

UNDER SCRUTINY

Communauté Saint-Martin, too many priestly vocations annoy Rome

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It may be a coincidence, but once again a community with a conservative orientation finds itself under Rome's magnifying glass. On 4 July last, the Dicastery for the Clergy appointed two apostolic assistants, Bishop Matthieu Dupont of Laval and Father

François-Marie Humann, to 'accompany' the Community of Saint Martin (Communauté Saint-Martin) for the next three years.

This French body was born in 1976 and found hospitality in the archdiocese of Genoa under the protection of Cardinal Giuseppe Siri, settling in the Capuchin convent of Voltri. The eminent Genoese cardinal explained that the Community of San Martino was born 'for the formation of French seminarians who are called to the priesthood but who refuse the confusion found in certain modern seminaries'. After 17 years in Italy, the institute returned to the diocese of Blois in 1993. But, if 31 years ago there were 30 seminarians, today there are more than 100, marking an important exception in the vocational desert that involves the now formerly 'very Catholic' France.

In fact, over the years, the Community of Saint Martin has become a source to draw on for dioceses grappling with vocational crises, being able to count on 175 priests and deacons. Yet, despite this, the Holy See has found it necessary to put this reality under 'investigation'. Indeed, it seems that it was the general crisis in vocations that set off the alarm bells in the Vatican.

The appointment of two apostolic assistants follows the pastoral visit decided by the Dicastery for the Clergy and carried out between July 2022 and January 2023 under the responsibility of Monsignor Benoît Bertrand, Bishop of Pontoise. The conclusions of the visit brought to light shadows on the figure of Father Jean-François Guérin, the founder who died in 2005 and against whom accusations of an 'abusive climate in the exercise of authority and spiritual accompaniment' and also of 'forced kissing' were allegedly made by some interviewees who were of age at the time. This is why, in a letter, Monsignor Matthieu Dupont and Father François-Marie Humann explained that 'it will be a matter of bringing truth and clarity to the founding period of the Community of Saint-Martin, to the personality of the founder who died in 2005, and to the facts of which he is accused by several former members of the community'.

Unfortunately, it is a script already seen in similar situations. Notably, this kind of three-year 'commissariat', also aims at other objectives. The two apostolic assistants, in fact, made it clear that 'it will also be necessary to work on the issue of vocational pastoral care and its reception, especially of the youngest members, to ensure better discernment and prudence when entering formation. It will also be a matter of supporting the renewal process of initial and ongoing formation in the light of Roman and national norms'. Words that hint at Rome's intolerance of too many vocations in this community with a conservative tendency and which by supplying thirty dioceses with priests risks 'infecting' half of France.

The priests of Saint Martin's, who fully accept the teachings of the Second Vatican Council, are very attentive to the solemnity of the liturgy, they also celebrate in Latin but according to the 1969 Roman Missal, they love Gregorian chant and prefer to wear cassocks at all times. In this case, therefore, there is *Nousus Antiquior* involved, but an overly traditional ecclesial sensibility seems to weigh in any case. It is difficult to conclude otherwise considering the mention of the 'work of reform that the Dicastery deemed necessary after reading the conclusions of the Visitators' made in the letter of the two newly appointed Apostolic Assistants.