



Have we won...?

On July 7, 2007, Pope Benedict XVI liberated the Tridentine Mass by the Motu Proprio Summorum Pontificum. Now on January 21, Cardinal Giovanni Baptista Re, the prefect of the Congregation for Bishops, signed the decree lifting the excommunication for the bishops of the Society of St. Pius X.

So both the preconditions the Society had established before wanting to enter into negotiations with Rome are fulfilled. Some say that now all is done and the final solution is nearby and others fear just the opposite: that the Society is trapped and condemned to disappear.

Texts compiled by father Jürgen Wegner

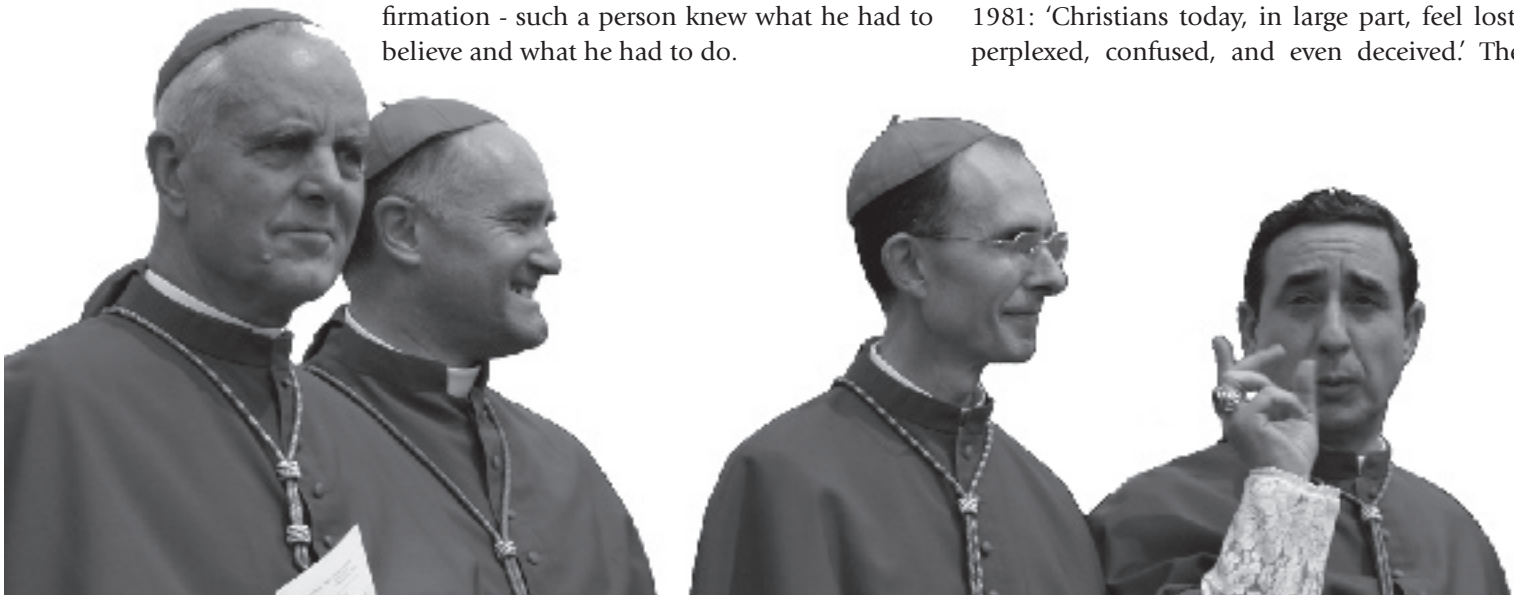
Why did Archbishop Lefebvre start up the Society of St. Pius X?

Archbishop Lefebvre gives us his reason in the first chapter of his "Open Letter to Confused Catholics" (published in 1985): "Who can deny that Catholics in the latter part of the twentieth century are confused? A glance at what has happened in the Church over the past twenty years is enough to convince anyone that this is a relatively recent phenomenon. Only a short time ago the path was clearly marked: either one followed it or one did not. One had the Faith - or perhaps had lost it - or had never had it. But he who had it - who had entered the Church through Baptism, who had renewed his baptismal promises around the age of twelve and had received the Holy Ghost on the day of his Confirmation - such a person knew what he had to believe and what he had to do.

Many today no longer know. They hear all sorts of astonishing statements in the churches, they read things contrary to what was always taught, and doubt has crept into their minds.

On June 30th, 1968, at the close of the Year of Faith, His Holiness Pope Paul VI made a profession of the Catholic Faith, in the presence of all the bishops in Rome and hundreds of thousands of the faithful. In his introductory remarks, he put us on guard against attacks on Catholic doctrine which, he said, 'give rise, as we regretfully see today, to trouble and confusion in many faithful souls.'

The same words crop up in an allocution of His Holiness Pope John Paul II on February 6, 1981: 'Christians today, in large part, feel lost, perplexed, confused, and even deceived.' The



Holy Father summarized the underlying causes of the trouble as follows:

'We see spread abroad ideas contrary to the truth which God has revealed and which the Church has always taught. Real heresies have appeared in dogma and moral theology, stirring doubt, confusion, rebellion. Even the liturgy has been harmed. Christians have been plunged into an intellectual and moral illuminism, a so-

ciological Christianity, without clear dogma or objective morality.'

This confusion is seen everywhere - in conversations, in books, in newspapers, in radio and television broadcasts, in the behavior of Catholics, which shows up as a sharp decline in the practice of the faith as statistics reveal, a dissatisfaction with the Mass and the sacraments, a general relaxation of morals."

Prot. N. 126/2009

Congregation for Bishops Decree

In a letter dated December 15, 2008, and addressed to His Eminence Cardinal Dario Castrillón Hoyos, President of the Ecclesia Dei Pontifical Commission, Bishop Bernard Fellay, on his behalf and that of the other three Bishops consecrated on June 30, 1988, requested again the lifting of the excommunication *latae sententiae* formally pronounced by a Decree from the Prefect of this same Congregation for Bishops dated July 1, 1988. In the above mentioned letter, Bishop Fellay, among other things, stated: "We are still as steadfast in our determination to remain Catholic and to place all our strength at the service of the Church of Our Lord Jesus Christ, which is the Roman Catholic Church. We filially accept her teaching. We firmly believe in the primacy of Peter and in its prerogatives, and this is the reason why the present situation makes us suffer all the more."

His Holiness Benedict XVI - touched with fatherly compassion over the spiritual difficulty manifested by those concerned by the sanction of excommunication and confident that the commitment they expressed in the above quoted letter of sparing no effort to go further in the necessary discussions with the Authorities of the Holy See concerning the issues still pending, and thus of being able to reach quickly a full and satisfactory solution of the problem raised at the origin - has decided to re-consider the canonical standing of the Bishops Bernard Fellay, Bernard Tissier de Mallerais, Richard Williamson and Alfonso de Galarreta with respect to their episcopal consecrations.

This act expresses the desire to consolidate reciprocal confidence in our dealings, to intensify and give stability to the relations of the Society of Saint Pius X with the Apostolic See. This gift of peace, at the end of the Christmas celebrations, is also intended to be a sign for the promotion of unity in charity in the universal Church, and to thereby remove the scandal of division.

It is wished that this step be followed without delay by the full communion with the Church of all the Society of Saint Pius X, in testimony of a true fidelity and genuine recognition of the Magisterium and of the authority of the Pope by the proof of visible unity.

According to the faculties expressly conceded to me by the Holy Father Benedict XVI, by virtue of the present Decree, I remit the censure of excommunication *latae sententiae*, pronounced by this Congregation on July 1, 1988, from Bishops Bernard Fellay, Bernard Tissier de Mallerais, Richard Williamson, and Alfonso de Galaretta, and as of this day, I likewise declare void of juridical effects the Decree published at the time.

Rome, from the Congregation for Bishops, this 21st day of January, 2009.

Card. Giovanni Battista Re
Prefect of the Congregation for Bishops

Why did archbishop Lefebvre consecrate bishops?

On June 2nd, 1988, four weeks before archbishop Lefebvre consecrated the four bishops he wrote in a letter to the Pope: "For indeed, if the ordinary Christian is authorized to ask the competent Church authorities to preserve for him the Faith of his Baptism, how much more true is that for priests, religious, and nuns? It is to keep the Faith of our Baptism intact that we have had to resist the spirit of Vatican II and the reforms inspired by it. The false ecumenism, which is at the origin of all the Council's innovations in the liturgy, in the new relationship between the Church and the world, in the conception of the Church itself, is leading the Church to its ruin and Catholics to apostasy.

Press Release from the Superior General

The excommunication of the bishops consecrated by His Grace Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre, on June 30, 1988, which had been declared by the Congregation for Bishops in a decree dated July 1, 1988, and which we had always contested, has been withdrawn by another decree mandated by Benedict XVI and issued by the same Congregation on January 21, 2009.

We express our filial gratitude to the Holy Father for this gesture which, beyond the Priestly Society of Saint Pius X, will benefit the whole Church. Our Society wishes to be always more able to help the Pope to remedy the unprecedented crisis which presently shakes the Catholic world, and which Pope John Paul II had designated as a state of silent apostasy.

Besides our gratitude towards the Holy Father and towards all those who helped him to make this courageous act, we are pleased that the decree of January 21 considers as necessary "talks" with the Holy See, talks which will enable the Priestly Society of Saint Pius X to explain the fundamental doctrinal reasons which it believes to be at the origin of the present difficulties of the Church.

In this new atmosphere, we have the firm hope to obtain soon the recognition of the rights of Catholic Tradition.

Menzingen, January 24, 2009
+Bernard Fellay

Being radically opposed to this destruction of our Faith and determined to remain within the traditional doctrine and discipline of the Church, especially as far as the formation of priests and the religious life is concerned, we find ourselves in the absolute necessity of having ecclesiastical authorities who embrace our concerns and will help us to protect ourselves against the spirit of Vatican II and the spirit of Assisi.

That is why we are asking for several bishops chosen from within Catholic Tradition, and for a majority of the members on the projected Roman Commission for Tradition, in order to protect ourselves against all compromise.

Given the refusal to consider our requests, and it being evident that the purpose of this reconciliation is not at all the same in the eyes of the Holy See as it is in our eyes, we believe it preferable to wait for times more propitious for the return of Rome to Tradition. That is why we shall give ourselves the means to carry on the work which Providence has entrusted to us."

Why did the Society establish preconditions?

Bishop Fellay will explain in his Statement to the Society's members and friends, January 22, 2001 why the Society demands Rome to fulfill first the following preconditions:

- that the Tridentine Mass be granted to all priests of the entire world
- that the censures against the Bishops be declared null.

"The principles that are to guide us through this rather new situation are the following:

1. Given that Rome has initiated this effort, it is normal that the Society take it with the seriousness that it deserves.
2. Our distrust is extreme, keeping before our eyes on the one hand the very recent example of the Fraternity of St. Peter, and on the other hand the continuity in the post-conciliar direction, which is constantly reaffirmed.
3. The Society has in no way the intention of modifying its principles and its general goal. The so abundant fruits of Grace, on the one hand, and the conciliar disaster on the other just go to reinforce its determination to conserve Catholic Tradition.

4. If there were to be an agreement it could only be seen in the perspective of giving back to Tradition its rights of citizenship, even if the final triumph will only be obtained gradually.

Why does the Society demand for theological discussions?

“When we take a stand, this is interpreted as a delay, a voluntary procrastination. Our intentions and our good will to really discuss with Rome are doubted. They do not understand why we do not want an immediate canonical solution. For Rome, the problem of the Society would be resolved by that practical agreement; doctrinal discussions would be avoided or postponed. For us, each day brings additional proofs that we must clarify to the maximum the underlying issues before taking one more step toward a canonical situation, which is not in itself displeasing to us. But this is a matter of following the order of the nature of things, and to start from the wrong end would unavoidably place us in an unbearable situation. We have daily proofs of this. What is at stake is nothing more nor less than our future existence. We cannot, and will not leave any ambiguity subsist on the issue of the acceptance of the Council, of the reforms, of the new attitudes which are either being tolerated or fostered.” (Bishop Fellay in his letter to Friends and Benefactors #73, October 23, 2008)

Why does the Society refuse a mere practical solution?

“After the publication of the *Motu Proprio Summorum Pontificum*, which acknowledged that the Tridentine Mass was never abrogated, there raises a certain number of questions concerning the future of the relations of the Society of St. Pius X with Rome. Several persons in conservative circles and in Rome itself have made themselves heard, arguing that, since the Sovereign Pontiff had acted so generously and thus given a clear sign of his good will towards us, there would be nothing left for the Society to do but to ‘sign an agreement with Rome’... We would like to take the opportunity of this Eastertide letter to review once again the principles governing our actions in these troubled times and point out a few recent events which clearly indicate that, basically, nothing has really changed except for the *motu proprio*’s liturgical overture, so as to draw from all this the necessary conclusions.

The fundamental principle that dictates our action is the safeguard of the faith, without which no one can be saved, no one can receive grace, no one can be pleasing to God, as the First Vatican Council states. The liturgical question is not paramount; it only becomes such inasmuch as it is the manifestation of an alteration of the faith and, consequently, of the worship due to God.

A notable change of orientation took place at Vatican II with regard to the Church’s outlook, especially on the world, other religions, the State, and even itself... One cardinal at the Council could even speak of ‘the 1789 Revolution in the Church.’...

At the same time, the Church’s relationship with the other religions underwent a transformation. Since Vatican II, Rome has avoided any negative or depreciatory observations about other religions. For example, the classic term of ‘false religions’ has completely disappeared from ecclesiastical vocabulary. The words ‘heretic’ and ‘schismatic,’ which used to designate the religions closer to the Catholic Church, have also disappeared, except when they are occasionally employed, especially the term ‘schismatic,’ to label us. The same holds true for the term ‘excommunication.’ The new approach is called ecumenism, and contrary to what everyone used to think, it does not mean a return to Catholic unity, but rather the establishment of a new kind of unity that no longer requires conversion.

Obviously, these new views completely disrupted the Church’s relations with the other religions. It is impossible to speak of a superficial change; for what they want to impose on the Church of our Lord Jesus Christ is a new and very profound mutation. John Paul II consequently was able to speak of a ‘new ecclesiology,’ admitting an essential change in the part of the theology that treats of the Church. We simply cannot understand how they can claim that this new understanding of the Church is still in harmony with the traditional definition of the Church. It is new; it is radically different and obliges the Catholic to observe a fundamentally different behavior towards the heretics and schismatics, who have tragically abandoned the Church and scorned the faith of their baptism. From now on they are no longer ‘separated brethren,’ (contin. page 9)

Letter of the Superior General of the Priestly Society of Saint Pius X

Dear faithful,

As I announce in the attached press release, the excommunication of the bishops consecrated by His Grace Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre, on June 30, 1988, which had been declared by the Congregation for Bishops in a decree dated July 1, 1988, and which we had always contested, has been withdrawn by another decree mandated by Benedict XVI and issued by the same Congregation on January 21, 2009. It was the prayer intention I had entrusted to you in Lourdes, on the feast of Christ the King, 2008. Your response exceeded our expectations, since one million seven hundred and three thousand rosaries were said to obtain, through the intercession of Our Lady, that an end be put to the opprobrium which, beyond the persons of the bishops of the Society, rested upon all those who were more or less attached to Tradition. Let us not forget to thank the Most Blessed Virgin who has inspired the Holy Father with this unilateral, benevolent, and courageous act, too. Let us assure him of our fervent prayers.

Thanks to this gesture, Catholics attached to Tradition throughout the world will no longer be unjustly stigmatized and condemned for having kept the Faith of their fathers. Catholic Tradition is no longer excommunicated. Though it never was in itself, it was often excommunicated and cruelly so in day to day events. It is just as the Tridentine Mass had never been abrogated in itself, as the Holy Father has happily recalled in the *Motu Proprio Summorum Pontificum* of July 7, 2007.

The decree of January 21 quotes the letter dated December 15, 2008, to Cardinal Castrillon Hoyos in which I expressed our attachment "to the Church of Our Lord Jesus Christ which is the Catholic Church," reaffirming there our acceptance of its two thousand year old teaching and our faith in the Primacy of Peter. I reminded him that we were suffering much from the present situation of the Church in which this teaching and this primacy were being held to scorn. And I added: "We are ready to write the Creed with our own blood, to sign the anti-modernist oath, the profession of faith of Pius IV, we accept and make our own all the councils up to the First Vatican Council. Yet we can but express reservations concerning the Second Vatican Council which intended to be a council "different from the others (cf. Addresses by Pope John XXIII and Paul VI)." In all this, we are convinced that we remain faithful to the line of conduct indicated by our founder, Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre, whose reputation we hope to soon see restored.

Consequently, we wish to begin these talks - which the decree acknowledges to be necessary - about the doctrinal issues which are opposed to the Magisterium of all time. We cannot help noticing the unprecedented crisis which is shaking the Church today: crisis of vocations, crisis of religious practice, of catechism, of the reception of the sacraments... Before us, Paul VI went so far as to say that "from some fissure the smoke of Satan had entered the Church", and he spoke of the self-destruction of the Church. John Paul II did not hesitate to say that Catholicism in Europe was, as it were, in a state of silent apostasy. Shortly before his election to the Throne of Peter, Benedict XVI compared the Church to a boat taking in water on every side. Thus, during these discussions with the Roman authorities we want to examine the deep causes of the present situation, and by bringing the appropriate remedy, achieve a lasting restoration of the Church.

Dear faithful, the Church is in the hands of her Mother, the Most Blessed Virgin Mary. In Her we place our confidence. We have asked from her the freedom of the Mass of all time everywhere and for all. We have asked from her the withdrawal of the decree of excommunications. In our prayers, we now ask from her the necessary doctrinal clarifications which confused souls so much need.

Menzingen, January 24, 2009
+Bernard Fellay

but brothers who 'are not in full communion'... and we are 'deeply united' by baptism in Christ in an 'inamissible' union...

Add to this the pope's positions on religious liberty, and we can easily conclude that the combat for the faith has not slackened over these last few years... The *motu proprio* that introduces the hope of a change for the better in matters liturgical is not accompanied by the logically related measures that should follow in other domains of the Church's life. All the changes introduced at the Council and in the post-conciliar reforms, which we denounce precisely because the Church had already condemned them, have been upheld... So long as facts do not corroborate this new assertion, we must conclude that nothing has changed in Rome's intention to pursue the conciliar course despite forty years of crisis, despite vacant convents, abandoned rectories, and empty churches. Catholic universities persist in their aberrations, and the teaching of the catechism is uncertain while Catholic schools are no longer specifically Catholic: they have become an extinct species...

For these reasons the Priestly Society of St. Pius X cannot sign an 'agreement.' It definitely rejoices at the pope's desire to reintroduce the ancient and venerable rite of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, yet it also observes the opposition - sometimes very tenacious - of entire bishops' conferences. Without giving up hope and without impatience, we can see that the time for an agreement has not yet come." (Bishop Bernard Fellay, Letter to friends and Benefactors, #72, April 14, 2008)

What is the Society's most intimate purpose?

"We place ourselves in God's providence. We are convinced that God knows what He is doing. Cardinal Gagnon visited us 12 years after the suspension: after 12 years of being spoken of as outside of the communion of Rome, as rebels and dissenters against the Pope, his visit took place. He himself recognized that what we have been doing is just what is necessary for the reconstruction of the Church. The Cardinal even assisted pontifically at the Mass which I celebrated on December 8, 1987, for the renewal of the promises of our seminarians. I was supposedly suspended and, yet, after 12 years, I was practi-

cally given a clean slate. They said we have done well. Thus we did well to resist! I am convinced that we are in the same circumstances today. We are performing a historical act. Unfortunately the media will not assist us in the good sense. The headlines will, of course, be "Schism," "Excommunication!" to their heart's content - and, yet, we are convinced that all these accusations of which we are the object, all penalties of which we are the object, are null, absolutely null and void, and of which we will take no account. Just as I took no account of the suspension, and ended up by being congratulated by the Church and by progressive churchmen, so likewise in several years - I do not know how many, only the Good Lord knows how many years it will take for Tradition to find its rights in Rome - we will be embraced by the Roman authorities, who will thank us for having maintained the Faith in our seminaries, in our families, in civil societies, in our countries, and in our monasteries and our religious houses, for the greater glory of God and the salvation of souls" (Sermon of Archbishop Lefebvre during the episcopal consecrations, June 30, 1988).

