

## Overall Assessment

The considerable body of documents submitted and examined shows that the Motu Proprio *Summorum Pontificum* currently plays a significant, albeit relatively modest, role in the life of the Church. Conceived by Pope Benedict XVI after years of sometimes bitter clashes between the supporters of the reformed liturgy of 1970 and those of the *Missale Romanum* in its 1962 edition, the MP *Summorum Pontificum* succeeded in affirming the equal dignity of the two forms of the same Roman Rite, thereby fostering the conditions for genuine liturgical peace, with a view also to a possible future unity of the two forms.

The mutual enrichment and updating of the *Missale Romanum* of 1962, desired by the same Pope (cf. Letter of 7 July 2007), have also been achieved through the publication of the implementing instruction of the aforementioned Motu Proprio: *Universae Ecclesiae* of 30 April 2011, as well as the two decrees confirmed by Pope Francis on 5 December 2019, following the unanimous favorable opinion of the Members of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (Decree *Quo Magis*, concerning the addition of seven new prefaces, and Decree *Cum Sanctissima*, concerning the inclusion of new saints).

The spread of the older form of the Roman Rite following the MP *Summorum Pontificum* stands at around 20% of the Latin dioceses worldwide, and its implementation today is certainly more serene and peaceful, though not everywhere; some residual cases remain unresolved. Unfortunately, in certain dioceses, the *Forma extraordinaria* has not been considered a richness for the life of the Church, but rather as an inappropriate, disturbing, and useless element for ordinary pastoral life, and even as “dangerous” and therefore something not to be granted, or to be suppressed, or at least strictly controlled so that it does not spread, in the hope of its eventual disappearance or abrogation.

The majority of bishops who responded to the questionnaire, and who have generously and intelligently implemented the MP *Summorum Pontificum*, ultimately express satisfaction with it—especially those who have also had the possibility to establish a personal parish where all the sacraments are celebrated in the *Forma extraordinaria* and where a stable, celebrating, and pastorally active community is formed. In places where the clergy have closely cooperated with the bishop, the situation has become completely pacified.

A constant observation made by the bishops is that it is young people who are discovering and choosing this older form of the liturgy. The majority of the stable groups present in the Catholic world are composed of young people, often converts to the Catholic faith or those returning after a time away from the Church and the sacraments. They are drawn by the sacredness, seriousness, and solemnity of the liturgy. What strikes them most, also amid a society that is excessively noisy and verbose, is the rediscovery of silence within sacred actions, the restrained and essential words, preaching that is faithful to the Church’s doctrine, the beauty of liturgical chant, and the

dignity of the celebration: a seamless whole that is deeply attractive. It is Benedict XVI himself who [wrote](#) in his letter to the bishops accompanying the MP *Summorum Pontificum* that this group of people are the privileged recipients of his legislative measure—alongside, of course, all those who for decades had been requesting the liberalization and legitimization, in liturgical and pastoral practice, of the venerable Latin-Gregorian liturgy.

The establishment of stable groups, as envisaged by the MP *Summorum Pontificum* and the Instruction [Universae Ecclesiae](#), has enabled the Holy See to accompany the path of reconciliation and ecclesial integration of these faithful—initially through the Pontifical Commission *Ecclesia Dei* and now through the Fourth Section of the CDF. For this, the bishops express satisfaction and gratitude. It is necessary to have an institutional body and a competent interlocutor who oversees the path of these groups and of the clerical institutes dependent on it, and who can assist the ministry of the bishops, to prevent arbitrary forms of self-management and anarchy within the groups, as well as abuses of power by some local bishops. The Holy See and its bond with the Pope are a guarantee for all, both the faithful and their pastors. Promoting ecclesial communion between the diocesan bishop and the members of the stable groups or institutes, and between them and the Pope, is fundamental for a serene and apostolically fruitful journey. These faithful desire to be regarded on an equal footing with the other faithful who attend the liturgy in the FO [*Forma ordinaria*], and they ask that pastors care for them pastorally without prejudice.

After a complex initial phase, and with some situations still pending, thanks to the MP *Summorum Pontificum* these groups of faithful—and indeed the bishops and priests themselves—have found stability and serenity, having in the former PCED and now the Fourth Section a calm, stable, and authoritative point of reference that guarantees their rights as well as their duties. Indeed, some bishops note that it is necessary to protect the stable groups to prevent departures from the Church toward schismatic communities or the SSPX [Society of St Pius X]. In all places where the stable groups are accompanied and supported by the diocesan bishop or by a delegated priest, there are virtually no more problems, and the faithful are content to be guided, respected, and treated as children by their father bishop.

The MP *Summorum Pontificum* and the accompanying letter speak of the Pope's desire to work for an internal liturgical reconciliation within the Church. In light of his 22 December 2005 address to the Roman Curia, Benedict XVI, recognizing the need—also with regard to the sacred liturgy—to proceed *not* according to a hermeneutic of rupture but rather by renewal in continuity with tradition, writes: “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” (Benedict XVI, [Letter of Accompaniment to the MP Summorum Pontificum](#)). This ecclesiological dimension of the hermeneutic of continuity with tradition and with a coherent renewal and development has not yet been fully embraced by some bishops;

however, where it has been received and implemented, it is already bearing fruit, the most visible of which is in the liturgy. Indeed, other bishops have noted the benefits brought by the MP *Summorum Pontificum* also for the *Forma ordinaria* of the liturgy, fostering a renewed sense of sacredness in liturgical action and contributing to a process of intra-ecclesial reconciliation.

Some bishops state that the MP *Summorum Pontificum* has failed in its aim of fostering reconciliation and therefore request its suppression—either because internal reconciliation within the Church has not yet been fully achieved, or because the Priestly Fraternity of St. Pius X has not returned to full communion with the Church. A general and detailed analysis of these responses reveals that the opportunity provided by this inquiry has allowed certain bishops to read and begin to understand more deeply the document under discussion [i.e., *Summorum Pontificum*]. In response to the first objection, it should be noted that such processes of reconciliation within the Church are necessarily slow and gradual; the MP *Summorum Pontificum* has laid the groundwork for this reconciliation. Regarding the second objection, it should be recalled that the MP *Summorum Pontificum* was not intended for the SSPX; they already had access to what was granted by the MP *Summorum Pontificum* and therefore did not need it.<sup>1</sup>

Rather, the MP *Summorum Pontificum* stands in unity and completion, as an organic and coherent development, to the *Motu Proprio Ecclesia Dei Adflicta* of John Paul II, by which the Polish Pontiff sought to save many Catholics who were lost and confused and at risk of schism following the episcopal ordinations carried out by Archbishop Lefebvre. Benedict XVI also affirmed that the MP *Summorum Pontificum* was issued as an instrument to address the Church's need for reconciliation with itself (*Op. cit.*); for this reason, he also promulgated the *Motu Proprio Ecclesiae Unitatem*, incorporating the Pontifical Commission *Ecclesia Dei* into the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. This process reached a felicitous conclusion with Pope Francis's *Motu Proprio* of January 2019, by which, in suppressing the Pontifical Commission *Ecclesia Dei* and establishing a special Section within the CDF, and affirming that the institutes and communities in question have today found proper stability of number and of life, the Pope directs these groups and ecclesial entities toward an ordinary and regular dimension of ecclesial life. In his *Motu Proprio*, Pope Francis entrusted the new section of the CDF with the task of “continu[ing] the work of supervision, promotion and protection conducted thus far by the decommissioned PCED.”

The bishops most attuned to this matter observe that the older form of the liturgy is a treasure of the Church to be safeguarded and preserved: it constitutes a good to find unity with the past, to

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<sup>1</sup> It suffices to say that the documents in question make no reference to the SSPX. Moreover, one must consider the authentic interpretation given by the Legislator himself in the book-length interview on his life. Responding to Peter Seewald in *Last Testament* on page 202 [*Ultime Conversazioni*, pag. 189], he states: “It is absolutely false to claim” that he intended the *Motu Proprio Summorum Pontificum* for the SSPX.

know how to advance along a path of coherent development and progress, and to meet, as far as possible, the needs of these faithful. When a state of peace is established at the diocesan level, the risk of a division into two churches, which some prelates fear, is obviated; these prelates, in turn, note that what distinguishes some groups of faithful who follow the *Forma extraordinaria* is their rejection of the Second Vatican Council. This is partly true, but it cannot be generalized. In these cases, too, it is noted that the bishop's pastoral care has been decisive in calming agitated spirits and clarifying the thinking of certain members of the stable groups.

The bishops also note the growth of vocations within the former *Ecclesia Dei* institutes, especially in the English and French-speaking areas, but also in the Spanish and Portuguese-speaking regions. Many young men are choosing to enter the *Ecclesia Dei* institutes for their priestly or religious formation rather than diocesan seminaries, to the manifest regret of some bishops. Indeed, in recent years the Fourth Section has recorded a significant increase in vocations within the institutes under its purview, along with a greater commitment by these institutes to the spiritual and intellectual formation of candidates for the priesthood and religious life—obviously in due proportion as these communities are smaller, though not insignificant, compared to the rest of the Church.

The Bishops in Spanish-speaking regions, in general, seem to show little interest in the MP *Summorum Pontificum*—though there are, nonetheless, faithful in these areas who request the older form of the liturgy. Similarly, the responses from Italian bishops suggest that, overall, they do not hold the *Forma extraordinaria* and its related provisions in high regard, with a few exceptions. The faithful, however, express deep gratitude to Benedict XVI and Pope Francis, because thanks to the MP *Summorum Pontificum*, they have emerged from an ecclesial life marked by clandestinity, rejection, ridicule, and abuses of power by certain bishops—abuses that were sometimes directed even at their priests. As for the requests of the faithful, in recent years several stable groups have been established, many of which have organized themselves into associations seeking the celebration of Holy Mass in the Latin-Gregorian liturgical form.

Some bishops would prefer a return to the previous *indult* situation in order to have greater control and management of the situation. However, the majority of bishops who responded to the questionnaire state that making legislative changes to the MP *Summorum Pontificum* would cause more harm than good. Any change—whether by suppressing or weakening the MP *Summorum Pontificum*—would seriously damage the life of the Church, as it would recreate the tensions that the document had helped to resolve. As the Archbishop of Milan puts it: “I have the impression that any explicit intervention could cause more harm than good: if the line of the MP *Summorum Pontificum* is further confirmed, it will provoke new waves of perplexity among the clergy (and not only them). If the line of the MP *Summorum Pontificum* is denied, it will provoke new waves of dissent and resentment among the supporters of the old rite.” Therefore, it is better to continue along the path already undertaken, without causing further upheaval.

Others think that with a potential change, the Holy See would, among other things, foster the departure of disappointed faithful from the Church toward the Society of St. Pius X or to other schismatic groups. This would strengthen the arguments of those who claim that “Rome gives with one hand and takes with the other,” and therefore should never be trusted. A change in the regulations would thus give rise to a resurgence of the liturgical wars. It could even foster the emergence of a new schism. Moreover, it would delegitimize two Pontiffs—John Paul II and Benedict XVI—who had committed themselves to not abandoning these faithful (cf. Motu Proprio *Ecclesia Dei Adflicta* of 1988; MP *Summorum Pontificum* of 2007).

An idea that emerges from some of the responses, and that could serve as the conclusion of this synthesis, is the following: while reaffirming the indisputable character of the reform that arose after the Second Vatican Council, it would be appropriate to introduce in seminaries and in the various ecclesiastical faculties sessions dedicated to the study of both forms of the one Roman Rite, in order to make known its immense richness at the service of the celebration of the entire and unique Christian mystery throughout the Church, and to foster peaceful conditions for the celebration of this liturgy in local churches, with priests suitably formed for its celebration.

In conclusion, a bishop from the Philippines stated in his final response to the questionnaire: “Let the people be free to choose.” And Benedict XVI, in his meeting with the French Episcopal Conference during his apostolic journey to France in 2008, stated regarding the MP *Summorum Pontificum*: “I am aware of your difficulties, but I do not doubt that, within a reasonable time, you can find solutions satisfactory for all, lest the seamless tunic of Christ be further torn. Everyone has a place in the Church. Every person, without exception, should be able to feel at home, and never rejected. God, who loves all men and women and wishes none to be lost, entrusts us with this mission by appointing us shepherds of his sheep. We can only thank him for the honor and the trust that he has placed in us. Let us therefore strive always to be servants of unity.” Pope Francis has taken up this expression of Benedict XVI, making it his own and reaffirming it against every form of division and exclusion in the Church. Ultimately, these words could serve as a criterion of evaluation, judgment, and guidance for us today.