Various sources are reporting that the Vatican is preparing to eliminate the Pontifical Commission *Ecclesia Dei*, perhaps as early as January 2019. See for example, this report from *Rorate Caeli*. The commission was named after the *Motu Proprio* by John Paul II of the same name which was issued in response to the consecration of four bishops by Archbishop Lefebvre. In the fourth paragraph of the document John Paul II identifies what he saw as the root disagreement between himself and Archbishop Lefebvre to be an "incomplete and contradictory notion of tradition." He went on to specify what he meant: "Incomplete, because it does not take sufficiently into account the *living* character of Tradition, which, as the Second Vatican Council clearly taught, 'comes from the apostles and progresses in the Church with the help of the Holy Spirit.'" (emphasis added) In so doing John Paul II made clear that the primary difficulty was doctrinal and not liturgical. A "preference" for the former liturgical rite was tolerable as long as the one offering the traditional form makes clear he accepts the novelties of Vatican II including the concept of "living tradition" that "progresses." John Paul II asks the bishops of the world to be tolerant of "the feelings of all those who are attached to the Latin liturgical tradition." The point is very clear, it is permitted to prefer the traditional forms of Mass out of an emotional attachment, but to do so on principle or for reasons of doctrine is not permitted.

Benedict XVI when issuing his *Motu Proprio Summorum Pontificum* made clear that being emotionally attached to the older form of Mass was not problematic as long as Vatican II was accepted. In his letter to the bishops accompanying *Summorum Pontificum* he contrasted those attached to Archbishop Lefebvre and his successors from "Many people who clearly accepted the binding character of the Second Vatican Council, . . . [who] nonetheless also desired to recover the form of the sacred liturgy that was dear to them." John Paul II (in *Ecclesia Dei* paragraph 6.a.) and Benedict XVI made clear that the primary purpose of the *Ecclesia Dei* Commission was not liturgical but to work to draw clerics of the Society of St. Pius X and religious communities affiliated with it away from the SSPX and into a canonical structure under the Commission. Steadily from 1988 onward the Commission pursued this mission facilitating most notably the priests who left the SSPX to form the Fraternity of St. Peter, the Institute of the Good Shepherd, the Apostolic Administration of St. John Vianey, and the Sons of the Redeemer (on Papa Stronsay).

Two years after *Summorum Pontificum*, Benedict XVI made even more clear that the primary mission of the *Ecclesia Dei* Commission was not liturgical but doctrinal when he ended the Commission's independent status within the Curia not by placing it under the Congregation for Divine Worship (which oversees the liturgy of the Church and which would be the natural home of a commission whose purpose was liturgical) but the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

Copyright © catholicfamilynews.com. All rights reserved.

The Commission has always been in the awkward position of having to answer liturgical questions and make legal determinations regarding the rubrics of the Traditional Mass when it has no connection with the aspect of the papal bureaucracy that specializes in liturgy. Benedict XVI in his 2009 reorganization of the *Ecclesia Dei* Commission emphasized that the issues dividing the Vatican and the SSPX were doctrinal. The SSPX also has consistently maintained the same perspective as recently as the communique following the November meeting with the Prefect for the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

In light of this history, are we to consider the rumors of the amalgamation of the *Ecclesia Dei* Commission as a positive development or an omen of bad things to come? in my opinion it is likely neither. It merely rearranges the deck chairs and does not fundamentally alter the discussions with the SSPX. It was clear from at least 2012 that the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith was directing those discussions and making the important decisions. The Secretary of the *Ecclesia Dei* Commission, Archbishop Guido Pozzo, proved an unreliable source for the Vatican's true position. His apparent publicly stated preference for a practical agreement resulting in canonical regularization without the SSPX accepting as true all statements in Vatican II and the post-Councilior teaching was overruled by the Commission who demanded a signed capitulation to the Council and an acceptance of the legitimacy of the New Mass. Thus, at most the amalgamation may eliminate a confusing layer of bureaucracy but would not fundamentally change the dynamic. It could end the curial career of Archbishop Pozzo but aside for the effect on him, there would likely be any large impact.

On the bad omen side, I believe it is unlikely a prelude to an attempted suppression of *Summorum Pontificum*. If Francis wanted to eradicate celebration of the Old Mass by the canonically recognized communities he would simply do so. He showed no hesitancy to destroy the Franciscans of the Immaculata for their movement toward a wider use of the Old liturgy. He simply ignored law and equitable juridical processes. Given this and other heavy handed suppression of opponents, he would not seem to feel constrained by the existence of the commission. Finally, he seems to share the position of his two predecessors that emotional attachment to the older liturgies can be tolerated within the Church (even though he may have more of a personal aversion to the older forms than Benedict) *as long as those attached do not combine that attachment with a public resistance to the novelties of Vatican II as progressing even further under his direction*. Personal preference for use of the older forms can still be purchased with silence on the novelties that Francis is taking to their natural conclusions. The real objective is to convince anyone who refuses the new liturgy because of its connection to doctrinal novelties to abandon the doctrinal objection. This objective is clearly preserved by simply streamlining the bureaucratic structure.

Copyright © catholicfamilynews.com. All rights reserved.

Thus, if the reports turn out to be correct, and the *Ecclesia Dei* Commission disappears, I think it unlikely to have a material effect on the situation on the ground.

Copyright © catholicfamilynews.com. All rights reserved.