

Various Churches?

By Fr. François Laisney

Truly much confusion reigns on the subject of the Church, and dangerous notions are put forward, even among Catholics attached to Tradition.

One can read: "That part alone of the visible Church is Catholic which is one, holy, universal and apostolic. The rest is various sorts of rot."

Immediately the question is raised: is the Catholic Church merely "a part of the visible Church"?

And this leads to another more fundamental question: is it legitimate to distinguish between the *Catholic Church*, *Christ's Church* and the *visible Church*?

On the contrary, does not the Catholic Faith oblige us to profess the identity between Christ's Church, the Catholic Church and the visible Church? Yes! Christ's Church is the Catholic Church, and this Church is visible!

It was because he was attached to this dogma of Faith that Mgr Lefebvre has always rejected the sedevacantist position which practically leads to an invisible Church, having lost all hierarchical bond, having no more hierarchy.

True, the author of the above quoted passage affirms that the Catholic Church is recognisable by its four notes; but he lets the reader understand that these four notes belong only to "a part of the visible Church." So he puts in question not the first, but the second equality.

And the great danger of such an affirmation is that the limit of the Catholic Church becomes practically invisible.

The author thinks he sufficiently affirms the visibility of the Catholic Church by writing: "But to say that the Catholic Church is visible, therefore the visible Church is the Catholic Church, is as foolish as to say that all lions are animals so all animals are lions." The error of such a phrase is to fail to grasp the true meaning of the affirmation "the Catholic Church is visible." When the Church teaches this truth – e.g. Pius XII in *Mystici Corporis* – it does not consider the Catholic Church as a *species* within a *genus* (which is the relation between *lions* and *animals*) as if he were saying nothing else than anyone could see people called Catholics as they could see people called Anglicans, Orthodox, Episcopalians, etc, as if *visible Church* was a *genus* within which one *species* would be the *Catholic Church*.

No! The affirmation "the Catholic Church is visible" means: "the Church of Christ is visible, and the Catholic Church is this Church." Nowhere Pius XII, neither any other Catholic authority, has ever taught that the Catholic Church would be merely a "part of the visible Church". No! The whole Church of Christ is visible, and the whole is the Catholic Church. And it is WITHIN the Catholic Church that one finds a mixture of good and bad fishes (Mt 13:48), of good grain and cockle (Mt 133:25), of wheat and chaff (Mt 3:12), of good Apostles and Judases. Never did the Catholic Church teach that it only comprised the eleven good Apostles (the part that had the note of holiness), and that Judas was the rot, outside of that faithful part. Yes, Judas was rotten, but within the Catholic Church, the only

Church of Christ.

Then what is the *Conciliar Church*? This expression was coined by Mgr Benelli: it manifested clearly the novelty of the reforms introduced by Vatican II. But did it designate a separate *Church*, with its own structure, its own faithful separated from the Catholic Church? Not really. It signified a *new spirit, new principles*, but not a new structure, nor a separate hierarchy and separate faithful. This new spirit causes the members infected by it in the Church to rot in as much as they are infected by it; it is like a virus in the Mystical Body of Christ: some cells are entirely corrupted, others only partially infected, some more some less, and few are exempt from it. It is true to say that this spirit is not Catholic; it is a spirit of rupture, a revolutionary spirit, it is 1789 in the Church.

But this spirit does not constitute a separate Church; it infects more or less the members of the Catholic Church. The separation between the sound members and the infected members is not visible, from the very fact that some members are only partially infected. It is like the separation between good and evil within the Church: the limit is within each member himself, since nobody is perfect here below! It is only at the end of the world that the separation shall be achieved, not by human judgement, but by the Judgement of Christ Himself, the Sovereign Judge, true God and true man. This does not mean that the

infection is not visible: as evil members are visible in the Church (and scandals have not lacked after Vatican II), so also this *conciliar* infection is visible, especially in those who are fully infected: modernist theologians, modernist priests' petitions in Austria... One sees these false principles at work in the practical ecumenical meetings (Assisi, concelebrations, visits to Synagogues, kissing of the Koran...)

These false principles do not constitute a *separate Church*, not even a distinct *part* of a whole which the *visible Church* would be.

To say that "the Conciliar Church is not the Catholic Church", if one means by this that the conciliar principles, the conciliar spirit are not Catholic principles, not a Catholic spirit, this is true: this is the meaning of certain words of Archbishop Lefebvre. But if one implies such a separation as that between a rotten part and sound part of an apple, it is not conform to reality, it is false; it is totally opposed to the teaching of Archbishop Lefebvre.

To separate within the visible Church, a Conciliar part, rotten, which "is not the Catholic Church", and a Catholic part which would only comprise that "which is one, holy, universal and apostolic", that takes away from the Catholic Church her structure (indeed the author does not hesitate to write: "the *official Church* is largely Conciliar and not Catholic"), *the part that would remain Catholic* would then be deprived of the structure which Our Lord Jesus Christ has given to His Church! It would no longer be recognisable as the Church of Christ. Such affirmations are therefore very dangerous to the Faith.

It is true that, due to the Conciliar crisis, the four notes have been somehow darkened, less visible in the whole of the Church – e.g. so many priests and religious abandoning their most sacred vows has put a stain of the visibility of the note of holiness – thus Archbishop Lefebvre has not hesitated to say that these notes are more visible among the faithful and priests attached to Tradition. But never did he say that the Catholic Church was only that sound "part of the visible Church"! On the contrary, he applied to the Church, to the whole

of the Church, what was true of Christ during his Passion: He was hardly recognisable as the Messiah at that moment, as was prophesied by Isaiah: "Despised, and the most abject of men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with infirmity: and his look was as it were hidden and despised, whereupon we esteemed him not" (Is. 53:3). Because of the modernist crisis, the Church passes as through her Passion, and is hardly recognisable. Thus it is very clear that for Archbishop Lefebvre the Catholic Church is the whole, not a mere part.

One sees in this false understanding of the distinction between *Conciliar* and *Catholic*, the doctrinal error which is in some at the root of their opposition to Bishop Fellay in this year 2012. Indeed, the author concludes: "the *official Church* is largely Conciliar and not Catholic", which logically leads to the refusal of any regularisation. One no longer sees that those who hold office in the Church have received the authority that Our Lord Jesus Christ has given to His Church, and thus have received a good thing – indeed what Our Lord Jesus Christ has established is evidently excellent – the abuses of that authority do not take away from the goodness of that authority in itself, of that hierarchical order; and thus if the Pope wants to regularise the place of the Society of Saint Pius X within that order, he wants something good (order is good) – therefore against which one has not the right to resist, in as much as he gives it with no evil conditions and with the sufficient guarantees so that this order be solid.

At the root of this doctrinal error, there is the ignorance of the great principle of St Augustine against the Donatists: in the Catholic Church communion with the wicked does not harm the good so long as they do not consent with their wickedness. Such an error leads to a "Catharist" notion of the Church, a Church of the pure, not infected by the Conciliar rot: such notion is simply not Catholic.

Kyrie eleison! May the Lord have mercy on those who could be tempted by such notions, and give them the grace to correct themselves, to return to the traditional notion of the Church, as the Church herself taught from the beginning, especially St Cyprian against the Novatians and St Augustine against the Donatists, both being authors of a book *on the unity of the Church*.

Some texts of Archbishop Lefebvre will illustrate this teaching.

"Therefore we count on the support of your prayers and on your generosity, to continue in spite of the trials this priestly formation, indispensable for the life of the Church. It is not the Church nor the successor of Peter who strikes us, but rather men of the Church imbued with liberal errors, occupying high positions in the Church and profiting of their power to obliterate the past of the Church and to establish a new Church which has nothing of Catholic." (Letter to Friends and Benefactors, 9 Sept. 1975 at the end.) In other words, those striking Archbishop Lefebvre were truly "men of the Church" truly "occupying high position in the Church", but were acting against the Society of Saint Pius X, not as "successor of Peter", but rather as "imbued with liberal errors."

"The Church is not ecumenical, much less liberal ecumenical, the Church is missionary. That is what I never ceased to repeat in my letter to Cardinal Seper, because he was asking some small precisions on facts, on our obedience, on our submission to the holy Father, and such matters. I think that it was necessary to address the matter from much higher, because

these are profound and very elevated reasons that prevent us from being fully obedient to the Pope and the Roman congregations. These are excessively important reasons. It is the whole new orientation of the Church, which is no longer a Catholic orientation, which is not the orientation of the Catholic Church. There is a very great difference between the missionary Church and the ecumenical Church. The missionary Church is that one truth-bearer, knowing that she possesses the truth in herself and bringing it to others to convert them. Her goal is conversion. On the other hand, ecumenism's goal is to find the truth in the errors and practically putting oneself on the level of the errors, putting the whole truth on level with error, and thus embracing errors. And this is absolutely inconceivable. It is the destruction of the truth of the Church. We cannot admit this. Now all the reforms, all what they want us to accept, by the suppression of the seminary, the suppression of the Fraternity, by the penalties imposed on us, the goal, the intention is always to make us accept all that the Council has done and all what was done after the Council, that is this new Conciliar Church, which is not the Catholic Church. This new Conciliar Church is not the Catholic Church because of its ecumenism. It considers error with the same respect as truth: you are in error, you are as worthy as those who are in the truth." (Spiritual conference at Ecône, 13 March 1978). The two underlined passages here show very well that what Archbishop Lefebvre understood by "this new Conciliar Church" was precisely "the whole new orientation of the Church", not a separate structure.

"This Conciliar Church... [is] following roads which are not Catholic roads: they simply lead to apostasy... It is clear that the only truth that exists today for the Vatican is the conciliar truth, the *spirit of the Council*, the *spirit of Assisi*. That is the truth of today. But we will have nothing to do with this for anything in the world! ... That is why, taking into account the strong will of the present Roman authorities to reduce Tradition to naught, to gather the world to the spirit of Vatican II and the spirit of Assisi, we have preferred to withdraw ourselves and to say that we could not continue. It was not possible. We would have evidently been under the authority... in the hands of those who wish to draw us into the spirit of the Council and the spirit of Assisi. This was simply not possible... This is why I sent a letter to the Pope, saying to him very clearly: We simply cannot accept this spirit and proposals, despite all the desires which we have to be in full union with you. Given this new spirit which now rules in Rome and which you wish to communicate to us, we prefer to continue in Tradition; to keep Tradition while waiting for Tradition to regain its place at Rome, while waiting for Tradition to reassume its place in the Roman authorities, in their minds." (Sermon of the Consecrations, 30 June 1988) One sees clearly that, in the most solemn moment of his opposition to this *conciliar Church*, Archbishop Lefebvre meant by this expression *the spirit of the council, spirit of Assisi... which reigns in Rome... [i.e.] in the minds of the Roman authorities*, i.e. in the mind of the men of the hierarchy of the Roman Church, which is the Catholic Church.

Archbishop Lefebvre was always absolutely opposed to this new spirit, which is not a Catholic spirit; but never did he consider the Church as split between a rotten part and a Catholic part, reducing the Catholic Church to a mere "part of the visible Church".