

Press Release from the Latin Mass Society

Latin Mass Society Patrons lead a joint letter to save the Traditional Mass

The Latin Mass Society welcomes the intervention of 48 prominent figures of culture, academia, and politics, including Catholics and non-Catholics, in a letter to *The Times* published today, in support of the Traditional Mass.

The letter appeals to the value of the ancient Mass both as a cultural artefact—‘a cathedral of text and gesture’—and an irreplaceable spiritual treasure, with a unique ability to ‘encourage silence and contemplation’.

It was organised by Sir James MacMillan, a Patron of the Latin Mass Society, whose article accompanies the letter in *The Times*, and is signed by another Patron, Lord Moore of Etchingham (Charles Moore).

Sir James MacMillan comments:

The people who have signed this letter are an impressively mixed bunch! Catholics, Protestants, Jews, agnostics atheists - all convinced that the Traditional Latin Mass is a thing of great beauty, wonder and awe, and a profound shaper of our culture, one way or another over the centuries. I stand with them in my appreciation of the form – ‘a cathedral of text and gesture’, which has given rise to great music and poetry through the ages. But it is as an observant and loyally practising Catholic that I wrote my cover article for The Times. If Rome were to do what is rumoured, it would be grossly unjust and make an utter mockery of ‘synodality’. And many observers outside the Church, in these difficult days of ideological and political tension, see this now as an issue of religious freedom. It is surely a mark of diversity, inclusion and equity that the Church can celebrate different rites - the Old Dominican rite, the liturgy of the Ordinariate, the rites of our eastern co-religionists, the Novus Ordo and, God willing, the Traditional Latin Mass.

Today’s letter references the petition of 1971, signed by 105 intellectuals, musicians, politicians, and cultural figures, which prompted Pope Paul VI to allow the continued celebration of the Traditional Mass. This permission applied at first only to England and Wales, but it was extended to the whole world in 1984. This permission is threatened today.

The 1971 petition was signed by many of the most prominent cultural figures of the day: not only Agatha Christie, but the Controller of Radio 3, the Director of the National Gallery, a former Director of Music at Westminster Cathedral, two Anglican bishops, the philosopher Iris Murdoch, the sculptress Barbara Hepworth, the soprano Joan Sutherland, the novelist Robert Graves, and many others. An earlier petition, in 1966, had been signed by Benjamin Britten and W.H. Auden; a later petition, in 2007, was signed by Franco Zeffirelli and René Girard.

The strong support for the Traditional Mass by non-Catholic cultural figures derives from its place in world culture. As the 1971 petition expressed it:

The rite in question, in its magnificent Latin text, has also inspired a host of priceless achievements in the arts— not only mystical works, but works by poets, philosophers, musicians, architects, painters and sculptors in all countries and epochs. Thus, it belongs to universal culture as well as to churchmen and formal Christians.

Full text of the Letter, with signatories

Latin Mass at risk

Sir,

On July 6, 1971, *The Times* printed an appeal to Pope Paul VI in defence of the Latin Mass signed by Catholic and non-Catholic artists and writers, including Agatha Christie, Graham Greene and Yehudi Menuhin. This became known as the "Agatha Christie letter", because it was reportedly her name that prompted the Pope to issue an indult, or permission, for celebration of the Latin Mass in England and Wales. The letter argued that "the rite in question, in its magnificent Latin text, has also inspired priceless achievements ... by poets, philosophers, musicians, architects, painters and sculptors in all countries and epochs. Thus, it belongs to universal culture."

Recently there have been worrying reports from Rome that the Latin Mass is to be banished from nearly every Catholic church. This is a painful and confusing prospect, especially for the growing number of young Catholics whose faith has been nurtured by it. The traditional liturgy is a "cathedral" of text and gesture, developing as those venerable buildings did over many centuries. Not everyone appreciates its value and that is fine; but to destroy it seems an unnecessary and insensitive act in a world where history can all too easily slip away forgotten. The old rite's ability to encourage silence and contemplation is a treasure not easily replicated, and, when gone, impossible to reconstruct. This appeal, like its predecessor, is "entirely ecumenical and non-political". The signatories include Catholics and non-Catholics, believers and non-believers. We implore the Holy See to reconsider any further restriction of access to this magnificent spiritual and cultural heritage.

Robert Agostinelli; Lord Alton of Liverpool; Lord Bailey of Paddington; Lord Bamford; Lord Berkeley of Knighton; Sophie Bevan; Ian Bostridge; Nina Campbell; Meghan Cassidy; Sir Nicholas Coleridge; Dame Imogen Cooper; Lord Fellowes of West Stafford; Sir Rocco Forte; Lady Antonia Fraser; Martin Fuller; Lady Getty; John Gilhooly; Dame Jane Glover; Michael Gove; Susan Hampshire; Lord Hesketh; Tom Holland; Sir Stephen Hough; Tristram Hunt; Steven Isserlis; Bianca Jagger; Igor Levit; Lord Lloyd-Webber; Julian Lloyd Webber; Dame Felicity Lott; Sir James MacMillan; Princess Michael of Kent; Baroness Monckton of Dallington Forest; Lord Moore of Etchingham; Fraser Nelson; Alex Polizzi; Mishka Rushdie Momen; Sir Andras Schiff; Lord Skidelsky; Lord Smith of Finsbury; Sir Paul Smith; Rory Stewart;

Lord Stirrup; Dame Kiri Te Kanawa; Dame Mitsuko Uchida; Ryan Wigglesworth; AN Wilson; Adam Zamoycki

Full text of the 1971 Petition and its signatories, as it appeared in *The Times* on 6th July 1971, [here](#).

Additional signatories of the 1971 petition, published in Italy, [here](#).

Full text of the 1966 Petition and its signatories, [here](#).

Notes for Editors

The Latin Mass Society was founded in 1965 to support the continued celebration of the Catholic liturgy in the form it took at the eve of the Second Vatican Council: the ‘1962 Missal’ or Traditional Mass.

The 1971 petition and others like it were the subject of a major historical study published in 2023:

The Latin Mass and the Intellectuals: Petitions to Save the ancient Mass from 1966 to 2007, Edited by Joseph Shaw, with a preface by Martin Mosebach (more information [here](#)).

Latin Mass Society

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