

Benedict's Revolution

Old Rite, New Rite, and the Holy See

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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's 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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