


The Latin Mass Movement Scrutinised

 RDAINED in 1993 and now at the frontline of the battle for Catholic tradition in his capacity as United States District Superior of the Institute of Christ the King Sovereign Priest, Father Timothy Svea offers his views on the various obstacles and opportunities currently facing the traditionalist movement. The refreshingly frank questions posed by Michael J. Matt, Editor Of *The Remnant*, are answered with equal candour. Our thanks to them both for this thought-provoking interview.

Now ten years after the promulgation of the *motu proprio Ecclesia Dei*, what do you see for the future of the Indult Movement, the approved religious orders, and perhaps, even, the Commission itself, which as you know, has always maintained itself to be only a temporary commission?

Fr. Svea: First, let me say that there is a distinction between the movement for the restoration of the Traditional Roman Mass and the vehicle provided by the Church 10 years ago by *Ecclesia Dei* for this movement. The Traditional Mass movement was around long before *Ecclesia Dei*, and should the commission indeed prove itself temporary, the movement will continue as long as there are Roman Catholics attached to this way of worship which has been reconfirmed as legitimate by the present Holy Father. As we all know, the Traditional Rite of Mass has been around for 1000 years, and should continue, God willing, to the end of time. As for communities approved by the Church, each is responsible for maintaining its liturgical identity, often in the face of great opposition. What cannot be denied is that in the past 10 years these communities have grown significantly. The health of these communities in the next 10 years depends entirely upon their own internal unity and identity. Likewise, the Traditional Mass movement utilizing the provisions of *Ecclesia Dei*, will only be as strong as those persons involved in it.

What do you see as the most prevalent dangers (both in Rome and amongst ourselves) threatening the continued growth of the Traditional Mass movement, now and in the future?

Fr. Svea: I see two dangers threatening this movement. On one hand, there are those who are pushing for a more “progressive” or “open” attitude towards the liturgical reform movement. On the other hand, there are those who are becoming more radical, and are headed towards extreme positions, often as a result of the difficulties they have encountered with the implementation of *Ecclesia Dei* in their particular locations.

Could you explain, Fr. Svea, briefly what areas of “reform” the more progressive element is concerned with?

Fr. Svea: From my experience, I know that there have been a great variety of proposals for modifying the form of the Mass according to the 1962 Roman Missal, which was conceded by the Pope in *Ecclesia Dei*. Many Traditionalists would prefer to use an earlier edition of the Missal, because there were changes in the 1962 Missal with which they are unhappy. These changes were minor and are hardly noticed by the average faithful. Then, there are some who want to use the 1965 version of the Roman Missal, or who would like to see the vernacular replace the Latin in the readings. They would also like to see the last Gospel dropped, to accept the new liturgical calendar, and to allow concelebration, etc. This has the potential to create a disaster for the Traditional Mass movement.

Would you say that, across the board, lay Traditionalists and this Movement, which means everything to them, are better off because of *Ecclesia Dei*?

Fr. Svea: *Ecclesia Dei* has brought us mixed blessings. No one can deny that now there is a much wider availability of the Mass and sacraments according to the Traditional Rite. This has brought incalculable blessings to the whole Church. We must believe this because of our faith in the Mass; but we also have experienced these blessings firsthand by seeing the good fruits which have been produced among the faithful who profit by the Mass. Another example of these good fruits is the large number of vocations to the priesthood and the religious life. On a less positive note, however, there has been a tendency on the part of some to diminish other aspects of the Traditional Catholic life, or to take a superficial attitude toward the crisis through which the Church is passing in our day. I personally believe that a widespread restoration of the Traditional Roman Rite Mass is essential to a real Catholic restoration of society. It is essential to recognize Christ’s primacy in the liturgy, on His altar, and in His tabernacle before we can bring our society to respect His primacy in the area of public morality. Nevertheless, there are other areas of Traditional Catholic life and theology that should not be neglected.

Along these lines then, what difficulties have you encountered (and do you expect to encounter) in the application of *Ecclesia Dei*?

Fr. Svea: The principal difficulty has been that of frank prejudice against the Traditional Roman Rite Mass. I have encountered visible hostility against the very notion of making the Mass available to those who legitimately desire it. It is not a question of loyalty to Rome or the Bishop. It is not a question of causing divisions or confusing people. These are all excuses. The crux of the problem is that there are those who are simply, and frankly, against the way that the Roman Catholic Church

has offered the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass for centuries. This reaction is more common among the older generation than among my generation or even among young people today. This is one of the reasons why perseverance and fortitude are so crucial to the success of the Traditional Mass Movement. We must be patient. Then, there is a more subtle problem. Since it is not open hostility, it is, therefore, more pernicious. It is the sentiment and conviction of some that by making the old liturgy look more like the new liturgy, or by becoming “bi-ritual” in the sense of celebrating both liturgies, we will be able to make advances for the old liturgy. This is a fatal misjudgement. To maintain our liturgy is to maintain our identity, and our unity. Any modifications introduced into the Mass will likewise, introduce unnecessary divisions, and points of contention. I do not believe we should feel obliged to bargain off bits and pieces of our liturgical heritage for imagined compensations. More will always be asked of us, and there are those who will not be satisfied until we are exactly like them. Look at the hostility so often shown against even the new liturgy offered in Latin, or in facing the Tabernacle. Look at the hostility shown against conservative groups, who, while promoting orthodoxy, do not even concern themselves with promoting the old liturgy as well. Can we honestly expect to gain the sympathy and support of hostile members of the hierarchy by throwing them titbits? No. We have to be strong. We have to be united. We have to be respectful and loving, but rock-solid. This does not mean being inflexible on truly accidental things, or that we should not be diplomatic. It means simply that we should be sure about our identity and be happy with it.

How does this relate, for example, to whether or not Traditionalists should join forces with the “reform of the reform” movement?

Fr. Svea: The Traditional Mass Movement should be promoting the Traditional Mass, and not a reformed version of the new Mass. It is that simple. I am not opposed to those who want to reform the new liturgy, but this is simply not my area of expertise. I am very happy offering the Traditional Roman Rite and working as a priest in good standing with the faithful attached to this rite. I think that by mixing the two movements, we would run the risk of losing our clarity of vision and of attracting to ourselves numerous enemies of the reform of the reform movement among the hierarchy and the clergy. I think we have enough enemies as it is.

In all candour, Father, would you say that the Commission in Rome was set up to aid and assist the cause for Traditionalism, or was it more concerned with damage control in the wake of Archbishop Lefebvre's episcopal consecrations of 1988?

Fr. Svea: My impression is that the commission was set up primarily for those leaving Msgr. Lefebvre's camp, but it has not functioned exclusively as such. In fact, it must be said that the majority of Tradition-minded Catholics were not a part of Msgr. Lefebvre's movement, and they did not identify with him. The Traditional Mass movement transcends any one particular organization or group. No one group can claim to represent all of us. The Commission cannot be dealt with by anyone having a naive attitude of enthusiasm, nor one of hostility. Its function is bureaucratic, not ideological. It is a relatively tiny dicastery in the midst of many more powerful ones.

There was, as you know, a tremendous amount of enthusiasm among many Traditionalists over the anniversary of Ecclesia Dei. Knowing what you know of Rome (where you spent so much time in training for the priesthood and as a priest) and Vatican politics, do you think that all the enthusiasm was justified?

Fr. Svea: I do not claim to be an expert on Vatican politics, but I don't think it takes much of an expert either to notice that when there is celebration for the anniversary of the establishment of a Vatican Dicastery, that the Dicastery is well-represented at the celebration. I was not present for the activities in Rome for the celebration, but from what I read, I did not notice that any high-profile representatives from this particular Dicastery were there. What I will say is that enthusiasm is never a good substitute for prudence. I recommend an approach of cautious optimism, for optimism is founded on our faith and hope in Christ and His Church. This kind of optimism can never fail us. We cannot let ourselves get depressed or discouraged by the numerous obstacles we encounter. Our faith and hope can never be based on man or on men in the Church.

If I were to say to you: "Father, in exchange for our permission to have the Traditional Mass, we Traditional Catholics should drop all public discussions of our doctrinal objections to the Modernist revolution," (i.e., against Ecumenism, collegiality, the New Theology, religious liberty, etc.), how would you respond?

Fr. Svea: I would respond by saying that we are not yet in a Soviet Gulag, where Catholics who have problems of conscience with certain developments since the Second Vatican Council must be silenced in order to buy liturgical concessions. Of course, it is all much more subtle than the way I have just characterized it. The crux of the argument is this: there are numberless dissenters from the Magisterial teachings

of the Church, whose opinions and teachings are well-known and tolerated, and if anyone should be silenced in public discussions of doctrinal objections by the authorities, whose job it is to uphold the Magisterial teaching, then it should be those who have been scandalizing the faithful for so long by their subjective theological interpretations. If the so-called Traditionalists confine themselves to upholding the perennial teachings of the Magisterium, which is the duty of every Catholic, there should be no problem. We know, however, that things are not necessarily like that. There are in fact some Traditionalists who have taken it upon themselves to make theological pronouncements where they have not the competence to do so. There are even so-called Traditionalists who have taken it upon themselves to make Canonical pronouncements about the Pope and the Bishops (as do the sedevacantists) where they have no competence to do so. Many Traditionalists become very reactionary and make exaggerated criticisms without sufficient knowledge, and so make us all look ridiculous. The ancient Romans used to say, “If you say too much, you have said nothing.” In other words, we have to get serious, both in the way we criticize and in the timeliness of our criticisms. That there is much to criticize is abundantly evident, but let us not forget to give praise where praise is due and to conduct ourselves prudently.

We hear it said often today that Traditionalists should “talk about the beauty of the Old Mass and declare a moratorium on criticizing the New Mass.” Now, admittedly, rash and vitriolic venting against the New Mass has proven mostly counterproductive, but, when it comes to serious and intelligent discussion of the very real dangers of various aspects of the New Mass, what say you of this new strategy, Father?

Fr. Svea: I agree with you that rash and vitriolic venting, as you put it, against the new Mass is basically counterproductive. It personally kept me away from the Traditional movement for years. We have to examine what is effective in bringing people to the Traditional Mass. I was raised going to Sunday Mass in the new liturgy, and what made me turn to the Old Liturgy was not Traditionalist criticisms of the new liturgy, but assisting at the Old Liturgy being reverently celebrated. I saw that what was taking place was something sacred. I saw that a sacrifice was being offered by a priest who was not there merely to preside over the assembly, but to mediate between God and us. At a certain point in the Mass a little bell was rung. There was hushed silence, the priest genuflected, and everyone knew that God was in our midst. We knew as the Mass proceeded that propitiation was offered for our sins and that Christ was really truly present, substantially, under the forms of bread and wine. It was a new experience for me. When I left that Mass, I determined that if God willed that I become a priest, I would offer Mass in that way. This experience has been

repeated in the lives of countless young people today. It confirms what was said by St. Peter Canisius, a great Doctor of the Church, whose teachings brought thousands back to the faith from Protestantism: “One Mass worthily and reverently offered is worth a hundred sermons.” I think there is a place for legitimate criticism and discussion about the post-conciliar liturgical reforms. Several Cardinals have even publicly stated so. I very much encourage your readers to familiarize themselves with the work of C.I.E.L. (Center International d’Etudes Liturgiques), whose works are available in English. Their approach is serious and scholarly; this is what we need. On a more common level, however, what people often find in their parishes is not what has been authorized by the church, and is, in fact, worthy of criticism. This stems from the fact that there are, after all, a great variety of ways in which the new liturgy can be celebrated. In any case, hyperbolic polemics are out of place and simply serve those who want to vent their spleen.

There have been rumours of late that priests of some of the approved orders, such as the Fraternity of St. Peter and the Monastery of St. Madeleine at Le Barroux, will soon be required to concelebrate the New Mass on certain occasions and in certain situations. First of all, do you believe these rumours to have any veracity? And, secondly, do you believe that, eventually, all approved orders will be expected to become “bi-ritual,” at least to some extent?

Fr. Svea: I have seen nothing official in writing to confirm these rumours, but I have been informed that the Monastery at Le Barroux has in fact agreed to concelebrate Mass under certain conditions. Concerning the Fraternity of St. Peter, I only know that Fr. Bisig, so far, has held the line by not giving permission to the priests in the Fraternity who want to concelebrate the Mass to do so. The real danger is this: if any one of the approved orders which so far has been celebrating the Traditional Rite exclusively begins making provisos for concelebrating the Mass on a regular basis, it will cause several grave problems for the Traditional Mass movement as a whole. The first problem is that it will give certain ecclesiastical authorities the opportunity to put pressure on the other groups who do not wish to concelebrate to do so. For example, bishops in France who are not necessarily favourable towards the Old Rite in their dioceses, but have nevertheless approved it for their own reasons, may take advantage of this occasion to ask Traditionalist priests to concelebrate with them on Holy Thursday. This would put the Traditionalist priest in a “Catch 22” position, because, if he says yes, then a compromise has been made, and the door is open to further compromise. If he says no, he may find himself in a more difficult position in the Diocese. I do not believe that we will all be expected to become “bi-ritual.” I do not think that is realistic, but I know that that is what some authorities would want. This would spell disaster for the cause of the Old Rite. Second, when one group_

gives in, there is a danger that another group will react strongly, and infighting will begin. The enemies of the Traditional Mass movement are cunning and would certainly love to see the Traditionalists groups caught up in internecine conflicts.

We've heard a great deal lately about the so-called Dialogue Mass. Many Traditionalists are encouraging this Mass as a way to show good faith and an open mind to some of the suggested reforms of Vatican II as spelled out later in Sacrosanctum Concilium In light of what we all have learned from recent history, what would you say to those calling for the wide application of the Dialogue Mass?

Fr. Svea: First, I don't think that we should have to feel put in a position of demonstrating our good faith and open-mindedness by changing the way we worship God. In Europe, the Dialogue Mass had already taken root a decade before the new liturgy was introduced. In most places in the United States, this was not the case. Besides, the true participation demanded of the faithful does not consist in verbal responses, but rather in an interior adhesion to the action of the priest at the altar. Personally, I have found Dialogue Masses where all the responses are given by the faithful, to be distracting and dis-edifying. Distracting, I say, because attention is shifted from the Sanctuary to the Nave. Dis-edifying because it is clearly the case that most of the faithful do not know the proper ecclesiastical Latin pronunciation, and the responses are rarely made in unison. It's difficult enough to train altar boys to give the responses well, let alone entire congregations! Therefore, what begins as an effort to help people to pray has, in my experience, usually had the opposite result. I am not saying that people can never give responses; for example, at sung Masses where a commonly known Mass, such as *Missa de Angelis* is sung, some people can usually follow along. My point is that real participation in Mass should first and foremost be interior.

What would you say in response to those who accuse the Indult Mass of being merely a "carrot on a stick" to be used to draw Traditionalists away from independent chapels, and that once these chapels are shut down, the Mass will be taken away?

Fr. Svea: It goes without saying that this accusation not only displays a universal lack of trust in the authorities of the Church, but also an unrealistic understanding of the developments that have taken place in the past 10 years. Broad generalizations, when dealing with the utilization of the Indult, are not always helpful. For instance, in some dioceses, there may be a very strong group of faithful who respectfully petition for the Mass, but are not blessed with a bishop who is open to this possibility. In other cases, there are bishops who are very open to the Old Mass, but there is little

interest among the faithful, The situation differs from place to place. I will not exclude the possibility that there may be some bishops whose interest in conceding the Indult Mass is purely to draw people from canonically irregular chapels, but this is certainly not the rule. I am not aware of any cases where the bishop has closed down an approved Latin Mass community whose members are of a reasonable size and vitality. Moreover, we have all heard of independent priests whose conduct and attitude do as much to discredit Traditionalists as do the most cunning of the modernists. I will point out this important fact:

the liberal bishops are generally less concerned, or not at all concerned, with independent chapels and Pius X communities, than they are with the spread of the Tridentine Mass. There are those bishops who would far prefer that we all go off to the Society of Pius X, or independent chapels, so our presence would no longer be an issue for them. This is a dreadful lack of pastoral concern, to say the least, but I know it is true. It is those working within the approved boundaries of Church law who are a cause for concern to those bishops. A year and a half ago Archbishop Weakland came out with an article in *America Magazine* strongly attacking the Indult for the Tridentine Mass. He went on at length to explain how dangerous this was to the reforms of the Second Vatican Council [Ed. See Dec. 1997 CO] I noticed that he displayed no concern whatsoever about the Society of Pius X or independent chapels. Why? They are “out of bounds.” They do not make a difference. Their effectiveness as centres of true reform and restoration in the church has been nullified. The largest category of Tridentine Masses made available in the United States is that of diocesan-approved Masses. In fact, the majority of American dioceses now have a regular Sunday Tridentine Mass available someplace within their boundaries. True, the supply does not yet adequately meet the need, but this is partially due, not to the reluctance of some bishops and clergy to comply with the Holy Father’s request for generosity in allowing the Mass, but to the fact that dissident Traditionalists are sapping the strength from the legitimate Latin Mass communities. In other words, the Indult Mass movement, were it intended as a trap to destroy the Old Mass, as some people say, has not only failed but achieved the opposite results.

Speaking of the SSPX, now, after ten years of attempting to lure these Traditionalists back ‘Into the fold’ via Ecclesia Dei, should we expect to see “less generosity” now on the part of some bishops when it comes to the Traditional Mass, since it’s becoming increasingly obvious that the Indult has not provided an impasse to the growth of the SSPX, which was its initial purpose?

Fr. Svea: There is a saying that if you are a pessimist you will never be disappointed. I am not a pessimist, and I have been disappointed with the implementation of *Ecclesia Dei* so far. With some notable exceptions, for example, in regard to the bishops with whom I work on a worldwide scale, there has been stingy response to the request the Holy Father made in *Ecclesia Dei*. Do I expect this to get worse? If I were a pessimist, I would say yes, but I may be disappointed. I do think that the movement will continue despite the imminent obstacles put in our way. If the Latin Tridentine Rite was purely a human invention, it would have died a natural death 30 years ago, but it lives. There are men like myself and my colleagues who live for it. God has given authority to His Pope and Bishops to govern His Church wisely, or less wisely; each shall render an account for his actions. What we cannot forget, though, is that God is still ultimately in charge. I respect the authority of the Pope and the Bishops because their authority comes from God. My hope for the future is dependent upon the Church, not upon the men of the Church. I do forecast some rough waters in the near future. I hope I am wrong.

Stepping away from the issue of the Traditional Mass for a moment, Father, how would you recommend that Traditionalists might preserve the Traditional view as a whole? In other words, leaving aside our liturgical “preferences” “are our very real doctrinal differences worthy of serious defence, and, if so, how do we go about doing this, while remaining loyal to the Church’s legitimate, but largely Modernist-infected, authority?

Fr. Svea: First, I will say that we have to understand the place of Tradition in our lives, and why it is important and worth defending. Tradition with a small “t” keeps us in touch with our past and the lessons which our forefathers learned by experience. Traditions provide us with an identity and roots. A problem with modern man is that he is rootless. He has no identity and has to find himself, but he looks to the wrong place. To have a future, you have to have a past. That is why the more I love my traditions as a Roman Catholic, the brighter my future seems to be. Looking at the Church’s past, I have seen that what I am going through, many others have gone through before me. I have seen that where the Church has suffered, she has also rejoiced. Even in death you can find resurrection. I identify myself as a Roman Catholic, pure and simple; but I am part of a “Traditionalist Movement” because I value, appreciate, love, and defend the precious doctrinal, devotional, and liturgical heritage of the Roman Catholic Church. There is nothing more glorious to which a man can dedicate his life. So, how to remain both loyal to Catholic Tradition and the Church’s legitimate authority, which sometimes seems at variance with it? The question posits an answer that is not apparent. In other words, we are dealing with a mystery. Hence, we cannot always have ready answers to explain everything

rationally. What we do have as Roman Catholics, however, is our faith and the Traditions that keep that faith alive, so long as we keep our Traditions.

There is so much bitterness and hatred in the world today, and, unfortunately, this ugly spirit oftentimes is found within the ranks of Traditionalists as well. Knowing that fundamentally, all Traditionalists (from all camps on the far right all the way over to the left) are serious Catholics trying to work out their salvation and defend the Church as best they know how, what advice would you give us as to how we should view (and deal with) brother Traditionalists with whom, for any of the many reasons, we do not agree?

Fr. Svea: Charity is ultimately the most important factor in determining whether we are going to spend eternity in Heaven, or in Hell. Charity is not “a ‘liberal’ virtue.” Liberals don’t have a monopoly on it. It’s not Novus Ordo. The community to which I belong, has as its motto “Promoting the Truth in Charity.” We need both charity and truth. Something which I discovered living in Europe was that there are so many divisions in the relatively small countries and communities, and even in the Traditional Mass movement, because the rule they live by is “seek that which divides us from others.” What has made things work is not that attitude, but rather “seek that which unites us, rather than that which divides us.” I think this is a good strategy for us to follow. Don’t waste your time attacking other Traditional Roman Catholics.

Finally, Father, with all the fear and apprehension of the myriad of problems associated with Y2K, what words of advice can you give that will be of help to all Traditionalists from all camps? In a sentence or two, can you give us all a bit of hope to help see us through the dark days that are sure to come very soon?

Fr. Svea: On a purely natural level, we might have reason to be discouraged, or depressed. If our struggle concerns itself with saving natural habitats, like rain forests, or preserving natural landmarks, we would all have given up long ago. We are involved in a supernatural struggle with principalities and powers; our hope is not based on anything human. It is entirely supernatural. The greatest joy we can have in this life is the joy of a peaceful conscience. Let us be faithful to that Hope in God and Our Lady, and continue our work. That is enough.