



VATICAN - The Motu Proprio Summorum Pontificum is "a sign for the whole Church with regard to certain theological-disciplinary principles to be safeguarded in view of the profound renewal, so desired by the Council." - Interview with Archbishop Albert Malcolm Ranjith, secretary of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments

Vatican City (Agenzia Fides) - The Motu Proprio Summorum Pontificum promulgated by Pope Benedict XVI on 7 July 2007 came into force on 14 September. The document treats the Rite of Saint Pius V revised in 1962 by Pope John XXIII. The Motu Proprio (Latin, "of his own accord") allows the celebration of Mass using the Tridentine Missal without the formerly requested permission of the local bishop. The Second Vatican Council and in particular the Liturgical Renewal of 1970 promoted by Pope Paul VI, issued a new Missal to replace the old Missal. Although the latter was never officially abolished, to use the old Missal, the faithful had to obtain permission from the local bishop. This permission was sanctioned by a Motu Proprio: *Ecclesia Dei adflicta* signed by Pope John Paul II on 2 July 1988. Now, with this new Motu Proprio, permission is no longer necessary and any «stable group» of faithful may ask the parish priest to celebrate Mass using the old Missal.

On the subject of the Motu Proprio Summorum Pontificum, Archbishop Albert Malcolm Ranjith, secretary of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments was kind enough to answer some questions put by Fides.

Archbishop Ranjith, in your opinion what is the significance of the Motu Proprio Summorum Pontificum?

In this decision I see not only the Holy Father's desire to open the path for followers of Monsignor Lefebvre to return to the full communion of the Church, but also a sign for the whole Church with regard to the safeguarding of certain theological-disciplinary principles with a view towards the profound renewal, so desired by the Council. It appears to me that the Pope is anxious to correct the tendency visible in certain circles, to see the Council as a break with the past and a new beginning. It suffices to call to mind the Holy Father's address to the Roman Curia on 22 December 2005. Besides, the Council never thought of itself in those terms. With its doctrinal and liturgical, juridical-pastoral decisions, the Council was one of many moments of profound reflection and renewal undertaken by the Church in her bi-millennial history with regard to her rich theological-spiritual heritage. With the Motu Proprio the Pope clearly affirms that any temptation to scorn venerated tradition is out of place. The message is clear: progress, yes, but not at the expense of history, or without it. The Liturgical Reform must also be faithful to all that went before from the beginning down to our day, nothing excluded.

On the other hand, we must not forget that for the Catholic Church divine revelation comes not only from the Sacred Scriptures, it comes also from the living Tradition of the Church. This belief distinguishes us from other Christian confessions. For us the truth emerges from both these poles Sacred Scripture and Tradition. I find this position much richer than others because it respects God's freedom to lead us to a deeper understanding of the truth revealed also by events in the future. Naturally it is up to the Teaching of the Church to discern what emerges. However we must realise the importance of Tradition. The Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Verbum* makes this very clear (DV 10).

What is more, the Church is a reality which surpasses the level of pure human invention. She is the mystical Body of Christ, the heavenly Jerusalem, God's chosen people. Therefore she is above earthly borders and limitations of time, being a reality which greatly transcends its earthly and hierarchical appearance. So what she receives must be faithfully handed on. We are neither the inventors nor the masters of truth, we are merely those who have received it and have the duty to safeguard it and hand it on to others. As Saint Paul said, speaking of the Eucharist: "For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you," (1Cor 11, 23). It follows that respect for

Tradition is not our freely taken choice in the quest for the truth, Tradition is its basis and must be accepted. Therefore fidelity to Tradition is an essential attitude for the Church. In my opinion the Motu Proprio must be understood in this sense. It can spur the necessary correction of route. In fact in certain decisions of the liturgical reform implemented since the Council, directions have been adopted which obscure certain aspects of the liturgy, better reflected in the earlier practice, because, for some people, liturgical renewal meant starting ex novo. However, we all know this was not the intention of the Sacrosanctum Concilium, which underlines that “care must be taken that any new forms adopted should in some way grow organically from forms already existing” (SC 23).

A characteristic of the pontificate of Benedict XVI would appear to be insistence on a correct hermeneutics of Vatican II. Do you think the Motu Proprio Summorum Pontificum goes in this direction? If so, in what sense?

In his writings while still a Cardinal, the Pope rejected a certain spirit of exuberance seen in some theological circles, motivated by the what they called “spirit of the Council” which, for him, was instead an “anti-Council spirit” or “Konzils-Ungeist” (Rapporto sulla Fede, San Paolo, 2005, chapter 2) and I quote: “we must firmly oppose this schematism of 'before' and 'after' the Council in the history of the Church, totally unjustified by the documents of Vatican II which repeatedly reaffirm the continuity of Catholicism” (ibid p. 33).

Now, this mistaken interpretation of the Council and of the Church's historical-theological journey, has affected every ecclesial sector including the liturgy. A certain attitude of rejection of ecclesiological, theological and also liturgical developments in the past millennium on the one hand and an ingenuous idolisation of what was said to have been the thought of the early Christians, on the other, has had no little influence on the liturgical-theological reform of the post Council era.

Categorical rejection of the pre-Council the Mass, as a relict of a epoch now “outdated”, was the result of this mentality. Many saw things in this way, but thank God, not everyone.

Sacrosanctum Concilium, the Constitution on the Liturgy, offers no justification for such an attitude. Both in the general principles and in the norms proposed, the Document is moderate and faithful to the significance of the liturgical life of the Church. It suffices to read paragraph 23 of the document to be convinced of this spirit of moderation.

Some of the reforms have abandoned important elements of the Liturgy with the relative theological considerations: now it is necessary and important to retrieve these elements. The Pope, who considers the rite of Saint Pius V, revised by Blessed John XXIII, a way to retrieve elements obscured by the reform, must have certainly reflected at length before making his decision; we know he consulted different sectors of the Church on the matter and, despite contrary positions, decide to allow the old Rite to be freely celebrated. Rather than a return to the past, as some say, this move indicates the need to restore an integral balance between the eternal, transcendent and heavenly aspects of the liturgy and the earthly and community aspects. It will also help eventually to establish a balance between a sense of the sacred and the mystery on the one hand and on the other the external gestures and social-cultural attitudes and commitments deriving from the liturgy.

While still a Cardinal, Joseph Ratzinger insisted that the Second Vatican Council should be understood beginning from its first document, precisely, the Sacrosanctum Concilium. Archbishop Ranjith, in your opinion, why did the Council Fathers choose to concentrate first of all on the Liturgy?

First, this decision was surely prompted by a profound awareness that the Liturgy for the Church is of vital importance. The Liturgy we might say is the hub of the matter, because we celebrate what we believe and live: this is the famous axiom, *Lex orandi, lex credendi*. Hence all authentic reform must involve the Liturgy. The Fathers realised this. Moreover the process of liturgical reform started long before the Council and was spurred on by the Motu Proprio *Tra le Sollecitudini* by Saint Pius X and *Mediator Dei* by Pius XII.

It was Saint Pius X who attributed to the Liturgy the expression “primary source” of authentic Christian spirit. Perhaps the existence of structures and experience of persons engaged in the study and introduction of a few liturgical changes, prompted the Council Father to choose the Liturgy as the first matter to be discussed at the

Council meetings. Pope Paul VI expressed the thought of the Council Fathers on the matter when he said: “we remind you to respect the scale of values and duties: first place to God; first obligation prayer; first source of divine life communicated to us, first school of spiritual life, and the first gift we can offer the Christian people, the Liturgy ...” (Paul VI, discourse to close the 2nd session of the Council, 4 December 1963).

Many saw the publication of the *Motu Proprio Summorum Pontificum* as a move by the Pope to bring schismatic followers of Lefebvre closer to the Church. Do you agree?

Yes, but this was not the only reason. The Holy Father explains his decision in the *Motu Proprio* and in the Letter with which he presents the document to the Bishops and gives other important reasons. Of course he will have taken into account the growing request from various sides especially the Society of Saint Pius X and the *Fraternita Sacerdotale* of San Pietro and certain Associations of lay Catholics, to make the Mass of Saint Pius V more available. It was important to ensure total integration of the Lefebvrians also because, errors of judgement committed in the past which caused unnecessary divisions in the Church, threaten to become almost impossible to heal. The Pope says this in the above mentioned Letter.

What in your opinion are the most urgent issues for a worthy celebration of the Sacred Liturgy? Which instances must be emphasised most?

I believe that in the growing request for the more frequent celebration of the Mass of Saint Pius V, the Pope saw signs of a loss of spiritual depth caused by the way in which the Liturgical moments have so far been celebrated in the Church. These difficulties arise from certain orientations of the post Council liturgical reform which tended to reduce, or better, to obscure essential aspects of the faith, and also from adventurous attitudes, not in keeping with the liturgical discipline of the Reform; this is seen everywhere.

I believe that one of the reasons why certain important elements of the Tridentine Rite were abandoned by certain liturgical sectors in the implementation of the post-conciliar reform is that what is said to have happened in the second millennium of the history of the Liturgy was underestimated and abandoned. Some liturgists saw the developments of that period, negatively. This opinion is mistaken because when we speak of the living Tradition of the Church, we cannot pick and choose to suit our preconceived ideas. Tradition, considered in a general sense also in the areas of science, philosophy or theology, is something living which continues to develop and progress, at high and low moments of history. For the Church, living Tradition is a source of divine revelation and the fruit of a continual process of unfolding. This is true also for liturgical tradition, - small t. Liturgical developments in the second millennium have their value. The *Sacrosanctum Concilium* does not speak of a new Rite, or a break with the past. Instead it says "new forms adopted should in some way grow organically from forms already existing". This is why the Pope writes: “In the history of the liturgy there is growth and progress, but no rupture. What earlier generations held as sacred, remains sacred and great for us too, and it cannot be all of a sudden entirely forbidden or even considered harmful.” (Letter to Bishop, 7 July 2007). To idolatrise what happened in the first millennium to the expense of what happened in the second, is hardly a scientific attitude. This was not the attitude of the Council Fathers.

A second problem would be a crisis of obedience to the Holy Father noted in some circles. This attitude of autonomy, visible among certain ecclesiastics, also in the highest ranks of the Church, is of no benefit to the noble mission which Christ entrusted to his Vicar.

There are voices that in some countries or dioceses bishops have issued regulations which attempt to practically annul or completely change the Pope's intentions. Such behaviour is contrary to the dignity and nobility of the vocation of a bishop of the Church. I am not saying this for everyone. Most bishops and ecclesiastics have accepted the Pope's decision with due reverence and obedience. This is praiseworthy. But sad to say there have been some protests.

At the same time we cannot deny that the decision was necessary because as the Pope writes: “...in many places celebrations were not faithful to the prescriptions of the new Missal, but the latter actually was understood as authorizing or even requiring creativity, which frequently led to deformations of the liturgy which were hard to

bear. I am speaking from experience, since I too lived through that period with all its hopes and its confusion. And I have seen how arbitrary deformations of the liturgy caused deep pain to individuals totally rooted in the faith of the Church.” (Letter to the Bishops). The result of this abuse has been a growing spirit of nostalgia for the Mass of S. Pius V. Moreover a general lack of interest in reading and respecting the norms issued by the Holy See, and even of the Introduction to the liturgical books, made the situation worse. Liturgy is still not on the list of priorities for courses of ongoing formation for ecclesiastics. It is necessary to make a clear distinction. The post council reform is not all negative; indeed there are many positive aspects in what has been achieved. But there are also changes and abuses which continue despite their bad effect on the faith and the liturgical life of the Church. I mention for example, a change not proposed by the Council Fathers or by the Sacrosanctum Concilium, Holy Communion received in the hand. This has contributed to some extent to a weakening of faith in the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. This, and the removal of altar rails and kneelers in church and the introduction of practices which oblige the faithful to sit or stand at the elevation of the Sacred Host, weakens the genuine significance of the Eucharist and the Church's profound sense of adoration for the Lord, the Only Son of God. Moreover in many places, the church the 'house of God', is used for meetings, concerts or interreligious celebrations. In some churches the Blessed Sacrament is almost hidden away in a little chapel, hardly seen and little decorated. All this obscures a belief so central in the Church, belief in the real presence of Christ. The church, for Catholics, is the 'home' of the Eternal One.

Another serious mistake is to confuse specific roles of the clergy and the laity at the altar making the sanctuary a place of disorder, too much movement and certainly not the 'place' where the Christian is filled with a sense of wonder and awe in front of the Lord's presence and His act of redemption. The use of dancing, musical instruments and singing which have little to do with liturgy, is not in keeping with the sacredness of a church and liturgical celebrations; I would also add, certain homilies of a political-social character, often badly prepared. All this distorts the celebration of Mass, making it a choreographic, theatrical event, instead of an event of faith.

There exist other aspects not in keeping with the beauty and wonder of what is celebrated on the altar. The implementation of the Novus Ordo is not all wrong, but much remains to be put in order, to avoid further harm to the life of the Church. I believe our attitude to the Pope and his expressions of concern for the good of the Church must be that of St Paul who writes to the Corinthians “Let all these things be done in a way that will build up the community” (1Cor 14, 26). (P.L.R.) (Agenzia Fides 16/11/2007; righe 199, parole 2.742)