The 1962 Roman Missal and Catholic-Jewish Relations

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Documentation, news, commentary, and analyses of current issues and events in Jewish-Christian relations.

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Updated July 28, 2007

Commentary	Links to Documentation

INTRODUCTION

In early July 2007, Pope Benedict XVI issued a papal executive order (known as a *motu proprio*), as well as an explanatory "cover letter" addressed to the world's Catholic bishops. As expressed in the letter, the purpose of the motu proprio was to promote "an interior reconciliation in the heart of the Church." It was intended for those Catholics whose devotion to the liturgy from the Council of Trent (the Tridentine Rite) had prompted some of them, in the wake of the liturgical renewal of the Second Vatican Council, to separate themselves from the Catholic community. The motu proprio makes it easier for the most recent version of the Tridentine Mass, the 1962 Roman Missal promulgated by Pope John XXIII, to be used in communities "where there is a stable group of faithful who adhere to [that] earlier liturgical tradition" (art. 5.1), rather than the post-Vatican II 1970 Roman Missal of Pope Paul VI. The latter is the form of the Mass used by the overwhelming majority of Catholics, whether in Latin or vernacular languages. The motu proprio's more liberal permission to use the 1962 Roman Missal is expected to be employed by a relatively small number of Catholics.

- The Latin original of the motu proprio (from the Vatican website)
- An English translation of the cover letter to bishops re the motu proprio (from the Vatican website).
- An English translation of the motu proprio (from Catholic News Service)

IMPLICATIONS FOR CATHOLIC-JEWISH RELATIONS

In the months preceding the issuance of the motu proprio, a number of individuals and groups involved in Christian-Jewish relations expressed concerns over the the prospect of fewer restrictions on the use of the 1962 Roman Missal. This is because that missal was prepared without being informed by the reforms inaugurated by *Nostra Aetate* in 1965.

Two principle issues were raised: the Good Friday intercessions in the 1962 Roman Missal ask God for "the conversion of the Jews" from their "blindness" and the "veil [upon] their hearts." This is strikingly different in tone from the intercession in the post- *Nostra Aetate* 1970 Roman Missal that prays that the Jewish people "will grow in the love of [God's] name and faithfulness to his covenant." In addition, the 1962 Good Friday intercessions pray for other Christians ("heretics and schismatics") and adherents of other religions ("pagans," *infidelium*) in disrepectful terms.

It should be noted that an earlier version of the Good Friday intercessions prayed for "the perfidious Jews," but that adjective was removed by the order of Pope John XXIII in 1959. That phrase is not present in the 1962 Missal and is not an issue in regard to the current motu proprio.

A second concern was that the lectionary for the 1962 Roman Missal contains very few scriptural readings from the Old Testament, a quasi-Marcionite difference from the 1970 Missal. The dialogue group "Jews and Christians" of the Central Committee of German Catholics raised both concerns in an April 4, 2007 public statement.

- Three general intercessions from the 1962 Roman Missal with comparison to 1970 prayer for the Jewish people.
- Statement of the Discussion Group "Jews and Christians" of the Central Committee of German Catholics (April 4, 2007)

CONTRADICTORY CONSTRUALS

After the publication of the motu proprio on July 7, 2007, it quickly became clear that its article 2 lent itself to two conflicting interpretations. Its reads:

> Art. 2. In Masses celebrated without the people, each Catholic priest of the Latin rite, whether secular or regular, may use the Roman Missal published by Blessed. Pope John XXIII in 1962, or the Roman Missal promulgated by Pope Paul VI in 1970, and may do so on any day with the exception of the Easter Triduum. For such celebrations, with either one Missal or the other, the priest has no need for permission from the Apostolic See

- ADL Calls Vatican Prayer for Conversion of Jews 'A Theological Setback' and 'A Body Blow to Catholic-Jewish Relations' (July 6, 2007)
- Richard John Neuhaus, "The Pope's Liturgical Liberalism" (July 7, 2007)

or from his Ordinary [local bishop].

Some commentators, focusing on the words "with the exception of the Easter Triduum," concluded that the motu proprio excluded the use of the 1962 Good Friday prayers. Others concentrated on the opening phrase, "In Masses celebrated without the people," understanding it to mean that the 1962 Missal was excluded on Good Friday only in the case of "private masses," but could be used in Triduum liturgies when congregations are present (which is now the norm for the Easter Triduum).

The Anti-Defamation League interpreted article 2 in the latter way, calling the motu proprio a "body blow to Catholic-Jewish relations." Richard John Neuhaus felt that article 2 excluded the use of the 1962 Good Friday prayers, calling the ADL's reaction "a mix of bellicosity and ignorance." Neuhaus also opined that the 1970 prayer that Jews will "arrive at the fullness of redemption" refers to faith in Jesus Christ and that Jews who take offense at that are offended by Christianity itself.

A message to the Jewish community from the Archdiocese of Boston's communications office stated that Cardinal Seán O'Malley understood "that the elements of the Good Friday services which are understandably objectionable to our Jewish and ecumenical brothers and sisters are not permitted to be used in the celebration of the Tridentine Rite." However, in its answers to "Twenty Questions on the Apostolic Letter *Summorum Pontificum*," the Committee on the Liturgy of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops indicated that that 1962 Missal's prayer for the conversion of the Jews could be prayed, but insisted that Pope Benedict "remains committed to 'the need to overcome past prejudices, misunderstandings, indifference and the language of contempt and hostility [and to continue] the Jewish-Christian dialogue…to enrich and deepen the bonds of friendship which have developed'"(no. 14).

The International Jewish Committee for Interreligious Consultations, the American Jewish Committee, and the International Council of Christians and Jews all requested that the Vatican clarifiy the confusion.

FURTHER MODIFICATIONS?

Rev. Dr. Norbert Hofmann, secretary to the Pontifical Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, issued a communiqué on July 21, 2007, offering "a provisional response" to the many inquiries the commssion has received. It explained that Catholic congregations under the authority of the Vatican's

- ADL's Abraham H. Foxman Op-Ed: "Wider use of Latin Mass threatens gains of past 40 years, " *Jewish Telegraphic Agency* (July 10, 2007)
- Archdiocese of Boston, "Statement Following the Recent Release of the Motu Proprio" (July 18, 2007)
- An English translation of the motu proprio with "Questions and Answers." (from the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' website) [pdf format]
- "AJC Seeks Clarification on the Latin Mass" (July 9, 2007)
- Nobert Hofmann, "Communiqué,"
- "ADL Welcomes Vatican's

Ecclesia Dei commission "have been using the 1962 Missal also for the Good Friday Liturgy [since 1988] and will continue to do so." Fr. Hofmann added that, "it is expected that an adaptation of the 1962 Missal will be needed, and this could provide a way forward," and that the " Commission for the Religious Relations with the Jews is committed to the search for an appropriate solution."

The mention of a possibility of refining the motu proprio was also voiced by the Holy See's Secretary of State, Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone. According to a July 18 Reuters news story published in *The Jerusalem Post* , "Bertone said the prayer that many Jews have found offensive could be substituted with one introduced into church rituals in the 1970s and which makes no reference to the conversion of Jews. 'This could be decided and this would resolve all the problems.' said Bertone. 'We could simply study' the possibility."

In response to the Reuters story, the ADL stated that it "was pleased that the Vatican is listening to our concerns," while the AJC said, "We appreciate the statement by Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, Vatican Secretary of State, making it clear that efforts will be made to replace the disturbing Good Friday prayer for Jewish conversion found in the 1962 version of the Latin Tridentine mass."

It might be noted that Cardinal Bertone, while recognizing the problem, only suggested the replacement as a subject worthy of study, a study that could take several years. In addition, the related question of how the 1962 Good Friday prayers characterizes other Christians and Muslims (among others) has not received much public discussion.

Consideration To Remove Anti-Jewish Prayer" (July 19, 2007)

- "AJC Welcomes Vatican Clarification," (July 19, 2007)

ANALYSIS

It would appear that developments outlined above reflect a number of tensions. On the one hand, the motu proprio extended an olive branch to the spiritual heirs of the excommunicated Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre, who rejected the Second Vatican Council as "modernist" and its liturgical reforms as destructive. By making it easier for Catholics who are most comfortable celebrating the Tridentine rite, the motu proprio intended to make them feel more at home in the Catholic Church and demonstrate that the Council was not a radical departure from the preceeding Catholic tradition.

On the other hand, when it comes to the question of Catholic teaching about Jews and Judaism, *Nostra Aetate* is arguably revolutionary. As many commentators have observed, what Jules

Isaac called "the teaching of contempt" for Jews and Judaism was so pervasive in Christian history that the authors of *Nostra Aetate*, committed after the Shoah to expressing a positive relationship to Judaism, found no helpful textual precedents from centuries of Christian writing and had to leap all the way back to New Testament texts for affirmative statements. *Nostra Aetate*, 4 is thus unique among Catholic ecclesiastical documents in that it cites only New Testament texts and no previous church councils, popes, or theologians.

Pope Benedict XVI, "Address to the Roman Curia" (Dec. 22, 2005) [from the Vatican website]

In a very relevant address to the Roman curia of December 22, 2005, Pope Benedict XVI wrote that it was incorrect to regard the Second Vatican Council with a "hermeneutic of discontinuity and rupture," which "risks ending in a split between the pre-conciliar Church and the post-conciliar Church" because only the Council's innovations are valued. The pope argued that the Council should be viewed with a "hermeneutic of reform, of renewal in the continuity of the [Church], which increases in time and develops, yet always remaining the same, the one subject of the journeying People of God."

Nevertheless, Benedict acknowledged that after the Shoah and "a retrospective look at a long and difficult history, it was necessary to evaluate and define in a new way the relationship between the Church and the faith of Israel" (The phrase "faith of Israel" is also noteworthy). This evaluation revealed "a discontinuity ... but in which, after the various distinctions between concrete historical situations and their requirements had been made, the continuity of principles proved not to have been abandoned. It is easy to miss this fact at a first glance. It is precisely in this combination of continuity and discontinuity at different levels that the very nature of true reform consists."

It seems that the pope was maintaining that despite the "discontinuities" with authentic Catholic belief represented by the centuries-old "teaching of contempt" for Jews, *Nostra Aetate* 's reform actually restored an essential continuity with authentic Catholic faith, presumably by retrieving the New Testament teaching that Jews "remain beloved of God" (Rom. 11: 28).

Thus, the issue of the 1962 Roman Missal's God prayer "for the conversion of the Jews," even though a tiny episode in the context of the entire liturgical year for a tiny number of Catholics, and probably not a conscious concern of those advocating the motu proprio's outreach, touches on the key issue for Catholics alienated by Vatican II: was the Council a condemnable rupture with the past? In the case of eighteen hundred years of constant negative speech about Jews and Judaism, *Nostra Aetate*'s positive expressions do indeed seem radically discontinuous, regardless of its citation of the ultimate textual authority, the New Testament. The contrasting perspectives of Lefebvre's followers and those Catholics committed to rapprochement with Jews (not to mention other Christians and other religions) create an extremely delicate set of dynamics for the Vatican, which is itself

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not theologically monolithic.

Moreover, the subject of conversionary "missions to the Jews" has been debated within the Catholic community in recent years, further complicating the theological picture.

It is impossible to know whether any of these considerations have consciously shaped recent developments, but they do form a backdrop for the subject of the motu proprio. Press comments that simplistically apply the political labels of "liberal" and "conservative" to this complex picture are misleading and unhelpful. They are a manifestation of the same "hermeneutic of discontinuity and rupture" that Pope Benedict criticized regarding the interpretation of the Council.

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