

Weak Tea?

September 6, 2008

To a layman asking whether one should – or could – attend today the (Tridentine) Mass of a priest ordained in 1972 with the 1968 new rite of Ordination, an SSPX priest answered that the SSPX “would not recommend it.” The layman found this answer “too weak to be definitive.” His hope for stronger answers is surely shared by many souls suffering from today’s all-round confusion.

However, clear answers are not always possible. Where an object is grey, one cannot say it is black or white. At the point of dawn, one cannot say it is night or day, because it is in between. Where the truth is confusing, it is more important to try to be true than to try to be clear. Alas, with Novus Ordo ordinations as with Novus Ordo Masses, no doubt they are more and more often invalid as the pre-Conciliar Church’s ways drop more and more into the past, but even today one cannot truthfully say that all Novus Ordo sacraments are automatically invalid.

A sacrament to be valid requires valid Minister, Form, Matter, and Intention. In 1972 it is reasonable to assume (one can always check) that the ordaining Minister (bishop) and his sacramental Intention were still Catholic. The Form of the 1968 rite of priestly Ordination includes (even in English) all the elements necessary for validity. And one can assume that the Bishop laid both hands on the future priest’s head, which means there was the Matter. For a 2002 Novus Ordo ordination the need to check elements necessary for validity is definitely more pressing, but for a 1972 ordination, surely the SSPX priest’s abstaining in his answer from a clear condemnation was reasonable.

Nevertheless he said the SSPX “would not recommend” attendance at such a priest’s (Tridentine) Mass, and surely that is also

reasonable. Besides the remote off- chance (in 1972) that the ordination was invalid, the Mass in question may be set in a whole Novus Ordo context liable eventually to undermine the Catholic Faith of those attending.

However, unless a priest knows personally such a celebrant and his manner of celebrating the Tridentine Mass, he must leave to Catholics who do know him to judge whether his way of celebrating is of a nature to nourish or to undermine the Faith of Catholics. Certainly not all Novus Ordo priests today picking up the Tridentine Mass mean to bring souls round to Vatican II. On the contrary.

Almighty God, we beg of You, restore order in Your Church!

Kyrie eleison.