

FRANCISCANS AND THE MOTU PROPRIO «SUMMORUM PONTIFICUM»

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On 7th July 2007 Pope Benedict XVI published the Apostolic Letter *Motu Proprio* data «Summorum Pontificum», concerning norms about the celebration of the Eucharist according to the Tridentine Rite of Pope Saint Pius V, as updated by the 1962 version of the Roman Missal, published by Blessed Pope John XXIII.¹ Together with this Apostolic Letter, Benedict XVI also published a Letter, which he sent to all bishops, explaining the pastoral aspects of «Summorum Pontificum» and the use of the Roman Liturgy preceding the liturgical reform undertaken by Pope Paul VI in 1970.²

The Apostolic Letter contains two parts. The first part is a brief historical outline of the progress of the Roman Rite from the times of Pope Saint Gregory the Great, right down to the Council of Trent, and to Popes Saint Pius V, Clement VIII, Urban VIII, Saint Pius X, Benedict XV, Pius XII and Blessed John XXIII, all of whom updated the liturgical books, particularly the Roman Missal, especially in the period following upon the Council of Trent. This section ends with a reference to the liturgical reform of Vatican II and the first typical edition of the new Roman Missal by Paul VI in 1970, followed by two other editions by John Paul II. The second section contains the new norms regarding the use of the Roman Liturgy prior to 1970, and particularly regarding the indult given by John Paul II in the Apostolic Letter *Motu Proprio* data «*Ecclesia Dei*» (2nd July 1988) in favour of those priests and faithful who ask bishops for permission to celebrate Mass according to the form contained in the latest edition of the Tridentine Roman Missal (1962).

The days immediately following the publication of «Summorum Pontificum», which will take effect as from 14th September 2007, witnessed a variety of attitudes and feedback from Christian associations and the press. They ranged from outright rejection by “progressives”, to moderate criticism by supporters of the achievements of liturgical reform after Vatican II, to euphoria and a sense of victory on the part of “traditionalist” sectors of the Catholic Church.

Article 3 of «Summorum Pontificum» states: “Communities of Institutes of consecrated life and of Societies of apostolic life, of either pontifical or diocesan right, wishing to celebrate Mass in accordance with the edition of the Roman Missal promulgated in 1962, for conventual or community celebration in their oratories, may do so. If an individual community or an entire Institute or Society wishes to undertake such celebrations often, habitually or permanently, the decision must be taken by the Superiors Major, in accordance with the law and following their own specific decrees and statutes.”³

Given the nature of such a new legal provision, one would immediately ask whether any Franciscan fraternity which specifically opts for such a celebration, either habitually or permanently, and which would receive permission for doing so from the competent authorities (major superiors for example), could be regarded as still being in the “mainstream” of what Franciscan spiritual tradition has lived for eight centuries, regarding the celebration of the liturgy (for example, the divine

office) “according to the Rite of the holy Roman Church.”⁴ Such an assertion might seem out of place, since the Roman Missal of 1962 is certainly part and parcel of venerable ecclesial liturgical tradition, which has been valid in the Church for centuries, and therefore still remains valid today.⁵ Our aim is simply that of providing food for thought if we are to delve into what Francis meant when he commanded the friars to pray the divine offices “according to the Rite of the holy Roman Church,”⁶ and if we consider the role of the Franciscan Order in liturgical reform in the Roman rite.

Saint Francis and the liturgical reform of the Fourth Lateran Council

Francis lived during one of the great moments of reform in the Church, namely that of the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) and its aftermath. We can compare the Franciscan Order in that period to the Franciscan Order in these last 40 years after Vatican Council II. The Fourth Lateran Council was instrumental in reforming the liturgical and sacramental practice of the Church. Among the post-conciliar documents of Lateran IV we can quote the decree «Sane cum olim» of Pope Honorius III (22nd November 1219), regarding respect and reverence towards the Eucharist, liturgical books, vessels, altars, etc.⁷ On 3rd December 1224 Honorius III issued the decree «Quia populares tumultus», addressed specifically to the Order of Friars Minor, in which he gave them the privilege of having a portable altar in their oratories, on which to celebrate solemn Mass and the other divine offices.⁸ Francis himself wrote many a time to his brothers, to clerics and to the faithful, regarding respect and reverence to the holy Eucharist, and regarding faithfulness to the Church of Rome with respect to liturgical norms promulgated by the Fourth Lateran Council.⁹ Scholars of Franciscan liturgical tradition agree on one important point, namely, that since the time of Saint Francis, the Friars Minor were keen upon spreading among their fraternities, and subsequently in their conventual churches, the updated form of liturgical practice in the papal court, and that they tried to update their own legislation and fraternal traditions to the needs of the Church in the post Fourth Lateran Council period.¹⁰

In his Chronicle, Salimbene de Adam of Parma attributes to Pope Innocent III the revision of the ecclesiastical divine office during the Fourth Lateran Council.¹¹ This revised office soon became popular with the Friars Minor, who according to the witness of Matthew of Paris, carried their liturgical books in their haversacks during their missionary journeys of preaching¹².

The general chapter of Pentecost of 1230 decreed that all the provinces of the Order should receive the breviaries and antiphonaries proper to the Order.¹³ The chronicles of Jordan of Giano and Thomas of Eccleston both speak about the practice of the friars to go to the cathedral and parish churches to sing the divine office, since they still did not have their own oratories.

In the years 1240-1244 the minister general Haymo of Faversham undertook a thorough revision of the liturgical books of the Order. The first liturgical books in the Order had been published during the pontificate of Gregory IX. They included the breviary and missal, together with the rubrics and calendar. These liturgical books had the aim of spreading the Roman rite. The insistence of the Rule upon liturgical faithfulness to the liturgy of the papal court is evident in the fact that scholars speak about the “Regula breviary”, the “Regula missal” and the “Regula ritual”.¹⁴

The spreading of the Roman liturgy by the Franciscans was so effective, that the breviary they used became to be called the “Roman-Franciscan” breviary. Pope Nicholas III (1277-1286) decreed that in the churches of Rome the old antiphonaries, graduals, missals and other liturgical books of the divine office were to be replaced by the liturgical books and breviaries in use in the Franciscan Order. The popularity of the liturgical reform after Lateran IV was such that, wherever the Franciscans settled down, including the university cities of Paris, Oxford, Bologna and Padova, they brought with them the revised Roman liturgy, particularly through the spreading of the “Breviarium Curiae”. This trend continued right down to the Council of Trent and the papacy of Saint Pius V, who unified the liturgy of the western Church by providing it with the Roman model which, with periodic modifications, remained in use until the latest liturgical reform, that of Vatican Council II.

Franciscans and the liturgical reform of the Second Vatican Council

The brief historical outline regarding the liturgical reforms introduced by the Fourth Lateran Council and the role of the Franciscan Order in spreading them, tells us one important fact, namely, that the Friars Minor were instrumental in promoting Church reform and that the Franciscan liturgical tradition has always progressed along the same lines indicated by the Church of Rome. The great Franciscan preachers of the Observant family in the fifteenth century are a proof of the beneficial use of the vernacular in popular preaching, just as the first Franciscan missionaries to the Far East and to the Americas were innovators in translating the Bible and other liturgical books into the native languages of the peoples they evangelised.

At this point of history we are faced with an option regarding the Roman liturgical tradition. «Summorum pontificum» states this plainly in Article 1: “The Roman Missal promulgated by Paul VI is the ordinary expression of the ‘Lex orandi’ of the Catholic Church of the Latin rite. Nonetheless, the Roman Missal promulgated by Saint Pius V and reissued by Blessed John XXIII is to be considered as an extraordinary expression of that same ‘Lex orandi’, and must be given due honour for its venerable and ancient usage. These two expressions of the Church’s ‘Lex orandi’ will in no way lead to a division of the Church’s ‘Lex credendi’. They are, in fact, two usages of the one Roman rite.”¹⁵

It is up to theologians to discuss whether there is, in fact, the one and same ‘Lex credendi’ in the Missal of Saint Pius V and that of Paul VI, given that the liturgical tradition prior to Vatican II, in some aspects, certainly expresses a different ecclesiology than that which developed after Vatican II regarding the celebration of the Eucharist. The aim of these reflections is that of asking ourselves if, as Franciscans, we are, in fact, free to decide personally and on a fraternal basis, whether we can opt for one or another of the liturgical forms being presented. The question of these forms being “ordinary” and “extraordinary” is not a question of substantial difference, given that the same ‘Motu proprio’ states, in Article 2: “For such celebrations, with either one Missal or the other, the priest has no need for permission from the Apostolic See or from his Ordinary.”¹⁶

One of the problems in accepting this provision without any sense of discernment in the case of us Franciscans is linked with a correct understanding of the ordained ministry in the fraternity. The Missal of Honorius III, which the friars used in the 13th century, had a rubric, which stated: “If there are more priests in the same

place, they can individually sing the Mass they want.”¹⁷ It is important to confront these words with what Francis himself states in the Letter to the Entire Order:

“I admonish and exhort you in the Lord, therefore, to celebrate only one Mass a day according to the rite of the Holy Church in those places where the brothers dwell. But if there is more than one priest there, let the other be content, for the love of charity, at hearing the celebration of the other priest.”¹⁸

In a time when there was no possibility of concelebrating the Eucharist, Francis prefers the primacy of charity in the fraternity above the personal choices of the priest in exercising his right to celebrate Mass. With the possibility of concelebration during “conventual” Mass, given to all religious communities after Vatican II, the question of the convenience of celebrating “private” Masses, at least in the Franciscan family, remains open to debate, just as the question of “concelebration” is still an object of debate in some sectors of the Church.

We shall not deal, at this point, with the pastoral aspects of one or the other kind of celebration, even though this is also a point of discussion, given that the Church has entrusted many parishes to the pastoral care of the Franciscan Order. This discussion would entail an examination of the role of the parish priest in relation to the local Ordinary, whose authority in decision making regarding the use or otherwise of the Tridentine Mass seems to have been curtailed in «Summorum pontificum», article 7.¹⁹

With all due “obedience and reverence to the Lord Pope”, we cannot accept the provisions of «Summorum pontificum» without some sense of preoccupation not only regarding its long-term effects on Church unity and pastoral ministry, but more so regarding its implications for us, as Franciscans. In our long history, we have hardly been an example of unity or uniformity. Nevertheless, the Franciscan family has always been a dynamic force in the Church. It has understood its faithfulness to the Church of Rome as implying a sincere effort to move on with the Church, to open up new spaces in which the Spirit of the Lord can operate. In this endeavour, ever faithful to Catholic tradition, and rejecting all kinds of innovations not based on sound Catholic doctrine, every Franciscan feels that it is his duty to move on. The Second Vatican Council has provided such an opportunity, which still needs to be studied in depth and valued for the future of the Church. Among the new fruits of the Spirit born out of Vatican II, the revised edition of the Roman Missal has certainly been a great success. The words of Pope Paul VI remain prophetic for us, Franciscan priests, if we have to discern whether we can, in fact, remain faithful to our tradition by making use of the privileges granted by «Summorum pontificum»:

“We hope nevertheless that the Missal will be received by the faithful as an instrument which bears witness to and which affirms the common unity of all. Thus, in the great diversity of languages, one unique prayer will rise as an acceptable offering to our Father in heaven, through our High-Priest Jesus Christ, in the Holy Spirit.”²⁰

NOTES

¹ The original Latin version I shall quote is that found in the official web-site of the Vatican: <http://www.vatican.va>

² The English translation of the Letter will be quoted also from the official web-site of the Vatican.

³ BENEDICTUS XVI, *Litterae Apostolicae Motu Proprio datae Summorum Pontificum*, Art. 3: “Si communitates Institutorum vitae consecratae atque Societatum vitae apostolicae iuris sive pontificii sive dioecesani quae in celebratione conventuali seu “communitatis” in oratoriis propriis celebrationem sanctae Missae iuxta editionem Missalis Romani anno 1962 promulgatam habere cupiunt, id eis licet. Si singula communitas aut totum Institutum vel Societas tales celebrations saepe vel plerumque vel permanenter perficere vult, res a Superioribus maioribus ad normam iuris et secundum leges et statuta particularia decernatur.”

⁴ *Later Rule*, 3,1, *Francis of Assisi. Early Documents*, Vol. I, ed. R.J. Armstrong, J.A. Wayne Hellmann, W.J. Short, Franciscan Institute, St. Bonaventure University, NY 1999 [= FAED I], 101.

⁵ BENEDICT XVI, *Letter to the Bishops on the occasion of the publication of the Apostolic Letter “Motu Proprio data” «Summorum Pontificum» on the use of the Roman Liturgy prior to the reform of 1970*: “In the first place, there is the fear that the document detracts from the authority of the Second Vatican Council, one of whose essential decisions – the liturgical reform – is being called into question. This fear is unfounded. In this regard, it must first be said that the Missal published by Paul VI and then republished in two subsequent editions by John Paul II, obviously is and continues to be the normal Form – the *Forma ordinaria* – of the Eucharistic Liturgy. The last version of the *Missale Romanum* prior to the Council, which was published with the authority of Pope John XXIII in 1962 and used during the Council, will now be able to be used as a *Forma extraordinaria* of the liturgical celebration. It is not appropriate to speak of these two versions of the Roman Missal as if they were ‘two Rites’. Rather, it is a matter of a twofold use of one and the same rite.”

⁶ *Reg. Bullata* (1223), 3,1: “Clerici faciant divinum officium secundum ordinem sanctae Romanae Ecclesiae”. The Cistercian chronicler Alberic de Trois-Fontaines, in his *Chronicle* (1227-1235) writes: “Regarding the usage (of the friars minor) in reading Scripture and singing psalms, he (Francis) chose the form of the Church of Rome” (*Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores*, 13,887-888).

⁷ HONORIUS III, Decree *Sane cum olim* (22 November 1219), in *Bullarium Romanum*, Honorius III, n. XI, tom. III, 366a-366b: “We strictly enjoin by precept that the Eucharist be reserved always devotedly and faithfully in a place of honour that is clean and designated for It alone. Every priest should teach his people frequently that they should bow in reverence whenever the life-giving Host is elevated at the celebration of Mass and that each one should do the same when the priest is carrying It to the sick. At the same time, the priest should carry It in becoming apparel covered with a clean veil and should bring It back opening at his breast and with respect. The priest should be preceded by a torch, since the Eucharist is the radiance of Eternal Light” (translation taken from FAED I, 55).

⁸ HONORIUS III, Decree *Quia populares tumultus* (3 December 1224), in *Bullarium Franciscanum* I, 20, n. 17: “Therefore, favourable to your petitions, by authority of these present letters, we concede to you this privilege: that in your places and oratories you may celebrate solemn Masses with a portable altar, as well as the other divine offices, without prejudice to the rights of parochial churches” (translation taken from FAED I, 562).

⁹ S.J.P. VAN DIJK, *Sources of the Modern Roman Liturgy. The Ordinal by Haymo of Faversham and Related Documents (1243-1307)*, Vol. I, Leiden 1963, 40-41: “The third chapter of the final Rule (1223) prescribes that, except for the psalter, clerics are to say the Divine Office according to the use of the Holy Roman Church, since they are allowed to have breviaries. Lay brothers are to say a number of Our Fathers for each of the Canonical Hours. Since at the time the brotherhood of St. Francis was predominantly an Order of laymen and clerics, the Rule limited itself to the obligation of the Office and its equivalent without reference to the Mass liturgy. The increasing number of priests soon made itself felt; by 1230 it was already so great that the first issue of liturgical books included both an Office and a Mass book.”

“The phrase ‘according to the use of the Holy Roman Church’ is vague in itself. The liturgical books published afterwards show how the Office intended was that of the pope’s court, officially residing at the Lateran palace. In the last years of the reign of Innocent III this office was codified in an ordinal, the arrangement and rubrics of which were followed not only in the liturgical books of the papal chaplains but also in those reviewed by Honorius III in order to release this liturgy to a wider use. In fact, the breviary was adopted by the canons of the cathedral of Assisi, from whom St. Francis inherited his veneration for the court liturgy. The papal chaplains, however, used the so-called Roman Psalter. The exception made on this point by the Rule indicates that the friars were to say the court Office but not the Roman version of its Psalter. They conformed to the tradition observed outside Rome by saying the Gallican Psalter.”

¹⁰ Cfr. N. MUSCAT, “Brothers, look at the humility of God”. *The Eucharist in the Writings and the Life of Saint Francis of Assisi*, Franciscan Studies Corner, web-site of the Maltese Franciscan OFM Province: www.ofm.org.mt

¹¹ *The Chronicle of Salimbene de Adam*, ed. J.L. Baird, Medieval & Renaissance Texts and Studies, Vol. 40, New York 1986, 4.

¹² “Libros continue suos, videlicet bibliotecas, in forulis a cullo dependentes baiulantes.” Quotation taken from GRATIEN DE PARIS, *Historie de la Fondation et de l'Évolution de l'Ordre des Frères Mineurs au XIIIe siècle*, Bibliotheca Seraphico-Capuccina, Roma 1982, 63-64, footnote.

¹³ *Thirteenth Century Chronicles. Jordan of Giano, Thomas of Eccleston, Salimbene degli Adami*, Translated from the Latin by P. Hermann, Introduction and Notes by M.T. Laureilhe, Franciscan Herald Press, Chicago 1961, 61: “In the same general chapter breviaries and antiphonaries according to the usage of the Order were sent to the provinces.”

¹⁴ S.J.P. VAN DIJK, *Sources of the Modern Roman Liturgy. The Ordinal of Haymo of Faversham and Related Documents (1243-1307)*, Vol. I, Leiden 1963, 40-55.

¹⁵ BENEDICTUS XVI, Litterae Apostolicae Motu Proprio datae *Summorum Pontificum*, Art. 1: “Missale Romanum a Paulo VI promulgatum ordinaria expressio ‘Legis orandi’ Ecclesiae catholicae ritus latini est. Missale autem Romanum a S. Pio V promulgatum et a B. Ioanne XXIII denuo editum habeatur uti extraordinaria expressio eiusdem ‘Legis orandi’ Ecclesiae et ob venerabilem et antiquum eius usum debito gaudeat honore. Haec duae expressiones ‘legis orandi’ Ecclesiae, minime vero inducent in divisionem ‘legis credendi’ Ecclesiae; sunt enim duo usus unici ritus romani.”

¹⁶ BENEDICTUS XVI, Litterae Apostolicae Motu Proprio datae *Summorum Pontificum*, Art. 2: “Ad talem celebrationem secundum unum alterumve Missale, sacerdos nulla eget licentia, nec Sedis Apostolicae nec Ordinarii sui.”

¹⁷ “Sed si sunt plures sacerdotes in hoc loco, secrete possunt cantare missam quam volunt.”

¹⁸ *EpOrd* 30-31: “Si vero in loco plures fuerint sacerdotes, sit per amorem caritatis alter contentus audita celebratione alterius sacerdotis.”

¹⁹ BENEDICTUS XVI, Litterae Apostolicae Motu Proprio datae *Summorum Pontificum*, Art. 7: “Ubi aliquis coetus fidelium laicorum, de quo in art. 5 §1 petita a parrocho non obtinuerit, de re certiore faciat Episcopum dioecesanum. Episcopus enixe rogatur ut eorum optatum exaudiat. Si ille ad huiusmodi celebrationem providere non potest res ad Pontificiam Commissionem ‘Ecclesia Dei’ referatur.”

²⁰ PAUL VI, Apostolic Constitution *Missale Romanum* (3 April 1969), in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 61 (1969) 217-226: “Haud secus Nos, etsi, de praescripto Concilii Vaticani II, in novum Missale legitimas varietates et aptationes (Cf CONCILIUM OECUMENICUM VATICANUM II, Const. de sacra liturgia *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, nn. 38-40; AAS 56, 1964, p. 110) ascivimus, nihilo tamen secius fore confidimus, ut hoc ipsum a christifidelibus quasi subsidium ad mutuam omnium unitatem testandam confirmandamque accipiatur, utpote cuius ope, in tot varietate linguarum, una eademque cunctorum precatio ad caelestem Patrem, per summum Pontificem nostrum Iesum Christum, in Spiritu Sancto, quovis ture fragrantior ascendat.”