

WHAT'S WRONG WITH THE LATIN MASSES AT INDEPENDENT CHAPELS?

SHOULD WE SUPPORT THEM?

Traditional Catholics will be eternally grateful to the many priests who heroically held fast to the Sacred Traditions, in spite of great opposition from the modernists over the years. Many of them set up independent chapels to help the abandoned faithful and paved the way for the work of the Society of St. Pius X. In some cases, these priests passed on the torch to younger priests unconnected to any legitimate society or order, and many issues have shown themselves to be of concern.

1. Some chapels are served by priests of dubious validity. Given reports of secret priestly ordinations and episcopal consecrations that have occurred in some of these independent communities, one who attends an independent chapel might be attending a Mass of dubious validity. With the SSPX, on the contrary, one may always have moral certitude as to the validity of the sacraments, given that no priest is permitted to work with the Society unless his ordination has been thoroughly examined and a conditional one performed if necessary. No one of serious scholarship or standing within the Church has questioned the validity of SSPX priests and bishops.

2. There are legal issues concerning the canonical status of independent chapels. The SSPX was established in 1970 as a society of common life, known today as a society of apostolic life, by the local ordinary of Fribourg. It was granted pontifical right through a *decretum laudis* of the Sacred Congregation for the Clergy in 1971. It possesses the right to incardinate priests, and this right remained intact following the invalid suppression of 1975, which was based on false pretenses and followed a highly irregular canonical process. Thus, the Society, even today, is not a group of loosely-connected clergy to happen to come together, but a legitimate society of apostolic life that possesses a canonical mission and the right of incardination. While rejecting the modern positivistic attitudes that permeate some parts of the new Code of Canon Law and the jurisprudence that accompanies it, the Society avoids the blatant disobedience found on the opposite side as well.

3. Independent priests and chapels have no authority structures due to the lack of superiors. Each independent priest becomes his own authority, or even worse, the servant of a lay board of directors, which is eerily reminiscent of the "parish councils" seen in many *Novus Ordo* parishes. This also creates practical issues: there is no set process to follow when examining the ordination and background of these priests, and after the death of an independent priest, there is often a battle concerning who will take his place and to whom the church property will be entrusted. This can lead to the property ending up in the hands of unsavory characters or even being returned to the dioceses. With the SSPX, however, there is a clear internal structure with superiors who decide how these practical questions will be decided and where individual priests will be assigned. Every priest needs reliable superiors and supportive confreres, something that Archbishop Lefebvre clearly understood, leading to his decision to establish the SSPX as a society of *common* life.

4. Some priests at independent chapels have dubious training in moral or dogmatic theology. By contrast, SSPX priests have the best traditional formation program in the Church, set up by Archbishop Lefebvre based on the sound formation that the Church has

maintained for centuries and his own extensive missionary experience. The professors are completely reliable and many past papal encyclicals are studied. SSPX priests are dedicated to reverent and beautiful Masses and inspiring (or at least orthodox) preaching.

5. Some priests constantly rant about the errors and evils in the Church without balance. Although it is important to understand the causes of the current crisis, constantly dwelling on everything that is going wrong can be detrimental to the spiritual life and sound Catholic thinking. Only the SSPX has maintained a consistent set of theological principles for the past half-century concerning how Catholics should think about and approach the current situation, avoiding both the deficiencies in the worldview of so-called conservatives as well as the excesses of sedevacantists and others.

6. Catholics are bound to judge according to the fruits. Our blessed Lord stated, “You will know them by their fruits.” The fruits of the Society are apparent: great demand all over the world for SSPX priests, full to overflowing seminaries and some genuine impact on correcting Vatican policy. All Society priests say each Mass as if it was their first, last, and only Mass. Without the work of the Society, there would have been no indult established in the 1980s, nor the *motu proprio* of Benedict XVI, *Summorum Pontificum*, promulgated in 2007. Only the SSPX has maintained coherent, consistent principles over the past several decades regarding the resolution of doctrinal and practical issues. Independent groups, by contrast, have usually caused division and infighting among the faithful and further doctrinal confusion, due to their rejection of even legitimate authority.