

PAIX LITURGIQUE

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REVISITING THE ROMAN SURVEY ON THE TRADITIONAL MASS

On 7 March 2020, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith undertook a survey among the bishops of the Latin Church regarding the application of the *motu proprio Summorum Pontificum* and the issues relative to the extraordinary form of the Roman rite (see our *Letter* 109 of May 22, 2020). At the time there was, and there still is today, much concern about what this survey might portend. We turned to Christian Marquant, President of Oremus-Paix Liturgique, for his reactions seven months after this project was undertaken.

Paix Liturgique: What do you think is the reason behind this survey?

Christian Marquant:

For starters, everybody knows that in Rome and among the Italian episcopate there is a tendency that would like to reign in the traditional Mass and especially the *Ecclesia Dei* institutes, i.e. to subject them to the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Congregation for Religious, respectively.

Under these pressures the Pope has responded as any government does when it means to bury criticism: he asked for a survey. Also, it makes sense that the Holy See should want more information on the current situation and growth of the *Summorum Pontificum* universe, and that it should seek to acquire it in the usual Roman way: by asking the bishops. What used to happen during the *ad limina* visits of the bishops, grouped by country, to Rome is now being accomplished at a global level. That is why, at the end of the day, I find this survey to be good news: it should draw our diocesan shepherds out of the negationist autism in which they are so often imprisoned when it comes to our reality. If, that is, they give objective answers to the questions they are being asked.

Paix Liturgique: And you believe that Vatican authorities are unaware of this reality?

Christian Marquant: They have only an imperfect awareness of it because they deal mostly with only part of that reality. For a long time now (during discussions with Archbishop Lefebvre, which failed in 1988, and thereafter in the conversation from 2000 to the most recent elections within the SSPX), the attention of Vatican authorities has focused nearly entirely on the Society of St. Pius X. In the eyes of those who are unaware of the actual situation, the SSPX constitutes, if not the entirety, at least the essential part of the traditional world, whereas in fact it increasingly represents only one element—albeit an important element—of those attached to the traditional liturgy and catechism. Also, as far as postconciliar Rome is concerned, the SSPX represents a major symbolic defeat, a thorn in its side: ever since the Church opened the door to ecumenism with Vatican II, she hasn't brought in any separated community (except for a few Anglicans), and she has experienced a new rupture: that of the SSPX!

Paix Liturgique: Do you think that this focus is wrongheaded?

Christian Marquant: It is not for me to judge what the Roman authorities prioritize and focus on. But I daresay that for those authorities to focus primarily on the Society of Saint Pius X has not been very professional; it betrays a lack of real and objective analysis. Rome was galvanized by the SSPX because it was the showcase of opposition to the Council, it had become a reservoir of traditional priests by 1974, and it proceeded to consecrate bishops in 1988. For the rest of the traditional world, the Holy See set up a situation of tolerance in 1988 (*Ecclesia Dei*) that theoretically moved to a situation of full rights in 2007 (*Summorum*

Pontificum), but does not take into account the phenomenon as it is and as it is increasingly becoming. National bishops' conferences have made things worse by always interpreting the decisions of Rome in a minimalist sense.

Paix Liturgique: Why is that?

Christian Marquant: At that episcopal level, it is often willful blindness. I have noticed that most of our shepherds have not devoted much energy to trying to understand the traditional movement and its potential. They have simply sought to ostracize it with attacks which, I have to say, have been uncommonly stupid, and in their blindness they have consistently claimed that there is no liturgical or catechetical problem—while over 90% of Catholics in Europe have abandoned their Church . . .

Paix Liturgique: Could they have had any other perspective, though?

Christian Marquant: Of course they could have: by opening their eyes. For the past three years we've been publishing the position of the traditional liturgy on each continent. You can tell that the *Summorum Pontificum* world is in a consistent growth pattern. In fact, it is now more widespread and numerous than the SPPX world. And the two of them together form a whole within the Church that can be ignored less every day amid a generalized collapse in the number of priests and religious (in the West) and in doctrine (everywhere).

Paix Liturgique: Do you think that this situation will intensify?

Christian Marquant: It will continue to intensify. First, traditional outfits like *Summorum Pontificum* are abundant today—think of the network of unsubsidized independent schools in France—and their outreach compounds that of the liturgy. The growth of the number of places where the traditional Mass is celebrated has been precisely measured over the ten years since the *motu proprio* (it has more or less doubled). This growth will go on. Furthermore, while one must be careful, in thinking of the traditional world, not to focus exclusively on the SPPX, one must also avoid, in thinking of the “official” traditional milieu, seeing only *Ecclesia Dei* communities. Certainly, these are flourishing in terms of priests and apostolates, but we have discovered that the *Summorum Pontificum* movement is now a majority diocesan and parish movement. This points to a rapid and practically limitless growth.

Paix Liturgique: Are you sure you're not exaggerating?

Christian Marquant: Well, remember that for the past twenty years we have commissioned over forty opinion surveys, not only in France but also in the main countries of Europe and now on all continents. . . and their results are significant. They indicate that everywhere, whatever the region under study and its dominant culture, there are at least 30% of practicing Catholics who wish to live their Catholic faith in the traditional liturgy. The days of the isolated groups of nostalgics you could point your finger at are over: these 30% of laymen represent hundreds of millions of Catholics who, at the end of the day, are dissatisfied with the liturgy they are being served up.

Paix Liturgique: Is this new?

Christian Marquant: Actually, no! The postconciliar media barrage hid the truth and tried to convince us that all Catholics were strong supporters of the innovations. It was untrue then, and always has been since. But in this matter as in many others, the elites, in this case diocesan authorities, refused to face the facts, which are now there for all to see—although they still don't understand them.

Paix Liturgique: And that, then, is why you are so pleased with this Roman survey among all the bishops of the world.

Christian Marquant: At the beginning of this interview I spoke of those Italian bishops who are hostile to the expansion of the traditional liturgy. Now, the results of this survey are supposed to be handled at the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith by the personnel in charge of the traditional liturgy. Yet the Italian

bishops, who keenly spotted the inherent danger of this survey, have arbitrarily modified the procedure outlined by Rome: the Conference of Italian Bishops has instructed the bishops of Italy to send their answers not back to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, but straight to the Conference of Bishops, which will then take it upon itself to collate them, summarize them, and send its summary to the Holy See. Without wishing to seem naïve (I am fully aware that those opposed to the traditional liturgy will do their utmost to thwart it), I see this as proof that they have been rattled by the truth. And this truth is the weight of the *Summorum Pontificum* world, which is a stand-in for the discontent of a considerable proportion of Catholics worldwide.

Paix Liturgique: So you believe that the current situation bothers them?

Christian Marquant: I do believe so, and I'll give you a reason why: a few days ago our dear friend Marco Sgroi, the president of the Italian Coordination of *Summorum Pontificum*, was telling us that the number of places where the traditional liturgy is celebrated in Italy had increased from 129 to 134 within the space of the single year 2019. This represents an increase of five venues, or 4%, within 71 of the 222 dioceses of Italy. He also told us that requests for celebrations are more and more numerous in Italy (at least thirty verified requests where the traditional liturgy is not currently being celebrated), even though there as elsewhere the drumbeat had long been that "the traditional problem concerns only the French, in France" ... Understandably, the Italian bishops are as worried today as the French bishops were yesterday.

Paix Liturgique: You're optimistic, then?

Christian Marquant: Yes, both by nature and in Christian hope. Specifically, I believe that God will write straight on crooked lines and that the growth of the traditional liturgy will be undeniable. If basic honesty is maintained, that is. Because bad faith will by no means disappear. Certain people will go on claiming, against all common sense, that this movement and these faithful do not exist. In the French-language Letter 744 of Paix Liturgique, it was reported that the most virulent of the Tridentine liturgy's enemies, Professor Andrea Grillo of the Pontifical University San Anselmo, had launched a petition on April 1, 2020, to ask that this liturgy should stop having an exceptional status and that it should be fully subordinated to diocesan bishops and the Congregation for Divine Worship. In other words, the goal of the traditional Mass's enemies is that it should be made subject to the bishops, then got rid of.

Paix Liturgique: But don't you think that this is a possibility?

Christian Marquant: No, I don't. First of all because attachment to the traditional liturgy is so to speak consubstantial with the Catholic faith, insofar as it is an attachment to the purest *lex credendi* of the Roman Church. The Roman Church, and therefore its liturgical faith, have the words of eternal life. Not Andrea Grillo.

There have been so many attempts to snuff out this liturgy and all that goes along with it over the past fifty years. All these attempts have turned out to be fruitless. They will be even more fruitless in the years to come, because of the risk of a liturgical war that would be even more violent than in the 1970s, and in an ecclesiastical body that is now extremely enfeebled. . . . Can you imagine Pope Francis launching a crusade—a clerical crusade to boot, *horresco referens*—against those who love traditional silence and piety? To me, such a scenario is unthinkable, indeed impossible.

Paix Liturgique: So what will come of this survey?

Christian Marquant : I couldn't say, but I hope it will help raise awareness of the size of the traditional phenomenon. I am convinced that within fifty years most Catholic diocesan and religious priests will have become at least a little bi-formalist, and that the traditional liturgy will be recognized by everybody, faithful and priests alike, as a spiritual and theological treasure of the Roman Church.