

“Your Movement Has Full Legitimacy”

H.E. Cardinal Alfons Stickler’s address to the Latin Mass Society of England, 20 June 1992 [Slightly modified for clarity].

I have accepted, with great pleasure, the invitation of your chairman and secretary to come to your meeting. Now after reaching my 80’s, I am free from my ordinary work in the Curia so I can more easily accept such invitations and I do it with great pleasure when I can be helpful to so many faithful who today have many difficulties.

I will communicate to you some ideas which I have found in many countries. I have been to Italy, France, Austria and Switzerland. I was also in the United States last February for the opening of the Dietrich von Hildebrand institute, with a Pontifical High Mass in St. Agnes church. I was told that the church had never been so full since Fulton Sheen preached his Lenten sermons there. People were coming from everywhere. So I realised that also in the United States, the movement and the consideration for the old Mass are very effective.

The first idea I will communicate with you is that you can be sure that your movement has full legitimacy in the Church. Some have said that we are not legitimate. That is not true, because, if you remember Article 4 of the Liturgical Constitution, the Council Fathers explicitly said all the venerable rites have to be preserved. Some people say this is valid for all the other rites, with the exception of the Roman Latin rite. This is not so. Because Article 4 says: all the rites legitimately recognized. This was not only established for the rites existing at that time, during the Council, but also for the rites that should be approved after.

Now the pre-conciliar Latin rite was really recognised after it had been changed, because as you know, exception was given immediately for old priests, and in England you had Cardinal Heenan who obtained the Indult for Wales in 1971. Then we had the *motu proprio*, the Indult of the Pope and then we had later on *Ecclesia Dei*, which was clearly confirmed by the Pope. For example, when he spoke to the Abbot of Le Barroux in 1990, who had asked explicitly for this rite. Consequently, a new authority was given to the old rite on the basis of the liturgical constitution of the Council itself.

This recognition is coming from the Holy See, from the Pope, under the conditions given at the moment of the new approbation which institutes a real legitimization of the Old Rite (and is available now). So if you fulfill the conditions for this continuation of the Old Rite, it is legitimate for you. This is the external legitimacy of your movement.

Now we have another legitimacy, which comes from the internal sensibility for this rite. You know that worship in every religion is closely attached to tradition. No worship is easily changed in any religion. All are attached closely to tradition. This is true in a special manner also for our rite, our Roman Latin rite. Its changing after the Council was said to be a question of natural development, but for every rite, thinking should be only organic, adopted slowly in order not to give the impression of changing, of cutting the tradition. Unfortunately, many people had this impression after the so-called “reform” established by the Commission which was instituted by Pope Paul VI after the Council.

Many things were changed which really cut the hearts of many of the faithful - I would say sometimes the best of the faithful. This is also a reason for your sensibility. You have a spiritual need to continue the Tradition in the external forms of the rite we professed before. This is the proof of the old saying “*lex orandi = lex credendi.*” [the way we pray determines our belief].

Unfortunately, too many things have confused the common faithful in our church; that is one of the reasons that they no longer have the security of an unchanging Rite. “Lex orandi lex credendi.” If the Law of worshipping is changed so profoundly, our faith has lost the help we had in our worship.

Now the next idea I want to express is that we always have to avoid, in our life and in our discussions, in our general behavior and in our association, every kind of polemics. There is always a danger of hurting others; if there are polemics, they will say: ah, You are a sect with no more reasoning. So we have to profess our attachment to the Old Rite calmly, reasoning with them but without polemics.

We have to explain also to ourselves the reasons for following the old Latin Rite, and we have many reasons for it. The first I mentioned already; it is the absolute tradition of liturgy in every religion to have no change with the past because we have to preserve that rite as the expression of our faith. You know that the Oriental Church [Eastern Rites] had saved the common truth, that is the Catholic truth, by preserving the sacraments because they were attached so strongly to the rite, which they would never change. The other heretics - Protestants and so on - have changed the Faith because they have changed the Rite.

The Vatican Council says explicitly that we have a communion in the Catholic Church: the Pope with the bishops and with the priests in all parts of the world. We are particular churches but we are all in one Catholic Church. If we have the same faith, even with different rites, but not in all our fundamental teaching, then we do not have the complete communion. For example, the Oriental church is a church which is not in complete communion because there is not preserved the dogma and the truth in the Primacy of the Pope. They do not have the whole truth, but they have preserved most of it. All the other churches are not called 'Churches' in the full sense but religious communities. This means that they do not have the complete substance of our faith. So the Catholic Church, in relation to the rites, which did not absolutely preserve the truths of the Catholic and Latin rites, does not have this unity. This is very important in Order to confirm our sensibility for the old Rite which is really that of the *lex credendi* expressed by the *lex orandi*. We have to consider still another idea. Modern catholics say: now we have to cut away all the old things. We must be modern. But this modernity is not the modernity of the Church because we have to preserve the whole substance that is our heritage from the past generations. So if many of the Bishops ask us "why do you follow The old rite?"

We can answer very easily: -- the New rite was introduced after the Council as a matter of pastoral care, that means that the faithful should be animated more and more by the new form of rites to be better in Catholic truth and life. But many good people in the world who still believe in the truths of the Catholic Church are not satisfied about the innovations introduced into the Mass. Can you say then that the pastoral purpose has been reached? I think, through my own experiences that there is more and more dissatisfaction becoming stronger always

in all the categories of age, social positions, even in many young people. Further, we are told that the truth about the Mass, about the center of the liturgy, is not really changed. But we can ask -do we have the same sense, the same reverence we have had before and perhaps still have when we assist at the old Roman Rite? Or do we have a loss of reverence, of awe for our biggest mystery, our faith in The Holy Mass? In the sacrifice? It was admitted officially when, two years ago, on the silver jubilee of the changing of the rite, authorities in Rome admitted that there was a great loss of awe in the Mass the most important rite of our worship.

This is the experience of all who travel around everywhere. We have lost what really is at the heart of our worshipping in the Holy Sacrifice. Many times we get the impression that it is the man being worshipped but not God. We have a community meal and not a sacrifice. I think that this was one of the most important changes in the general attitude *visa-vis* the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. When I studied theology I was told that the center of the Mass was the Consecration, the Communion is quite necessary for the priest but supposes the sacrificial act already done. Today at the center is the meal. What do we have to do when confronted with the situation as members of the association [the Latin Mass Society] you represent here? Firstly, we have to tell our bishops and our Priests that we are not satisfied with the New Rite, that we have good reasons for being attached to the Old Mass. We should explain all the reasons why it should be available for those who ask for it. We must also explain that the Holy Father has granted the privilege contained in the *motu proprio Ecclesia Dei* and wants to take care of the sentiments of those attached to the old Latin Mass. Our fidelity to the old Rite must always conform to the decisions of the Holy See, with all the conditions satisfied which the Holy See has laid down for this purpose. We should persist in our fidelity to this heritage which is a heritage of truth, because we can be sure that also today, the old Latin Mass is completely valid and the *lex orandi* reflects the *lex credendi*. If we are faithful in *oratione*, we can be certain to remain also attached to the truth in *credendo*, in full devotion to our heritage of faith.