

AFTER TRADITIONIS CUSTODES

The ecclesiastical circumscription, an idea for the Ancient Rite

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The news of an imminent "final solution" for the Mass in the Ancient Rite, reported by the website *Rorate Caeli*, has spread in a very short time. It is no mystery that within the Dicastery for Divine Worship there is a rather fierce current that would like the death of

the Ancient Rite.

This current is led in particular by the secretary of the Dicastery, Archbishop Vittorio Francesco Viola, who recently forbade that the Mass in the ancient rite could continue to exist in Melbourne Cathedral, where it has been celebrated every week since 1992, when it was Cardinal George Pell himself who celebrated it ([here](#) is Viola's letter). From now on, the faithful will have another church at their disposal, but only for two years. After this time, if the Archbishop of Melbourne, Msgr Peter Comensoli, wants to renew the permission, he will have to send the Dicastery "a further relatio" detailing the number of participants and, above all, indicating "the steps that have been taken to lead the faithful linked to the previous liturgy towards the celebration of the liturgy according to the liturgical books reformed by decree of the Second Vatican Council". In essence, the Archbishop of Melbourne is warned that what he has done to re-educate dissidents will be monitored...

There is no need to keep pointing out how these pastors are blinded by an ideology that makes them incapable of seeing something so simple, which is that they are dealing with the faithful, young families, teenagers and children, not enemies or reactionaries. Faithful who simply find nourishment in a ritual form that does not come from Mars or even from some circle of liturgists, but from centuries of liturgical tradition.

But in a situation like this, it is necessary to come out of the corner and be bold, in the serene certainty that truth will eventually find its way. This is why the proposal of Father Louis-Marie de Blignières, founder in 1979 of the St Vincent Ferrer Fraternity, is of great help: to ask for an ad hoc ecclesiastical circumscription to be erected for the faithful linked to the Ancient Rite. The proposal was presented in an interesting article in the magazine he founded, *Sedes Sapientiae* (no. 165, September 2023, pp. 17-44), then illustrated in an interview granted to *Tu es Petrus* (no. XLI, January-February-March 2024), magazine of the French district of the Priestly Fraternity of St Peter, which we make available to you in English ([see here](#)).

Father de Blignières' history has been marked by many painful separations; the first was in 1982, when he had to detach himself from Father Guérard des Lauriers, from whom he had received the Dominican habit, when he learned that the latter had been ordained bishop illicitly. Six years later, he also distanced himself from Mgr Marcel Lefebvre, who had ordained him a priest. Then the difficulty of carrying on a Fraternity linked to the Old Dominican Rite, always exposed to the danger of a rather hostile ecclesial climate. A very brief outline of his life history is necessary to understand that

Father de Blignières is neither naive nor idealistic; and that his proposal does not disregard the enormous difficulties that the Church has been experiencing for decades, and which have been exacerbated in this pontificate. Let us see, therefore, what it would be concretely.

An ecclesiastical circumscription concerns, Father de Blignières explains, "hierarchically structured communities of the faithful that are either dioceses (or particular Churches), or entities created for particular reasons and juridically assimilated to dioceses. Military ordinariates and personal apostolic administrations are examples of this'. It is therefore an entity with legal personality, which can only be established by the Holy See, which also appoints the bishop who becomes the Ordinary of this ecclesiastical structure. Hence, a bishop with jurisdiction.

The purpose of the erection of an ecclesiastical circumscription is to make available to the faithful what Father de Blignières calls 'the traditional pedagogy': not only the Missal approved by John XXIII in 1962, but also the other sacraments, the sacramentals, the catechism, etc. This ecclesiastical circumscription would also allow the incardination of diocesan priests who wish to offer this service to the faithful, just like the Military Ordinariates, and possibly to erect their own seminary. The faithful who join this circumscription will not cease to belong to their own diocese, based on their residence, because these structures exercise a 'cumulative jurisdiction', which is in fact provided for by the canonical order of the Catholic Church, i.e. a jurisdiction that is added to another, without eliminating it.

The proposal stems from the need to respond to a need of the faithful, which has become urgent after the stalemate "for Catholics faithful to hierarchical communion and linked to the 'previous forms of Latin tradition'", a stalemate caused by Traditionis Custodes. There are realities, numerically significant, that act outside the hierarchical communion and that, for this reason, now enjoy greater freedom of action than those who wish to remain in effective communion with the Pope and the bishops subject to him. A paradox that needs to be healed, given also the continuous haemorrhaging of faithful and priests who end up joining these realities and frequenting them, mostly because they find the doors closed by their bishops and the Dicastery itself.

Father de Blignières' proposal hinges on the presence of a bishop, who will become the Ordinary of the ecclesiastical district and who will therefore guarantee not only a sacramental service, but hierarchical union, through his inclusion in the episcopal college. There will thus be a bishop, a member of the hierarchy of the Church, who will be able to exercise true power of jurisdiction and interrelate with the diocesan bishops

(as well as with the Holy See), thus relieving individual groups of the faithful from "negotiating their status with prelates, bishops or parish priests, who often have difficulty understanding him (or who fear for the peace of their dioceses, showing favouritism towards him)". In this way, there would be a gradual return to an internal pacification of the Church, made all the more necessary after the recent developments related to the person of Msgr. Carlo Maria Viganò and the announcements of the St. Pius X Fraternity.

But why would the Holy See grant this sort of ordinariate when it is doing everything it can to destroy the Ancient Rite? Father de Blignières urges not to fixate on the present, but to 'take into account the long history of the Church'. And of the surprises that unexpectedly arise. Like the decree that the Pope granted to the Priestly Fraternity of St Peter, after Traditionis Custodes. Or like the fact that, thirty years after Paul VI's expressed desire to prohibit the use of the ancient Missal, another Pope, Benedict XVI, gave it back full citizenship, declaring it "never abrogated". However, "we must be cautious in making pessimistic predictions about the future of the Church. Because the Church is not in the hands of men, but of the Lord. And as a well-known proverb says: man proposes and God disposes."

One must emphasise the importance of beginning to disseminate and familiarise oneself with this idea, which, moreover, is not new, having already been put on the table several times since 1988. Nor is it adventurous, since it would be a canonical configuration provided for by law. In short, it is important to 'start processes'. And then have some of Gimli's audacity: 'Certainty of death, little chance of success.... What are we waiting for?''.