

Tridentine Community News

September 26, 2010

Michael Davies – Part 1 of 2 – Background



Michael Davies was the Glenn Beck of Catholic authors. With wit and a verbal skewer, Davies could take an opinion, support it with facts, and drive home a point. Like Beck in the popular media, Davies is seemingly everywhere in the traditional Catholic media, despite his having passed away in 2004. His output consisted of a seemingly endless stream of articles, books, and booklets. Many if not most vendors of books pertaining

to the Extraordinary Form carry at least some of his works, and they are conversation starters even today.

As with Glenn Beck, controversy arises as soon as Davies' name is mentioned. Some dismiss Davies' credibility because he wrote for *The Remnant* newspaper in the 1980s, a journal which espoused some strange viewpoints during that period. He also made the occasional statement of questionable orthodoxy, such as when he endorsed the suggestion that members of a California parish whose Tridentine Mass was discontinued attend a nearby "independent" priest's chapel instead.

It is a cliché that no one loses more sales than a successful salesman. Sales is a numbers game. The more leads one pursues, the more sales one should get. One salesman might close five orders out of 100 leads. Another might close one order out of 20 leads. Who has accomplished more? The salesman who lost more sales. The analogy in Michael Davies' case was his controversial comments. He made so many public comments that some were bound to be less wise than others. Yet these isolated, though often well-known, anecdotes do not represent the man's legacy.

Davies was not the first person to write about Vatican II and its subsequent liturgical changes, but he was the first, and certainly the most popular, traditionalist to write for a broad audience. Others, often priests or academics such as Msgr. Klaus Gamber, seemed to target a more academic milieu. Davies did not skimp on the footnotes, quotes, or references to support his views, but the more casual and attention-grabbing style of his writings clearly targeted the common man.

Davies' secular job as an elementary school teacher gave him some freedom to write and deliver speeches, especially during off months. After retiring from teaching in 1992, he was in 1995 appointed President of the International Federation *Una Voce*, the world's largest advocacy group for matters pertaining to the Tridentine Mass. Like the secular advocacy groups AARP and NAACP, *Una Voce's* activities range from publishing to lobbying, though in Rome rather than Washington or Ottawa. In this leadership role, Davies spent the last years of his life traveling, giving speeches, and continuing to write, becoming the world's top lay advocate of the Extraordinary Form.

Davies took the interesting path of having defended the positions of both then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger and SSPX founder Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre. Many Catholics find the latter's actions grossly imprudent and disobedient. Some traditionalists did not believe the former had been acting aggressively enough to advocate the traditional liturgical views His Eminence expressed in his writings. Davies would have been more than interested to learn that the former Cardinal Ratzinger, in his new capacity as Supreme Pontiff, is pursuing reconciliation with Lefebvre's organization.

Largely through his work with *Una Voce*, Davies had met several times with our present Holy Father. Indeed, Davies memorably shared the stage with Cardinal Ratzinger in Rome in 1998 at the event commemorating the tenth anniversary of both the Motu Proprio *Ecclésia Dei Adflícta* and the founding of the Priestly Fraternity of St. Peter. It was at this event that His Eminence made the now-famous statement that we would have to wait for a "new generation of prelates" before a "juridic" solution freeing the Tridentine Mass would be enacted. That statement was rather depressing for many who believed Cardinal Ratzinger to be the most likely member of the Curia to pursue such legislation. After the event, Davies assured skeptics that His Eminence would push for such legislation if it were possible. In 2007, Davies was vindicated when the now-Holy Father issued his Motu Proprio, *Summórum Pontificum*, allowing any priest to celebrate the Tridentine Mass on his own volition.

Cardinal Ratzinger made a kind statement upon Davies' passing. With his advanced theological and liturgical knowledge, and understanding of Vatican politics, it is telling that the now-Pope Benedict XVI saw value in Davies' writings and work.

As this column has pointed out about other pioneering figures in the restoration of the Church's Traditional Liturgy, Davies faced obstacles that no one will ever face again: There was no Internet. There were fewer intelligence sources who knew what was going on inside the walls of the Vatican. There were fewer sympathetic chanceries and bishops, and fewer interested priests, than we now have. And yet Davies persisted, relying on manual research, a network of contact people, and even hand-writing his manuscripts. It is hard to imagine that someone with such a drive could evolve today, because unlike Glenn Beck, who rightly considers himself an entertainer first, Michael Davies was not engaging in these pursuits for monetary reward. He was simply driven by love of our Holy Mother Church, as frustrating as that love had been for him at times in an era when restoration of the Tridentine Mass might have appeared to be a lost cause. Today, we owe him a debt of gratitude for his foresightful work. *Requiescat in pace.*

Tridentine Masses This Coming Week

Mon. 09/27 7:00 PM: Low Mass at St. Josaphat (Ss. Cosmas & Damian, Martyrs)

Tue. 09/28 7:00 PM: Low Mass at Assumption-Windsor (St. Wenceslaus, Duke & Martyr)

Wed. 09/29 7:00 PM: **High** Mass at St. Josaphat (Dedication of St. Michael the Archangel)