

COLUMNISTS

What is Cardinal Stickler saying?

On Sunday evening, May 12, some 4,000 people attended a special solemn celebration of the Latin Tridentine Mass in St. Patrick's Cathedral, New York, by Cardinal Alfonso Stickler, the retired prefect of the Vatican Archives and Library. (See *Catholic Courier*, May 16, page 4.)

A year ago last May Cardinal Stickler spoke at a conference in the New York area co-sponsored by two groups (ChristiFides and Keep the Faith) that are opposed to the Vatican II and post-Vatican II reforms of the liturgy, including the vernacular Mass, the altar facing the people, lay lectors and lay eucharistic ministers, and Communion in the hand.

The cardinal's talk, entitled "The Attractiveness of the Tridentine Mass," and an accompanying interview were published in the summer 1995 issue of the quarterly, *The Latin Mass*.

Both the talk and the interview should be disturbing to anyone who believes in the supreme authority of an ecumenical council and the respect that is owed to the Bishop of Rome, especially by a member of the College of Cardinals.

Cardinal Stickler charges that the so-called Vatican II Mass authorized by the council and by Pope Paul VI is marred by theological and doctrinal errors, and that the pope himself knowingly permitted these errors because of the weakness of his own personal character.



essays in theology

BY FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

To be sure, the cardinal does not express his views unambiguously. He sometimes speaks in a kind of code that his friendly audience can decipher, but which is more likely to confuse most everyone else.

For example, when he is asked about the change in the translation of the words of eucharistic consecration from "for you and for many" to "for you and for all," he replies: "If a substantial part, even only a word, is changed, then it becomes invalid."

Think of what the cardinal is saying. If, in fact, the council or Paul VI authorized a change in a single word of the consecration, the millions of Masses that have used, and continue to use, that consecratory form are invalid. They are empty rites, of no spiritual value.

But then the cardinal dances away from his ominous charge. "The problem of the translation of many into all is

a problem in nearly every language. But we cannot see that it is a substantial change." A few lines later he says, "Naturally the translation should not change, even if the sense is substantially unchanged. Why change it?" he asks. "In order to confuse the meaning for the faithful."

Is the cardinal implying here that the council and Paul VI authorized the change in the translation of the consecration in order to confuse the faithful? If not, what is he saying?

At one point in his talk, he suggests (incorrectly) that whenever the Council of Trent adds the Latin words *anathema sit* ("Let him/her be condemned") to one of its teachings, it intends to say that anyone who opposes the teaching is "excluded from the community," that is, excommunicated.

But, he notes, the Council of Trent (which approved the Tridentine Mass), ordered that the Canon of the Mass, or Eucharistic Prayer, should be recited silently. It is recited aloud today.

In authorizing the audible recitation of the Eucharistic Prayer, did the fathers of Vatican II, including Pope Paul VI, and the post-conciliar liturgical commission incur excommunication? The cardinal also refers in the interview to the reception of Communion in the hand as an "abuse" that must be changed because it is "a motive of disadoption in many cases."

But didn't Paul VI authorize this

practice? Cardinal Stickler admits the pope did authorize it, but only because the pope was weak. He yielded to pressure. From whom? From bishops conferences around the world!

What kind of ecclesiology is the cardinal working out of? Are the bishops no more than an impotent pressure group that occasionally interferes with the pope's supreme governance of the universal church? Are the bishops of the world spiritually capable of pushing the pope into approving an abuse that leads "in many cases" to "disadoption"? If so, doesn't this call into question the value of the magisterium in preserving the church from doctrinal and moral error? And aren't popes supposed to be made of rock, not Jell-O?

Why, then, would the pope have yielded so easily to such inappropriate pressure? "Every pope has his character," Cardinal Stickler points out in his interview. We cannot expect a pope who was not a strong man before he became pope, he says, to become a strong man after becoming pope.

The superiors of the church, the cardinal observes, "remain human beings even as bishops, as popes, and other representatives of Our Lord."

Theologians are often criticized by, and occasionally get into trouble with, ecclesiastical authorities for saying things like that. Will Cardinal Stickler?

Father McBrien is a professor of theology at the University of Notre Dame.

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