

## Conference of Abp Lefebvre

(Long Island, New York, November 5, 1983)

I THINK THAT, like all traditionalist Catholics, you would like now to hear how things stand; at what point relations are between the Priestly Society of St. Pius X and the Vatican in Rome. So I shall give you a rapid summary.

### Why do I maintain relations with Rome

Why do I maintain relations with Rome? Why do I keep going to Rome? Because I think that Rome is the center of Catholicism, because I think that there cannot be any Catholic Church without Rome. Consequently, if our purpose is to find a way of setting the Church straight again, it is by turning to Rome that maybe, with the grace of God, we may perhaps manage to set the situation straight. It is not one single bishop like myself who can set the whole situation straight in the Catholic Church. That is why I strive to keep on going to Rome and to plead the cause of Tradition. Because I am persuaded that it is by Tradition that the Catholic Church will recover its position as it was before the Second Vatican Council, and the means of its true progress. In the first place, I must tell you that I am under no illusions the situation in Rome is very grave, very grave. Let me sum up the whole situation as it took place at the Council and such as, unfortunately, it still exists even today, by saying that there were, in fact, three betrayals of the Church. Holy Church was betrayed in three ways in a very direct and concrete fashion.

The first betrayal was the betrayal with the Freemasons, the second with the Protestants, and the third was the betrayal with the Communists.

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### Relations with Rome: goal and no compromise

So, you can understand that when I go to Rome and when I refuse the principle of Religious Liberty proclaimed at the Council, I am told, "you must accept the Council, you must accept the liturgical reforms." And, then, I refuse. These are not trifling matters. Religious Liberty did not get passed in the Council as easily as that. It is a whole program. Consequently, for the last six years I have been going to Rome, always to try to have them reform the Council, to have the schemas of the Council reformed which are no good, like the one on Religious Liberty.

Obviously, I meet with a continuous refusal on the part of the Vatican, though when I met the Pope himself, at the end of 1978, he did agree to name an intermediary between himself and myself, Cardinal Seper. Then Cardinal Seper died and the Pope named Cardinal Ratzinger. But we are still running up against the same problems. In the latest letter which I received from Rome, the Pope continues to regret that I am unwilling to accept all the acts of the Council, that I am unwilling to accept the liturgical reforms in the Holy Church. But there is no way round these. And in fact, there is even an additional obstacle, which is the new Code of Canon Law, which has been made in the same spirit

I've just been speaking to you about, the spirit of the Council, a bad spirit. Hence, obviously, I run into great difficulties. But since they are willing to sit down and discuss, who knows? Almighty God is all powerful and so, I say to myself, if the Good Lord wishes to make them understand, wishes one day to give them a particular enlightenment, perhaps one day we shall manage to make

them accept a correction of the Council, to come back to Tradition in the liturgy and to come back to Tradition in the Church. Well. I am well aware that it is very difficult, because I have now been going for six or seven years to Rome in order to achieve this purpose and we are still at the same point we started. Hence, when they say I am seeking a compromise with Rome, there is no question for me of compromising over anything whatsoever with Rome I am simply asking for the return to Tradition, which is the only way for the Church to truly recover her perfection and her sanctity, as before.

## Freedom for the old Mass?

There is the situation such as it is at present, and I must admit that, for the moment, I see no great hope. The only little success which might be on the way is this famous decree still in suspense, still being put off, a decree to enable all priests to say the old Mass, to leave them freedom and no longer to persecute them. Now, this decree was due to appear, but for three years they have been talking about it and for three years it has still not been published. For, you must realize that, at present, the situation at Rome is very difficult. Modernism is still all powerful at Rome. The Modernist and progressive Cardinals are in the majority; thus, even if there are one or two cardinals who are more or less traditionalists and who have at least a desire to come back to Tradition, well, they are immediately stopped by five or six cardinals who have all power and who put pressure on the Holy Father to stop any return to Tradition. It is they who are preventing this decree from appearing. They say to the Pope, "If you make this decree appear, if you liberate the old Mass, the traditional Mass, then everything that we have done since the Council is over and done with."

There is a true struggle going on in Rome between the few traditionalist Cardinals Cardinal Oddi, Cardinal Ratzinger, Cardinal Palladini, on one side, and all the progressive cardinals on the other: Cardinal Casaroli, Cardinal Pironio, Cardinal Baggio; and all those who are in the Congregations of Worship: Cardinal Casoria with Msgr. Virgilio Noe; and then in the Congregation of Faith, Msgr. Hamer, a Dominican, all these are Modernists and each time that they go to see the Pope they say, "Above all, no turning back, no return to Tradition, out of the question!"

Now the Pope is not strong willed. He seems a strong man, but he is not a strong man, he is weak. I saw that myself in the audience I had with him. He was ready to sign a paper giving me freedom, saying that I and the Priestly Society could celebrate the Tridentine Mass, "Oh, that's not important, you prefer that Mass, oh, if you like, that is not important. It's a disciplinary question." And then, he summoned Cardinal Seper to say that he would be the intermediary between the Pope and myself, and when he told Cardinal Seper, "After all, there aren't really many difficulties in the case of Msgr. Lefebvre. We could grant him the right to celebrate the Tridentine Mass with the Society." "Oh, no!" cried out Cardinal Seper, "Oh, no, Holy Father! They are making this Mass into a battle flag! We cannot accept!" And then the Holy Father was like a naughty child caught in the act, he seemed to be afraid, and he said, "All right, all right. Listen, you talk with Monseigneur, I have a great deal of work. Cardinal Baggio is waiting for me. He has a great deal of work." And then the Holy Father left. That is not behaving like a true Pope! A Pope who knows what he is doing should have said to Cardinal Seper, "Listen, I am the head. I know what I am doing, and if I wish to sign such a document for Msgr. Lefebvre, I am quite free to do so!"

## Contra factum

Here is why I have always thought that I had to go to Rome, that I had to write, that I had to visit these cardinals in order that they should not say that we are doing nothing or that we no longer recognize them or that we wish to have no contact with them. They cannot say that I have not done everything in my power to try to stay in contact with them. However, I think what counts much more

are the facts, than the words or writings, even for Rome. What are the facts which count for us? The seminaries! To make priests! To make traditional priests, priests according to Tradition, to make good and holy priests in our seminaries. That is the work we must carry on with and the work which counts in Rome.

Why does Rome still go on receiving me? Why do they still consider me with a certain respect? Because they know that I have seminaries, that I have now ordained nearly 200 priests since 1970 and that I have 250 seminarians in my seminaries. They know that very well and that's what counts at Rome. They no longer have any seminaries. Their seminaries are empty or they are Modernist seminaries. Now they know that at Ecône, at Ridgefield, at Zaitzkofen, and at Buenos Aires, we are forming true priests. They know that very well and they admire our young priests. So, that is what makes even more of an impression on them than my words, writings or meetings.

They are well aware that this year I ordained thirty priests. So that's what I think it is. And they are perfectly well aware that our priests are spread throughout the world. They know of the existence of our traditional groups throughout the world, and a little everywhere in the world. We are striving to extend. They know we have many priories in Europe, in all the European countries. They know, moreover, that there are other traditional priests, that we are not alone, that we support other traditional priests in their work. So all of that scares them a little. They are forced to reckon with us. And that is how I think we will succeed one day in convincing Rome that they must return to Tradition. They will say, we can no longer ignore these seminaries, these priests, not only the priests of the Society, but all traditionalist priests as well. We can no longer ignore them. That is the task before us, and I have never changed!

## Accusations in the USA

And that is why I will now proceed to say a few words, as we must do, on the sad situation in which the Society found itself this year in the Northern District of the United States. Well! I have been accused of changing. Changing what? The Mass that I say, the Mass that was said a few moments ago by Fr. Schmidberger, is the Tridentine Mass! It's the traditional Mass! I have never changed anything! It's the same Mass attended by the poor priests who left us: Fr. Kelly, Fr. Sanborn, and the others, while they were at Ecône. And how long were they at Ecône? Fr. Kelly spent two years in Switzerland, Fr. Sanborn three, or maybe, four years, Fr. Dolan the same, Fr. Collins was also at Ecône, they always had the same Mass there the one we say today. So, we have not changed a thing.

How can they now say, "The Archbishop is changing"? What? What am I changing? They know perfectly well they spent years at Ecône that they had there the liturgy which we now have, that we have not changed one iota, not one thing. They are the ones who have wanted change, who have wanted to go back to an older liturgy or to older practices. They are the ones who wanted change. We wanted to change nothing, not one thing. We have made no compromise with Rome. That charge is not true. So it is very sad to think that these priests who were ordained by myself and who, after all is said and done, receiving everything from Ecône and the Society, should now be turning against the Society. Why? They say we are making compromises, they say we are going to accept the New Mass, they say things of this kind, which are absolutely false. You can see that for yourselves.

So, I think that the good sense of the faithful will triumph and that, little by little, the faithful will understand that a certain number of our priests have taken up an attitude which is not normal. In fact, they are children rebelling against their parents. Their father in priesthood is me. They are rebelling against me, whereas I have changed nothing, nothing, nothing. This attitude is unacceptable, absolutely unacceptable.

And not only are they rebelling, as you see, but also it is I, obviously, who asked them to look after the development of the Society here in the United States. Consequently, through them we obtained Oyster Bay Cove and acquired Ridgefield, Armada, and the other chapels, and all this was

agreed between us we granted them the necessary authorizations. And now they are saying, “All that property is ours.” Not only are they rebelling, but also they are claiming the properties, properties for which, in the case of Ridgefield, I sent the money from Switzerland! I sent \$500,000.00 from Switzerland to buy Ridgefield! And now, it’s meant to belong to them? It’s inconceivable! It’s plain theft! It’s unreal, it’s unbelievable!

They deliberately put all their names on the boards of the corporations, whereas I was asking them to put the usual names on them, as everywhere else in the Society: those of Superior General, General Bursar, and so on. True, they put my name in, but my name is the only one in these corporations, in place of the others we asked them to put in, they put in all their own names, telling us all the time, ‘Oh, yes, Monseigneur, we’ll change them, we’re going to do what you want’ . . . , but they never did. And now they thought they were strong enough to break away from us, so they are saying “The properties are ours.” Did you ever hear anything like it? It is really unbelievable. It is really sad to think that priests formed by ourselves could reach such a point. However, in our day and age, alas! trials are all too common. Obviously, we are living in an age of confusion within the Church and we have to get used to such trials. However, I hope that the situation will be straightened out and that maybe some of them will come back to join us once more, that some of them will do some thinking, and that God will give them light.

In any case, I thank all of you here for remaining faithful to us, and we will remain faithful to you. We will carry on with what you have always seen in the Society. I gave Confirmation today just as I have given it in Oyster Bay Cove, in Armada, and elsewhere, in all the centers. I have changed nothing. So, I trust you will remain faithful and that we will be able to continue working together for the greater good of the Church, because there is nothing more disastrous, even in the face of Rome, than these divisions, because these divisions weaken us and weaken our fight for Tradition. So, let us pray that everything will be sorted out.

Personally, I am not seeking to harm these priests. May God be their judge! And I ask you not to get into polemics, but simply to follow us. You now have here a magnificent chapel. Come and attend Mass in this chapel with the priests of the Society, and, in the various centers, bring about a regrouping of the faithful staying with the Society, so that they keep their bond with Rome and with the Church. It is very important that there should always be the bond with Rome if we wish to remain Catholic; even if we do not agree with everything being done in Rome, I think the bond is absolutely indispensable.

That is what I wished to say to you. I thank you warmly for your attention and for your support. I congratulate you on all the work you have done here it is a minor miracle. For I had been saying to Father Kelly for the last ten years, we must have a chapel in New York, and now, in the space of a few months, the chapel exists and we have at last got a chapel in the New York area. So, I thank the Good Lord, I thank you all, and I trust that this chapel will be the means of a return to genuine Tradition.