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## For Lefebvrians, every Mass except their own is dubious

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In the widely-quoted long letter of 14 April 2012, the then Superior General of the Priestly Fraternity of St Pius X warned the other three bishops ordained by Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre against 'making the errors of the Council of super heresies', knowing

that overestimating these errors would lead the FSSPX to isolate itself and take the path of schism.

**Some of these exaggerated assessments of the errors of the Council were already circulating widely**, albeit discreetly, even during Bishop Fellay's two terms of office. However, no one ever took action to remedy the situation. But, following the election of the new General Council, these views were brought into the open and have become the official 'magisterium' of the Society. Just a few months before the change of guard and the end of Bishop Fellay's time as superior, Fr François-Marie Chautard, rector of the Institut Saint Pie X (the FSSPX's university), published an article in *Le Chardonnet* (April 2018), a bulletin of the important Parisian church of the same Fraternity, that questioned the validity of the sacraments of the 'conciliar Church'. 'Unfortunately, the question is not limited to the magisterial value of the conciliar teachings, but extends to the validity and legitimacy of the power of sanctification'; and that is not all: 'Both in terms of the object and the subject, the habitual acts of conciliar jurisdictional power are doubtful'. In essence, the universal Church has been living with uncertainty about the validity of acts of jurisdiction and sanctification for sixty years.

**An oversight in a minor bulletin?** It does not seem so. On 11 January 2024, Fr Jean-Marie Gleize — a professor at the Seminary of Ecône for thirty years, and the theologian chosen by the FSSPX for the 2009–11 talks with the Holy See — published an [article](#) in *Courrier de Rome*. In it, he reinterpreted the necessity of the minister's intention for a sacrament to be valid. According to the Abbé, if the minister does not share the same faith as the Church but uses the Church's rite, he in fact wants to do what the Church does. However, this only applies when the rite used is 'traditional'; if a bishop uses a new rite to ordain priests, for example, and this rite is not in accordance with the *Editio typica*, then it is doubtful that the bishop wants to do what the Church does. This doubt arises from the rite that is actually celebrated, and not from the fact that the bishop is a modernist. The reformed Mass rite is then directly attacked, as Cardinals Bacci and Ottaviani wrote that 'the *Novus Ordo* is doubtful', and therefore 'the new Masses are doubtful because the priests who celebrate them no longer believe in transubstantiation; it is the rite that is doubtful'.

**In practice, when faced with any sacrament celebrated according to the new rite** — except baptism, marriage and confession — one doubts its validity because it is the rite that is in question. Therefore, the minister who conforms to this non-traditional rite would no longer have the objective intention of performing the actions of the Church. Monsignor Lefebvre himself doubted the validity of the new Masses, Gleize

explains, 'firstly because the *Novus Ordo*, the model for these Masses, is dubious: an uncertain formula commands the uncertain fulfilment of the things to be accomplished', essentially invalidating the minister's objective intention. He insists on this point, stating that Lefebvre declared the sacraments 'all doubtful' because 'we do not know exactly what their intentions are'. Their intentions are doubtful precisely to the extent that the new rites reformed by Paul VI are doubtful.'

**Dear Catholics who attend the *Novus Ordo***, you believe that your loved one who has just received the Anointing of the Sick has also received the corresponding graces. However, it is doubtful that this is the case. The same applies to your confirmation and to offering a Mass in suffrage for the soul of your grandfather or receiving the Lord Jesus in the Holy Eucharist. While the universal Church confirms the validity of these sacraments, the Fraternity tells you otherwise. The whole sacramental life of the Church thus becomes uncertain; souls no longer know whether they are receiving God's grace. What are the consequences? If you want to save your soul, go to the Fraternity.

**The French District of the FSSPX website features these concepts** in the form of a [Petit catéchisme de la nouvelle messe](#) (Short catechism of the new Mass), written by Fr Daniele di Sorco, FSSPX. According to this text, the new Mass is doubtful from two perspectives: the objective intention of the minister and the subjective intention. Regarding the former, the text states that 'being fundamentally ambiguous [...] it does not sufficiently express what the Church intends to do', and regarding the latter, it states that 'if we consider the distortion that the doctrine on the Mass has undergone in the catechism and in the teaching of current seminaries, we can conclude that this intention is not always present'.

**Therefore, 'the danger that the new Mass is invalid is very great';** we are more certain of the validity of a baptism performed by a Buddhist or an atheist in case of necessity than of a Mass celebrated by a Catholic priest. This conclusion is not only inevitable, but also explicitly stated in the 'small catechism'.

**The legitimacy of the *Novus Ordo* is also called into question** as it 'does not sufficiently express the Catholic faith on the mystery of the Eucharist, but implies a substantially ambiguous profession of faith'. Therefore, the new Mass is not lawful. But how can we affirm this when our faith teaches us that every general liturgical law promulgated by the Pope is infallible? The answer is simple: for the Fraternity, it is not a law because every bad law that goes against the common good is merely named a law. What parallel does the Fraternity suggest to explain this concept? The law that authorises abortion: this is a bad law.

**Therefore, the new Mass is never legitimate,** and its validity is doubtful. This helps to explain why the FSSPX has always refused to sign any agreement with the Holy See, which would obviously require recognition of the validity and legitimacy of the *Novus Ordo*. However, the Fraternity would never be required to celebrate it. One can also understand the practical consequences of this approach. 'It is never permissible to actively assist at the new Mass (i.e. by joining in the prayers and liturgical gestures and receiving Communion) because it is never permissible to inwardly adhere to something unlawful'.

**On the other hand, passive attendance** (i.e. a purely physical presence) is sometimes permitted, for example at funerals or weddings, 'on condition that no scandal is caused, i.e. that nothing is done that might suggest active participation'.

**Therefore, it is never permissible to actively participate in the 'new Mass',** not even to fulfil the Sunday obligation if one is unable to attend an FSSPX Mass. It is also not permissible 'if it is celebrated without abuses', because 'its ambiguity in terms of faith does not depend on abuses, but on the official rite itself'. It is not possible to simply receive Holy Communion nor to communicate with hosts consecrated in the 'new Mass'. For this reason, when FSSPX priests are given permission to celebrate Mass in Catholic churches, they never use hosts consecrated in the tabernacle, only those consecrated by them at the time of celebration.

**If the reader thinks that attending Mass in the old rite,** even if not celebrated by the FSSPX, might be an option, we must disappoint them. In the Italian District's magazine *La Tradizione Cattolica* (no. 110, 2019), we read that 'when the *motu proprio Summorum Pontificum* is explicitly applied, we will be dealing with a celebration in which the gestures of the Tridentine Mass are objectively emptied of all meaning'.

'Any celebration officially presented according to the terms of the *motu proprio* will, in

our opinion, be just as unacceptable as the new Mass, and for the same reasons', because 'the habitual, or worse, exclusive, attendance at Masses granted according to the letter or spirit of the *motu proprio* is itself a public and external profession of a certain conception of the Church, doctrine, the Council and the Mass itself; a conception which is clearly suspected of heresy.'

**The French District's position** (Fideliter, no. 252, 2019) is no different: 'To the question: 'Between two Sundays when one attends Mass at the Fraternity, can one attend Mass in another, non-traditional context [i.e. the FSSPX or "priest friends"] simply to fulfil the Sunday obligation?', the answer is certainly 'no'. Today, unfortunately, more and more Catholics answer 'yes', going there often and without any problems.' The Fraternity itself forbids its priests from attending Masses celebrated in the ancient rite, for example by the ex-*Ecclesia Dei* institutes, in chasubles; they may only attend in black. This effectively prohibits *communicatio in sacris* with Catholic priests, just as the Catholic Church ordinarily prohibits the same with members of churches not in full communion with the Catholic Church. This means that the Fraternity treats Catholic priests, regardless of the rite celebrated, as if they were priests of schismatic churches. In doing so, it is manifesting its own schism, in that it does not want to communicate sacramentally with those who are in communion with the Pope. Not even with the Pope himself.

**This is what the Fraternity means when it asks the Holy See to accept it 'as it is',** and when it requests authorisation for the next episcopal consecrations so that it can continue its apostolate 'for the salvation of souls'. Those who continue to claim that the Fraternity is not schismatic should at least acknowledge these facts. Those who hope that the Pope will approve the Fraternity without requesting anything in return should consider the implications of their request: the Pope would effectively be approving bishops and priests who refuse to participate in sacraments with the Catholic Church.