



Boston Catholic Journal



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The Perpetual Authority of the Latin Mass



Revisiting the Apostolic Constitution *Quo Primum*

(Pope St. Pius V - July 14, 1570)

What part of the word “Forever” do we no longer understand?

On the third day of April 1969 the temporal concept of “*forever*” was astonishingly and arbitrarily *quantified* by Pope Paul VI — much to the perplexity of historians and physicists — as 399 years — or *to be precise, 399 years, 9 months, and 11 days.*

On that day Pope Paul tampered with time and eternity by expurgating or otherwise expunging the ancient Latin rite of the Mass known as *Quo Primum* — which unambiguously states that “*this present Constitution ... will be valid henceforth, now, and forever*” — and replacing it, by a *tour de force*, with his own Apostolic Constitution *Missale Romanum*, otherwise known as the *Novus Ordo*, or “*The New Mass.*”

This does not mean, of course, that Pope Paul VI *explicitly stated* that:

“Henceforth the word and the concept of “*forever*” — *now* — as of this third day of April 1969 — *only means* 399 years, 9 months, and 11 days.”

However — and this is vital to understand — it is the inescapable logical consequence of replacing the *Roman Missal* of the Apostolic Constitution *Quo Primum* (*Missale Romanum ex decreto Sacrosancti Concilii Tridentini restitutum*) of 1570 with the *Novus Ordo Missae* (New Order Mass) on April 3, 1969 — for the *Missale Romanum* unambiguously states that the Latin Mass (as we have come to call it) is, and *always will be*, the only valid Mass, and as such irreformable, incapable of being altered, modified, or changed in any way *by any person whomsoever* — “henceforth, now, and *forever*”.

Pretty clear, yes?

But this unalterable Mass *had*, in fact, been *superseded* by the *Novus Ordo Missae* (New Order Mass) following Vatican II, despite the fact that *Quo Primum* was to be in force “forever” and in no way “altered”. What was decreed to remain both *unalterable* and *forever* ... was neither, following Vatican II.

We were left asking ourselves what, in fact, the word “forever” had suddenly come to mean, together with all the ramifications of this re-definition of a clearly

understood concept. In other words, if “forever” does not mean “for all time and into eternity” ... what, precisely does it mean?

If what is held to be “forever” is abrogated in its intension by the introduction of something that re-defines it in such a way that it is nullified. Why is that? Simply put, anything “*other than*” our understanding of the intensionality of “forever” *eo ipso* nullifies it, **for it must be less and cannot be greater** than “forever” as we had always understood the concept “forever”— and what is less is *already* understood in *other* temporal terms, in which case the *re-definition* of “forever” becomes merely redundant of other and already existing temporal concepts such as “now”, “past”, “present”, and “future”.

In other words, if “forever” is in any way abbreviated to something less, then it is determinate and if it is determinate it is quantifiable. In the present case it is reduced to 399 years, 9 months, and 11 days, or the period between *Quo Primum* (the Latin Mass) in 1570 and its being superseded by *Missale Romanum* (Mass in the vernacular) in 1969. What was deemed as binding “forever” in 1570 and the following 400 years was breached by something new (*novus*) and different in 1969. But how is this possible if what was binding “now, henceforth, and forever” in 1570 was replaced in 1969? How could “forever” come to mean, “only in force for 400 years — after which it is susceptible to being abrogated”? Logically such a

breach cannot occur without somehow re-defining the concept of “forever”. But this is fraught with inconsistencies and contradictions that make any effort of the sort possible.

Consider the following verse: “I am the living bread that came down out of Heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he shall live *forever*” (St. John 6.51) What do we understand by this? That those who “eat of this bread” shall live for 399 years, 9 months, and 11 days? Of course not. We understand that they shall live *forever*, which is to say, for all time into eternity. The word “forever” or “for ever” occurs 472 times in Holy Scripture and it is always spoken of or understood in terms of limitless perpetuity, e.g., “for his mercy endureth *forever*.” (Ps. 135.20) By what possible warrant can we understand God’s mercy as enduring for a finite quantum of time, say, 160 years, 6 months, and two days? In other words, how do we *quantify* forever? We cannot. It is not a quantifiable sum.

When Saint Paul says of Christ: “Jesus Christ, yesterday, and today; and the same forever,” how are we to hold “yesterday” as meaning, “the day before this present day,” and “today” as “this present day” — but “forever” as meaning “399 years, 9 months, and 11 days”? After that limited duration of time does Christ become something different? Why did Saint Paul not say “Jesus Christ, yesterday, and today; and for 399 years, 9 months, and 11 days”?

In other words, does the word “forever” in Sacred Scripture, *and* in ordinary discourse, mean something different than it meant in *Quo Primum*, and if it does, why just *Quo Primum*? If we *re-define* the concept of “forever” it must apply to each and every iteration of it, *wherever* it occurs, sacred or profane. Are we prepared to do this? Is it even logically possible? In a word, no.

Moreover, we must then ask, what then is the *periodicity* of the concept “forever” once it acquires a terminus, an end — and what is more, and of far greater importance, *what lies beyond it*? If it is merely *the most extensive* temporal concept in an array of other lesser, but equally determinate temporal concepts, then its durability is finite — notwithstanding that the notion of *time itself* is indefinite (for being discretely, and however arbitrarily enumerated, it is at least *conceptually* infinite by mere addition). As Saint Augustine pointed out in broaching the concept of eternity (in which there is no time as we understand it) it is pointless to ask “what preceded eternity?” for the notion of *precedence* is itself a temporal notion, and to ask “what preceded eternity?” (in which there is no time) is to ask “what preceded time *before there was no time.*” We are now asking, “what succeeds forever when “forever” as a determinate time frame expires?” What do we call it? Can we concatenate a series of “forevers” *indefinitely*? And if we do, what shall we call it? Forever? We cannot — for “forever,” as we had said, has become a *determinate time frame* following the Apostolic Constitution *Missale Romanum* of

Vatican II. Perhaps you begin to see the inconsistency, the absurdity really, of *tampering with the notion of “forever.”*

Even if we argue that the Pope has the *authority and the ability to re-define* and *abbreviate* the notion of “forever” by invoking Christ’s pronouncement to Saint Peter: “Whatever you bind on earth is bound in Heaven” (St. Mat. 18.18), we *still* have not circumvented the problem. Heaven itself is the paradigm *par excellence* of “forever” (and so, too, is Hell). Time and logic are not in the arena of “Faith and Morals” in which alone the Pope is competent and infallible. (Nor, incidentally is economics). Even if a pope repeals a former pope’s Apostolic Constitution, *he cannot repeal logic nor re-define the intensionality of a concept*, in this case “forever.” To say that St. Pius V did not “intend” to use “forever” in the way we, and all our predecessors understood it, is absolutely without warrant or justification. ¹He meant that The Apostolic Constitution *Quo Primum* would be binding *forever*. If not, why the severest admonition at the end of *Quo Primum*?

“Therefore, *no one whosoever is permitted to alter this notice of Our permission, statute, ordinance, command, precept, grant, indult, declaration, will, decree, and prohibition. Should anyone dare to contravene it, know that he will incur the wrath of Almighty God and of the Blessed Apostles Peter*

and Paul.”

Consider the Force, Extent, Clarity, and absolute *Perpetuity* of the following twelve excerpts from *Quo Primum*:

- “It is most becoming that there be in the Church only one appropriate manner of reciting the Psalms *and only one rite for the celebration of Mass*”
- “*This ordinance applies henceforth, now, and forever*”
- “This new rite alone is to be used”
- “*This Missal is to be used by all churches, even by those which in their authorization are made exempt, whether by Apostolic indult, custom, or privilege, or even if by oath or official confirmation of the Holy See, or have their rights and faculties guaranteed to them by any other manner whatsoever.*”
- “*This present Constitution, which will be valid henceforth, now, and forever*”
- “*Nothing must be added to Our recently published Missal, nothing omitted from it, nor anything whatsoever be changed within it*”

- “We order them in virtue of holy obedience to chant or to read the Mass according to the rite and manner and norm herewith laid down by Us”
- “*They must not in celebrating Mass presume to introduce any ceremonies or recite any prayers other than those contained in this Missal*”
- “*This Missal is hereafter to be followed absolutely, without any scruple of conscience or fear of incurring any penalty, judgment, or censure, and may freely and lawfully be used.*”
- “*This present document cannot be revoked or modified, but remains always valid and retain its full force*”
- “The Missal [must] be preserved incorrupt throughout the whole world and kept free of flaws and errors”
- “Therefore, no one whosoever is permitted to alter this notice of Our permission, statute, ordinance, command, precept, grant, indult, declaration, will, decree, and prohibition. Should anyone dare to contravene it, know that he will incur the wrath of Almighty God and of the Blessed Apostles Peter and Paul.”

Since Vatican II, however, “forever”, it appears, has a terminus after all ... and does not mean ... well ... forever ... at least in the reinterpreted and novel concept of time enunciated by Pope Paul VI in his Apostolic Constitution *Missale Romanum* — which abolished, or more properly *expurgated* the notion of

“forever” to accommodate changes that could not be reconciled with that concept.

Quo Primum leaves absolutely no room for ambiguity as you will see in the document itself which accompanies this article. If the proposal on the table is in open conflict with the concept of “forever”, then one must go: *the proposal* or “*forever*”. Paul VI opted for the latter. It must either be redefined or abolished. He did both.

From a purely philosophical point of view, this quantification of the temporal category that we understand as “forever” poses not simply significant, but insuperable problems in any discussion concerning the nature of any conceivable temporal discourse. Let us look at a few instances.

If “forever” does not mean "uninterrupted continuity without end", then by that same logic it simultaneously and necessarily abrogates every other temporal permutation:

- “*Never*” does not mean “*at no time*” — either in the past, the present or the future.
- “*Now*” does not mean “*at this moment or in this present time*”
- “*Before*” no longer means “*preceding or anteceding the present*”

- “*Past*” we no longer understand as “*what had preceded the present*”

Altering the connotation or intension of any of these five categories (forever, never, now, before, past — but especially “forever”), not simply alters, but abolishes the connotation or meaning of each and all of them.

Consider the following *diametric* concepts pertaining to time which — *if “forever no longer means “absolute perpetuity”* — no longer connote, or mean, what we had erstwhile understood them to mean in the temporal ordering of any state of affairs:

- Forever / never, periodicity
- Now / before or after
- Present / past, future, soon
- Early / late
- Old / new
- Modern / ancient
- First / last, second, third, etc. (i.e., a *series*) — also, minute, hour, day, week, month, year, decade, century, millennium, etc.

- Eternal / temporal

As we see, quite a bit follows from “forever” no longer being understood as forever but rather, as 399 years at which time “forever” expires.

We must understand that the term “forever” subsumes all the temporal categories and inflections under it, all of which are determinate and finite extensions of time relative only to “forever” (for all time and into eternity) which had erstwhile been understood as indefinite and indeterminate — as so many parts, or segments, if you will, of an infinitely extensive concept (forever) that is indeterminate by definition.

In a word, if “forever” is arbitrarily determined as a finite quantum, all that it subsumed beneath it and understood relative to it is also susceptible to arbitrary determination and we can no longer coherently enter into temporal discourse of any kind that presumes to bind any state of affairs to a determinate referent in time. A week, or month, for example, is only what we arbitrarily understand it to be according to our purpose at hand.

The implications of “implicitly” *redefining* the temporal concept of “forever” are enormous. Think of it. They pertain, according to the canons of reason, not only to the simplest geometric concept of a line (“*A line has only one dimension: length. It continues forever in two directions.*”), but to the trajectory, and ultimately, the

destiny of the human soul according to the most fundamental notions of Christian doctrine: the eternity of God and the immortality of the soul.

“Now” as 3-minutes-27-seconds

Let us look at this more closely. If, by a pure fiat, we are no longer to understand “now” as “the present moment”, but a duration of “3 minutes and 27 seconds” — what follows? Indeed, can we even *ask* the question, “*what follows?*” since “following” is a temporal concept meaning “occurring after the present moment, or “now.”

What happened in the intervening “3-minutes-27-seconds”?

How do we understand that 3-minutes-27-seconds vacuum? We cannot say that it did not exist, or that what occurred within it did not occur — nor is it possible that *nothing* occurred within it. Such an assertion accords with neither reason nor experience. In the 3-minutes-27-seconds that intervenes between the present now and the next now (3-minutes-27-seconds later) what do we say of what we *did* or what *had happened* in that time frame? Whatever it was, it did not occur in a “now”, but in the hiatus between 2 successive 3-minute-27-seconds “nows”.

When then did it occur? We do not have the apparatus to determine this, for we have created a false and illogical time narrative that involves not just inconsistencies but contradictions. By interjecting 3-minutes-27-seconds between successive “nows” we have superseded the model of time and, of course, of the notion of a clock which was ticking between, and *enumerating* those 3-minutes-27-second “nows”.

“Before” as 2-minutes-17-seconds

What logically holds true for the concept “now” equally holds true for every other category of *re-interpreted time*. If, for example, we reinterpret “before” as preceding “now” by 2-minutes-17-seconds, we face the same conundrum. It devolves through every other permutation of *re-interpreted time* until we can have no coherent discourse or discussion involving temporal characteristics. This is to say that we cannot have a discussion in which anything is spoken, for “spoken” is the past tense of the present tense “speak.” *In a word, all discourse is inescapably temporal: it occurs or had occurred or will occur.*

We cannot say a lot in 2-minutes-17-seconds which, by this reasoning, would qualify it as speaking “now”. Moreover, when the 2-minutes-17-seconds are up, how are they differentiated from the “following” or “previous” 2-minutes-17-

seconds? Is there a hiatus between the “previous” 2-minutes-17-seconds and the “following” 2-minutes-17-seconds? What is its duration? And what can — for something must — occur within it? How then, shall we speak of it?

Once *specific determinacy* is predicated of temporal concepts, they lose all coherence.

You may say, “Well, a clock enumerates 60 seconds for each minute and 60 minutes for each hour, and so on — so there *is* a specific and determinate time frame.” Yes ... for atomic clocks and the like (which are arbitrarily and artificially divided to begin with — why, for example, 60 seconds for a minute and not 136, and what is the *specific* duration of a *second* that is *not* already arbitrarily based on the present caesium model:

“The ‘second’ is the duration of 9,192,631,770 periods of the radiation corresponding to the transition between the two hyperfine levels of the ground state of the caesium-133 atom.”. [2](#)

Would the same numeric values hold true if the model were based on barium? In other words, this may hold true for certain atomic clocks, but **not for concepts**.

***Quo Primum* and the infeasible Concept of “Forever”**

All this has been a rather long and roundabout way of demonstrating the most important fact that pertains to Catholics: that “forever” as it pertains to time is not a finite quantum, but means, as it has always meant, and will always be understood to mean: “uninterrupted continuity without end”. This pertains to Heaven and it pertains to Hell. Therefore, it intrinsically pertains to Christian Doctrine. If either Heaven or Hell are merely 399 years, 9 months, and 11 days, the question naturally arises: what happens after that? As we see, we cannot escape the notion of “forever” without logical inconsistency — and if *Quo Primum* states “*forever*” concerning the way we celebrate Mass, it was a definitive, unambiguous, and unimpeachable statement that clarified, once and for all, the manner in which the Mass was, is, and always will be celebrated — *forever*.

Even popes cannot change the nature of time and the consistency of logic. *Quo Primum and the traditional Latin Mass* prior to its enervation (or evisceration: you choose, for both apply) following Vatican II, *remains binding upon all Catholics* (read *Quo primum* which follows) — *forever*. It is inescapable. Pope Saint Pius V *forever bound* every successor to the Chair of Peter to it, together with every Catholic.

The extremely frightening question that follows is ineluctable: what does this mean concerning the validity of virtually every Mass “celebrated” since Vatican II? If we can prescind from an *authentic Apostolic Constitution* that binds us forever to the Mass as it was celebrated prior to 1962, from *what else* are we prepared to illicitly dispense with in the way of the Deposit of the Faith and *authentic* historical Catholic dogma? We already see it unfolding before us, especially under the papacy of Francis among those who deplore a “throw away culture” but appear to embrace a “throw away” Church.

Somewhere in every part of the world the authentic Latin Mass is being celebrated; many under conditions similar to the underground Church in China, and the only difference is that those who police and brutally suppress these recalcitrant congregations outside of atheistic China are the heavy-handed bishops *of the Church itself* — many of whom appear to have lost the Faith — but not the comfort and perquisites of their office.

¹ Despite the *purely conjectural assertion* by apologists such as Likoudis and Whitehead that, “*Quo Primum* [was] ... not attempting to fix one particular version of the Roman Missal for all time.” And that “the ‘Tridentine Mass’ and the ‘New Order of the Mass’ constitute different versions of the same Missal” — they do not even upon the most cursory reading of both. *The Pope, the Council, and the Mass: Answers to Questions the Traditionalists Have Asked*, 1981 and 2006, Emmaus Road Publishing

² <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/how-does-one-arrive-at-th/> “The second is the duration of 9,192,631,770 periods of the radiation corresponding to the transition between the two hyperfine levels of the ground state of the caesium-133 atom.”

What “FOREVER” really means:

The Apostolic Constitution

Quo Primum



“**F**rom the very first, upon Our elevation to the chief Apostleship, We gladly turned our mind and energies and directed all our thoughts to those matters which concerned the preservation of a pure liturgy, and We strove with God's help, by every means in our power, to accomplish this purpose. For, besides other decrees of the sacred Council of Trent, there were stipulations for Us to revise

and re-edit the sacred books: the Catechism, the Missal and the Breviary. With the Catechism published for the instruction of the faithful, by God's help, and the Breviary thoroughly revised for the worthy praise of God, in order that the Missal and Breviary may be in perfect harmony, as fitting and proper — *for it is most becoming that there be in the Church only one appropriate manner of reciting the Psalms and only one rite for the celebration of Mass* — We deemed it necessary to give our immediate attention to what still remained to be done, *viz*, the re-editing of the Missal as soon as possible.

Hence, We decided to entrust this work to learned men of our selection. They very carefully collated all their work with the ancient codices in Our Vatican Library and with reliable, preserved or emended codices from elsewhere. Besides this, these men consulted the works of ancient and approved authors concerning the same sacred rites;

and thus *they have restored the Missal itself to the original form and rite of the holy Fathers.* When this work has been gone over numerous times and further emended, after serious study and reflection, We commanded that the finished product be printed and published as soon as possible, so that all might enjoy the fruits of this labor; and thus, priests would know which prayers to use and which rites and ceremonies they were required to observe from now on in the celebration of Masses.

Let all everywhere adopt and observe what has been handed down by the Holy Roman Church, the Mother and Teacher of the other churches, and ***let Masses not be sung or read according to any other formula*** than that of this Missal published by Us. *This ordinance applies henceforth, now, and forever,* throughout all the provinces of the Christian world, to all patriarchs, cathedral

churches, collegiate and parish churches, be they secular or religious, both of men and of women — even of military orders — and of churches or chapels without a specific congregation in which conventual Masses are sung aloud in choir or read privately in accord with the rites and customs of the Roman Church. *This Missal is to be used by all churches*, even by those which in their authorization are made exempt, whether by Apostolic indult, custom, or privilege, or even if by oath or official confirmation of the Holy See, or have their rights and faculties guaranteed to them by any other manner whatsoever.

This new rite alone is to be used unless approval of the practice of saying Mass differently was given at the very time of the institution and confirmation of the church by Apostolic See at least 200 years ago, or unless there has prevailed a custom of a similar kind which has been

continuously followed for a period of not less than 200 years, in which most cases We in no wise rescind their above-mentioned prerogative or custom. However, if this Missal, which we have seen fit to publish, be more agreeable to these latter, We grant them permission to celebrate Mass according to its rite, provided they have the consent of their bishop or prelate or of their whole Chapter, everything else to the contrary notwithstanding.

All other of the churches referred to above, however, are hereby denied the use of other missals, which are to be discontinued entirely and absolutely; whereas, by *this present Constitution, which will be valid henceforth, now, and forever*, We order and enjoin that nothing must be added to Our recently published Missal, nothing omitted from it, nor anything whatsoever be changed within it under the penalty of Our displeasure.

We specifically command each and every patriarch, administrator, and all other persons or whatever ecclesiastical dignity they may be, be they even cardinals of the Holy Roman Church, or possessed of any other rank or pre-eminence, and *We order them in virtue of holy obedience to chant or to read the Mass according to the rite and manner and norm herewith laid down by Us* and, hereafter, to discontinue and completely discard all other rubrics and rites of other missals, however ancient, which they have customarily followed; and *they must not in celebrating Mass presume to introduce any ceremonies or recite any prayers other than those contained in this Missal.*

Furthermore, by these presents [this law], in virtue of Our Apostolic authority, We grant and concede in perpetuity that, for the chanting or reading of the Mass in any church whatsoever, *this Missal is hereafter to be followed*

absolutely, without any scruple of conscience or fear of incurring any penalty, judgment, or censure, and may freely and lawfully be used. Nor are superiors, administrators, canons, chaplains, and other secular priests, or religious, of whatever title designated, obliged to celebrate the Mass otherwise than as enjoined by Us. We likewise declare and ordain that no one whosoever is forced or coerced to alter this Missal, and that *this present document cannot be revoked or modified, but remains always valid and retain its full force* notwithstanding the previous constitutions and decrees of the Holy See, as well as any general or special constitutions or edicts of provincial or synodal councils, and notwithstanding the practice and custom of the aforesaid churches, established by long and immemorial prescription — except, however, if more than two hundred years' standing.

It is Our will, therefore, and by the same authority, We decree that, after We publish this constitution and the

edition of the Missal, the priests of the Roman Curia are, after thirty days, obliged to chant or read the Mass according to it; all others south of the Alps, after three months; and those beyond the Alps either within six months or whenever the Missal is available for sale.

Wherefore, in order that the Missal be preserved incorrupt throughout the whole world and kept free of flaws and errors, the penalty for nonobservance for printers, whether mediately or immediately subject to Our dominion, and that of the Holy Roman Church, will be the forfeiting of their books and a fine of one hundred gold ducats, payable ipso facto to the Apostolic Treasury.

Further, as for those located in other parts of the world, the penalty is excommunication *latae sententiae*, and such other penalties as may in Our judgment be imposed; and We decree by this law that they must not dare or presume either to print or to publish or to sell, or in any way to accept books of this nature without Our approval and

consent, or without the express consent of the Apostolic Commissaries of those places, who will be appointed by Us. Said printer must receive a standard Missal and agree faithfully with it and in no wise vary from the Roman Missal of the large type (*secundum magnum impressionem*).

Accordingly, since it would be difficult for this present pronouncement to be sent to all parts of the Christian world and simultaneously come to light everywhere, We direct that it be, as usual, posted and published at the doors of the Basilica of the Prince of the Apostles, also at the Apostolic Chancery, and on the street at Campo Flora; furthermore, We direct that printed copies of this same edict signed by a notary public and made official by an ecclesiastical dignitary possess the same indubitable validity everywhere and in every nation, as if Our manuscript were shown there.

Therefore, no one whosoever is permitted to alter this notice of Our permission, statute, ordinance, command, precept, grant, indult, declaration, will, decree, and prohibition. *Should anyone dare to contravene it, know that he will incur the wrath of Almighty God and of the Blessed Apostles Peter and Paul.*”

Pope Pius V

Pius Episcopus

Servant of the Servants of God

Ad Perpetuam Rei Memoriam *

Given at St. Peter’s in the year of the Lord’s Incarnation, 1570, on the 14th of July of the Fifth year of Our Pontificate.

* *Ad Perpetuam Rei Memoriam*: The document is a trustworthy and *permanent* record of fact *to be kept in everlasting remembrance*.

Geoffrey K. Mondello
Editor
Boston Catholic Journal



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