

What is happening in the Church?

This column strives to keep the reader up to date with some of the more important statements, events, challenges that confront the Church in Canada, Rome and the world. Keeping in mind the fact that the Church militant does not just consist in the works of Tradition, but in all those who keep the true Faith, even if they do not love and defend it as they ought, it hopes to keep Catholics aware of good and positive developments, as well as the betrayals of modernism, in order to understand the situation of the Church in all the complexity of its reality.

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Pope's astonishing letter of apology

Father Lombardi himself, the Papal spokesman, called this letter "unusual". In fact, it is practically unheard of that a Pope would give a letter of explanation of this kind, and it is certainly the first time that this Pope has offered such an apology and justification to the world's bishops. Yet, this is precisely what Benedict XVI did on March 12, in a long letter explaining and justifying the remission of the so-called excommunication of the Society's four bishops. It was undoubtedly prompted by the "avalanche of protests" that he had received and by the fact that most bishops did not agree with his decision, and were not afraid to say so, and resented that it was taken without consultation with them.

In the subdued and discreet language of *romanitas* the Pope says that "many bishops were perplexed" and that they found this measure "difficult to view positively". He also refers to the unexpected nature of a measure that was not at all collegial, as the bishops have now come to expect. In point of fact, the negative reaction was overwhelming, especially from Germany. This is what Cardinal Cordes (President of the Pontifical Council *Cor Unum*) had to say: "We have lived through the vehemence of the reaction in Germany to the lifting of the excommunication of the four bishops, and we can only rub our eyes in astonishment. Evidently, this is not just a question of persons, but of the very institution of the See of Peter, that seems to be the stumbling block".

Positive aspects

In his immediate Press Release, Bishop Fellay, Superior General of the Society of Saint Pius X, concentrated on the positive aspects of this letter. Far from reversing the lifting of the excommunications or coming out with any further condemnation of the Society, the Pope maintained and explained his previous decision, and this despite phenomenal pressure to the contrary. Furthermore, Bishop Fellay expressed his appreciation for the long-awaited doctrinal discussions: "we wholeheartedly thank the Holy Father for having placed the debate back on the level on which it must be held, that of

the Faith." Indeed, the Pope's letter reiterated the importance of the doctrinal discussions, explaining that the whole situation of the Society of Saint Pius X with respect to Rome is essentially a doctrinal one, and not just a disciplinary one: "...the problems now to be addressed are essentially doctrinal in nature and concern primarily the acceptance of the Second Vatican Council and the post-conciliar magisterium of the Popes". It is gratifying to see this, since the Society has long and frequently requested that Rome acknowledge that the differences are of a doctrinal nature and that discussions be on the doctrinal level, which until now it has always refused to do, attempting to trap the Society into accepting a purely canonical and disciplinary solution.

It should also be added that the joining of the *Ecclesia Dei* Commission to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith is also much appreciated, reinforcing as it does the consideration of the whole work of Tradition on the level of the Faith, and the abandonment of any attempt for a false, artificial, legalistic solution, such as was used to incorporate the Indult communities back into the post-conciliar church after the consecrations of 1988. It also accepts that we can have reservations with respect "to the authority of the Council" and that the doctrinal differences with respect to Vatican II are "doctrinal questions" or "problems" that remain to be "clarified". These are huge admissions in the favor of Tradition, and we appreciate them very much. This letter contains no support to the recent statement by the German bishops that the Society would have to accept Vatican II in its entirety, but to the contrary condemns the modernists who want to have Catholic doctrine based solely on Vatican II: "Vatican II embraces the entire doctrinal history of the Church. Anyone who wishes to be obedient to the Council has to accept the faith professed over the centuries, and cannot sever the roots from which the tree draws its life".

There is a further aspect of this letter that is encouraging for the traditional movement, now under persecution for

forty years. It is the admission of the injustice of this persecution, and how directly it is opposed to Catholic charity. The Pope does not even hesitate to use the words "hate" and "attack" with respect to those who attack traditional Catholics, referring to the episcopacy of certain countries, such as Germany. Speaking about "unpleasant things... in Church circles", he has this to say: "At times one gets the impression that our society needs to have at least one group to which no tolerance may be shown; which one can easily attack and hate. And should someone dare to approach them - in this case the Pope - he too loses any right to tolerance; he too can be treated hatefully, without misgiving or restraint". It is certainly a curious anomaly that simply for lifting the so-called excommunications, the Pope has merited the same attacks as ourselves. It certainly shows the diabolical bitterness of the modernists in their attacks on Tradition.



Negative aspects

However, despite all the above, the Pope's criticisms of traditional Catholics make it very clear that he does not share our convictions. His motive is not that he believes that we are right in what we affirm concerning Catholic doctrine and the crisis, but rather "that we must have at heart the unity of all believers". It is "reconciliation" amongst Catholics and between Catholics and non-Catholics that is his goal. Here his liberalism is clearly visible. The Church should be broad and open enough to allow a place for traditional Catholics. Indeed, he believes that his embracing of us will force a change in our "interior attitudes", as it did in the Ecclesia Dei communities, such as Le Barroux and the Fraternity of St. Peter, that he says "enabled them to move beyond one-sided positions and broke down rigidity". Here he is sadly mistaken, for our combat is entirely doctrinal, and not a compromise for the sake of legality as in their case. That the Pope's goal is to force us to change into modern Catholics is made very clear in this surprising statement: "The remission of the excommunication has the same aim as that of the punishment: namely to invite four Bishops once more to return". It is consequently a different tactic than the threat of a punishment, but for the same purpose, that through association, contact,

discussion, kindness we might be induced to accept Vatican II. The Pope also made it clear in this letter that he considers the Society's positions to be a freezing of the Church's teaching authority in the year 1962, a gross caricature of the Church's unchanging Tradition, that is the deposit of the Faith handed down without change, but with development, always in the same sense. Bishop Fellay's response is that "far from wanting to stop Tradition in 1962, we wish to consider the Second Vatican Council and post-conciliar teaching in the light of this Tradition...without rupture".

The most tragic part of this letter, though, is the declaration of the Pope's priorities, namely that "there are more important and urgent matters" than the question of Catholic Tradition, and that in fact his priority has not changed: it is "the unity of all believers". He explains that this is to be done on two levels: firstly that of "ecumenism - a common witness by Christians to their faith", and secondly by "Interreligious dialogue - for all those who believe in God...to attempt to draw closer to one another, and to journey together, even with their differing images of God". This declaration of his priorities, as they have been since the beginning of his Pontificate, is the proclamation once more of the great liberal deception of Vatican II, deception that has brought about the indifferentism with which we are so familiar and caused the destruction of Catholic identity, and in many even the Catholic Faith itself. It IS the cause of the crisis, and the Pope stated it openly in his letter. Speaking of "all believers", he says, "their disunity, their disagreement among themselves, calls into question the credibility of their talk of God". This means that in speaking of God and religion we can only have credibility when we agree with those with whom we disagree! An impossible contradiction, and yet the Pope calls for an end to all disagreement among believers!

For the sake of truth and completeness, it must also be added that the Pope did not hesitate in this letter to attack the priests of the Society. Employing a whole list of liberal labels, he accuses them of "obstinacy and narrowness...one-sided positions and... rigidity, ...arrogance and presumptuousness, an obsession with one-sided positions etc.". Their motives for being priests are said to be "mixed" - although he admits that he does not know how much, with "various distorted and unhealthy elements". With all the retreats and examinations of conscience that make up a traditional priestly formation, with all the declarations that have to be made before ordination, one wonders what could possibly he considered unhealthy about the greater glory of God, the extension of the reign of our Divine Savior, the glory and defense of Holy Mother Church, the love of the priesthood and the Mass, the salvation of souls, starting with our own. May these be our prayer intentions during the discussions that are to come.