

Open answer to the Open Letter of Bishop Williamson to the members of the SSPX

Singapore, May 12, 2013

Most Reverend and dear Bishop Williamson,

I hear the basic accusation:

“the present leadership of the Society of St Pius X means to lead it away from the direction set for it by Archbishop Lefebvre, and towards the ideas and ideals of the Second Vatican Council.”

“Superiors meaning to lead them and yourselves towards, even into, the great apostasy of modern times.”

This is a very grievous accusation, that requires facts proportionate to prove it. But what do we get afterwards?

An analysis of Bishop Fellay’s declaration of April 15, 2012 follows. From the very first paragraph one finds an evil twist. Indeed, Bishop Fellay wrote, as the first paragraph of his declaration: *“We promise to be always faithful to the Catholic Church and to the Roman Pontiff, its supreme Pastor, Vicar of Christ, successor of Peter and head of the body of Bishops.”* These words of bishop Fellay were almost an exact quote of Archbishop Lefebvre’s words: *“I, Marcel Lefebvre, promise to be always faithful to the Catholic Church and the Roman Pontiff, its Supreme Pastor, Vicar of Christ, Successor of Blessed Peter in his primacy as head of the body of bishops”* (May 5, 1988). Now who would not see in such promise **a clear, unambiguous profession of Catholic Faith and fidelity to the Catholic Church?** It seems hard to find something evil in this. Yet you do, writing that it “can easily be misdirected today towards the Conciliar Church as such, and to the Conciliar Pontiffs.” Your very comment destroys its own self; indeed you use the words “as such”, which means that you want to take words in their precise meaning. Just apply those words, “as such”, to Bishop Fellay’s original sentence and they refute your own comment: “We promise to be always faithful to the Catholic Church *as such* and to the Roman Pontiff, its supreme Pastor, Vicar of Christ *as such*, successor of Peter *as such* and head of the body of Bishops.” Thus to find evil even in this first sentence of Bishop Fellay manifests that “ill-disposition” of which St Thomas speaks in IIa IIae qu. 60 a.3: “this [interpreting doubts in the evil side] is due to a man being ill-disposed towards another: for when a man hates or despises another, or is angry with or envious of him, he is led by slight indications to think evil of him, because everyone easily believes what he desires.”

The analysis continues in the same vein, and it is superfluous to go through each paragraph. Though that April 15th declaration is not without need of some corrections – which Bishop Fellay himself acknowledged – yet it is far from the original accusation that you try to prove. No, it is NOT true that “whoever studies these ten paragraphs in the original text can only conclude that their author or authors have given up the Archbishop’s fight for Tradition, and have gone over in their minds to Vatican II.” At most one may say that this text is weak and contains some inappropriate words (ambiguous, inexact, inappropriate, or simply wrong, like the 7th paragraph) in an effort to find a doctrinal declaration acceptable to the present members of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. It is not true to say that the SSPX Headquarters has not retracted it (your French KE 303, but not in the English version: which one is the original?) Explicitly Bishop Fellay said to Archbishop DiNoia on 28th August 2012 that it is retracted and can no longer serve as basis for work.

The same accusations are sometimes made against the Protocol of May 5, 1988, which had been prepared by the future Bishop Tissier de Mallerai and signed by Archbishop Lefebvre. Would you accuse these two the way you accused Bishop Fellay? Certainly not! If that declaration of April 15th had really “given up Archbishop Lefebvre’s fight for Tradition”, the modernists – who are no fools – would have rejoiced and accepted it! No matter how weak one reckons it, it remained too strong for the CDF and was unacceptable for them; it was therefore far from “giv[ing] up the Archbishop’s fight for Tradition.”

By the way, any honest reader of Archbishop Lefebvre’s letter of May 6, 1988 [see my book *Archbishop Lefebvre and the Vatican*] would not agree with your writing: “It is well known that on May 6 he repudiated that Protocol because he himself recognized that it made too many concessions for the Society to be able to continue defending Tradition.” In that letter, Archbishop Lefebvre warmly thanked Cardinal Ratzinger for that Protocol, and **far from disapproving it, he basically asked for a prompt implementation of it**, requesting a proximate date for the approved Consecration (the only way in which he departed from the protocol is in the threat that, if no date were given to him, he would go ahead: he explained himself about that saying that such threat had been the only way to go forward in those negotiations). It is only after he received the response for it, with its requests for other candidates which made the given date of August 15th impossible to keep since there was not enough time to process the dossiers for those additional candidates, that faced with such a recurrent postponing game (June 30th was the fourth date, Archbishop Lefebvre having already postponed three times), he decided to go ahead on June 30th. Cardinal Ratzinger was visibly conscious that Rome had not treated Archbishop Lefebvre fairly in that matter, and thus wanted to correct it during his pontificate.

You conclude at the end: “*the Society’s leadership seems to have lost its grip on the primacy of truth, especially Catholic Truth.*”

Given the **disproportion** of such conclusion – and of the above accusations – with the actual words of Bishop Fellay’s declaration (and with all the other accusations in the past 18th months, typically in the *Open Letter to Bishop Fellay* by supposedly 37 priests in France), when I try to understand the reasoning behind, it seems to me that the **basic** accusation is this one which you state: “The problem is less the agreement than **the desire of any agreement that will grant to the Society official recognition**, and that desire is still very much there.” And the reasoning seems to be this one: the occupiers of the See of Peter and Roman Congregations are “the apostates of Rome”, men wholly dedicated to “the ideas and ideals of the Second Vatican Council,” which is “the great apostasy of modern times”; any agreement whatsoever with them, any canonical recognition by them, makes one a collaborator in that great apostasy of modern time, a liberal, great enemy of God.

Now in all honesty, such reasoning was NEVER the reasoning of Archbishop Lefebvre! Indeed on March 22nd 1980, he was saying (*Homœc 20A1*): “This is the reason why today particularly I insist on this unity among us. True, such unity is easier to keep for religious families in monasteries. For us who are very much spread out by the very nature of our priestly fraternity, unity may seem sometimes more difficult. Well, if it is more difficult, precisely it requires that we have stronger bonds, more solid, more resolute, in order to be well united with one another and work for the kingdom of Our Lord Jesus Christ, in this religious family which is – once more – united with the Church of all times. And united with the Church of today, and even united, I would say, to her leaders who, if they are influenced with modern ideas to which we cannot adhere, if they are influenced with the ideas of this *new right*, as said Leo XIII, right that has been condemned by Leo XIII and all his predecessors, and if in this sense we do not feel united in thought with those with whom we should be in full communion of thought, it does not matter. This does not break this unity, because **through their persons who should be fully submitted to Tradition, fully subject to what their predecessors have taught, we are united through them to this apostolicity which comes down through all the sovereign pontiffs to the present Sovereign Pontiff today reigning**. In this we must be persuaded, convinced, that we are precisely, intimately, more than anyone, members of the Holy Church and **with all the members of**

the Church we fight for the reign of Our Lord Jesus Christ; even if some of them, unfortunately, by their conduct, their thinking, their writing, their acting, do not favour the reign of Our Lord Jesus Christ. This is indeed what happened throughout the history of the Church.”

Does recognizing Pope Francis as the legitimate pope makes one a modernist? By doing so, we simply recognize the fact of his legitimacy as supreme pontiff, as the Archbishop said above. That part in him is still Catholic. And if that Catholic part does recognize us, it will neither make us modernists.

Moreover, such reasoning manifests “*to have lost its grip on the primacy of truth, especially Catholic Truth.*” Thus you fall in the very default that you accuse others. Indeed, Catholic Truth is not something you can take in part: either you believe the whole Faith or you have lost the whole Faith. Now one essential article of the Catholic Faith is precisely the faith in the Catholic Church, and especially the “faith in Peter” as Archbishop Lefebvre said on the very day of your own ordination, June 26, 1976: “O yes, we have Faith in Peter; we have faith in the successor of Peter!” And he said in another occasion: “If any one breaks with Rome, it will not be me.” From the beginning of the Society, he was careful to obtain the approval of Bishop Charrière and even shortly after Assisi he was still willing to postpone the Consecration in order to do it with the approval of the Pope and within a proper canonical structure. It is only in front the lack of good faith of those in authority at Rome that he went ahead without waiting for them.

Catholic Faith teaches us that we cannot be saved alone, separated from the Church. Faith alone is not sufficient; without Charity, that “bond of perfection” (Col. 3:14) which binds us with Christ and with each member of Christ, it is impossible to go to Heaven. “And if I should have ... all knowledge, and if I should have all faith, ... and have not charity, I am nothing... it profiteth me nothing” (I Cor 13:2-3). If this internal bond with the Church, consisting in sanctifying grace and charity, is absolutely necessary for salvation, the external bond of the Church, consisting, as St. Robert Bellarmine teaches, in the profession of the Catholic Faith, the practice of Catholic worship (starting with the sacrament of Baptism) AND the hierarchical communion is also necessary for salvation, “*re aut voto*”; that is, in case without fault on one’s part one of these external aspect is not possible *in fact*, then at least the “*votum* – the firm desire and will” of it is necessary for salvation. Thus the Catholic Church teaches that the very desire of a proper canonical situation (in which basically the hierarchical communion consists) is necessary. Read St. Robert (quoted in *Is Feeneyism Catholic?* p. 40): he clearly says that if such hierarchical recognition is unjustly denied, the lack of it may not be an obstacle to salvation; but if it is not even desired, then that very lack of desire for hierarchical communion is an obstacle to salvation.

You might say: yes, I want proper hierarchical communion, but with proper Catholic authorities, not with those presently occupying Rome. My answer is: this is basically the sedevacantist position, and was NEVER Archbishop Lefebvre’s position, nor is it in conformity with reality: it is not *true*. In some of your writings (*Various Churches?*) you present the situation as if they are in the *Conciliar Church* and not in the Catholic Church, presenting the Catholic Church as only that part of the visible Church which would have remained sound. Here are your words:

That part alone of the visible Church is Catholic which is one, holy, universal and apostolic. The rest is various sorts of rot.

Now such thinking was NEVER the thinking of Archbishop Lefebvre. (See my own text on [Various Churches?](#)) He never considered the Catholic Church as merely a *part* of the whole visible Church, a part whose boundaries would no longer be clearly visible, a part where there would no longer be a proper hierarchy, since as you wrote in that same text: “*the ‘official Church’ is largely Conciliar and not Catholic.*” The error of reasoning in that text is to confuse the being/essence and its properties/marks: from the fact that the four Marks of the Church are less visible in many areas due to the errors of the Council, especially the scandalous ecumenism, one cannot conclude that they are “not Catholic”. In a famous sermon, on 29th June 1982 (Bishop Fellay’s ordination, and mine), Archbishop Lefebvre beautifully exposed the trial this present crisis is giving to the faith of some; he explained that the Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ was a challenge to the Faith of some in the beginning of the Church, and there were some heretics who refused to recognise the true humanity of Christ saying that God

could not have suffered so much, and thus they devised that He only had an apparent body; and there were other heretics who refused to recognise the Divinity of Him who suffered so much. In a similar way the present Passion of the Church, Mystical Body of Christ, is a challenge to the faith of some, and there are some who refuse to recognise the errors and evils going on in the Church, saying that Christ could not let so much evil in the Church, and there are others who refuse to recognise that those officials who strayed so far from their duty may still be a part of the Mystical Body of Christ and they became sedevacantists. Archbishop Lefebvre rejected both errors, and explained that, as no one could have said beforehand how far could physical evil (suffering) go in the physical Body of Christ, so no one could say beforehand how far could spiritual evil (error and sin) go in the Mystical Body of Christ; it is a mystery that the Son of God could say in His sufferings: “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Mt. 27:46); yet one ought to remain faithful like Our Lady at the foot of the Cross. So it is a mystery to see that the successor of Peter could invite all religions together to pray at Assisi like John Paul II did: to pray to which God? Yet *contra factum non fit argumentum*, as you rightly reminded us often. Yet even after that Assisi scandalous meeting, Archbishop Lefebvre was working with Cardinal Gagnon to establish a proper canonical situation for the SSPX.

Catholic Truth is that, in spite of all the imperfection and some deep sins of the successors of the Apostles, some saints, some reprobates and Judases, we must be in communion with them, because they *are* the successors of the Apostles.

Then you might say: Yes, we recognise the Pope, but we ought to keep our distances, since “it is Superiors who mould their subjects and not the other way around.” Here the great principle of St. Augustine is there to calm your fears: “in the Church, communion with the wicked does not harm the just, so long as they do not consent with their wicked deeds.” Such fear must not make us reject that which is in itself good (hierarchical communion, *ORDER* within the Church), the right positioning of ourselves towards the *possession* of the authority that comes from Christ. Only when faced with the abusive *exercise* of that authority we should resist. What we ought to do – and this is what Bishop Fellay has been keen to do from the beginning of the offers of Rome, i.e. from the year 2000 – is to exercise the *virtue of prudence* and provide for the protection and guarantees for the continuation of the work of Tradition.

When Bishop Fellay exposed in last year’s spring *Cor Unum* the principles that were directing his exercise of this prudence, he wrote: “*Our principled position: the faith first and foremost: we intend to remain Catholic and, to that end, to preserve the Catholic faith first of all.*” Then he exposed that “*two points were absolutely necessary in order to assure our survival: The first is that no concessions affecting the faith and what follows from it (liturgy, sacraments, morality, discipline) may be demanded of the Society. The second is that a real liberty and autonomy of action should be granted to the Society, and that these freedoms should allow it to live and develop in concrete circumstances.*” How honestly can you write after that he is leading us “*away from the direction set for it by Archbishop Lefebvre, and towards the ideas and ideals of the Second Vatican Council... towards, even into, the great apostasy of modern times*” and that he has “*lost [his] grip on the primacy of truth, especially Catholic Truth*”? You may say that he had some imprudent and weak words, but you may not draw those outrageous conclusions of yours! They are so far from the whole reality, i.e. *all* that Bishop Fellay has said and not just a part, that one cannot but wonder whether it is not rather you who *has lost his grip on truth*.

You warn us of “the danger in which your Superiors are placing their faith and therewith their eternal salvation.” Dear Monseigneur, there are priests who have been following you and have grievously fallen in scandalously schismatic declarations. Father Chazal gives a resoundingly schismatic “No!” to the question: “What we have is a complete entanglement of Truth and error, still good people having the Faith and rotten members. In case of such entanglement, as for the wheat and the chaff, what do we do? Do we go on the field? No!” If he is not in the field of Our Lord, he will not be gathered in the barn of Our Lord; he *cannot* be gathered in the barn of Our Lord if he is not in the field of Our Lord. Such “No!” is a refusal of the Church *in concreto*; it is really a schismatic *No*. Though in your loose association there is not real authority – a very liberal association indeed – yet, you have a certain moral leadership over them, and thus ought to correct him, for his own salvation. Unless he returns in the field, he will not be saved.

Protestants rejected the Church for the scandals of the renaissance Popes and bishops. We must not follow their example!

Archbishop Lefebvre was really a “man of the Church”, a man whose whole life was in the service of the Church, a man *faithful* to the Church. It seems to me that this word, *fidelity*, can summarise the whole life and fight of Archbishop Lefebvre: he was faithful to the Faith, faithful to the Liturgy, faithful to the morals, faithful to the Church! That fidelity is very simply expressed in the words he asked to be put on his tomb: “I have delivered to you that which I have received.” This fidelity is itself your own episcopal motto!

The *Superiors of the Society* are indubitably all dedicated to this *fidelity* of Archbishop Lefebvre, uncompromised fidelity to the faith, to the liturgy, to the morals *and to the Church*, as Bishop Fellay’s latest letter to friends and benefactors makes it manifest. We, priests of the Society of St Pius X, do not want to leave it!

When I first met Archbishop Lefebvre, in Feb. 1976, at a time the media were speaking of him as “*l’évêque de fer* – the bishop of steel”, the quality that struck me most was his *humility and meekness*. He could truly say with St Paul: “be ye my imitators as I am of Christ!” (1 Cor. 11:1) “I live, not me, Christ lives in me” (Gal. 2:20). Archbishop Lefebvre was a man of Faith, a man with a living Faith: he manifested by these virtues the true Faith that inhabited him. To be faithful to his example of sacerdotal holiness is also an essential part of the fidelity that each member of the Society of St Pius X should practice.

I am sure that all the members of the Society of St Pius X would rejoice greatly if *you* would return to where you should never have left, within the Society of St Pius X, continuing in that same fidelity without introducing new ideas of the Catholic Church as a part of the visible Church. And if some orders seem difficult, since they are not against God, it is much more profitable for your soul and more excellent example given to others, to obey such orders with humility rather than resisting: “Therefore he that resisteth the power [authority], resisteth the ordinance of God. And they that resist, purchase to themselves damnation” (Rom. 13:2). For “God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble” (Jac. 4:6).

We all pray for you, that you may return with the meekness and humility of Archbishop Lefebvre.

Yours sincerely in Jesus and Mary,

Father François Laisney