

# No sign of a rapprochement

From De Lubac to Lefebvre, France has long been a place of passionate argument about Catholicism and the liturgy. Publication of the Pope's *motu proprio* has provoked intense debate and has consequences not only for celebration of the Mass but a wider vision of the Church

For France, more than any other country, publication of Benedict XVI's *motu proprio* permitting a wider use of the Tridentine Mass is a defining moment for the Catholic Church. The largest number of traditionalist Catholics (*intégristes* as they are called) is to be found in France and it is there that the row between traditionalists and progressive Catholics has continued fiercely for more than 40 years since the Second Vatican Council. It is a quarrel between liberal Catholics – their heroes include De Lubac and Congar and those responsible for the *aggiornamento* of the Council – and the admirers of the French bishop Marcel Lefebvre, who led the crusade against all the conciliar reforms.

After years in the wilderness, the traditionalists experienced a marked thawing in relations with the Vatican following the election of Pope Benedict XVI. In August 2005 Benedict XVI granted an audience to Bernard Fellay, the present superior-general of the Fraternity of St Pius X, the seminary for dissident priests, founded by Mgr Lefebvre, in Ecône, Switzerland, after his excommunication in 1988. (The schism became inevitable when Mgr Lefebvre ordained four bishops, illicitly, before his death in 1991.)

Then, last year, the Vatican created the Institut du Bon Pasteur in Bordeaux, without consulting the archbishop of that city, Cardinal Jean-Pierre Ricard, who is also president of the episcopal conference. This institute, for priests and seminarians of the Fraternity who are reconciled with Rome, is answerable directly to the Pope, who appointed as its superior Fr Philippe Laguérie, who was recently expelled from the Fraternity for disobeying the superior-general.

Cardinal Ricard was received – at his request – by the Pope to whom he voiced his fears concerning the situation in France, pointing out that the traditionalists had waged an unceasing war against the official Church, branded as “neo-protestant and neo-modernist”, preaching against the reforms of the Council and occupying churches illegally, often resorting to violence. Fr Laguérie, for example, took over the parish of Saint-Éloi in Bordeaux without permission. “The traditionalists consider the Latin Mass as the flag of a wider cause,” said Cardinal Ricard, “since a religious rite is more than a liturgical expression, it is a political

vision of the Church and the world.”

Today, after publication of the *motu proprio*, many French bishops feel that they have been ignored and that the traditionalists have won the day. Cardinal Ricard, who is a member of the Roman Commission *Ecclesia Dei*, which deals with the traditionalists, admitted that the Pope's decision went further than he had expected, “opening wide the door to the traditionalists” since they may use the breviary and celebrate the sacraments according to the old ritual (published in 1962). But he added that they have to recognise the riches of the Council's liturgical reform and cannot refuse to celebrate Mass according to Paul VI's Missal. The cardinal's main worry is that the fundamental questions (ecumenism, interreligious dialogue, religious freedom) are not addressed by the *motu proprio* and that sectarian divisions will be exacerbated.

Many bishops point out that the traditionalists already have access to the Tridentine Rite in 80 per cent of France's dioceses: more than 120 such Masses are authorised by the bishops every week, not to mention the 170 Sunday Masses celebrated by the schismatic priests of the fraternity. The Archbishop of Paris, André Vingt-Trois, and the Archbishop of Lyons, Cardinal Philippe Barbarin, both consider

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that the needs of the traditionalists are fully met in their archdiocese. In Marseilles, according to Archbishop Georges Pontier, “the requests for Mass in Latin are on the decline and only concern a few hundred Catholics”. Bishop Claude Dagens of Angoulême is more pessimistic: “While I understand the need for unity I fear that the risk of dissension between the faithful is real. We must not sacrifice the truth nor instru-



mentalise the liturgy in a political and cultural power struggle.”

The Bishop of Nancy, Jean-Louis Papin, is perhaps the most outspoken in his criticism of the document. “The Tridentine liturgy is quite different from that of Vatican II,” he observed. “For many traditionalists the Tridentine Mass is a pretext to criticise the Council and they have already admitted that the Pope's decision is only a first step in their fight to turn the clock back. Frankly I don't think that the *motu proprio* can be put into practice. I don't see how I can bother my young priests who are already overworked and have never studied Latin!”

According to an opinion poll organised by the Catholic magazine *Le Pèlerin*, 65 per cent of practising Catholics are opposed to the Tridentine Rite. The lay workers in the Church are the most critical of the papal document. One 69-year-old catechist, Marie-Thérèse Aubry, saw it as a regression, “a return to the old rigorist Church which turns the young away, when we need them more than ever”, while a lay director of the liturgy in Lille, Richard Delcroix, called the decision “detestable, divisive and retrograde”.

As for the traditionalists, they are pleased but circumspect. The fraternity published a statement welcoming “the Church's return to its liturgical tradition. If the decree is properly implemented this will create a climate

of confidence in which to discuss the fundamental problems as yet unresolved”, indicating, it would seem, that this could well be a prerequisite to the opening of doctrinal discussions raised by the Council and the lifting of the excommunication of the schismatic bishops.

One can see why the bishops fear the *motu proprio* could well rekindle the fire of revolt. And this quarrel between the factions of the French Church plunges its roots deep in the country’s history, going back to the Reformation and the Revolution.

Traditionalist Catholics remain faithful to the Counter-Reformation, decided by the Council of Trent in the sixteenth century to answer the criticisms of Luther and Calvin, and refuse all dialogue with “heretical” Protestants. They consider the conciliar Church to have succumbed to liberalism and modernism (conscience as opposed to authority, the rights of man rather than the commandments of God) and refer exclusively to their papal champions: Pius V and his liturgical reform (1566), Pius IX and his “Syllabus of Errors” (1864), Pius X and his encyclical *Pascendi* (1907), condemning modernism, “the mother of all heresies”. Their political heroes are equally typecast: Charles Maurras, whose far-right Action Française was finally condemned by Pius XI in 1926, the Catholic dictators Franco, Salazar, Pinochet and Videla, and French fascist leaders from Pétain and his Vichy regime, collaborating with the Nazis, to Jean-Marie Le Pen and his racist Front National.

**L**iberal Catholics, on the other hand, were largely responsible for the *aggiornamento* of the Church, from the nineteenth century to the Second Vatican Council. Lammenais defended religious freedom and the Sillon association of Marc Sangnier launched a Catholic social movement that produced Christian trade unions. Jacques Maritain answered Maurras in his seminal work *Humanisme intégral* (1936) and Emmanuel Mounier founded the Catholic intellectual monthly *Esprit*. The magazine *Témoignage Chrétien*, founded clandestinely by the Jesuit Pierre Chaillet in 1941, inspired many Catholics to join the Resistance.

The “Action Catholique” movements formed such social and political leaders as Jacques Delors. Worker-priests and many leading theologians, like Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, Henri de Lubac and Yves Congar, were reduced to silence by Pius XII, but they came into their own with the Council, which was largely the fruit of their labours, thanks to Pope John XXIII.

Today, as the struggle between these two contradictory visions of the Church continues, the French bishops’ concern is not only that the traditionalist minority will take advantage of Benedict XVI’s benevolent gesture in their favour to reinforce their influence in France. It is that they will move inexorably to further influence in Rome.

■ Alain Woodrow writes from France for *The Tablet*.

## MARGARET HEBBLETHWAITE

# ‘Karina will never earn more than peanuts for washing clothes’



I have lost my washerwoman, Karina. She has emigrated to Argentina, joining the constant dribble of Paraguayan young women crossing the border in search of humble domestic work. Karina had an emotional motivation too – her husband had left her for another woman, and she had sisters already in Buenos Aires, one of whom could help with childminding.

When Karina began working for me she was a slim and pretty young woman, but she is turning plump now, as happens to most of the women here who start out as graceful nymphs. It is a question of nutrition, I suppose. The children, Jorgito (“little George”) and Celeste (“Sky blue”), are real beauties but with all the shyness that is characteristic of the poor. It is touching to see them faithfully trotting along hand in hand with their mother, not daring to leave her orbit for an instant. Her husband Jorge sells trinkets on the buses – hairbands, socks and mobile-phone cases, strung up on a display board. He used to return home with up to a couple of pounds a day, but Karina will never earn more than peanuts from washing clothes, for hardly anyone can afford to pay a laundry woman, even for the going rate of 40 pence a dozen items. (This is for washing by hand in cold water. Washing machines are very rare indeed.)

Karina’s family do not come from our town of Santa María, but from Encarnación – a city a couple of hours away. This means that she will always be regarded as something of a stranger: “She is not from here,” people say. So when Jorge left her (albeit with a legal but unenforceable agreement to support his children) she not only feared she would not be able to meet the household bills, but had no family support structure. “Without my husband, there is nothing to keep me here,” she said.

Blinking back the tears, she asked me to send an urgent text message to her sister in Buenos Aires, giving the number of a friend’s mobile phone where she could be rung back. Her sister rang and said she was out of

work and could not send Karina the fare, but another sister in Buenos Aires was working and could help.

Paraguayans do not send money through the banks, because they do not have bank accounts. If they are sending money from further away, they use Western Union, which is rapid, easy to use and has many branches – none in Santa María but several in neighbouring San Ignacio. But within the country – and probably from Argentina too – the usual method is by *encomienda*, which means sending a packet with the driver of a bus, not as a favour but as a paid service. This might sound more inconvenient than using the post and having something delivered to your door instead of to the bus terminal, but only a small minority use the post, so there has never been the bulk to make for an efficient service. Buses, by contrast, travel frequently, and there are several daily services from San Ignacio to Buenos Aires. So many people send parcels by *encomienda* that many bus companies have an office specifically devoted to sending and receiving parcels.

Surprisingly enough, it is safer to send money by *encomienda* than by post, as well as a lot faster. If you declare how much money you are sending and leave the envelope unsealed, the bus company is responsible for seeing that the amount you send is the amount that arrives. Some companies have even slimmed down the process so that the bank notes are not physically sent to their destination, but the amount paid in at one end is the amount that can be drawn out immediately at the other end.

And what is happening to Karina’s nice new home on the estate? The going rate for renting a house is around £20 a month, and has not gone up in the seven years I have lived in Santa María. But few people can afford to pay that much – or even half that amount for a little house built for the poor – so Karina is looking for a solution sought by a number of others with empty properties, to “lend” the house – that is, let people live in it rent-free. If you lend your house, then the occupier pays the electricity and water bill, and these utilities are kept active. But if you leave the house unoccupied and the electricity and water are cut off, there will be a fat fee for reconnection. Finding people who can afford to meet these bills is not easy, so Karina went off to Argentina hopeful for the future, but leaving her house empty and its future unresolved.