

LATIN MASS IN LATIN AMERICA

by John Burke

There is a corner of God's earth where not only are a good 400 Masses a week said reverently in Latin for the faithful but the entire traditional liturgy is followed as a matter of faith.

Catholic doctrine and discipline, undiluted and unambiguous, are being taught in home and school under approved Brazilian priests for whom Vatican II might never have taken place. New churches continue to be built exclusively for the ancient rituals in everything from baptisms (1,354 last year) to funerals in this diocese with its own seminary to the north of Rio.

Yet it would be feasible for an uninformed churchgoer from elsewhere, even one speaking Portuguese, to visit the area without realising that things were different from the rest of Brazil and beyond. Paradox and miracle, it is a reality.

Most readers will know about the varied efforts to preserve and revive traditional liturgy. To appreciate the unprecedented Brazilian achievement, it is worth analysing what happens worldwide.

TRIDENTINE MOVEMENTS

The international federation, Una Voce, and its affiliates like the Latin Mass Society in England and Wales, work with priests who usually say the New Mass too. More often than not, they must borrow a re-ordered church for the relatively rare Tridentine celebration. The International Centre for Study of the Liturgy (CIEL), founded in France, does the same, even obtaining a sympathetic member of the hierarchy or a prelate from the Vatican. In 2003, however, its seventh annual Mass in London is to be said by the only traditional bishop in Brazil.

There are also some monasteries dedicated to old rites, such as the Benedictine monasteries of Barroux and Bellaigue in France, but priests of the still suspended Society of Pius X will say nothing but the old Mass at their own chapels or centres, widely scattered. Figuratively and literally, they are flying priests (the phrase is borrowed, dogma aside, from conservative Anglicans who prefer visiting male ministry to a feminist incumbent).

By contrast, a priest from a pontifical seminary such as St Peter's in Wigratzbad or Christ the King near Florence has to find a sympathetic presbytery in the Catholic Church at large, meaning that his Tridentine celebrations must co-exist with vernacular Masses. Such accommodations are few and far between.

BRAZIL'S RELIGIOUS CONFUSION

Rome recently authorised yet another form of concession and co-existence, this time a unique dual formula whereby a traditional diocese in Brazil, with its own churches, newly exists on the same territory as one where the Novus Ordo was belatedly imposed. In fact, except for the buildings, the old diocese is simply reinstated but alongside the new one that supplanted it.

Both wings of the Church operate in and around the city of Campos dos Goytacazes which gives its name to one of 255 dioceses in what is, nominally, the world's most Catholic country. In fact, it is common to see crucifixes in shops, banks and offices or reminders of Fatima on desks and counters, not to mention images of saints on windows and windcreens.

Church attendance is still high among the 175 million Brazilians whose country is larger than the continental United States. But a recent report from Brazil's conference of 417 bishops notes a decline of 7 percent in Christian belief, reaching 15 percent in the crime-racked metropolis of Rio. There and elsewhere, many people blithely mingle Christian devotions with pagan ceremonies brought over by slaves from Africa.

PROTESTANTISM AND POLITICS

Proliferating Bible-based sects are also attracting former Catholics, especially the poor who are more likely to be coloured and black than white. Protestant fundamentalists even produced a presidential candidate, Anthony Garotinho, and his wife, Rosinha, who has succeeded him as social-democratic governor of Rio de Janeiro (RJ) state. The federal race was won by a left-winger, Luis Inacio da Silva (Lula), one of whose earlier bids was ruined after a onetime girlfriend revealed that he paid her to get an abortion. Lula has always had close links with Brazil's communists and so-called social Catholics, both of whom still support the sometimes violent Movement for the Landless (MST).

In the countryside are innumerable chapels for Pentecostal communities that are building enormous temples in cities like Curitiba. Ample funds are available from the USA, and a source in Campos suggested that protestantization was a tactic of Freemasonry to subvert Catholicism.

I saw revivalists recruiting on the streets in places as far apart as Porto Alegre and Belo Horizonte. I also met some Jehovah's Witnesses, all dressed in Sunday best, after they opened yet another new Kingdom Hall built in record time, this time in rural Itamonte, to join 8,500 that already exist in Brazil. The inauguration was led by the national co-coordinator, a former seminarian from Sao Paulo! "Most of us left the Catholic Church because it abandoned sound Biblical principles", said another Jehovah's Witness.

CATHOLICISM IS DEGRADED

Solemn liturgy too! Here are three examples, including something I have not seen in Europe. In the same town of Itamonte (Minas Gerais), the parish priest laughed when I mentioned the lack of stoups for any holy water. In Rio, I had to ask the celebrant for Holy Communion, as he lounged presidentially watching women administering the Sacrament. In Curitiba, as elsewhere, the choir was on the sanctuary; the lectionary was paraded up the aisle to applause for the Gospel, during which the congregation — many of Slavonic origin — gave what looked like the Hitler salute!

CAMPOS PROVIDES HOPE

Such novelties can be avoided in Campos dos Goytacazes (not the only Campos in Brazil) that is located 175 miles north of Rio in Rio de Janeiro state. Also known as Campos (RJ), it is reached in four hours from the metropolis by a fast bus of Auto Viacao.

The area is reasonably prosperous by Brazilian standards, its wealth coming from agriculture and alcoholic fuel as well as offshore gas. Campos (RJ) is also a military town, hosting the 59th infantry regiment and Brazil's special forces. There is a rare memorial to Brazilians killed on the Italian front in 1943-45, and, close by, an exceptional reminder of the Church Militant: a big stone slab on which are engraved the Ten Commandments.

Both monuments are within sight of the modernist basilica whose collegial bishop and clergy must now co-exist with special forces equally recognised by Rome.

REVIVAL OF THE REMNANT

It was only in 2002 that Cardinal Dario Castrillon Hoyos, Prefect of the Sacred Congregation, made not one but two visits from Rome to foster and further Catholic orthodoxy. At the start of the year, he regularised the status of the unofficial bishop and all his priests. Amazingly, only seven months later, he came back to consecrate an experienced traditional priest as eventual successor.

This ended two decades in the wilderness, stemming from exactly the same resistance shown by the late Archbishop Lefebvre and his following to the aftermath of Vatican II. His opposite number in Brazil was Bishop Antonio de Castro Meyer, a doctor of theology, who had made known his own reservations about Vatican II, particularly criticising in 1966 the biased application of the documents.

It is no coincidence that both bishops had a strong devotion to Our Lady of Fatima, and that they both saw the danger of atheistic communism. Castro Meyer virtually became chaplain to Brazil's conservative movement, Tradition Family Property (TFP), a direct opponent during its heyday of the MST and the likes of Helder Camara, the Bishop of Recife.

Also like Lefebvre, the Bishop of Campos had serious misgivings about the new Mass, so on 12 September 1969, he successfully petitioned Pope Paul VI who allowed the old Mass to be the official liturgy of Campos. It was on that same trip to Europe that he visited Archbishop Lefebvre.

CRISIS COMES TO CAMPOS

In 1981, after 30 years in the episcopate, Castro Meyer was retired. His progressive successor, Bishop Carlos Navarro, issued an ultimatum to say the Novus Ordo, switching to Portuguese. The 30 priests who made a stand, solely over the old Latin liturgy, were banned from diocesan churches. Yet so strong was the attachment of their flocks that they managed to say the old Mass in halls, houses and garages. The outcasts formed themselves into the Priestly Society of the Cure d'Ars (Uniao

Sacerdotal S. Joao-Baptista-Maria Vianney). And in time, their faithful flocks scraped enough money together to hire or build their own places of worship.

Then in 1988, since it takes two bishops to consecrate another, Castro Meyer went to Ecône to help Lefebvre create four successors in the international Society of Pius X.

When both Lefebvre and Castro Meyer died in 1991, the Brazilian grouping had its own leader, Licinio Rangel, consecrated by the valid yet unofficial bishops of the Society of Pius X who travelled to São Fidelis (RJ), because Campos was still getting young men who wanted to enter a traditionally Catholic seminary.

ROME TAKES NOTICE

The stand-off with surrounding modernists continued until 2000 AD when Brazilians joined other traditionalists in the pilgrimage to Rome, organised by the Society of Pius X. The public welcome given to these 4,000 Catholics of the old Latin rite moved the Vatican to open talks with the twin groupings in the northern and southern hemispheres. This task was delegated to Cardinal Castrillon.

There is still no agreement between Rome and Ecône whose Bishop Fellay warned the Brazilians against compromise. Rangel, however, replied that Campos was in a simpler and singular situation, being a diocese in exile surrounded not only by sympathisers but opponents uneasy at the confusion.

On the feast of the Assumption 2001, he sent the Pope an appeal signed by all his priests “to be recognised as Catholics”, reminding him of Paul VI's fear of the “self-destruction of the Church”. His Holiness replied “with pastoral joy” on Christmas Day, acknowledging that the “salvation of souls” was the supreme duty stipulated in Canon 1752, and revoking sanctions under Canon 1382.

CEREMONY OF RECONCILIATION

The result was that on 18 January 2002, Cardinal Castrillon arrived in Campos to regularise the situation canonically. The ceremony of reconciliation took place in the existing cathedral, the Basilica of the Most Holy Saviour whose high altar and pulpit make it still look more Catholic than many a modernised church elsewhere. There was no Mass of any kind, but a Te Deum was sung and the document was read out for all present.

Under this agreement, the traditional community in Campos has become a Personal Apostolic Administration, meaning that it answers directly to the Holy Father instead of to the Archdiocese of Rio and still less to the Brazilian bishops' conference.

Added weight was given to the agreement by the public support of important prelates in Brazil. Those present included two cardinals, one archbishop, four bishops and the representatives of two more bishops, while several other churchmen sent messages of congratulations.

On behalf of his following, Rangel accepted the legitimacy of the Pope, pointing out that his portrait and that of the conciliar bishop for Campos had always been in the sacristies of the unauthorised churches and chapels. He also accepted the new Mass as being valid “provided that it is celebrated correctly and with the intention of offering a true sacrifice of the Holy Mass”.

Likewise, he recognised the Vatican Council “as one of several councils and accepting it in the light of tradition”. In a certain way, this Campos formula reminds me of Margaret More's taking the oath to Henry VIII's supremacy “so far as the law of God allows”. Her father, Sir Thomas More, declined outright to sign any document just as Econe does - as yet.

WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS?

Summing up the achievement in an interview with the Brazilian magazine 30 Dias, Rangel said that what had transpired between Campos and Rome should not be called an agreement but an understanding. He seemed to imply that the Vatican had come round to realising that the traditionalists had been right all along! In fact, when the interview was reprinted in the priestly society's monthly bulletin Ontem Hoje Sempre (Yesterday, Today, Forever), it was headlined: Unity within sacred tradition.

Apart from the priestly fraternity's own news and views, this bulletin does carry statements made by the Vatican and even the Brazilian hierarchy (which has a history of radical politicking), where they are doctrinally correct. For example, the issue of February 2002 reprints the Catholic Church's condemnation of clergy who sexually abuse and pervert adults and minors, something that has affected Latin America as much as anywhere else.

Where doctrine goes astray, Campos retains a freedom of action that some Tridentine organizations may lack, and that Econe certainly fears to lose. Thus, again in the above interview, Rangel made it clear that he had not signed up to silence in return for the old Mass and traditional status quo. It cannot have escaped notice, either in Rome or at home, that the June 2000 issue of *Ontem Hoje Sempre* attacked the former president of the Brazilian bishops' conference, Ivo Lorscheiter of Santa Maria, for attending the heretical ceremony in his own cathedral of making a self-styled bishop for the tiny Anglican community in Brazil.

A THEOLOGICAL TIME-BOMB

Answering a question about unresolved matters relating to Canon 212, Rangel agreed that there would be further study of certain matters not defined by the Magisterium and capable of reform. He explained, "This canon recognises the right and even, at times, the duty to express, after competent study, one's own opinion, even in a public manner, within the Church, faced with documents and attitudes of our ecclesiastical authorities. That means, as we state in our declaration, that we are by no means promising silent complicity in the face of possible errors."

Rangel also paid tribute to all those in the (collegial) Church who had made possible the accord that was accepted unanimously by his Priestly Union of the Cur, d'Ars. Emphasising that Pope John Paul II himself had done his utmost for reconciliation, he praised the entire Congregation of the Clergy, especially the departmental head, Fr Fernando Jose Monteiro. No less than five cardinals at the Vatican were for it:

Battista, Medina, Ratzinger and Sodano as well as Castrillon himself.

Significantly, Rangel also thanked no less than eight Brazilian prelates, including Cardinal Eugenio Sales of Rio, for supporting the reconciliation. Another surprising name was Roberto Gomes Guimaraes who is the third modernist Bishop of Campos since 1981.

CASTRILLON RUSHES BACK

It took an unforeseeable event to prove that conservatives in the Vatican would not allow the agreement to lapse. When Rangel, still freshly authorised as bishop, contracted cancer, Rome might have let the see become vacant, eventually putting its own man in. Just what Lefebvre had feared for Econe.

Instead, on 18 August the Colombian cardinal was urgently back in Campos to consecrate a coadjutor and obvious successor, Fr. Fernando Areas Rifan, who had been Castro Meyer's secretary and personal representative. In the presence of almost 10,000 faithful, he was given the honorary title of Bishop of Cedamusa in Mauritania, previously held by an American bishop.

Castrillon was assisted by Bishop Rangel himself and also by the modernist bishop of Nova Friburgo (RJ). And the ceremony in the open air was watched by the same line-up of modernist churchmen as before. They included Bishop Guimaraes of Campos who, like his new opposite number, had been ordained by Castro Meyer and even taught Rifan at seminary!

Also present were the Apostolic Nuncio, Alfio Rapisarda, to whom the priestly society acknowledged a great debt for the new accord. The consecration of August was watched too by Dom Tomas de Aquino OSB, the abbot of a Benedictine monastery in Santa Cruz (RJ) that is planting a traditional colony at Bellaigue.

Most of the 100 priests attending say the vernacular Mass, but one of the society's own was Fr Eduardo Athayde from St Anthony of Padua's who stated bluntly, "What this means in the Church's current situation is vigorous action against desacralization, moral laxity and false ecumenism".

The ceremony was also witnessed by Father Ignatius Harrison from Brompton Oratory in London, helping to bridge a psychological gap that Rifan mentioned to me: "We do feel rather remote out here, so it is vital for the world's traditionalists to keep in touch with each other".

AN INTELLECTUAL BACKGROUND

Born in 1950 at Sao Fidelis, the new bishop attended junior and senior seminaries in the diocese before being ordained in 1974. Having studied theology and philosophy, he taught the latter along with psychology to later seminarians and he also became director of diocesan education.

His main gift is probably as a communicator, although he does play the accordion. He was official spokesman for the Society of the Cure d'Ars, and he has been broadcasting on Radio Continental in Campos in Portuguese for the past 19 years. There is a daily programme, Ave Maria, and a weekly one whose title Catolico Sempre. Incidentally, there is an excellent website: www.catolicosempre.com.br Since, however, there are always those who suggest that liturgy takes second place to charity and is even incompatible with it, note that Bishop Rifan has a track-record of caring for some of the all too many poor in Brazil. He set up a dispensary named after St Vincent de Paul for allocating relief.

Significantly, he also supported the peaceful Programme of Communal Action, an alternative to the radical MST. The municipality of Campos dos Goytacazes has given him two civic awards that must increase the prestige of authentic Catholicism.

A DYNAMIC DIOCESE

As the effective leader of traditionalists throughout Latin America since Rangel died in December, the new Bishop of Campos commands the direct allegiance of 30,000 Catholic lay-folk and 30 priests plus one deacon in his far-flung diocese. Seven of them serve the town of Campos, including the oldest priest of all, Fr Heinrich Fischer, a German from the Rhineland ordained in 1960. The oldest church in the entire area is the colonial baroque one that was founded on 13 May (of all days) 1752 to serve a convent in Campos dos Goytacazes. It escaped modernist ravages because:

“We are Carmelite sisters faithful to the Tridentine rite of the Latin Mass”.

Campos has seen the erection of beautiful new churches for the Mass of all time throughout its Babylonian exile. The principal avenue at Sao Fidelis, for example, is graced by a large new church whose twin pinnacles had to be put in place by a crane brought up from Rio last year. By then, the Catholics of Campos could hear the old Mass in 19 churches, 115 chapels and 20 other centres. Itabapoana alone has 28 chapels in addition to a new church in traditional style.

Looking purely Portuguese is the church of the Apparition of Our Lady at Porciuncula, one of the worst towns to suffer from modernist frenzy. Forced out in 1981, Fr. Jose Collacao was reduced to ministering to the faithful at an old station. It was thanks to the kindness of Porciuncula's mayor that he and his flock were granted land by a health centre. Before dying five years later, this true priest was able to say Mass in a new church that attracted so many worshippers that it was enlarged in 1999.

Another town especially targeted by self-styled progressives was Itaperuna, 60 miles westward on the high road to Belo Horizonte. It was only in May 2000 that a new church was opened in honour of Our Lady of Fatima, her statue being crowned by the mayor's wife. It can accommodate half of Itaperuna's 1,000 churchgoers, including 11 traditional nuns in the grey habit of the Servants of Jesus and Mary.

The same year saw a high altar of granite, topped by the tabernacle, installed at Our Lady of the Rosary that had to be enlarged a decade after it was erected. It is among the six traditional churches in Campos dos Goytacazes that also include St Joseph's, standing opposite one of the many noisy New Alliance evangelical temples.

Since, however, the ghost of Cranmer has not afflicted Brazil as much as elsewhere, it is not always apparent whether a local church has Mass in Latin or Portuguese, although modernist priests outnumber those of the Cure d'Ars Society by two to one.

Even my taxi-driver got confused. Generally, a church open all day is traditional, other signs being statues of Our Lady of Fatima, St Teresa of the Little Flower and St John Vianney. There will certainly be a notice asking the congregation to be modestly dressed (MODESTIA NAS TRAJES), and most of the womenfolk make sure that they are veiled for Mass. Or just look for a figure in a black cassock or an austere habit! There may well be a priest in the confessional for longer than has become customary elsewhere; the 30 priests hear 12,745 Confessions per month.

STILL THEY BUILD

Two large churches for the Tridentine rite are unfinished. One is the pro-cathedral, 186 feet long and 46 wide, to complement the still beautiful basilica in the main square. In fact, the latter is likely to be eclipsed when two wings are eventually attached at a total cost of two million dollars. The pro-cathedral itself is dedicated to the Immaculate Heart of Our Lady of the Rosary of Fatima, but it will form part of a complex named after the Thirteenth of May.

This will consist of a college, a house for retreats, a catechetical centre and a unit for social assistance. The fabric of the pro-cathedral itself still requires 300,000 dollars for completion before it can accommodate 1,000 worshippers and provide 18 rooms at lower level for meetings of such associations as the Daughters of Mary and Apostolate of Prayer. In the meantime, Sunday worship is in the crypt, the total attendance at three Masses being 800.

The other church under construction is St Gerald's on the opposite side of the River Paraiba that reaches the South Atlantic 15 miles away at Sao Joao de Barra where St Cecilia's is the new traditional church. St Gerald's is far less advanced than the pro-cathedral, but so great is the hunger for the old Mass that a temporary altar is used in the bare interior. Amid builders' tools and rubble, carpets are unrolled and benches brought out for the congregation that is still paying for construction.

ANOTHER CATHOLIC GENERATION

St Gerald's looms opposite a school of the same name run by nuns at the Our Lady of Good Counsel convent. I toured both this school and that next to the pro-cathedral. The seating and equipment are basic compared to those in the developed world, and there is a lack of books, but the all-important crucifix is prominently displayed.

Being there for Sunday catechism and adult instruction (I faced some awkward questions about Christianity in Britain), what also impressed me was a blackboard on which the teacher had explained in detail the sacrament of Baptism, including the fact that it washed away original sin.

The weekday School of the Three Young Shepherds has 30 teachers for 311 pupils. Parents who can afford it pay an annual fee equivalent to 300 dollars (190 sterling) per year in a country where the monthly salary starts at 79 dollars (50 sterling) and only one Brazilian in ten earns 15,800 dollars (10,000 sterling) a year.

Yet another school was opened in 2000 AD at Santa Maria where 50 children so far are taught by the Sisters of the Child Jesus. Altogether, 3,000 children in Campos are taught real Catholic doctrine at 11 schools.

I asked Rifan whether the traditional parts of the Campos region still had control of catechetics. He told me that if they got an erroneous book circulating elsewhere in Brazil, they could and would reject it for their own schools and seminary.

Education is not the only apostolate of the 102 nuns at five traditional convents. They also run an old folks' home besides doing other charitable work. All in all, Catholicism is not confined to Sunday; it permeates the whole life of the diocese throughout the liturgical and calendrical year. Thus, the latest annual statistics include 164 marriages.

As Bishop Rifan said to me, when I compared the victory of Campos with that of Barroux, "An abbot has the rank of a bishop, but we have much more than the monastery - we have a whole diocese complete with a seminary".

Named after the Immaculate Conception, this modest building is furnished in rudimentary fashion by the standards of the developed world. It stands almost opposite a church so ultra-modern that one seminarian, Jose Henrique Alves de Alemeida, warned me, "It is more like a lecture-hall than a house of God".

In total, there are 26 seminarians, by no means all from the local area; the others reflect not only geographical diversity but the kaleidoscopic nature of the traditional movement.

One seminarian is from Curitiba in southern Brazil, a staunchly Catholic city of German, Polish, Ukrainian and Italian immigrants. There are also two Spaniards, who previously studied at St Peter's in Wigratzbad, and a Chilean who transferred from the seminary established in Argentina by the Society of Pius X which says the old Mass in 26 cities there. It also has a few centres in the southern states of Rio de Janeiro, Sao Paulo and Santa Catarina.

TEACHING OTHER NATIONS

So does Campos grow the mustard seed along with sugar-cane, and can its priests still co-operate with those of Pius X who offer Masses in six lands of South America?

Bishop Rifan named one man: "Cardinal Castrillon is sincere and he loves the Church, but decisions rest with the Vicar of Christ and ultimately Almighty God". I tried to press him further about the prospects for the traditional liturgy, but his attitude seemed to be one of patience and discretion. Softly, softly!

On the other hand, he is clear that there is now a dividing line between the twin communities founded by Lefebvre and Castro Meyer that still have a huge identity of interest. Asked whether his accord with the Vatican compromised orthodoxy, he

replied, “Moral doctrine allows a starving man to effectively steal from a supermarket, but if the manager offers him food, he is no longer entitled to take what he likes. We at Campos now have what we asked for as of right.”

And the titular Bishop of Cedamusa is sad that this has drawn attacks from Bishop Williamson of Pius X: “He has published some hard words about me. I want to be friends with the Lefebvrists, but some of them do not want to be friends with me!”

On the other hand, he has been invited by the International Centre for Liturgical Studies (CIEL) to say Mass in London on 10 May 2003, and to speak at the conference afterwards. With his knowledge of English as well as French, Spanish and Italian, the new traditional bishop in Campos has an opportunity to

spread the word on both sides of the North and South Atlantic where further Personal Apostolic Administrations would solve a lot of problems.

The End.