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Latin, yes - Tridentine, not necessarily

The Association for Latin Liturgy

by Jeremy de Satgé

Most Catholics think of the Latin Mass as simply the Mass as celebrated before the reforms instigated following the Second Vatican Council – the Tridentine Rite, as it is commonly known. It is easy to understand why this should be the case. First, in the zeal to reform the rite of Mass, Latin was largely dropped, in spite of what the Vatican II document concerning the liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, decreed on the matter. Second, there has been a concerted effort from reactionary pressure groups in favour of the Tridentine Rite of Mass, both in Britain and abroad, which has very successfully raised the profile of the Old Rite. In my view, we have a rather uncomfortable situation whereby we have two Rites of Mass co-existing. The truth of the matter is that the Latin Mass is simply any Mass celebrated in Latin.

Those interested in preserving the dignity of the liturgy and trying to redress some of the “liturgical abuses” that have come about since the new rite of Mass (*Novus Ordo*) came into being, are particularly delighted at the appointment of Pope Benedict XVI, who is well known for his interest in the subject and is considered the hero of the hour for Latinists generally. It is interesting to note that he has already met with a Lefebvrist bishop; and as I write this, an Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on the subject of “The Eucharist: Source and Summit of the Life and Mission of the Church” has just concluded. Early reports on the output of this Synod indicate that the bishops have proposed to the Pope that in international celebrations the Mass be said mainly in Latin, and that priests be trained in seminaries to use Latin prayers and Gregorian Chant.

One of the dangers of having two rites of Mass co-existing is that it weakens the visible unity of Catholics, particularly because the Tridentine Mass is still celebrated using the pre-Vatican II calendar. This means that different Feasts are celebrated on different days (such as Christ the King) and that any new Saints are excluded. The subject of the calendar is something that Tridentinists feel very strongly about, which leads one to suspect that many followers consider the whole of Vatican II to be a mistake if not anathema.

The Association for Latin Liturgy was formed in 1969 by members of the Latin Mass Society, who disagreed with its decision to lobby solely for the preservation of the Tridentine Rite Mass. (At this point the LMS should really have renamed itself the Tridentine Rite Society or something similar in order to be strictly accurate to its intentions.)

The stated aims of the Association are threefold: first “to promote understanding of the theological, pastoral and spiritual qualities of the liturgy in Latin”; secondly, “to preserve the sacredness and dignity of the Roman rite”; and thirdly, to secure, for the present and future generations, the Church's unique inheritance of liturgical music.”

The Association believes that its objectives “...are most likely to be achieved by frequent celebrations of the Mass in Latin in the revised Roman rite, to which the majority of the laity are accustomed, while many are dissatisfied with the shortcomings of much current liturgical practice.” The Bishops of England and Wales recognized the Association in 1970

as an approved Catholic Society, and in 1975 Pope Paul VI conferred on it the Apostolic Benediction.

Sadly, the Association is not well known, although its behind the scenes activities are impressive. From the outset the Association looked forward rather than backwards, wishing to embrace fully the spirit of the Second Vatican Council and in particular *Sacrosanctum Concilium*.

But why Latin? Contrary to popular opinion, Latin is still the official language of the Church and is especially appropriate for any international gathering of Catholics – as has recently been seen on world television with Pope John Paul's funeral and Pope Benedict's inauguration Mass.

Vatican II's document stated that although the vernacular was to be allowed "...steps must be taken to ensure that the faithful are able to say or sing together, also in Latin, those parts of the Ordinary of the Mass which pertain to them..".

Latin also adds dignity to the Mass. Although there was a desire to get away from some of the more rigid rubrics of the Mass and to make the Mass less effete - and of course to encourage a more active participation on the part of the people - the continued use of Latin acts as a check against the style and personality of a priest which can often dominate the way Mass is celebrated. It is hard to imagine a priest extemporising *ad libitum* in Latin.

Many might ask whether all this really matters. I would say strongly that it does. Given that the primary evangelising tool the Church has is the Mass, it is the duty of bishops and priests to ensure that the celebration is as dignified and glorious as possible.

As a prayer, the Mass should take us out of the humdrum of our daily lives and help raise our hearts and minds to Almighty God. Secondly, surely nothing should require more respect and dignity than receiving Our Lord in communion! Pope John's Paul emphasised this in his declaring of the Year of the Eucharist.

The Association has two full meetings a year in places of historical interest around the country. Meetings include both Mass and Vespers, a meal and a learned talk. The Association also has an impressive list of publications to date, most notably a highly useful Latin-English Sunday Missal and other resources to encourage the singing of the plainsong settings of the Mass.

The Association has always been keen to promote Latin in conjunction with an accurate and beautiful translation into English, so that the faithful can have a full understanding of the texts. Currently, members of the Association are working on a full musical setting of Compline (Night Prayer) in both Latin and English which should be available in early 2006. It is not perhaps surprising that a member is currently on secondment, working for ICEL on the translation of the Third Edition Missal; and when eventually the English translation is made available, the Association will be swift in producing a new bi-lingual Sunday Missal.

The Association publishes three newsletters a year. Articles may also be read on the Association's website, www.latin-liturgy.org.uk which also provides details on how to become a member.

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