

PRESS RELEASE

“I do not think that the Holy Father needs my advice”

Institute of Christ the King’s Msgr. Schmitz on *Summorum Pontificum*

Theologian sees Pope’s *motu proprio* as providing greater access to “the Church’s wonderful treasure of liturgical wisdom”

By Brian Mershon

Msgr. Michael Schmitz has graciously granted the following interview on the *motu proprio Summorum Pontificum* to *Inside the Vatican*. Since 2000, he is the vicar general and provincial superior for the Institute of Christ the King Sovereign Priest in the United States. Msgr. Michael Schmitz was ordained to the priesthood by then Cardinal Ratzinger in 1982, after completing studies at the Gregorian University in Rome where he earned a doctorate in dogmatic theology. Pope John Paul II elevated him to the rank of chaplain of His Holiness in 1998.

The Institute was founded in 1990, is based in Gricigliano, Italy, where the international seminary is located. Their foundation was originally in Gabon, where it still maintains several missions. The Institute was founded by Msgr. Gilles Wach, STD, Superior General, along with co-founder Fr. Philippe Mora, STD. Both Msgr. Wach and Fr. Mora received their priestly formation under the late Cardinal Siri of Genoa. By invitation of the bishops, the Institute celebrates the Rite of 1962 in more than 50 dioceses worldwide.

The Institute’s U.S. headquarters is at the Shrine of Christ the King in Chicago, 6415 S. Woodlawn Ave.

Q: What does the freeing of the Classical Roman rite mean for Catholics worldwide?

A: The universal permission to celebrate the Classical Roman rite as envisioned by the Holy Father in his *motu proprio Summorum Pontificum* will help to re-establish a balanced view of the Church’s wonderful treasury of liturgical wisdom, which is not, and cannot be limited to one specific period of time only. As in her doctrine, the Church draws from a Divine Source when it comes to the expression of her sacramental life, whose richness has been developed with the assistance of the Holy Spirit over the ages. For priests and laity alike, it will be an enormous gift to have access to this wealth without pressures or tensions.

Q: Even if the Classical Roman rite is freed as a simple matter of justice, how do you think it will practically work since so many priests do not know Latin or the rubrics in today's Church?

A: Fortunately, over the last 19 years, the Holy See has allowed the establishment of priestly communities that can now help their fellow priests to learn and discover this beautiful liturgical heritage. Under the wise direction of the bishops, to whose "charity and prudence" His Holiness appeals, and who certainly will generously open their hearts to the widespread desire of the Classical Roman Rite, our communities can help all interested priests to be introduced in celebrating this liturgy with the exactness true beauty calls for.

Q: One of the two preconditions the bishops of the Society of St. Pius X (SSPX) have requested since 2000, was a recognition affirming what nine curial cardinals affirmed in 1986 — subsequently blocked due to concerns from various European bishops — namely that the Classical Roman liturgy has never been abrogated. Now that this first step has been granted, what do you predict will happen next?

A: I am not very much into predictions, because I am not a prophet, so you will excuse my not having an answer to this question.

There is only one thing that I know for sure: Holy Providence has brought us to this important moment, which is only a beginning of ever richer graces that God's mercy will bestow on the Church through this event. While the Holy Father has indeed underscored that the Missal of 1962 has never been abrogated, we have still to patiently pray and work for an ever greater understanding of the link between liturgy, obedience and unity in the Church of today. Let us not forget that the Sacrifice of the Cross, as the decisive center of the liturgical mystery of all ages and source of the unity of the Mystical Body, was and is in the first place an act of obedience for the glory of God in His Church.

Q: Do you think there are sufficient grounds for the Pope to grant the SSPX's second precondition, the lifting of the decrees of excommunication, or declaring them null and void?

A: For someone who is not privy to all the details of the negotiations between the Holy See and the Society of St. Pius X, it is difficult to give a balanced consideration of the whole problem. However, I am very confident that the Holy Father will treat the question with the same justice and fatherly understanding he has shown for all those who are attached to the Classical Roman rite.

Q: How do you think the freeing of the Classical Roman rite might aid in a restoration of the Church worldwide?

A: Since I have had the grace to be ordained to the Holy Priesthood, I have always experienced that the liturgical mystery is not only the key and center of the Church's life, as the Holy Father has stated so many times, but also that the priestly existence of all the servants of the altar is greatly dependent on their personal link to the liturgical celebration of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.

Accordingly, convinced that peaceful and non-polemic access to the whole world of liturgical depth offered by the Church to priests and laity throughout the centuries will revive and strengthen the Mystical Body greatly. I am especially confident that priestly vocations will be brought forth by the possibility of an ever deeper insight into the mystery of the liturgy.

Q: Do you believe the idea of people participating rightly and well in the liturgy, brought out in *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, is indeed a worthy goal, even for the Classical Roman liturgy?

A: The participation of the people at the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass was already underscored by several popes before the document you mentioned. As a matter of fact, the encyclical *Mediator Dei* of Pius XII specifies the theological meaning of this participation. There can be no question that our Blessed Mother participated in a very full sense in the Sacrifice of her Son while standing under the cross.

This true participation in the divine mystery of the Mass, under the prudent direction of the Church, can also find its expressions in adjoining liturgical music or appropriate responses. This exterior participation, though, will only have a spiritual meaning if it is accompanied with an interior participation according to the example of the Blessed Mother.

Q: Do you think that the Orthodox may be watching very keenly what the Pope is doing to restore the Latin liturgical tradition?

A: We all know that our Holy Father is an extremely learned person and we can be sure that nothing of this importance will ever escape his attention. We can only hope that the efforts of the Holy See to reconcile the Orthodox churches — thus continuing a long tradition of efforts made by various Roman Pontiffs — is blessed with spiritual success.

The emphasis the Orthodox world rightly puts on the liturgy will certainly make their representatives reconsider our theological position if we are able to show them that we have the same respect for our own liturgical sources that they have for their traditions.

Q: Based upon your experience, do you believe many diocesan seminarians and priests are interested in offering the Classical Roman rite? Do you have any evidence of this, and can you quantify it?

A: There is a considerable interest by young priests and seminarians concerning the Classical Roman Rite. Our evidence is general and I would easily say that I have been in contact with hundreds of interested young clergy and vocations who have inquired about the Institute of Christ the King Sovereign Priest and our liturgical practice.

We have so many vocations ourselves that we have to make a selection because we cannot accept them all. Our requirements are quite demanding, but the combination of a strong identity in our spirituality and our community life with a charitable faithfulness to the fullness of Catholic Tradition is obviously very attractive to deeply motivated young men.

Q: I have been told by more than one source that more than half of the seminarians at a pontifical college and seminary in the U.S. desire to offer the Classical Roman rite. Would this surprise you?

A: On the background of what I have just said, I am not only not astonished, but I know of other seminaries where the same is the case.

Q: What do you think this might mean for seminary training in the future?

A: It is not my place to speak about the training in other seminaries, but wouldn't it be wonderful if all seminarians could share the same experience of liturgical life and grace that thousands have had before, and that has produced innumerable saints over the history of the Church?

Q: How much importance do you think the Pope gives to the Classical Roman rite's role in assisting in a true "reform of the reform" in accord with the Latin liturgical tradition?

A: Again, I like to remind you that I am not a prophet and I am also unable to read the mind of the Holy Father. I am convinced that through the generous permission for all priests to celebrate the Classical form of the Roman Rite an organic development will bring the Church to overcome many of the present liturgical difficulties to which the Holy Father alludes in His letter to the Bishops accompanying the motu proprio.

Q: Some “reform of the reformers” say we should take the 1962 missal as a basis for the *Novus Ordo* without any of the novelties such as altar girls, extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion, while requesting the people to kneel to receive Holy Communion on the tongue, using Gregorian chant and only the Roman Canon while offering the sacrifice *ad orientem*, etc., but then implement only those specific elements called for in *Sacrosanctum Concilium*.

But the problem with that of course is we are ignoring the organic development of the *Novus Ordo* and all of the post-Conciliar documents, and most diocesan bishops would not allow their priests to offer Mass regularly in that manner. Do you see any way to solve this practical dilemma?

A: The Holy See has pointed out that the rites should not be mixed. The Holy Father has made that very clear when he speaks of an ordinary form and an extraordinary form as two expressions of the one Latin Rite. He wishes both forms to be celebrated in their own appropriate way.

With great confidence I would leave it to the operation of the Holy Spirit to take care of the problem you mention because it should not again be resolved by committees of scholars but by the *sensus fidelium*, the sense of faith in the Mystical Body, which includes all bishops, priests and faithful of good will.

Q: Dario Cardinal Castrillón and Jorge Cardinal Medina have both played important roles in this development of reaffirming the Classical Roman liturgy to its rightful place. Do you have any comments?

A: I can only profess my deepest gratitude to their Eminences and to all those in the Roman Curia who have contributed to the solution the Holy Father has granted to the Church. The Institute of Christ the King is honoured by their friendship and will do everything to facilitate the implementation of the *motu proprio* according to the wishes of Pope Benedict XVI and the guidance of His faithful collaborators.

Q: Do you think that Pope Benedict XVI will offer the Classical Roman rite at the main altar in St. Peter’s basilica? Do you think he should?

A: You kindly keep asking me what the Holy Father should do. I do not believe that the Holy Father needs my advice, but, as we all know, before his election he already had graciously agreed to celebrate the Classical Roman Rite several times. If His Holiness would deem it wise to do so now, at a place of his choice it would certainly hearten the ever growing number of old and young Catholics throughout the world who love the Classical Roman Rite. However, first of all, let us be grateful and thank him with our filial prayers and our heartfelt obedience for his generous permission, and leave it to him to decide what to do further.

Q: As a closing note, is there anything you would like to elaborate upon further?

A: I want to wholeheartedly invite all priests and seminarians who want to know more about the Classical form of the Latin Rite, or who want to learn how to celebrate it, to contact the priests of the Institute of Christ the King in the United States or elsewhere.

We have always tried to take great care of the beauty of the liturgy and we would be overjoyed to contribute in this way to the dignified and recollected celebration of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and the other Sacraments according to the Classical liturgy.

It is not our form of the Rite, it is one of the ritual forms of Holy Mother Church. And every priest and every seminarian should know it to understand the many graces the Sovereign High Priest Jesus Christ has bestowed with it on His Spouse who remains forever beautiful in her liturgical life.

Brian Mershon has a master's in theology and bachelor's in news-editorial journalism. His articles have appeared in numerous media outlets, both online and print. He writes from Greenville, South Carolina.

SOVEREIGN PRIEST

In his apostolic letter regarding use of the Classical Roman Rite, the motu proprio “Summorum Pontificum,” the Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI confirmed, by decree, that the Roman Missal used until 1970, the latest form of which dates of 1962 under Pope John XXIII, was never abrogated and that it is licit to celebrate the Sacrifice of the Mass according to this edition as the extraordinary form of the Liturgy of the Church. Thus, there are two licit forms of the Roman Missal available to all Catholics of the Latin Rite, identified as two expressions of the law of prayer of the Roman Catholic Church – the Missal promulgated by Paul VI in 1969 is termed the “ordinary expression of the law of prayer,” while the Missal of 1962 is the “extraordinary expression of the law of prayer.”

Driven by pastoral concern, Pope Benedict XVI’s motu proprio eases restrictions previously governing the use of the Traditional Latin Liturgy. Thus, most significantly, Summorum Pontificum replaces conditions for use of the 1962 Missal set down by preceding papal documents on the Traditional Latin Rite issued by Pope John Paul II — Quattuor abhinc annos (1984) and Ecclesia Dei adflicta (1988) — with a new series of conditions. As decreed in Summorum Pontificum, now, any priest of the Latin Rite can celebrate the 1962 edition of the Roman Missal privately

and with the possibility of faithful being present, permission from the priest's bishop no longer being required. In the case of public celebration of the said Missal, permission is required of the authority of the particular entity under which the priest operates. In the case of a diocesan parish, that authority would be the pastor, in the case of a

religious community, the local superior, in the case of an oratory, the rector. This authority, however, is exhorted to willingly accede to the requests of those desiring to use the rite of the Roman Missal published in 1962.

The motu proprio also makes clear that the faithful should be given access to all Sacraments of the Catholic Church as administered in the previous form of the Roman Liturgy, and declares it lawful for clerics in holy orders to also use the Roman Breviary of 1962.

In Article 3, mention is made specifically of communities or institutes of consecrated life, and societies of apostolic life that may desire to use the Roman Liturgy of 1962 on a habitual or permanent basis. It declares that this is allowed and that such a matter would be decided upon by the major superiors of the particular entity, according to the norm of law and the particular law and statutes governing it.

The Institute of Christ the King Sovereign Priest, a society of apostolic life of diocesan right, founded in 1990 is one such community already making permanent and habitual use of the 1962 Liturgical books, already established under the provisions of Pope John Paul II's motu proprio *Ecclesia Dei*, and whose status is confirmed by Pope Benedict XVI's current document. Its formation, and that of several other such groups, reflects the reality pointed out by the Holy Father his letter to bishops accompanying the motu proprio: "In the meantime it has clearly been demonstrated that young persons too have discovered this liturgical form, felt its attraction and found in it a form of encounter with the Mystery of the Most Holy Eucharist, particularly suited to them." Most priests of the Institute of Christ the King are in their thirties, and its Seminary, located in Florence, is peopled by over 60 young men in their twenties.