

We have given our lives to the Church,

and so we hope to contribute to the good of **the Church**

*Interview with His Excellency Bishop Fellay
Conducted by Fr. Lorans. February 5, 2009. (www.dici.org)*

Bishop Bernard Fellay

Fr. Lorans: Your Excellency, the first question is about the rapidity of the publication of the decree of January 21, 2009. Were you surprised by such rapidity?

Bishop Fellay: Yes, absolutely. I promise you that I was not expecting the decree to come at that time. However, let me clarify this. I was expecting something ever since Cardinal Castrillon Hoyos had said to me (back in November 2005): "Write to the pope and ask him". I think he used the words "withdrawal" or "lifting of the excommunication". So, I said to myself: if Rome recommends that I ask, Rome must be ready to grant it. From that moment, one could say that sometime it would happen.

However, the last six months were rather cold, that is to say, there was the infamous ultimatum, the summons from Rome in the beginning of June. The Holy See was not happy with my latest Letter to Friends and Benefactors in April, and since then, we had been in a statu quo, or even at a deadlock. Deadlock, because of that summons that I never fully understood in all its terms. It was clear that they were not happy because I had said we were against the Council, that there were unacceptable things in the Council, and that it was necessary to discuss such things before envisaging something practical, a canonical solution. I responded to the summons by a letter to the Pope. After that nothing more, no reaction from Rome.

At the end of the summer, beginning of autumn, there were some indirect, little messages, but not a single direct contact; only those through some go-betweens, some priests who

would have spoken with the Cardinal to know what was happening. That shows that there was some expectation, but nothing special. Just before the pilgrimage to Lourdes, there was the first contact with Cardinal Castrillon, whom I informed of a letter that would resume contact, since we had been at a deadlock. This was a letter that took me some time to compose and to let ripen, and finally I sent it on December 15. In this letter I tried to explain: the summons of June shows that we are at a deadlock, and that if we want to get out of it, we need to change our method. I spoke of a status quæstionis, that is to say, that it was necessary to approach the thing from another viewpoint. And that viewpoint, I reminded him in the letter, is that since 2001, we had proposed a "roadmap" with two pre-conditions that would improve the situation from the outside. In other words, for a long time we have had a false reputation... in the official Church, we are looked upon as rebels, with all the pejorative labels that we have been saddled with for some time now. So I wrote: we must succeed in getting rid of all this, so that we can discuss without these labels, without pressure, without mistrust. This is why we have asked for two things: the freedom of the Mass for all priests, and the withdrawal of the decree of excommunication, since it was null anyhow, since there was no excommunication. In this letter, I recognized that the first point had finally been granted, but that the situation of our relations, the way we were treated in the Church, continued to be disparaging for us. What the pope tried to obtain from one side, by reducing the pressure on us, is neutralized or even aggravated by the way we are treated.

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The letter does not deal with the root of the problem, but how to approach it. It affirms our position with the Church, by saying that we are attached to the Church, we are Catholics, we have never left her, thus we recognize all the major principles of the Church, and the fact that there is a Pope with his prerogatives. But on the other hand, in that letter, in the name of the other three bishops and myself, I asked for the second point: the withdrawal of the decree of excommunication.

As my letter was relatively severe, I was not expecting a rapid response. It was only a means of renewing contact. Then, in mid-January I decided to go to Rome to see how things were going. There were new cardinals in charge of various congregations and whom I did not know. I had heard that some were favorable to the old Mass. Hence I had prepared this little three-day visit to meet with these cardinals. Now, almost on the eve of my departure, I received a phone call from Cardinal Castrillon: "I must see you right away, to tell you something. It is about the excommunications, and before it is made public, I would like to tell you about it." It came at the right time, though it was quite unforeseen, because I had also planned to make this trip to bring the spiritual bouquet, those 1,703,000 rosaries collected between November and Christmas. But I did not intend to meet with the cardinal, I would just have delivered the letter. Of course, I managed to find time to visit the Cardinal even though my schedule was rather busy. I really had not expected this since I had heard some echoes that were negative. They were rumors, and as such did not deserve too much credit. It was rumored that, in Rome, they were wondering whether they should not reconfirm the condemnations against the Society, and condemn Bishop Fellay for supporting a schismatic deviation in the SSPX. In such an atmosphere, I was indeed surprised by the decree and it is all the clearer that it must be attributed to the Blessed Virgin Mary.

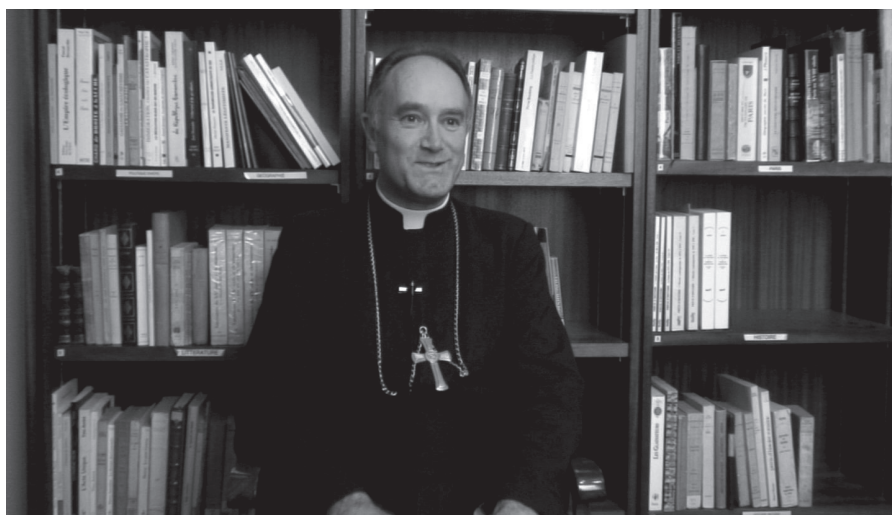
Fr. Lorans: So you thank Our Lady and the Holy Father for the decree?

Bishop Fellay: Yes, absolutely.

Fr. Lorans: Ever since the decree, there has been also what is called the Bishop Williamson affair. Do you, all the while deploring his com-

ments as you have already said, do you suspect a set-up in this affair?

Bishop Fellay: For me, there is no doubt about it, yet it is practically impossible to prove. Yet, there could never be such a coincidence. The Swedish TV recorded Bishop Williamson's interview on November 1st (2008)... and it just comes out now! That, in itself, is already a little queer. I note, in passing, that the television channel, or at least the reporter, used this interview to show it or mention it to certain proprietors of places of worship we had in Sweden, and that as a consequence we lost these places. Hence, there was really a bad and wicked intention, which had nothing to do with a TV interview. We already knew about this. On top of it, there was not just the Swedish TV, but the whole thing was made public in a popular German magazine, *Der Spiegel*, under the title: "The Pope is Going to Be in Trouble."

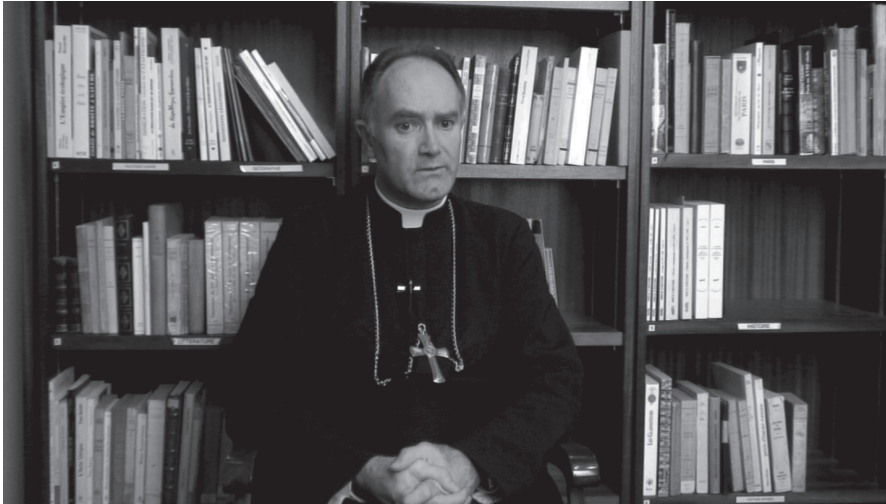


Fr. Lorans: When was this?

Bishop Fellay: Just when I came back from Rome, on January 19, they announced the broadcasting of the interview for the following week. In the article, *Der Spiegel* shows that the Pope has a conservative tendency, that he has already made several reforms, that he is approaching the SSPX. This is the context in which they announced that: "He was going to be in trouble". Then came Bishop Williamson's statements. It all resembles an orchestrated plan, more than a coincidence. What is interesting is that an Italian newspaper and other "well informed" people on a blog told us that in the upper spheres of the

Vatican a short yet detailed study is circulating, with facts and movements, which destroys the set-up.

What is absolutely certain today is that there is a coalition of all the progressivists or of the left-wing who use the unfortunate declarations of Bishop Williamson. And they use the Society, now branded with a very infamous label, to put pressure upon the pope. And this pressure, obviously does not deal only with the issue brought up by Bishop Williamson's statements. Quite clearly, it is a vengeance, they are lobbying to force Rome to give up the attempt at restoration, or rather the beginning of an attempt... We can see that they are all forming a league against the person of the pope and the Vatican, or at least the pope's close associates. And of course, in passing they take advantage of the situation to tear the Society to pieces.



Fr. Lorans: So after the canonical excommunication, we now have a "catholic" excommunication?

Bishop Fellay: It is a bit like that. We went from one label to the next. We tried to get rid of one sticky label, in the hope of improving our public image... But in fact, it is not only a question of our image, it goes much further. Underneath the excommunication, the whole attitude of Archbishop Lefebvre was condemned. His attitude had become as it were the incarnation of Tradition, this Catholic attitude of a strong and steadfast attachment to the past of the Church for our age. Hence, his famous words: "I have handed down what I have received." You cannot hand down unless you are attached to what

you have received. This attitude of all times is blamed by today's Church because Archbishop Lefebvre is excommunicated. We can call it not the excommunication of one individual but of Tradition itself. That is what we wanted to be rid of. We were not concerned about our own little good name. It is not a matter of our puny public image. It goes much further. Of course, by the same token it was taking a weapon away from our opponents, who always had the easy answer to our requests: "You're excommunicated, you've got no business to be here."

It was an attempt at approaching them with greater serenity and making easier the return to Tradition which is dawning on the horizon of the Church and which is obvious among the younger generations. Of course, we cannot say it is a general phenomenon, but it is important nonetheless. The younger generations aspire to much more than what they are given today. And this "much more", they are looking for everywhere, obviously, but a good number of them look for it in the right place. But it is for them an unknown world, a world blamed and defamed. For all these reasons, we requested the withdrawal or the annulment of the decree of excommunication.

And just as we finally got rid of that one label, and we are not completely freed from it yet, another one is flung into our face, and this last one is much more serious, much more frightening not only for Catholics but for the world at large. It is almost like a hint from the Good Lord telling us: "Look here, I gave you one beatitude, and I'm confirming it: 'Blessed are ye when they shall speak all that is evil against you, untruly, for my sake.'" I am no masochist, and obviously this new label is not at all to our liking, all the more so because it is false, even falser than the first, and terribly unjust. I feel like saying with St. Therese: "I look forward to the last judgment", when everything will be revealed and truth will shine brightly. I can't help thinking that, at that moment, the media will have to render many accounts for what they did, and this in full justice and truth. For the present, it is up to us to prove by facts and actions that this infamous label is both unjust and false.

Fr. Lorans: You were talking about the decree of annulment, withdrawal, lifting. It is true that you had asked for the withdrawal of the decree of 1988, and that they gave you a lifting of

the excommunication. Are you disappointed? You didn't expect that, did you?

Bishop Fellay: Disappointed is maybe not the right word. I think we had no illusion, when we asked that justice be done, i.e. that the excommunication be recognized null and from the beginning. In this sense, we were requesting the annulment of the first decree, of a sanction which had no basis, I have explained this several times. Quite recently, Cardinal Castrillon told me: "Listen, we know well that you are subjectively convinced of having acted rightly, consequently there is no fault, no sanction, and no excommunication. But, understand that from the outside, there was an objective fact which gave the appearance of a 'rebellion' against Rome; and for this there was a censure. So it must also be removed." On our part, we had indeed asked for an annulment, which we call the withdrawal of the decree and which amounted to a recognition that the excommunication was null from the beginning. We were granted the withdrawal of an excommunication, which is not exactly the same thing. In Church language it is called a "remissio, remittere". It seems to me it should be translated as a lifting of the excommunication.

I am not disappointed inasmuch as considering the circumstances in Rome, the enormous power of the progressivists, I doubt that even the pope best disposed towards us, could have done any better given all the elements. So from this viewpoint, I am not disappointed. But I hope that some day, God knows when, once the situation has improved in the Church, the whole affair will be revised and the good reputation of our venerated and most dear Archbishop Lefebvre restored as soon as possible.

Fr. Lorans: When you addressed that letter of December 15 to Cardinal Hoyos, did you promise anything? Did you promise any compensation in return?

Bishop Fellay: From the beginning, we had stated without any possible ambiguity that we were asking for this as a courtesy from Rome, to start rebuilding in an atmosphere of mutual trust. It is obvious that we were asking Rome to act of its own accord, in Latin we would say: *motu proprio*, which presupposes a unilateral movement, and hence no concession, and no

agreement on our part. Rome was to grant our request given our situation, and given the fact that we had not acted against Rome, nor against the Church; quite the contrary, we did it for the Church. I think that is what happened. The pope, with the support of a few collaborators, granted this, but in this act we must recognize a decision of the pope. In Rome, they insisted much on the fact that "it came from the pope".

We have one desire which is to take what was put aside, which now rests on a few shoulders, and to have it rediscovered and shared with all Catholics of the entire world

Fr. Lorans: What does the Pope expect, not from you, but from Tradition? What does the SSPX represent in his eyes, since he sets down this courageous act, especially in the present circumstances. By performing this generous and gratuitous act, what does he expect?

Bishop Fellay: Maybe we should distinguish between what is certain and what is less so. What is certain, is what he himself said. Now, in the words which accompanied his act, there is an insistent request that, on our part, we make all possible efforts to overcome what he calls "division". We must be very careful with the words he uses, which are not very familiar, or which we keep hearing and which are easily ambiguous. In any case, he speaks of coming back to full communion, or something along those lines. These words full communion are never defined. When you see how a number of bishops and cardinals are reacting right now, and the way they treat the pope, you can truly wonder who is in communion, and what is the quality of this communion. These are arguments *ad hominem*. Yet we clearly see that the pope is concerned, and wants to avoid a possible schism, maybe not in the near future. Already during my private audience, he expressed this thought: we were not in the best of terms with Rome. The situation had been dragging on. Consequently there was an objective risk, especially for the generations who never knew a normal state of the Church, and who live in the sort of self-sufficiency in which we are now; this might easily generate an attitude that could become a movement separated

from the Church. His thinking is not wrong. Of course, at present, we exclaim: "No, not at all, we are Catholics, we keep all the Catholic principles and even though we disagree on very serious issues; we take the necessary precautions to avoid falling into schism. For instance, we pray for the pope, we speak about the Church. We do not turn in on ourselves, but look at what is happening around us. Even if we sometimes speak ill of the Church, at least, we speak of it, and we instill into our priests and faithful the concern for the Church which every Catholic must have." So, on the pope's part, this concern certainly exists. He also mentioned it in his *motu proprio* about the Mass. So, this is his first concern, and the first thing he expects from us.



His second point is very interesting, because it corresponds to what we had asked for. He wants that the situation continues through talks. In the Italian original text of the decree it is "colloqui", talks, conversations, which are called necessary. Now we have been asking precisely for that, because considering all that is going on, I think that, even from an ontological viewpoint, we have to follow this route. We may speak of progressing by stages, and it may take a relatively long time to piece everything back together for the good of the Church. For us, there is only one solution: the Church must recover her healthy state, whereas now it is in the midst of a crisis, which has its root in doctrine. The crisis is not only doctrinal, many aspects of the crisis in the Church are now of the moral and disciplinary order. Everything is going crazy in all directions. But I truly think we can affirm that the source of the solution is at the level of a purification of thought. We must rediscover the doctrine of

the Church in all its pristine purity without all the ambiguities, the fuzzy and confusing terms used on purpose and which brought about the crisis we are now witnessing. We may also take the problem from the other end. Actions must be taken somewhat in all directions at the same time. Morals also must be reformed, and for instance, the liturgy is a great help. Liturgy even leads to doctrine. So it is good to have a simultaneous movement at all levels. But it remains certain that we cannot expect a lasting and profound unity in the Church without a clear proclamation of the Faith, devoid of any ambiguity, just as the Church has always done through all ages. Each time doctrine became fuzzy, the result was a crisis. Hence, I think we are heading in the right direction when we try to purify, or to give all its luster back to Catholic doctrine. This is what we expect from these discussions.

Fr. Lorans: And for you, Your Excellency, superior general of the Society, at the head of 500 priests across the world, what do you wish to bring to the Church? What would you like to bring as your contribution?

Bishop Fellay: Well, in the first place, it is not much, just our poor little personal efforts. We have given our lives to the Church, and so we hope to contribute to the good of the Church as much as possible.

But I think we must look beyond our persons, and far beyond. We have changed nothing. We have simply inherited. Once again, we have received all these treasures from the Church. We live according to the Church as it was in the past. So there is not only a doctrinal treasure, but all that has constituted the Church of all times. And we carry all this as best we can. This is not an arrogant or pretentious statement. In the Pontifical, during the ordination to the diaconate, the bishop says to the future deacons: "You carry the Church." This refers to the Levites of the Old Testament who used to carry the Ark of the Testament. I find this expression very beautiful when applied to deacons. Well, we carry this treasure of the Church, which is really the Church's own treasure. We have one desire, which is to take what was put aside, which now rests on a few shoulders, and to have it rediscovered and shared with all Catholics of the entire world, so that we see those fruits of sanctification and holiness belonging to the Church.