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LITURGICAL WAR

Roche, Latin Mass executioner fails to fake moderate role

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Amidst the Vatican's ever tightening chokehold on the traditional Mass, a bizarre situation has now arisen in which a Protestant politician from Northern Ireland appears to have more of an understanding of the old rite's value than the Prefect of the Vatican's liturgy office.

On March 6, an [interview with Cardinal Arthur Roche](#) was published by the Catholic Herald, in which the cardinal expressed highly bizarre and notable commentary on the traditional Latin Mass, or old rite.

As documented by this correspondent, Cdl. Roche is known from his days as a bishop in dioceses in England as having a noted opposition to the Latin Mass. Since becoming prefect of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments (CDW) in 2021, Cdl. Roche has had means, motive and opportunity to expand upon this predisposition.

Less than two months after he was promoted, Pope Francis issued *Traditionis Custodes* providing the cardinal with ample opportunity to clampdown on thriving Latin Masses throughout the globe.

This opportunity, Cdl. Roche has certainly made good use of. In 2022 he **authorized** less than 60 parish churches to host the Latin Mass – in the entire world. Figures after then have not yet been released, but increasing cancellations of Latin Mass centers have been well documented in the many months since.

In the meantime, Cdl. Roche has made no secret about his feelings. While devotees of the old rite have faced – **in the words** of Cardinal Raymond Burke – a “persecution” from the Vatican for their adherence to this Mass, Cdl. Roche has described such people as **being more Protestant than Catholic.**

Provision of the Latin Mass in recent decades was an “experiment” which “has not entirely been successful,” he **said in** 2021, adding that the Church should instead go back to what “the [Second Vatican] Council required of the Church” – the *Novus Ordo*. “The theology of the Church has changed,” he **argued** on BBC Radio in 2023, and therefore, so must the liturgy.

But speaking to the *Catholic Herald*, Cdl. Roche made something of an attempt to paint himself as a moderate on the liturgy war which he has so violently stoked, while also appearing to belittle traditional Catholics and lie about the contents of *Traditionis Custodes*.

He said:

Of course, it is good that people want to be part of the Church, and there is no reason why they cannot. There is nothing wrong with attending the Mass celebrated with the 1962 missal. That has been accepted since the time of Pope St John Paul II, Pope Benedict and now Pope Francis.

What Pope Francis said in *Traditionis Custodes* is that it is not the norm. For very good reasons, the Church, through conciliar legislation, decided to move away from what had become an overly elaborate form of celebrating the Mass.

Firstly, if there is “nothing wrong” with attending the traditional Mass, Catholics might wonder why Cdl. Roche has so described them as being akin to Protestants simply for attending it. Certainly, the widely documented, and similarly widely-condemned, “persecution” of Latin Mass Catholics which has stemmed from the Vatican has not left them with the impression that “there is nothing wrong with attending” it. Indeed, Roche and his office have gone out of their way to ensure that it is increasingly difficult to do just that.

Secondly: Cdl. Roche attempts to paint himself as a liturgical moderate when he comments that “What Pope Francis said in *Traditionis Custodes* is that it is not the norm.” But this claim does not align with reality. At worst, it is a blatant lie about the **contents** of *Traditionis Custodes* (TC).

As the cardinal should well know, by virtue of his particular office, Pope Francis **did not merely say** that the Latin Mass is “not the norm.” On the contrary, he made the striking claim that the *Novus Ordo* is “the unique expression of the *lex orandi* of the Roman Rite.”

Perhaps the cardinal sensed the need to appear as a moderate, as part of some early pre-conclave maneuvers, following in the footsteps of other cardinals who have quietly begun posturing amid the ongoing hospitalization of Pope Francis.

Perhaps he is - somehow - truly ignorant of what the text states, despite rushing so eagerly to enforce it these last two and a half years. Perhaps, as a number of commentators and liturgical scholars have opined over the years, he has an insufficient understanding of the liturgy, of the differences between the old rite and the new, and the theology behind both.

However, given that he has argued the Church has seen a change in theology requiring the implementation of the *Novus Ordo*, Cdl. Roche would appear to be cognizant of the theology of the new rite, and by virtue of the implications of this same statement must have some understanding of how the new contrasts with the old. How then must a Catholic – perhaps a Catholic worn down with the Vatican’s “persecution” of the Mass he goes to out of simple desire to worship God – understand this phrase from Cdl. Roche? Is he a liar, ignorant, or ambitious?

Roche continues: “I often hear people say, ‘Cardinal Roche is against the Latin Mass.’ Well, if they only knew that most days I celebrate Mass in Latin because it is the common language for all of us here. It is the *Novus Ordo* Mass in Latin. I was trained as an altar boy until the age of 20, serving the Tridentine Form.”

Are we really to believe that the prefect of the Vatican’s liturgy office thinks that the *Novus Ordo* offered in Latin is the same as the traditional liturgy? Surely, someone in his position could not be so ignorant?

But if not ignorant, perhaps it was a joke. Did Cdl. Roche truly believe that after persecuting devotees of the traditional Mass for years, it was appropriate to make a joke at their expense?

In stark contrast to Cdl. Roche’s dismissiveness, a Protestant politician from Northern Ireland has come out in public support of the traditional Mass.

Concerned **about reports** that Roche’s office might cold-heartedly ban the nearly 20-000 strong Latin Mass pilgrimage of young people to Chartres from having their final Mass in the famous cathedral, Mr. Jim Shannon MP **filed an urgent question** with the British government to intervene. Shannon’s written **motion from last autumn can be read here**.

Asked by this correspondent about his actions, Shannon explained that “this issue aligns with my ongoing commitment to address concerns about the spirituality and religious practices of individuals and communities.”

“The restriction on the celebration of the Latin Mass directly impacts those who adhere to the Tridentine Rite, a significant spiritual and cultural expression of Catholic worship,” he added.

“Whilst I am a proud Protestant and a unionist this does not deter my beliefs in freedom of religious belief as I have previously raised freedom of religious belief violations affecting Catholics, highlighting his long-standing advocacy on such matters,” he added.

Any prohibition on the Latin Mass in the Chartres pilgrimage would be “another

example of a situation where believers are restricted in practicing their faith, making it a relevant and important issue for us to address," Shannon told me.

Amidst the backdrop of the bloody conflict in Northern Ireland, so often sadly intertwined with religious division, the instance of a Protestant politician making a public defense of the Catholic ancient liturgy is groundbreaking.

For him to defend the Latin Mass against the specter of its persecution by the Vatican itself, is even more astonishing. Mr. Shannon has been clear and honest in his appraisal of the Church's liturgy and Vatican attempts to restrict it.

Cdl. Roche has also been clear and honest, insulting Catholics devoted to it and making jokes at their expense while ushering in continued restrictions. If only the Vatican's liturgy office had someone with the integrity of Mr. Shannon then the Church would have suffered less of a crisis.

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