

PAIX LITURGIQUE

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THE SITUATION OF THE TRADITIONAL LITURGY THROUGHOUT THE WORLD AT THE END OF 2018 (Part two): THE PRIESTS

In our Letter 102 (13 July 2019), we presented the situation of the traditional Mass throughout the world. We gave an overview of the countries where the traditional Mass is celebrated and noted that it is now present in over eighty countries—not to mention regions that depend on a mother country such as Martinique or New Caledonia for France or Puerto Rico for the USA. Today we present the second part of our 2018 survey and examine the number of priests who celebrate the traditional Mass throughout the world. To do so we continue our conversation with Christian Marquant, who had shared his thoughts on the fifth day of *Summorum Pontificum* in Rome on 29 October 2018.

Q-Do we have an idea of the number of priests who celebrate the traditional Mass throughout the world?

Christian Marquant - This issue is even more difficult to deal with than that of the places where the traditional Mass is celebrated, even when one takes into account only those priests who are associated with traditional institutes. Furthermore, for this survey we disposed only of often fluctuating or incomplete statistics and of superficial information concerning diocesan priests, who generally have no desire to publicize their attachment to the *usus antiquior*. For this reason I thank in advance all those who will help us correct and improve our information, just as I had done for the first part of this survey.

Q - Surely we have sufficiently precise data concerning the Priestly Society of Saint Pius X?

Christian Marquant - Indeed, that institution publishes relatively precise statistics (1). According to these, priests incorporated in the SSPX numbered about 660 at the end of 2018. Yet it is more difficult to assess the number of priests who belong to religious groups attached to the SSPX, such as the Capuchins of Morgon, the Benedictines of Bellaigue, the Fraternity of the Transfiguration, and many others. We know of their existence, but not the number of priests in them. One may prudently put forward a total number of fifty priests “allied” to the SSPX. Still, to these roughly 710 priests must be added the so-called “Resistance” priests, who gravitate in the same universe although they do not belong to the SSPX. A figure of fifty seems reasonable for this group. One may therefore seriously consider that this group as a whole comprises about 760 priests.

Q - What about the communities that continue to be called “Ecclesia Dei”?

Christian Marquant - There again some elements are simple enough to know; others, less so. Indeed, while the great *Ecclesia Dei* institutes gladly provide figures, there are smaller groups for which data is harder to come by.

So for example it is known that the Fraternity of Saint Peter numbered a little over 300 priests at the end of 2018, the Institute of Christ the King Sovereign Priest had 112, the Institute of the Good Shepherd forty-five, and the Administration Saint John Mary Vianney thirty-five. This yields an initial total of about 500 priests. If the other priests of the *Ecclesia Dei* nebula amount to about a hundred, a figure I consider to be worth considering, there is a total of roughly 600 priests for this constituency.

Q - Do you include traditional Religious in this calculation?

Christian Marquant - Actually, Ecclesia Dei Institutes fall into the category of non-secular, i.e. religious, priests. Your question, though, concerns monasteries—particularly Benedictine monasteries—attached to the traditional Mass such as Fontgombault, Clear Creek, or Norcia (and many others!) that were founded before 1988 (or are in charge of traditional communities founded before or after that date; I have Riaumont in mind). They have always been independent of the former Ecclesia Dei commission, except when it came to settling liturgical questions. It is not unreasonable to estimate their number at about 130 priests throughout the world.

Therefore the “official” constituency that groups together ED community priests and religious priests of the traditional liturgy would amount to about 730 priests (600 ED + 130 non-ED religious).

Q - So do you reckon that the traditional world as a whole amounts to over 1400 priests?

Christian Marquant - Yes, if we are still discussing priests who belong to institutes that are “specialized” in the traditional Mass, and not diocesan priests who celebrate it. If, then, one adds together the 760 priests of the SSPX world and the 730 priests of the “official” traditional world, one reaches close to 1500 priests. You’ll note that the two traditional “families” have about the same number of priests.

Q - Do you think it is meaningful?

Christian Marquant - The most obvious meaning is the remarkable vitality of the traditional world. It seems even considerable if one compares—in the West anyway—the “fertility” of the extraordinary world with that of the ordinary world. I here understand “fertility” as the ratio between the number of faithful who practice a given liturgy and the number of priests they “produce.” In the West, this “fertility rate” is dramatically weak in the ordinary form, whereas it is roughly similar to preconciliar figures in the extraordinary form. In France, according to the lowest estimates, 1% of French houses of worship are devoted to the traditional liturgy; the number of laymen attending them is at least 5% the total number of practicing Catholics, but with a clearly lower than average age demographic, and every year they “beget” 15 to 20% of priests that may be likened to diocesan priests (in 2017: 22 ordinations for the traditional Mass; 84 for the new Mass).

Note also that the SSPX has not slowed down since 1988—when the ED Commission was created and the ED Institutes were erected. As for the development of the ED Institutes et al., it has never ceased growing. Not only has the competition not harmed anyone, but everything has happened as though the development of a more diverse “offer” had increased the “demand,” namely the manifestation of vocations. You’ll forgive me for using such trivial terms in speaking of the supernatural reality of the Lord’s calling, but it is incarnated in a sociological reality, as is everything in the Church.

Q - Yet you do not reduce the number of priests attached to the traditional liturgy to “specialized” institutes?

Christian Marquant - Not at all. On the contrary, I insist on the following fact: our survey shows that next to the priests who belong to traditional institutions, there exists a considerable and growing number of diocesan and religious priests strongly attached to the traditional Mass. they know it and they celebrate it.

Q - How can you assess this universe in terms of numbers?

Christian Marquant - That is the heart of the difficulty for our research, but it is not impossible to sort through it, though without being too precise. We have a few available avenues to probe:

A -celebrants of Summorum Pontificum Masses in the dioceses;

B -priest-members of priestly associations;

C -priests who have learned to celebrate the traditional Mass;

D -the many contacts Paix Liturgique has made at the grass-roots level.

Q - What do you mean by “celebrants of Summorum Pontificum Masses”?

Christian Marquant - The greatest number of Masses celebrated in virtue of the motu proprio Summorum Pontificum according to the usus antiquior are not by Ecclesia Dei priests but by diocesan priests or religious who do not belong to traditional institutes.

For instance, look at our interview with Marco Sgroi (Letter 680 of 29 January 2018), who points out that in Italy 83% of SP Masses are celebrated by diocesan priests, which goes a long way to reveal the hidden side of tradition. Yet, as Marco Sgroi appropriately notes, while at first there were many priests in charge of these celebrations who did not want to offer them, or even who accepted such assignments in order to kill the emergence of such communities of the faithful, such a state of affairs is only marginal today: the priests who say the traditional Mass are quite willing to do so.

And this is observable in nearly all areas affected by the SP phenomenon.

One can assess the number of such priests at over 200 in Italy, over 250 in France, over 150 in England, etc.

Q - What do you mean by “priestly associations”?

Christian Marquant - For France I am thinking of the Opus sacerdotale, which has long brought together mainly diocesan priests, most of whom are attached to the traditional Mass. Their membership allows them to recharge their batteries in that spirit during retreats or various study sessions. I can also mention, for Italy, the Amicizia Sacerdotale Summorum Pontificum.

Our contacts with these associations or with other, more discreet, groups provide us with a second clue to the number of priests attached to the traditional Mass for any given region, even though, obviously, this second avenue of inquiry largely overlaps with the first one.

Q - You also mentioned the case of non-traditional priests who wish to learn how to celebrate the traditional Mass?

Christian Marquant - Yes, this is a well-known phenomenon, even though the houses belonging to the SSPX or to the “official” traditional world that participate in teaching the traditional Mass do so with a great deal of discretion. But it is a fact that since the 2007 motu proprio several thousands of priests have undergone such a formation. We know of a house in the United States that claims to have taught over 1000 American priests how to celebrate the usus antiquior.

Q - You mentioned your contacts?

Christian Marquant - We also have direct contacts with European priests and indirect contacts through our foreign friends. I can state that there still are very many priests who are not free to display their attachment to the traditional Mass in their parish or diocese. They still fear reprisals or at least various difficulties. So there is a non-negligible number of “dissident” priests, if I may use such a strong analogy. Their confreres all around them have no idea about their liturgical preferences, which they practice in a sort of double life!

Q - Are you able to draw conclusions from these different research avenues?

Christian Marquant - It's difficult. I'll just give you a low-ball number of 3000 priests attached to the *usus antiquior* throughout the world, although I believe there are more than 5000. The "2019 Report" we'll be publishing next December will certainly demonstrate as much.

Q - That figure of 3000 is quite high as it is!

Christian Marquant - I'm prudent in citing such numbers. One thing is certain: while the institutes of traditional priests are essential to the existence of the traditional liturgy, the world of secular and religious priests, whether or not they are openly attached to the *usus antiquior*, already amounts to a considerable group, at least twice as numerous as the perfectly quantifiable SSPX and ED groups. The latter have been, and still are, those who've maintained the Tridentine liturgy. The others represent its future, in a perspective of a revival of the Church in which she emerges from the crisis currently afflicting her.

Q - How representative are these priests compared to the Church as a whole?

Christian Marquant - The most recent statistics on Catholic priests provided by the Vatican Statistical Office in 2018 concern the year 2016 (2). The figure reveals that Latin and Oriental Catholic priests number 414 467 all told. Our 4500 priests attached to the traditional Mass (1500 "Traddy" priests plus the 3000 "diocesan and regular" priests) therefore represent at least 1.1% of Catholic clergy worldwide that have remained, or have gone back to being, Tridentine. The figure is higher if one takes only Latin clergy into account—since we are talking about the Latin liturgy—and if one considers only active priests. This is far from paltry, considering that this identity has long been forbidden and remains, by and large, persecuted. And yet, it keeps on growing . . .

(1) <http://laportelatine.org/quisommesnous/statistiques/stat.php>

(2) *Annuaire statistique de l'Eglise 2016* (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2018), 80.