

# The Crux of the Matter

(1984)

*by Most Rev. Donald J. Sanborn*

## **Why an April '83 crisis happened in SSPX, and why it keeps on happening.**

BEWILDERED is probably the best word to describe the reaction of the faithful to the April break-up of the Society. My impression, even now, is that the faithful who have read the positions of both sides are clear in their minds about the particular issues, but still do not understand just how the whole dispute started. Their impression of the Society, at least in the Northeast District, was one of harmony, steady growth, and optimism. By the Spring of 1983, the seminary had achieved its peak in growth rate, both from the point of view of new vocations and physical expansion. The laity were enthusiastic and forward-looking; people were confident that their spiritual needs would be met by the ever-expanding and apparently trouble-free Society of Saint Pius X. December, 1982, brought in \$60,000 to the Seminary building fund; January \$50,000. To my disbelief, it seemed that we were going to get through the first part of our contract without having to borrow a cent. Never had there been such a surge in new vocations; never had it looked so good for the Fall semester. Had things been normal this past year, I estimate that we would have accepted 20 to 25 new candidates.

Then disaster struck, like the tornado that descends swiftly but silently from the somber, sultry cloud upon its unsuspecting victims. Accusations were hurled, priests were thrown out on to the street, seminarians left. Despair, the sullen sister of hope, gripped the laity as they watched the weeks' events in horror.

How could it have happened? How could years of work be shattered in a flash? That is the question the laity are still asking themselves which needs an answer.

The answer lies in understanding that the particular issues of the liturgy, the expulsion of priests, the annulments, the dubious ordinations, etc. were merely symptoms of a much deeper issue: the role of the Society in the Church. Is the Society the preserver and protector of tradition in the Church, or is it a sifter of the liberal reforms, accepting some, rejecting others?

The question becomes clearer when one analyzes the fundamental accusation hurled against the "nine priests": disobedience to the Archbishop. The "nine" have been accused of this disobedience because they will not go along with His Excellency's decisions concerning liturgy, annulments, ordination rites, etc. The accusation implies, of course, that Archbishop Lefebvre has the power from the Church and from God to make and impose decisions of this nature. The claim — express or implied — that the Archbishop has such power is the very crux of the matter.

In normal times of the Church, if there were ever a question about liturgy, sacramental rites, annulments, or the expulsion of priests, the matter would be referred to the Holy See, and the decision would be adhered to by all without the slightest dissent. Because the Vatican is presently filled with modernists, it is necessary for Catholics to find an "interim norm" for their Catholicism, until such time as Providence sees fit to expurgate the Church of the alien element, or at least to make very clear who is Catholic and who is not. The most obvious norm, to which the faithful naturally gravitated, is the tradition of the Church, i.e. what the Church has always done in her liturgy and discipline, and what she has always believed in her doctrine and morals.

The most vocal and eminent champion of the theory that tradition is the norm in this crisis was Archbishop Lefebvre. If there is one thing that I learned from him in the twelve years that I have spent with him, it is that we have to adhere to tradition in order to preserve the Catholic faith. This principle became firmly established in my mind and daily activity. It is the very principle which guided all my decisions and actions of April 1983. I simply concluded that we would never compromise tradition no matter what the consequences. And consequences we now have.

Upon entering Ecône, I had a somewhat confused notion of the nature of the problems in the Church and just how to react to them. Although I knew that I abhorred the changes of Vatican II, I was still very unaware of the degree of their malice and of their perverse origins. Before meeting Archbishop Lefebvre, it had never occurred to me that the solution to the problem in the Church was simply to maintain tradition boldly, no matter what anyone says. My decision to enter Ecône was equivalent to a declaration of war on modernism and modernists; I think that the other Americans felt the same way.

It soon became apparent to me that not everyone had the same idea. Archbishop Lefebvre had gathered together a certain number of priests and seminarians in Europe who constituted, respectively, the faculty and student body of early Ecône. They had sought out the Archbishop, and not vice-versa. I think that His Excellency at the time was looking forward to a quiet and sanctified retirement after his recent resignation from being Superior General of the Holy Ghost Fathers. Because, however, these traditionally-minded clerics had asked him for ordination, he found it necessary to establish a recognized form of religious life according to the norms of the law. Ecône and the International Fraternity of Saint Pius X were thus born, and, surprisingly, this body of clergy received the approbation of the Bishop of Fribourg, Lausanne, and Geneva, and of the Bishop of Sion, Switzerland. Although both bishops were aware that the traditional Mass was being used at Ecône, it still retained their official permission to operate.

Although this approbation seemed like a good thing at the time, it nevertheless caused confusion. What were we? How can we have the blessing of the local bishop when we are against virtually everything he is doing? Are we seeking a niche in the New Church, or are we at war with it?

## Unanswered Questions

These questions were never really answered. Instead, the principle of adherence to tradition was constantly reiterated. An atmosphere of "playing by ear" quickly developed. Being at Ecône in those years was like being in a football game, in which you were certain that your team was going to win, but no one had told you yet what the game plans were. As long as we kept to tradition, everyone thought, nothing would go wrong.

Because of this approved status, Ecône attracted a great number of young men, mostly from France, to study for the priesthood. Because of its approved status, there was no hurdle of "disobedience" to surmount, and being a traditionalist in Europe actually had a certain air of respectability, far different from what I had experienced in the United States. As a result, these young men differed widely in their motives for adherence to tradition, creating varying degrees in the firmness of their traditional convictions.

While it is true that all of the priests and seminarians who came to Ecône in the early days loved the traditional Mass, some preferred the late Paul VI versions of it, while others favored the use of the pre-John XXIII rubrics, including the unreformed Holy Week rites. All loved the traditional Mass, but some loved it to the exclusion of the New Mass, others not. Some would favor the traditional laws of fast and abstinence, others not. Many seminarians thought nothing of returning home on vacation and attending the New Mass, while others would have died before doing such a thing. Many seminarians were learning the Saint Pius X breviary and Mass, while others were cultivating the reforms of John XXIII and beyond. The priest who was the rector of the seminary during my years there, for example, was publicly in favor of the Saint Pius X rubrics, and even managed to introduce into the reformed Holy Week rites at Ecône a number of the traditional observances. To my knowledge, the clergy of Ecône still retain the insertions which this rector made, quite contrary to the positions which they have recently enunciated concerning the liturgy.

## Hard-Liners, Soft-Liners

Great latitude prevailed in these matters at Ecône. There were "soft-liners" and "hard-liners." Soft-liners wanted the Society to be a religious congregation which would retain the traditional practices of the Church, but which would not condemn as "non-Catholic" the changes of Vatican II.

For example, there were some priests on the faculty who would say the New Mass in parishes on Sunday or while on vacation. They saw no theological problems there, since after all, both were approved. The hard-liners, on the other hand, saw the Society as the "new Jesuits," so to speak, this time fighting Protestants not in northern Germany, but Protestants in purple, sitting in high places of authority in the Church, injecting into the veins of the Church a false religion. The soft-liners would constantly worry about what the modernist hierarchy was thinking about Ecône, and would conjure up ways of pleasing them. Hard-liners would disregard the modernist hierarchy, assuming

that they were wolves in sheep's clothing, and should be treated as such.

The underlying question which divided these two groups, but which was seldom stated, was: "Are the Modernists Catholics?" or "Are the changes of Vatican II a true form of the Catholic religion?" or "Can someone who promotes the changes of Vatican II lay claim to the name 'Catholic'?"

If one answers the question in the affirmative, then logically traditionalists can only hope to be a pea in the modernist pod, a separate rite perhaps, recognizing the legitimacy of the entire post-Vatican II Church, at least in its officially approved disciplines. Such an answer would make someone worry about what the modernist hierarchy thought of Ecône, and would always keep open the option of returning to them, if things became too hot in the traditional camp. After all, they would say, the Vatican II changes are Catholic. A negative answer, on the other hand, is a call to outrage, a call to arms, the arms of preaching, teaching, writing, the arms of traditional sacraments, traditional spirituality, traditional philosophy and theology. It is a call to cleanse the Temple with a whip.

Unfortunately Archbishop Lefebvre gave both sides something to work with. Both sides could legitimately point to words and actions of His Excellency to support their respective positions. Each side claimed to be his true followers, to have his true spirit.

### **True Followers: Archbishop-Liners**

The truth is that neither side was or did, since Archbishop Lefebvre never really answered the fundamental question — whether the modernists were Catholic or not — which answer would have placed him on one or the other side. Rather, the Archbishop "played by ear" his reaction to the crisis, and would occasionally say things and do things from which you could logically conclude that he felt that the modernists were not Catholics, and occasionally say things and do things from which you could conclude that the modernists were Catholics.

The ones the Archbishop considered his **true** followers were those who did not draw any conclusions from his sayings or actions, who did not seek an answer to the fundamental question, who were neither hard-liners nor soft-liners, but only "Archbishop-liners." His Excellency always cultivated and favored this kind of seminarian, and surrounded himself with them when they were ordained. He would visibly spurn those who, either by word or deed, manifested an adherence to a principle which lay above and beyond the Archbishop, and to which the Archbishop himself was considered subject and responsible.

I think that he felt that such clerics threatened the unity of his Society, and were simply "using" him for ordination. His attitude, one sensed, was, "Why come to Ecône if not to follow Monsignor Lefebvre?" I think he believed that the fundamental operating principle of Ecône was to follow Archbishop Lefebvre in his struggle to retain tradition.

In order to help seminarians who came to him, he was willing to lead them on a step-by-step basis through the dark tunnel

of the crisis in the Church; all were invited but none forced to take the same steps as he. If you felt squeamish about continuing at any point you were free to leave, and if he felt squeamish about your continuing in his Society, he would ask you to please leave, thank you.

### **The Result: Regular Eruptions**

And leave they did. Ecône and the Society as a whole has been plagued, from the beginning, with controversies, divisions, defections, purges, and expulsions.

About every two years since 1970 there has been some major eruption. If I am counting correctly, nearly one-third of the priests whom Archbishop Lefebvre has ordained are now no longer part of the Society. The toll among seminarians is similarly staggering.

Whenever circumstances would maneuver either the "hard line" or the "soft line" into a confrontation with the Archbishop's line, the missiles of accusation of "disloyalty" and "disobedience" would be launched with jolting ferocity, and the targeted victim, regardless of his contributions or position in the Society up to that time, would just wither away from the heat of the opprobrium.

The direction of the strikes usually depended on the weather in Rome. If Rome was conciliatory, then the soft-liners were "in", and the hard-liners "out." If Rome pursued a hard line, then the soft-liners were "out" and the hard-liners were "in". Inevitably the strike against the one side would inflate those of the opposing victorious side with a false sense of security, compelling them to think that His Excellency had definitively sided with them. Little did they know that they would be the next ones on the block.

**The long-term survivors were the ones who did not think,** and consequently found no trouble in zigzagging theologically, advancing when the Archbishop advanced, retreating when he retreated, affirming when he affirmed, negating when he negated, changing when he changed, accepting the reforms which he accepted, rejecting the reforms which he rejected. Such was the ideal seminarian.

### **"Are You against the Archbishop?"**

Let examples illustrate the point. Something which always made me uneasy at Ecône was a certain "picking and choosing" of reforms, which, in Archbishop Lefebvre's mind, were acceptable and in accordance with tradition. The dialogue Mass, the Paul VI reforms in the traditional Mass, the use of the lecterns instead of the altar for the Epistle and Gospel, the observance of the Paul VI eucharistic fast, and the suppression of the traditional fasts of Lent and Ember Days are all examples of the picking and choosing. One got the impression of being somewhere in between the reforms and tradition, a third entity somewhere between new and old. The only apparent measuring stick was Archbishop Lefebvre's own judgement concerning the acceptability of the innovation.

An incident which is vivid in my mind from about ten years ago further illustrates the point. I was assigned to take part as a server in a Solemn Mass at Ecône. In order to accomplish the task accurately, I studied from a traditional manual of liturgy, a French one, the very one named by Ecône to be the standard manual of the seminary. When the practice time came, I was discussing certain movements with the Master of Ceremonies, and pointed out to him that he had instructed us differently from what was indicated in the book. His response was that Archbishop Lefebvre wanted it that way, and then glared at me and roared, "Are you against the Archbishop?"

I peeped a meek "no," and did it the "Archbishop's way." I later pondered the conversation, and realized, I think for the first time, that what the Church commanded and what Archbishop Lefebvre commanded were, in this case, two different things. Which was the higher authority, Catholic tradition or Archbishop Lefebvre?

Many in the Society argue that since we cannot follow our local hierarchy, modernists that they are, we must follow and obey someone, and that someone is Archbishop Lefebvre. They contend that he has a certain authority over traditional Catholics, since he is the one "chosen by God to be the Athanasius of our time." Accordingly, they assign to him an authority to rule traditional Catholics all over the world. This authority requires Catholics to trust him to make decisions through the crisis, and to select from the Vatican's reforms what is traditional and what is not. In other words, he is regarded by many to be the living tradition of the Catholic Church.

In the above example of the liturgy, they would argue that I would have been obliged in obedience to Archbishop Lefebvre, over any obligation to the previous tradition, to do it his way. After all, they would say, you have the guarantee that it is Catholic since Archbishop Lefebvre approves of it.

### **Right If the Archbishop Says So**

Although the argument sounds attractive to the faithful who are longing for a true shepherd, and who would be heavily inclined to surrender their intellects to him as they would to the Pope in normal times, it nevertheless causes many more problems than it solves.

In the first place, if traditional Catholics have rejected Vatican II and everything which has come forth from it, even the New Mass promulgated by Pope Paul VI, since these things break with tradition, why would not the same criterion of tradition be applied to one bishop, Archbishop Lefebvre? Why would we accept a reform which Archbishop Lefebvre says is all right, but reject a reform which a **pope** says is all right?

Secondly, to concede such a power to Archbishop Lefebvre, i.e. that of ruling the faithful all over the world, laity and clergy alike, is equivalent to making him the Pope. To do so would be schismatic.

Thirdly, although a certain unity would be achieved among the traditionalists by granting this authority to him, it would be

a false unity, not of Catholic principle, but of a man, and would disappear as soon as the man disappears.

Father Richard Williamson gives a perfect illustration of the kind of submission which is sought by the Society. In his interview dated June 9, 1983, entitled, "The Archbishop and the Nine — Questions and Answers", he states, on page eight:

Nevertheless there is not in my own mind a serious doubt as to the validity of the new rite of ordination, even if it is administered in English, so long as the English forms are properly followed because the English forms signify clearly enough the grace that they have to effect.

Then Fr. Williamson says shortly after:

Now His Grace may come to a different conclusion on the question of the English rite for ordination, and if His Grace comes to a different conclusion, I shall be very inclined to follow him because he is a far better theologian than I am.

Logic poses the question to Fr. Williamson, "If the rite is certainly valid, how can anyone, including the Archbishop, even entertain the thought of changing his mind?" Logic then begins to worry about people dying with the absolutions and anointings of New Rite priests, who are "certainly valid" today, but who may be the object of a mind-changing tomorrow.

And will the soul who went to heaven today, because the New Rite is valid today, be told that he must go to hell tomorrow, because the Archbishop has changed his mind and Fr. Williamson has followed suit? There is no consistency, and it does not make sense.

A similar scenario is found in the liturgical question. In 1976, His Excellency officially approved of the use of the so-called "Saint Pius X rubrics" (i.e. those preceding the 1955 Bugnini reforms) for three of the five districts of the Society. In 1983, Archbishop Lefebvre declared that to adhere to such rubrics is disobedient to John XXIII.

Logic intervenes again and asks "Why was it not disobedient in 1976? If it was licit to use them in 1976, why is it not licit to use them in 1983? If it was permitted for Archbishop Lefebvre to reject the John XXIII rubrics in 1976, why is it not permitted for a priest to say 'no' to Archbishop Lefebvre when he seeks to impose the same rubrics?" **Does Archbishop Lefebvre have more authority than John XXIII?** If, in the name of tradition, we resist the command of a pope, why could not one resist the command of a bishop who imposed the same thing?

Archbishop Lefebvre faulted Fr. Zapp for resisting him on the rubrics of John XXIII, and faulted me for saying that Fr. Zapp had a right to do so. I think that His Excellency would have preferred to have had priests who would not have even considered the inconsistencies of 1976 and 1983.

## **My Removal: The Real Reason**

I believe that is why Fr. Williamson was named to replace me. In a cordial but heated discussion with him in November of 1982, I pointed out to Fr. Williamson that in 1974 I remembered the Archbishop saying that he felt that he could not tell people to

stay away from the New Mass, if they had no traditional Mass to attend, whereas, in 1980, he had given a conference in Ridgefield in which he said that attendance at the New Mass was forbidden, and that the Church's rules concerning assistance at non-Catholic services should be applied to the New Mass.

I mentioned to Fr. Williamson that I had thought, in 1974, that His Excellency was mistaken for not forbidding people to assist at the New Mass, since it seemed inconsistent with our position.

Fr. Williamson responded that he felt that the Archbishop was *right* in 1974 and *right* in 1980.

This is precisely the kind of mind that His Excellency is looking for in his seminarians. The obvious problem in Fr. Williamson's statement is that two contrary propositions cannot both be true. His Excellency was right either in 1974 or in 1980, but not both. It is still the New Mass — it has not changed from 1974 — and assistance at it is either licit or illicit.

Ironically, in the same conversation, Fr. Williamson said that, one year previous, he had been the main proponent of the New Mass's being "intrinsically evil" during his classes at Ecône, in reaction to a growing "soft" element there, which claimed that the New Mass, in its pristine form, could not be considered evil, since it was approved by a pope.

During the peak of that crisis at Ecône, Fr. Williamson had complained to me about the solution which the rector of the seminary had proposed, namely, to announce that it mattered little what you thought about the New Mass as long as you did not contradict Archbishop Lefebvre. The crisis ended in a purge.

## **A Logical Soft-Liner**

Another example will illustrate the mentality. Last year about this time, Archbishop Lefebvre was in the United States to attend to the financial crisis at Saint Mary's. On his way back to Europe, he stopped at Ridgefield in order to see the progress of the building. In a conversation about a priest in France (which I now understand was "for my benefit," as they say), His Excellency complained that the priest insisted on omitting the Confiteor before Holy Communion. It was against the "rules of the Fraternity" to omit the Confiteor before Holy Communion. (This rule had been decreed at the very same meeting of the Archbishop's council at which the John XXIII rubrics were imposed on all, i.e. January, 1982.) It seemed that the priest was eventually going to leave the Fraternity.

In reality, however, the French priest was acting very logically and reasonably. Pope John XXIII suppressed the Confiteor before Holy Communion in his new rubrics, and the priest's point was that, if we are going to follow John XXIII, then let us follow John XXIII. It is impossible to affirm in the same breath that it is necessary and obligatory to follow the rubrics of John XXIII and that it is licit to continue to use a rubric which he suppressed. It does not make sense. Because the French priest was holding to this principle, he was considered disobedient to the Archbishop and outside of the "spirit of the Fraternity," etc. Looking back now, I think that I was meant to translate the con-

versation into Americanese, and realize that my attachment to the traditional rubrics which had been originally approved by Archbishop Lefebvre would now be considered disobedient and against the Archbishop and the Fraternity.

It should be explained to the reader at this point that only the Pope has power over the liturgy, according to Canon Law, and that no bishop, archbishop, or even cardinal could ever legislate in matters liturgical. In times like our own, therefore, when the present liturgical norms are manifestly contrary to the Catholic Faith, we are not permitted to make up our own rules, or to consider the present crisis a "free-for-all", in which we can take the reforms that we like and reject others. To the contrary, we have the grave obligation of choosing, to the best of our ability, that point in time when the liturgy was entirely pure and free from any stain of modernism, an element totally alien to the Catholic religion.

While it is possible that there could be differences of opinion concerning the correct date to choose, the principle remains the same that we must follow a determined set of rules used by the Church at some time before the Council, and regard them as binding. To concoct a mish-mash is to depart from the liturgical unity of the Roman Catholic Church. While I disagree with the French priest in his choice of the John XXIII rubrics, the very least you can say is that he is using a set of rubrics approved by a Roman Pontiff, and not a liturgical smorgasbord which no pope has ever recognized.

### **Nothing to do with Papal Authority**

In a similar fashion, Archbishop Lefebvre has condemned the "nine" as being schismatic and disobedient to papal authority because we refuse the John XXIII rubrics.

In reality, the matter has nothing to do with papal authority, since His Excellency continues to impose the Confiteor before Holy Communion, apparently even with the threat of expulsion. If John XXIII suppressed it, would it not be against the same papal authority to retain the Confiteor as it would be to retain any other pre-John XXIII rubric? This fact, which may seem insignificant at first glance, reveals clearly that the crux of the matter is not obedience to John XXIII's rubrics, but to Archbishop Lefebvre's rubrics.

The icing on the cake is that priests who work with the Society priests in Australia have an "indult" (special permission) from Fr. Schmidberger to continue using the pre-John XXIII rubrics, the very same set of rubrics declared to be "schismatic" and "disobedient to papal authority" in April. Although such accusations sounded good in the Spring in an attempt to denigrate completely the reputation of the priests that had been serving the people's spiritual needs for years, it is evident that Archbishop Lefebvre does not really think that the use of these rubrics is unlawful. If it is permitted for priests in Australia to continue using these rubrics, why is it illegal for priests in America? Why was the whole house burned down, if there is nothing wrong with this form of the liturgy ?

## Follow the Church or Follow the Man?

These incidents point out that the use of these rubrics **has nothing to do with any pope**; it depends on **Archbishop Lefebvre's permission**, and not that of a pope. But the Church says that an archbishop does not have such a power, and that's the crux of the matter. What may seem to some to be a tempest in a teapot over minor questions of liturgy is actually a very important battle of principle: i.e., what is the determination of our guiding force in the crisis in the Church: the constant practice of the Church, or Archbishop Lefebvre, the man?

The importance of the question may become clearer to some by our final example, that of the New Code of Canon Law. In the midst of all of the April fulminations, Archbishop Lefebvre said in one of his conferences:

In the instruction in the new Canon Law they talk about "eucharistic hospitality." What is this "eucharistic hospitality"? It means that when a Protestant comes to receive Holy Communion and he says, "I have the true Catholic Faith in the Real Presence of Jesus Christ in the Holy Eucharist," and if he says that, then you must give him Communion. That is incredible! It is impossible, impossible! He has no other Catholic Faith, only in the Real Presence, and so we must give him Communion. He may have no faith in the Sacrifice of the Mass, he has no faith in the papacy, he has no faith in sanctifying grace, and we must still give him Communion? Impossible! It is in the new Canon Law! We cannot use this Canon Law. It is the same as all the other books that come from this reform of the Council of Vatican II.

Although I was not attending the Archbishop's conferences, I learned of their contents from notes taken by seminarians who had left. Distraught as I was over the accusations made by His Excellency, I was relieved to know that at least they were not going to accept the New Code. Only a few months earlier I had divulged to Dr. Coomaraswamy my fears about the New Code, and its possible acceptance by the Society. "At least," I thought to myself in April, "there is one bright side to this whole fiasco."

Lo and behold, the November, 1983, *Angelus*, the official English-language publisher and editor for Archbishop Lefebvre and the International Society, states:

The old Code will be abrogated. We are hoping to publish a commentary on the New Code by Father Thomas Glover, JCD, in a forthcoming issue. Father Glover is Professor of Canon Law at the Society of Saint Pius X seminaries in Europe. Father has pointed out that whatever our personal feelings about the new Code, it comes to us with the full authority of the Pope and that we have no alternative but to accept it as the official Canon Law of the Church.

But now in December, we see a totally opposite position. In an excellent letter jointly signed by their Excellencies Bishop Antonio de Castro-Mayer and Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre, we read:

We utter this cry of alarm, rendered all the more urgent by the errors, not to say the heresies, of the New Code of Canon Law.

While this most recent declaration savors of the fire of the Holy Ghost, for which we constantly pray to be enkindled in our hearts, for Archbishop Lefebvre and the Society, this represents a major shift from the spirit of reconciliation with the modernists which Archbishop Lefebvre has followed since the election of John Paul II in 1978.

Undoubtedly many priests and seminarians of the Society's "soft-line" will be shocked and scandalized by the tone and content of this document. It states implicitly that John Paul II is a heretic, since it says clearly that the New Code of Canon Law, which he signed and promulgated, contains heresies.

As much as we can rejoice over this letter, I fear that the principles contained therein will not be permitted to illumine the practical order nor generate a consistent way of acting in the International Society.

I further fear that those who will draw conclusions from this shift on the part of Archbishop Lefebvre will be told to leave — as we were — and that those who dare to point out that this new attitude is a departure from the one he adhered to for the past five or six years, will be similarly told that they are "against the Archbishop."

You may be already asking yourself why they accept the New Church annulments in the practical order, while in principle they reject their source, the New Code.

It seems that the same spirit of "picking and choosing" will be operative in the Society, taking the same toll on everyone except those who do not think. Despite all of their attestations of their fidelity to John Paul II, it seems that **the Society is more interested in what Archbishop Lefebvre thinks about the New Code, than what John Paul II thinks about it.**

And will they continue to say that, in order to be Catholic, it is necessary to be united to this modernist hierarchy, even after they have accused it of having publicly promulgated heresy? But what Catholic would ever want to be united to a heretic?

What really causes the ulcers in the stomach is that **you never know what they are going to do or say.** I am frankly relieved that I will not have to spend any more sleepless nights, worrying about whether I should obey Archbishop Lefebvre the man, or the principles which he has enunciated. I am honestly very happy that I can watch this one from the bleachers.

I think that we can expect an enormous purge of the soft-liners in the months to come, which will give a heady confidence to the much downtrodden hard-liners. But if modernist Rome should respond benevolently but slyly to this gauntlet, I have no doubt but that the original road of reconciliation with the Vatican will again be taken.

Then the hard-liners will once again be eliminated — and once again the long-term survivors will be those who during the whole crisis spoke about nothing but the weather.

## **Zig When It Zigs. Zag When It Zags.**

The theological hopscotch over the New Code is perfectly representative of the Society's procedure since the beginning. I believe that they are looking for a clergy which will zig when it zigs, and zag when it zags.

I fear that the Society is looking for a clergy that will regard its Superior General as their ultimate ecclesiastical authority, at least in the practical order, if not in the theoretical order. I fear that it seeks a clergy which will reject the New Code in April, accept it in November, call it heretical in December, all the while repelling both common sense and reason as possible disturbances to the unity of the Society. And what will 1984 bring?

I believe that **the fundamental reason for my removal in April is that I failed to train the seminarians to be "followers of Archbishop Lefebvre."** I taught them to be followers of Catholic tradition, and to follow Archbishop Lefebvre to the extent that he was faithful to Catholic tradition.

In this way the operating principle of seminarians at Ridgefield was different from the operating principle of seminarians in other parts of the Society. Our seminarians would affirm when tradition affirmed, negate when tradition negated, accept when tradition accepted, reject when tradition rejected. In short, we simply did everything the Catholic Church always did, and completely ignored the modernists and their concoctions.

For this reason, the John XXIII pill was not easily swallowed at Ridgefield, since these seminarians, steeped in the principle of adherence to tradition as their norm, could not help but smell the unmistakable stench of modernism in these rubrics of John XXIII. They understood immediately that the principle was violated by the presence of even a speck of modernism in the seminary. Up to that time, they had never even conceived of the possibility of a dichotomy between what the Church commanded and what His Excellency commanded.

## **The Crux of the Matter**

After these somewhat lengthy explanations and examples, I hope that my reader now understands the intrinsic problems within the Society which caused the Spring break-up. In a word, the inconsistency of the fundamental position of the Society towards the Vatican II changes causes Archbishop Lefebvre to vacillate theologically and liturgically, and his followers are then forced to act either consistently with **principles** or inconsistently with **him**.

This inconsistency is like a bacterium which causes a festering sore; about every two years, the sore is lanced with excruciating pain. Those who are expelled or who leave are the pus, and when they are gone, the Society once again feels the same sense of relief as a person who has just had a boil lanced. Unfortunately the bacterium still remains inside, only to fester again later.

Inevitably April '83 will happen again somewhere, sometime. With the rapidity of theological zigzagging we have noticed simply in the past few months, it is almost certain that someone will "zig" when he was supposed to "zag", and the So-

ciety will run to push the Purge and Fulmination buttons with summary dispatch.

You never know, but perhaps today's button-pushers will be tomorrow's targets.

My purpose in this article was not to lessen your opinion of Archbishop Lefebvre, or of any of his priests. His Excellency is a prelate of supreme virtue, a shepherd who cares for souls, a bishop who loves the Catholic Church. His priests are good men who equally desire the restoration of true Catholicism. It truly pains me to be at odds with any one of them. My only purpose here was to assign a cause for the April fissure, which struck so swiftly and mysteriously that our faithful are still reeling from it. To put it bluntly, things in the Society were not as peaceful as they may have seemed.

In what was to be my final conference to the seminarians in March of 1983, as I could see in the distance the black clouds of the coming storm, laden, so to speak, with the tears of priests, seminarians, and laity, even, perhaps of the Archbishop, I addressed these words to them: "I have made as the basis of your formation the adherence to the traditions of the Church. You are not here because of adherence to the Archbishop, because he is not infallible. Tradition should always be your guide. If you remember me for anything, remember me for that."

*(The Roman Catholic, 1984)*

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