Letter to Cardinal Estévez from Ecclesia Dei Society, Australia

August 1999

His Eminence Jorge Cardinal Medina Estévez Congregazione Per il Culto Divino Palazzo delle Congregationi Piazza Pio XII 10 00193 Roma Italy

PROTOCOL 1411/99

Your Eminence,

I am writing in my capacity as Secretary of The Ecclesia Dei Society, an Australian association of lay Catholics dedicated to preserving and promoting, in union with the Holy See, celebration of the Mass according to the 1962 Missal.

This letter is prompted by our reading of your Protocol 1411/99 which contains a series of "Responsa Officiala" to questions recently put to your Congregation about the use of the Missal of Pope Paul VI and the 1962 Missal.

My purpose is respectfully to request that this Protocol not be published in Notitiae. Publication of this Protocol would attack the specific liturgical charism of the Priestly Fraternity of St Peter, a clerical society of Apostolic Life of Pontifical Right: a community established by the Holy See in the full knowledge of its exclusive attachment to the 1962 Missal and with the end in view of preserving that attachment.

In July 1988 the Motu Proprio "Ecclesia Dei adflicta" was promulgated and gave great hope to Catholics united to the Holy See who wished to worship according to the traditional liturgical forms of the Latin tradition. This decree was received with relief and joy by the kind of Catholics represented by our Society. But in Australia and around the world, Ecclesia Dei adflicta has been consistently attacked as a fraud by adherents of the Lefebvre movement. It has been represented by them as a device designed to lure traditionally minded Catholics into abandoning, by degrees, their legitimate aspiration to worship in the way their fathers had done.

Publication of Protocol 1411/99 would have the practical effect of confirming the Lefebvrist position. Our experience in Australia leads us to predict that, as a consequence, many former Lefebvrists who since 1988 have cautiously accepted the bona fides of the Holy See in this matter and attached themselves to communities that were created as a result of Ecclesia Dei Adflicta would return to their previous position in the Lefebvrist movement.

Already the Priestly Fraternity of St Peter has been subject to considerable and unjust pressure to undertake pastoral works which would require the Fraternity to compromise its particular, and essentially important, liturgical character. Such demands are equivalent to demanding, for example, that, as a condition of being allowed to undertake apostolic work, a Franciscan should abandon his habit. The publication of Protocol 1411/99 would make the demands already being made of the Fraternity, for all practical purposes, irresistible. Moreover, given that some of the persons who drafted the original questions put before your Congregation are not members of the Fraternity, and even come from outside the traditional movement, it is not unreasonable to wonder whether their motive in posing these questions was to weaken fatally, and to destroy, the liturgical integrity of the Fraternity - and, indeed, its very reason for existing. It seems hardly credible that the Holy See would establish the Fraternity only to cut the ground from under it.

In order that the rightful aspirations of traditional Catholics can be genuinely respected - and these aspirations include a desire to live the priestly and religious vocations entirely within the context of the classical Latin liturgical tradition - religious communities of various kinds must be permitted to form which are exclusively attached to the 1962 Missal and other relevant liturgical books. The growing number of Catholics here in Australia who wish to pursue their vocations in traditional religious communities, as well as the lay people who wish to support them in fulfilling this calling, would be astonished and disheartened by the enunciation of a policy at odds with Ecclesia Dei adflicta and the practical measures subsequently taken under its mandate. Certainly the many young men who are now discovering, in the light of an integral experience of Catholic tradition, vocations to the priesthood will not wish to pursue them under a regime of enforced biritualism and compromised liturgical apostolate.

Might I stress, by way of conclusion, that neither I, nor our society, question the legitimacy and doctrinal rectitude of the Roman Missal promulgated by Pope Paul VI in 1970. We do, however, strongly advocate the “beauty of unity in variety” (Ecclesia Dei adflicta): unity in a variety which is genuinely free and under Peter.

I remain, Your Excellency, your obedient servant in Jesus Christ, and I ask your blessing for myself and for our Society.

Yours sincerely in Domino,

(Hugh Henry) SECRETARY

cc. His Eminence, Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger

His Eminence, Angelo Cardinal Felici

Mons. Stanislao Dziwisz