

We traditionalists understandably focus a lot of attention on the growth and prospects of the Traditional Latin Mass. And, despite *Traditiones Custodes*, I personally believe the outlook for the Traditional Mass has never been brighter. Francis's 2021 Motu Proprio, coming, as it did, after decades of steady growth in TLM communities, is too little too late—an attempt to close the proverbial barn door after the horses are already out. It's only a matter of time before the powers that be recognize this and something akin to *Summorum Pontificum* is reinstated. Such is my belief at least.

But in this video I'd like to speak not of the Traditional Mass, but the current state of the Novus Ordo, because I believe it is not the TLM but the so-called "reverent Novus Ordo" that is most imperiled by current developments.

The pontificate of Paul VI ushered in a period of liturgical chaos that has been well documented. So great was the disorder that even many sympathetic to the conciliar reform believed things had gotten out of hand. A correction was needed—not a restoration of the pre-conciliar order, mind you, but a correction that could walk the church back from the brink of chaos while staying true to the intentions of the Council Fathers. The Novus Ordo was a deviation from the Traditional Latin Mass, but within the Novus Ordo there was a further split between those who favored the correction and those who did not; many of the latter believed the deconstruction of the 70s had not gone far enough.

But the correction was favored by both John Paul II and Benedict XVI. During the combined 35 year pontificates of these two men, the party of the correction—which I will term "the Reform of the Reform"—enjoyed the theoretical support of Rome. I say "theoretical" because JP2 and Benedict only supported the Reform of the Reform in writing, doing almost nothing to back up their pronouncements in action. But at least Reform of the Reform apologists could justify their arguments with an appeal to Rome. Even if the pontiffs did little to curb actual liturgical abuse—and in many cases even contributed to it—it could not be denied that the weight of John Paul II and Benedict XVI stood behind the Reform of the Reform.

This gave proponents of "the reverent Novus Ordo" and intellectual home. It also was a significant morale boost—even if the landscape was chaotic at home, one could at least take comfort in knowing that Rome had your back. After all, the good guys were in charge. Reform of the Reform was a respectable *via media* that had the papal imprimatur.

It is interesting to contrast this with the Traditional Latin Mass, which never needed papal approbation to find an intellectual home. This is because the TLM is a heritage, not a policy. It exists independent of the popes and, while may benefit from papal support, is neither a creation of the papacy nor dependent upon it for its vitality or integrity. The "reverent Novus Ordo," on the other hand, it completely dependent upon hierarchical support for its continued existence. Would the movement to "correct" the Novus Ordo have had any vitality if not paid lip service by JP2 and Benedict XVI? It's hard to see how. Like the eponymous character in

*Weekend at Bernies*, the reverent Novus Ordo continues to exist only so long as there are men of influence to prop it up.

This is why the landscape has changed so dramatically since 2013. There is no longer an intellectual home for the Reform of the Reform. Rome is hostile to it; Pope Francis not only opposes the TLM, but any “backwards looking” attempts to restore Latin, *ad orientem* worship, Gregorian chant, or stricter guidelines for the reception of Holy Communion—all integral components of the Reform of the Reform platform. Francis’s liturgical war may be directed against the TLM, but the “reverent Novus Ordo” is taking heavy collateral damage.

It is becoming increasingly difficult to incorporate traditional elements into the Novus Ordo. *Ad orientem* is a perfect case study. As early as 2020, Bishop Peter Christenson of Boise and Paul Etienne of Seattle banned *ad orientem* Masses. In the wake of *Traditiones Custodes*, *ad orientem* was also banned in Washington DC; the dioceses of Venice, Florida and Chicago also banned *ad orientem* Masses said without explicit permission. If you are a Reform of the Reformer, Rome no longer has your back.

The movement is also orphaned ideologically. Ask yourself, who are the intellectual luminaries of the Traditional movement today? Athanasius Schneider. Roberto de Mattei. John Rao. Cardinal Burke. Alcuin Reed. Peter Kwasniewski. Martin Mosebach. We could easily go on, as the list is immense. Now, who are the intellectual heavyweights of the Reform of the Reform movement today? [INSERT CRICKETS] George Weigel is still making noise, and you also have Great Value theologians like Mary Healy occasionally taking pot shots at the TLM, but you will no longer find intellectuals of the caliber of Karol Wojtyla or Joseph Ratzinger among the ranks of the Reform of the Reform. Even Denis Crouan, the most eminent mind among the French “Mass as the Council intended it” crowd, this year threw in the towel admitting that the Reform of the Reform was, quote, “a waste of time.” And of the Reforms surviving proponents, none of them are in Rome.

Not even the old ETWN and Catholic Answers vanguard can be depended upon. Those apologists who have not gone off the deep end are TLM adjacent, even if they choose not to be identified publicly as “traditionalists.”

The reverent Novus Ordo was always a difficult proposition. This is because flux and variability is hardwired into the framework of the new Mass itself. How much ink has been spilled debating about the Mass “as the Council intended?” The Novus Ordo is a chameleon. The guitar Mass with thirty Extraordinary Ministers and the reverent liturgy with Latin Mass parts and communion kneeling on the tongue are *both* the Novus Ordo—and that’s what so problematic about it. Its inherent structure is gelatinous; it becomes whatever its celebrant wants it to be. Something like this is a poor vehicle for handing on the traditional faith.

The Novus Ordo has no bones, and those who argued otherwise—who argued for a “correction”—could only succeed insofar as the institutional church was willing to prop up such

efforts. But with institutional support for the Reform dwindling to nothing, the movement for a reverent Novus Ordo has about as much standing power as FDR's legs.

“But if that's true for the reverent Novus Ordo, it's even more true for the TLM!” some will say. “There's even less institutional support for the TLM; even if the reverent Novus Ordo is rare, the TLM is positively suppressed.” True...but the Traditional Mass was never dependent upon Rome for its existence, and this makes all the difference. Pope Francis may have pulled the life support from the TLM and the reverent Novus Ordo; but