

# LITURGY NO LONGER A MONOPOLISED INDUSTRY

By JAMES R. LOTHIAN

**I**N July 2007, Pope Benedict XVI issued his motu proprio *Summorum Pontificum* freeing the Traditional Latin Mass from the restrictions imposed on its celebration for four decades.

In so doing, he replaced monopoly in liturgy with competition. That has given Catholics greater choice and for that reason is beneficial in and of itself. Perhaps more important, however, is what this competition means going forward.

## Competition v Monopoly

Competition and monopoly are concepts borrowed from economics so it may seem a stretch, and perhaps even somewhat profane, to apply economic thinking to the liturgy. Nevertheless, there's a carryover: what happened in the Church following the post-Vatican II liturgical changes is largely, if not totally, consistent with what economic theory predicts.

The first major problem with monopoly is that leads to waste and distortion, both in consumption and production. Too little of the good in question is produced relative to the situation under competition. Some of the resources—the people that would have engaged in the production of the good in question and the buildings and equipment they would have used—get diverted to other uses, uses in which those resources are less productive. This is the first source of waste. It is not any different to what would happen if some of the resources were simply destroyed.

If too little of the good is produced relative to the situation in a competitive market, then too little will be consumed. Consumers eventually will find substitutes for the monopolised good, but these substitutes are goods that by definition are valued less. Otherwise consumers would have chosen the substitutes to begin with. This redirection of consumption to less valued products and resultant frustration of consumer wants is a second source of waste. It is not much different to what would happen if some of these products were simply thrown in the sea.

How appropriate is this stylised theoretical account to the liturgical changes that followed the Second Vatican Council? Well, consider what has happened in the 40 years since those changes took effect.

A whole genre of liturgy was effectively eliminated, most noticeably the traditional Mass of the Roman Rite,

but also those of the Dominican Rite, traditional Ambrosian Rite and the other local rites. Many of the popular devotions—Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, the Miraculous Medal Novena, Corpus Christi processions and the like—fell by the wayside in many if not most parishes. Confessionals fell into disuse.

Many of the people who had been occupying the pews, none of whom were consulted in any of this—the "consumers," if you will—went elsewhere. Mass attendance in most Western countries, as I have documented in this Review, declined immediately following the liturgical changes and continued to decline in the years that followed. As time went by other factors very likely contributed to these declines, but it stretches credulity to the limit to argue that Catholics were satisfied with the changes.

On the production side we have witnessed the same sorry spectacle. The number of priests in most Western countries declined markedly, seminaries in very many dioceses and of very many religious orders became near empty or closed and the average age of priests rose to the point that in another decade's time, unless something changes, the number of priests will plummet even further.

In short, the direction of both sets of changes is entirely consistent with theoretical predictions. The major difference is that in the standard theoretical account of monopoly behaviour the reduction in production takes place because the monopolist is trying to maximise pecuniary gain via a higher product price.<sup>1</sup> The motivation for suppressing the old liturgies post-Vatican II, in contrast, was something else entirely. It's akin to what one finds in government-run monopolies or certain so-called "non-profit" corporations. In both, the monopoly gains are redistributed as perquisites to managers and workers rather than as higher returns to shareholders.

In the case at hand, the perquisites were in the realm of ideas. The reformers had a vision of the liturgy different to the traditional one and they imposed it.

Monopolisation in liturgy provided them with "a terrain for experimenting with theological hypotheses" as Pope Benedict put it in his 2001 Fontgombault address and enabled them to do so unfettered by opposition.

Their announced goal, to quote Antoine Dumas OSB, one of the architects of the reform, was "to restore the unity of a missal that, while remaining faithful to the

Roman style characterised by the complementary qualities of clarity, density, and sobriety, had to open itself to contemporary aspirations-according to the very fruitful directives of Vatican II".

The ultimate result was to limit severely the scope of liturgical development. The liturgy could, and indeed did, change, but in one direction only-horizontally rather than vertically, with the focus on the community to varying degrees eclipsing the true focus of the liturgy which should be on worship of Our Lord.

The liturgy was now viewed as something man could invent. And he-or at least the soi-disant experts-did invent. The inventing, moreover, has continued apace since then, with the result that the actual celebration of the Mass now differs greatly not only from one country and another, but from one diocese to another, and indeed at times from one Mass to another in the same parish.

The one constant in all of this, if one can call it that, was the near-total suppression of the old liturgy and of any attempts to carry its external forms over to the new. Rare indeed was the parish in which the new Mass was celebrated in Latin, or Gregorian chant heard, despite the emphatic statements in the Second Vatican Council's "Constitution on the Liturgy" urging that both be retained. One can point to the pro-Cathedral in Dublin, the Brompton Oratory or Our Lady's Basilica, Onze Lieve Vrouwe Basiliëk, in Maastricht as counter examples of sorts, but these are the exceptions that prove the rule. Rarer still were parishes in which the traditional Mass, be it Roman rite or other rite, was celebrated on a regular basis and the sacraments administered according to those older rites.

In 1988 in his apostolic letter *Ecclesia Dei*, Pope John Paul II tried to change some of this, issuing an indult that freed the old Mass from some of the restrictions surrounding its celebration. The catch was, the local bishop had to give his approval for such celebrations. The Pope wrote: "To all those Catholic faithful who feel attached to some previous liturgical and disciplinary forms of the Latin tradition, I wish to manifest my will to facilitate their ecclesial communion by means of the necessary measures to guarantee respect for their aspirations. In this matter I ask for the support of the bishops and of all those engaged in the pastoral ministry in the Church."

That plea to the bishops, however, fell on largely deaf ears. So also did Pope John Paul's request a decade later to his fellow bishops asking them "to understand and to have a renewed pastoral attention for the faithful attached to the Old Rite and, on the threshold of the Third Millennium, to help all Catholics to live the celebration of the Holy Mysteries with a devotion which may be true nourishment for their spiritual life and which may be a source of peace".

Landscape changed

*Summorum Pontificum* has changed the liturgical landscape dramatically. It has put the old Mass on the same footing juridically as the new. No longer can it be stifled either by arbitrary decree or by episcopal lethargy. As is true in any market in which monopoly has given way to competition-bear with me again on the analogy-production will increase and consumer wants will be better served. That already is happening not only in Ireland but elsewhere.

In Ireland there's been a close to 70 per cent increase in the number of Masses celebrated since 2006, the institution of a Latin Mass chaplaincy at St Kevin's Church in Harrington Street, Dublin, and two training seminars organised by the Latin Mass Society of Ireland in Co. Donegal and Co. Cork for priests wishing to learn to celebrate the Extraordinary Form. These were both considered highly successful, and were attended by a total of 22 priests. The LMSI is planning another such seminar in Lettermore, Co. Galway between Easter and Pentecost. There are plans for yet another, in Dublin.

In the rest of the world, hard data are skimpy to non-existent. Nevertheless there is a continual stream of reports on the internet and in local newspapers on the old Mass being celebrated again in parishes after a hiatus of 40 or more years, on young priests who have learned it and are now celebrating it regularly, on pontifical high Masses being celebrated by bishops who had not previously done so, on training courses for priests, and the organisation and training of scholas to sing the Mass prayers. In Rome itself, there is at long last a parish dedicated exclusively to the old liturgy and run by the FSSP, Santissima Trinit' dei Pellegrini, near the Ponte Sisto. In Chicago, Cardinal George has turned over St Gelasius Church, near the University of Chicago, to the Institute of Christ the King Sovereign Priest.

One fell swoop

More important, the competitive environment that *Summorum Pontificum* is ushering in, will inevitably alter the process governing liturgical development. Prior to Vatican II the liturgy developed bit by bit over the centuries. After that council, change came in one fell swoop, with a new Mass conjured up by a committee in the course of a few years and imposed on the Church by papal decree.

Writing in 1992 in his preface to Mgr Klaus Gamber's *The Reform of the Roman Liturgy*, Pope Benedict, then a cardinal, described the situation in these terms:

What happened after the Council was totally different: in the place of liturgy as the fruit of development came fabricated liturgy. We left the living process of growth and development to enter the realm of fabrication. There

was no longer a desire to continue developing and maturing, as the centuries passed and so this was replaced-as if it were a technical production-with a construction, a banal on-the-spot product.

With greater competition that living process of growth again has become possible. In competitive markets, planning occurs, but at the level of individuals, not by committee. If something new works, it survives. Growth and change take place, to use Nobelist Friedrich Hayek's phrase, "as the result of human action not human design".

Edmund Burke, writing over two centuries ago described this process of organic growth exceedingly well, albeit in a political rather than religious context:

At once to preserve and to reform is quite another thing. When the useful parts of an old establishment are kept, and what is superadded is to be fitted to what is retained, a vigorous mind, steady, persevering attention, various powers of comparison and combination, and the resources of an understanding fruitful in expedients are to be exercised; they are to be exercised in a continued conflict with the combined force of opposite vices, with the obstinacy that rejects all improvement and the levity that is fatigued and disgusted with everything of which it is in possession. But you may object-"A process of this kind is slow. It is not fit for an assembly which glories in performing in a few months the work of ages. Such a mode of reforming, possibly, might take up many years." Without question it might; and it ought. It is one of the excellences of a method in which time is amongst the assistants, that its operation is slow and in some cases almost imperceptible.

Reverence begets reverence

The celebration of the old Mass will increase, and it already has. How much that continues will depend upon the preferences of both the laity and the clergy and the time and abilities of the latter. None of this, however, is exogenous-something totally determined by outside forces. The Mass itself is a great teacher. The dictum *lex orandi lex credendi*-that as we pray so shall we believe-is considered a dictum for very good reason. Preferences can change, and very likely will over time. And where there is a will there will be a way. More reverential Masses will beget greater reverence on the part of both laity and clergy and this, in turn, will have secondary effects that operate to further that process.

There very likely also will be a spillover, both from the older liturgies to the new and, as time goes by, in the opposite direction. In this connection, Fr. John Zuhlsdorf, the "Fr. Z" of the blog WDTPRS, has argued that:

The Holy Father's document did not only for the most

part take the decisions about the older form of Mass out of the hands of local bishops. It also presented a new "hermeneutic" through which priests, especially younger priests, would begin to read Holy Mass and understand themselves at the Lord's altar.

What *Summorum Pontificum* did was open the possibility of hundreds of humble instances of the "gravitational pull" which the older form of Mass, through these priests, would have both on the way they celebrate the newer form and, subsequently, on the participation of people in Holy Mass.

This cross-pollination between the old and new rites is something that Pope Benedict has long regarded as both necessary and desirable. He alluded to it explicitly in October 1998 in the paper he delivered at the seminar that he and the late Alfons Cardinal Stickler organised to celebrate the issuance of *Ecclesia Dei* by Pope John Paul and the founding of the Priestly Fraternity of St. Peter, and then later in his letter to the bishops accompanying *Summorum Pontificum*.

With the issuance of *Summorum Pontificum* the Church has, therefore, entered a new era and, in a very important sense, returned to an older one. In his letter to the bishops accompanying that document, Pope Benedict wrote:

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.

For 40 years this, was not at all the case. I am reminded of the Psalmist's lament:

Quadragesima annis proximus fui generationi huic,  
et dixi: "Semper si errant cordo  
Ipsi vero non cognoverunt vias meas"

Forty years long was I offended with that generation,  
and I said: "These always err in heart.  
And these men have not known my ways."

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