

Myths of the Liturgical Reform

Rev. Dylan Schrader



Myths of the Liturgical Reform

This presentation is based on questions and requests I have received from parishioners.

I do my best to present things factually and (hopefully) in an understandable way.

I realize that what some people have been taught and what they've personally experienced may differ from how I explain things here.

Myths of the Liturgical Reform

In this presentation, my stated goal is not to *evaluate* or *judge* whether various liturgical reforms were a good or bad idea.

That's an important discussion, and it might come up spontaneously, but in the formal part of this presentation itself, I just want to focus on the facts.

Myth: The liturgical reform
happened at Vatican II

Fact: The liturgical reform began before Vatican II and continued after

The Liturgical Reform in the Modern Era

For most of Church history, the liturgical forms developed slowly and naturally over time with limited central control.

There was still fairly widespread uniformity, but it happened organically.

Each diocese or region oversaw its own liturgical books and customs.

Following the Protestant Reformation, there was great concern for protecting Catholic faith and liturgy, so the pope started to exercise greater central control.

The Liturgical Reform in the Modern Era

In 1570, Pope Pius V issued a universal *Missale Romanum* (Roman Missal):

- A printed book (printing press!)
- Essentially the same as long-standing traditions, not something new
- The whole Western Church was *required* to use this book for Mass,
 - *Unless* a particular diocese, religious order, etc., had its own tradition that was *at least 200 years old*.
- Most of the Western Church adopted the 1570 Roman Missal, but some religious orders kept their traditional forms.

The Liturgical Reform in the Modern Era

The 1570 Roman Missal was slightly updated from time to time over the centuries, with new editions coming out.

- 1605: Clement VIII notices that publishers have been changing the Scripture passages from the Old Latin version to the Vulgate version, orders them changed back
- 1634: Urban VIII reverses this decision, changing back to the Vulgate version again
- New saints added over the years

The Liturgical Reform in the Modern Era

- 1884: Leo XIII revises the Church calendar
 - Calendar is becoming too full of saints
- 1920: Benedict XV implements revisions to the Missal and Breviary that had been planned earlier by Pius X but never gotten done
 - Calendar rubrics modified
- 1955: Pius XII issues majorly revised Holy Week services
- 1960: John XXIII issues a new code of rubrics, calendar simplified
 - Implemented in the Missal of 1962

The Liturgical Reform in the Modern Era

Other changes were also going on. E.g.,

- 1910: Pius X declares that first Communion should be given at a lower age (around 7)
 - One result is that in most places, the order of the sacraments of initiation got flipped and in many places still has not been fixed
- Changing of Communion fast rules:
 - 1953, water allowed, some exceptions allowed (e.g., priests offering multiple Masses)
 - 1957, fast changed from midnight to 3 hours
 - 1964, Paul VI reduces the fast to 1 hour
- Evening Masses:
 - 1953: Pius XII gives bishops the ability to allow evening Masses on certain days if necessary

The Liturgical Reform in the Modern Era

There was also a lot happening on the practical level with the *liturgical movement*, which involved:

- A careful study of historical sources
- Development of systematic and mystical theology of the liturgy
- Great efforts to “raise the bar” in terms of liturgical celebrations
- Efforts to help regular Catholics understand the liturgy (e.g., hand missals)
- Vernacular languages being used more widely in non-Mass ceremonies (e.g., Baptism); had already been used in some ceremonies (e.g., confession, marriage)

Myth: A typical parish Mass of today is what Vatican II called for.

Fact: A typical parish Mass of today follows textual and rubrical changes far more drastic than what Vatican II envisioned.

What happened following Vatican II?

For the sake of simplicity, it's helpful to distinguish **three levels** of change:

1. What Vatican II asked for.
2. What the *Consilium* designed and was officially approved in the years following Vatican II.
3. What actually happened at the parish level.

At each stage, there is greater divergence with the result that what is typical at the parish level is *very different* from what Vatican II itself envisioned.

What happened following Vatican II?

Vatican II, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 23: “That sound tradition may be retained, and yet the way remain open to legitimate progress careful investigation is always to be made into each part of the liturgy which is to be revised. This investigation should be theological, historical, and pastoral. Also the general laws governing the structure and meaning of the liturgy must be studied in conjunction with the experience derived from recent liturgical reforms and from the indults conceded to various places. Finally, there must be no innovations unless the good of the Church genuinely and certainly requires them; and care must be taken that any new forms adopted should in some way grow organically from forms already existing.”

What happened following Vatican II?

- Vatican II (1962-65)
 - Document on the liturgy issued in 1963 (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*)
- *Missale Romanum* implementing the letter of what *Sacrosanctum Concilium* asked for published in many countries in 1964/65
- The *Consilium* is set up to implement changes
 - They organize and tackle the entire question of liturgical reform at an enormous scale (calendar, Bible readings, music, all sacraments, Mass, blessings, etc., etc.)
- 1967: *Tres abhinc annos*
- 1969: Entirely new *Ordo Missae* (Order of Mass)

What happened following Vatican II?

- 1970: *Missale Romanum*, edition 1
- 1971: *Missale Romanum*, edition 1 reprint with minor updates
 - 1972: Subdiaconate abolished
- 1975: *Missale Romanum*, edition 2
- 2002: *Missale Romanum*, edition 3
- 2008: *Missale Romanum*, edition 3 reprint with minor updates

What happened following Vatican II?

- 1974 Sacramentary
 - Note: This is the English-language translation of the *Missale Romanum*, but it was published with an entirely different name! (The Holy See later forces English-speaking countries to correct this.)
 - This translation is *extremely loose and inaccurate* and *frequently* just includes entire re-writes.
- 1985 Sacramentary
- 1998 Draft Sacramentary (never promulgated)
- 2011 Roman Missal
 - Finally the English translation of the 2002/8 *Missale Romanum*

Myth: Vatican II got rid of Latin.

Fact: Vatican II mandated the preservation of Latin.

Latin

- 1963: *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 36: “Particular law remaining in force, the use of the Latin language is to be preserved in the Latin rites.”
 - Calls for possibility of vernacular in: “readings and directives, and some of the prayers and chants”
- 1964: Vernacular allowed for readings, the Our Father in low Mass, the petitions, chants such as the Gloria and Creed, some prayers such as “Lord, I am not worthy ...”
- 1967: Vernacular allowed for the Roman Canon
- 1974: Vernacular allowed for entire Mass

Latin

But, while the vernacular was being allowed, the Church was simultaneously calling for the preservation of Latin (strongly!)

- 1963: *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 54
 - People must learn Mass parts in Latin
- 1967 *Musicam sacram*
 - Pastors (again) mandated to teach Latin Mass parts to people
- 1974: Paul VI gives every bishop a copy of *Iubilare Deo*, the minimum repertoire of Gregorian Chant for all Catholics to learn
- 1980: *Dominicae coenae*, no. 10
 - “The Roman Church has special obligations towards Latin, the splendid language of ancient Rome, and she must manifest them whenever the occasion presents itself.”

Latin

- 1983: Code of Canon Law mandates priests must be well skilled in Latin
- 2004: *Redemptionis Sacramentum*, no. 112: re-affirmation of priests' ability to offer Mass in Latin
- 2007: *Sacramentum caritatis*, no. 62
 - Another plea for priests and people to learn Latin
 - The people "*must be empowered*" to say/sing the Latin Mass parts

(just some examples; there are also many less formal requests/pleas/encouragements)

Myth: Vatican II mandated renovations of church buildings (such as removal of altar rails, high altars, icons, etc.)

Fact: Vatican II did not mandate any architectural changes to churches.

Church architecture

- 1963 *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 128 calls for revised guidelines for “the worthy and well planned construction of sacred buildings, the shape and construction of altars, the nobility, placing, and safety of the eucharistic tabernacle, the dignity and suitability of the baptistery, the proper ordering of sacred images, embellishments, and vestments.”
- 1964 *Inter Oecumenici*
 - “In building new churches or restoring and adapting old ones every care is to be taken that they are suited to celebrating liturgical services authentically and that they ensure active participation by the faithful”

Church architecture

Inter Oecumenici, no. 90 did not mandate changes to existing church buildings. It did give some norms and recommendations for construction of new churches or if a church was being renovated.

Example:

- No. 91: *Recommends* a freestanding altar instead of one against the wall.

Church architecture

Note: Norms for construction of new churches have been updated since 1964 and are found in several documents, including the Roman Missal itself. Too lengthy to get into details here, but the important take-away is that the removal of altars, Communion rails, images, etc. was never mandated by the Church.

Guidelines generally favored respecting existing historical structures and focused on recommendations for new buildings.

Example: Cardinal Lercaro's letter to heads of bishops' conferences (*Notitiae* 1965: 262).

1967: *Eucharisticum mysterium*, no. 24: "In adapting churches care will be taken not to destroy treasures of sacred art."

Myth: Vatican II directed that the priest face the people for Mass.

Fact: Vatican II says not one word about this.

Ad orientem

The *Missale Romanum* prior to Vatican II contains instructions for celebrating Mass with the priest facing together with the people (*ad orientem*) and for Mass with the priest facing toward the people (*versus populum*), at an altar against the wall or at a freestanding altar.

The post-Vatican II *Missale Romanum* contains the same flexibility: at certain points the priest is directed to face the people, at certain points to face the altar.

Ad orientem

In other words, the widespread change of priests facing toward the people for the Eucharistic Prayer that occurred in the 1960s and beyond was not a matter of liturgical law but of trends and personal choice.

The current edition of the Roman Missal continues to present both *ad orientem* and *versus populum* as options for Mass.

Myth: Vatican II allowed
Communion in the hand.

Fact: Communion in the hand was introduced illegally following Vatican II and eventually legalized as an exception.

Communion in the hand

- Late 1960s: In France, Belgium, Holland, and Germany, some priests start giving Communion to people in the hand.
 - The Pope and the Holy See try several times to stop this.
- Late 1960s: Seeing the disobedience continue, Pope Paul VI writes to all the bishops of the world asking whether they want the Church to allow Communion in the hand.
 - Majority of bishops say no and that the people themselves don't want this.
- 1969: Paul VI issues *Memoriale Domini*
 - Publishes results of the worldwide survey

Communion in the hand

Memoriale Domini (1969): “The Apostolic See therefore emphatically urges bishops, priests and laity to obey carefully the law which is still valid and which has again been confirmed [of distributing Communion only on the tongue]. It urges them to take account of the judgment given by the majority of Catholic bishops, of the rite now in use in the liturgy, of the common good of the Church.”

“Where a contrary usage, that of placing holy communion on the hand, prevails, the Holy See—wishing to help them fulfill their task, often difficult as it is nowadays—lays on those conferences the task of weighing carefully whatever special circumstances may exist there, taking care to avoid any risk of lack of respect or of false opinions with regard to the Blessed Eucharist, and to avoid any other ill effects that may follow.”

Communion in the hand

“In such cases, episcopal conferences should examine matters carefully and should make whatever decisions, by a secret vote and with a two-thirds majority, are needed to regulate matters. Their decisions should be sent to Rome to receive the necessary confirmation, accompanied with a detailed account of the reasons which led them to take those decisions. The Holy See will examine each case carefully, taking into account the links between the different local churches and between each of them and the Universal Church, in order to promote the common good and the edification of all, and that mutual good example may increase faith and piety.”

Communion in the hand

For a country to apply for the indult, the following were necessary:

- 1) Communion in the hand had to already be presently in that country;
- 2) the bishops of that country had to have two-thirds majority vote in favor of Communion in the hand;
- 3) Communion in the hand should not be imposed in a way that would exclude the traditional manner;
- 4) the way of introducing this must be done tactfully;
- 5) Communion in the hand should not cause the person to think it is just ordinary bread; 6) one must be careful to not allow profanation or any fragment to fall.

Communion in the hand

- 1977: Bishops of the USA meet to discuss this question.
 - They did not get a $\frac{2}{3}$ majority from the bishops present in favor of requesting the indult to give Communion in the hand in the USA.
 - Cardinal Bernardin decided to poll the bishops who were absent from the meeting, and this pushed it over $\frac{2}{3}$.
 - Request sent to Rome.
- June 17, 1977: Rome grants the US Bishops an indult to permit giving Holy Communion in the hand.
- The legal status of this is essentially unchanged since then, i.e., the normal way of giving Holy Communion is on the tongue, but in the USA the Bishops may allow the faithful the option of receiving Holy Communion in the hand.

Myth: The *Novus Ordo* abolished
the subdiaconate.

Fact: The *Novus Ordo Missae* was promulgated in 1969; the subdiaconate was abolished in 1972.

Subdiaconate

While it might seem obscure, the abolition of the subdiaconate is actually a key to understanding major differences on the parish level between the traditional form of Mass and the revised form.

The *Novus Ordo Missae* when promulgated in 1969 envisioned the participation of a deacon, subdeacon, acolytes, lectors, etc. as a regular feature of Masses.

When the subdiaconate was abolished in 1972, the subdeacon's jobs got re-assigned to the other roles, especially the acolyte.

Subdiaconate

However, when this re-distribution of roles was combined with the fact that most parishes did not have instituted acolytes, the *result* was that altar servers ended up doing things the subdeacon used to do!

For example: in the traditional form, the subdeacon brings the chalice to the altar. This was meant to be done by the subdeacon in the *Novus Ordo*, but it was then re-assigned to the acolyte after 1972. In the absence of an acolyte, a regular altar server ends up doing this.

Subdiaconate

At the same time, in most parishes *before* Vatican II, there weren't ordained lectors, acolytes, or subdeacons around *either*.

In a parish with sufficient priests, multiple priests could divide up these other roles.

In a nutshell: Either before V2 or after, we've never really been effective at getting the liturgical roles filled in normal parishes in the way the Church ideally envisions: instituted lectors, acolytes, deacons, priests all taking their own parts

Myth: The *Novus Ordo Missae* got rid of chalice veils, Communion patens, bells, and so forth

Fact: Most such things are
required or encouraged

Chalice veils, patens, etc.

- Chalice veils were required up until the 2002 edition of the Roman Missal, when they went became encouraged (but optional).
- Communion patens are still required and have been the entire time according to the Roman Missal and other documents (e.g., *Redemptionis Sacramentum*, no. 93).
- The use of bells depends on local custom, but is mentioned several times in the Roman Missal.
- Gestures such as striking the breast during the Confiteor, bowing during the Creed, bowing one's head at the name of Jesus, Mary, or the Trinity are all required.

Further Resources

There are many resources available, including some of my old websites:

- <http://ordo-missae.ipsissima-verba.org> (the Order of Mass cross-referenced thoroughly with other liturgical documents)
- <http://liturgical-books.ipsissima-verba.org> (extensive list of editions of post-Vatican II liturgical books)
- <http://notitiae.ipsissima-verba.org> (collection of official statements from the 1960s onward pertaining to the liturgy)