

Question 1

Why were all the changes made when everything was going so well for the Church? Conversions were up, vocations were up, and we had a beautiful traditional Mass that communicated the sense of the sacred. Why was all that abruptly changed?

It would be foolish to deny that in some respects older Catholics can look back upon a “golden age” of the Church, which witnessed extraordinary developments in piety, devotion, conversions, missionary conquests, and a remarkable material flourishing, especially in the United States, and indeed, throughout North America. A truly impressive network of seminaries, convents, houses of study, and schools (from elementary schools to colleges and universities) reflected heroic labors by bishops, priests, religious, and laity to establish the Church in a cultural environment, which was in many ways hostile to Catholicism. The holy lives and wise policies of the popes from Leo XIII to Pius XII contributed enormously to the prestige of the Church in a world growing increasingly secular.

Nevertheless, it is also undeniable that there were some weaknesses underlying the imposing external facade of twentieth-century Catholicism. Pope Leo XIII had prophetically diagnosed the major weaknesses of the Church in the United States as early as 1899 in his apostolic letter *Testem Benevolentiae*, sent to Cardinal James Gibbons, Archbishop of Baltimore. In this letter Pope Leo spoke of “followers of . . . novelties [who] judge that a certain liberty ought to be introduced into the Church so that, limiting the exercise of its powers, each one of the faithful may act more freely in pursuance of his own natural bent and capacity.”¹ What the great Pontiff describes as a danger to the Church resembles what some consider the Church to be today, a “do-as-you please” church. The fact that Leo XIII was warning Catholics in America about the danger of this before the turn of the twentieth-century means that the seeds of it already existed. We have seen the danger grow abundantly since.

It is also worthy of remark that serious deficiencies in the life of the Church prior to the Council were commented upon at great length by various converts to the Church, many of whom were disturbed at the

¹ Pope Leo XIII, *On Americanism Testem Benevolentiae* (January 22, 1899), trans. John Tracy Ellis, ed. in *Documents of American Catholic History*, vol. II (Chicago: Regnery, 1967), p. 537. Also available online at <http://www.ewtn.com/library/PAPALDOC/L13TESTE.HTM>.

apathy, indifference, conformism, and lack of apostolic zeal and ardor evident in the lives of all too many Catholics. The appearance of a liturgical movement among American Catholics (in addition to a renewed interest in biblical and theological scholarship, as well as in Thomistic philosophy) also indicated the existence of further efforts to bring a greater understanding of liturgy to the people, some of whom were ill-instructed in the Faith. The gap between awareness of the meaning of faith in one's personal life and the steadily increasing secularization of public and social life was growing ever wider as the century progressed, and Catholics were affected by the secularization and materialism around them more deeply than was realized.

The weakness underlying much traditional Catholic observance and practice can be found in the amazingly quick collapse of the formerly imposing façade of American Catholicism that has been manifested since the Second Vatican Council and the rapid changes which followed in its wake. The faith of countless Catholics proved unable to withstand the sharp challenges and confusions of today. Whether the issue was birth control or liturgical change, too many Catholics were not very Catholic, being unwilling to follow the hierarchical Church, when the crunch came. This is a continuing phenomenon. A beautiful Latin liturgy proved to be no barrier to widespread spiritual collapse. And, moreover, we must not romanticize the matter for the liturgy was often *not* celebrated with that much care, reverence, beauty, and splendor.

Much responsibility for the confusion that followed in the wake of the Council in the United States and Canada can undoubtedly be laid at the door of the clergy, who, in the experience of most Catholics, carried out the Council's liturgical reforms in a sometimes mindless way. Yet what can one say about the depth of supernatural faith in Christ and His promises that could be shaken because the Mass began to be said in English? Or merely because of liturgical scandals? This is not to minimize the consequences of such scandals in the lives of those who have found the very sense of the sacred eliminated in their parish's liturgical life. But *Christ* must always remain the proper object of our faith, and never the externals of liturgical practice which admittedly have been confusing over the past few years. Any change in deep-rooted habits can cause confusion. This is especially true where habits of worship are concerned. But allowing confusion to drive one from the Church is much more unfortunate than the liturgical chaos itself. And the fact is the Church did determine through the Second Vatican Council to make far-reaching changes in her worship and

Question 1: Why All the Changes?

practices, and the calling of the Council by Pope John XXIII was a perfectly legitimate exercise of the supreme authority in the Church which, as we shall see in the answers to later questions, he possessed. The convocation of a council by the pope to help deal with problems which the Church had to face was also an eminently traditional act. Popes have many times called councils to deal with problems and, almost without exception, councils have introduced modifications in the Church's discipline.

Pope Leo XIII, in his letter on Americanism quoted above, even remarked how fitting it is for the Church "to admit modifications" in her discipline (though never in her doctrine) "according to the diversity of time and place." Pope Leo continues:

The Church, indeed, possess what her Author has bestowed on her, a kind and merciful disposition; for which reason from the very beginning she willingly showed herself to be what Paul proclaimed in his own regard: "I became all things to all men, that I might save all" (1 Cor. 9:22). The history of all past ages is witness that the Apostolic See, to which not only the office of teaching but also the supreme government of the whole Church was committed, has constantly adhered to the same doctrine in the same sense and in the same mind: but that it has always been accustomed to so modify the rule of life that, while keeping the divine right inviolate, it has never disregarded the manners and customs of the various nations which it embraces. If required for the salvation of souls, who will doubt that it is ready to do so at the present time? But this is not to be determined by the will of private individuals, who are mostly deceived by the appearance of right, but ought to be left to the judgment of the Church.²

When Pope John XXIII convoked a general council of the Church, one of his reasons was to enable the Church to deal better with the "manner and customs" of the modern world; in doing so, he was only demonstrating what his predecessor had indicated, namely, that the Church was ready to change "if required for the salvation of souls." And what Pope John saw—one of the principal reasons he gave for calling the Second Vatican

² Pope Leo XIII, *Testem Benevolentiae*, p. 540.

Council—were the souls of countless modern men in need of Christ but without Christ. “It is a source of considerable sorrow,” Pope John said in his opening speech to the Council, “to see that the greater part of the human race . . . does not yet participate in those sources of divine grace which exist in the Catholic Church.” It was in order, therefore, that the Church’s doctrine might “influence the numerous fields of human activity” that Pope John thought a council was necessary so that the Church could better “look to the present, to the new conditions and new forms of life introduced into the modern world which have opened new avenues to the Catholic apostolate.”³

This remains true today; the Council was called for a legitimate reason, and the program of the Council remains to be carried out. “What the Spirit said to the Church through the Council of our time,” Pope John Paul II wrote in his first encyclical *Redemptor Hominis*, “cannot lead to anything else—in spite of momentary uneasiness—but a still more mature solidity of the whole People of God, aware of their salvific mission.”⁴

In an address to a special plenary session of the College of Cardinals held between November 5 and 11, 1979, Pope John Paul II went even further in speaking of the central importance of the Second Vatican Council, in spite of some of the deformations that have followed it. The Pope said:

Obedience to the teachings of the Second Vatican Council is obedience to the Holy Spirit, who is given to the Church in order to remind her at every stage of history of everything that Christ said, in order to teach the Church all things (cf. Jn. 14:26). Obedience to the Holy Spirit is expressed in the authentic carrying out of the tasks indicated by the council, in full accordance with the teaching set forth therein.

These tasks cannot be treated as though they did not exist. It is not possible to claim to make the Church go back, so to speak, along the path of human history. But neither is it possible to rush presumptuously ahead, toward ways of

3 Pope John XXIII, “Opening Speech to the Council” (October 11, 1962), in *The Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Walter M. Abbott, S. J., trans. and ed. Joseph Gallagher (NY: America Press, 1966), pp. 710-719. Also available online at <http://www.christusrex.org/www1/CDHN/v2.html>.

4 Pope John Paul II, The Redeemer of Man *Redemptor Hominis* (March 4, 1979), no. 3. Available online at www.vatican.va.

living, thinking and preaching Christian truth, and finally to ways of being a Christian, a priest, a religious that are not envisioned in the integral teaching of the council—“integral,” that is to say, understood in the light of the whole of sacred Tradition and on the basis of the constant Magisterium of the Church herself.⁵

It was providential, then, that the Council, under the guidance of Pope John XXIII and Pope Paul VI, clearly addressed itself to the removal of some of the past Church patterns of externalism, legalism, and formalism that in some ways had served to paralyze the evangelizing energies of priests, religious, and lay people in spreading the Gospel among the peoples of the modern world, who are already undergoing vast cultural and technological changes. Anyone who remembers the pre-conciliar Church remembers how the Catholic laity commonly assumed that it was not their responsibility to spread the faith; religion was the business of the priests and religious. That was too often the attitude of the clergy, as well! It is an attitude that must now be changed. In a de-Christianized world, religion is the business of the believing laity, even as it also remains the business of the clergy.

Just as the Council of Trent itself was a “reforming Council” preparing the Church to meet effectively the challenges of a post-Reformation Europe, so the Second Vatican Council was similarly intended to be a reforming Council, designed by God’s Providence to meet the new challenge of contemporary unbelief—which in our day calls for *evangelization*! In the words of Pope Paul VI, “the objectives [of the Council] are definitely summed up in this single one: to make the Church of the Twentieth Century ever better fitted for proclaiming the Gospel to the people of the Twentieth Century.”⁶

Pope John Paul II echoed this when he wrote in *Redemptor Hominis* that:

The Church’s consciousness must go with universal

5 Pope John Paul II, “At the conclusion of the Plenary Assembly of the Sacred College” (November 9, 1979). Available online in Latin at http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/speeches/1979/november/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19791109_riunione-plenaria_it.html.

6 Pope Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation on Evangelization in the Modern World *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (December 8, 1975), no. 2. Available online at http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/paul_vi/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_p-vi_exh_19751208_evangelii-nuntiandi_en.html.

openness, in order that all may be able to find in her ‘the unsearchable riches of Christ’ (Eph. 3:8) spoken of by the Apostle of the Gentiles. Such openness, organically joined with the awareness of her own nature and certainty of her own truth, of which Christ said, ‘The word which you hear is not mine but the Father’s who sent me’ (Jn. 14:24), is what gives the Church her apostolic or in other words her missionary dynamism professing and proclaiming in its integrity the whole of the truth transmitted by Christ.⁷

This does not mean that the Church since the Council has not been beset with problems. Pope John Paul II admitted that “the Church that I . . . have had entrusted to me is not free of internal difficulties and tension;”⁸ but he insisted that Catholics must now move ahead in spite of these difficulties because God “desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:4). Who but those in what Vatican II reiterated is “the true Church”⁹ can better help bring men to the knowledge of the truth that resides in the Catholic Church?

If we will make the effort to look at recent Church history from the long-range perspective of God’s dealings with His People, we must realize how possible and even likely it was that no one would have ever paid the slightest attention to any of the things the Second Vatican Council *really* said, or that the Popes have said subsequently, if we had not had the thorough shaking up that in fact we have had. “Why are you afraid, O men of little faith?” (Mt. 8:26). As Saint Anthony of Padua said long ago, and as is true today: “Only when the proud house of earthly comfort is reduced to a ruin, can the Lord prepare a dwelling place for His inward comforting.” It should be clear by now that we must look more carefully at the actual teachings of the Council, and try, finally, to put those teachings of the Council into practice. We certainly cannot go back to the past, however glorious its successes were. It is toward the long-awaited “second spring” in the life of the Church (foreshadowed in the writings of Pius XII and more recently by the Second Vatican Council) that we must now head under the guidance of the successors of Peter, chief shepherds of the flock. What John Paul II has said on this subject is unmistakable:

⁷ Pope John Paul II, *Redemptor Hominis*, no. 4.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Second Vatican Council, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (December 4, 1963), no. 2. Available online at http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19631204_sacrosanctum-concilium_en.html.

Question 1: Why All the Changes?

The Pope . . . expects a noble and generous effort on your part to always know better your Church. The Second Vatican Council wanted to be a Council about the Church. Take the documents of the Council, especially *Lumen Gentium*, and study them. With loving attention. Then you will discover that there is not a “new Church”! The Council has revealed with more clarity the one Church of Christ, one having new dimensions but the same in essence.

The Pope expects from you a loyal acceptance of the Church. You cannot be faithful and remain attached to secondary things, valid in the past but already outdated. You will not be faithful either if you try to build the so-called Church of the future, unrelated to the present.

We must be faithful to the Church born once and for all from the plan of God: at the cross, the empty tomb and at Pentecost, which is born not of the people or from reason, but from God.¹⁰

With respect to the liturgical abuses that have scandalized many Catholics and caused some to doubt the Church, a further observation is perhaps in order. These scandals have *not* flowed from the genuine reform of the Mass decreed by the Council, but from *disobedience* to the decrees of the Council and to the subsequent liturgical enactments of the Holy See. It is no remedy to these abuses and scandals to engage in disobedience oneself by rejecting or criticizing the authority of a pope or an ecumenical council convoked and presided over by a pope. There is nothing traditionally Catholic about that; the very idea of Catholics opposing a pope or an ecumenical council would surely have scandalized any earlier generation of Catholics as much as the liturgical aberrations have scandalized some today.

If we imagine that the course the Church has taken since the Council is going to be reversed—again we are talking about the official changes, not unauthorized abuses that individuals may have introduced—we should reflect prayerfully on the fact that both of the Roman pontiffs elected since the end of the Council, Popes John Paul I and John Paul II, declared decisively that their pontificates would be dedicated to carrying out the

¹⁰ Pope John Paul II, homily delivered in Mexico City (January 29, 1979).

official decrees of the Council. Pope John Paul I inaugurated his brief reign by saying:

We wish to continue implementing without interruption the legacy left us by the Second Vatican Council. Its wise norms must be applied. Here we must be on guard lest impulses that arise perhaps from generosity but are nonetheless imprudent, should distort the teaching and meaning of the council. We need also to be vigilant lest, on the other hand, efforts at restraint that are inspired by timidity should dampen the stimulus to renewed life which the council gave.¹¹

Upon his election to the office of Peter, Pope John Paul II similarly declared:

First of all, we wish to point out the unceasing importance of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, and we accept the definite duty of assiduously bringing it into effect. Indeed, is not that universal Council a kind of milestone as it were, an event of the utmost importance in the almost two thousand year history of the Church, and consequently in the religious and cultural history of the world?¹²

It seems clear that, whatever we thought about some of the gusts that blew in when good Pope John XXIII opened up those famous windows, we are nevertheless now equally obliged to go *forward* from the fact of the Council and what it decreed. If mistakes have occurred in the implementation of its decrees—and they have—if errors and abuses have cropped up—and they have—the remedy for them is nevertheless to be found in a more careful implementation of the official reforms of the Council. The Church has to move forward, not back. The revised Roman Missal containing the New Order of Mass is now an integral part of what is today “given” for loyal Catholics. To continue to protest about the *Novus Ordo* and to call for a

11 Pope John Paul I, To the Cardinals and to the World *Urbi et Orbi* address (August 27, 1978). Available online in Latin at http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_i/messages/documents/hf_jp-i_mes_urbi-et-orbi_27081978_it.html.

12 Pope John Paul II, To the Cardinals and to the World *Urbi et Orbi* address (October 17, 1978). Available online at www.cwtn.com/jp2/papal3/jp2urbi.htm.

return of the “Tridentine Mass” is to distract from more important issues of concern, for example, the integrity of Catholic doctrine in the face of the unprecedented assault against it by the forces of the modern world. Possible further revisions of the Roman Missal to help enhance or restore greater reverence and a more profound sense of the sacred, the possible revival of Latin as a liturgical language alongside the vernacular, better (and perhaps more accurate) vernacular translations of the Mass and other sacraments—all these aims will only be achieved in loyal submission to and docile partnership with legitimate Church authority, not in acrimonious conflict with that authority because of changes which have already been made, even if they have not always turned out as well as they could.

When the New Order of Mass is celebrated as it ought to be—with dignity, splendor, and solemnity, all called for by the rubrics for the *Novus Ordo Missae*—the average Catholic would experience the same reverence in the “Mass of Saint Pius V”¹³ and the “Mass of Paul VI” using the Roman Canon. The latter, as we will show in some of the answers to questions which follow, is really the same as always, and continues to give us the living Christ as sacrifice and sacrament. We should remember that, even if the traditional liturgy as promulgated by Saint Pius V had never been changed, infidelity, modernism, and secular humanism would still be with us, as they were before the changes came about, and they would still constitute the main dangers to the faith today.

At times, the laity may have much to suffer these days. But we cannot complain about the disobedience of modernists and secularizers in the Church if we ourselves become disobedient to the legitimate authority of the Church.

And, in considering the whole question of the extent to which the Church can change the externals of the liturgy or the administration of the sacraments, a matter which will be discussed in detail in the sections which follow, we should consider the wise words of Pope Pius XII:

As our Lord Jesus Christ gave the Church only one government under the authority of the Prince of the Apostles, one single faith, one single sacrifice, so He gave only one single treasury of signs producing grace, namely, the sacraments. Nor has the Church in the course of

13 So called because while the Council of Trent called for a reform of the liturgy, it was Pope Pius V (1566–1572) who actually implemented that reform.

centuries substituted other sacraments for those sacraments instituted by Christ, nor has she the power to make this substitution, for, according to the teaching of the Council of Trent, the seven sacraments of the New Law were instituted by Our Lord Jesus Christ, and the Church has no power over “the substance of the sacraments,” that is, over those things which, according to the sources of divine revelation, Christ the Lord Himself prescribed must be maintained in the sacramental signs. . . .

But if, by the will and prescription of the Church, these rites were at one time necessary for the validity [of the sacrament], everyone knows that *what the Church had decreed she has also the power to change or to abrogate*.¹⁴

Thus the Third General Council of the Church, at Ephesus in Asia Minor, decreed in AD 431 that “it should not be lawful to publish another faith or Creed than that which was defined by the Nicene Council.”¹⁵ The Fourth General Council at Chalcedon twenty years later explicitly confirmed this decree; yet the great Council of Trent in the sixteenth century decreed that a new Creed *did* have to be published—what has since been most commonly called the Creed, or Profession of Faith, of Pope Pius IV. What the Church has herself decreed, she also has the power to change or abrogate through proper Church authority.

Similarly, among the large number of decrees issued by the Fourth General Council of the Lateran, convened by Pope Innocent III in AD 1215, was a canon forbidding the foundation of any new religious orders.¹⁶ Considering all the new religious orders that have been founded since 1215—including the great Dominican order, which dates its foundation to within a decade after this Lateran decree forbidding any new religious orders—it is clear that the Church has the authority to change her own Church laws (not divine laws) for reasons which seem to her good and sufficient. In the past, she has made changes in Church law or discipline

14 Pope Pius XII, Apostolic Constitution *Sacramentum Ordinis* (November 30, 1947), in *The Church: Papal Teachings*, selected and arranged by the Benedictine Monks of Solesmes, trans. Mother E. O’Gorman, RSCJ (Boston, MA: St. Paul Editions, 1962), p. 638. (Emphasis added).

15 See <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05491a.htm>.

16 Philip Hughes, *The Church in Crisis: A History of General Councils* (NY: Hanover House, 1961), p. 218.

that may have seemed to some to affect unchangeable essentials—but the Church herself was the judge that they were not changes in essentials.

We shall demonstrate in the course of our answers to specific questions raised by those concerned about the post-Vatican II changes that the principal changes that have most disturbed or distressed people do *not* affect what Pope Pius XII above calls “the substance of the sacraments”—insofar, of course, as these disturbing changes are really official changes decreed by the authority of the Church and not aberrations introduced by individuals on their own. We shall also show that the Church had the authority to make changes in exactly the sense understood by Pope Pius XII, and exercised by the Council of Trent when it modified decrees of the Councils of Ephesus and Chalcedon, and by the medieval Popes when they approved the foundation of religious orders despite the decree prohibiting their foundation as enacted by the Fourth General Council of the Lateran.



Addendum to Question 1

The above discussion mentions the “revised Roman Missal.” Its first Latin edition appeared in 1970. A second edition was issued in 1975, and it was this second edition which was normative at the time of the publication of the original edition of this book. The third Latin edition (*editio typica tertia*) of the revised Roman Missal was approved in the Jubilee Year 2000, although it was not published until 2001. Its General Instruction of the Roman Missal (GIRM) contains the normative liturgical rubrics and regulations that must now be followed in American dioceses. Some practices formerly allowed or not addressed in previous editions are now prohibited. For example, the Lectionary is never to be carried in the entrance procession. The processional Cross must have the figure of the crucified Christ. Hymns are not to be substituted for chants found in the Order of Mass, such as the *Gloria* or the *Agnus Dei*. The deacon, if present, must kneel during the Eucharistic Prayer until the elevation of the Chalice. Extraordinary ministers of the Eucharist are not to approach the altar before the priest has received Holy Communion, and must always accept from the hands of the priest the vessel from which they distribute Communion. These and other rubrics contained in the 2001 GIRM are clearly intended to place a new emphasis on the sacred.

After a twenty-five year evaluation of liturgical celebrations using the 1975 edition, there is much in the new GIRM to warrant the judgment of the current prefect of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, Cardinal Francis Arinze, that “the do-it-yourself Mass is ended; go in peace.”¹⁷

¹⁷ Robert Moynihan, as quoted in “The Return of the Latin Mass?” in *Inside the Vatican* (May 13, 2003).