

Letter from Dr. John C. Rao, President Una Voce America to Cardinal Estévez

Sept. 23, 1999

His Eminence Jorge Cardinal Medina Estevez

Congregazione Per il Culto Divino Palazzo delle

Congregazioni Piazza Pio XII 10 Vatican City, 00193

Your Eminence:

I am writing this letter in my capacity as President of Una Voce America. In doing so, I know that I am representing both the deep respect that our organization feels for the Congregation that you head, as well as the very serious concerns that it has regarding Protocol 1411.

By this time, I am certain that you have received many letters expressing anxiety with respect to the effects that Protocol might have on the particular mission and future of the Priestly Fraternity of St. Peter. Fears will undoubtedly also have been indicated about the impact that the Protocol could have on people who have always been critical of the 1988 Indult and its reliability. These anxieties and fears are common to Una Voce America as well, and are therefore the main reason for my writing.

Allow me, however, the opportunity to strike another note, one that is of vast consequence to me as a professor of history at a Catholic university and as a father of a very young family. Although it may not involve a matter that can be weighed by canonical norms, it does, at the very least, represent a major lay concern in a Church recently rededicated to the overriding importance of pastoral considerations in her everyday life.

It is a sad fact, confirmed by large numbers of my colleagues in both confessional and secular education in the United States, that the overwhelming majority of young people in this country are receiving woefully inadequate instruction of all kinds. This failed education has left them not only indifferent to theological, philosophical, moral, historical and aesthetic questions, but often ignorant even of basic reading and writing skills. In many respects, a truly "dark age" is forming around us, and one that is made all the more frightening in that it is nevertheless accompanied by a considerable mechanical knowledge bereft of higher guidance.

Hence, it is a special joy to see the awakening of any questioning mind and spirit to the realm of truth, goodness and beauty when one does encounter it. And my experience has shown me that such minds and spirits have, without exception, found that attendance at masses said by priests like those of the Fraternity of St. Peter, as permitted under the 1988 Indult, provides them with an opening into the broader world that their ordinary education and the surrounding culture has unfortunately denied them.

Students whom I have brought to the celebration of Holy Mass according to the 1962 Missal, at churches approved by the local Ordinary, have here encountered everything that is, ironically, almost impossible to find in the average American environment, academic or otherwise. They have been exposed to people familiar with Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek, Latin and Arabic languages. They have met scholars in patrology. Through lecture series and personal conversations they have become aware of and interested in church history, the oriental liturgies, mystical theology, music and art. Attendance at this Mass has given them knowledge of the tremendous problem of abortion and euthanasia, since churches where Fraternity priests (and others like them) are active are invariably strongholds of the Pro-Life movement. For some, attendance here has been the first experience that they have had of real participation in a multi-racial community as well. In short, I have become dependent upon the atmosphere of churches where the Mass permitted by the the Indult is offered for the opportunity it has demonstrably provided for introducing the young to civilized life in general. Here, they have found real love for the mind and spirit, respect for the past, recognition of the realities of modern life, and true diversity--all, I should like to add, in the context of an atmosphere of lay-clerical friendship and obedience to the Holy See. Everything that Second Vatican Council could have hoped for regarding the creation of an educated, active laity, participating in the liturgy, is flourishing under these conditions. I should hope to see this atmosphere continue and grow stronger still, for my students' sake, and, in the long run, for the education of my own children also.

As an historian and as a father, therefore, I feel justified in adding to the most obvious concerns of *Una Voce America* with respect to the future of the Fraternity of St. Peter and the credibility of the Indult as a whole, a deep fear regarding the impact the Protocol might have on serious education. I should very much regret tampering with something that works so well to awaken people from intellectual and spiritual slumber; something that introduces them to the whole civilized heritage of the hunt

for truth, goodness and beauty. I should very much dislike leaving them with one less defense against a hopelessly inadequate educational system and the ever more barbaric environment around them. It is my firm conviction that anything disturbing the life of communities working under the Indult of 1988 would have precisely that effect.

My prayer as President of Una Voce America is that priests such as those of the Fraternity of St. Peter may continue to prosper within the framework in which they have labored so successfully up to this date, and that nothing will be done that could hinder their effective functioning under authoritative leadership. I know that they, like all of us, accept the difficulties that they are facing as part of the mystery of God's Providence, and that they will grow through them as has everyone who has worked sincerely for the renewal of Christ's Church. In the hope that my prayer will be answered,

I remain

Yours truly,

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Una Voce America