

Fr. Perozich comments —

The excommunication of 6 bishops from the Society of St. Pius X has been in the news.

In 1988 when Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre ordained 4 bishops and incurred excommunication, Cardinal Ratzinger called for the church to look to itself to see where she needs to hold to the ancient truths and tradition, thus making no need for separation, schism, or excommunication.

As Pope Benedict XVI he promulgated [Summorum Pontificum](#) to allow for the wider offering of the traditional Mass and sacraments hoping to keep people in the fold of the church.

With the promulgation of [Traditionis Custodes](#), these offerings were withdrawn and severely restricted, with a resultant strain on unity, but without the self reflection on the part of the Vatican that the then Cardinal Ratzinger encouraged the church to do.

Pope Francis' exhortation of "Hagan lios" "make a mess or make some noise" —achieved its effect.

Joseph Ratzinger gives a clear analysis in his brief remarks, as is his style. He can convey in a few words a depth of truth and understanding that most theologians can only attempt to do in voluminous fashion while still missing the mark.

This is offered to you to give you insight into one of the crises in the life of the church in 2026.

Cardinal Ratzinger's Remarks Regarding the Lefebvre Schism

by [Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger](#)

DESCRIPTION

The translated text of an address by Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, given July 13, 1988, in Santiago, Chile before that nation's bishops.

LARGER WORK

The Wanderer

In recent months we have put a lot of work into the case of Lefebvre with the **sincere intention of creating for his movement a space within the Church that would be sufficient for it to live.** The Holy See has been criticized for this. It is said that it has not defended the Second Vatican Council with sufficient energy; that, while it has treated progressive movements with great severity, it has displayed an exaggerated sympathy with the Traditionalist rebellion. The development of events is enough to disprove these assertions. The mythical harshness of the Vatican in the face of the deviations of the progressives is shown to be mere empty words. Up until now, in fact, only warnings have been published; in no case have there been strict canonical penalties in the strict sense. And the fact that when the chips were down Lefebvre denounced an agreement that had already been signed, shows that the Holy See, while it made truly generous concessions, did not grant him that complete license which he desired. Lefebvre has seen that, in the fundamental part of the agreement, he was being held to accept Vatican II and the affirmations of the postconciliar Magisterium, according to the proper authority of each document.

There is a glaring contradiction in the fact that it is just the people who have let no occasion slip to allow the world to know of their disobedience to the Pope, and to the magisterial declarations of the last 20 years, who think they have the right to judge that this attitude is too mild and who wish that an absolute obedience to Vatican II had been insisted upon. In a similar way they would claim that the Vatican has conceded a right to dissent to Lefebvre which has been obstinately denied to the promoters of a progressive tendency. In reality, the only point which is affirmed in the agreement, following *Lumen Gentium* 25, is the plain fact that

not all documents of the council have the same authority. For the rest, it was explicitly laid down in the text that was signed that public polemics must be avoided, and that an attitude is required of positive respect for official decisions and declarations.

It was conceded, in addition, that the Fraternity of St. Pius X [Ed. note: known in the U.S. as the Society of St. Pius X] would be able to present to the Holy See -- which reserves to itself the sole right of decision -- their particular difficulties in regard to interpretations of juridical and liturgical reforms. All of this shows plainly that in this difficult dialog Rome has united generosity, in all that was negotiable, with firmness in essentials. The explanation which Msgr. Lefebvre has given, for the retraction of his agreement, is revealing. He declared that he has finally understood that the agreement he signed aimed only at integrating his foundation into the "Conciliar Church." **The Catholic Church in union with the Pope is, according to him, the "Conciliar Church" which has broken with its own past.** It seems indeed that he is no longer able to see that we are dealing with the Catholic Church in the totality of its Tradition, and that Vatican II belongs to that.

Without any doubt, the problem that Lefebvre has posed has not been concluded by the rupture of June 30. It would be too simple to take refuge in a sort of triumphalism, and to think that this difficulty has ceased to exist from the moment in which the movement led by Lefebvre has separated itself by a clean break with the Church. A Christian never can, or should, take pleasure in a rupture. Even though it is absolutely certain the fault cannot be attributed to the Holy See, it is a duty for us to examine ourselves, as to what errors we have made, and which ones we are making even now. The criteria with which we judge the past in the Vatican II Decree on Ecumenism must be used -- as is logical -- to judge the present as well.

One of the basic discoveries of the theology of ecumenism is that **schisms can take place only when certain truths and certain values of the Christian faith are no longer lived and loved within the Church.** The truth which is marginalized becomes autonomous, remains detached from the whole of the ecclesiastical structure, and a new movement then forms itself around it. We must reflect on this fact: that a large number of Catholics, far beyond the narrow circle of the Fraternity of Lefebvre, see this man as a guide, in some sense, or at least as a useful ally. It will not do to attribute everything to political motives, to **nostalgia, or to cultural factors** of minor importance. These causes **are not capable of explaining the attraction which is felt even by the young, and especially by the young,** who come from many quite different nations, and who are surrounded by completely distinct political and cultural realities. Indeed they show what is from any point of view a restricted and one-sided outlook; but there is no doubt whatever that **a phenomenon of this sort would be inconceivable unless there were good elements at work here, which in general do not find sufficient opportunity to live within the Church of today.**

For all these reasons, we ought to see this matter primarily as the occasion for an examination of conscience. **We should allow ourselves to ask fundamental questions, about the defects in the pastoral life of the Church, which are exposed by these events. *Thus we will be able to offer a place within the Church to those who are seeking and demanding it, and succeed in destroying all reason for schism. We can make such schism pointless by renewing the interior realities of the Church.*** There are three points, I think, that it is important to think about.

While there are many motives that might have led a great **number of people to seek a refuge in the Traditional liturgy, the chief one is that they find the dignity of the**

sacred preserved there. After the council there were many priests who deliberately raised "desacralization" to the level of a program, on the plea that the New Testament abolished the cult of the Temple: the veil of the Temple which was torn from top to bottom at the moment of Christ's death on the cross is, according to certain people, the sign of the end of the sacred. The death of Jesus, outside the City walls, that is to say, in the public world, is now the true religion. Religion, if it has any being at all, must have it in the nonsacredness of daily life, in love that is lived. Inspired by such reasoning, **they put aside the sacred vestments; they have despoiled the churches as much as they could of that splendor which brings to mind the sacred; and they have reduced the liturgy to the language and the gestures of ordinary life, by means of greetings, common signs of friendship, and such things.**

There is no doubt that, with these theories and practices, they have entirely disregarded the true connection between the Old and the New Testaments: **It is forgotten that this world is not the Kingdom of God,** and that the "Holy One of God" (John 6:69) continues to exist in contradiction to this world; that **we have need of purification before we draw near to Him; that the profane,** even after the death and the Resurrection of Jesus, has not succeeded in becoming "the holy." **The Risen One has appeared, but to those whose heart has been opened to Him, to the Holy; He did not manifest Himself to everyone.** It is in this way a new space has been opened for the religion to which all of us would now submit; this religion which consists in drawing near to the community of the Risen One, at whose feet the women prostrated themselves and adored Him. I do not want to develop this point any further now; I confine myself to coming straight to this conclusion: We ought to get back the dimension of the sacred in the liturgy. *The liturgy is not a festivity; it is not a meeting for the purpose of having a good time. It is of no importance that the*

parish priest has cudgeled his brains to come up with suggestive ideas or imaginative novelties. The liturgy is what makes the Thrice-Holy God present amongst us; it is the burning bush; it is the Alliance of God with man in Jesus Christ, who has died and risen again. The grandeur of the liturgy does not rest upon the fact that it offers an interesting entertainment, **but in rendering tangible the Totally Other, whom we are not capable of summoning. He comes because He wills.** In other words, the essential in the liturgy is the mystery, which is realized in the common ritual of the Church; all the rest diminishes it. **Men experiment with it in lively fashion, and find themselves deceived, when the mystery is transformed into distraction, when the chief actor in the liturgy is not the Living God but the priest or the liturgical director.**

Aside from the liturgical questions, the central points of conflict at present are Lefebvre's attack on the decree which deals with religious liberty, and on the so-called spirit of Assisi. Here is where Lefebvre fixes the boundaries between his position and that of the Catholic Church today.

I need hardly say in so many words that what he is saying on these points is unacceptable. **Here we do not wish to consider his errors, rather we want to ask ourselves where there is lack of clarity in ourselves. For Lefebvre what is at stake is the warfare against ideological liberalism, against the relativization of truth.** Obviously we are not in agreement with him that -- understood according to the Pope's intentions -- the text of the council or the prayer of Assisi were relativizing.

It is a necessary task to defend the Second Vatican Council against Msgr. Lefebvre, as valid, and as binding upon the Church. **Certainly there is a mentality of narrow views that isolate Vatican II and which has provoked this opposition.** There are many accounts of it which give the

impression that, from Vatican II onward, everything has been changed, and that what preceded it has no value or, at best, has value only in the light of Vatican II.

The Second Vatican Council has not been treated as a part of the entire living Tradition of the Church, but as an end of Tradition, a new start from zero. The truth is that this particular council defined no dogma at all, and deliberately chose to remain on a modest level, as a merely pastoral council; and yet many treat it as though it had made itself into a sort of superdogma which takes away the importance of all the rest.

This idea is made stronger by things that are now happening. **That which previously was considered most holy -- the form in which the liturgy was handed down -- suddenly appears as the most forbidden of all things, the one thing that can safely be prohibited.** It is intolerable to criticize decisions which have been taken since the council; on the other hand, if men make question of ancient rules, or even of the great truths of the faith -- for instance, the corporal virginity of Mary, the bodily Resurrection of Jesus, the immortality of the soul, etc. -- nobody complains or only does so with the greatest moderation. I myself, when I was a professor, have seen how the very same bishop who, before the council, had fired a teacher who was really irreproachable, for a certain crudeness of speech, was not prepared, after the council, to dismiss a professor who openly denied certain fundamental truths of the faith.

All this leads a great number of people to ask themselves if the Church of today is really the same as that of yesterday, or if they have changed it for something else without telling people. **The one way in which Vatican II can be made plausible is to present it as it is; one part of the unbroken, the unique Tradition of the Church and of her faith.**

In the spiritual movements of the **postconciliar era, there is not the slightest doubt that frequently there has been**

an obliviousness, or even a suppression, of the issue of truth: Here perhaps we confront the crucial problem for theology and for pastoral work today.

The "truth" is thought to be a claim that is too exalted, a "triumphalism" that cannot be permitted any longer. You see this attitude plainly in the crisis that troubles the missionary ideal and missionary practice. **If we do not point to the truth in announcing our faith, and if this truth is no longer essential for the salvation of Man, then the missions lose their meaning.** In effect the conclusion has been drawn, and it has been drawn today, that in the future we need only seek that Christians should be good Christians, Muslims good Muslims, Hindus good Hindus, and so forth. If it comes to that, how are we to know when one is a "good" Christian, or a "good" Muslim?

The idea that all religions are -- if you talk seriously -- only symbols of what ultimately is incomprehensible is rapidly gaining ground in theology, and has already penetrated into liturgical practice. When things get to this point, **faith is left behind, because faith really consists in the fact that I am committing myself to the truth so far as it is known. So in this matter also there is every motive to return to the right path.**

If once again we succeed in pointing out and living the fullness of the Catholic religion with regard to these points, we may hope that the schism of Lefebvre will not be of long duration.