



Letter to friends and Benefactors

February 2009

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Dear faithful,

The lifting of the excommunications and the excitement following Bishop Williamson's interview with the Swedish television are perhaps the two topics that have filled the most pages of the newspapers this past month. More than one month later we'll take the time to evaluate the question.

The history of the excommunications

On June 30, 1988, Archbishop Lefebvre consecrated four bishops for the Society of St. Pius X. Pope John Paul II judged that "this act was one of disobedience to the Roman Pontiff in a very grave matter and of supreme importance for the unity of the Church,... Hence such disobedience - which implies in practice the rejection of the Roman primacy - constitutes a schismatic act" (Motu Proprio Ecclesia Dei). Archbishop Lefebvre accomplished this act despite formal instructions that had been sent to him and the Pope declared the excommunication of Archbishop Lefebvre, Bishop de Castro Mayer and the four consecrated bishops.

Until the pilgrimage of Tradition in Rome in the Holy Year 2000, there were only insignificant developments in the relations between Rome and the Society. But the pilgrimage demonstrated to the Roman authorities the fruits of Catholic Tradition: numerous young vocations, large families, Catholic people who are fervent, joyful and proud of their faith. Thanks to the convincing faith of the pilgrims, already during the pilgrimage the way to new contacts was opened: Cardinal Castrillon Hoyos invited the four bishops of the Society to the Vatican. Admittedly, it was just a first contact, but it showed that the Romans were willing to interest themselves with the Society. How would this small feeble Society proceed in front of the powerful giant of Rome?

The General Council sketched the outline for the future path of the Society in January 2001. As the ways of Rome with regard to Tradition do not inspire confidence, the Society must logically expect to be treated as all those who have left the combat of Archbishop Lefebvre. To protect itself, the Society asked concrete actions which would indicate unmistakably the Vatican's intentions in their regard: that all priests would have the freedom to celebrate the Tridentine Mass, and that the decree of excommunication would be lifted. These two measures were not asked in order to obtain directly an advantage for the Society itself, but rather to give a traditional breath to the Mystical Body and thus, indirectly, aid towards a healthful accord between the Society and Rome. Once Rome had satisfied the requests of these two preliminaries and the "anti-traditional" climate had begun to change, the Society would take up the discussions with Rome. Afterwards, the canonical situation could be regulated.

On July 7, 2007, after the Rosary Crusade, the Motu Proprio "Summorum Pontificum" was made public. What a beautiful act - what an encouraging act - for Tradition. Not only from now on were all priests free to say the Mass, but the Pope had also stated that the Tridentine Mass had never been abro-

gated. The combat of Archbishop Lefebvre is restored, his courage crowned with the Pope's support. Even more, the Motu Proprio gives priests the right to say the Breviary and use for the administering of sacraments and for blessings the Ritual of 1962. The first obstacle had passed.

In the beginning of June 2008 Cardinal Castrillon Hoyos sent an ultimatum to Bishop Fellay and threatened the Society with a "re"-declared schism if it did not publicly show its willingness to collaborate with Rome before the end of the month. The Society was supposed to commit itself:

- to an answer in proportion to the generosity of the Pope,
- to refrain from any public discourse that does not respect the person of the Holy Father and that would be contrary to ecclesial charity,
- to avoid the claim of being a magisterium which is superior to the Holy Father and to not put the Society forward in contraposition to the Church,
- to demonstrate the willingness to act honestly, in all ecclesial charity and with respect for the authority of the Vicar of Christ,
- to respect the date – fixed for the end of the month of June – for a positive answer. This would be a required and necessary condition as immediate preparation to the accord for the attainment of full communion.

Four months later, in October, Bishop Fellay responded to this threat in his "Letter to Friends and Benefactors": "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 let 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." Our Superior General showed himself firm and resolute in not abandoning the path outlined in 2001. Before the two preliminaries would be satisfied, the Society would not enter into discussions and a canonical solution would not be foreseen until after the end of these discussions. In the same letter he restarted the faithful on a new Rosary Crusade.

In a letter dated December 15, Bishop Fellay reaffirmed our will to remain Catholic: "We firmly believe in the Primacy of Peter. We are ready to write the Credo with our blood..., we adhere to all the Councils up to Vatican I. Nevertheless, we cannot but put forward certain reserves with regard to the Second Vatican Council." In the same letter, the Bishop clearly expressed our great sufferings caused by the actual situation and asked again for the withdrawal of the document of excommunication of 1988.

In the month of January, the Bishop brought to Rome the results of the Second Rosary Crusade: 1,703,000 rosaries for the lifting of the excommunication. In the days which followed his visit to Rome, on January 21 the Roman decree was signed and it was made public on January 24.

Consequences

The Second Vatican Council was the clear-cut turning away from Tradition, and the opening up of new ideas. The decree of the lifting of the excommunications will be the beginning of a new interest in traditional teachings and the return from the conciliar changes. The decree, after more than forty years, brings Rome closer to Tradition. It is a big step towards the reunification of the Catholic Authority with the Catholic Truth. For too long, the authority and the truth were divorced. Since the Motu Proprio Summorum Pontificum, one can no longer affirm that the true rite of the Mass is prohibited by Rome. Of course,

some will, even so, act as if the rite were still forbidden. After the decree of January 21, no one may any longer say that Catholics attached to the Tradition are “outside of the Church”. And here also, certain conciliarists will continue to act as if traditionalists were out of the Church. But this time, they will no longer have the Pope on their side.

The multitude of articles published against the lifting of the excommunications shows clearly that the followers of the Second Vatican Council are opposed to the action of the Pope. They fear the logical consequences from the lifting of the excommunications. Articles entitled such as: “Keep the course of the Second Vatican Council” prove what is at stake in the question. The petition in Germany against the papal act reveals that which modern theologians ask of us, and that which they desire to defend: “It’s the absolute recognition of the decisions made at the Second Vatican Council which is demanded.” The theologians invite all visitors to their site to vote against the decision because they rule out the acceptance of “a group within the Church that refuses to accept the council.” ... Cardinal Kasper, President of the Pontifical Council for the Union of Christians deplors the decree that for him is a “partial Rehabilitation (restoring to favor) of Tradition”; CWN news stated in an article that “Pope Benedict has made a bold move toward ending a split that began more than 20 years ago. At the same time, he has cleared the way for a debate on the most important theological issue facing the Christian world today. The outcome of that debate will have an importance that stretches far beyond the circles of Catholic traditionalism.”

Discussions

If in the near future the Society engages itself in discussions with Rome, this does not mean to say that it will be automatically brought under the aegis of Vatican II. The decree engages in nothing more than the undertaking of the discussions to which the Society itself had taken on from the year 2000 when it asked, as preliminaries, for the liberation of the Mass and the lifting of the “excommunications”. How could the Society not rejoice at the occasion which it has been given to be able to expound before Rome the serious doctrinal grounds which she believes to be at the root of the actual crisis in the Church? Of course, there are from two sides – the sedevacantists and the conciliarists – voices that claim to know that Bishop Fellay has already signed agreements with Rome. Some mobilize the “powerful” in battle formation against “Bernie Fellay” and draw up petitions to remove “the traitor to the mission of Archbishop Lefebvre” from his post. Others, wishing to calm the modernist circles, say: “We know that delicate negotiations between the Vatican and the SSPX have been going on for the past several years. Bishop Fellay met the Pope in 2005; the excommunications remained in force for more than three years after that meeting. During that time, it’s safe to say, the Vatican sought assurances that the SSPX would be open to a true reconciliation. The excommunications were lifted only when those assurances were received. In other words, the Pope’s public gesture tells us that private talks are already advanced.”

New Crusade

The Pope has displayed courage and an exceptional benevolence toward Tradition by satisfying the two preliminaries set down in 2001. That which seemed at the time to be an unrealistic demand and beyond all possibilities – of which the fulfillment is an obvious miracle – now is a reality.

But we must be aware that everything up until now has been just the modest introduction in the true combat and until now we have done nothing but place the pieces on the chessboard and show ourselves as respectable players: nothing more. The great game only now begins. The discussion will be taken up and we will finally see the moving of positions.

Who will win? Without a doubt: The Blessed Virgin! Through her we have obtained the liberation of the Mass in a first Rosary Crusade. She has bestowed upon us new graces in our Second Crusade. The 1,703,000 rosaries have earned us the lifting of the excommunications.

A third Crusade can only lead to the final victory!

So then, let us faithfully pray our rosary during this time of Lent. Let us voluntarily add a second or even a third rosary per day. The game is of tremendous importance. The Church could, yes, she must come out of her crisis.

- ❑ The first intention in the recitation of our rosary will therefore be in thanksgiving to the Blessed Virgin Mary.
- ❑ The second intention will be the recitation of the Aves for our Holy Father the Pope. There was probably not any other Cardinal – eligible in 2005 – who would have wanted or would have dared to take the steps that were undertaken by Pope Benedict XVI. Certainly he foresaw the refusal on the part of many of the bishops and the general outcry on the part of the press each time he undertook a step in favor of Tradition. And even so, he did not hesitate to liberate the Mass and to lift the excommunications. His pontificate, subsequently, is criticized as never before. Among the modern theologians voices are raised asking the Pope to renounce his position and to retire. The pressure on him increases from day to day. It will be up to him to make the final decision in the coming discussions, so then, to him to assume the responsibility and to receive on himself all the attacks from those people and groups opposed to him. He deserves our support through our greatest possible number of prayers.
- ❑ The third intention will be to pray for the Superiors of the Society, especially for Bishop Fellay, our Superior General. The new situation is not without danger, the discussions will be difficult, probably very long, and there are numerous adversaries. The bishop shoulders all the responsibility for the 500 priests of the Society, a certain responsibility for the communities which are friends of the Society and the responsibility for some hundreds of thousands of faithful from all over the world.

During this time of Lent, I entrust these intentions to you, I count on your commitment, and I know to whom I am speaking. During the last Crusade, the faithful from Canada have shown themselves extremely fervent. May they increase even more their endeavors: For God, for the Church, for the Catholic faith!

May this holy time of Lent be for us and for our beloved Church, through our sincere, persevering and generous efforts, a time of spiritual revival.

Father Jürgen Wegner, District Superior