

A Refutation of “A Catechetical Refutation”

(Regarding a Defence Made of Bishop Williamson’s Comments on the Novus Ordo)

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Introduction

In May 2016, a Mr. Sean Johnson published a paper called “A Catechetical Refutation (Regarding Certain Objections Made to Bishop Williamson’s Comments on the Novus Ordo)”¹ in which he defended, amongst other things, Bishop Richard Williamson’s advice to a lady’s question regarding attendance at the Novus Ordo Mass during a conference His Excellency gave in Mahopac, NY on June 28, 2015.² The advice stirred much controversy amongst priests and faithful of Catholic Tradition because His Excellency gave the woman permission (i.e., the “okay”) to continue attending the Novus Ordo Mass.³ After all, the matter of the Novus Ordo Mass is one of the fundamental points in the fight for Catholic Tradition and against the Second Vatican Council and its reforms. Some proceeded to accuse His Excellency of breaking the “Declaration of Fidelity to the Positions of the Society of St. Pius X”⁴ formulated by Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre himself and required of all seminarians from 1981 onward.⁵ In particular, the following proposition His Excellency was accused of transgressing:

“I shall never advise anyone in a positive manner to take an active part in such a Mass.”⁶

It is in Point #19 of his paper where Mr. Johnson makes the following conclusion:

“Therefore, one cannot accuse Bishop Williamson with violation of the 1981 Pledge of Fidelity, unless he imbues the words of that Pledge with a false understanding.”

I object to Mr. Johnson’s analysis and conclusion. It has misled many from the Archbishop’s true stance on the Novus Ordo Mass and its active attendance. Therefore, it is the main purpose of this paper to demonstrate that His Excellency Bishop Richard Williamson did indeed transgress the particular proposition of the Declaration of Fidelity and consequently ought to retract what he said in the conference.⁷

Sources of a Moral Act

Prior to proceeding with my arguments, let us briefly discuss the sources of a moral act; there are three: object, end, and circumstances. The object of a moral act tells us “what is happening”. As such, it provides

¹ <http://ablf3.com/resources/a-catechetical-refutation.89/>

² https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ma9_10iVBik

³ I do not have to argue the point of whether Bishop Williamson gave the “okay” to the lady in Mahopac to continue attending the Novus Ordo Mass. Mr. Johnson admits in Point #2 and Point #19 of his paper that Bishop Williamson did indeed do so. However, even if Mr. Johnson would have denied it, I have shown in a post called “Concerning Bishop Richard Williamson and the Novus Ordo Missae” that he did indeed give her the “okay”. See <http://www.ecclesiamilitans.com/2016/02/14/concerning-bishop-richard-williamson-and-the-novus-ordo-missae>.

⁴ <http://www.ecclesiamilitans.com/2016/04/04/declaration-of-fidelity-to-the-positions-of-the-society-of-st-pius-x>

⁵ Let us recall that even Bishop Williamson himself required this Declaration to be signed by seminarians when he was Rector of the seminaries in Winona, MN, and Argentina.

⁶ “Mass” here is in reference to the Novus Ordo Mass, or more precisely, the Mass celebrated in the new rite called the Novus Ordo Missae, which was concocted after the Second Vatican Council.

⁷ I do not affirm or deny any of the other propositions in Mr. Johnson’s paper other than those I affirm or deny in this paper.

us with information about the nature of the moral act and the means used by the agent to attain his desired end. The object of the moral act give it its “species”. Murder, theft, and almsgiving are three examples. The end is the reason for which the agent acts. It answers the question “why is the act being done”. The circumstances are factors that surround the moral act. They answer the questions “who, where, when, etc.” They modify in some way the nature of the moral act but only accidentally.⁸

The three sources of a moral act determine whether a particular act is good or evil. If all three sources are good, then the act as a whole is good. If even one source is evil, then the act as a whole is evil. However, the object of the moral act plays a special role due to it being what gives the moral act its nature. Hence, if the object of a particular moral act is evil, then the act is “intrinsically” evil. As such, no end or circumstance, no matter how good, can ever justify performing an act that has an evil object.⁹ Now if one cannot ever perform an intrinsically evil act himself, it follows that he cannot ever advise another to perform an intrinsically evil act either.

Now note this well – the three sources of a moral act provide the “matter” for *sin*. They do not provide the “form” for *sin*. The “form” for *sin* is provided by the advertence of one’s intellect and the consent of one’s will in the face of performing an evil act. In other words, the “matter” considers the goodness or evilness of a particular moral act, whereas the “form” considers the imputability of merit or guilt before God on the one performing that particular good or evil act. Hence, the “matter” considers the “objective” elements of a particular moral act and the “form” considers the “subjective” elements of that particular moral act. The following is a quote from the New Advent Catholic Encyclopedia:

“This distinction (i.e., between material and formal sin) is based upon the difference between the objective elements (object itself, circumstances) and the subjective (advertence to the sinfulness of the act). An action which, as a matter of fact, is contrary to the Divine law but is not known to be such by the agent constitutes a material sin; whereas formal sin is committed when the agent freely transgresses the law as shown him by his conscience, whether such law really exists or is only thought to exist by him who acts. Thus, a person who takes the property of another while believing it to be his own commits a material sin; but the sin would be formal if he took the property in the belief that it belonged to another, whether his belief were correct or not.”¹⁰

Therefore, determining the goodness or evilness of a particular moral act is *not* dependant on the advertence or consent of the person performing the act. In other words, a particular moral act is objectively good or evil regardless of what one thinks about it or how one acts upon it. This is the essence of objective moral truth!

Why is this important? It is important because Mr. Johnson’s argument hinges on attempting to demonstrate that active attendance at the Novus Ordo Mass is not intrinsically evil, so we must therefore

⁸ Some circumstances can actually modify the nature of the moral act such that they modify the act essentially or add a new species to the act. However, in these cases they are no longer categorized as circumstances, but instead form part of the object. For example, the circumstance of a man and a woman being both married but not to each other specifies an act of sexual intercourse between them to be adultery. St. Thomas Aquinas calls circumstances that modify the nature of the moral act the “condition” of the object (ST I-II, Q. 18, Art. 10).

⁹ Let us recall the first principle of all ethics and moral theology that “one must do good and avoid evil” and its corollary that “one must never use evil means so that a good end may come about”.

¹⁰ <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/14004b.htm>. Even though the “end” is not listed here amongst the objective elements, it is nevertheless an objective element because it is actually a type of circumstance. It is commonly distinguished from other circumstances because of the import it plays in a moral act. See *Moral Theology: A Complete Course based on St. Thomas Aquinas and the Best Modern Authorities, Article 3, No. 70*, by John McHugh, O.P., and Charles Callan, O.P.

look to the circumstances to determine whether it is a sin for one to actively attend it.¹¹ The applicable circumstances were enunciated by Archbishop Lefebvre and priests of the Society of St. Pius X. The Declaration of Fidelity enshrines the Archbishop's position in this regard. Bishop Williamson was only adhering to the Archbishop's position in his advice to the lady and therefore did not transgress the Declaration of Fidelity. This is basically the line of reasoning proposed and defended by Mr. Johnson in his paper. On the contrary, I shall propose and defend that active attendance at the Novus Ordo Mass *is* intrinsically evil, and even it were not so, the circumstances do *not* justify attending it. Archbishop's position regarding advice on active attendance at the Novus Ordo Mass, as enshrined in the Declaration of Fidelity, corresponds with the stance that active attendance is intrinsically evil. Bishop Williamson, by his advice to the lady in Mahopac, transgressed the Declaration on this point. It has been well over one year since he gave this advice; yet, he has not publicly retracted it. Therefore, he continues to be in a state of opposition to the position of his spiritual father.

Part I – Novus Ordo Mass Attendance and Circumstances

Let us begin the first part of this paper by assuming, for the sake of argument, that Mr. Johnson is correct that active attendance at the Novus Ordo Mass is not intrinsically evil. We must then look to the circumstances to see whether active attendance is morally permitted. In Point #2 of his paper, Mr. Johnson writes the following:

“The objective principle, outlined by all the examples above, is that nobody should attend the Novus Ordo. As demonstrated above, this was emphasized repeatedly in the course of his answer.

“But subjectively, there can be exceptions to the principle because of circumstances (e.g., extreme spiritual necessity, ignorance, etc.).”

To put Mr. Johnson's point more succinctly, “objective principles may allow for exceptions when applied to concrete individual cases due to circumstances”.

Misapplication of the Science of Casuistry

Mr. Johnson, in Point #3 of his paper, attempts to use the science of “casuistry” to justify the subjective application of objective principles. He quotes from the New Advent Catholic Encyclopedia on the definition of “casuistry”:

“The application of general principles of morality to definite and concrete cases of human activity, for the purpose, primarily, of determining what one ought to do, or ought not to do, or what one may do or leave undone as one pleases; and for the purpose, secondarily, of deciding whether and to what extent guilt or immunity from guilt follows on an action already posited.”

And again (emphasis by Mr. Johnson):

*“Since the special function of casuistry is to determine practically and in the concrete the presence or absence of a definite moral **obligation**, it does not fall within its scope to pass judgment on what would be more advisable, or on what may be recommended as a counsel of perfection.”*

¹¹ We must also look at the “end” to determine the goodness or evilness of a moral act. However, the “end” and its relation to active attendance at the Novus Ordo Mass is not a point of dispute between Mr. Johnson and me. Therefore, the “end” of active attendance at the Novus Ordo Mass on the part of the agent will be assumed to be “good” throughout this paper.

And finally (emphases by Mr. Johnson):

*“The necessity of casuistry and its importance are obvious. From the nature of the case, the general principles of any **science** in their concrete application give rise to problems which trained and expert minds only can solve. This is especially **true** regarding the application of moral principles and **precepts** to individual conduct. For, although those principles and **precepts** are in themselves generally evident, their application calls for the consideration of many complex factors, both objective and subjective. Only those who unite scientific **knowledge** of morality with practice in its application may be trusted to solve promptly and safely problems of **conscience**.”*

Without making further distinctions (I’ll do that later), I do agree with Mr. Johnson that there are objective principles that can be sidestepped, so to speak, in particular cases because of the circumstances.¹² For example, it is a Catholic Church principle that one must not seek the Sacrament of Penance from a schismatic priest. In this case, the “object” of the moral act is “confessing to a schismatic priest”. However, the Church also teaches that when one is in the immediate danger of death, this principle can be overlooked because of the presence of a grave spiritual necessity, which in this case is the “circumstance” of the moral act.¹³ He may therefore confess to a schismatic priest. My problem, however, is that Mr. Johnson is incorrectly applying the above definition and explanation of the science of casuistry to defend the proposition in Point #2 of his paper that I more succinctly wrote as “objective principles may allow for exceptions when applied to concrete individual cases due to circumstances”. It is not the purpose of the science of casuistry to *distinguish* between objective moral principles and exceptions to these objective moral principles. Rather, it is the purpose of the science of casuistry to take the *existing* principles and their exceptions *as taught* in the science of *ethics* and *other disciplines of moral theology* and *apply* them to concrete individual cases. *Distinguishing* between objective moral principles and exceptions to these objective moral principles (again, I’ll make further distinctions later) is itself the purpose of ethics and other disciplines of moral theology:

“The Method to Be Followed in Moral Theology.-(a) The positive method is a simple statement of moral principles and doctrines, with little attention to argument, except such as is found in the positive sources (e.g., scripture, tradition, the decisions of the Church).

*“(b) The Scholastic method is a **scientific statement of moral teaching** through accurate definition of terms, systematic coordination of parts, strict argumentation and defense, attention to controversies, and recourse to philosophy and other natural knowledge.*

*“(c) The casuistic method, or case-system, is the **application of moral principles** to the solution of concrete problems of lawfulness or unlawfulness.*

*“The **Scholastic method is the one best suited for the study of Moral Theology**, because it is more scientific, and fits one better to understand, retain, and **apply** what one learns. But it is not exclusive of the other methods, since it perfects the positive method, and **is the groundwork** for the **case method**. Each method has a special suitability for certain ends. Thus: (a) the positive method is well adapted to preaching, and hence was much in favor with the Fathers of the Church, as can be seen from their moral homilies and treatises; (b) the **Scholastic method is the best for study, teaching, apologetic**, and was followed by the*

¹² If the objective principle is in regards to an intrinsically evil act, then there can be no circumstances that morally permit it to be sidestepped.

¹³ I am assuming here that the person in the immediate danger of death believes himself to be in a state of mortal sin. Note also here that the implication is that “confessing to a schismatic priest” is *not* an intrinsically evil act.

great classical works of theology in the Middle Ages and later; (c) the **case method** is very helpful to the seminarian and the priest **in the exercise of the ministry of the confessional.**"¹⁴

It should be clear from what is quoted above that it is not the science of casuistry that teaches the objective principles of a moral act or their exceptions (further distinctions still to come). Even the following quotation from the New Advent Catholic Encyclopedia used by Mr. Johnson states that casuistry is:

*"The **application of general principles of morality** to definite and concrete cases of human activity,...."*

These general principles of morality are not obtained from the science of casuistry itself. Casuistry only attempts to apply them to concrete individual cases in which the variation that exists in the number of factors and the details of these factors from one case to another may be extensive.

Confounding of the Objective and Subjective Elements of a Moral Act

Mr. Johnson uses the science of casuistry to justify the subjective application of objective principles because he fails to understand the distinction in meanings between "objective" and "subjective" as applied to the sources of morality, specifically in regards to the "circumstances". The root cause of his error is that Mr. Johnson implicitly takes "subjective" as meaning "anything regarding the subject himself" (i.e., the one performing a moral act) and "objective" as meaning "anything outside the subject himself". In regards to the "circumstances" of a moral act and applying this meaning of "subjective", Mr. Johnson proposes that circumstances such as extreme spiritual necessity and ignorance are subjective circumstances. Here again I quote what he wrote in his paper in Point #2 (emphases mine):

*"But **subjectively**, there can be exceptions to the principle because of circumstances (e.g., **extreme spiritual necessity, ignorance, etc.**)."*

In a loose sense, Mr. Johnson is correct. "Extreme spiritual necessity" and "ignorance" are circumstances and they both regard the subject himself. However, when technically analyzing a moral act in regards to its circumstances, only "extreme spiritual necessity" properly falls under the category of "circumstances"; "ignorance" does not. To understand why, let us quote again a portion of the Catholic Encyclopedia that I quoted earlier (emphases mine):

*"This distinction (i.e., between material and formal sin) is based upon the difference between the **objective elements (object itself, circumstances)** and the **subjective (advertence to the sinfulness of the act)**."*

Let us now quote the definition of "material evil" that Mr. Johnson quoted in Point #17 of his paper (emphasis mine):

*"Something that is **objectively** a moral evil, but which is in a given instance performed **without knowledge of its evil** or under duress without consent to the evil."*

We see in the first quote that the "circumstances" are "objective" elements and we see in both quotes that "ignorance" (i.e., "advertence to the sinfulness of the act" and "without knowledge") is distinguished or separated out from what is considered "objectively" (materially) evil. "Extreme spiritual necessity", on the other hand, even though it is regarding the subject himself, is not a form of "ignorance" (or consent of the will). Therefore, it is correctly designated as a "circumstance". However, Mr. Johnson, by implicitly defining "subjective" as "anything regarding the subject himself" instead of "advertence to the sinfulness of the act"

¹⁴ McHugh, John, O.P., and Callan, Charles, O.P., *Moral Theology: A Complete Course based on St. Thomas Aquinas and the Best Modern Authorities, Introduction, Nos. 13 and 14.*

or “knowledge of its evil”, makes the fatal error of placing “ignorance” as a “circumstance” in his analysis of the morality of active attendance at the Novus Ordo Mass.

Ignorance May Only Excuse; It Does Not Give a Moral Right

Another and perhaps more simple way of pointing out that “ignorance” is not to be designated as a circumstance in the analysis of a moral act is that ignorance never gives one the moral *right* to perform an act with evil circumstances. In other words, ignorance never creates a condition where it takes precedence over evil circumstances and thereby gives one the moral *right* to perform the act in question. Rather, ignorance may merely *excuses* one from being guilty of sin before God.

*“Influence of the Various Kinds of Ignorance on the Voluntariness of Acts.--(a) Ignorance of an act, whether as to its **substance or quality**, makes an act involuntary, when the ignorance itself is involuntary, as will be explained in paragraph 29. Hence, if we refer to ignorance that is not blameworthy and to the guilt of violating the law of God, we may say: ‘**Ignorance excuses.**’”¹⁵*

Two things that should be taken from the above quote:

- 1) Ignorance of a moral act can be as regards to the act’s substance (i.e., object) or quality, which pertains to the circumstances among other things.¹⁶ Here “ignorance” is distinguished from the circumstances thereby lending additional credence to what was said above.
- 2) Ignorance excuses, and that only if it is not blameworthy (i.e., inculpable ignorance). To “excuse”, by definition, is to not hold someone blameworthy for some act wrongly or poorly performed.

On the other hand, a circumstance that is correctly designated as such in the analysis of a particular moral act may give someone the moral *right* to perform the act despite the existence of evil circumstances. In the example of “confessing to a schismatic priest”, the fact of one “being in immediate danger of death” causes the presence of the circumstance of “grave spiritual necessity”. This circumstance takes precedence over the circumstance that the priest is a schismatic. Hence, one has the moral *right* to confess to him. This moral right justifies his act.

I would like to now make the further distinctions I earlier said I would make. It is acceptable to state that “there can be exceptions made to objective moral principles due to circumstances” if we simply mean that even though the “object” of the moral act is not itself evil, one ought not to perform that act as a general rule; only when such and such “circumstances” exist may the act be performed. Using the example given earlier, as a general rule one ought not to confess to a schismatic priest (object); however, one being in the immediate danger of death, which thereby causes a circumstance of grave spiritual necessity, morally permits him to do so. The problem here, though, is one of imprecision in that the “object” may be mistakenly thought to be the sole “objective” moral principle. However, again, the “circumstances” (and “end”) do form part of the “objective” moral principle as well. It is understandable that because in a particular moral act there is generally one species that defines the object, whereas there can be many applicable “circumstances”, it is more simple to just place the “object” as the “objective” moral principle, but we must not let this make us forget that all three sources of morality (object, end, and circumstances) form the “objective” elements of a moral act. If Mr. Johnson clearly understood this, he would not have erroneously used the science of casuistry to defend the proposition that “objective principles may allow

¹⁵ McHugh, John, O.P., and Callan, Charles, O.P., *Moral Theology: A Complete Course based on St. Thomas Aquinas and the Best Modern Authorities, Introduction, Article 2, No. 28 (emphases mine)*.

¹⁶ Earlier I mentioned that circumstances modify the object in an accidental manner. “Substance” and the “Nine Accidents” are “Categories of Being”. “Quality” is one of the Nine Accidents. St. Thomas Aquinas uses the concepts of “substance” and “accident” in an analogous manner when speaking about moral acts (ST I-II, Q. 18, Art. 3).

for exceptions when applied to concrete individual cases due to circumstances”. Instead, he would have argued it using the general principles of morality and their implications.

In defence of his position that ignorance is a legitimate circumstance in the analysis of actively attending the Novus Ordo Mass, Mr. Johnson quotes Archbishop Lefebvre and other priests. He concludes the following in Point #4 of his paper:

“There can be no doubt, therefore, that neither the SSPX, Archbishop Lefebvre, Avrille, Fr. Chazal, Fr. Peter Scott, etc. ever intended to bind the ignorant (or those in necessity). Consequently, one cannot justly charge Bishop Williamson with having departed from this teaching.”

The quotes of these clergymen provided by Mr. Johnson do speak about ignorance. However, Mr. Johnson laces them with an interpretation that fits his erroneous paradigm that I have already refuted above. In none of the quotes provided do the clergymen admit that ignorance is truly a “circumstance” as defined and explained above or that it gives one a moral right to actively attend the Novus Ordo Mass. Again, ignorance may only excuse one from the guilt of sin.

Extreme Spiritual Necessity: Justification for Novus Ordo Mass Attendance?

What about “extreme spiritual necessity” as a circumstance? Does this not give one the moral right to actively attend the Novus Ordo Mass? Assuming again that active attendance at the Novus Ordo Mass is *not* intrinsically evil, I answer “no”. Even though I agree that “extreme spiritual necessity” is a true circumstance in analyzing a moral act, when has the Church ever taught that actively attending Mass or even receiving Holy Communion when one hasn’t done so for a long time is of “extreme spiritual necessity”? If she did, then why in the history of the Church have Catholics living in Russia or other countries where schismatics were in the majority and Catholic churches were few and far in between not been given the permission to attend Masses celebrated by schismatic priests or receive Holy Communion from them? It is because the Church has never considered these acts as being of “extreme spiritual necessity”. Therefore, I don’t either. Furthermore, why does Sean Johnson not claim “extreme spiritual necessity” as a justification for the followers of Archbishop Lefebvre to actively attend the Novus Ordo Mass? His paper is silent on this question.

As for quotes from clergymen that actively attending the Novus Ordo Mass and/or receiving Holy Communion is of “extreme spiritual necessity”, the only quote that appears on the surface to be relevant is the following (emphasis by Mr. Johnson):

*“In 1975, he (Archbishop Lefebvre) still admitted that one could ‘assist occasionally’ at the new Mass when one feared going without Communion for a long time. However, in 1977 he was **more or less** absolute: ‘To avoid conforming to the evolution slowly taking place in the minds of priests, we must avoid -I could **almost say** completely- assisting at the new Mass.’”*

It is true that Archbishop Lefebvre was not as resolute on forbidding attendance at the Novus Ordo Mass several years after its promulgation. His stance in the 1980s, however, was one of absoluteness. This will be demonstrated later in this paper. Nonetheless, the statement that “one could ‘assist occasionally’ at the new Mass when one feared going without Communion for a long time” should not be construed as meaning that the Archbishop himself believed that receiving Holy Communion when one hasn’t done so in a long time was truly of “extreme spiritual necessity”. The Archbishop was surely aware that the Church did not teach this. Rather, we should construe that the Archbishop was simply viewing it from the point of a person

fearing for his own soul the consequences of not receiving Holy Communion for a long time, especially if he had been receiving Holy Communion regularly. I concede that this was a weak position for the Archbishop to take, but it is also understandable given that the Novus Ordo Mass was only in existence for 6 years at that point. Sometimes we need to see the bad fruits of a change before taking a firmer position against it. The 1981 Declaration of Fidelity, however, put an end to any compromise with the Novus Ordo Mass. The following is an example of the resolute position the Archbishop held shortly before his death regarding those who believe they need to attend the Novus Ordo Mass when the Traditional Mass is not available (emphases mine):

*“Make the effort to go once a month and do 100 km if necessary, to attend the Catholic Mass! Like in the missions, we were visiting our faithful’s three times a year. We could not do more! That was the average. This didn’t mean that they were bad Christians. They could not do it otherwise. It is not an impossible thing. So we say: **‘But am I not doing a grave sin by not going to Mass?’ Not at that Mass! It does not oblige under pain of grave sin. We are never forced to do an act that tends to diminish our faith. It’s not possible. God cannot force us to do an act like this. On the other hand, we are seriously obliged to do everything possible to attend the Mass of St. Pius V, the Catholic Mass. There, the obligation remains, but not for a rite that is almost Protestant. On the contrary, there is an obligation not to go.**”¹⁷*

Contention regarding Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre’s Position(s) on Attending the Novus Ordo Mass

Mr. Johnson, in Point #4 of his paper, protests the argument that Archbishop Lefebvre became so resolute later on in his position regarding active attendance at the Novus Ordo Mass that he outright no longer give permission for anybody whosoever to do so (emphasis mine):

*“There can be no doubt, therefore, that neither the SSPX, Archbishop Lefebvre, Avrille, Fr. Chazal, Fr. Peter Scott, etc. **ever** intended to bind the ignorant (or those in necessity). Consequently, one cannot justly charge Bishop Williamson with having departed from this teaching.”*

Mr. Johnson appeals to a spiritual conference given by Archbishop Lefebvre in 1979 to justify his conclusion. I have already refuted this in a blog post called “No Public Apology Forthcoming to Bishop Williamson”.¹⁸ In this post, I stated the following (emphasis not in original post):

*“The Archbishop in this purported evidence is simply considering the precise judgement that should be made on those priests who celebrate the New Mass and those faithful who attend the New Mass. The Archbishop here recognizes that the matter of celebrating or attending the New Mass is grave and that their full consent on the part of those who celebrate it or attend it. However, the Archbishop also recognizes that there is the lack of knowledge regarding the gravity of the matter on the part of many who fully consent. Therefore, they do not subjectively sin. One must be careful then when broaching this subject with such people. **However, nowhere does the Archbishop state in this purported evidence that it is okay to counsel such people that it is morally acceptable to celebrate or attend the New Mass.** Rather, the Archbishop emphasizes that such people must not be condemned. After all, the pope, bishops, and priests approve of the New Mass. Therefore, to tell them that the New Mass is evil and that consequently one must not celebrate it or attend it has to be done carefully and gently. As a matter of fact, there may even be times when it is better not to mention it at all. For example, let us say that someone who you just met happens to tell you that she is a Catholic and that she attended a wonderful Mass that very morning. Let us also say*

¹⁷ <http://www.ecclesiamilitans.com/2016/02/15/archbishop-marcel-lefebvre-on-the-novus-ordo-missae>

¹⁸ <http://www.ecclesiamilitans.com/2016/04/16/no-public-apology-forthcoming-to-bishop-williamson>

that by the conversation it is clear that she attended a New Mass. Depending on the situation, it may be better to keep your mouth shut and not bring up the evils of the New Mass as you reckon that it is not an opportune time and that hence she would not benefit if you brought up the subject. Rather, you surmise that she may actually get turned off. There is no sin committed by you in keeping silent in this case. Now it is true that Bishop Williamson handled the case of the lady in Mahopac, NY carefully and gently. However, the problem is that he advised her that she could continue attending the New Mass given her circumstances. This was done in the context of a soul seeking direct counsel from a shepherd of souls on the matter of the New Mass. In this situation, Bishop Williamson had a duty to tell her the truth about the evils of the New Mass and consequently counsel her to stop attending it. But that is not what he did!"

Mr. Johnson only extrapolates his conclusion from the words of the Archbishop given in this conference; nowhere does the Archbishop explicitly state it. Rather, it is safe to say that by this point in time, 1979, and for certain the years that followed, the Archbishop was absolute in his position regarding active attendance at the Novus Ordo Mass. The quote from the Archbishop shortly before his death, which I provided above, is evidence of this and so is the 1981 Declaration of Fidelity, which I shall go into more detail later in this paper.

Mr. Johnson, in Point #18 of his paper, tries to paint in a corner those who, like myself, claim that Archbishop Lefebvre changed his position over the years regarding active attendance at the Novus Ordo Mass:

"Finally, it is worth observing that, if Archbishop Lefebvre's position regarding Novus Ordo Mass attendance evolved over time (despite his having clearly understood its objective evil back in 1969, when he was steering the committee of bishops and cardinals who were to produce the Ottaviani Intervention), it evinces clearly that the matter of Novus Ordo Mass attendance is one of prudence, and not doctrine."

"To oppose this contention, we would be forced to admit that either Archbishop Lefebvre's position was incoherent (i.e., Allowing for many years attendance at the Novus Ordo, despite clearly understanding its evils), or, that Archbishop Lefebvre changed his doctrinal position (which means he was in doctrinal error from 1969 – 1977, which the Ottaviani Intervention clearly shows was not the case)."

Contrary to Mr. Johnson, I agree with the position that Archbishop Lefebvre grew in understanding over the years of the evilness of the Novus Ordo Mass, which resulted in him taking an absolutist position regarding active attendance. The following is an extract of a conference that the Archbishop gave in Econe on April 11, 1990 (emphasis mine):

*"You have on that subject some explanations from the book of Mr. Salleron, those are in my opinion, probably the best ones which were given and the most complete. He really made a study on n.o.m. It's hard to do it more perfectly and more completely than what he did very courageously. He is not afraid to say in which way the n.o.m. is equivocal. There are three chapters, one after the other, which show that it is equivocal and it is clear that the n.o.m. favors heresy. For those reasons, the n.o.m. is a failure. There are three chapters which are very well written for us now. Also, **his whole analysis of the n.o.m. and the whole history with all very well studied documents are really enlightening.** If someone is still adhering to the n.o.m. after having read that book, it is because he will never understand anything. **Besides, that is why I brought it with me to the Holy Office.** And then, when they talked with me about the n.o.m., they interrogated me. 'So concerning the n.o.m.; how is it that you say some rather serious things about it?' So, I can assure you they asked me questions. It's shocking... 'Do you maintain that a faithful Catholic can think and affirm that a sacramental rite, especially the one of the Mass, approved and promulgated by the Pope,*

can be nonconforming with the Catholic faith or favor heresy?’ I said: ‘Well here! You are holding the book. It’s not even my words, you see! But I agree absolutely with what he says: equivocal Mass, Mass favoring heresy ...’

*“So, I also advise you to have this in your library, this book by Salleron, and to give it to the people who are hesitant. ‘But, even so, the n.o.m., we know priests who are brave, who are good and who are trying say it well etc....’ Read this! You will see! It is the n.o.m. in itself! It is not the priest who is saying it. It is not because he says it piously or anything that the new rite changes. It is not because it changes anything in the rite of the Mass. It is obvious that this new rite is a rite that has been made only to draw us closer to the Protestants! **That is clear! Finally, clear!**”¹⁹*

The book that Archbishop Lefebvre refers to in this extract was written by a Louis Salleron and entitled “La Nouvelle Messe”. It was originally published in December 1970. The second edition was published in September 1976.²⁰ The Archbishop presented this book to the Holy Office on January 11 and 12, 1979, when he was called in to be interrogated about the Novus Ordo Mass and other topics.²¹ What we have here, then, is evidence that the Archbishop’s understanding of the evilness of the Novus Ordo Mass did not remain stagnant and fixed in 1969. Rather, it grew over time. Faced with an unprecedented situation in the history of the Church and with the pope and virtually every bishop in the world against him, it is perfectly understandable that the Archbishop would not immediately come out and declare active attendance at the Novus Ordo Mass as being intrinsically evil. It would take, instead, some years of prayer, study, and reflection for him to reach that conclusion.

As another example of Archbishop Lefebvre’s growth in understanding, let us hear his words spoken in 1990 regarding the Second Vatican Council (emphases mine):

*“The **more one analyzes** the documents of Vatican II, and the **more one analyzes** their interpretation by the authorities of the Church, the **more one realizes** that what is at stake is not merely superficial errors, a few mistakes, ecumenism, religious liberty, collegiality, a certain Liberalism, but rather a wholesale perversion of the mind, a whole new philosophy based on modern philosophy, on subjectivism.”²²*

Let us not, then, interpret Archbishop’s move towards becoming more strict over the years regarding active attendance at the Novus Ordo Mass as a sign of incoherence or doctrinal error on his part, or that active attendance at the Novus Ordo Mass is a matter of prudence. Rather, let us see it as movement along a continuum.

Part II – Novus Ordo Mass Attendance and Intrinsic Evil

We now begin the second part of this paper in which I shall demonstrate, contrary to Mr. Johnson’s arguments, that active attendance at the Novus Ordo Mass is intrinsically evil, that the Archbishop’s position regarding advice on active attendance at the Novus Ordo Mass, as enshrined in the Declaration of Fidelity, corresponds with this stance, and that, consequently, Bishop Williamson’s advice to the lady in Mahopac transgressed the Declaration on this point.

¹⁹ <http://www.ecclesiamilitans.com/2016/02/15/archbishop-marcel-lefebvre-on-the-novus-or-do-missae>

²⁰ <http://tradinews.blogspot.ca/1984/12/itineraires-quinze-ans-de-guerre.html>. Go to the dates mentioned.

²¹ http://catholicapedia.net/Documents/cahier-saint-charlemagne/documents/C263_Mgr-Lefebvre-et-le-Saint-Office_40p.pdf. Go to the top of p. 34.

²² *Two Years after the Consecrations*, Address Given to Priests in Ecône, Switzerland on September 6, 1990.

The Novus Ordo Mass and Intrinsic Evil in Things vs. Acts

Let us recall that an act that is “intrinsically” evil is one that may never be performed. Even if the end is the most noble and even if the circumstances are perfectly good, an intrinsically evil act remains forbidden. Now if one cannot ever perform an intrinsically evil act himself, it follows that he cannot ever advise another to perform an intrinsically evil act either. It stands to reason, then, that if we demonstrate that the active attendance at the Novus Ordo Mass is intrinsically evil, one can neither actively attend the Novus Ordo Mass himself nor advise another to do so. Mr. Johnson, however, attempts to demonstrate that active attendance at the Novus Ordo Mass is *not* intrinsically evil, which then allows him to defend the permission to continue attending the Novus Ordo Mass that Bishop Williamson gave to the lady in Mahopac.

Before we continue, I want to say something about those (I am *not* speaking about Mr. Johnson here) who make a fuss trying to make fine distinctions between the terms “intrinsically”, “inherently”, or “in itself”; they are grasping at straws. All three terms mean essentially the same thing and can therefore be used interchangeably. They all refer to the nature of a thing, that is, to the thing’s internal constitution. When applied to moral acts, they refer to the “object” of the act. As I mentioned earlier, the “object” gives the moral act its nature. This is important to point out because the Declaration of Fidelity does not use the term “intrinsically” or the term “inherently”. Rather, the term used is “in itself” when referring to the Novus Ordo Mass.²³ Here is the precise statement of the Declaration:

“...the new rite is in itself bad.”

The Latin translation for “in itself” is “in se”. The Latin translation for “in itself bad” or “bad in itself” is “malum in se”.²⁴ This term is applied to moral acts to mean that an act is evil in its very nature (i.e., intrinsically or inherently evil, or evil in its object). However, Mr. Johnson attempts to make a distinction between “intrinsic” evil in *things* and “intrinsic” evil in *acts*. In Point #15, he writes the following (emphasis by Mr. Johnson):

“Furthermore, we need to distinguish intrinsic evil as applied to things/objects (e.g., Novus Ordo) and intrinsic evil as applied to human acts (attending the Novus Ordo).

“Speaking firstly of the concept of intrinsic evil as applied to the Novus Ordo Missae itself (i.e., to objects/things, rather than to human acts), the SSPX, Archbishop Lefebvre, and Bishop Williamson have always taught along these lines:

*‘At best, [the new Mass] provides a deficient spiritual diet to the faithful. The correct definition of evil—lack of a due good—clearly shows that **the New Mass is evil in and of itself** regardless of the circumstances. It is not evil by positive profession of heresy. It is evil by lacking what Catholic dogma should profess: the True Sacrifice, the Real Presence, the ministerial priesthood.’*

²³ “He (Archbishop Lefebvre) did not say the New Mass was intrinsically bad in the sense in which one can say that something is intrinsically perverse; however, he considered that it was bad in itself and not only because of the circumstances in which the rite was performed (e.g. a table instead of an altar or Communion in the hand).”

Tissier de Mallerai, Bernard, *The Biography of Marcel Lefebvre, 2004, Angelus Press, pp. 464-465* (in brackets mine).

*“This Mass is not bad in a **merely accidental or extrinsic way**. There is something **in it** that is truly bad. It was based on a model of the Mass according to Cranmer and Taize (1959). As I said in Rome to those who interviewed me: ‘It is a poisoned Mass!’”*

Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre in 1981, quoted by Bernard Tissier de Mallerai in *The Biography of Marcel Lefebvre, p. 465* (emphases mine).

²⁴ <http://legal-dictionary.thefreedictionary.com/Malum+in+se>

“It is in this sense, therefore, that the SSPX has taught that the Rite itself is intrinsically evil.

“But does it necessarily follow, therefore, that all those who attend the Novus Ordo are themselves committing an intrinsically evil act?”

“No.”

By making his distinction between intrinsically evil *things* and intrinsically evil *acts* and then proceeding to define the moral object of attending the Novus Ordo Mass as “Mass attendance” and not “Novus Ordo Mass attendance”, Mr. Johnson attempts to demonstrate that Archbishop Lefebvre and the SSPX made the same distinction so as to say that the *Rite* (i.e., text and rubrics) of the Novus Ordo Mass is intrinsically evil, but that active *attendance* at the Novus Ordo Mass is not intrinsically evil. Mr. Johnson concludes Point #15 as such (emphases by Mr. Johnson):

*“Therefore, we can say with the SSPX, Archbishop Lefebvre, or Avrille, et al, that as regards the Novus Ordo Rite **itself**, it is inherently (or intrinsically) evil, but as regards Novus Ordo Mass attendance, since the object is good (i.e., Mass attendance), **attendance** cannot be intrinsically evil.”*

There is a significant problem with this line of reasoning and conclusion. While it is true that Archbishop Lefebvre and the SSPX taught that the Novus Ordo Rite is evil in itself, they could not, strictly speaking, treat the Rite as a “thing” for two key reasons. One reason is that a “thing” cannot be truly “intrinsically” evil. The reason why a thing cannot be truly intrinsically evil is because every thing that exists, immaterial and material, was created by God (goodness Itself) directly or indirectly. Hence, even when man takes that which God created (e.g., chemical elements that exist in nature) and formulates what we call an evil thing (birth control pill), the thing “itself” is not truly “intrinsically” evil.²⁵ Rather, the intrinsic evil belongs to the “use” we make of the thing. In other words, the intrinsic evil is in regards to the object of the “moral act”. As it applies to the Novus Ordo Rite, the “use” is its “celebration” (or active attendance), which is intrinsically evil. It would be of virtually no concern if the acts to be performed and words to be spoken were only written down on paper, but no priest ever used the Rite for the celebration of the Mass. To substantiate my point further, what if it was discovered that the birth control pill formulation was actually good for human males’ health in some way? What if I studied the Novus Ordo Rite by reading a missal in order to point out its problems or what if I used the same missal to keep a fire going? These would all be good *uses* of these *things*. The reality is that you will never see St. Thomas Aquinas or any Thomist worthy of the name apply the term “intrinsic evil” to a “thing”. The term will only be applied by them to a “moral act”. The second reason Archbishop Lefebvre and the SSPX could not, strictly speaking, treat the Novus Ordo Rite as a “thing” is because a rite is a series of acts performed and words spoken, and as such, it really pertains to moral acts than things. The rite may be recorded in a thing (e.g., a book) as words, but the rite itself is not the book or the words recorded in the book. Therefore, when the Archbishop and the SSPX taught that the Novus Ordo Rite is evil in itself, it must be taken to mean that the *celebration* of the Novus Ordo Mass is not *made* evil by the additions, subtractions, and/or modifications of the priest (e.g., adding prayers, removing prayers, modifying the words of consecration, etc. – these are all moral acts) to the Rite authorized by Rome. Rather, the evil exists in the *celebration* of the Rite *as* authorized by Rome. To overlook this point is to overlook the fundamental reason why the Archbishop and the SSPX took the position that the Novus Ordo Mass is evil in itself. Any reference, therefore, to the Novus Ordo Rite as a “thing” must be understood analogously. The conclusion from all this is that, contrary to Mr. Johnson’s

²⁵ If we understand this, then we also understand that not even the devil himself is “intrinsically” evil.

conclusion, Archbishop Lefebvre and the SSPX taught that Novus Ordo Mass *attendance* is *intrinsically evil* (or evil in itself), that is, the *object* of the moral act is “Novus Ordo Mass attendance” and *not* simply “Mass attendance”. Here are a few quotes from the Archbishop and the SSPX that support my conclusion (emphases and what is in brackets and not italicized mine):

*“The New Mass, **even when said** (celebration of the Novus Ordo Rite as the moral object) **with piety and respect for the liturgical rules** (i.e., as authorized by Rome and therefore without evil circumstances added by the priest), is subject to the same reservations since it is impregnated with the spirit of Protestantism. It bears **within it** (in itself) a poison harmful to the faith.”²⁶*

*“However, regardless of the gravity of the sacrilege, the New Mass still remains a sacrilege, and it is still **in itself sinful** (regarding a moral act). Furthermore, it is never permitted to knowingly and willingly **participate in an evil or sinful thing** (participation in the Novus Ordo Rite as the moral object), even if it is only venially sinful. For the end does not justify the **means** (participation in the Novus Ordo Rite as the moral object). Consequently, although it is a good thing to want to assist at Mass and satisfy one’s Sunday obligation, it is **never permitted to use a sinful means** (participation in the Novus Ordo Rite as the moral object) to do this. **To assist at the New Mass** (participation in the Novus Ordo Rite as the moral object), for a person who is aware of the objective sacrilege involved, is consequently at least a venial sin. It is opportunism. Consequently, it is not permissible for a traditional Catholic, who understands that the **New Mass** (the Novus Ordo Rite, its celebration or active attendance) is insulting to Our Divine Savior, **to assist at the New Mass** (participation in the Novus Ordo Rite as the moral object), and this **even** if there is no danger of scandal to others or of the perversion of one’s own Faith (as in an older person, for example), and **even** if it is the only Mass available (regardless of the circumstances).”²⁷*

*“At best, [the new Mass] provides a deficient spiritual diet to the faithful. The correct definition of evil—lack of a due good—clearly shows that the New Mass is evil in and of itself **regardless of the circumstances**. It is not evil by positive profession of heresy. It is evil by lacking what Catholic dogma should profess: the True Sacrifice, the Real Presence, the ministerial priesthood.”²⁸*

Let us now provide a link to an audio in which Bishop Williamson himself publicly acknowledged the intrinsic evilness of actively attending the Novus Ordo Mass:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f0gV0qyZN50>

In this recording, Bishop Williamson says that the New Mass is “illicit in any case”, that it is “intrinsically offensive to God” and “intrinsically evil”, and that “one may not attend a valid, illicit Mass any more than a Satanic Mass”. It is clear from this audio that Bishop Williamson once held publicly the position that one may never actively attend the Novus Ordo Mass even when valid.

Moral Object: “Mass Attendance” or “Novus Ordo Mass Attendance”?

In his paper, Mr. Johnson decides to not just rely on what Archbishop Lefebvre and the SSPX taught about the moral object of the act of actively attending the Novus Ordo Mass. In Point #16, he goes further by attempting to prove *theologically* that the moral object of the act of actively attending the

²⁶ Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre, *Open Letter to Confused Catholics*, 1986, Angelus Press, p. 29.

²⁷ Fr. Peter Scott, *from the Questions & Answers section, The Angelus, September 2002 Issue.*

²⁸ <http://sspx.org/en/new-mass-legit>. Note that Mr. Johnson tried to use this quote to support his conclusion, but “regardless of the circumstances” makes it clear that the quote concerns itself with the matter of the “moral act”, that is, the “celebration” of the Novus Ordo Mass. Read “....the New Mass is evil in and of itself regardless of the circumstances **in which it is celebrated**”.

Novus Ordo Mass is indeed simply “Mass attendance” and not “Novus Ordo Mass attendance”. He is so confident of his proof that he concludes as such:

“It is clear, therefore, that to maintain that the moral object is “Novus Ordo Mass” attendance (rather than simply ‘Mass attendance’) is erroneous, and can only be maintained at the expense of rejecting an axiom of Thomistic and scholastic philosophy around which the Church, Tradition, and all approved theologians have expressed unanimity since the time of St. Augustine.”

“There is no escaping this conclusion.”

What is this axiom of Thomistic and scholastic philosophy that Mr. Johnson speak about? It is the following:

“Nothing is desired in the will, unless it is first apprehended in the intellect.”

Using this axiom, Mr. Johnson reasons that a person *ignorant* of the evil of the *Novus Ordo Mass* cannot *will* to actively attend the *Novus Ordo Mass*. He only is only *aware* of the *Mass* and therefore can only *will* to attend the *Mass*. Since the *object* of an act must be *known* and *willed* by the person performing the act,²⁹ the *object* in this case must therefore be “Mass attendance” and not “Novus Ordo Mass attendance”. There is nothing formally illogical with Mr. Johnson’s reasoning. However, I do have a problem with the matter of his logic. I shall proceed to provide an explication of the problem.

It is true that when analyzing a case to determine culpability, we must understand what the person wills to perform (i.e., the object), the circumstances under which that act is performed, and the desired end. Leaving aside the circumstances and end for the sake of brevity, if we are mistaken about the object willed, then we will be attributing an act to the subject that he did not actually perform. For example, I see two people walking side by side in front of me. The person to my left puts his hand in the back pocket of the person to my right and pulls out his wallet. I interpret the act as one of theft. However, I later learn that the person that was on my right had his hands full (which I didn’t realize) and asked the person that was on my left to pull his wallet out for him. Therefore, what I judged as theft actually was not and therefore the person is not culpable of theft. *However*, the tables could be reversed where the person performing an act could be mistaken about the moral object of the act. For example, a person is at a birthday party and decides to leave before the party is over. As there are so many female guests, purses were all placed in one small room that was not well lit. The person takes what she thinks to be her purse and leaves the party. However, she was mistaken and actually took another woman’s purse that looks like hers. As far as she was concerned, however, the moral object of the act was “taking that which is mine”, but this is not what actually took place. What actually took place was “taking that which belongs to someone else without their consent”. Therefore, the woman was mistaken as to the moral object. Was she *subjectively* guilty of sin? No. Was the act *objectively* evil? Yes.

A second example:

A man and a woman who are not married engage in sexual intercourse with each other. They are both ignorant of the precept of the Natural Law that forbids sexual intercourse outside of marriage.³⁰ As far as they are concerned, the moral object is “expressing their love for each other”. Are they *subjectively* guilty of fornication? No. Was the act *objectively* fornication? Yes.

²⁹ Mr. Johnson argues for this in Point #15 of his paper.

³⁰ Ignorance of the secondary precepts of the Natural Law, such as those of the Decalogue, is possible for a period of time. See *Handbook of Moral Theology, 1956, Mercier Press, Sections 68 and 70* by Dominic M. Prummer, O.P.

A third example:

A person actively attends a Tridentine Mass to adore God. Unknownst to him, the priest is a Modernist who feigns the words of Consecration. Hence, the host remains the substance of bread. The person worships the host. As far as he is concerned, the moral object is “adoration”. Is he *subjectively* guilty of idolatry? No. Was the act *objectively* idolatry? Yes.

We see here again in these examples the importance of distinguishing between the “objective” and “subjective” elements of a moral act. The object is an objective (material) element of sin, whereas advertence and consent are subjective (formal) elements of sin. Sometimes the object *willed* by the person is consonant with the object that is *actually taking place*. At other times, the object *willed* by the person is *not* consonant with the object that is *actually taking place*. In either case, the object that is *actually taking place* determines the act’s “objective” morality. The object *willed*, on the other hand, is a *product* of the deliberation process of the intellect (in relation to advertence) and the will (in relation to consent), which both determine the act’s “subjective” morality. If the intellect errs in the deliberation process regarding the object of an act that is to *actually take place*, the will, in receiving and consenting to that erroneous information, chooses an object (i.e., object *willed*) that is not consonant with what *actually takes place*. This error does not affect the “objective” morality of the act, but only the “imputability” of guilt (“subjective” morality) on the one performing the act.

“Error and ignorance in regard to the object or circumstances of the act to be placed, affect the judgment of the intellect and consequently the morality and imputability of the act.”³¹

In the third example mentioned above (the same line of reasoning that I am about to express applies to all three examples mentioned above) , if the person came to know, with a moral certitude, that the priest was indeed feigning the words of Consecration, what would happen if he, nonetheless, continued to worship the unconsecrated host? The object *willed* would then conform to the object *actually taking place* and consequently the objective (material) sin of idolatry would become a subjective (formal) sin of idolatry. The only change causing that transformation is the person becoming advertent to what is *actually taking place*. This shows the moral obligation of the subject to conform himself to objective moral truth and hence the predominance of the objective order over the subjective order in moral matters. If one disagrees with my argument and persists that the object *willed* is the only object we need to consider, then he is implicitly admitting that a person determines reality; this is pure subjectivism.

With the preceding argument, I have shown that Mr. Johnson’s conclusion that the moral object of actively attending the Novus Ordo Mass is “Mass attendance” and not “Novus Ordo Mass attendance” is not as inescapable as he thought. By making the object *willed* the sole factor in determining the moral object of an act, he excludes the object *actually taking place*, which is what truly defines the objective nature of the act. As such, his conclusion derives from a premise that is at best incomplete.

My next step is to show that “Novus Ordo Mass attendance” is the moral object. I admit that it is sufficient to state that “Mass attendance” is the moral object when speaking about all legitimate rites of the Catholic Church. Why? Because all legitimate rites of the Catholic Church are good. Therefore, there is no need to qualify “Mass attendance” by naming the rite being used to celebrate the Mass, unless one is doing so only for accidental reasons. However, when it comes to using the Novus Ordo Rite to celebrate the Mass, the act of active attendance is modified in its species (i.e., moral object). The species changes from a good one to an evil one. Therefore, it becomes necessary to specify “Novus

³¹ <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/14004b.htm> (emphases mine)

Ordo Mass attendance' as the moral object rather than just "Mass attendance". What precisely, then, is that evil species? Fr. Peter Scott gives us the answer (emphases mine):

*".....even if we could be certain of the validity of the Novus Ordo Masses celebrated in today's conciliar churches, it does not follow that they are pleasing to God. Much to the contrary, they are objectively **sacrilegious**, even if those who assist at them are not aware of it....."*

*"**Sacrilege** is a sin against the virtue of religion, and is defined as "the unbecoming treatment of a sacred person, place or thing as far as these are consecrated to God" (Jone, Moral Theology, p.108). The moral theologians explain that **sacrilege** is in itself and generally a mortal sin (ex genere suo), but that it is not always a mortal sin, because it can concern a relatively small or unimportant thing. Here we are speaking of a real **sacrilege**, the dishonoring of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, by the elimination of the prayers and ceremonies that protect its holiness, by the absence of respect, piety and adoration, and by the failure to express the Catholic doctrine of the Mass as a true propitiatory sacrifice for our sins.*

*".....regardless of the gravity of the **sacrilege**, the New Mass still remains a **sacrilege**, and it is still in itself sinful."³²*

Mr. Hugh Akins co-authored an excellent treatise on this subject called "Sacrilege according to St. Thomas Aquinas: A Critical Look at the New Mass".³³ In it, he states the following (emphases mine):

*"With regard to the new Mass our immediate concern here is not with the question of validity. **Our chief concern is the question of irreverence to God and the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.**"*

*"It is true that the spirit of religious indifference, which the new Ordo breathes and spreads, would be sufficient grounds to reject it simply because of the threat it poses to the faith of the people. For charity and its demands would override an obligation of a purely ecclesiastical law. But we are even going beyond that and charging that the new Ordo must be rejected not simply because it is offensive and dangerous to the faith of the people, but that **it must be rejected because it is irreverent to God, irreverent to the doctrine of the Mass, and when said validly, is a sacrilege against the most Holy Sacrament and Sacrifice of the altar.**"*

*"**The new Ordo is, we are charging, a grave and cruel offense against God!** The use of a doubtfully valid Consecration form, which is mortally sinful, would also, we think, of itself, justify our rejection of the "New Mass" as it is said in our parish churches. But **the use of a doubtfully valid Consecration form** in the Mass would not only justify our staying away from it but would actually compel us to stay away because this very act itself (i.e. using a doubtful form) **is also a sacrilege.** The Canon Lawyer and Moral Theologian, Fr. H. Jone, put it this way:*

*Matter and form must be certainly valid.
Hence, one may not follow a probable opinion
and use either doubtful matter or form.
Acting otherwise one commits a **sacrilege.**
(Moral Theology)"³⁴*

Later on in the treatise, Mr. Akins states the following (emphases mine):

³² Fr. Peter Scott, from the Questions & Answers section, *The Angelus*, September 2002 Issue.

³³ <http://ca-rc.com/books/sacrilege-according-to-st-thomas-aquinas>

³⁴ Chapter 3: The New Mass - Irreverence and Sacrilege.

*“.....a natural law which prohibits the performance of evil acts ‘never ceases to oblige in case of moral impossibility [i.e. grave difficulty].’ The reason is that ‘such laws forbid actions that are **intrinsically evil**. Therefore, idolatry, blasphemy, [**sacrilege**] onanism, perjury, etc., are not allowed even to save one’s life. All other laws cease to oblige when it is morally impossible to observe them’ (Jones, op. cit., p. 29).”³⁵*

Active attendance at the Novus Ordo Mass, whether valid or not, is a sacrilege, which is intrinsically evil. Therefore, “Novus Ordo Mass attendance” must be stated as the moral object.

The Declaration of Fidelity on Advising Novus Ordo Mass Attendance

Now we move to analyzing in more detail the Declaration of Fidelity to the Positions of the Society of St. Pius X. The full Declaration is as follows (emphases mine):

I, the undersigned, _____ (name) _____ recognize _____ as Pope of the Holy Catholic Church. That is why I am ready to pray in public for him as Sovereign Pontiff. I refuse to follow him when he departs from the Catholic tradition, especially in the questions of religious liberty and ecumenism, as also in the reforms which are harmful to the Church.

I grant that Masses celebrated according to the new rite are not all invalid. However, considering the bad translations of the Novus Ordo Missae, its ambiguity favoring its being interpreted in a Protestant sense, and the plurality of ways in which it can be celebrated, I recognize that the danger of invalidity is very great.

I affirm that the new rite of Mass does not, it is true, formulate any heresy in an explicit manner, but that it departs “in a striking manner overall as well as in detail, from the Catholic theology of the Holy Mass”, and for this reason the new rite is in itself bad.

That is why I shall never celebrate the Holy Mass according to this new rite, even if I am threatened with ecclesiastical sanctions; and I shall never advise anyone in a positive manner to take an active part in such a Mass.

Finally, I admit as being legitimate the liturgical reform of John XXIII. Hence I take all the liturgical books from it to be Catholic: the Missal, the Breviary, etc.; and I bind myself to make exclusive use of them according to their calendar and rubrics, in particular for the celebration of Mass and for the recitation in common of the Breviary.

In doing this I desire to show the obedience binding me to my superiors, as also the obedience binding me to the Roman Pontiff in all his legitimate acts.

Signed _____³⁶

This Declaration represents the mind and position of Archbishop Lefebvre from 1981 until 1991, the year of his death. As with most declarations, it is carefully formulated and hence must be given more weight than the Archbishop’s private conversations, sermons, or conferences regarding the same subject matter. As I mentioned earlier, seminarians were required to sign this Declaration prior to being ordained as priests of the SSPX. If a SSPX priest were to depart from even one statement of the Declaration, he may no longer declare himself a faithful spiritual son of the Archbishop.

The two paragraphs we are most concerned about related to this paper are those in bold. I repeat them here:

³⁵ Chapter 4: The Question of “Sunday Obligation”.

³⁶ <http://www.ecclesiamilitans.com/2016/04/04/declaration-of-fidelity-to-the-positions-of-the-society-of-st-pius-x>

I affirm that the new rite of Mass does not, it is true, formulate any heresy in an explicit manner, but that it departs “in a striking manner overall as well as in detail, from the Catholic theology of the Holy Mass”, and for this reason the new rite is in itself bad.

That is why I shall never celebrate the Holy Mass according to this new rite, even if I am threatened with ecclesiastical sanctions; and I shall never advise anyone in a positive manner to take an active part in such a Mass.

The first of the two paragraphs states that the Novus Ordo Rite does not contain explicit heresy, but given that it departs from the Catholic theology of the Mass, it is in itself bad. As I explained earlier, “in itself bad” is synonymous to “intrinsically evil” or “inherently evil”. Now notice in the second paragraph that because the Novus Ordo Rite is in itself bad, a SSPX priest must *never* celebrate Mass according to it. For the same reason, a SSPX priest must also *never* advise anyone in a positive manner to take an active part in such a Mass. We see here the *absolutist* position taken by the Archbishop in regards to both the celebration of the Novus Ordo Mass and its active attendance. There is clearly no allowance for circumstances to justify celebration or active attendance. How, then, does Mr. Johnson try to get around this? In Point #19 of his paper, Mr. Johnson takes note of the phrase “in a positive manner” of the Declaration to defend Bishop Williamson’s advice to the lady in Mahopac. He writes the following:

“To construe Bishop Williamson’s permission for this woman to continue attending the Novus Ordo as ‘advising someone in a positive manner’ to attend the Novus Ordo is surely a distorted perception of the case.

“To ‘permit’ is not the same as ‘to promote’.

“The former conveys a concession being made due to circumstances, or a toleration being extended; the latter conveys the idea of desiring that one attend the Novus Ordo.

“No sane mind would contend Bishop Williamson was promoting new Mass attendance by extending a concession or dispensation from the objective preclusion due to circumstance (in this case ignorance). If they did, they would likewise be bound to contend the same of Archbishop Lefebvre, in light of the 1979 quote above, which would be madness.”

So according to Mr. Johnson to “advise in a positive manner” means to “promote”. But where did he get this interpretation? He does not say. Nevertheless, does this interpretation even provide a continuity of thought? The Declaration binds SSPX priests to *never* celebrate the Novus Ordo Mass and, according to Mr. Johnson, it also binds them to never *promote* active attendance at the Novus Ordo Mass. I’m sorry, Mr. Johnson, but the second statement is too divergent from the first to sensibly flow from it. Furthermore, why would the Archbishop need to worry about SSPX priests, bred for Catholic Tradition, “promoting” active attendance at the Novus Ordo Mass? Not even the Superior General of the Priestly Fraternity of St. Peter needs to worry about his priests doing that!

For a proper interpretation of “in a positive manner”, let us turn to Fr. Juan Carlos Ortiz, a priest of the Catholic Resistance ordained in 1984 and still faithful to the mind of Archbishop Lefebvre. He provided me with this explanation:

“The distinction I use concerning the attendance to the NOM is based on the moral principle of co-operation.

"It's sinful to positively or actively or formally co-operate in the evil action of another.

"Now, the novus ordo missae is intrinsically evil.

"Therefore, no one should positively or actively or formally advise another to attend the NOM.

"Material or passive or negative co-operation of attending the NOM is permitted when there is no hope of stopping someone else from attending it. This kind of co-operation is not sinful because the co-operation is only remote. Only when there is a risk of a proximate grave scandal, then to act in this manner is not permitted and one must positively discourage another from attending."

Another priest, who is currently in the SSPX and wishes to remain anonymous, provided me with this explanation:

"To recommend in a positive manner is to tell the faithful that they can in good conscience actively assist at such rites. This is wrong quite simply because these rites are offensive to God. However, there are occasions in which priest is obliged to leave people in good faith, for a variety of reasons. He will not positively recommend that they assist at the New Mass, but to avoid a greater evil, he is not always obliged to tell them that they must not do so. To keep silence in this manner is not to recommend in a positive manner. The same principles are applied in Moral Theology to situations in which it can cause greater harm than good to tell a person that he must not do something wrong, and can transform a material sin into a formal sin."

It is clear from the explanations of these two priests that "in a positive manner" means to communicate to the recipient the message that it is morally okay, permitted, allowed, acceptable, etc. to actively attend the Novus Ordo Mass. On the contrary, the Declaration forbids a priest at all times to communicate this message in any manner whatsoever. The Declaration, however, for the sake of avoiding a greater evil, does not forbid silence or non-interference at certain times, or does not always oblige a priest to condemn active attendance. The key point is that active attendance at the Novus Ordo mass is never morally acceptable. This is the correct meaning of "I shall never advise anyone in a positive manner to take an active part in such a Mass".

I stated earlier that one is never morally allowed to perform an intrinsically evil act, and that it follows from this that he may never advise another to perform an intrinsically evil act. The Declaration is in agreement with this line of reasoning. If the priest is never allowed to celebrate the Novus Ordo Mass because it is intrinsically evil (i.e., bad in itself), then it follows that he may never advise another to actively take part in that intrinsically evil act (in this case, as a participant). Otherwise, the priest would be co-operating in that intrinsically evil act. Fr. Ortiz confirms this in his statement.

Allow me to use the analogy of God's permissive will to drive home the point even further:

God permits evil, but He never positively wills it.

God often doesn't interfere with the commission of evil acts, but He never says, "Yes, you may do evil." In like manner, a priest faithful to the Declaration often doesn't interfere with one actively attending the Novus Ordo Mass, but he must never say, "Yes, you may actively attend the Novus Ordo Mass." On the contrary, this is what he *is* saying when he advises "in a positive manner".

Conclusion

Since Bishop Williamson gave permission (i.e., the “okay”; I agree that he did not “promote”) to the lady in Mahopac to continue to attending the Novus Ordo Mass, he advised “in a positive manner”.³⁷ It has been well over one year since that day and he still has not retracted. Since the fight against the Novus Ordo Mass is one of the core battles of Archbishop Lefebvre’s fight for Catholic Tradition, this deviation from the Archbishop’s position is enormous. We cannot overlook it. By his words, Bishop Williamson has opened up the floodgates within the Catholic Resistance on a matter that had already been settled in 1981. It is truly a shame to see the turmoil and confusion that has ensued. Let us pray that one day soon His Excellency rectifies the situation by returning to the position of his spiritual father. Until then, he cannot truly call himself the Archbishop’s faithful spiritual son on this matter.

As for those of us who want to remain wholly faithful to Archbishop Lefebvre, the modern day St. Athanasius, let us continue his fight. We must reject the Novus Ordo Mass wholesale. We must never celebrate it, actively attend it, or advise others “in a positive manner” to actively attend it.

+ FOR THE REIGN OF THE SACRED AND IMMACULATE HEARTS! +

³⁷ See Footnote #3.