



**Fœderatio Internationalis *Una Voce***

***Positio N. 16***

THE PROCLAMATION OF LECTIONS IN LATIN  
IN THE EXTRAORDINARY FORM

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### From the General Introduction

These papers, commissioned by the International Federation *Una Voce*, are offered to stimulate and inform debate about the 1962 Missal among Catholics ‘attached to the ancient Latin liturgical tradition’, and others interested in the liturgical renewal of the Church. They are not to be taken to imply personal or moral criticism of those today or in the past who have adopted practices or advocated reforms which are subjected to criticism. In composing these papers we adopt the working assumption that our fellow Catholics act in good will, but that nevertheless a vigorous and well-informed debate is absolutely necessary if those who act in good will are to do so in light of a proper understanding of the issues.

The authors of the papers are not named, as the papers are not the product of any one person, and also because we prefer them to be judged on the basis of their content, not their authorship.

The International Federation *Una Voce* humbly submits the opinions contained in these papers to the judgement of the Church.

### The Proclamation of Lections in Latin in the Extraordinary Form: Abstract

Under the Instruction *Universae Ecclesiae* it is permissible to repeat the lections in the vernacular after their proclamation in Latin, or, in Low Mass, for them to be read only in the vernacular. This paper seeks to explain and defend the restriction on the use of the vernacular; the arguments here are relevant also to the debate concerning the possibility of having the whole of the Mass of Catechumens in the vernacular, or the Propers. The first consideration is the importance of the tradition of chanting the Epistle and Gospel at Sung Mass, which the law of the Church protects. This raises the deeper point that the lections have not only a didactic, but a laudatory role in the liturgy, and switching from Latin to a non-liturgical language not only undermines this role, but undermines the sense of a sacred, liturgical time which is produced by the use of Latin. The use of the vernacular at more points during the liturgy, which would mean more frequent alternation of languages, would, for this reason, be particularly problematic.

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## FIUV PP 16: The Proclamation of Lections in Latin in the Extraordinary Form

1. For the Extraordinary Form of the Roman Rite, the Instruction *Universae Ecclesiae* (2011) 26 states:

As foreseen by article 6 of the Motu Proprio *Summorum Pontificum*, the readings of the Holy Mass of the Missal of 1962 can be proclaimed either solely in the Latin language, or in Latin followed by the vernacular or, in Low Masses, solely in the vernacular.

Thus, it is compulsory at Sung and Solemn Masses for the Epistle and Gospel to be sung in Latin;<sup>1</sup> at Low Mass it is possible to read them only in the vernacular. The practice at Low Mass varies for historical reasons between countries, but reading the lections in Latin is widespread. The repetition of the lections, where they are read or sung in Latin, in the vernacular, before the sermon, is a very common practice, though by no means universal.
2. Many of those promoting Latin in the Ordinary Form (or the ‘Reform of the Reform’) suggest that all the Propers be read in the vernacular, or for the vernacular to be used for the whole of the Mass up to the Offertory.<sup>2</sup> For this reason the law and practice of the Extraordinary Form demands explanation, an explanation which has relevance also for these wider issues.<sup>3</sup>
3. This paper will take for granted the general arguments in favour of the use of Latin given in Positio 7.<sup>4</sup>

### The laitretic role of the lections

4. One aspect of the question, which explains the distinction made in *Universae Ecclesiae* between Sung and Low Masses, is the special value of the practice of chanting the lections. This practice goes back to the roots of the Gregorian Chant in the Jewish Temple, and its solemnity, beauty, and expressiveness are outstanding. Clearly its loss would be a serious impoverishment of the Church’s liturgical patrimony, and of the liturgical experience of the Faithful.
5. This tradition of Chanted lections itself raises a wider question, however, of the role of the lections in the Mass. In origin, the chanting of the lections, and the inflexions of the chants corresponding to the middle and end of sentences, with questions distinguished

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<sup>1</sup> At *Missa Cantata* it is permissible for the Epistle to be read rather than sung, though this is rare.

<sup>2</sup> Known in the context of the Extraordinary Form as the Mass of Catechumens; in the Ordinary Form as the Liturgy of the Word.

<sup>3</sup> It is interesting to note that liturgical scholars as sympathetic to Latin as Fr Aidan Nichols OP and Fr Jonathan Robinson Cong. Orat. regard the case for vernacular lections as requiring no argument: see Nichols *Looking at the Liturgy: a critical view of its contemporary form* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1996) p120; Robinson *The Mass and Modernity: walking to heaven backwards* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005) p336.

<sup>4</sup> Position Paper 7: Latin as a Liturgical Language.

from indicative statements, served clarity of hearing and understanding.<sup>5</sup> They continue to make it easier for the Faithful to follow familiar or important texts, and those in which all kneel at a certain point, such as the reference to the death of Our Lord in the Gospels of the Passion.<sup>6</sup> Equally, however, they give the proclamation of the lections a deeply solemn and liturgical character, paralleling that of the Preface, underlining its latreutic quality. This is further emphasised by the ceremonies, particularly evident in Solemn and Pontifical High Mass, of the blessing of the minister reading the text, the incensation of the Missal, the kissing of the Missal, and the movement of ministers and servers around the sanctuary. The reading of the Gospel facing north symbolises the proclamation of the Gospel to the unconverted pagans of Northern Europe. At Low Mass the same point is made by the proclamation of Scripture from the Altar of Sacrifice.

6. The value of the proclamation of Scripture as an act of worship is affirmed by the Rite of the Ordination of deacons and subdeacons, who are commissioned to read the Gospel or the Epistles ‘both for the living and for the dead.’<sup>7</sup>
7. While Scripture naturally has didactic value, this is true also of all the Propers of the Mass, and indeed the Ordinary, and it is impossible to make a sharp distinction between a didactic Mass of Catechumens and a latreutic Mass of the Faithful. As the Second Vatican Council’s *Constitution on the Liturgy* observed  
The two parts which, in a certain sense, go to make up the Mass, namely, the liturgy of the word and the eucharistic liturgy, are so closely connected with each other that they form but one single act of worship.<sup>8</sup>
8. With this in mind, it is natural that the lections should be chanted in Latin, the liturgical language of the Western Church. Equally naturally, at Low Mass, which is derived both historically and logically from Solemn Mass, the lections may appropriately be read in Latin also.

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<sup>5</sup> A synod at Grado, Italy, in 1296, restricted the use of the (more complicated) melismatic tones in chanting the Gospel because ‘these impeded the understanding of the hearers and so the devotion in the minds of the faithful is reduced’. Quoted by Fr Uwe Michael Lang *The Voice of the Church at Prayer* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2012) p153. As Lang points out, earlier in the century St Francis had been inspired to found the Friars Minor by hearing the Gospel of Mission of the Apostles proclaimed at Mass for the Feast of St Matthias (Matthew 10:7-10).

<sup>6</sup> Other examples of the Sacred Ministers and the Faithful kneeling at a certain point during the proclamation of the lections are these: on Epiphany and during its octave, at the reference to the Magi falling to worship the Christ-child; on the second Passion Sunday, the Finding of the Holy Cross, and the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, all kneel at the Epistle, at the words “ut in nomine Jesu omne genu flectatur”; the third Mass of Christmas, when the Prologue of John is read; at the end of the Gospel for Wednesday of the Fourth Week of Lent (John 9:1-38). These parallel the occasions of genuflections during chants such as the Lenten Tract *Domine non secundum*, and for the verse of the Pentecost Alleluia *Veni, Sancte Spiritus*.

<sup>7</sup> The Roman Pontifical: In the Ordination of Subdeacons, the Bishop says: ‘Receive the book of epistles and have the power of reading them in the church of God, both for the living and for the dead.’ In ordaining Deacons, he says: ‘Receive the power of reading the Gospel in the Church of God, both for the living and for the dead.’

<sup>8</sup> Second Vatican Council: Dogmatic Constitution on the Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium* 51: ‘Duae partes e quibus Missa quodammodo constat, liturgia nempe verbi et eucharistica, tam arcte inter se coniunguntur, ut unum actum cultus efficiant.’

9. There are two other considerations, which apply also to some extent to the question of having other Propers in the vernacular in celebrations of the Extraordinary Form.

#### Pastoral considerations

10. The first is the question of the practical pastoral value of having the lections in the vernacular. In Masses with the people, it is common practice, where the lections are given in Latin, to repeat them in the vernacular before the sermon. It cannot be argued, therefore, that there is a pastoral imperative to have lections in the vernacular instead of Latin; there is no 'either-or' dilemma. The only argument for omitting the lections in Latin would seem to be that it saves a little time.
11. Again, however, it may be asked whether, in the conditions of most celebrations of the Extraordinary Form today, the repetition of the lections in the vernacular is necessary, since, if the Faithful do not have hand missals containing a translation, they may very easily be given a translation printed on a single sheet of paper. In this respect the situation is somewhat different from that obtaining when permission for giving the lections in the vernacular began to be given for certain regions in the 1940s: at that time parish priests could not simply print off multiple copies of a translation from the internet.
12. The same goes for the other Propers, and for that matter the Ordinary of the Mass. The use of Latin is not in fact a barrier to understanding what is being said during the liturgy, since anyone who wishes to know can easily follow a translation, and anyone who thinks that it is important that the Faithful be able to follow the Mass in their own language, can easily ensure that translations are available.<sup>9</sup>
13. A final argument is given by the scholar László Dobsay: that the Collect, Secret, and Postcommunion should be kept in Latin, even if other parts of the Mass are translated, because of the importance of Catholics being familiar with the rich Latin terminology of these prayers.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> In relation to obscure or minority languages and multilingual congregations, providing the Faithful with a translation presents more of a challenge. This challenge is more easily met, nevertheless, than finding a way to use the necessary languages from the Altar, which cannot easily be done in multiple languages, and should involve a more formal process of official approval of the translations used.

<sup>10</sup> László Dobsay: 'The citations from, and references to, the liturgical texts are present in the works of the Church Fathers and many spiritual writers, as well as in the prayers and meditations of the saints. Priests and a lay people who have a high level of theological formation but do not know the Latin liturgy extremely well (which means now they are not familiar with the Latin texts), surely cut themselves off from the historical records of the Church's life. Not to know the vocabulary used, or the sentences referred to, means not being able to recognize their context and origin in the theological and spiritual literature of the tradition itself.' *The Restoration and Organic Development of the Roman Rite* (London: T&T Clark, 2010) p79. Dobsay proposes that other parts of the Mass be said in the vernacular, notably the *Pater Noster*. This proposal seems to lack pastoral value, however, since the meaning of this text will have been known to most worshippers since infancy.

## The integrity of the liturgy

14. The second is the question of the integrity of the liturgy. The writer Martin Mosebach addresses this in the context of the ‘problem’, as he puts it, of the sermon:

Entering into the sacred space of the liturgy, every interruption makes me suffer; I suffer whenever the garment of the liturgy is rent (to put it metaphorically). ...[By the end of the Gospel] the believer is deep in another world. He has understood that all whimsy and spontaneity must be silent when it comes to making visible what is objectively “entirely other”.<sup>11</sup>

15. This atmosphere, and the attitude which it encourages, is interrupted by the sermon, which has a quite different, more personal and prosaic, character; even more jarring, as Mosebach observes, can be the recitation of parish notices. Mosebach does not argue against placing the sermon at this point in the liturgy—its presence here is of long standing—but says simply

I do think it is important to realize that there is a problem here, a “problem” insofar as there is no obvious solution to hand.<sup>12</sup>

16. Similarly, while we may allow that vernacular lections can have advantages, we should recognise that abruptly shifting from Latin (or other ancient liturgical languages)<sup>13</sup> into the vernacular, and back again, creates a problem considered from the point of the view of the liturgy as a sacred sphere, marked out notably by the use of Latin. Were more Propers to be said in the vernacular the Mass would involve quite frequent shuttling back and forth between the two languages, one sacred and one profane. Latin cannot create and sustain a sense of sacrality if it is constantly interrupted, and we should regret even the most necessary interruptions.<sup>14</sup>

## Conclusion

17. This paper has sought to give a rationale both for the law of the Church, stated in the Instruction *Universae Ecclesiae*, that the lections must be given in Latin in a Sung Mass, and for the widespread practice of giving them in Latin even in Low Mass. The rationale is essentially that the Latin language is not a dispensable aspect of the liturgy, in the Extraordinary Form, and that to replace Latin with the vernacular for sections of

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<sup>11</sup> Martin Mosebach *The Heresy of Formlessness: The Roman Liturgy and its enemy* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2006) (first published in German 2003) pp49-50

<sup>12</sup> Ibid p52. Similar reasoning may be applied to other long-standing uses of the vernacular in the Latin liturgical tradition, such as the wedding vows: the need to use the vernacular here is linked to ensuring the validity of the sacrament of Matrimony, and for that very reason it does not represent a precedent for its use elsewhere; the liturgical ‘problem’ it represents cannot be solved, but is manageable because it is limited in scope.

<sup>13</sup> Notably the Kyrie, in Greek.

<sup>14</sup> An example of a more necessary interruption would be the use of the vernacular for Marriage Vows, where the value of immediate intelligibility is the greatest.

the Mass not only lessens the liturgical quality of that section of the Mass, but interrupts the liturgy as a whole.

18. This argument depends upon the observation that the Mass of Catechumens cannot be categorised simply as a didactic element, which need not have a specifically liturgical character, a character expressive of worship. The prayers and ceremonies of the Extraordinary Form simply do not allow that interpretation of the structure of the Mass.
19. Again, the argument applies *a fortiori* to the possibility of having other Proper texts in the vernacular. Edifying as they are to the Faithful, they are an integral part of the worship offered to God in the Mass, and a constant switching between Latin and the vernacular would seriously undermine the Faithful's sense of the Mass as a sacred time.