

PAIX LITURGIQUE

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Liturgical Peace: A Global Imperative

Now with a Polish edition, the Letter of Paix Liturgique has completed its internationalization. After the first foreign version published in Italian in the summer of 2009 came the German, Spanish, English, Portuguese, and now soon the Polish editions. This recent development of the Letter of Paix Liturgique seeks to respond to the encouragement of the *Motu Proprio Summorum Pontificum* that the Holy Father Benedict XVI gave the Church in July 2007 for the world-wide spread of the celebration of the traditional Mass, now called "Extraordinary Form of the Roman Rite. Although the Paix Liturgique association is well known in its country of birth, France, such is not the case everywhere else. In order to help our new readers better to understand the originality of Paix Liturgique, we have asked our President, Christian Marquant, for a few words.

Christian Marquant founded the *Mouvement de la jeunesse catholique de France* (MJCF, the "Catholic Youth Movement of France") in 1967 and created Oremus in 1990. It was in the early 2000s that he initiated Paix Liturgique. Limited at first only to the diocese of Nanterre, near Paris, the operations of Paix Liturgique, which consist in supporting the application of the Pope's provisions for the traditional Mass, have incrementally extended to all of France.

Q: Mr. Christian Marquant, where is Paix Liturgique today?

CM: Since the activity of Oremus in the 90s and the appearance of Paix Liturgique during the campaign in the diocese of Nanterre to obtain the implementation of the *Motu Proprio Ecclesia Dei* that John Paul II desired in 1988 [1], we have evolved a lot. Certainly this is the case for the methods and means we use since, thanks to the advent of the Internet, we went from a group of faithful that had to use ruinously expensive traditional means -mass mailing, journal publishing, etc.- to a large team of correspondents and editors distributing a weekly electronic newsletter. But as to substance, our motivation remains a desire to help bring about reconciliation and unity in the Church.

As our interests widened, first to all of France and, since the *Motu Proprio Summorum Pontificum*, to the Catholic world writ large, our letter has become the hub of our outreach activities. Indeed, it reaches over 350,000 people in its French version and about 200,000 in its different international versions.

Still, we have lost none of our fondness for conditions on the ground. Let's just say that we have refined our approach as an adaptation to the calmer climate that Benedict XVI's pontificate has ushered in. So for example we peacefully approach the faithful and clergy as they go to Mass; in France, since March 2009, we have distributed 550,000 copies of a brochure in support of the Holy Father.

Q: You mentioned the international version of the Letter to Paix Liturgique. Could you expand on that? Why did you go international?

CM: At the heart of Paix Liturgique lies the conviction that Catholic tradition is not an Indian reservation. The rehabilitation of the Church's liturgical tradition is the exclusive business neither of the Society of Saint Pius X, nor of the "traddies", nor of French Catholics; it is that of Catholicism as a whole. This in fact is what Cardinal Cañizares, Prefect of the Congregation of Divine Worship, explained admirably well in his preface to Msgr Nicolas Bux's book on the "Reform of Benedict XVI," recently published in French by the Tempora publishing company. Now because the "reform of the reform" that the Sovereign Pontiff desires is everybody's business, it seemed to us useful, to begin with, to develop our letter on the Internet -to take it beyond the limited circle of our friends and sympathizers- and then to make it accessible to Catholics worldwide. So for six months now we've been working at expanding our team and improving our database to be in a position to propose monthly editions in English, Portuguese, Spanish, German, and Italian. This has allowed us to broaden our horizon and to note that the liturgical question is indeed an international issue in the Church, not merely a Franco-French problem. In Hong Kong, in the Philippines, in Nigeria, in Brazil, or in Mexico, as well as in Poland or the UK, laymen, priests, nuns and prelates are everyday working on rediscovering this treasure of the Church, the traditional Mass.

Q: Speaking of which, how do you perceive the present situation?

CM: It is, quite simply, un hoped for: for the first time since the upheavals that were brutally imposed in the name of the "Spirit of the Council," a reconciliation seems possible beyond this or that liturgical preference. Indeed the Pope has removed the last obstacles (real or imagined) to a stronger unity of all Catholics around the Holy Father.

In this favorable atmosphere unity henceforward rests principally on the personal commitment of the baptized: of the faithful, of course, whose role in the

Church the Vatican II Council underscored, but also of the bishops and priests who as Pastors fully bear this responsibility.

For each of us the question is whether we truly wish to be faithful to the commitments of our faith in Jesus Christ.

Q: Paix Liturgique has become known especially through opinion polls, hasn't it? ...

CM: The idea of commissioning opinion polls was born of the contemptuous silence we encountered: "You do not exist"; "you're living in the wrong century"; "there is no liturgical problem among us"; "you've missed the train of renewal", etc. Yet not only did these claims strike us as so many caricatures from the outset, but even, as the years have gone by, they have turned out to be absolutely without basis in reality: the number of the faithful who are attached to the old Mass is forever on the increase; the young are ever more attracted to it.

As a privileged observer, I have been able, for the past forty years, starting with the sizable French "Silent ones of the Church" movement just after the Council, to observe that those attracted to the traditional liturgy are not "a tiny group of old folks and nostalgics" but a sizable part of the Catholic faithful. Convinced as I was by this reality, which testimonies confirmed every day, we looked for an instrument to give some consistency to that reality. How could we make it known that it was neither honest nor reasonable to reduce Catholics attached to the Latin and Gregorian liturgy merely to the faithful of the Society of Saint Pius X, who, as the claim then went, "at best" amounted to no more than 1% of the faithful?

Following the example set by the then president of Una Voce, Éric de Saventhem, in Germany in the early 80s, we got the idea of commissioning an opinion poll in France in 2001 with one of the great polling institutions in the country. The results of that Ipsos investigation went beyond our wildest expectations! Indeed, at a time when the claim was still routinely made that the Missal according to John XXIII was forbidden, over 20% of practicing Catholics stated that they wished to live out their Catholic faith within the traditional liturgy ...

Since then, we commissioned two further polls along the same lines in France, followed by one in Italy in September of 2009 that yielded the extraordinary result of two practicing Italian Catholics in three ready to attend the old Mass. We have also begun to undertake polls in the dioceses, in Versailles and Paris for the time being, and have just undertaken a poll among German Catholics ...

So, little by little, we are getting a pretty accurate picture of the reality: since the Holy Father's beautiful words in 2007, at least one in three Catholics who attend Sunday Mass in their parish would participate in a Mass celebrated according to the extraordinary form ...

Q: Yet many Pastors seem in no hurry to accept this reality and to achieve unity among Catholics, do they?

CM: Alas! Ideology is alive and well in a good portion of the clergy, and even more so among the bishops! The issue of unity is still by and large approached within an exclusive understanding of unity: all those who exhibit the slightest attachment to the Church's two thousand year old tradition, be it doctrinal or liturgical, are ignored or looked at with suspicion.

It is more than about time for this blindness to cease and for our bishops to become aware that very many of the faithful wish to live out their Catholic faith within the extraordinary form of the Roman rite. As difficult and as painful as this realization might be for some of them, it is an essential first step.

Since we began our "international" letters, we have been in a position to establish that for many bishops on all five continents, "there is no problem in the liturgy," "there is no demand for the implementation of the Motu Proprio," "only a tiny number of the faithful has any interest in the traditional liturgy," or even "the Motu Proprio's only purpose is to solve the SSPX problem" ...

This way of looking at things is, to say the least, inaccurate.

Honest evaluations of the situation, dialog in the field, and opinion polls amount to a clear demonstration: although, for the past forty years, only a tiny number of the faithful has raised its voice against the abuses and the pseudo-prohibitions of the traditional Mass during the years of lead, the great majority of those who were attached to the traditional liturgy behaved as the Church's Silent Ones and stayed quiet. Some stopped going to Mass while others kept going to their diocesan parishes even when this offended their catechetical and liturgical sensibilities.

Considering that the publication of the Catechism of the Catholic Church has gone some way to resolve the issue catechism, the publication of the Motu Proprio might have resolved the liturgical issue as well. Unfortunately, such is not yet the case. To be sure, not all bishops are opposed to the Motu Proprio, far from it! Still, there are strong oppositions; even the most favorable bishops, rather than applying the 2007 Motu Proprio pure and simple (celebration of both forms of the rite at the parish level, particularly in the larger downtown parishes), tend to use only the 1988 Motu Proprio (occasional concession of non-parish-based masses).

Q: What can we hope from our bishops, then?

CM: Simply this: let them stop just trying to be right against the Pope and be willing, at long last, to acknowledge the needs of the faithful who are attached to the traditional Faith and its practice. As long as these laymen are considered as second-class Christians, or even as "a problem," the Church unity that the bishops profess will remain nothing but a hypocritical notice of intent. An immediate first step to contemplate might be to ensure that all the already established celebrations of the extraordinary form of the Roman rite truly and generously correspond to the actual requests of the faithful. What does this mean? Quite simply that the celebrations be on Sunday, regular, and at family-friendly times. "Extraordinary form" does not mean "extraordinary conditions" for the celebrations, as is unfortunately too often the case.

Next, our pastors -our parish priests first and foremost since the MP gives them this responsibility without their having to obtain the bishop's placet- should respond to the requests they receive loyally and within a reasonable delay, without equivocating or playing for time.

Respect, receptivity, and goodwill: that is all we ask of our pastors and bishops. Since these are principles they constantly invoke, we have not lost the hope of finally seeing their fruits in our parishes.

[1] *Providence finally crowned this campaign with success, since three Sunday Masses in communion with Rome are now celebrated in that diocese (while there is none in the neighboring diocese of Saint-Denis).*