



Pope Poised To Revive Latin Mass, Official Says Ancient Tridentine Rite Was Replaced in 1960s

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Pope Benedict XVI has drafted a document allowing wider use of the Tridentine Mass, the Latin rite that was largely replaced in the 1960s by Masses in English and other modern languages, a church official said yesterday.

The official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity, said the pope told colleagues in September that he was writing the document "motu proprio," a Latin phrase for on his own initiative, and that it was in its third draft.

"There will be a document, it will come out soon, and it will be significant," the official said. Benedict "will not let this be sidetracked," he added.

Wider use of the Tridentine Mass is a cause dear to the hearts of many Catholics, for both esthetic and ideological reasons. It was codified in 1570 and remained the standard Roman Catholic liturgy for nearly four centuries, until the gathering of church leaders known as the Second Vatican Council ushered in major reforms from 1962 to 1965.

To some Catholics, the return of the old Latin Mass is symbolic of a conservative turn away from what they view as the "excesses" that followed the Second Vatican Council, said the Rev. Thomas J. Scirghi, who teaches liturgical theology at the Jesuit School of Theology in Berkeley, Calif.

He said many churchgoers associate the Tridentine Mass with beautiful Gregorian chants and a dignified service, while they associate the new Mass -- formalized in 1969 -- with guitars, drums and short-lived experiments such as "Pizza Masses" in which pizzas, rather than wafers, were consecrated in a bid to attract young people.

In fact, the new Mass can be celebrated with great solemnity, either in vernacular languages or in Latin, said Nathan D. Mitchell, professor of liturgical studies at the University of Notre Dame. And

the Tridentine Mass, he added, "wasn't always celebrated with care, beauty, aplomb and musical finesse."

"There's a lot of romanticizing of the old liturgy. Most parishes celebrated it as what they called Low Masses, with no singing, no preaching, the priest just mumbling something that was inaudible," Mitchell said.

Nonetheless, he acknowledged, the Tridentine Mass has become "an icon for all the things that people thought had been forfeited and lost at, and after, the Second Vatican Council. That includes not only the liturgy but also a church of visible discipline

and hierarchical structure, the ancient discipline of the priesthood, the moral authority of bishops and the pope, a way of looking at the human relationship to God."

The old Latin Mass was never formally prohibited, but it virtually disappeared from the 1960s until the mid-1980s, when Pope John Paul II allowed it back into limited usage, permitting parish priests to celebrate it if they obtained permission from their bishops. Some bishops have freely granted such requests, and some have not.

In Washington, new Archbishop Donald W. Wuerl has continued the policy of his predecessor, Cardinal Theodore E. McCarrick, by making the Tridentine Mass easily available. It is celebrated each Sunday at three local churches -- St. Mary Mother of God in Chinatown, St. John the Evangelist-Forest Glen in Silver Spring, and St. Francis de Sales in Benedict, Md., according to Susan Gibbs, spokeswoman for the archdiocese.

In the Arlington Diocese, Bishop Paul S. Loverde earlier this year allowed two churches, St. Lawrence in Franconia and St. John the Baptist in Front Royal, to begin celebrating the Tridentine liturgy each Sunday.

Traditionalist Catholics rejoiced yesterday over the pope's forthcoming decision, which was first reported Wednesday by the Times of London. But some were cautious, noting that rumors have circulated for months that Benedict was about to grant a "universal indult," or general permission, for priests to use the Tridentine Mass.

"I'll believe it when I see it, because I can't tell you how many times there have been exact days when this universal indult was supposed to be issued," said Kenneth J. Wolfe, 33, a choir member at St. Mary Mother of God.

Experts predicted that the papal document would allow more Catholics to experience the old liturgy but would not supplant the new Mass, which is likely to remain the standard in most dioceses.

"Here in the diocese of Galveston, [the Tridentine Mass] is permitted in one church, and not very many people go. So even if the indult is granted, I don't think it will lead to a big division in the church," said the Rev. Michael Barrett, an Opus Dei priest who runs the Holy Cross Chapel and Catholic Resource Center in Houston.

The change might, however, help to heal a rift between the Vatican and followers of the late Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre, a French prelate who bitterly opposed the Second Vatican Council's decisions. Benedict has reached out to Lefebvre's followers, signaling that he would allow them to use the old Mass in return for their recognition of his authority.

"This is an attentiveness to a very, very small faction that he wants to bring back on board," said Monsignor Kevin W. Irwin, dean of the school of theology at Catholic University.

In addition, allowing wider use of the Tridentine Mass might appeal to some older Catholics who miss it and some younger ones who are curious about it. Most important, according to the Rev. Robert Gahl, a professor at the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross in Rome, it would rectify what

Benedict has described as a "breach" in Catholic tradition because the old Mass was effectively suppressed.

The Second Vatican Council called for the "full, conscious, active participation" of the laity in the Mass. As a result, the new Sunday Mass has three readings from Scripture, instead of two, and some may be done by lay people. The priest usually faces the congregation and must give a homily each Sunday; in the Tridentine Mass, the priest faces the altar, with his back to the congregation, and a sermon is optional.

While the Tridentine Mass contains only one version of the Eucharistic prayer -- the moment when Catholics believe the bread and wine become the body and blood of Christ -- the new Mass offers nine additional versions.

"People are tired of not knowing what they're going to find" when they go to Mass, said the Rev. Joseph Fessio, the pope's English-language publisher and a leading conservative in the U.S. church.

"Benedict is saying, 'The people have a right to the immemorial spiritual customs of the church.' "

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