

# Considerations on the Church and on the place occupied within it by the Society of St. Pius X

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**Father Franz Schmidberger**

I. The Church is a mystery. It is the mystery of the one true God, present among us, the Savior God who does not want the sinner to die, but to be converted and to live. Conversion requires our cooperation.

II. The Church is infallible in its divine nature; but it is led by men who can make mistakes and are not without faults. The office of the leader must be distinct from his person. He holds his office for a time and then departs, whether by death or other circumstances: the office, however, remains. Today Pope Francis holds the papal office with the power of primate. At an hour we do not know, he will depart and another pope will be elected. But as long as he occupies the Holy See, we recognize him as such and pray for him. We do not say that he is a good pope. On the contrary, with his liberal ideas and his management of his office, he is spreading much disarray in the Church. But at the moment when Christ established the Church, He foresaw the entire line of popes throughout the whole history of the Church, even a Pope Francis. And yet, He allowed him to ascend the papal throne. Similarly, the Lord instituted the Blessed Sacrament of the altar while foreseeing many sacrileges throughout history.

III. The Society of Saint Pius X was founded in the midst of these bewildering times by Archbishop Lefebvre for the Church. Its mission is to offer the Church a new generation of priests, to preserve the true Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, and to proclaim the Kingdom of Jesus Christ over all of society, precisely in the face of liberal popes and princes of the Church who betray the Faith. Thus, conflict inevitably ensued: the Society was exiled in 1975 (1). Not only did it survive its exile, but it grew there, becoming for many a sign of opposition to the work of destruction that continues in our time. This opposition was particularly evident on June 30, 1988, during the consecration, made necessary by the internal situation, of four bishops *nullius* by Archbishop Lefebvre.

IV. Nevertheless, Archbishop Lefebvre continued, after the condemnation of the Society, to seek a solution for it under canon law and did not even shy away from seeking dialogue with the Roman authorities; to this end, it was important for him to encourage them to become aware of the situation and thus to reverse course. He continued these efforts even after consecrating the bishops, although, realistically, he had little hope of success. Using an *argumentum ad hominem*, he pleaded for permission to "experience Tradition." That is to say, he fully recognized the fact that the Society found itself in an exceptional situation, and this was in no way its own fault, but that of its opponents. The situation remained this way until the year 2000. From that moment on, Rome dealt with a settlement, sometimes in a cunning manner, sometimes with honest intentions, depending on the person on the Roman side who had taken up the problem.

V. The dramatic and continuous decline of the Church from then on, and the simultaneous and persistent evolution of the Society, led some cardinals and bishops to a partial or complete realization, though not always openly confessed. Rome itself gradually lowered its demands, and the most recent proposals no longer mention recognition of either the Second Vatican Council or the legitimacy of the *Novus Ordo Missae*. **Thus, the time seems right to regularize the situation of the Society**, for several reasons:

1) Every abnormal situation tends by its nature towards normalization.

2) Let us not lose sight of the danger that some of the faithful and certain members of our confreres may become accustomed to this abnormal situation and consider it normal. The objections raised here and there to participation in the Holy Year (2), as well as the complete disregard for Pope Francis's granting of ordinary jurisdiction to hear confessions (3)—having consistently emphasized the emergency situation, we were fully justified in demanding extraordinary jurisdiction—raise concerns. If some of the faithful or our confreres feel comfortable in this state of freedom regarding dependence on the hierarchy, then this suggests a loss of the *sensus ecclesiae*. We do not have the right to argue: *"We have sound doctrine, the true Mass, our seminaries and priories, and above all, bishops. Therefore, we lack nothing."*

3) We do indeed have sympathizers and even friends among the bishops and cardinals. One or another would gladly call upon us for help, give us a church, or even entrust us with their seminary; but in the current situation, they are unable to do so. These Nicodemuses eagerly await a solution that would also provide them with personal support. In any case, many barriers would fall and numerous obstacles would be overcome among Catholics who are strong in faith but anxious. References in the media and elsewhere to a schismatic, apostate, or separated Fraternity would be eradicated forever.

4) In the coming years, we will have an urgent need for new bishops. Consecrating them without a papal mandate is certainly possible in a situation of extreme emergency. But if one wishes to consecrate bishops with the permission of Rome, that permission must be requested.

5) Modernists, liberals, and other enemies of the Church are very concerned about the solution for the Fellowship under Church law. Does not the discernment of minds suggest that we are on the right track?

6) How can the Church overcome this crisis? There is no glimmer of hope in the present state of affairs. On the other hand, a formal act of recognition of the Fellowship would trigger a salutary upheaval within the Church. The good would be encouraged, the wicked would suffer a defeat.

VI. Response to some objections:

1) How can one seek recognition from Pope Francis?

*Answer* : We have already indicated the necessary distinction between the office and its holder. The current pope undoubtedly has a divinely ordained duty to demonstrate to everyone what the Council truly was and what its recent consequences have brought about within the Church: disarray, the dictatorship of relativism, the priority given to pastoral care over doctrine, and friendship with all enemies of God and other opponents of Christianity. But this is precisely one of the Council's errors: separating cause from effect.

Some were too captivated by the person of Benedict XVI, instead of first considering the papal office and then the individual; his resignation was a rude awakening for many. Let us not make the same mistake, focusing too much on the concrete person instead of the divine institution! Perhaps it is precisely Pope Francis, with his unpredictable character and improvisations, who would be capable of such a leap. The media might forgive him for such a measure, something they would never have forgiven Benedict XVI. With his authoritarian, not to say tyrannical, style of governance, he would very likely be able to impose such a measure even against a massive outcry.

2) But what will people say about the "resistance"?

*Answer* : We cannot direct our actions toward people who have clearly lost their sense of and love for the Church in its concrete form. Moreover, they are currently completely torn apart by internal struggles.

3) You must now remain silent regarding all current errors.

*Answer* : We will not be silenced; we call errors by their names both before and after standardization. We would very much like to return from the "exile" in which we now find ourselves.

4) Pope Francis has such a bad reputation among Catholics that recognition of the Society by him would cause more harm than good for it.

*Answer* : We began by distinguishing between the office and the person. If Francis is Pope—and he is—then he possesses primacy of jurisdiction over the entire Church, regardless of whether he otherwise does good or harm to the Church. Let us take the path that is beneficial to the Church; let us not be led by the pursuit of worldly favors, and God will bless us.

5. But this integration into the conciliar system will cost the Fraternity its profile, perhaps even its identity.

*Answer* : It all depends on how steadfast we are and who is converting whom. If we approach this energetically, relying on God's grace, then our new situation will become a blessing for the entire Church. Where else is there a community that can concretely undertake such a work of conversion? Certainly, we must not rely on our own abilities and virtues, but on God's help. Consider the struggle between David and Goliath, and draw an analogy: as Christians, we are planted in a completely godless, corrupt world, and we must prove ourselves in it. The danger of contagion is great, but we must and can escape it with God's grace. One thing is certain: a new situation will not make our activity easier, but rather hinder it; nevertheless, it will make it all the more fruitful.

6. All the communities that submitted to Rome, either assimilated into the conciliar system, or they collapsed.

*Answer* : The initial situation is not the same. In our case, it is Rome that demands a solution and has approached us; in other cases, these communities have gone to Rome as supplicants, often already carrying a sense of guilt. Furthermore, none of them has bishops, except for the Association of the Holy Curé of Ars in the Diocese of Campos in Brazil, where Bishop Rifan is ready to compromise. Obviously, the solid bulwark of an appropriate ecclesiastical structure is necessary. This seems to be ensured by a personal prela-

ture. So far, such a structure has not been proposed to any other community. Finally, the objection raised is only partially relevant: the Fraternity of Saint Peter, for example, has existed for over 27 years and, at least in the German-speaking regions, has remained, with a few exceptions, faithful to the Traditional Latin Mass. However, his life insurance was the Priestly Society of Saint Pius X "behind the scenes".

## VII. Conclusion

If God wishes to effectively help his Church, which is bleeding from a thousand wounds, he has a thousand ways to do so. One of them is the official recognition of the Priestly Fraternity by the Roman authorities. Is not the Fraternity consecrated to the Blessed Virgin, who will protect it and guide its work even in this new situation?

*Dignare me laudare te, Virgo sacrata – da mihi virtutem contra hostes tuos.* – Allow me, O holy Virgin, to sing your praises; give me strength against your enemies.

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## Notes from La Porte Latine

(1) Sentence of the commission chaired by Cardinal Garrone addressed to Archbishop Lefebvre on May 6, 1975

(2) Some reflections on the bull *Misericordiae vultus* announcing the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy, Father Christian Bouchacourt – June 23, 2015 (3) September

1, <sup>2015</sup> – Confessions – Press release on Pope Francis' letter on the approach of the Holy Year Access



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