

Editor's Note: In light of this week's news concerning the possibility of "imminent reform" of *Summorum Pontificum* by Pope Francis (see [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#) for details), we offer readers the following article by our longtime friend and contributor Christopher Ferrara, which first appeared in the March 2019 Print Edition of CFN (click [HERE](#) to subscribe) under the title, "Bergoglio Abolishes Pontifical Commission *Ecclesia Dei*: No Big Deal or Prelude to Total Abrogation of *Summorum Pontificum*?"

At the time, Ferrara was responding to Pope Francis' then-recent suppression of the Pontifical Commission *Ecclesia Dei* (PCED) by means of an [Apostolic Letter](#) (Jan. 17, 2019). "Certain commentators have dismissed the move as an inconsequential simplification of the Vatican organizational chart," Ferrara observed. "I beg to differ. For the reasons that follow, I believe that the suppression of the PCED is the prelude to an attempted reversal of the Latin Mass revival launched by Benedict XVI's historic Apostolic Letter *Summorum Pontificum* (SP). The aim would be a quarantine of the traditional Latin Mass within a few established societies or communities, followed by ruthless suppression of its celebration by those bishops who have never accepted SP and have sought in every way to undermine its application."

We hope this article will be helpful for framing this week's news in a wider context, one astutely identified by Ferrara over two years ago.

Bergoglio Abolishes Pontifical Commission *Ecclesia Dei* No Big Deal or Prelude to Total Abrogation of *Summorum Pontificum*?

Introduction

On January 17, 2019, Pope Bergoglio issued *motu proprio* ("on his own initiative") an [Apostolic Letter](#) suppressing the Pontifical Commission *Ecclesia Dei* (PCED) and absorbing its functions entirely into a new section of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF). The PCED will no longer have a separate juridical existence or budget.

Certain commentators have dismissed the move as an inconsequential simplification of the Vatican organizational chart. I beg to differ. For the reasons that follow, I believe that the suppression of the PCED is the prelude to an attempted reversal of the Latin Mass revival launched by Benedict XVI's historic Apostolic Letter [Summorum Pontificum](#) (SP). The aim

would be a quarantine of the traditional Latin Mass within a few established societies or communities, followed by ruthless suppression of its celebration by those bishops who have never accepted SP and have sought in every way to undermine its application.

To make my case, I must first recall what SP established for liberation of the traditional Mass from its false imprisonment based on the fraudulent claim that Paul VI had forbade its celebration when he promulgated his disastrous New Mass, the creature of Annibale Bugnini's infamous Consilium.

Pope Benedict's Liberation of the Traditional Latin Mass

SP, ending the "indult" (special permission) regime established by John Paul II, declared that the traditional Mass, last codified in the Missal of 1962, was "*never abrogated*." And in his [letter to the world's bishops accompanying SP](#), Benedict further declared: "this Missal was *never juridically abrogated* and, consequently, in principle, *was always permitted*."

Always permitted! Thus ended a fraud upon the faithful that Church leaders had perpetrated for nearly forty years. The fraud was assisted by Paul VI himself, who allowed the false impression of an abrogation of the traditional Latin Mass to spread throughout the Church, even though he rejected Bugnini's request for a declaration that the traditional Mass was "definitively abrogated" because it would be "interpreted as 'casting odium on the liturgical tradition.'"[\[1\]](#)

SP further provided as follows:

- Every priest may celebrate "private" Masses using the traditional Missal without permission from his bishop or the Holy See, and such Masses "may... also be attended by faithful who, of their own free will, ask to be admitted." (Arts. 2, 4)
- All communities or institutes of consecrated life may celebrate Mass according to the traditional Missal, assuming a proper vote of the members where required. (Art. 3)
- Every pastor of every parish is free, without need of episcopal or Vatican permission, to provide for public celebration of the traditional Mass every Sunday whenever a "stable group" of the faithful requests it. (Art. 5)
- The pastor of any parish is free — without permission from Rome or the local bishop — to "allow celebrations in this extraordinary form for special circumstances such as marriages, funerals or occasional celebrations, e.g., pilgrimages..." (Art. 5)
- Pastors of parishes are also free "to grant permission to use the earlier ritual for the

How Important Was PCED for Protecting Wider Access to the Traditional Mass?

administration of the Sacraments of Baptism, Marriage, Penance, and the Anointing of the Sick, if the good of souls would seem to require it.” (Art. 9)

- Clerics are also free to “use the Roman Breviary promulgated by Bl. John XXIII in 1962.” (Art. 9)
- Finally, any bishop is free to erect “a personal parish in accordance with can. 518 for celebrations following the ancient form of the Roman rite, or to appoint a chaplain” for that purpose — that is, to establish an exclusively Latin Mass parish. (Art. 10)

Thus did SP lay the groundwork for a universal revival of the Latin liturgical tradition. But Pope Benedict did not stop there.

Crucial Role of PCED in Securing the Right to Liturgical Tradition

SP also provides — and this is critical to understanding the significance of Bergoglio’s move — that the PCED, first established solely to address “regularization” of priests in the Society of Saint Pius X (SSPX), would now have a new appellate function for communities or members of the faithful who might be denied their right to the traditional Mass and other rites as guaranteed by the norms of SP summarized above: “The same Commission, in addition to the faculties which it presently enjoys, will exercise the authority of the Holy See in ensuring the observance and application of these norms” (Art. 12).

Confronted by the murmuring of numerous bishops against SP and the rights of the faithful it secures, Benedict approved PCED’s promulgation, on April 30, 2011, of an Instruction ([*Universae Ecclesiae*](#)) for the implementation of SP. The Instruction reaffirmed that the Pope’s intention in SP was that of “offering to *all the faithful* the Roman Liturgy in the *Usus Antiquior*, considered as a precious treasure to be preserved” and “effectively *guaranteeing and ensuring* the use of the *forma extraordinaria* for *all* who ask for it...” (Art. 8).

Note well: Under SP and the Instruction, the Latin Mass is to be made available to *all* the faithful who ask for it. In keeping with that mandate, the 2011 Instruction slammed shut various loopholes certain bishops were attempting to create to evade enforcement of SP, while reaffirming that the PCED has authority to overrule them upon petitions from the faithful individually or in community. To summarize some key provisions:

- SP is “a universal law for the Church,” not a mere series of suggestions for bishops to consider. (Art. 2)
- SP enforces “the traditional principle, recognised from time immemorial and necessary to be maintained into the future, that ‘*each particular Church must be in accord with*

How Important Was PCED for Protecting Wider Access to the Traditional Mass?

the universal Church not only regarding the doctrine of the faith and sacramental signs, but also as to the usages universally handed down by apostolic and unbroken tradition. These are to be maintained not only so that errors may be avoided, but also so that the faith may be passed on in its integrity, since the Church's rule of prayer (lex orandi) corresponds to her rule of belief (lex credendi).'" (Art. 3, emphasis in original)

- No less than St. Gregory the Great and St. Pius V are cited for the proposition that the traditional *Missale Romanum* "has enjoyed a particular prominence in history, and was kept up to date throughout the centuries...." (Art. 4)
- "On account of its venerable and ancient use, the *forma extraordinaria* [traditional Mass] is to be maintained with appropriate honor." (Art. 6)
- ".... What was sacred for prior generations, remains sacred and great for us as well, and *cannot be suddenly prohibited* altogether or even judged harmful [citing Benedict's letter to the bishops accompanying SP]." (Art. 7)
- Every bishop must "undertake all necessary measures to ensure respect for the *forma extraordinaria* of the Roman Rite, according to the *Motu Proprio Summorum Pontificum*." (Art. 14)
- The "stable group of faithful" who have the right to a traditional Mass in a parish means not only "some people of an individual parish who... come together by reason of their veneration for the Liturgy in the *Usus Antiquior*" but also "persons coming from different parishes or dioceses, who gather together in a specific parish church or in an oratory or chapel for this purpose." (Art. 15)
- A priest visiting a parish must be permitted to celebrate his Mass according to the traditional Missal. (Art. 16)
- Not only secular but religious priests have the right to celebrate their "private" Masses according to the traditional Missal without any "special permission from...superiors." (Art. 23)

PCED's Decisive Role Highlighted in 2011 Instruction

The 2011 Instruction also affirmed the PCED's decisive role as enforcer of the rights of the faithful to the whole of liturgical tradition:

- "The Sovereign Pontiff has conferred upon the Pontifical Commission *Ecclesia Dei* ordinary vicarious power for the matters within its competence, in a particular way for

monitoring the observance and application of the provisions” of SP. (Art. 9)

- Accordingly, the PCED has the power “to decide upon recourses [appeals] legitimately sent to it, *as hierarchical Superior*, against any possible singular administrative provision of an Ordinary which appears to be contrary to the Motu Proprio” — meaning that the PCED, as hierarchical superior, can overrule any local bishop who defies the provisions of SP. (Cf. Arts. 11-13)
- “In cases of controversy or well-founded doubt about the celebration in the *forma extraordinaria*, the Pontifical Commission *Ecclesia Dei* will adjudicate.” (Art. 13)

In sum, with SP and the 2011 Instruction, Benedict XVI established, at least on paper, a strong canonical framework freely allowing for a widespread and unhindered revival of liturgical tradition in parishes as well as in societies, institutes and orders *to be enforced by the PCED as the hierarchical superior of the bishops* with the power to overrule them on petitions from the faithful.

To this framework Benedict added, by his Apostolic Letter [*Ecclesiae Unitatem*](#) (July 2, 2009) the proviso that the PCED would be organically linked to the CDF such that its President would henceforth be Prefect of the CDF. Nevertheless, the PCED would continue with “its own allocation of staff,” including a Secretary and officials, and thus would continue to exercise its enforcement function with respect to the rights secured by SP. This reorganization, Benedict declared, was in order to facilitate discussions with the SSPX following his previous [remission](#) of the purported excommunication of its four bishops on January 21, 2009. These discussions were to be had under the CDF’s auspices because, [according to Benedict](#), “the problems that must now be addressed with the Society are essentially doctrinal in nature” and the CDF is the Vatican dicastery whose competence is doctrine.

What Bergoglio Has Really Done

With this background in view, it should be apparent that Bergoglio’s Apostolic Letter entirely suppressing the PCED substantially negates Benedict XVI’s canonical framework for the protection and spread of the traditional Latin Mass and the other traditional rites and liturgical books throughout the Church. A prudently close reading of the Letter reveals a sinister intention: to quarantine use of the Latin liturgy and traditional sacramental rites and books within a few approved orders and societies while ending universal access to liturgical tradition by all priests and laity as enforced by the PCED.

If this claim seems extravagant, consider the following language from the [Apostolic Letter](#)

How Important Was PCED for Protecting Wider Access to the Traditional Mass?

itself:

- “For over thirty years the Pontifical Commission *Ecclesia Dei*...has carried out...the task of collaborating...in facilitating the full ecclesial communion of priests, seminarians, communities or individual men and women religious connected with the Fraternity founded by Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre...”
- “... [B]y virtue of the Motu Proprio *Summorum Pontificum* of 7 July 2007, the Pontifical Commission extended the authority of the Holy See to those Institutes and Religious Communities which had adhered to the extraordinary form of the Roman Rite and had assumed the precedent traditions of religious life...”
- “Two years later, my Venerable Predecessor Benedict XVI, with the Motu Proprio *Ecclesiae Unitatem* of 2 July 2009 reorganized the structure of the Pontifical Commission.... [C]onsidering that...the questions addressed [regarding SSPX]...were of a primarily doctrinal nature, he connected it more systematically to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith...”
- “Considering that today the conditions which led the holy Pontiff John Paul II to institute the Pontifical Commission *Ecclesia Dei* have changed; noting that *the Institutes and Religious Communities which customarily celebrate in the extraordinary form have today found proper stability of number and of life*; recognizing that the aims and questions addressed by the Pontifical Commission *Ecclesia Dei* are of a *predominantly doctrinal order*...”
- “I decree that... The Pontifical Commission *Ecclesia Dei*, instituted on 2 July 1988 with the Motu Proprio *Ecclesia Dei adflicta*, is decommissioned [*soppressa*, “suppressed”, in the original Italian].”
- “Furthermore, I establish that this Motu Proprio – to be observed *notwithstanding anything to the contrary, even if worthy of specific mention* – be promulgated by publication in the 19 January 2019 issue of *L’Osservatore Romano*, entering immediately into force, and that it be inserted thereafter into the official register of the Holy See, the *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*.”

It doesn’t take a lawyer to discern in the quoted language an implied negation of everything the now-abolished PCED was empowered to do in order to ensure that under SP the Church’s Latin liturgical patrimony be made available “to all the faithful,” “*all* who ask for it” and every priest. Consider the following points:

First, notice how the Letter clearly implies that only a few “Institutes and Religious

How Important Was PCED for Protecting Wider Access to the Traditional Mass?

Communities” — not all the faithful — were ever the beneficiaries of SP and the PCED’s powers to enforce SP’s norms and that today these institutes and communities have “stability of number.”

Second, the crucial phrase “stability of *number*” is a dead giveaway of an intention to limit use the traditional Mass and sacramental rites to the few institutes and communities that already use them — no additions to this “stabile” list permitted! — while obrogating (impliedly repealing a prior law by enacting a new law) the Benedictine mandate that the traditional Mass and sacraments be made available to *all individual members* of the faithful and *all individual priests* who request them.

Third, Bergoglio’s intention to obrogate Benedict’s universally operative pro-Latin liturgy regime is confirmed by the Letter’s provision that “this Motu Proprio – to be observed *notwithstanding anything to the contrary, even if worthy of specific mention....*” This is classic canonical language for a blanket obrogation (again, implied repeal) of all prior Church law deemed inconsistent with new legislation.

Fourth, accordingly, the Letter clearly implies that the new section of the CDF replacing the PCED as a separate entity will exist *solely* to conduct discussions with the SSPX on its supposed “doctrinal” differences with Rome, *not* to ensure access to the traditional Mass and sacraments throughout the Church.

In sum, the right of any aggrieved member of the faithful to have access to the Church’s liturgical patrimony, guaranteed under both SP and the 2011 Instruction, now quietly disappears without a trace, along with the former PCED’s crucial function as *hierarchical superior* for enforcement of SP’s norms against local interference.

If anyone doubts that this is precisely the outcome contemplated by Bergoglio and his collaborators, consider a prominent article published in the January 19, 2019 issue of *L’Osservatore Romano*, to which [LifeSiteNews has alerted its readers](#). In the article, distributed to journalists by the Vatican Press Office, one Nicola Gori tellingly observes:

“It is therefore not a question of a wholesale suppression [of the PCED], but of a transfer of competencies, given that *the main axis on which the activity will be based has been restricted to the doctrinal sphere....* This means that progress has been made in communion and therefore the current *motu proprio* offers implicit recognition to the Pontifical Commission which, with its efforts and activity, *has fulfilled its duties.*”

How Important Was PCED for Protecting Wider Access to the Traditional Mass?

Note well: According to Gori and the Vatican Press Office, the PCED's work is done, and now all that remains is for the CDF to continue its endless palaver with the SSPX's representatives about vague "doctrinal differences." None of these "doctrinal differences," by the way, have ever been reduced to actual propositions stating in so many words the new doctrines arising from Vatican II and its aftermath that SSPX adherents would be required to accept in order to be considered Catholics in good standing. That is because no such propositions exist, the Church having no power to announce new doctrines at Vatican II or otherwise.

So, everything else the PCED did (or was supposed to do) for the benefit of the faithful in general has been extinguished by the stroke of a pen. As Gori confirms: "Over the years, the institutes and religious communities that celebrate in the extraordinary form of the Roman Rite have also reached a certain stability of both people and life. And this evolution has also gradually led to a reduction in the work of the Pontifical Commission." This "stability" obviously means *no further growth* in the number of people outside "institutes and religious communities" that "celebrate in the extraordinary form of the Roman Rite." In short, a Bergoglian quarantine of the Latin liturgical tradition.

Adding to the trail of breadcrumbs, the newly appointed editorial director of Vatican communications, the prominent Vaticanist and relentless Bergoglian apologist Andrea Tornielli, has published an [editorial](#) in which he states tellingly as follows:

"The emergency no longer exists, thanks also to the decision of Benedict XVI to permit the use of the 1962 Roman Missal (promulgated by Pope St. John XXIII before the beginning of the Second Vatican Council).

For this reason, Pope Francis said in the *motu proprio* that 'the Institutes and Religious communities which habitually celebrate in the extraordinary form have today found their own stability of number and life'. Their existence is therefore consolidated, and all the functions are transferred to the new section which, among other things, will consist of the same staff previously employed by the Commission....

This most recent change is motivated by the fact that the aims and questions dealt with by the Commission 'are of a primarily doctrinal order'. This is a reference to the dialogue between the Holy See and the Priestly Fraternity of Saint Pius X, or FSSPX, founded by Archbishop Lefebvre."

How Important Was PCED for Protecting Wider Access to the Traditional Mass?

Like the Apostolic Letter itself and the article by Gori, Tornielli's editorial conspicuously fails to mention the former PCED's role in ensuring that the traditional Mass and sacraments would be available to *all* priests and *all* faithful who ask for them, not just those attached to "the Institutes and Religious communities which habitually celebrate in the extraordinary form [and] have today found their own stability of number and life." As to the latter, Tornielli says "their existence is therefore consolidated...." Meaning *juridically frozen* as the only vehicles for access to the traditional Mass and sacraments.

I hasten to add that this does not mean that bishops here and there will not continue to be favorable to a wider access to liturgical tradition in various dioceses, where Latin Mass parishes and chapels have exploded in number since SP was promulgated. But it *does* mean that bishops hostile to liturgical tradition will no longer have to contend with the PCED as a "hierarchical superior" with the power to overrule them should they refuse to comply with the norms of SP and the 2011 Instruction. They can now simply point to Bergoglio's suppression of the PCED and say to those requesting access to liturgical tradition: *As the Pope has declared, you have your religious institutes and communities, which are stable in number. Go look for one of them if you want a Latin Mass.*

All that remains is a formal *abrogation* of SP — i.e., its complete and explicit repeal, as distinct from *obrogation* — on the same ground on which the PCED was suppressed: that there is no longer any need for SP as "the Institutes and Religious communities which habitually celebrate in the extraordinary form have today found their own stability of number and life." I would venture that Bergoglio is quite disposed and is even planning to abrogate SP upon the death of Pope Benedict, should Bergoglio survive him. Then the way would be open to a papal or local episcopal *diktat*, once again reducing access to the Latin Mass to a mere indulgence that can be granted or withdrawn at will. The principle (to quote Benedict) that "what was sacred for prior generations, remains sacred and great for us as well, and *cannot be suddenly prohibited*" would once again be buried by a brutal exercise of raw power.

Pozzo Removed

While the staff of the suppressed PCED is supposed to be carried over into the superseding section of the CDF, whose work will now apparently be limited to "doctrinal" discussions with the SSPX, in another of the cunning maneuvers that have characterized this pontificate Bergoglio has [removed](#) one, and only one person, from the former PCED's staff: its Secretary, Monsignor Guido Pozzo. By a separate decree, Pozzo was humiliatingly demoted to finance chief for the Pontifical Musical Choir.

It was Pozzo who, while serving as PCED's Secretary, famously [described](#) a "para-conciliar

ideology” according to which, in the name of Vatican II, a “foreign way of thinking has entered into the Catholic world, stirring up confusion, seducing many souls, and disorienting the faithful.” There is in the Church today, said he, “a ‘spirit of self-demolition’ that pervades modernism....”

And it was Pozzo who expressed strong sympathy for the position of the SSPX regarding the notoriously problematic texts of the Council (including *Nostra Aetate*, *Unitatis Redintegratio*, and *Dignitatis Humanae*) whose compatibility with Tradition is far from evident. Regarding the “doctrinal” discussions with the SSPX, Pozzo uttered the forbidden thought that the conciliar documents at issue are not strictly doctrinal but in many places pastoral or prudential in character and therefore may be subjected to legitimate criticism as such. Pozzo even dared to [speak the truth](#) that “the Church’s tradition is developing, *but never in the sense of a novelty* – which stands in contrast to the previous teaching – but [rather] a deeper understanding of the *Depositum fidei*, the authentic deposit of the Faith.”

So, obviously, Pozzo had to go. Which means there is no one left among the former staff of the PCED who will admit that the “doctrinal discussions” are not really about strict doctrine but rather ambiguous and novel pronouncements which, being novelties, cannot possibly pertain to the perennial Faith and thus cannot be forced upon Catholics as objects of belief. “Dialogue” and “ecumenism,” for example, are not articulable doctrines but novel ecclesial activities in which Church leaders have vainly engaged for half a century with no results except grave damage to the integrity of the Faith through the now-prevalent attitude “which considers all religions to be more or less good and praiseworthy”—precisely the grave error condemned by Pope Pius XI in [Mortalium Animos](#) as leading to “naturalism and atheism” and ultimately to “altogether abandoning the divinely revealed religion” (n. 2).

Conclusion

Perhaps I will be proven wrong in my prediction that the suppression of the PCED is but the opening salvo in Bergoglio’s attack on the Latin liturgical revival launched by his predecessor. We shall soon see. But there is one prediction in which we can all be completely confident: the Church’s eventual full recovery from the madness of the post-conciliar “updating” of the Church. When that happens, coincident with the Triumph of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, this pontificate and the preceding ecclesial chaos of which it represents the apex will fade from memory to reside only in the annals of the most embarrassing failures of the Church’s fallible human element.

Want more great Catholic content? [SUBSCRIBE](#) to *Catholic Family News* and help support our work! [DONATIONS](#) are also accepted and greatly appreciated. God bless you and thanks for reading!

How Important Was PCED for Protecting Wider Access to the Traditional Mass?

[1] Annibale Bugnini, *The Reform of the Liturgy: 1948-1975* (Collegeville, MN.: The Liturgical Press, 1990; English edition), p. 300.