

Menzingen 14 April 2012

To their Excellencies Tissier de Mallerais, Williamson and de Galarreta.

Your Excellencies,

To your collective letter addressed to the members of the General Council we have given our full attention. We thank you for your concern and for your charity.

Allow us in turn with the same concern for charity and justice to make the following observations.

Firstly, the letter gives a good account of the gravity of the crisis shaking the Church and analyses with precision the nature of the errors flying all around. However, the description suffers from two faults with regard to the reality of the Church: it is lacking both in supernatural spirit and in realism.

It lacks supernatural spirit. Reading your letter one seriously wonders if you still believe that the visible Church with its seat in Rome is truly the Church of Our Lord Jesus Christ, a Church horribly disfigured for sure from head to foot, but a Church which nevertheless still has for its head Our Lord Jesus Christ. One has the impression that you are so scandalised that you no longer accept that that could still be true. Is Benedict XVI still the legitimate pope for you? If he is, can Jesus Christ still speak through his mouth? If the pope expresses a legitimate desire concerning ourselves which is a good desire and gives no command contrary to the commandments of God, has one the right to pay no attention and to simply dismiss his desire? If not, on what principle do you base your acting in this way? Do you not think that, if Our Lord gives a command, He will also give us the means to continue our work? Well, the Pope has let us know that his concern to settle our affair for the good of the Church was at the very heart of his pontificate, and that he also knew that it would be easier both for him and for ourselves to leave things as they presently stand. Hence it is a firm and just desire to which he is giving expression. Given the attitude that you put forward there is no further place for Gideons or for Davids or for anyone counting on the help of the Lord. You blame us for being naïve or fearful, but it is your vision of the Church that is too human and even fatalistic; you see dangers, plots, difficulties, you now no longer see the help of grace and the Holy Ghost. If one is ready to grant that divine providence conducts the affairs of men, while leaving them their liberty, then one must also accept that the gestures in our favour of the last few years come from Providence. Now, these gestures indicate a line - not always a straight line - but a line clearly in favour of Tradition. Why should this line suddenly come to an end when we are doing all we can to remain faithful and when our efforts are being accompanied by no few prayers on our part? Would the Good Lord drop us at the most decisive moment? That makes no sense. Especially if we are not trying to impose on Him any will of our own but we are trying to discern amidst events what God wants and we are ready to act as He wishes.

At the same time your attitude lacks realism both as to the depth and the breadth of the errors.

Depth: within the Society, we are in the process of making the Council's errors into super-heresies, as though it is becoming absolute evil, worse than anything, in the same way that Liberals have dogmatised this pastoral council. The evils are already dramatic enough so that one does not need to exaggerate them any further. (Cf. Roberto de Mattei, *A History never written*, p. 22; Msgr. Gherardini, *A Debate to be begun*, p. 53, etc.) No more distinctions are being made. Whereas Archbishop Lefebvre more than once made the necessary distinctions concerning Liberals. This failure to distinguish leads one or the other of you three to an "absolute hardening". This is serious because such a caricature no longer corresponds to reality and logically it will in the future finish up

in a true schism. And it may well be that this fact is one of the arguments pushing me to delay no longer in responding to the pressure from Rome.

Breadth: on the one hand the present authorities are blamed for all the errors and evils to be found in the Church leaving out the fact that they are trying at least partly to free themselves from the worst of them (the pope's condemning of the "hermeneutic of rupture" denounces very real errors). On the other hand it is claimed that everybody is firmly rooted in this pertinacity ("all modernists", "all rotten"). Now that is obviously false. A great majority may still be carried away by the movement, but not everybody.

So that as for the most crucial question of all, that of whether we can survive in the case of the Society being recognised by Rome, we do not arrive at the same conclusion as you do.

Let it be noted in passing that we did not look for a practical agreement. That is false. All we have done is not refuse a priori, as you ask us to do, to consider the Popes offer. For the common good of the Society, we would far prefer the present solution of the intermediary status quo but it is clear that Rome will put up with it no longer.

In itself, the proposed solution of a personal Prelature is not a trap. That is clear firstly from the fact that the present situation in April of 2012 is very different from that of 1988. To claim that nothing has changed is a historic error. The same evils are making the Church suffer, the consequences are even more serious and obvious than ever; but at the same time one may observe a change of attitude in the Church, helped by the gestures and acts of Benedict XVI towards Tradition. This new movement which started about ten years ago is growing stronger. It includes a good number (still a minority) of young priests, seminarians and even a small number now of young bishops who are clearly to be distinguished from their predecessors, who tell us of their sympathy and support, but who are still somewhat stifled by the dominant line in the hierarchy in favour of Vatican II. This hierarchy is losing speed. That is an objective fact and shows that it is no longer an illusion to think of a fight arising within the Church, even if we are well aware of how long and difficult it will be. I have been able to observe in Rome that even if the glories of Vatican II are still in the mouths of many, and are pushed down our throats, is nevertheless not in all the heads. Fewer and fewer Romans believe in Vatican II.

This concrete situation, together with the canonical solution being proposed, is very different from that of 1988 and when we compare the arguments given by Archbishop Lefebvre at that time we draw the conclusion that he would not have hesitated to accept what is being proposed to us. Let us not lose that sense of the Church, which was so strong in our venerated founder.

Church history shows that the curing of evils afflicting it normally happens gradually and slowly. And when one problem is over, there is another that begins... oportet haereses esse. It is not realistic to require that everything be settled to arrive at what you call a practical agreement. When one watches how events are unfolding it is highly likely that the end of this crisis will take tens of years yet. But to refuse to work in the vineyard because there are still many weeds that risk stifling and obstructing the vine runs up against a notable lesson from the Bible: it Our Lord himself who gives us to understand with His parable of the chaff that there will always be in one form or another weeds to be pulled up and fought against in His Church.

You cannot know how much your attitude over the last few months - quite different for each of you - has been hard for us. It has prevented the Superior General from sharing with you these great concerns, which he would gladly have brought you in to, had he not found himself faced with such a strong and passionate lack of understanding. How much he would have loved to be able to count on you, on your advice to undergo this so delicate moment in our history. It is a great trial, perhaps

the greatest of all 18 years of his being superior. Our venerable founder gave to the Society bishops a task and precise duties. He made clear that the principle of unity in our Society is the Superior General. But for a certain time now, you have been trying - each one of you in his own way - to impose on him your point of view, even in the form of threats, and even in public. This dialectic between the truth and the faith on the one side and authority on the other is contrary to the spirit of the priesthood. He might at least have hoped that you were trying to understand the arguments driving him to act as he has acted these last few years in accordance with the will of divine Providence.

We are praying hard for each of you that we may find ourselves all together once again in this fight which is far from over, for the greater glory of God and for love of dear Society.

May Our risen Lord and Our Lady deign to protect and bless you,

+Bernard Fellay

Niklaus Pfluger+

Alain-Marc Nély+