

Austrian man claims responsibility for tossing controversial Synod statues into river

In a YouTube video, a young man from Austria claims that he was one of the two men who took five controversial statues from a church near the Vatican and threw them into the Tiber River.

"I came to a conclusion together with a friend of mine.. we should go to Rome. We should get the statues out of the church. They do not belong in a Catholic church," Alexander Tschugguel said in the video uploaded on Nov. 4.

In the five-minute video, entitled "Why we threw the Pachamama idols into the Tiber river," Tschugguel describes how he came to see the carved images in Santa Maria in Traspontina as a violation of the First Commandment.

The statues, which were identical carved images of a naked pregnant Amazonian woman, had been displayed in the Carmelite church of Santa Maria in Traspontina, close to the Vatican, and used in several events, rituals, and expression of spirituality taking place during the Oct. 6-27 Amazonian synod.

In the video Tschugguel said that he spoke with volunteers within Santa Maria in Traspontina on several occasions. They explained to him that that statues were "signs of fertility, of Mother Earth, and integral ecology."

The video is uploaded from the same account as an Oct. 21 video, which showed two men with obscured faces entering the Santa Maria in Traspontina to take the images and then throwing the carved wooden figures from the side of the Sant'Angelo bridge into the Tiber River.

With more than 176,000 views on YouTube, this video increased the controversy surrounding the images at the Amazon synod.

Pope Francis issued an apology Oct. 25 asking forgiveness from those who were offended by the "Pachamama" statues being thrown into the Tiber River, and said that they had been displayed in the church "without idolatrous intentions."

In the latest video, Tschugguel appeals for people to subscribe to his YouTube channel, and includes a link to the "Boniface Institute," a simple website with links to make donations via Paypal and Patreon. There is no explanation of who or what these donations would fund.