



AN INTERVIEW WITH BISHOP DE GALARRETA

May 2, 2009

Your Excellency, you are one of the four bishops consecrated by Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre on June 30, 1988. You have recently been appointed Visitor of the Seminary of La Reja to replace Bishop Williamson. Before we talk about your current assignment, we would like to ask you some questions regarding the events of recent weeks. On January 21, 2009, the Vatican sanctioned the lifting of the decree of excommunication from July 1, 1988, after the consecrations of bishops by Archbishop Lefebvre. In an interview with *Nouvelles de Chrétienté* (No. 115, Jan.-Feb. 2009), Bishop Fellay said, referring to the excommunication of 1988: “This decree was void because there was no excommunication.” In your sermon of March 15, 2009, you also stated: “We have always said and have always maintained that these censures were absolutely void in law and fact.” Why argue the invalidity of the excommunication declared by John Paul II in 1988?

In our written contacts with Rome, we always took great care to make clear that what we asked for was a declaration of the nullity of the excommunications, or—in a slightly more acceptable form for them—the withdrawal of the decree of excommunication, precisely because these (the excommunications) do not exist. Archbishop Lefebvre’s consecrations in 1988 constituted an act absolutely necessary for the continuity of the

Catholic priesthood, of Tradition, of the Catholic Faith, and of the Church itself. It was an act of survival to safeguard the Catholic Faith, and therefore it is not a sin that should require any condemnation or censure. It was a virtuous act and, in my opinion, a supremely virtuous act for the sake of souls and the good of the Holy Church.

Don’t you think it is contradictory to maintain on one hand that there is no excommunication, and on the other hand to have petitioned Rome to do something about the decree?

The contradiction is only apparent because whether or not the excommunications are valid is one thing, and the impression of the rest of the Church and public opinion is something different. It is clear that we bore a stigma in the eyes of the whole Church, which was like a condemnation of what we represent: Catholic Tradition. These are two different aspects. Objectively speaking, there was no excommunication. Now, subjectively speaking, in the minds of the people, that is what impelled us to ask to have the decree withdrawn.

In response, Rome issued the decree of January 21, 2009, not recognizing the invalidity of the excommunication, but erasing the penalty. This is not what the SSPX had requested. And yet Bishop Fellay asked to have a *Magnificat* sung to celebrate the fact. You yourself said in your March 15 sermon that “we

are delighted and grateful for this decree.” Why are you happy if the decree is not what you asked for?

Without a doubt, the way this decree was worded does not correspond either to truth or to justice; therefore the question of the rehabilitation of the bishops, including Archbishop Lefebvre and Bishop de Castro Mayer, remains unresolved, as ultimately a rehabilitation of all the faithful of Tradition. We had asked for the withdrawal of the decree as an effective sign of good will and of a change of attitude in Rome in regards to us and Tradition. That is why we are glad. While the decree is not what it should be, nevertheless, we no longer have a case of persecution and for persecution and breakup. It also removes a major obstacle for souls to be able to draw near the riches of Tradition and the true Faith.

Your Excellency, you said in your sermon that the number of the faithful had increased after the decree of January 21.

Yes, indeed, after the Motu Proprio several thousands of priests asked for the DVD that teaches how to offer the traditional Mass. Also, after this decree there has been a lot of new people contacting us through our priories and seminaries.

Many wonder why the Pope issued the decree of January 21. Some speak of an intention to first absorb and then silence the SSPX. Others speak of a simple act of benevolence of the Pope. What is your opinion?

It is difficult to know the intentions, but by what one can infer from the facts, there are probably several different reasons. It seems indisputable to me that we can find on the Pope’s part some good will to restore justice and benevolence. But at the same time it is also clear that what they expect in Rome is that these actions and contacts will allow them to place us inside the “ecclesiastical dynamics” that would smooth the rough edges we’re supposed to have; for example, what Rome calls our rigidity and our uncompromising stand in respect to dogma. So they expect to “moderate” us a bit, incorporating also some positive things from us.

Another important aspect is Benedict XVI’s desire to demonstrate the continuity of Vatican II with Tradition: If you want to prove that there is continuity, we must be allowed to exist and live within the confines of the conciliar Church. Certainly Rome’s view of things and of us is the greatest danger of the future contacts.

Can we speak of a traditionalist pope?

No, unfortunately not. Benedict XVI has taken care to deny this explicitly. He feels fully and theologically identified with the Second Vatican

Council. His teaching and his governing of the Church fall squarely within the spirit of the Council. The proof is that he wants to incorporate us into the official Church, but within an ecumenical conception. He is practicing ecumenism towards us.

However, there is at the same time a change of attitude regarding tradition: the attitude towards us is no longer one of persecution, but, to some extent, of acceptance. This change in attitude, more candid now, more open to tradition, serves us as a foundation to tackle the talks with Rome. What’s good, what’s new with this Pope, is this change in attitude and the acceptance that the Council and the postconciliar teaching must be in continuity with Tradition. This is one point of agreement and a starting point for the discussions.

In his letter to the bishops of the world of March 12, the Pope said that “the problems to be addressed now are essentially doctrinal in nature, and relate primarily to the acceptance of Vatican II and the postconciliar teaching of the Popes.” What are the doctrinal problems Benedict XVI mentions here?

They are precisely the novelties inspired by the liberal, neomodernist principles such as, for example, religious freedom, freedom of conscience, ecumenism, democracy that entered the Church with the vision of the “Church as communion,” “Church as people of God” and through collegiality, which limits the authority of the Pope and the bishops. In short, we’re talking about the anthropocentric, humanist and personalistic turn that has penetrated the Church and performed a Copernican revolution. We have moved from a Christocentric, God-centered conception of the Church to a sort of worship of man, as claimed by Pope Paul VI.

According to the decree of January 21, the doctrinal talks between the Society of Saint Pius X and the Vatican would have to begin. It’s been said several times by the SSPX that we must “study Vatican II in light of Tradition.” How is this expression to be understood?

This expression requires some clarification. We clearly understand by this that the guideline for an explanation of any Church doctrine is its conformity to Tradition. Therefore to study the Council in the light of Tradition means rejecting everything that is in contradiction to the traditional teaching and Magisterium, and accepting that which is consistent and harmonious with what was believed always, everywhere and by all, which is the definition of tradition.

So we can say that the goal of these talks is “to convert Rome”? Doesn’t that sound arrogant? Wishful thinking?

The term “to convert Rome” is not accurate. It is rather a return, a re-conversion. Moreover, it is God who can enlighten the minds and move hearts to be able to return to the tradition of the Church. We would be arrogant if we were to wrap ourselves in our own new ideas and set ourselves up as judges of the doctrines of the Church. But it is rather the opposite: we intend to judge a series of novelties in the light of what was always believed and lived in the Church. Therefore it’s a question of fidelity, not of pride. Arrogance is precisely the attitude of those who, based entirely on their own personal opinions contrary to the Faith, reject 2,000 years of Church teaching. Wishful thinking? No, we’re not engaging in wishful thinking, because we are not going into this with false expectations, that is, we do not have fixed expectations. We believe it is our duty to bear witness to the Catholic Faith, to defend it and condemn the contrary errors, but we don’t know what will be the result of these discussions. We do not know if the discussions will yield little or some fruit or nothing at all. We do not know if at the onset of the talks Rome will regret them or if we’re going to be able to continue them. We have an obligation to do so, it is our duty, but it is God who gives the fruit...nothing at all, 30 percent, 60 percent, 100 percent? God only knows, and He will provide; but remember, for God nothing is impossible.

Archbishop Lefebvre consecrated four bishops invoking a state of necessity. He spoke in his sermon of an “operation survival” of the Church. Is there still such a state of necessity after the Motu Proprio of July 7, 2007, authorizing the Tridentine Mass and the decree of January 21, 2009, concerning the excommunications?

Yes, the state of necessity was not brought about by some wrongful convictions or even just by the disappearance of the traditional liturgy. Our combat has not ended with the Motu Proprio. The state of necessity originated with the change in the Faith, the introduction of doctrines radically opposed to tradition and the Catholic Faith. In this sense, the problem remains exactly the same and has not changed. Although there has been some improvement in the attitude of the official Church regarding the traditional liturgy, there was no resolution of the doctrinal problem of the Mass. The state of necessity remains exactly the same because the question of Faith continues to exist.

What prospects do you see for the Society of St. Pius X in the future? An agreement with Rome? A canonical recognition?

Not at all, either in the immediate future or for a while. We actually reject this possibility. We know that until Rome returns to tradition, any practical or canonical agreement is incompatible with the confession and public defense of the Faith, and would mean our death. In the best case, humanly speaking, we have several years of discussions ahead of us.

Your Excellency, you have just been appointed Visitor of a seminary that has 42 seminarians and 6 teachers. What is the difference between the role of Visitor and that of Director? What will be your concern, your goal as a visitor of the seminary?

My specific role is actually to ensure a quiet and peaceful transition. I am serving as interim director, while still fulfilling my other duties; I will alternate some periods of time at the seminary with my travels to administer the sacraments of ordination and confirmation. This transition period can last six or nine months, though you never know....I have been in Spain for 15 years in what had started as a temporary appointment for a year....Thank God this seminary is very well established, with an experienced, excellent teaching staff. So my task is to continue the excellent work that my predecessor did at the seminary, and simply solve whatever needs may occur in these months, contributing a few things of my own.

What does the training of a seminarian involve?

There are three main pillars: first, formation in the Faith—the doctrinal, theological formation that is accomplished through the studies of philosophy, theology, and Scripture; essentially, the study of St. Thomas Aquinas, the great light of Catholic studies. The second part is the training in what we could call piety, especially through the traditional liturgy and participation in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. It also includes the formation of a deep, true personal prayer life. Thirdly, the seminary is a school of perfection, of holiness. This is essential. We aim at a spiritual growth with the practice of virtue and fighting against our own faults. This doctrine, piety and virtues lead us to holiness and union with God.

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Your Excellency, there is a crisis of vocations. The conciliar seminaries have few seminarians, but not

so this seminary. How do you explain the number of vocations we see here?

I think these men are attracted to the traditional concept of the Catholic priesthood: the priest is to offer the sacrifice of the Mass, to preach the Truth, to sanctify souls; a priest is dedicated to the establishing of the primacy and royalty of Our Lord Jesus Christ while building the Church. Without a doubt, to consecrate one's life to God and to souls through all the riches of the traditional Catholic priesthood is an appealing ideal.

Do you mean that nowadays God calls men to His service as much as in days gone by?

That's a difficult question to answer! I do not know. Perhaps there are fewer men called as a punishment for the abandonment of God's way, as a punishment for apostasy. That being said, I also think that there are still many young people who have a vocation, but because of the lack of a true ideal, and especially because of the cares of this world, these desires are drowned. Sometimes life has led [these young men] to certain experiences that block or impede a vocation. I believe that part of the problem is that sometimes the parents do not take good enough care of the souls of their children, especially the adolescents. Some are not providing the necessary care to support in their children the desire and the disposition for the priesthood, and to have them develop the virtues necessary to pursue a vocation: generosity, spirit of sacrifice, fortitude, strength of character.

In addition to the six years of Seminary studies there is the "Year of Humanities." What is this year? A pre-seminary, a year of discernment?

Actually it's a bit both at once. It is a year given to those who do not enter the seminary after a solid base of humanistic studies, to alleviate the tremendous gaps in education today. On the other hand, for many of these young men this is a year during which, in a better environment, they can discern their vocation and find which path to follow in life. It was an excellent idea of Bishop Williamson to have set up this year of studies, because that difficulty of which I spoke, of discovering and pursuing a vocation, and even perseverance in life as a layman, is to a large extent mitigated by this year of humanities. For him who will continue in the seminary, it is an excellent foundation. And for him that decides to continue his life in the world, this year gives him a strength that will ensure his perseverance for life.

During the July holidays there have been for several years now the so-called "Days of Humanities." What is

the purpose of these workshops? Will they take place this year? On what topic?


The purpose of this workshop is to study, in a short period of time, some key subjects of the modern world which confront Catholics nowadays, to give training and encouragement to persevere in this battle. This year it will take place in July on the subject of evolutionism. We will study the scientific aspect of the subject, but also the impact of evolutionism on other fields: philosophy, theology, the current situation of the Church. This will be supplemented with other topics: music, art, literature...all of course adapted to the level of young people.

One last question: In this terrible crisis that shakes the Church, what advice would you give to our faithful?

The advice that I would most strongly offer to all is to bear in mind that faithfulness and perseverance in this tremendous crisis do not happen only by keeping the faith, but also from maintaining hope and charity. Surely our fundamental duty is fidelity to the truth, to the Faith. But just as important as believing, professing, and defending truth is, so it is to have trust, hope, in Our Lord, who is God, and to believe in the omnipotence of Our Lord, who said to us: "Do not be afraid, I have overcome the world"; and also "There is nothing impossible for God."

Our Lord is Truth, and He is also Charity. The great Christian revelation is about the love that God has for men. The motto of our founder was *Credidimus Caritati*, "We have believed in God's love for us," and that means we should remain in the love of God and also maintain the love between us. The commandment par excellence of Our Lord is charity. The new commandment is that we love one another as He loved us.

I always remember with pleasure the words of St. Augustine, who asked God to soften his heart so that the love of truth would not make him lose sight of the truth of love. I think that is the great temptation for those of us who remain faithful in the midst of the aggression from the world and sometimes from the members of the Church themselves: to fall into despair and bitterness.

To remain faithful, we must keep the truth in its entirety, but making sure that this love of truth will not take away from us the truth of hope—God will triumph—or the truth of love: that we love one another to strengthen one another. 

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