

# Dogmatizing Discipline: Papal Authority, Modifying the Mass and The Truth About *Quo Primum* By Thomas J. Nash

**ISSUE:** When Pope Saint Pius V issued his apostolic constitution (*Quo Primum*) that promulgated the venerable Tridentine Rite of the Mass in 1570, *could* he bind all future Popes from modifying or superseding this rite?

**RESPONSE:** No, because the rite of the Mass by its nature involves much *changeable* discipline, as opposed to simply *unchangeable* doctrine.<sup>1</sup> Consistent with previous and subsequent Popes, Pope Saint Pius V used ecclesiastical terms like “forever” and “in perpetuity” to safeguard the liturgy. But these terms do not bind future Popes from altering the disciplines, who themselves would have “supreme, full, immediate, and universal ordinary power”<sup>2</sup> in their respective pontificates. This fact is well known among canonists and liturgists. The Tridentine Rite itself was based on *previous* rites and, by the time Pope Paul VI issued his apostolic constitution (*Missale Romanum*) that promulgated the *Missale Romanum* in 1969, several Popes already had modified the Tridentine Rite several times *without controversy*.

**DISCUSSION:** Jesus Christ founded the Catholic Church on the person of St. Peter, promising that the gates of hell would not prevail against him in governing the Church (cf. Mt. 16:18; Lk 22:31-32). While Jesus also gave governing powers to those bishops in union with Peter (cf. Mt. 16:15-18; Lk. 10:16), He made Peter and his papal successors preeminent in overseeing the Church, uniquely giving them the keys of the kingdom of heaven (cf. Mt. 16:19). The giving of keys hearkened back to the authority that the kings of ancient Israel provided to the stewards (prime ministers) of their kingdoms, enabling them to act on their behalf (cf. Is. 22:15-25). In providing Peter with the keys of the kingdom of heaven, Jesus let His disciples know that He was restoring and universalizing the Kingdom of Israel.

Like royal stewards in ancient Israel, Peter and his papal successors are subject to the authority of a king, in their case the King of kings, the God-man Jesus Christ. The Pope and the bishops teaching in union with him are not the authors or arbiters of Church teaching, but rather its “guardians and authentic interpreters,”<sup>3</sup> fulfilling the divinely sustained mission that Christ gave to Peter and the other disciples (cf. Mt. 28:18-20).<sup>4</sup> A Pope cannot contradict Christ’s teachings, which by nature are *unchangeable*. However, guided by the Holy Spirit, he may lead the Church to a deeper and clearer understanding of them over time via a principle known as “development of doctrine” (cf. Jn. 14:26; 16:13). Further, because Christ promised that the gates of hell would not prevail against His Church, we can be confident that a Pope will not teach error regarding faith and morals when exercising his teaching office as the Successor of St. Peter.

To foster the most effective administration and advancement of His kingdom in various times and places, Jesus gave Peter and his papal successors wide authority in governing the Church, including the authority to “bind and loose” (Mt. 16:19). In addition to sacramental dispensation, binding and loosing applies to *disciplinary* matters, i.e., ones which by nature admit of *change* or *modification*. Disciplinary matters include elements of how the Church administers and celebrates the sacraments. For example, the Church could mandate the discipline of Baptism by immersion in one period to better symbolize our death to sin, yet later mandate Baptism by pouring for some other pastoral reason.

In other words, the disciplinary aspects of liturgy are not dogmatic, i.e., “set in stone” for all time; they’re changeable. In the case of Baptism, the sacrament is valid whether by immersion or pouring, yet adhering to the specific discipline is no light matter. Again, Jesus told Peter that “whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven” (Mt. 16:19). Jesus provides centralized papal authority to visibly foster and maintain unity (Catechism, no. 882). To deliberately flout a papal disciplinary directive is to run afoul of God and commit a grave offense against unity. Liturgical

discipline remains binding until a pope, or someone lawfully deputed by him, modifies that discipline.

### ***Quo Primum*: A Changeable, Liturgical Innovation**

In issuing *Quo Primum* several years after the close of the Council of Trent, some critics of the Church argue that Pope Saint Pius V “codified” the Mass that had been celebrated since the days of Jesus<sup>5</sup> and forever bound all future pontiffs to celebrate the Tridentine Rite exactly as he prescribed, i.e., without any change or modification. To clearly establish Pius V’s purposes in issuing *Quo Primum*, we will examine five related important issues:

- Whether Pope Saint Pius V revised the Mass via *Quo Primum*, or permanently mandated a liturgical tradition dating back to Christ;
- Which persons in the Church did Pope Saint Pius V prohibit from modifying the Tridentine Rite in any way;
- The use of the words “forever” or “in perpetuity” regarding the permanence of the apostolic constitution;
- The use and meaning of prohibitive language in the constitution’s final paragraph;
- Modifications made to *Quo Primum* before Paul VI issued *Missale Romanum*.

First, in issuing *Quo Primum*, Pius V makes very clear that his apostolic constitution is a *revision* or *modification* of the Mass. He specifically notes that the Council of Trent authorized “Us to revise and re-edit the sacred books: the Catechism, the Missal, and the Breviary.”<sup>6</sup> The Pope also notes that his liturgical innovation is not a new phenomenon in the Church. The Apostolic See, headed by the pope in Rome, and which has the primary responsibility of extending the faith to the whole world and safeguarding it, had previously allowed the establishment of different Western rites to celebrate the Mass. In fact, Pius V explicitly exempts from celebrating the Tridentine Rite those churches<sup>7</sup> in the West using long-established, ancient liturgies. Those exempted also included religious orders, such as the Dominicans, who used variations of the Roman Rite that were more than 200 years old. In addition, *Quo Primum* did not even apply to Eastern Catholic Churches.

Pius V clearly did not mandate the Tridentine Rite for everyone in the Church. Furthermore, he recognized and upheld earlier popes’ actions that had established new rites to celebrate the Mass. While the Tridentine Mass was substantively the same Mass that Christ and His disciples celebrated in the early Church—the new, definitive, and timeless Passover Sacrifice-Meal<sup>8</sup>—it certainly was not celebrated in exactly the same way. Pius V did not simply reaffirm or restore “the ancient rite of Christ”; rather he promulgated a rite that explicitly replaced various older rites which came into existence after Christ’s Ascension. In realizing that disciplinary changes have occurred in 2,000 years of celebrating Mass, consider simply that the first Masses Christ and His disciples celebrated were in Aramaic or Hebrew, not Latin. To argue that the “Traditional Mass” of the Tridentine Rite has “2,000 years of venerable usage”<sup>9</sup> and is “the Mass of All Time” is, at best, reckless hyperbole.

Second, whom did the Pope bind from modifying *Quo Primum*? Pope Saint Pius V restricted the following people or groups of people from making any and all changes:

We specifically command each and every patriarch, administrator and all other persons of whatever ecclesiastical dignity they may be, be they even cardinals of the Holy Roman Church, or possessed of any other rank or preeminence, and We order them in virtue of holy obedience to chant or to read the Mass according to the rite and manner and norm herein laid down by Us, hereafter, to discontinue and completely discard all other rubrics and rites of other missals, however ancient, which they have customarily followed; and they must not in celebrating Mass presume to introduce any ceremonies or recite any prayers other than those contained in this Missal.<sup>10</sup>

Pius V again notes the existence of rites that his Tridentine Rite supersedes. More importantly, in binding Church leaders, he says “be they even cardinals,” not popes, and therefore those “possessed of any other

rank or preeminence” are of lower rank than cardinal. Given the disciplinary aspects of the Mass, Pius V realized that he could not bind future popes, just as previous popes could not have bound the Council of Trent and him from modifying the Mass as they did in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Furthermore, popes use “Us” in solemn declarations to convey that their individual acts and authority encompass communion with all popes, yet are particular to them as the pope in a given time period. In other words, popes use “Us” instead of “me” to recognize that previous and future popes also have legitimate authority to modify discipline for their time and place in history.

Third, if a pope may modify the sacred books, what did Pius V mean when he wrote that *Quo Primum* “will be valid henceforth, now, and forever”?<sup>11</sup> While “forever” or “perpetual” may often mean “for all time” or even “for all eternity,” Pius V’s expression is a common Church legal formula that conveys that *Quo Primum*’s provisions will always apply *until* he or some future pope decides otherwise. As if to prove that point in his own document, Pius V provides aforementioned exemptions from the Tridentine Rite *after* decreeing that his liturgical decree “applies henceforth, now, and forever, throughout all the provinces of the Christian world. . . .”<sup>12</sup> Even within *Quo Primum* itself, “forever” doesn’t mean forever.

Pope Clement XIV’s suppression of the Society of Jesus (the Jesuits) in 1773 provides additional evidence of the Church’s legal use of “forever” or “perpetual.” Clement declared that his decree was “perpetually valid,” yet no one questioned the authoritative validity of Pope Pius VII’s decision in 1814 to reestablish the Jesuits.<sup>13</sup> Even in *Missale Romanum*, Paul VI began with the formula “*Ad perpetuam rei memoriam*” (for a perpetual record). As with Scripture, the words used in other authoritative Church documents need to be read in context.

Fourth, there is the alleged controversial concluding paragraph of *Quo Primum*:

Therefore, no one whosoever is permitted to alter this letter or heedlessly to venture to go contrary to this notice of Our permission, statute, ordinance, command, precept, grant, indult, declaration, will, decree, and prohibition. Should anyone, however, presume to commit such an act, he should know that he will incur the wrath of Almighty God and of the Blessed Apostles Peter and Paul.<sup>14</sup>

Two years earlier, Pius V used the same concluding paragraph in *Quod a Vobis*, his apostolic constitution promulgating a revision of the Roman Breviary. Yet, Pope St. Pius X revised Pius V’s Roman Breviary in 1911 via his own apostolic constitution *Divino Afflatu*, noting that the same Breviary had been previously revised by Popes Clement VIII, Urban VIII, and Leo XIII.<sup>15</sup> No one protested any of these Popes’ actions because it was widely understood that popes are exempt from such prohibitions. *Divino Afflatu* also included a concluding paragraph similar to *Quod a Vobis*—again, an ecclesiastical warning against unauthorized modification of the Breviary.

Fifth, critics of Pope Paul VI fail to recognize that other popes modified *Quo Primum* long before Paul VI issued his *Missale Romanum*. According to the critics’ reading, Pius V precluded any change, even by a future Pope, when he wrote, “We order and enjoin that nothing must be added to Our recently published Missal, nothing omitted from it, nor anything whatsoever be changed within under the penalty of Our displeasure.”<sup>16</sup>

In fact, other popes modified *Quo Primum* and no one took issue with their actions, as Father Joseph Jungmann conveys in *The Mass of the Roman Rite*:

*Some real changes* since the 16<sup>th</sup> century in the rubrics and in the text of the Missal of Pius V *have resulted in certain instances from papal orders*. For instance, in the new edition of the missal under Clement VIII (1604), the biblical chant pieces, which in some printings had been arbitrarily changed in favor of the new Vulgate, were restored to their original state, and new regulations were made regarding the final blessing. In another new edition of the Mass book under Urban VIII (1634), the wording of the rubrics was *greatly improved* and the revision of the hymns already accomplished in the breviary was carried out also in the few hymns of the missal. No new edition with any notable changes came out till that of 1920, which contained the

revisions based on the reform of Pope Pius X. For the rest, excepting the increase in saints' feasts, very little was done to affect the arrangement of the Mass. Pope Clement XIII prescribed the Preface of the Holy Trinity for Sundays, and Pope Leo XIII ordered the prayers said after low Mass.<sup>17</sup>

### **Real Catholic Tradition: Maintaining Church Unity**

To believe that Pius V could have imposed a permanent, unalterable Mass ritual 1,500 years after Christ is to erroneously dogmatize discipline. Such a belief is modern-day Gallicanism,<sup>18</sup> suggesting that previous rites dating back to Christ were somehow deficient and that only with Pius V did the Church finally “get it right.” Such a belief is effectively blasphemous because it places changeable liturgical discipline on par with the timeless, dogmatic truth of the new Passover Sacrifice-Meal of the Mass.

One might prefer the venerable Tridentine Mass. One might argue that some provisions of the *Missale Romanum* could be improved. But no one may lawfully oppose a pope's authority to promulgate a new or modified Mass rite, nor the binding nature of its related provisions. Real Tradition requires maintaining Church unity.

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<sup>1</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1125.

<sup>2</sup> *Code of Canon Law: Latin-English Edition* (Washington DC: Canon Law Society of America, 1999) canon 331. See also the 1917 *Code of Canon Law*, “The Roman Pontiff, being the successor of St. Peter, possesses not only an honorary primacy, but supreme and full power of jurisdiction in the whole Church concerning matters of faith and morals as well as of discipline and government” (canon 218, §1).

<sup>3</sup> Pope Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae*, 1968, nos. 4, 18.

<sup>4</sup> See also *Catechism*, nos. 85-86, 891-92, and 2035-36.

<sup>5</sup> Conveyed in the schismatic Society of St. Pius X's pamphlet, “Why the Traditional Latin Mass? Why NOT the New?”

<sup>6</sup> Pope Saint Pius V, *Quo Primum*, 1570; as cited in James Likoudis and Kenneth D. Whitehead, *The Pope, The Council and the Mass—Revised Edition* (Hanover, Mass: The Christopher Publishing House, 1982), 248.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, as cited in Likoudis and Whitehead, 249. Examples would include the Ambrosian Rite in Milan, Italy.

<sup>8</sup> *Catechism*, nos. 1340, 1364-67; 1 Corinthians 5:7-8; 10:16-17.

<sup>9</sup> Taken from the schismatic Society of St. Pius X's pamphlet, “Why the Traditional Latin Mass? Why NOT the New?”

<sup>10</sup> Pope Saint Pius V, *Quo Primum*, as cited in Likoudis and Whitehead, 249-50, emphasis added.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, as cited in Likoudis and Whitehead, 249.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Likoudis and Whitehead, *The Pope, The Council, and the Mass*, 59-60.

<sup>14</sup> Pope Saint Pius V, *Quo Primum*, as cited in Likoudis and Whitehead, 251.

<sup>15</sup> Likoudis and Whitehead, *The Pope, The Council and the Mass*, 56-57.

<sup>16</sup> Pope Saint Pius V, *Quo Primum*, as cited in Likoudis and Whitehead, 250.

<sup>17</sup> Father Joseph A. Jungmann, S.J., *The Mass of the Roman Rite: Its Origins and Development, Vol. I* (Allen, Texas: Christian Classics, 1986), 140, emphasis added.

<sup>18</sup> The Gallican Church would not assent to papal modifications of universal Church discipline. See Roy J. Deferrari, trans., *Denziger: The Sources of Catholic Dogma—30<sup>th</sup> Edition* (Powers Lake, N.D.: Marian House), nos. 1324, 1326, 1599).

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