

# At a pivotal point

Interview with H.E. Bishop Bernard Fellay by a reporter of the Catholic Magazine “Nouvelles de Chrétienté” (Sept.-Oct. 2010).

**Nouvelles de Chrétienté (hereafter: NdC): The Society of St. Pius X is celebrating its fortieth anniversary. Is this the end of the wandering in the desert, as it was for the Hebrews in the time of Moses?**

the desert, with one difference: the manna is quite difficult to find. There are encouraging signs, especially on the part of Rome; unfortunately they are quite mixed up in other very troubling matters. A few blades of grass in the desert....

**NdC: In spite of everything, how is the Society of St. Pius X developing throughout the world?**

H.E.: The Society is actually developing a bit everywhere. Some regions are making more rapid progress than others—I’m thinking of the United States, for example—but the big handicap that we run up against is the lack of priests. Requests for help come in from all sides, but because of our severe shortage of priests we cannot respond as we ought. With every appointment [of a SSPX priest to a pastoral assignment] we make a choice that is going to disappoint one or more groups of the faithful. On the one hand that is a rather good sign, since it shows a certain development in our work, but it is also quite painful. Think of the mission countries, particularly in Africa or in Brazil. If we could send fifty priests there, it would be a great relief. The immense continent of Asia is waiting also....

**NdC: Archbishop Lefebvre used to say that for the authorities in Rome the statistics of that growth were more eloquent than theological arguments. Is that still true?**

H.E.: I don’t know whether we should say “the statistics” or “the facts”. At any rate the two things are equally telling. As the good old saying puts it, *contra factum non fit argumentum*, the-



H.E. Bishop Fellay (hereafter: H.E.): It seems to me that what we are experiencing resembles instead one of those expeditions of the scouts who catch a glimpse of the Promised Land, although circumstances do not allow the people to enter it. In order to avoid any misinterpretation of the image just used, I hasten to add that we declare just as firmly as ever that we are Catholics and that, with God’s help, we intend to remain that way. However, for the Church as a whole this crisis does resemble a wandering in

re is no arguing against the facts—that is still totally valid. And Archbishop Lefebvre’s statement is quite true. We should note that it is not so much the number that impresses Rome, since we are still a negligible quantity in the Mystical Body as a whole. But what we represent, in an extremely vivid way, a living Tradition—that overawes them. These magnificent fruits which are very certainly, by the admission of a high-ranking Roman prelate himself, the work of the Holy Ghost—that is what induces the Roman authorities to take a look at us. All the more because we are talking about fresh fruit springing up in the middle of the desert.

**NdC: In this month of September, reports on the implementation of the Motu Proprio concerning the traditional Mass are to be sent to the Holy See. Only a few bishops implemented the Roman directives generously. How do you explain this hesitancy, or this resistance?**

H.E.: Just as the new Mass expresses a certain new spirit, that of Vatican II, so also the traditional Mass expresses the Catholic spirit. Those who cling tenaciously to Vatican II because they see in it a new start for the Church, or those who suppose that with Vatican II a new page was turned definitively in Church history, simply cannot accept the coexistence of a Mass that recalls precisely what they thought they had abandoned forever. There are two spirits embodied in the two Masses. That is a fact! And the two do not go together! We find among modern Catholics a similar hatred for the Rosary, for example. And it is all related. We see in the controversy over the Mass a very good illustration of the complexity of the crisis that is rocking the Church.

**NdC: Do you mean to say that in the Church today, behind a façade of unity, there are hidden divisions not only between the local bishops’ conferences and the Holy See, but even in Rome among various opposing trends? Do you have factual evidence?**

H.E.: Oh! Yes, alas, we certainly are in those times that have been foretold, when there will be cardinal against cardinal, bishop against bishop. This sort of dispute is generally very discreet and escapes the notice of the laity. But recently, on various occasions, it has become open and pu-

blic, for instance in the gratuitous attack by Cardinal Schönborn against Cardinal Sodano. That looked a lot like a settling of scores. But it is no secret that opposing trends clash in Rome itself. We have the facts about several cases, but I don’t think that it is helpful to the lay faithful to reveal such things.

**NdC: A recent conference given by Msgr. Guido Pozzo, Secretary of the Ecclesia Dei Commission at the seminary of the Priestly Fraternity of St. Peter (1) attempts to prove the doctrinal continuity between Vatican II and Tradition. To that end it deals with the question about the “subsistit in” and the issue of ecumenism. Do these examples seem convincing to you?**

H.E.: I would not say “convincing” but surprising. That conference is the very logical application of the principles enunciated by Benedict XVI in December of 2005. And it gives us a presentation of ecumenism that is fairly different from what we have heard for the past forty years..., a presentation mixed in with eternal principles concerning the oneness of the Church and her unique perfection, concerning the exclusive character of salvation. We do see in this an attempt to preserve the Church’s perennial teaching and at the same time a Council that is revisited in the light of Tradition. The mixture, although interesting, still leaves open some logical questions concerning the role played by the other Christian confessions [denominations]... which were called “false religions” until the time of Pius XII inclusive. Will anyone from now on dare to use that term again?

**NdC: In his lengthy conclusion, Msgr. Pozzo proposes a Second Vatican Council that has been re-examined—if not corrected; one that denounces relativism, a certain overemphasis on the “pastoral” approach, and an excessive reliance on “dialogue”.... Do you think that this presentation is capable of bringing about unanimity in Rome and in the dioceses? What do you think about this revised version of the Council?**

H.E.: It is interesting, in the sense that they are presenting a new Second Vatican Council to us, a council which in fact we never knew and which is distinct from the one that was presen-

ted during the past forty years. A sort of new skin! It is interesting especially inasmuch as the ultra-modern trend is condemned rather strongly. A sort of moderate or tempered council is being presented to us. The question remains, what kind of reception will this new formula have? It will certainly be deemed too traditional for the modernists and not traditional enough for us. Let us say that many of our attacks have now proved to be justified, a good deal of what we condemn is condemned. But although the matter is condemned, there is still a major disagreement concerning its causes. Because ultimately, if such intellectual disorientation was possible with respect to the Council, and to such a degree, to such an extent..., there certainly must be a proportionate cause! If we discover such a great divergence in interpreting the conciliar documents, we will have to admit someday that the deficiencies in those documents are there for a reason.

**NdC: Some people committed to Tradition think that the crisis in the Church should end instantaneously, that the passage from this crisis to its solution should take place all at once. In your view is this a sign of supernatural confidence or of all-too-human impatience? In a gradual resolution of the crisis, what are the positive steps that have already been taken? What steps do you hope to see in the future?**

H.E.: The instantaneous solution of the crisis, as some people imagine it, can result only from a miracle or from large-scale violence. If it does not come about in that way, then there will still be the gradual solution. Although absolutely speaking one cannot exclude the possibility that God could work such a miracle, usually God governs His Church differently, through the more normal cooperation of creatures and of His saints. In general it takes at least as much time to get over a crisis as it did to unleash it, if not more. The path of reconstruction is long, and the work—immense. But above all the choice of personnel will be the determining factor. If the policy for nominating bishops finally changes, then we can hope. By the same token there will have to be a thoroughgoing reform of teaching at the pontifical universities and of priestly formation in the seminaries. These are long-range projects which at the moment are still

dreams, but over a period of ten years they could already be taking shape seriously. Everything depends on the pope at first. For the moment the positive thing is above all the acknowledgment that many things have gone awry.... People are admitting that there is a sickness, a grave crisis in the Church. Will they go much further? We will see.

**NdC: What specifically can the Society of St. Pius X contribute as a solution to this unprecedented crisis? What role can Catholics devoted to Tradition take in this work of restoration? What do you expect from the young generation which is now twenty years old and will be sixty... in forty years?**

H.E.: [We can offer] a reminder that the Church has a past that still remains quite valuable today. This is not dusty nostalgia but a fresh look at the Tradition of the Church—a decisive contribution toward a solution of the crisis. We should add to this the reminder about the power of the traditional Mass, about the mission and role of the priest as Our Lord intends it, in His image and according to His Spirit. When we ask priests who approach the Society what they expect from us, they tell us initially that they expect doctrine. Even before the Mass! This is surprising, but at the same time it is a good sign. The lay faithful have the important role of witnessing, of showing that the Christian life as it has always been understood, with its demands and respect for God's law, is quite possible in the modern world. It is Christian life put into practice, a very concrete example needed by the man in the street. And for the generation of twenty-year-olds, I see that it is waiting, ready for the adventure of Tradition, sensing very well that what is being offered to it, apart from Tradition, is nothing but imitation goods. We are at a pivotal point for the future reconstruction and, although it is not yet clearly apparent, I think that everything is possible.

**(I) Conference given by Msgr. Guido Pozzo on July 2, 2010 at the seminary in Wigratzbad (Germany), entitled, "Aspects of Catholic theology in the reception of Vatican II". See our commentary in DICI no. 220 dated August 7, 2010, "Vatican II: a debate between Romano Amerio, Msgr. Gherardini and Msgr. Pozzo".**