

The Attractiveness of the Tridentine Mass

by
Alfons Cardinal Stickler



Cardinal Alfons Stickler, retired prefect of the Vatican Archives and Library, is normally reticent. Not so during his trip to the New York area in May [1995]. Speaking at a conference co-sponsored by Fr. John Perricon's ChistiFideles and Howard Walsh's Keep the Faith, the Cardinal scored Catholics within the fold who have undermined the Church—and in the final third of his speech made clear his view that the "Mass of the post-Conciliar liturgical commission" was a betrayal of the Council fathers.

The robust 84-year-old Austrian scholar, a Salesian who served as peritus to four Vatican II commissions (including Liturgy), will celebrate his 60th anniversary as a priest in 1997. Among his many achievements: *The Case for Clerical Celibacy* (Ignatius Press), which documents that the celibate priesthood was mandated from the earliest days of the Church. Cardinal Stickler lives at the Vatican.

The Tridentine Mass means the rite of the Mass which was fixed by Pope Pius V at the request of the Council of Trent and promulgated on December 5, 1570. This Missal contains the old Roman rite, from which various additions and alterations were removed. When it was promulgated, other rites were retained that had existed for at least 200 years. Therefore, is more correct to call this Missal the liturgy of Pope Pius V.

Faith and Liturgy

From the very beginning of the Church, faith and liturgy have been intimately connected. A clear proof of this can be found in the Council of Trent itself. It solemnly declared that the sacrifice of the Mass is at the center of the Catholic liturgy, contrary to the heresy of Martin Luther, who denied that the Mass was a sacrifice.

We know from the history of the development of the Faith that this doctrine has been fixed authoritatively by the Magisterium in the teach of popes and councils. We also know that in the whole Church, and especially in the Eastern churches, the Faith was the most important factor in the development and formation of the liturgy, particularly in the case of the Mass.

There are convincing arguments for this from the early centuries of the Church. Pope Celestine I wrote to the bishops of Gaul in 422: *Legem Credendi, lex statuit supplicandi* — the law of praying determines the law of believing. This has subsequently been commonly expressed by the phrase, *lex orandi, lex credendi* [the law of prayer is the law of belief].

The Orthodox churches preserved the Faith through liturgy. This is very important because in the last letter the Pope wrote, seven days ago, he said the Latin Church must learn from the Eastern churches, especially about the liturgy...

Conciliar Statements

A matter often neglected is the two types of conciliar statements and decisions: doctrinal (theological) and disciplinary.

In most of the councils we have both doctrinal and disciplinary. In some councils we have no disciplinary statements or decisions; we have some councils without doctrinal statements, with only disciplinary statements. Many of the Eastern councils after Nicaea treated only questions of faith. The Second Council of Toulon in 691 was strictly an Oriental council for only disciplinary statements and decisions, because the Eastern churches had been neglected in the preceding councils. It brought discipline up to date for the Eastern churches, especially the Church in Constantinople.

This is important because in the Council of Trent we have explicitly both: we have chapters and canons which belong exclusively to faith; and then, in nearly all the sessions, after the theological chapters and canons, we have exclusively disciplinary matters. The distinction is important. In all the theological canons we have the statement that anyone who opposes the decisions of the Council is excluded from the community — *anathema sit*. But the Council never states an *anathema* for purely disciplinary matters — the Conciliar sanctions are only for doctrinal statements.

Trent on the Mass

This is important for our reflections now. I've already pointed out the connection between faith and prayer—liturgy—and especially between faith and the highest form of liturgy, the common worship.

This connection has its classic expression in the Council of Trent, which dealt with the topic in three sessions: the thirteenth in October 1551, the twentieth session in July 1562, which dealt with the Sacrament of the Eucharist, an especially the twenty-second in September 1562, which produced the dogmatic chapters and canons on the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. There is also a particular decree

that concerns those things that have to be observed and avoided in the celebration of Mass. This is a classical and central statement, authoritative and official, of the Church's mind on the subject.

The decree first considers the nature of the Mass. Martin Luther had clearly and openly denied its very nature by stating that the Mass was not a sacrifice. It is true that, in order not to disturb the simple faithful, the Reformers did not immediately eliminate all those parts of the Mass which reflected the true Faith and ran contrary to their new doctrines. For example, they retained the elevation of the Host between the Sanctus and the Benedictus.

For Luther and his followers, worship consisted mainly in preaching as a means of instruction and edification, interwoven with prayers and hymns. The reception of Holy Communion was only a secondary event. Luther still maintained the presence of Christ in the bread at the moment of its reception, but he strongly denied the Sacrifice of the Mass. For him the altar could never be a place of sacrifice.

From this denial we can understand the consequent flaws in the Protestant liturgy, which is completely different from that of the Catholic Church. We can also understand why the Council of Trent defined the part of the Catholic Faith which concerns the nature of the Eucharistic sacrifice: it is a real saving, force. In the sacrifice of Jesus Christ the priest is a substitute of Christ himself. As a result of his ordination he is a true alter Christus. By means of the Consecration the bread is changed into the Body of Christ and the wine into His Blood. This implementation of His sacrifice is the adoration of God.

The Council specifies that this sacrifice is not a new one, independent of the unique sacrifice of the Cross; rather it is dependent upon that unique sacrifice of Christ, making it present in a bloodless way such that the Body and Blood of Christ are substantially present, while still remaining under the appearance of bread and wine. Consequently there is no new sacrificial merit; rather, the infinite fruit of the bloody

sacrifice of the Cross is effected or realized by Jesus Christ constantly in the Mass.

It follows that the action of the sacrifice consists in the Consecration; the Offertory (by which bread and wine are prepared for the Consecration) and the Communion are integral parts of the Mass, but are not essential ones. The essential part is the Consecration, by which the priest, in the person of Christ, and in the same way, pronounces the consecrating words of Christ.

Thus, the Mass is not and cannot be simply a celebration of Communion, or a mere remembrance or memorial of the sacrifice of the Cross, but rather a true, unbloody making present of this self-same sacrifice of the Cross.

For the same reason we can now understand that the Mass is an effective renewal of the sacrifice of the Cross. It is essentially an adoration of God, offered only to Him. This adoration rightly involves other elements: praise, thanksgiving for all the graces received, sorrow for sins committed, petitions for necessary graces. Naturally the Mass can be offered for one or all of these various intentions. All these doctrines were established and promulgated in the chapters and canons of Session 22 in the Council of Trent.

Trent's Anathemas

Various consequences derive from this fundamental theological nature of the Mass. First, the Canon Missae.

In the Roman liturgy there has always been only one Canon, which was introduced by the Church many centuries ago. The Council of Trent expressly stated, in Chapter 4, that this Canon is free from error; in fact it contains nothing that is not full of sanctity and piety and that does not raise the faithful to God. In composition it is based on the words of Our Lord himself, the tradition of the apostles and

the regulation of saintly popes. Canon 6 of Chapter 4 threatens with excommunication those who maintain that the Canon Missae contains errors and should therefore be abolished.

In Chapter 5 the Council stated that human nature requires external signs in order to raise the spirit to divine things. For that reason the Church has introduced certain rites and signs: silent or vocal prayer, blessings, candles, incense, vestments, et cetera. Many of these signs have their origins in apostolic prescriptions or tradition.

Through these visible signs of faith and piety, the nature of the sacrifice is underscored. The signs strengthen and encourage the faithful in their meditation on the divine elements contained in the sacrifice of the Mass. To safeguard this doctrine, Canon 7 threatens with excommunication all those who consider these external signs as inducing impiety instead of piety. This is an example of what I discussed before: this kind of statement, with the canon of sanctions, has largely a theological meaning, not only a disciplinary meaning.

In Chapter 6 the Council emphasizes the desire of the Church that all the faithful present at Mass should receive Holy Communion, but states that if only the priest who celebrates the Mass receives Holy Communion, this Mass should not then be called private and so be criticized or forbidden. In this case the faithful receive Communion spiritually, and, further, all sacrifices offered by the priest as a public minister of the Church are offered for all the members of the Mystical Body of Christ. Thus, Canon 8 threatens with excommunication all those who say that such Masses are illicit and should therefore be forbidden—another theological statement.

Chapter 8 is dedicated to the peculiar language of worship in the Mass. It is known that in the cult of all religions a sacred language is used. In the Roman Catholic Church during the first three centuries the language was Greek, being the common language employed in the Latin world. From the fourth century on, the Latin language developed into the common idiom in the Roman Empire. Latin

remained for centuries in the Roman Catholic Church as the only language for worship. Quite naturally, Latin was also the language of the Roman rite in its central act of worship, the Mass. This remained the case even after Latin was replaced as the living language by the various Romance languages.

Trent on Latin, Silence

Now we come to the question: why not change again? We answer: divine Providence establishes even secondary things. For example, Palestine—Jerusalem—is the place of the Redemption by Jesus Christ. Rome is the center of the Church. Peter was not born in Rome. He came to Rome. Why? It was the center then of the Roman Empire—that means, of the world. That is the practical background of the diffusion of the Faith by the Roman Empire, only a human thing, a historical thing. But it enters certainly in divine Providence.

A similar process can be seen even in other religions. For the Moslems, the old Arab language is dead and yet it remains the language of their liturgy, of their cult. For the Hindus, the Sanskrit. Due to its necessary connection with the supernatural, worship naturally requires its own particular religious language, which should not be "vulgar" one.

The fathers of the Council knew very well that most of the faithful assisting at the Mass neither understood Latin nor were able to read translations. They were generally illiterate. The fathers also knew that the Mass contains a great deal of instruction for the faithful.

Nevertheless they did not agree with the view held by Protestants that it was necessary to celebrate the Mass only in the vernacular. In order to provide instruction for the faithful, the Council ordered that the old custom approved by the Holy Roman Church—the mother and teacher of all churches—be maintained everywhere, and that care should be had for souls in explaining the central mystery of the Mass.

Canon 9 threatens with excommunication those who affirm that the language of the Mass must only be the vernacular. It is noteworthy that in both chapter and canon the Council of Trent only rejected the exclusivity of the "vulgar" language in the sacred rites. On the other hand, we need once again to take into account that these various Conciliar regulations do not only have a disciplinary character. They are based on a doctrinal, theological foundation that involves the Faith itself.

The reasons for this concern can be seen, firstly, in the reverence that is due to the mystery of the Mass. The decree which immediately followed concerning what has to be observed and avoided in the celebration of the Mass states, "Irreverence cannot be separated from impiety." Irreverence always involves impiety. In addition, the Council wished to safeguard the ideas expressed in the Mass, and the precision of the Latin tongue safeguards the content against misunderstanding and potential errors based on linguistic imprecision.

For these reasons the Church has always defended the sacred tongue and even recently Pius XI expressly stated that this language should be non vulgaris. For these self-same reasons Canon 9 established excommunication against those who affirm that the rite of the Roman Church, in which a part of the Canon and the words of consecration are pronounced silently, must be condemned. Even silence has a theological background.

Finally, in the first canon of the reform decree, in the twenty-second session of the Council of Trent, we find other regulations which have a somewhat disciplinary character but also complete the doctrinal part-for nothing is more fit to guide worshipers to a deepened understanding of the mystery than the life and example of the ministers of cult. These ministers should mold their lives and behavior to this end, and that is reflected in their dress, their bearing, their speech. In all this they should be dignified, modest and religious. They also are to avoid even slight faults since in their case

they would be considered grave. Thus superiors were to demand of the sacred ministers the living out of the whole tradition of proper clerical behavior.

The Mass of Pius V and the Mass of Paul VI

Now we can better appreciate and understand the theological background and foundation of the discussions and regulations of the Council of Trent concerning the Mass as the summit of the sacred liturgy. In response to the serious challenge of Protestantism we can now understand the theological attractiveness of the Tridentine Mass, not only for that particular historical period but also as a pattern for the Church and liturgical reform of Vatican II.

In the first place, we have to determine here the correct meaning of this reform. As in the case of the Tridentine Mass, we emphasize the importance of a correct understanding of what was understood by the Mass of Pope Pius V which fulfilled the wishes of the Council fathers at Trent.

Now, we must underline what should be considered the correct name of the Mass of the Second Vatican Council: the Mass of the post-Conciliar liturgical commission. A simple glance at the liturgical constitution of the Second Vatican Council immediately illustrates that the will of the Council and the will of the liturgical commission often do not coincide, and are even evidently contrary.

We'll briefly examine the main differences between the two liturgical reforms as well as what we might term their theological attractiveness.

Firstly, in the light of the Protestant heresy, the Mass of Pius V emphasized the central truth of the Mass as a sacrifice, based on the theological discussions and specific regulations of the Council. The Mass of Paul VI (so-called because the liturgical commission for the reform after Vatican II worked under the ultimate responsibility of

the Pope) emphasizes rather the integral part of the Mass, Communion, with the result that the sacrifice is transformed into what could be termed a meal. The great importance given to the readings and to preaching in the new Mass, and even the faculty given to the priest to add private speeches and explications, is another reflection of what can be called an adaptation to the Protestant idea of worship....

French philosopher Jean Guitton says that Pope Paul VI revealed to him that it was his [the Pope's] intention to assimilate as much as possible of the new Catholic liturgy to Protestant worship. Clearly, it is necessary to verify the true meaning of this remark, since all the official statements of Paul VI—especially his excellent eucharistic encyclical *Mysterium Fidei* of 1965, issued before the end of the Council, as well as the *Credo of the People of God* demonstrate his absolute orthodoxy. Now, how can we explain this opposite statement?

Along these same lines we can try to understand the new position of the altar and the priest. According to the well-founded studies of Msgr. Klaus Gamber concerning the position of the altar in the old basilicas of Rome and elsewhere, the criterion for the old position was not that it should face the worshiping assembly, but rather that it should be turned towards the East, which was the symbol of the rising sun of Christ who was to be worshiped. The completely new position of the altar and priest in facing the assembly, previously forbidden, today becomes an expression of the Mass as a meeting of the community.

Secondly, in the old liturgy the Canon is the center of the Mass as sacrifice. According to the testimony of the Council of Trent, the Canon traces itself back to the tradition of the apostles and was substantially complete at the time of Gregory the Great, 600. The Roman Church never had other canons. Even for the *mysterium fidei* in the Consecration form, we have evidence from Innocent III, explicitly, at the inauguration of the Archbishop of Lyons. I don't

know if the majority of liturgy reformers know about this fact. St. Thomas Aquinas in a special article justifies this *mysterium fidei*. And the Council of Florence explicitly confirmed the *mysterium fidei* in the Consecration form.

Now, this *mysterium fidei* was eliminated in the Consecration words brought about in the new liturgy. Why? We also find permission given for new canons. The second one—which does not mention the sacrificial character of the Mass—with its merit of being the shortest, has virtually supplanted the old Roman Canon everywhere. Thereby, the profound theological insight given by the Council of Trent has been lost.

The mystery of the divine Sacrifice is actualized in every rite, though in different ways. In the case of the Latin Mass it was emphasized by the Tridentine Council with the silent reading of the Canon in Latin. This has been discarded by the proclamation of the Canon in the new Mass out loud.

Third: the Vatican II reform destroyed or changed the meaning of in much of the rich symbolism in the liturgy (though it remains in the Oriental rites). The importance of this symbolism was emphasized by the Council of Trent....

This fact was deplored even by a well-known atheistic psychoanalyst, who called the Second Vatican Council the "Council of Bookkeepers."

Vulgarizing the Mass

There is one theological principle completely overthrown by the liturgical reform but confirmed both by the Council of Trent and by the Second Vatican Council, after a long and sober discussion. (I assisted, and can confirm that the clear resolutions of the final text of the Council constitution substantially reaffirmed it). That principle: the Latin language is to be preserved in the Latin rite. As in the

Council of Trent, so in Vatican II the Council fathers admitted the vernacular only as an exception.

But for the reform of Paul VI, the exception has become exclusive. Theological reasons which were stated in both councils for the retention of Latin in the Mass can now be seen to have been justified in the light of the exclusive use of the vernacular introduced by the liturgical reform. The vernacular has often vulgarized the Mass itself, and the translation of the original Latin has resulted in very serious doctrinal misunderstanding and errors.

Furthermore, the vernacular was not formerly permitted for people who were not only illiterate but also completely different from one another. Now that different languages and dialects can be used in worship, by Catholic people of varying tribes and nations, all living closely in a world that becomes smaller every day, this Babel of common worship results in a loss of external unity in the world-wide Catholic Church which was once unified in a common voice. Further, it has become on a number of occasions the cause of internal disunity even in the Mass itself, which should be the spirit and center of external and internal concord among Catholics throughout the world. We have many, many examples of this fact of disunion caused by the vulgar tongue.

And another consideration.... Before, every priest in the whole world could say the Mass in Latin for all the communities, and all the priests could understand Latin. Unfortunately, today no priest can say the Mass for all the people in the world. We must admit that, only a few decades after the reform of the liturgical language, we have lost that possibility of praying and singing together even in the great international gatherings, such as Eucharistic conferences, or even during meetings with the Pope, the center of the unity of the Church. No longer can we sing and pray together.

Finally, we have to consider seriously the behavior of the sacred ministers in the light of the Council of Trent—the behavior of the

sacred ministers whose deep relationship with their sacred ministry the Council of Trent emphasized. Correct clerical behavior, dress, bearing, comportment, encourage people to follow what they say and teach. Unfortunately, the wretched behavior of many clerics often obliterates the difference between sacred minister and laity, and emphasizes the difference between the sacred minister and the alter Christus.

Summarizing our reflections, we can say the theological attractiveness of the Tridentine Mass corresponds with the theological incorrectness of the Vatican [II] Mass. For this reason the Christi Fidelis of the theological tradition should continue to manifest, in the spirit of obedience to legitimate superiors, the legitimate desire and pastoral preference for the Tridentine Mass.

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