vatican Council. He has called for an end to “the liturgical war” by promoting what he calls “a common reformed rite” – in other words, a mixture of the *Novus Ordo* with the Mass of all time.

This article seeks to explore the proverbial weeds sown in *Summorum Pontificum* and its companion [Letter to Bishops](#), analyze Cardinal Sarah’s cultivation of those weeds, and consider the damage such weeds could inflict if they are not dealt with swiftly.

Weeds in *Summorum Pontificum* and Companion Letter

For all the good the document has done, we must not overlook certain fundamental flaws in Benedict XVI’s *Motu Proprio* “On the Use of the Roman Liturgy Prior to the Reform of 1970” (full title). Perhaps the most serious problem is his false dichotomy of “ordinary form” verses “extraordinary form,” applying the former to the *Novus Ordo* and the latter to the traditional Latin Mass. This novel distinction, which implies the two “forms” are equal in dignity, lays the foundation for his assertion, “These two expressions of the Church’s *lex orandi* (rule of prayer) will in no way lead to a division in the Church’s *lex credendi* (rule of faith); for they are two usages of the one Roman rite” (art. 1). For multiple reasons, this assertion is simply not true – not *historically* and not *theologically*.

The “extraordinary form” or traditional *Ordo Missae* (Order of Mass) developed organically from what Christ Himself instituted, the Apostles practiced, and their successors (early Church Fathers) meticulously preserved. Various prayers and ceremonies were of course added, removed, or modified *gradually* over time, but always with great reverence and care to preserve the substance of the rite as a whole. Moreover, there did come a time (relatively early, in the grand scheme of Church history) when significant alterations ceased. Fr. Adrian Fortesque (1874–1923) discusses this fact in his scholarly work on liturgical history entitled [*The Mass: A Study of the Roman Liturgy*](#) (originally published in 1912):

“The reign of St. Gregory the Great (590–604) marks an epoch in the history of the Mass. He left the Roman liturgy practically in the state in which we still have it. ... There is moreover a constant tradition that St. Gregory was the last to touch the essential part of the Mass, namely the Canon. ... **From, roughly, the time of St. Gregory we have the text of the Mass, its order and arrangement, as a sacred tradition that no one ventured to touch except in unimportant details.**”^[1] [emphasis added]

Instances in which drastic aberrations have sprung up quickly, like poisonous weeds, have always occurred in the context of heresy or schism. A prime example took place during the Protestant revolt, as recounted by Fr. Fortesque:

“**The Protestant Reformers naturally played havoc with the old liturgy.** It was throughout the expression of the very ideas (the Real Presence, Eucharistic Sacrifice and so on) they rejected. So **they substituted for it new Communion services** that expressed their principle but, of course, broke away utterly from all

historic liturgical evolution [development].” [emphasis added]

In response to these attacks, the Council of Trent

“wished the Roman Mass to be celebrated uniformly everywhere. The medieval **local uses**[2] had lasted long enough. They had become very florid and exuberant; and their variety **caused confusion**. It would be better for all Roman Catholics to go back to an older and simpler form of the Roman rite. In its eighteenth session (16 Feb. 1562) **the Council appointed a commission to examine the missal, to revise it and restore its earlier form. ... They accomplished their task very well. It was not to make a new missal, but to restore the existing one “according to the custom and rite of the holy Fathers,” [Pope St. Pius V, *Quo Primum*]** using for that purpose the best manuscripts and other documents.”[3] [emphasis added]

Thus, the Roman Missal prepared by the Tridentine liturgical commission and promulgated by Pope St. Pius V in 1570 exemplifies a true liturgical reform, that is, a restoration and codification of the ancient Roman liturgy. Such is the historic dignity and theological purity of the “extraordinary form.”

Conversely, the “ordinary form” - introduced *four hundred years later* by Pope Paul VI in 1970 - is, by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger’s own admission, “a fabrication, a banal on-the-spot product.”[4] It was concocted by a post-conciliar committee, the *Concilium*, established by Paul VI in 1964, led by Msgr. Annibale Bugnini,[5] and assisted by six Protestant ministers.[6] While it preserves many of the fixed parts of the traditional *Ordo Missae* (although often in truncated forms), “the *Novus Ordo Missae*,” in the words of Cardinals Alfredo Ottaviani and Antonio Bacci, “... 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 22 of the Council of Trent.”[7] This was their conclusion after reviewing the famous *Critical Study of the New Order of Mass*, an in-depth analysis prepared by a group of Roman theologians shortly after the publication of Paul VI’s *Missale Romanum* (Apr. 3, 1969) in which he announced the forthcoming *Novus Ordo Missae*.

How strange it is, then, to refer to this “banal on-the-spot product” as “ordinary” (normal) while calling the Roman Mass of all time “extraordinary” (atypical, unusual)! Some have theorized that Benedict’s intention was to characterize the traditional Mass as “extraordinary” in the sense of “better” or “special,” but his [Letter to Bishops](#) concerning

Summorum Pontificum clearly demonstrates otherwise. He wrote the following to quell the fears of those opposed to the traditional Mass, tellingly, because of their unwavering commitment to Vatican II:

“In the first place, **there is the fear that the document detracts from the authority of the Second Vatican Council**, one of whose essential decisions - the liturgical reform - is being called into question.

This fear is unfounded. In this regard, it must first be said that **the Missal published by Paul VI and then republished in two subsequent editions by John Paul II, obviously is and continues to be the normal Form - the *Forma ordinaria* - of the Eucharistic Liturgy.** The last version of the *Missale Romanum* prior to the Council, which was published with the authority of Pope John XXIII in 1962 and used during the Council, will now be able to be used as a *Forma extraordinaria* of the liturgical celebration. It is not appropriate to speak of these two versions of the Roman Missal as if they were ‘two Rites.’ Rather, it is a matter of a twofold use of one and the same rite.”

Here again, we see the assertion that the “two forms” of the “same rite” are equal in value and legitimacy. He repeats this emphasis further on by saying that “the two Forms of the usage of the Roman Rite can be **mutually enriching**: new Saints and some of the new Prefaces can and should be inserted in the old Missal,” and also:

“There is no contradiction between the two editions of the Roman Missal. In the history of the liturgy there is growth and progress, but no rupture. ... Needless to say, in order to experience full communion, **the priests of the communities adhering to the former usage cannot, as a matter of principle, exclude celebrating according to the new books. The total exclusion of the new rite would not in fact be consistent with the recognition of its value and holiness.**”

But this begs the question: Why would anyone, clergy or laity, insist on retaining the traditional Latin Mass if there is nothing wrong with the *Novus Ordo*? Surely, Benedict does not believe that people’s attachment to traditional liturgy is purely sentimental. He of all people no doubt understands that, from the very beginning of the “traditionalist” movement, the reasons for resisting the post-conciliar changes have always been doctrinal in nature.

This fact remains the same today for souls who discover and embrace Tradition by God’s grace. The Mass has been – and will forever remain – at the heart of the struggle to restore Tradition in the Church.

Perhaps this is why Cardinal Sarah has been so outspoken lately concerning a need for “liturgical reconciliation,” that is, a “can’t-we-all-just-get-along” compromise between those who hold fast to Tradition (cf. 2 Thess. 2:14) and those who either prefer novelty (cf. 1 Tim. 6:20-21) or who have never known anything else. The real problem, as we shall see, is that he, like Benedict, refuses to admit there are serious problems with the Council documents, including *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy).

Enter Cardinal Sarah

On June 6, 2017, Cardinal Sarah addressed those gathered at *Sacra Liturgia Milan 2017*, an international liturgical conference held in Milan, Italy.^[8] The title of his presentation was “[The Sacred Liturgy—Our Encounter with Almighty God: A Christological and Ecclesiological Perspective](#)” and, to give credit where credit is due, His Eminence did highlight some praiseworthy points. He emphasized the necessity of belonging to “the one true Catholic Church founded by [Christ],” the importance of worship *ad orientem*, the “grave evil” of failing to attend Mass on Sundays and holy days of obligation, the need for a renewed reverence towards Christ as Lord and God, and the preeminence of receiving Holy Communion on the tongue while kneeling. In light of the Fatima Centenary, he even connected his call to receive Holy Communion in the traditional manner to the apparitions of the [Angel of Peace](#):

“Fatima, also, is for us an appeal from Heaven and an explicit exhortation of God to receive Holy Communion on our knees and tongues. We celebrate this year the centenary of the apparitions of Our Lady of Fatima. Before the appearance of the Virgin Mary, in the spring of 1916, the Angel of Peace appeared to Lucia, Jacinta and Francisco, and said to them, ‘Do not be afraid, I am the Angel of Peace. Pray with me.’ ...

In the fall of 1916, at the third apparition of the Angel, the children realized that the Angel, always the same one, held in his left hand a chalice over which a Host was suspended. A few drops of Blood fell from Host into the chalice. Leaving the chalice and the Host suspended in air, the Angel came to the children, bowed to the ground, repeating three times this prayer:

Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit: I love You deeply and I offer You the

most precious Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of Jesus Christ, present in all tabernacles of the earth, in reparation for the outrages, sacrileges, and indifference by which He is offended. And through the infinite merit of His Most Sacred Heart, and the Immaculate Heart of Mary, I beg of You the conversion of poor sinners.”

While acknowledging these laudable exhortations, we must also challenge his accolades for Vatican II in general, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* in particular, and the notion of “mutual enrichment” first introduced, as we saw, by Benedict XVI. Concerning these topics, Cardinal Sarah stated:

“However, **I would like to emphasize how that Constitution [*Sacrosanctum Concilium*], like all the Conciliar reform, does not stand in opposition to what the Church celebrated before the Council.** That is why I have affirmed, on some occasions, what we understand by **the expression ‘the reform of the reform.’** This expression **means that the ordinary and extraordinary form of the same Roman rite can mutually enrich each other.** I am convinced that it would be good to make a serious study without delay on the possible enrichment of these two forms.

In some circles, unfortunately, it has become popular to speak of the ‘liturgy of Vatican II’ as something constructed according to a new ecclesiology that is separate and intentionally distinct from the ‘old’ ecclesiology and liturgical life of the Church preceding the Second Vatican Council. **We must not allow this opposition of ‘old’ and ‘new’ to continue! ... The liturgy is not drawn up anew every time there is a development in ecclesiology.** The Church before the Council and the Church after it are not two separate and different entities. **The Council did not seek a rupture, but a development and enrichment,** as it is evident when we read with serenity the history of the Church, where faith confessed and celebrated is always in continuity and never breaks with the past.”

This language is very reminiscent of Benedict’s “hermeneutic of reform in continuity” ([Christmas Greeting to the Roman Curia](#), 2005), yet neither he nor Cardinal Sarah have actually demonstrated the alleged continuity of the Council and its reforms with Tradition. Why? Because, quite simply, the Council and its reforms *are not in continuity with Tradition* – at least, not on several crucial points – and no amount of assertion can change that fact. This is precisely why the theologians who [petitioned](#) Benedict in 2011 for an in-depth review

of the Council in light of Tradition stated:

“If it should happen that this continuity cannot be proved scientifically, as a whole or in part, it would be necessary to say so calmly and candidly, in response to the demand for clarity that has been awaited for almost a half a century.”

To those who question the validity of Benedict’s “hermeneutic of continuity,” Cardinal Sarah had this to say: “To think differently and to change the doctrine or **to invent a different liturgy is to betray the Second Vatican Council and to remove the faithful from Christ**, the steadfast Rock and the spring of living water.” According to this logic, would not Paul VI, Msgr. Bugnini, the rest of the *Concilium*, and all other post-conciliar innovators be guilty of betraying the Council (not to mention the faithful), considering they *did* “invent a different liturgy”?

On the other hand, [*Sacrosanctum Concilium*](#) certainly seems to contradict Cardinal Sarah’s claim that the Council did not call for liturgical innovation. The document states, among other things:

“**The rite of the Mass is to be revised** in such a way that the intrinsic nature and purpose of its several parts, as also the connection between them, may be more clearly manifested, and that devout and active participation by the faithful may be more easily achieved.

For this purpose, **the rites are to be simplified**, due care being taken to preserve their substance; **elements which, with the passage of time, came to be duplicated, or were added with but little advantage, are now to be discarded**; other elements which have suffered injury through accidents of history are now to be restored to the vigor which they had in the days of the holy Fathers, as may seem useful or necessary.” (art. 50)

“**A new rite for concelebration is to be drawn up** and inserted into the Pontifical and into the Roman Missal.” (art. 58)

Is it a betrayal of the Council to implement these clearly mandated changes? No, the only betrayal that transpired was the betrayal of Tradition (and the faithful, who have a right to it) *by the Council*.

“Liturgical Reconciliation” via Hybrid Mass

Approximately one month after his address at the *Sacra Liturgia* conference in Milan, Cardinal Sarah published a piece entitled “[Pour une réconciliation liturgique](#)” (For a liturgical reconciliation) in the July-August 2017 issue of the French journal *La Nef*.^[9] He wrote in honor of the tenth anniversary of the publication of *Summorum Pontificum* and his article, like his conference speech, is a mixed bag (overall, however, the article contains less praiseworthy contents than the speech). To start with something positive (relatively speaking, of course), His Eminence acknowledged the following about the *Novus Ordo*:

“Let me humbly express my fear that the liturgy of the ordinary form could run the risk of turning us away from God because of the massive and central presence of the priest. He is constantly in front of his microphone, and constantly has his gaze and attention towards the people. It is like an opaque screen between God and man. When we celebrate the Mass, let us always place on the altar a large cross, easily visible, as a point of reference for all, the priest and the faithful. Thus shall we have our East, because ultimately the Crucified is the Christian East, says Benedict XVI.” [emphasis added]

With all due respect, his fear has been a reality for over four decades! Since the imposition of the *Novus Ordo* on the faithful, Mass attendance and faith in the Real Presence of Christ in the Holy Eucharist among Catholics have dropped to such abysmal lows that John Paul II described the situation as a “silent apostasy.”^[10]

While Cardinal Sarah does call for the “ordinary form” to be “enriched” by the “sacred attitudes which characterize the extraordinary form” (e.g. priest keeping thumbs/forefingers together after the Consecration, more genuflections, reception of Communion on the tongue while kneeling), he focuses most of his efforts on defending the goodness of the Council, asserting the legitimacy of the *Novus Ordo* (based on Benedict’s supposedly “definitive” magisterial teaching in *Summorum Pontificum*), and calling for peace through compromise. The following are some examples (emphasis added):

- **“The liturgy has become a battlefield, the place of clashes between the advocates of the pre-conciliar missal and those of the missal resulting from the reform of 1969.** The Sacrament of love and unity, the sacrament that allows God to become our food and our life, to divinize us while remaining in us and us in Him, has become an occasion of hatred and contempt. **The Motu Proprio has definitively put an end to this situation.** Indeed, **Benedict XVI affirms with his magisterial**

authority, ‘It is not appropriate to speak of these two versions of the Roman Missal as if it were “two Rites.” It is rather a dual use of one and the same Rite.’ **Thus does he deal with all those fighting the liturgical war.**”

- “All reform in the Church is a return to the roots, never the victory of one clan over another. Also, **those who claim that the use of the extraordinary form of the Roman rite would call into question the authority of the Second Vatican Council are gravely mistaken.** As Benedict XVI affirms with authority, ‘this fear is unfounded.’ **How can we suppose that the Council wanted to contradict what was done before? Such a hermeneutic of rupture is contrary to the Catholic spirit.** The Council did not wish to break with the liturgical forms inherited from Tradition, but rather to deepen them. The Constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium* stipulates: ‘The new forms must proceed from the old forms by a sort of organic development’ (SC 23). **It would therefore be wrong to consider that the two liturgical forms belong to two opposing theologies.**”
- “Since there is profound continuity and unity between the two forms of the Roman rite, then necessarily **the two forms must mutually enlighten and enrich one another. ... It is a priority that with the help of the Holy Spirit we examine in prayer and study how to return to a common reformed rite,** always with the aim of a reconciliation within the Church because for the moment there is still violence, contempt, and painful opposition that demolish the Church and take us away from that unity for which Jesus prayed and died on the cross.

Ten years after this prophetic act [*Summorum Pontificum*], it is up to us to implement this mutual enrichment which Pope Benedict called ‘internal reconciliation of the Church.’ **The pastoral courage of Pope Francis invites us here to be very concrete. Let us do so!**”

- “With all my heart, **I call for the implementation of the liturgical reconciliation taught by Pope Benedict in the pastoral spirit of Pope Francis!** Never must the liturgy become the banner of one faction. For some, the term ‘reform of the reform’ has become synonymous with ‘one clan over the other.’ This expression therefore risks being inappropriate. I prefer to speak of liturgical reconciliation. In the Church, the Christian has no adversary! ... **More than a ‘reform of the reform,’ it is a reform of hearts! It is a reconciliation of the two forms of the same rite, a mutual enrichment.** The liturgy must always be reconciled with itself, with its deep being!

Enlightened by the teaching of the Motu Proprio of Benedict XVI, reinforced by the audacity of Pope Francis, it is time to take this process of reconciliation

of the liturgy with itself to its conclusion.”

Features of Proposed Hybrid Mass

And what is the “conclusion” or end goal of “this process of reconciliation”? Apparently, “a common reformed rite,” that is, a mixture of the *Novus Ordo* and traditional Latin Mass into some new creation. Cardinal Sarah is calling for a synthesis of the “two forms of the one Roman Rite” according to Benedict’s principle of “mutual enrichment.” According to Sarah, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* provides “the essential criteria,” including the active participation of the faithful (SC 30), readings in the vernacular (SC 36), congregational responses (SC 48) so as to eliminate “silent spectators,” and ritual simplicity devoid of “unnecessary repetition” (SC 50). He also reiterates Benedict’s call for a common liturgical calendar and “convergence of lectionaries” as necessary components of the “common reformed rite.”

With a nod to the competent office of the Roman Curia, Cardinal Sarah says, “It is up to the Pontifical Commission *Ecclesia Dei* to proceed in this matter with prudence and in an organic way.” Regardless of what that commission decides, however, he asserts:

“In any case, **the extraordinary form** of the Roman rite can no longer be called the ‘pre-conciliar rite.’ It is now a form of the Roman liturgy which **must be illuminated, enlivened and guided by the teaching of Vatican II**. With humor, it can be said that Benedict XVI made the extraordinary form a post-conciliar liturgy!”

Forgive me, but I do not find humorous the destruction of the traditional Latin Mass being here proposed. And make no mistake, a synthesis of the old and new rite *would destroy* the traditional Roman Missal as codified and issued by Pope St. Pius V, who concluded his act of promulgation in [*Quo Primum*](#) with a most solemn warning:

“Therefore, no one whosoever is permitted to alter this notice of Our permission, statute, ordinance, command, precept, grant, indult, declaration, will, decree, and prohibition. Would anyone, however, presume to commit such an act, he should know that he will incur the wrath of Almighty God and of the Blessed Apostles Peter and Paul.”

Updated Postscript

Since this article was first published in September 2017, Louis Tofari of [Romanitas Press](#) has written some excellent pieces for CFN concerning rumors about a forthcoming “Hybrid Missal”. I strongly encourage all readers to check out his articles (available [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#)) and stay tuned for further treatments of liturgical matters by Mr. Tofari, an expert on all things liturgical and regular CFN contributor.

To purchase CD copies of Mr. Tofari’s 2018 CFN Conference speech, “The Roman Mass: Bulwark of the Faith”, call **1-800-474-8522**.

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Notes

[1] Fr. Adrian Fortesque, *The Mass: A Study of the Roman Liturgy* (Fitzwilliam: Loreto Publications, 2003), p. 172-173.

[2] i.e. slight variations of the Roman Rite as celebrated in particular cities or regions.

[3] Fortesque, *The Mass: A Study of the Roman Liturgy*, p. 205-206.

[4] See Introduction to the French edition of *The Reform of the Roman Liturgy* by Msgr. Klaus Gamber (*La Reforme Liturgique en question* [Le-Barroux: Editions Sainte-Madeleine, 1992], pp. 7-8).

[5] Bugnini (1912-1983), an Italian Vincentian priest, was ordained in 1936 and enjoyed a long career in the field of liturgical reform. During the reign of Pius XII and into the beginning of John XXIII’s pontificate, he served as secretary of the Commission for Liturgical Reform (1948-1960) and subsequently of the preparatory liturgical commission for Vatican II (1960-1962). Although not reappointed by John XXIII at the start of the Council, his hiatus was short lived. Paul VI recruited him in early 1964 to once again serve as secretary, this time, for the *Concilium* (Committee for Implementing the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy) (1964-1969). He retained his post as the *Concilium* became the Congregation for Divine Worship (1969-1975) and was consecrated Titular Archbishop of Diocletiana during his tenure (1972). Then, without any public explanation, he was abruptly reassigned to the Holy See’s diplomatic corps (1976-1982), allegedly due to the discovery of evidence implicating him as being a Freemason (see Michael Davies, “[How the liturgy fell apart: the enigma of Archbishop Bugnini](#)”, *AD2000* Vol. 2, No. 5 [June 1989]).

[6] See Louis Tofari, “[What About those Six Protestants and the New Mass?](#)”, *The Remnant*, Aug. 30, 2013.

[7] Letter to Paul VI dated Sept. 25, 1969 (see *The Ottaviani Intervention: Short Critical Study of the New Order of Mass* [Rockford: TAN Books and Publishers, 1992], p. 27).

[8] The name “Sacra Liturgia” and corresponding logo appear to be used by multiple affiliate groups around the world (e.g. Sacra Liturgia USA, Sacra Liturgia UK). According to the “Sacra Liturgia” [Facebook page](#), the organization “is committed to an authentic interpretation of the Second Vatican Council’s mandate for liturgical reform; an assessment of the implementation of *Sacrosanctum Concilium* that is faithful to the Council; an ongoing consideration of the value of a possible reform of the reform; the integral celebration of the modern rites with an optimal *ars celebrandi*, and an openness to the value and riches of the *usus antiquior* in the Church today.”

[9] English translation of excerpts provided in this article are courtesy of Peter Romero, a longtime friend and supporter of *Catholic Family News*.

[10] Apostolic Exhortation [Ecclesia in Europa](#) (June 28, 2003), n. 9.