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# Benedict's Revolution: The Return of the Old Latin Mass

Thomas E. Woods Jr. | Feature

11/6/07

When the secular media suddenly start talking about Catholic liturgy, something is afoot in the life of the Church. By the second year of Pope Benedict XVI's pontificate, that's exactly what happened. The *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, the *Los Angeles Times*, *U.S. News and World Report* -- the subject was everywhere.

The reason for all this attention was the pope's long-awaited *motu proprio* that would make the traditional Latin Mass of the pre-conciliar Church (or the 1962 Missal) more widely available. That used to be considered a dangerous idea. It's now mainstream.

The consensus today -- which echoes the conclusion of a blue-ribbon commission of cardinals in 1986 -- is that although Pope Paul VI had devoutly wished that the new missal would supplant the old, no action officially suppressing the traditional liturgy was ever taken, and thus the old missal, even if largely eclipsed in practice, has continued to be a living part of the Church these past four decades.

This is the view of -- among other Vatican officials -- Darío Cardinal Castrillón Hoyos, president of the Ecclesia Dei Commission and former prefect of the Congregation for the Clergy, and Jorge Cardinal Medina Estévez, former prefect of the Congregation for Divine

Worship. It also happens to be the view of Benedict, who noted in his recent letter to bishops that "this Missal was never juridically abrogated and, consequently, in principle, was always permitted." The 1986 Commission added that any priest ought to be able to choose which missal he wanted to use. Initially sympathetic, Pope John Paul II ultimately shelved the idea.

## What We Lost

With the *motu proprio* *Summorum Pontificum*, the idea of freedom for the old missal -- and not just the Mass but all the sacraments, and even the old Breviary -- is back.

The secular media, so often wrongheaded and hostile when it comes to the Church, were correct to sense that Benedict's desire to bring back the traditional liturgy was something momentous. Still, some managed to get the issue entirely wrong: Some people want "Mass in English," they report, but others want "Mass in Latin." But the issue at stake has never been merely one of language. It is a question of two

different liturgical books and two different ways of saying Mass.

Benedict's move is an act of generosity, justice, and simple common sense. When the Church possesses something of priceless worth like the Missal of St. Pius V -- which is itself the consummation of centuries of gradual development -- and when some of her faithful seek to nourish their souls at its copious font of grace, who could be so petty as to deny it to them?

Countless figures of prominence recognized what the Church was losing in the old rite. When nearly four decades ago it seemed as if the traditional Latin Mass would never be heard from again, a group of British intellectuals, Catholic and non-Catholic alike, issued a protest to the pope urging him not to carry out such a terrible offense against Europe's cultural patrimony. Signatories included Agatha Christie, Graham Greene, and Malcolm Muggeridge. It read, in part:

If some senseless decree were to order the total or partial destruction of basilicas or cathedrals, then obviously it would be the educated -- whatever their personal beliefs -- who would rise up in horror to oppose such a possibility. Now the fact is that basilicas and cathedrals were built so as to celebrate a rite which, until a few months ago, constituted a living tradition. We are referring to the Roman Catholic Mass. Yet, according to the latest information in Rome, there is a plan to obliterate that Mass by the end of the current year . . . . The rite in question, in its magnificent Latin text, has also inspired a host of priceless achievements in the arts -- not only mystical works, but works by poets, philosophers, musicians, architects, painters and sculptors in all countries and epochs. Thus, it belongs to universal culture as well as to churchmen and formal Christians.

The petition concluded with a plea to the pope: "The signatories of this appeal, which is entirely ecumenical and non-political, have been drawn from every branch of modern culture in Europe and elsewhere. They wish to call to the attention of the Holy See, the appalling responsibility it would incur in the history of the human spirit were it to refuse to allow the

traditional Mass to survive, even though this survival took place side by side with other liturgical forms."

Pope Paul VI responded to the petition with an indult for England and Wales that retained the old rite as an option for special occasions. The old rite had won a tiny victory. More significant was what the petition itself seemed to show: that even non-Catholics perceived something alienating -- unjust, even -- about the simple suppression of something as stupendous as the traditional Latin Mass.

That's where the matter stood until John Paul II issued an indult allowing the traditional liturgy on a limited basis in 1984, broadening that allowance somewhat in 1988. The world's bishops often neglected the pope's call to be "generous" toward those who favored the old rite. John Paul, who had little interest in the matter, didn't push it.

## The Benedictine Difference

It is possible to argue, as some indeed have, that the Church's liturgical problems are really only a secondary matter, and that it is more important to concentrate on the faithful transmission of the Church's teachings on faith and morals. But the liturgy is at the very heart of the Church -- Vatican II describes the Eucharistic sacrifice as "the source and summit of the Christian life" -- and cannot be so neatly isolated from these other things. Pope Benedict XVI, while still Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, argued that the crisis in the Church was closely related to the crisis in liturgy: "I am convinced," he wrote in his memoirs, "that the crisis in the Church that we are experiencing today is, to a large extent, due to the disintegration of the liturgy."

Now let us be clear: Cardinal Ratzinger did not regret that the liturgical reform ever took place. He declared himself pleased with the additional scriptural readings in the new missal, and the greater allowance for vernacular languages. Still less did he maintain that the new missal expressed the truths of the Catholic faith less precisely or explicitly than the old. In a 1983 letter to Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre, he pointed to

the new missal's retention of the venerable Roman Canon (now known more prosaically as "Eucharistic Prayer I") and its unambiguous references to the Eucharistic sacrifice to show it was beyond theological reproach. (The Roman Canon was itself saved from the chopping block, though, only by the personal intervention of Pope Paul VI.)

Ratzinger's unhappiness with the liturgical reform, therefore, did not include concerns about the doctrinal rectitude of the new missal. Those concerns were most clearly and consistently expressed by the late British author Michael Davies. Davies, along with the vast majority of traditionalist supporters of the old liturgy, never questioned the validity of the new form of the Mass. His complaint -- expressed most systematically in his book *Pope Paul's New Mass* -- was that it did not convey Catholic teaching, particularly on the nature of the ordained priesthood and the sacrificial aspect of the Mass, as consistently and precisely as did the traditional liturgy.

Davies never said that heresy had been inserted into the new missal; what mattered was what had been *suppressed*. He argued that the changes to the missal did not seem random: Their tendency was consistently to remove or diminish prayers and gestures that highlighted these Catholic teachings. The new missal referred to the idea of sacrifice with language ambiguous enough to satisfy even some Protestants. Eucharistic Prayer II failed to include the word "victim," which in this context refers to Jesus Christ as the Divine Victim whose sacrifice on Calvary is made present on Catholic altars during the Mass. The indefectibility of the Church, argued Davies, meant that we could be sure that the Church would never fail in her mission, and thus the new rite was certainly valid. But it did not mean that she would always use the most effective or felicitous language to express her teaching, and that was Davies' point.

It seems likely that these kinds of criticisms, even if not shared by Benedict himself, are not altogether forbidden to Catholics of good will. Following Davies' death in September 2004, Cardinal Ratzinger wrote a

moving eulogy to a man with whom he had had a good working relationship.

I have been profoundly touched by the news of the death of Michael Davies. I had the good fortune to meet him several times and I found him as a man of deep faith and ready to embrace suffering. Ever since the Council he put all his energy into the service of the Faith and left us important publications especially about the Sacred Liturgy. Even though he suffered from the Church in many ways in his time, he always truly remained a man of the Church. He knew that the Lord founded His Church on the rock of St. Peter and that the Faith can find its fullness and maturity only in union with the successor of St. Peter. Therefore we can be confident that the Lord opened wide for him the gates of heaven. We commend his soul to the Lord's mercy.

### The Failure of Liturgical Reform

Even if Cardinal Ratzinger could not endorse the traditionalists' critique of liturgical reform in its entirety, some of their concerns were also his own. His writing on the liturgy emphasized a number of key factors, some of which were intrinsic to the reform and others that were merely its unfortunate byproducts.

For one thing, he contended that the new missal gave rise to excessive creativity in liturgical celebration. This development undermined the very essence of liturgy and cut Catholics off not only from their past but even from the parish down the street, where Mass was different. In *Feast of Faith*, Ratzinger wondered, "Today we might ask: Is there a Latin Rite at all any more? Certainly there is no awareness of it. To most people the liturgy seems to be rather something for the individual congregation to arrange. Core groups make up their own 'liturgies' from week to week, with an enthusiasm which is as amazing as it is misplaced."

The very idea that liturgy is something to be *made* reflects a complete breakdown of liturgical consciousness. Ratzinger wrote: "Neither the apostles nor their successors 'made' a Christian liturgy; it grew

organically as a result of the Christian reading of the Jewish inheritance, fashioning its own form as it did so. In this process there was a filtering of the individual communities' experiences of prayer, within the basic proportions of the one Church, gradually developing into the distinctive forms of the major regional churches. In this sense liturgy *always* imposed an obligatory form on the individual congregation and the individual celebrant. It is a guarantee, testifying to the fact that something greater is taking place here than can be brought about by any individual community or group of people."

There are those who complain that requiring strict fidelity to the rubrics infringes on the freedom of the "faith community" to devise the kinds of liturgies that suit them best. Ratzinger disagreed, and suggested that "the obligatory character of the essential parts of the liturgy also guarantees the *true freedom of the faithful*: it makes sure that they are not victims of something fabricated by an individual or group, that they are sharing in the same liturgy that binds the priest, the bishop and the pope. In the liturgy, we are all given the freedom to appropriate, in our own personal way, the mystery which addresses us." In fact, he turned the complaint around, noting that these manufactured liturgies themselves amount to a kind of tyranny exercised over hapless congregations, the vast bulk of which do not belong to parish liturgy committees. "Those able to draw up [manufactured] liturgies are necessarily few in number, with the result that what is 'freedom' for them means 'domination' as it affects others."

On the one hand, Ratzinger argued, this was not the fault of the new missal. Speaking on the tenth anniversary of the *motu proprio Ecclesia Dei*, John Paul II's 1988 document on the old liturgy, he cautioned that "the freedom that the new *Ordo Missae* allows to be creative, has often gone too far." So far had it gone, he said, that there was often a greater difference between two celebrations of Mass according to the new missal than there was between properly celebrated offerings of the new and old missals.

On the other hand, he seemed to suggest, the new missal was not altogether blameless:

As concerns the Missal in current use, the first point, in my opinion, would be to reject the false creativity which is not a category of the Liturgy . . . . In the new Missal we quite often find formulae such as: *sacerdos dicit sic vel simili modo* [the priest speaks thus or in words to this effect] . . . or, *Hic sacerdos potest dicere* [Here the priest may say] . . . . These formulae of the Missal in fact give official sanction to creativity; the priest feels almost obliged to change the wording, to show that he is creative, that he is giving this Liturgy immediacy, making it present for his congregation; and with this false creativity, which transforms the Liturgy into a catechetical exercise for *this* congregation, the liturgical unity and the *ecclesiality* of the Liturgy is being destroyed. Therefore, it seems to me, it would be an important step towards reconciliation, simply if the Missal were freed from these areas of creativity, which do not correspond to the deepest level of reality, to the spirit, of the Liturgy.

### Losing the Sacred

A second major theme in Ratzinger's corpus of liturgical writing is what he called *desacralization*. He told the Chilean bishops in 1988 that although many reasons could be cited to explain why a great many people "seek a refuge in the traditional liturgy," the primary one was that "they find the dignity of the sacred preserved there."

After the Council, he explained, many priests "deliberately raised 'desacralization' to the level of a program." They argued that the New Testament had abolished the cult of the Temple, and that the tearing of the Temple veil from top to bottom upon Christ's death was meant to signify the end of the sacred. "The death of Jesus, outside the City walls, that is to say, in the public world, is now the true religion. Religion, if it has any being at all, must have it in the nonsacredness of daily life . . . . Inspired by such reasoning, they put aside the sacred vestments; they have despoiled the

churches as much as they could of that splendor which brings to mind the sacred; and they have reduced the liturgy to the language and the gestures of ordinary life, by means of greetings, common signs of friendship, and such things."

A sure sign of desacralization, and the replacement of the sacred by a more familiar, man-centered ethos, is the reduction or even elimination of kneeling in liturgical settings. Ratzinger was a consistent opponent of the fanaticism against kneeling, and in his book *The Spirit of the Liturgy* recalled a revealing story from the sayings of the Desert Fathers. When God once compelled the devil to show himself to Abba Apollo, what was most striking about his hideous and emaciated frame was that he had no knees. "The inability to kneel," Ratzinger wrote, "is seen as the very essence of the diabolical."

As we saw Ratzinger observe above, the sheer variety and instability that characterizes the new rite in actual practice (whereby the offering of Mass in one place is unlike how it is celebrated somewhere else) raises the question of whether there even exists a coherent Roman rite. Yet for all this diversity, he said, there was one consistent feature on which the contemporary Mass-goer could confidently rely: they will all be aesthetically dreadful. On *that* point these divergent celebrations of Mass do indeed resemble one another. "It is strange," he wrote, "that the postconciliar pluralism has created uniformity in one respect at least: It will not tolerate a high standard of expression."

And here again we encounter the phenomenon of desacralization, for how else are we to describe the substitution of 1970s banalities for the extraordinary range of Catholic musical patrimony?

## Breaking with the Past

Ratzinger's third major criticism of the liturgical reform was that whatever its virtues, the new missal, both in particular sections and in its entirety, leaves the impression of a rupture with the past, and can seem

contrived. It resembles more a compilation by a committee of professors than the organic development of a truly living liturgy. "In the place of liturgy as the fruit of development came fabricated liturgy," Ratzinger wrote. "We abandoned the organic, living process of growth and development over centuries, and replaced it -- as in a manufacturing process -- with a fabrication, a banal on-the-spot product."

Again Ratzinger faulted the liturgical books themselves, and not merely their clumsy implementation. "Even the official new books, which are excellent in many ways, occasionally show far too many signs of being drawn up by academics and reinforce the notion that a liturgical book can be 'made' like any other book." The new missal "was published as if it were a book put together by professors, not a phase in a continual growth process. Such a thing never happened before. It is absolutely contrary to the laws of liturgical growth."

Ratzinger cited the reform of the liturgical calendar as an example of "the armchair strategy of academics, drawing up things on paper which, in fact, would presuppose years of organic growth." This approach was "one of the weaknesses of the postconciliar liturgical reform." Those responsible, he said, simply "did not realize how much the various annual feasts had influenced Christian people's relation to time. In redistributing these established feasts throughout the year according to some historical arithmetic -- inconsistently applied at that -- they ignored a fundamental law of religious life."

Ratzinger's claim that the organic development of the liturgy gave way in the liturgical reform to "fabricated liturgy" raises a more fundamental question, albeit one that he himself never confronted directly: Does the pope possess the moral or even the legal right to make radical revisions to the Church's liturgy? There had been a great many changes to the Roman liturgy over the centuries, to be sure, but they had been gradual and organic, and typically imperceptible. There was never anything like what happened in 1969-1970.

Alfons Cardinal Stickler, for one, has his doubts. Stickler, the retired prefect of the Vatican library and archives, was a *peritus* (expert) on Vatican II's liturgy commission. "I have never cast in doubt the dogmatic or juridical validity of the *Novus Ordo Missae*," Stickler recorded in his memoir. But "in the case of the juridical question serious doubts have come to me in view of my intensive work with the medieval canonists. They are of the unanimous opinion that the popes may change anything with the exception of what the Holy Scriptures prescribe or what concerns previously enacted doctrinal decisions of the highest level, and the *status ecclesiae*."

Although the concept of the *status ecclesiae* defies perfectly clear definition, it refers to aspects of the Church's life "over which even the pope has no right of disposal." According to Cardinal Stickler, there is good reason to believe that the liturgy itself "should belong to the *status ecclesiae*."

Msgr. Klaus Gamber likewise doubted the pope had any such power. Gamber, an accomplished, respected, mainstream liturgist, included a chapter called "Does the Pope Have the Authority to Change the Rite?" in his book *The Reform of the Roman Liturgy: Its Problems and Background*. "Since there is no document that specifically assigns to the Apostolic See the authority to change," he concluded, "let alone to abolish the traditional liturgical rite; and since, furthermore, it can be shown that not a single predecessor of Pope Paul VI has ever introduced major changes to the Roman liturgy, the assertion that the Holy See has the authority to change the liturgical rite would appear to be debatable, to say the least."

Ratzinger wrote a laudatory preface to the French-language edition of *The Reform of the Roman Liturgy*, endorsing Monsignor Gamber's work and commending the author to readers worldwide. It must surely be licit to hold this opinion, therefore, for otherwise the cardinal -- now pope -- would never have endorsed such a book or author.

## Reading between the Lines

Although Ratzinger himself never addressed the question head on, it is perhaps suggestive that while *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, the Vatican II document on liturgy, says no priest may change the liturgy on his own authority, the new *Catechism* -- in the writing of which he himself played a great part -- goes much further and says that even the supreme authority in the Church "may not change the liturgy arbitrarily, but only in the obedience of faith and with religious respect for the mystery of the liturgy."

In *The Spirit of the Liturgy* Ratzinger came as close as he ever did to raising and answering this interesting canonical question. What we do know is that he will have no truck with those who take the essentially anti-intellectual position that the pope's authority is bound neither by tradition nor reason, and that his wishes and commands are ipso facto good and justifiable:

After the Second Vatican Council, the impression arose that the pope really could do anything in liturgical matters, especially if he were acting on the mandate of an ecumenical council. Eventually, the idea of the givenness of the liturgy, the fact that one cannot do with it what one will, faded from the public consciousness of the West. In fact the First Vatican Council had in no way defined the pope as an absolute monarch. On the contrary, it presented him as the guarantor of obedience to the revealed Word. The pope's authority is bound to the Tradition of faith, and that also applies to the liturgy. It is not 'manufactured' by the authorities. Even the pope can only be a humble servant of its lawful development and abiding integrity and identity.

In light of these criticisms, it is not surprising that Ratzinger should have favored the wide availability of the 1962 Missal, since it pre-existed the abuses and problems that have accompanied the new missal. But he supported the wide availability of the old liturgy not simply because he shared some of the concerns of traditionalists who were skeptical of the new, or as a grudging allowance to those stubborn souls who refused to get with the times -- as the *motu proprio*

was dishonestly spun even before its release. It came instead from a deep personal love for the traditional liturgy that he shares with traditionalists.

Thus in 2001 Ratzinger told a liturgical conference at France's Benedictine abbey of Fontgombault: "I well know the sensibilities of those faithful who love this [traditional] Liturgy -- these are, to some extent, my own sensibilities." On the tenth anniversary of *Ecclesia Dei* he expressed his delight at the fruits that that papal initiative had borne: "I think it is above all an occasion to show our gratitude and to give thanks. The diverse communities born thanks to this pontifical text have given to the Church a great number of vocations to the priesthood and to religious life."

Ratzinger was also concerned that the Church's credibility was compromised by the Orwellian claim that what was once the Church's greatest and most cherished treasure could become forbidden overnight, and that a fondness for it could actually give rise to suspicion or derision. In the interview that became his book *Salt of the Earth*, he declared:

I am of the opinion, to be sure, that the old rite should be granted much more generously to all those who desire it. It's impossible to see what could be dangerous or unacceptable about that. A community is calling its very being into question when it suddenly declares that what until now was its holiest and highest possession is strictly forbidden and when it makes the longing for it seem downright indecent.

The cardinal returned to this theme again and again. In Fontgombault he said that "in order to emphasize that there is no essential break, that there is continuity in the Church, which retains its identity, it seems to me indispensable to continue to offer the opportunity to celebrate according to the old Missal, as a sign of the enduring identity of the Church. This is for me the most basic reason: What was up until 1969 *the* Liturgy of the Church, for all of us the most holy thing there was, cannot become after 1969 . . . the most unacceptable thing." This, among other reasons, is why he "was from the beginning in favor of the freedom to continue using the old Missal." "There is no doubt,"

Ratzinger said, "that a venerable rite such as the Roman rite in use up to 1969 is a rite of the Church, it belongs to the Church, is one of the treasures of the Church, and ought therefore to be preserved in the Church."

As for *suppressing* the old Mass -- which happened de facto if not de jure -- Ratzinger considered the idea not only pastorally unwise, but also completely at odds with all previous liturgical history.

It is good to recall in this regard what Cardinal Newman said when he observed that the Church, in her entire history, never once abolished or prohibited orthodox liturgical forms, something which would be entirely foreign to the Spirit of the Church. An orthodox liturgy, that is to say, a liturgy which expresses the true faith, is never a compilation made according to the pragmatic criteria of various ceremonies which one may put together in a positivist and arbitrary way -- today like this and tomorrow like that. The orthodox forms of a rite are living realities, born out of a dialogue of love between the Church and her Lord. They are the expressions of the life of the Church in which are condensed the faith, the prayer and the very life of generations, and in which are incarnated in a concrete form at once the action of God and the response of man.

To be sure, for a variety of reasons liturgical rites can die. The Church, moreover, "can define and limit the usage of rites in different historical circumstances." But "the Church never purely and simply prohibits them." And while Vatican II "did ordain a reform of the liturgical books," Ratzinger reminded listeners that it "did not forbid the previous books."

## Pope Benedict Acts

For decades, Catholics have been told that the new Mass *is* the traditional Mass -- that its promulgation by Church authority made it ipso facto traditional. The chaplain at a well-known Catholic university recently rebuked traditionalist students who asked for the traditional Latin Mass with precisely this brand of legal positivism: the Novus Ordo *is* the traditional Mass, he

insisted. Benedict (and great liturgists like Monsignor Gamber) will have none of this nonsense: The old rite is the old rite, the new rite is the new, and they are not and never have been the same.

These, in brief, were the liturgical concerns of Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger. All of these themes can be found in Pope Benedict's extraordinary *motu proprio*, and in the letter to bishops that accompanied it.

Benedict speaks of the destruction wrought by liturgical creativity on the mature liturgical sense that is supposed to inform Catholic piety. In many places, he says, 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."

He likewise urges the revival of a sense of liturgical continuity, and warns against the Orwellian world in which what was once considered holy and beautiful must suddenly be denigrated and forgotten: "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. It behooves all of us to preserve the riches which have developed in the Church's faith and prayer, and to give them their proper place."

We are likewise reminded of what a great treasure we possess in the 1962 Missal. The two documents speak of its "sacrality," describe it as "sacred and great," and demand that it "be given due honor for its venerable and ancient usage." This is a treasure of the Church that should be embraced (or at least respected) by all.

This treasure, moreover, is not something to be confined to older Catholics with a nostalgic longing for the religious practices of their childhoods. Roger

Cardinal Mahony of Los Angeles tried to argue that John Paul II's allowance for the 1962 Missal had been intended only for old people; he was soon corrected by Rome. That interpretation has now been absolutely excluded, by the Church's highest authority. The pope specifically notes that "it has clearly been demonstrated that young persons too have discovered this liturgical form, felt its attraction and found in it a form of encounter with the Mystery of the Most Holy Eucharist, particularly suited to them."

Now in addition to arguments from theology, philosophy, and ecclesiology, there is also a specific pastoral concern in Benedict's mind: those million or so faithful who have wandered from the Church's official precincts, so great has been their alienation by the postconciliar changes. It was Ratzinger who primarily brokered the agreement that would have reconciled Archbishop Lefebvre and his Society of St. Pius X (SSPX) in 1988, and he wept after the proposal collapsed. As frustrated as he has grown with them at times, Benedict has had a sympathy for the SSPX over the years that has been understood by few and shared by fewer, even among those who describe themselves as his biggest supporters. Early in his pontificate Benedict held a private audience with Bishop Bernard Fellay, SSPX superior general.

At the same time, it would be a serious mistake to suggest that the motivating factor behind the pope's *motu proprio* was exclusively the reconciliation of the SSPX. That is doubtless among the reasons that compelled the pope's initiative, but it is surely not the only or even the most important one. As we have seen, the pope has many and varied concerns about the condition of the liturgy in the Church today, and he is likewise disturbed about the appearance of discontinuity in the Church's liturgical life. He has long wished for the Church to come to terms with her own liturgical tradition, and the reintroduction of the old missal alongside the new makes that possible.

Especially revealing is that the pope has fought to make the Church's traditional liturgy available not only against liberal opposition -- who expected the vandals to give up without a fight? -- but even in the face of

indifference and hostility from his own friends in the episcopate, where the silence about Benedict's initiative in the preceding months was glaring. Benedict's heart is really in this.

Benedict's views are surely a source of embarrassment to those in the Catholic world who have spent the past four decades lecturing others for their supposedly misplaced devotion to the old missal. Some appear to have believed that they could prove their Catholic credentials in proportion to their dismissals of the traditional liturgy. I am thinking in particular of the papal Latinist who called the old rite a "useless Mass," adding that "the whole mentality [motivating its return] is stupid," and the well-known head of a religious order who once told his friars, "Anyone who wants to say this Mass is wasting his time and wasting his life."

To the contrary, Pope Benedict says simply, "Let us generously open our hearts and make room for everything that the faith itself allows."

We can surely agree, in light of Benedict's own comments, that there is something deranged about this kind of loathing for something that had been so fundamental to Catholic life for so long, and so deeply venerated by so many generations of saints and ordinary faithful.

For more than a generation, decent Catholics have been denounced and had their motives questioned for saying the very things our current pope has spent much of his career saying. Although a lot of apologies are owed to a lot of people, it is a misplaced effort to demand them now.

This is instead a time to rejoice, for the Church has at last made peace with her own tradition. She once again openly acknowledges the riches that Pope Benedict XVI -- and a great many other good Catholics -- have long pointed to in the traditional Latin liturgy. What was holy and beautiful yesterday remains holy and beautiful today. Orwell has not had the last word after all.

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# Rebellion Against the Pope Over the Latin Mass

Deal W. Hudson | Column

11/6/07

From the Vatican comes news that resistance to Benedict XVI's promotion of the Old Latin Mass is considered "[rebellion against the pope](#)."

You may recall that on July 7, 2007, Benedict XVI released an Apostolic Letter called a *motu proprio* (because the pope wrote it "of his own accord" rather than using an advisor or member of the Vatican Curia). The letter, titled *Summorum Pontificum* ("Of the Supreme Pontiffs"), took the power away from bishops who want to continue to block the celebration of the Tridentine Mass -- the normative Roman Catholic liturgy from 1570 to 1962.

Some bishops were not so happy about that. They, along with like-minded lay leaders, consider any return to the Old Latin Mass a rejection of Vatican II reforms.

The permission to celebrate some parts of the Mass in the vernacular was one of the signal changes wrought at the Second Vatican Council. Of course, the original Vatican II document, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, 1963), restricted the use of the vernacular to readings, directives, and some of the prayers and chants.

Over the next few years, however, bishops' conferences around the world peppered the Vatican with requests for more use of the vernacular until, by 1970, many priests were no longer using Latin at all.

The entirely vernacular Mass was *not* what Vatican II espoused. So anyone who claims that Benedict XVI's *motu proprio* "overthrows" the Council needs to go take another look at the Constitution on Sacred Liturgy, section 36.

Archbishop Albert Ranjith Patabendige, the secretary of the Congregation for Divine Worship, in an interview with an Italian Web site, called upon bishops worldwide to follow the dictates of the papal letter

which allows a local pastor to give permission to groups to celebrate the old liturgy using the 1962 Missal. Patabendige, a prelate from Sri Lanka, asked his fellow bishops to set "aside all pride and prejudice."

One bishop he may have had in mind was Bishop Raffaele Nogaro of Caserta, Italy, who cancelled the Mass saying, "To mumble in Latin serves no purpose."

Other bishops have not criticized the decision directly but have allowed their surrogates to speak for them. Rev. Peter Daly, writing in *The Tidings*, the official paper of the Los Angeles Archdiocese, writes:

Apart from the schismatic followers of Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre and a few young people who are nostalgic for a church they never knew, almost nobody is pressing for it. Nobody under the age of 55 even remembers the old Latin ritual.

And whose fault is that?

Certainly not the laity who have been raised in a post-1970 Catholic Church that stopped celebrating the Mass that had been the common experience of Catholics worldwide for nearly 400 years.

Thus, if you have never been to a Tridentine Mass, you have not experienced the liturgy as it was known by St. Thérèse of Lisieux, John Henry Cardinal Newman, St. Frances de Sales, St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, St. Bernadette, St. Maximilian Kolbe, and Blessed John XXIII, to name only a *very* few.

Just looking at a list like that should make the uninitiated at least curious to experience that which fed the souls of these great saints.

This isn't the first time that Archbishop Ranjith has publicly criticized bishops who are ignoring Benedict XVI's wish that the Tridentine Mass be more widely

celebrated. At an address to the Latin Liturgy Association last month in the Netherlands, Ranjith called those bishops "disobedient," adding that they were being used as "instruments of the devil."

Devil or not, we can be grateful for a member of the Vatican Curia who is willing to speak out in defense of

the Holy Father on a matter that is clearly very dear to his heart.

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# Today's Abolitionists

Irene Lagan | Column

11/7/07

Late last month, 33 sisters from 26 countries met in Rome at the invitation of the U.S. embassy of the Holy See and the Italian Union of Major Superiors. The weeklong meeting was no ordinary gathering of nuns; it was the launch of an international, intercongregational religious network of sisters to counter the scourge of human trafficking.

Spearheaded by Consolata Missionary Sr. Eugenia Bonetti, whose "call within a call" led her back to her native Rome, the meeting was an opportunity for sisters to bond and equip themselves with practical skills.

Many observers -- including the U.S. Department of State -- consider Sister Eugenia a pioneer in the arena of modern slavery. After 24 years as a missionary in Africa, she discovered a greater, more hidden poverty in Rome, where many of the same poor she met in African countries were cut off from family and subjected to forced prostitution:

The first girl who introduced me to this world changed my life. She ran away from her captors and came to us to ask for help. She was Christian, and asked us to pray. Hearing her story, the sufferings she endured, opened to me this world of modern-day slavery.

The U.S. State Department issued the first official report on Trafficking in Persons in 2000, when the Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons was established. In 2006, they estimated that at least 800,000 people were bought and sold that year across international lines, while millions more were traded within their own countries.

Sister Eugenia has been working with women and girls in the streets and detention centers for 16 years, and has watched a steady influx of youth in the sex trade, mostly from Nigeria and Romania. Currently in

Italy, her congregation of Consolata Missionaries has 250 sisters devoted to the task of providing safe havens and rehabilitation for people caught in the web.

But governments have been slow to recognize the problem. Eleanor Gaetan, senior coordinator for public policy outreach at the U.S. State Department, said that it was in fact women religious and faith-based groups who brought the issue to the attention of lawmakers and government officials. As numbers swelled in detention facilities, they were the ones who consistently listened and ministered to troubled youth and women and followed them upon release, often across borders, through contacts with other congregations.

## A Sisterly Touch

The U.S. and now the Italian governments have come to appreciate religious sisters as uniquely suited to counter global trafficking. Present in virtually every corner of the world, sisters have ministered to the poor and marginalized for centuries and recognize their needs in ways others do not.

More immediately, sisters have a welcoming and comforting maternal presence, the result of devoting themselves entirely to love of God and neighbor. Victims trust sisters more than the suspect promises of law enforcement. Indeed, Sister Eugenia said the girls she has helped know her as "Mamma" -- someone who sees beyond their shame and guilt.

"We are the modern day Good Samaritans. It is easy for all to pass by a prostitute on the street and turn the other way," Sister Eugenia said.

But the sisters are not naïve to the complexity of human trafficking. While their availability to victims is

essential, the sisters have also been the impetus behind new measures. They've chided police for being harsh with victims and letting consumers of street sex off the hook, and have called on priests and male religious to stop turning a blind eye to the problem of pornography.

According to most of the sisters, poverty and demand are the main culprits in the booming slave trade. Sr. Susan Mahoney, Holy Name Sister of Jesus and Mary based in California, said the growing divide between rich and poor creates untenable moral choices. "For many it comes down to a choice between feeding their children daily by prostituting themselves or remaining in abject poverty."

### Hostage to the Devil

Pornography is legal, and where prostitution is not, it is often ignored or accepted. Moreover, the problem is hidden: Most people view prostitutes or pornographic models as victims by choice, and some in the trade maintain that they are free.

But Sr. Patricia Ebegbulem, a missionary sister of St. Louis from Nigeria, paints a very different picture. She described in detail the way traffickers strip victims of dignity through rape and abuse first, then deprive them of spiritual consolation through rituals that are directly contrary to the gospel. Girls from Nigeria, most of whom are Christian, are taken to a shrine where they are forced to perform rituals and swear oaths never to reveal the identity of their traffickers.

"I am dealing with one girl now," Sister Patricia related. "She was deported from Rome, where other sisters were working with her. Terrible things were done to her. We try to show her a new way of life, give her hope for a different future. But she wants to go back, to run away again. There is hope, but it takes time."

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# Disgust Is Not Enough

Mark P. Shea | Column

11/8/07

Here's something you don't read every day. The Middle East Media Research Institute reports the following:

Media Uproar Following Egyptian Mufti's Fatwa on Companions of the Prophet Muhammad Being Blessed by Drinking His Urine

An uproar in the Egyptian media followed the recent publication of a book by Egyptian Mufti Dr. Ali Gum'a in which he claimed that the companions of the Prophet Muhammad would drink his urine to be blessed.

Most people don't know that a "fatwa" is *not* a death sentence but rather an *opinion* by a Muslim leader. Because of this, many Western readers -- merely glancing at the story -- will assume that somebody has yet again been sentenced to death for saying something untoward about Mohammed. But the story is stranger than that. It turns out the fatwa by Dr. Ali Gum'a is not condemning, but *endorsing*, the idea that some people believed drinking Mohammed's urine brought a blessing.

Other Muslims are upset with this -- much bustle and shouting, etc. We see this sort of thing all the time on TV. The Islamic world appears to be full of angry bearded men who are always screaming about something. And when that "something" they are screaming about is "drinking the urine of Mohammed," it becomes a matter fatally easy for Westerners to make fun of. In addition to our being mortally sick of ululating Bronze Age thugs yelling on TV, there's also a strong disgust factor that drives our reaction to the story.

Still and all, Catholics interested in an intelligent defense of the Faith should be cautious about jumping on the bandwagon of criticism here. Why? Because disgust over urine is an *aesthetic* reaction, not an argument. And if we do not think things through, our

kneejerk ridicule of a story like this can leave the Church wide open to exactly the same ridicule from her enemies here in the West.

Here's how it works: Modern secularists of the "Religion Poisons Everything" school (such as Christopher Hitchens) naturally dismiss all this sort of fofoerah about the Piss of the Prophet as yet one more illustration of the barbarism of Islam. Such polemicists have a knack for delivering witty putdowns of the Bronze Age fanatics and their crude superstitions. But then, conservative Christians get on board with their own guffaws because -- particularly in the case of Hitchens -- his views of Islam coincide with the Western rejection of the assorted barbarisms of Radical Islam. Hitchens seems like a convenient ally.

And so conservative Catholics are suckered into a trap by the peculiar prejudices of this particular hour in history. Those who base their Faith purely on aesthetics will soon find themselves hoisted on their own petard by the atheist polemicist.

"What, are you *Catholics* guffawing about?" asks the Hitchenseque atheist. "You are, after all, the ones with the mummified head of St. Catherine of Siena looking down at you from a reliquary in a European shrine. You are the ones who divvy up the bones of St. Teresa of Avila and scatter her all over Spain. And supremely, you are the ones who take with utmost seriousness the words 'Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood you have no life in you.' Blood drinkers laughing at urine drinkers! That's rich!"

In short, if we thoughtlessly make disgust -- about urine drinking or any other aesthetic matter -- our sole argument in dealing with the challenge of Islam, we leave ourselves open to the atheist who will insist that the only real difference between Muslims and Christians is which magical body fluid they happen to

superstitiously revere. If we have only aesthetics to back us up, we will be in a very poor position to answer a world that continues to ask, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat? This is a hard saying! Who can hear it?"

Catholics must recognize that, in certain ways, we are far closer to Muslims than we are to secular postmodernists. That's not because -- as the atheists say -- the Catholic faith is a barbaric oriental superstition indistinguishable from Islam. Rather, Christians share with Islam -- and most of the human race -- that thing a tiny minority of Western atheists

have cut from their souls: a sense of the sacramental in created things.

Next week, we'll talk about how to flesh that out (pardon the pun).

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# Muzzling the Bishops with 'Civility'

Deal W. Hudson | Column

11/9/07

**O**n Tuesday, a group of Catholics in Washington, D.C. issued a statement calling for a greater "spirit of civility" as Americans approach the 2008 presidential elections. When I saw the title of the statement -- "[A Catholic Call to Civility in Public Debate](#)" -- I thought, *what a great idea!*

Then I read it, and I was puzzled and disappointed.

I agree wholeheartedly with the statement's call to avoid "attacks on private conduct." But then I came to the following line:

Others, for political and even ecclesiastical reasons, seek the public embarrassment of politicians whose public positions differ with Church teachings through the public refusal of the sacrament of Holy Communion or public admonition by the Bishops.

What "others" did these signers have in mind? Our Holy Father, Benedict XVI, issued a warning to pro-abortion politicians on May 9, 2007, saying that Catholic politicians who support a proposed law allowing women to have abortions in Mexico City no longer deserve to receive Communion.

Excommunication, the Holy Father said, is "not something arbitrary. It is part of the [canon law] code. It is based simply on the principle that the killing of an innocent human child is incompatible with going in Communion with the body of Christ" ([USA Today](#)).

His words were *so* clear that Mayor Rudy Giuliani -- then a newly announced presidential candidate -- was forced to take a reporter's question on the pope's comment. "I do not get into debates with the pope," he wisely said.

But he added, "Issues like that, for me, are between me and my confessor" ([New York Daily News](#)).

In other words, it's a "private matter." Is this what the signers of the statement had in mind when they condemned public attacks on "private conduct"? Is "private conduct" code language for a politician's view on abortion?

Only a month after the pope's comments, Giuliani's pro-abortion stance was publicly criticized by Bishop Thomas J. Tobin (Providence, RI). Bishop Tobin compared Giuliani to Pontius Pilate in the [diocesan newspaper](#):

As Catholics, we are called, indeed required, to be pro-life, to cherish and protect human life as a precious gift of God from the moment of conception until the time of natural death . . . . I can just hear Pilate saying, "You know, I'm personally opposed to crucifixion but I don't want to impose my belief on others."

Is this an example of the incivility that this statement condemns?

If so, are the bishops being asked to be "kinder and gentler" toward pro-abortion Catholic politicians? Or are they being asked to say nothing about them at all?

## Trying To Prevent Another Kerry?

It's obvious to everyone, including the reporter from the Catholic News Service, that this statement is a response to the public debate over Communion during the 2004 race. The civility statement also suggests, wrongly, that the question of denying Communion to John Kerry was initiated by the laity:

As lay Catholics we should not exhort the Church to condemn our political opponents by publicly denying them Holy Communion based on public dissent from Church teachings.

As a matter of historical fact, the debate began in January 2004 when it was revealed that Bishop Raymond L. Burke -- then in La Cross, WI -- counseled some pro-abortion Wisconsin politicians not to receive Communion. A few months later, after becoming archbishop of St. Louis, Burke announced that he would withhold Communion from John Kerry, if he presented himself at the altar.

Burke was lambasted by the media, but he received the backing of numerous bishops who made their own statements on denying Communion to pro-abortion Catholic politicians: Archbishop Charles Chaput (Denver), Archbishop John Myers (Newark), Sean Cardinal O'Malley (Boston), and Bishop Michael Sheridan (Colorado Springs).

Are these bishops guilty of incivility in launching attacks on "private conduct"? Did these bishops speak because "partisan" laypersons twisted their arms, as the statement implies?

Civility is a virtue, and we need more of it in our public discourse. But it must not -- and need not -- come at the expense of our bishops speaking the truth.

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# My Friday Night Hit List

Marjorie Campbell | Column

11/9/07

**B**y Friday night, I am exhausted. Sometimes, too drained to do anything else, I play a game listing the people who irritated me the most that week. It's not charitable: It's my Friday Night Hit List.

*My husband's former girlfriend.* This woman occasionally surfaces in my life, like a toxic oil slick. She suddenly appeared on Monday evening at a restaurant where we were dining, draped herself around my husband's neck, and cooed, "Hello Billy. I've been so worried about you. Are things any better at home?" Then, glancing at me with feigned surprise: "Oh, hi. I didn't know you were here." That's when I developed food poisoning and ran to the bathroom pondering, "What would Darth Vader do?"

*The large woman with acne.* Tuesday morning, Southwest Airlines squeezed me into a portion of a middle seat in the back of an airplane. A woman of grand girth generously occupied the other portion of my seat, along with her own window seat. "Not fair," I groaned inwardly, and looked at her. The woman had *terrible* acne. Distracted, I found my shoulder quickly pinned under her heavy upper arm, while her lower arm rested in my lap. We traveled with our thighs lumped together, as I tried not to moan aloud.

*My former boss.* This man still actively irritates me. Even though I haven't worked for him for ten years, he plagued my memories on Wednesday. Call him "Maniac" for easy reference -- he gave sexism new contours. The same scene replays like a late-night TV horror movie: the day I told Maniac I couldn't write a brief for him because I had to take my feverish, vomiting baby to the doctor. Maniac rolled his eyes in disgust, shouted "You're not committed to your job anymore," and stormed from my office.

*Post-Office Bert.* Bert made my hit list when I bought stamps from him on Thursday. He might take medication to control postal rage; his mood swings

more than the Dow. But on Thursday, I watched Bert tell a foreign visitor with a small package to mail, "I can't take the package unless you tape it." "But," the young woman stammered in broken English, "I no have scotchy tapes." Bert, positioned firmly behind a two-foot tall roll of official Post Office adhesive tape, pointed to a sign and read, "Postal policy prohibits the distribution of packaging tape." The woman slunk away -- and the evil Bert grinned.

*Four hugely annoying teenagers.* This morning, I attended a special Mass for those anticipating confirmation in the spring. I unwisely sat behind four involuntary teen candidates. I watched these blue-jeaned, belly button-bared girls, with eye-liner thicker than no-passing lines, smack gum, whisper, laugh, and mimic the priest through the course of the Mass. Aghast by this overt I'd-rather-be-at-the-mall performance, I wondered: Could I wrestle them into the Ladies Room, one by one, and wash their little lip-sticked mouths out with soap?

That's it -- my Friday Night Hit List. Once I have it neatly compiled, I can work it over for hours. I can memorize it, take it to bed with me, and supplement it through the night. By morning, I have developed more startling proof that each of these people is inexcusably annoying and unlovable. At this point, I get excited about sharing my findings.

Usually it's my husband who rescues me. As I load my Power Point presentation for restructuring the Post Office to eliminate Bert's job, Bill interrupts, "Honey, remember what you tell the children: 'If you can't find something nice to say about someone, just pray for them!'" I wince. Did I say that? I meant scary people like Osama bin Laden or Scott Peterson or my former murder client. Surely I did not mean the people I love to hate on Friday evening?

My husband remains patient and blinks his deep brown eyes my way. Good grief. Of course I have told my children to find something nice in everyone. Bill chimes again, "Remember, 'Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you'?"

Bill's gaze pushes me, like a child afraid to jump in the pool. I think about the lonely life my husband's former girlfriend leads; about the Southwestern woman's beautifully manicured hand gently resting in my lap; about Maniac's radiant joy when he brought his small sons to work; and about Bert's crooked smile the day I said, "You did a great job moving the line." I recall how warmly the girls said "Peace be with you," even as I snarled at them.

No one is entirely unlovable, I know, even on Friday night. But it's my Friday Night Hit List -- my sorted out, worked-over catalogue of irritations -- that God calls my Prayer List. By Sunday morning, I am ready. I run through it one last time, shaking my head, and I begin, "For these people, who irritate me so much, dear God, I pray . . ."

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# Grace Is the Hardest Pillow

Eve Tushnet | Review

11/7/07

*Lobotomy Magnificat*

Kathy Shaidle, Oberon PR, 104 pages

Because the Fall warped all things in our world, even our language, in order to recover the truth about that world we must warp our language even further. T. S. Eliot did this, hitting the English language and Western culture until it shattered. In *Lobotomy Magnificat*, Canadian Catholic poet Kathy Shaidle hits language even harder, producing short, violent, pointillist poems in which each image is compressed into the tightest possible space.

The collection's opening piece, "A Summer Thunderstorm Considered as the Assassination of John Fitzgerald Kennedy," sets the tone:

*Skin's prayed wet rosaries all day.*

*Finally thunder turns the corner -- a memory trigger.*

*Can't close the window in time. . . .*

*Sidewalk and rain -- concrete veronicas.*

There's that same Eliot retreat into double-tongued muttering ("Can't close the window in time" does much the same work in Shaidle's poem that "HURRY UP PLEASE IT'S TIME" does in "The Waste Land") and the same obsessive sifting through the past, endlessly seeking, hoping that this time the half-remembered lost object will be found. And Eliot, too, was preeminently a poet of the Fall.

But Shaidle's from the 20th century, with none of Eliot's Miniver-Cheevyng dissimulations. Her style is shocking but straightforward, nothing to hide, a roving klieg light rather than a shifting shadow-pattern of autumn leaves. She writes about the Kennedys, about conspiracies and murders, contemplatives and

humiliated women. The title page of *Lobotomy Magnificat* maps her territory: "Jack Ruby" (*I posed before a lined and numbered wall,/my head like shot-glassed whisky*), "St. Laurence's Gridiron Disguised as an Electric Fan in Thomas Merton's Bangkok Hotel Room, 1968" (*those God-tossed well-coins/you call saints*), "Contacts with Trotskyites" (*men can be hard/and men can be soft/but mostly they can just get lost*), "Good Friday, Georgia O'Keefe" (*Waiting for time to take its communion*). Ferociously Catholic, wryly political, challenging and stricken -- that's Shaidle country. Thérèse of Lisieux and Jimmy Dean.

Readers who know Shaidle solely through her combative and often vituperative weblogs (Relapsed Catholic, and now *Five Feet of Fury*) may be surprised at the poignancy and compassion of her poetry. The title poem, written from the perspective of Rosemary Kennedy before and after her lobotomy, is heartbreaking:

*The nurse folds up my blanket like a flag*

*and the rich were sent empty away. . . .*

*I am left here to hold my own hand,*

*kneeling in the coral pews behind my eyes*

*somehow.*

Shaidle's poem in the voice of convicted murderer Evelyn Dick includes this description of an incestuous assault on Evelyn as a little girl:

*After the first time, I went to that window*

*and threw my soiled nightgown out.*

*It gnarled in the rosebush, Abraham's ram.*

*And no-one said a word.*

The longer you spend with that imagery, the more it hurts.

Not every poem works. "Restoration Conspiracy Notebook" never quite comes together -- it's a heap of portentous utterances, not a poem. But the best poems in this collection are among the best poems I've read.

Illness, physical pain, and humiliation; people for whom God is an inescapable and often anguished question, not an answer; but also art, contemplation, the ability to accept an unbearable situation with

humor and grace. (Shaidle manages to capture the humor St. Therese deployed against herself and her canonizers.) She's Hopkins with fistfights, Paglia without the self-absorption of ersatz paganism, Patti Smith at Midnight Mass. Her poetry is broken the way hearts are broken.

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*Eve Tushnet writes from Washington, D.C.*