

PAIX LITURGIQUE

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An interview with Felipe Alanis Suárez, President of Una Voce international

Since October 2015 Felipe Alanis Suárez, the founder of Una Voce Mexico, has been the first non-European president of the International Federation Una Voce (FIUV). He kindly agreed to answer our questions to take stock of an organization that is about to celebrate its fiftieth anniversary. Indeed, while Una Voce France was created by Georges Cerbelaud-Salagnac in 1964, the International Federation Una Voce (FIUV) was formally erected in Zurich in 1967. At the time the press all over the world was reporting that many artists and intellectuals were protesting against the Church's abandonment of Latin and Gregorian chant, which they considered disastrous not only from the religious point of view but also in terms of culture.

I - Our interview with Felipe Alanis Suárez

1 - Felipe, you are now the president of the Fédération internationale Una Voce, the oldest and largest initiative promoting the preservation of the Gregorian liturgy. What is going to be the main guideline of your action during your mandate, which extends until 2017, the tenth anniversary of Summorum Pontificum?

Felipe Alanis Suárez: In the first place, I hope to pursue my predecessors' work. The Good Lord has allowed the FIUV to have such remarkable personalities at its helm as Dr. Éric de Saventem, our first president, and also the much lamented Michael Davies. One of the successes of the FIUV has been its success in becoming an institution. Our driving force arises from the community of our members, who while participating in a collective project also preserve their own charism and continue to wage their own battles. We have the benefit of collaborating with people who have a precious experience to draw on, such as Leo Darroch, one of the pillars of the FIUV: he has been involved in the federation's activities for over twenty years. There are also younger figures, such as Joseph Shaw, who leads one of the most ambitious projects in the traditional world, the Positions Papers ([see here](#)), and Carlos Palad, who works for the development of the extraordinary form of the Mass in the Philippines. In fact, I might also speak of Russia, Poland, and many other countries, without of course forgetting France, but what I'd like to get across with these few names is that the FIUV is not an individual affair: it is a collective enterprise. In this international character of ours, we tend to be deeply Catholic.

None of this exempts me from the particular responsibility that is mine for my two year mandate, which I have formally placed under the protection of the mystery of the Immaculate Conception. Through this consecration, I have placed my limited abilities in the hands of the Blessed Virgin, so that, by her intercession and under her guidance, our activities may be directed strictly towards the greater glory of God.

Our action will continue along three main axes:

- to serve as a line of communication and representation for the thousands of local groups attached to the Tridentine Mass;
- to provide, as far as possible, practical assistance to groups who wish to start celebrating (or already celebrate) the extraordinary form of the Roman rite;
- to develop and present the arguments in defense of the traditional liturgy, as our role as laymen allows us to do.

These three missions are obviously interdependent and every one of our projects contributes to them all.

Lastly, you mentioned 2017 as the tenth anniversary of Benedict XVI's motu proprio. Now it so happens that it will also be the fiftieth anniversary of the FIUV's first plenary assembly. Far from merely celebrating these anniversaries, we shall endeavor to look forward to the next ten and fifty years: peace is far from reached and we are not yet at the end of our prayer and work.

2 - During his pontificate Benedict XVI endeavored to focus the attention of the faithful and of the Church on the central place of Christ in the liturgy and consequently on the centrality of the liturgy in the life of Catholics. Many new liturgical initiatives were born to accompany this movement of "reform of the reform" (lectures, pilgrimages, websites, books, etc.): how does the FIUV consider this initiatives?

Felipe Alanis Suárez: As a matter of principle we are naturally well disposed to every undertaking seeking to underscore the centrality of Christ—not of man—not only in the liturgy but also in all the Church’s life. As far as concerns the “reform of the reform” movement, our experience is that we often agree in identifying the root of the problems within the very structure of the Novus Ordo. It is not only the ars celebrandi—which varies from parish to parish and also from pope to pope, as a comparison among the three last popes’ celebrations indicates—that is at fault, but also certain aspects intrinsic to the 1970 Missal.

Generally speaking the reform of the reform seems to be based on the fact that the liturgy is a legacy, not a creation; the traditional movement shares this principle, of course. Proposing new practices or new rites that don’t exist today to get out of the crisis could only ever result in failure. The only possible way is to curb and tone down the changes wrought by the reform by reintroducing elements found in the extraordinary form such as the Latin Canon, celebration ad orientem, Gregorian chant, the sacredness of the sanctuary, etc.

Yet most of these restorations obviously do not correspond to the ethos of a Novus Ordo that is both minimalist and do-it-yourself, i.e. presenting the celebrant with a multitude of options. Worse yet, the trouble with the new missal is that hardly anyone respects it! If there is anything that the past fifty years have taught us, it is that respect for the rubrics cannot be obtained by decree, alas! Significantly no movement in defense of the Novus Ordo according to the General Instructions of the Roman Missal has yet been able to get off the ground. It’s as though it were doomed to permanent mutation, from one change to the next. By all accounts, the entire hierarchy of the Church allows any possible variation so long as it meets a pastoral pretext.

In fact, what should one expect from a reform of the Novus Ordo? A new reform a few years down the road?

Furthermore, since the elements that allow for a recovery of Christ’s centrality in the Novus Ordo refer to the extraordinary form, won’t they simply seem like the nostalgic reflection of a light that shines elsewhere? The main proposals of the “reform of the Reform” are the reintroduction of the celebration ad orientem, the prayers at the foot of the altar, the Roman Canon, etc., when all of these elements already exist in the traditional Mass. The traditional Mass abides immutable, sober, eternal, revealed, respected, sacred. It will not change so dramatically. This is not wishful thinking: it is a statement of fact based in history.

In summary I should say that we respect and appreciate the effort of the “reform of the reform.” It is very honorable, humble, and often valuable undertaking, which, however, runs the risk of being only a temporary fix since all it can do is produce a new liturgy, and a newer set of options to choose. On the other hand the extraordinary form, which isn’t under the influence of any intellectual movement, can boast of its sacredness, its history, and its own rights—as well as its strong pastoral character, as can be observed in its full catholicity wherever it is celebrated. The normalization of its celebration in the Church’s daily life is the surest path to bringing Christ back to the center of the Church’s liturgical life.

3 - Thanks to the precious work of Joseph Shaw, the chairman of the Latin Mass Society of England and Wales, the FIUV has published close to thirty position papers on the liturgy and relevant topics. Which ones from amongst them struck you the most?

Felipe Alanis Suárez: These position papers (abbr.: PP) are a magnificent contribution to the entire traditional movement. Those that have struck me the most personally are those on altar servers (PP 1), on silence in the liturgy (PP 2), and on men and the extraordinary form (PP 26). This is most likely because they articulate the reasons for my attachment to the traditional Mass. I am convinced that a good number of readers have found in this series of articles concrete and evidence-based arguments to explain their attachment to the extraordinary form. I invite all of your English-speaking reader to **consult them** on our Internet site.

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An EF Mass organized by Una Voce Cuba.

II - The reflections of Paix liturgique

1) The international dimension of the FIUV is one of its main characteristics and provides a good illustration of the traditional Mass’s universality: today the FIUV counts forty-one associations spread across every continent, from Cuba to Japan and from Nigeria to Latvia. One of the secrets to the FIUV’s longevity is that each member retains its own identity, its own calendar of events, and its own priorities. These last few years the spread Una Voce has been among formerly communist countries (Russia, Belarus, Latvia) and in Latin America, Cuba being the symbol of this ever more universal liturgical renaissance.

2) Felipe Alanis’s insistence on making teaching and apologetical materials and practical assistance available to groups setting up celebrations is a felicitous one. Having supported the development of the motu proprio Summorum Pontificum in France since 2007, we are well aware of how eager those who request formation and information are eager for them. This is all the more the case in countries where everything remains to be done: from translating the texts that govern the application of the motu proprio to the Sunday Mass propers. As Felipe Alanis Suárez says, “peace is far from reached and we are not yet at the end of our prayer and work.” In this sense the FIUV is showing a good example with its series of Position Papers on the 1962 Missal. These are published under the editorship of Joseph Shaw, a father of many children, president of the highly active Latin Mass Society of England and Wales, and professor at Oxford. These

papers are a precious instrument for advancing the traditional liturgy's riches and specificities.

3) Felipe Alanís Suárez's comments on the "reform of the reform" seem quite right to us. He is correct in judging that this movement, promoted by brave priests and prelates at the grassroots level, is in itself a further proof of the Novus Ordo's "manufacturing defects." These elements of the ancient liturgy are so contrary to the spirit and the ethos of the new liturgy that their reintroduction into it greatly risks being a mere stopgap. This is all the more the case because **such reintroductions will be temporary by their very nature, unless this leads to making up a new New Missal, which is not only improbable but would also be perfectly useless so long as the entire Church has not recovered the true meaning of the liturgy.**