PAIX LITURGIQUE

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THE RENEWAL OF THE LATIN LITURGY IN PUERTO RICO

In 2012 the International Una Voce Federation announced that three new local sections from around the Caribbean Sea had been admitted: Cuba, Costa Rica, and Puerto Rico. At the time this announcement perfectly illustrated the fact that the effects of the motu proprio Summorum Pontificum knew no borders and that the demand for the traditional Mass was universal.

Five years later the situation in Cuba seems to have met a roadblock. On the other hand a priest from the Institute of the Good Shepherd has just been on mission in Costa Rica for the purpose of opening up a local monthly apostolate sometime soon. As for Puerto Rico, two dioceses regularly offer the extraordinary form of the Roman rite and the local Una Voce association maintains good relations with the local episcopal authorities.

Thanks to the painstaking work of Fr. Brian W. Harrison, an Australian priest who lived on the island from 1989 to 2007, we are in a position to present the story of the Latin Mass's return to Puerto Rico. Fr. Harrison, of the Oblates of Wisdom, is a renowned theologian whom the local ordinary, Bishop Juan Fremiot Torres Oliver, had invited to teach at the Pontifical University of Ponce. Bp. Torres Oliver—who was also the president of the local Catholic bishops' conference 1983-1994—is quite traditional in outlook and appreciated Fr. Harrison's interpretation of the Second Vatican Council "in keeping with Tradition."

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I - EXCERPTS FROM FR. HARRISON'S ACCOUNT

a) Paul VI Masses in Latin

"During Bishop Ricardo Suriñach's episcopate in Ponce (2001-2003), I celebrated two public Sunday Latin Masses in Our Lady of Guadalupe Cathedral in Ponce (on 4/29/01 and 2/24/02). For these Masses I used the editio typica of the Missal of Pope Paul VI promulgated in 1969 and slightly revised in 1970 – the rite popularly known as the Novus Ordo. I also celebrated two similar Sunday Masses in the parish church of Arroyo (3/3/02 and 6/2/02), where a young Cuban-American pastor was strongly sympathetic to the revival of Latin. (However, these two Masses resulted in complaints to the Ponce diocesan chancery about Fr. García and his traditional leanings from 'progressive' nuns in his parish. Life became difficult for him and not long afterwards he left for the US and has since been ministering in Chicago.)"

"The next Bishop of Ponce, the Most Rev. Félix Lázaro (episcopate 2003-2015), was also favorably disposed to having some Latin liturgies available as an option, as was the then Rector of the Cathedral, Msgr. Marcos Pancorbo. So I celebrated monthly sung Latin *Novus Ordo* Masses in the Ponce Cathedral during my last four years in Puerto Rico. I taught the little Cathedral choir to chant Mass VIII (Missa de Angelis) on these occasions.(Today's Una Voce Puerto Rico President, Edgardo Cruz, often joined in this schola when he drove across the island from San Juan to attend these celebrations.) That monthly Mass was generally quite well attended, and was considered newsworthy enough to gain a quite sympathetic double-page write-up, complete with photos and an interview of myself and a couple of happy attendees, in Puerto Rico's main daily newspaper, El Nuevo Día. I am pretty sure that, unfortunately, no public Latin *Novus Ordo* Masses have been celebrated, in Ponce or anywhere else in the island, since my departure almost a decade ago. But I think the main reason for that has not so much been a loss of popular interest, or a negative change of heart on the part of the Bishop of Ponce, but rather, just the lack of any priest who was willing, able and available to continue what I had begun."

b) The traditional Mass

"Under the so-called Indult regime (1984-2007) I had possessed ever since February 1989 a *celebret* for private celebration with the 1962 Missal, issued to me by

the Pontifical Ecclesia Dei Commission over the signature of its first President, Augustin Cardinal Mayer. But since virtually hardly any of my Masses in Puerto Rico were private, I went through the 1990s without using my celebret in the island. The first Traditional Latin Mass in Puerto Rico that I can find in my records is dated April 29, 2000, at the San José Obrero (St. Joseph the Worker) parish church in El Tuque, Ponce. At that time we Oblates of Wisdom priests were in charge of the parish, so I had more freedom there and celebrated a private Mass."

"The first initiative from Puerto Ricans themselves to revive the Traditional Latin Mass came a year later. The central figure in this movement was the late Don Cancio Ortiz de la Renta, a thorough-going traditionalist. Don Cancio had written to the then Una Voce President, the late Michael Davies, asking him if he knew of any priests in Puerto Rico who celebrated the Traditional Latin Mass. Michael, who had been a friend of mine for some years in spite of our differences of opinion on some issues, wrote back advising Cancio to get in touch with me via the Pontifical Catholic University of Puerto Rico Ponce, where I was a theology professor. Don Cancio succeeded in contacting me at around the New Year, and I was happy to oblige; and so on February 10, 2002, the first Traditional Mass celebrated in 'la Isla' since Vatican II at the initiative of Puerto Ricans themselves, and through the assistance of Una Voce International, was offered. It was a strictly private Mass on a dining-room table at the San Juan residence of some friends of Cancio's - a retired judge or doctor whose name escapes me now. As I recall, about five or six people were present."

"Cancio promptly decided that the nascent Puerto Rican movement to revive the Traditional Latin liturgy should be organized as the *Sociedad de San Fernando Rey*. The first Mass under the new society's auspices, and I believe the first (or at least, the first ecclesiastically approved) Traditional Mass offered in any Puerto Rican church or chapel since Vatican II, was celebrated privately --by word-of-mouth invitation only-- on March 10, 2002, in the parish church of San Jorge, located in the Santurce sector of the City of San Juan. Another one followed 9 June. If I remember rightly, only a small group attended these Masses --not reaching double figures. I remember there were at least a couple of private Traditional Latin Masses celebrated each year under the auspices of either Don Cancio and the *Sociedad de San Fernando Rey*, or the increasingly active Edgardo Cruz, in churches where there were sympathetic priests in charge. Another such Mass was offered in San Jorge on 8/30/07, and the last one, just before I left Puerto Rico, was in my priests' residence at the Pontifical Catholic University in Ponce on November 7, 2007. By that time, Don Cancio, who had health and other personal problems, was no longer attending these Traditional Latin Masses, and, since well before his death on June 13, 2011, Edgardo Cruz had pretty much taken over the role of organizing them and finding priest celebrants."

II – THE REFLECTIONS OF PAIX LITURGIQUE

1) **An Australian priest born into a Presbyterian family, converted to Catholicism at 27, and ordained a priest in 1985 by Saint John Paul II at 40 becomes the artisan of the renewal of the traditional Mass in a Spanish-speaking Caribbean country . . . . this gives a good illustration not only of the Latin and Gregorian Mass's universality but also of how inscrutable the ways of the Lord are to our human understanding.** Fr. Harrison's account also recalls that until 2007 the custom was for diocesan or religious priests who were not members of an Ecclesia Dei institute to ask that Roman Pontifical Commission for a canonical document permitting them to celebrate according to the Tridentine missal. This *celebret*—which was often also granted to priests coming from the Society of Saint Pius X—indicated that the priest had was subject no censure and could celebrate in the traditional form.

2) Fr. Harrison begins his account by talking about the celebration in Latin and Gregorian chant of what is now called the ordinary form of the Roman rite. He reveals that his bishop as well as the rector of the cathedral were favorable to it; as a result, he was able to offer it once a month for four years. The island's main daily newspaper even devoted a two-page spread to this "Latin Mass." Yet none of the priests in the diocese, or even on the island, opted to carry on this celebration after him and the faithful quietly returned to the ordinary form in Spanish. **This short-lived experiment perfectly reflects how the rubrical celebration of the reformed Mass in Latin and Gregorian chant, whatever the virtuous efforts spent on it, has never been able to find a place in the Church beyond a few rarified locations.** On the other hand the perseverance of the Puerto Rico faithful to obtain the celebration of the extraordinary form corresponds admirably with the perseverance displayed wherever the traditional Mass was first forbidden, then retained, and finally (since 2007) revived.

3) **While the Mass is no longer offered in the diocese of Ponce, where Fr. Harrison used to serve, it is offered regularly in two dioceses:**
-in the diocese of San Juan where, in March 2015, the archbishop designated Santa Ana's church in the capital's historic downtown as the venue for the diocesan celebrations organized by Una Voce Puerto Rico: the Mass is offered there every month, and more often when an outside priest visits.
-in the diocese of Mayagüez, where the pastor of Inmaculada Concepcion de los Protomártires church has been hosting the extraordinary form of the Roman rite every Wednesday at noon and the first Sunday of the month since the fall of 2016.

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