

Archbishop Lefebvre and the Conciliar Church

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On countless occasions, in sermons and addresses, in documents and books, and in conversation, Archbishop Lefebvre distinguished the Conciliar Church from the Catholic Church. What did he mean by this term, “Conciliar Church”? In order to answer this question it is necessary to recall some of the many times he used it, and in what context. This exercise sheds considerable light on the Archbishop’s thought, since the notion that there is another entity, quite distinct from the Catholic Church, to which it is possible for men to belong, is central to his position on the crisis. And equally crucial to his general thesis is the notion that attachment to the Conciliar Church entails *separation* from the true Church.

The first and most significant of the occasions on which Archbishop Lefebvre denounced “the Conciliar Church” was in his famous declaration of 1974, which declaration supplied the necessary *casus belli* for Paul VI to suppress the Society of St. Pius X in 1976.

Archbishop Lefebvre declared,

We hold firmly with all our heart and with all our mind to *Catholic Rome*, Guardian of the Catholic Faith and of the traditions necessary to the maintenance of this faith, to the eternal Rome, mistress of wisdom and truth.

We refuse on the other hand, and have always refused, to follow *the Rome of Neo-Modernist and Neo-Protestant tendencies* which became clearly manifest during the Second Vatican Council, and after the Council, in all the reforms which issued from it.¹

After being notified of the *ipso facto* suspension he was supposed to have incurred by proceeding with priestly ordinations against the command of Paul VI, Archbishop Lefebvre wrote:

It thus appears impossible to approach the basic problem, which the agreement of the *Conciliar Church*, as H. E. Mgr. Benelli himself calls it in his last letter, and the *Catholic Church*.

Let there be no mistake. It is not a question of a difference between Mgr. Lefebvre and Pope Paul VI. It is a question of the radical incompatibility between the *Catholic Church* and the *Conciliar Church*, the Mass of Paul VI being the symbol and the program of the Conciliar Church.²

¹ Archbishop Lefebvre, *Declaration*, November 21, 1974. Emphasis added.

² Note of July 12, 1976, to the *Agence France-Presse*.

In an interview in August, 1976, the Archbishop further clarified his meaning.

[T]his Council represents, both in the opinion of the Roman authorities as in our own, a *new church* which they call themselves the "Conciliar Church".

We believe that we can affirm, taking into consideration the internal and external critique on Vatican II, that is, in analysing the texts and in studying its circumstances and its consequences, that the Council, turning its back on Tradition and breaking with the Church of the past, is a *schismatic council*. The tree is known by its fruits. Since the Council, all the larger newspapers throughout the world, American and European, recognise that it is destroying the Catholic Church to such a degree that even the unbelievers and the secular governments are worried.

...

Accepting this new principle [of indifferentism], all the doctrine of the Church must change, as well as its cult, its priesthood, its institutions, because everything in the Church until the Council had demonstrated that she alone possessed the Way, the Truth and the Life in Our Lord Jesus Christ, Whom she kept in person in the Holy Eucharist, and Who is present thanks to the continuation of His sacrifice. Thus a total overturning of Tradition and of the teaching of the Church has occurred since the Council and through the Council.

*All those who cooperate in the application of this overturning accept and adhere to this new "Conciliar Church", as His Excellency Mgr. Benelli called it in the letter that he sent me in the name of the Holy Father last June 25, and they enter into the schism.*³

And in another interview given at the same time, the founder of the Society of St. Pius X emphasised the same point.

What is schism? It is a break, a break with the Church. But a break with the Church can also be a break with the Church of the past. *If someone breaks with the Church of two thousand years, he is in schism.* There has already been a council which was declared schismatic. Well, it is possible that one day, in twenty years, in thirty, in fifty years - I don't know- the Second Vatican Council could be declared schismatic, because it professed things which are opposed to the Tradition of the Church, *and which have caused a break with the Church.*⁴

Also, at this time:

We are suspended *a divinis* by the Conciliar Church and for the Conciliar Church, to which we have no wish to belong. That Conciliar Church is a schismatic Church, because

³ Interview with Archbishop Lefebvre in Écône, on August 2, 1976 and published in the French magazine *Le Figaro*, August 4, 1976. Emphasis added.

⁴ Interview Given to the *Nouvelliste* of Sion, Valais, Switzerland, at Ecône on August 3, 1976 and Printed on August 4, 1976. Emphasis added.

it breaks with the Catholic Church that has always been. It has its new dogmas, its new priesthood, its new institutions, its new worship, all already condemned by the Church in many a document, official and definitive....

The Church that affirms such errors is at once schismatic and heretical. This Conciliar Church is, therefore, not Catholic. *To whatever extent Pope, Bishops, priests, or faithful adhere to this new Church, they separate themselves from the Catholic Church....*⁵

Summarising his position, a few weeks later, he wrote:

In so far as the new Church separates itself from the old Church we cannot follow it. That is the position, and that is why we maintain Tradition, we keep firmly to Tradition; and I am sure we are being of immense service to the Church.⁶

In his 12th Letter to Friends and Benefactors, in March 1977, Archbishop Lefebvre said:

This new attitude of the Church authorities is a negation of the Cross of Our Lord. To ask us to follow this attitude, which lay under the surface during the Council, and which is clearly expressed in *the reforms and practice of the Conciliar Church*, is as much as to ask us to deny Christ crucified. We cannot do so.⁷

Now some have been tempted to think that the Archbishop only made these comments under the influence of passion, and that he exaggerated. It may well be true that passion caused him to use language that his diplomatic training and experience would usually have guided him to avoid. But the content of this analysis would remain his true thought until his dying day, fourteen years later.

It must not be supposed that by the simple distinction between the Conciliar Church and the Catholic Church the Archbishop was asserting that the entire hierarchy had defected. This he did not believe.

Whatever the language employed, the underlying analysis did not alter. In his sermon for the ordinations of 29 June 1978, he explained:

I believe that I have the right to ask these gentlemen who present themselves in offices which were occupied by Cardinals (who were indeed saintly persons and who were defenders of the Church and of the Catholic Faith) it seems to me that I would have the right to ask them, "Are you with the Catholic Church?" "Are you the Catholic Church?" "With whom am I dealing?" If I am dealing with someone who has a pact with Masonry,

⁵ Archbishop Lefebvre, *Reflections on Suspension a divinis*, June 29, 1976. Emphasis added.

⁶ Archbishop Lefebvre, Press conference given at Econe on September 15, 1976.

⁷ *Letter to Friends and Benefactors*, 19 March 1977. Emphasis added.

have I the right to speak with such a person? Have I the duty to listen to them and to obey them?⁸

Also in 1978, after describing the fruitfulness of the traditional apostolate, the founder of Ecône drew the theological conclusion:

How can one avoid the conclusion: there where the faith of the Church is, there also is her sanctity, and there where the sanctity of the Church is, there is the Catholic Church. *A Church which no longer brings forth good fruits, a Church which is sterile, is not the Catholic Church.*⁹

In 1983, his thought was identical:

Exactly the same day nine years ago on the 21st of November, I drew up a manifesto which also brought down on me the persecution of Rome, in which I said I can't accept Modernist Rome. I accept the Rome of all time with its doctrine and with its Faith. That is the Rome we are following, but the Modernist Rome which is changing religion? I refuse it and I reject it. And that is the Rome which was introduced into the Council and which is in the process of destroying the Church. I refuse that Church.¹⁰

Now two comments of Archbishop Lefebvre, including one of those given above, were made the basis of an examination, in person, by the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith. Here are the minutes:

In a preliminary note (12 July 1976) to a letter addressed to the Holy Father, you wrote:

“Let there be no mistake, it is not a question of a dispute between Mgr. Lefebvre and Pope Paul VI. It is a question of the radical incompatibility of the Catholic Church and the Conciliar Church, the Mass of Paul VI representing the program of the Conciliar Church.”

That idea is made explicit in the homily given on the preceding 29 June during the ordination Mass at Ecône:

“Well! It is precisely the insistent demands of those sent from Rome that we change our rite which makes us reflect. And we are convinced that this new rite of Mass expresses a new faith, a faith which is not ours, a faith which is not the Catholic Faith. This new Mass is a symbol, an expression, an image of a new faith, a Modernist faith...It is plain that this new rite is subtended, so to say, it supposes another conception of the Catholic faith, another religion... Slowly but surely the Protestant notion of the Mass is being introduced into Holy Church.”

⁸ Ordination Sermon, June 29, 1978. Emphasis added.

⁹ *Letter to Friends and Benefactors*, no. 15, 8 September 1978.

¹⁰ Press Conference, Paris, 9 December 1983.

QUESTION:

Are we to conclude from those statements that according to you, the Pope, promulgating and imposing the new *Ordo Missae*, and all the bishops who have received it, have founded and assembled visibly around them a new "Conciliar" Church radically incompatible with the Catholic Church?

ANSWER:

I remark, first of all, that the expression "Conciliar Church" comes not from me but from H.E. Mgr. Benelli who, in an official letter, asked that our priests and seminarians should submit themselves to the "Conciliar Church."

I consider that a spirit tending to Modernism and Protestantism shows itself in the conception of the new Mass and in all the Liturgical Reform as well. Protestants themselves say that it is so, and Mgr. Bugnini himself admits it implicitly when he states that this Liturgical Reform was conceived in an ecumenical spirit. (I could prepare a study showing how that Protestant spirit exists in the *Ordo Missae*.)¹¹

He did not quail before the examiners; there was no withdrawal of the term "Conciliar Church" – although he assigned its origin to another – and nor was there any undermining of the meaning of the term. Instead, Archbishop Lefebvre explained what it signified – viz. that the new liturgy expresses a new religion, Modernist and Protestant. And later in the same interview he affirmed once more, "What is astounding is that an *Ordo Missae* savoring of Protestantism and therefore 'favoring heresy' should be spread abroad by the Roman Curia."

In the same examination by the CDF, he was asked to explain his actions in conferring sacraments in dioceses without the approval of the ordinaries of those dioceses. His answers were illuminating.

QUESTION:

Is not that to think and act as though the legitimate hierarchy did not exist, and to begin to form, willingly or not, a dissident community?

ANSWER:

It may be thought that in a general way, in some countries, the hierarchy is not playing its part. There is no question of my founding a dissident community, but of ensuring that the Catholic Church continues on a basis of Canon Law and the great principles of theology.

It is sufficiently clear from this answer that the Archbishop regarded the situation as an emergency in which the faithful had been left without true pastors. In the history of the Church,

¹¹ Examination before the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith, January 11 and 12, 1979.

there exist examples of neighbouring bishops coming to the aid of those abandoned by heretical pastors. This principle is made more explicit in the Archbishop's reply to a later question:

QUESTION:

In your letter of 13 April 1978 to the Sacred Congregation you enclosed "General considerations on the state of the Church since Vatican Council II which alone permit of an adequate reply to the questions asked about the *Ordo Missae*, our continuation of the activity of the Priestly Fraternity of St. Pius X in spite of the interdictions received from the bishops and from Rome."

On the basis of those considerations, it seems to us that your position can be stated in the following thesis:

A bishop, judging in conscience that the Pope and the Episcopate are in general no longer using their authority to ensure the faithful an exact transmission of the faith, may legitimately, so as to maintain the Catholic faith, ordain priests without being a diocesan bishop, without having received dimissorial letters and against the formal and express prohibition of the Pope, and may assign to those priests the exercise of the ecclesiastical ministry in different dioceses.

a) Does that thesis state your position correctly?

b) Is that thesis in conformity with the traditional doctrine of the Church to which you mean to hold fast?

ANSWER:

You are setting a trap for me!

To a) No. I have not acted, starting from a principle like that one. It is the facts, the circumstances in which I found myself, which compelled me to take certain positions, and in particular the fact that I had in the Fraternity of St. Pius X a work already legally constituted which I had to continue.

To b) I think that history can furnish examples of similar acts done, in certain circumstances, not *against* but *aside from the will of the Pope*. But this question is too serious and too important to be answered at once. I prefer, therefore, to postpone my answer.

Written Answer Given by Mgr. Lefebvre the Next Day, 13 January 1979

In the case where the Roman Curia sends out documents or performs acts inspired by a Liberal and Modernist spirit, it is the duty of the bishops to protest publicly and to object.

Similarly, if the Catholic Universities and the Seminaries are themselves infested with Liberalism and Modernism, it is the duty of the bishops to found Seminaries in which Catholic doctrine is taught.

In whole countries fall into Modernism, Liberalism and Marxism, and the faithful, aware of the danger to their faith, ask for faithful priests to serve them and their children, it is the duty of the bishops who have stayed Catholic to respond to their appeal.

St. Athanasius, St. Eusebius of Samosata, and St. Epiphanius asserted and acted on those same principles, which stand to reason when the state of the Church is catastrophic. It is also obvious that those bishops should make every effort to help the Pope provide remedies for that situation.

It is noteworthy that the thesis of the *state of emergency* was then presented with such clarity so many years before the episcopal consecrations which brought it to such prominence. It is also of great significance that the Archbishop was already, in 1978, putting forth the example of St. Eusebius of Samosata as justification for his acts. This historical case, which was studied in such detail by the venerated Dom Grea in his work on the hierarchy of the Church, certainly justifies not only the conferral of sacraments in other dioceses, but even the consecration of bishops without papal mandate.

The fundamental principles which Dom Grea identified, and upon which Archbishop Lefebvre explicitly acted, were the abandonment of the faithful by their lawful pastors, and the inability to refer to the Roman Pontiff. In such circumstances, explains Dom Grea, true Successors of the Apostles are entitled to treat these abandoned dioceses as *missionary* territory, and act to restore the Church just as if they were establishing it from the beginning.

For Archbishop Lefebvre, the Church was in a state of emergency brought about by the refusal of the bishops to profess the faith and to succour the faithful with true doctrine, certainly valid sacraments, and the mass of all time. The Modernist bishops had implicitly resigned as pastors of their faithful. By the mid-1980s, he had also formed the view that the Roman Pontiff was at least *morally* inaccessible.

The connection of these notions to the thesis that there were two entities, one the Catholic Church which he was continuing, and another new Church which was destroying the true Church, is obvious. Those bishops who formally adhered to the programme of Vatican II and its reforms, had abandoned the Church.

In case this interpretation seems in any way forced, let the reader consider the letter that Archbishop wrote to Bishop de Castro Mayer towards the end of both of their lives, in 1990, urging him to agree to the consecration of a successor. In this important letter, he made the distinction between the true Church and the new church the foundation of the radical act he was recommending:

[T]he Conciliar Church, having now reached everywhere, is spreading errors contrary to the Catholic Faith and, as a result of these errors, it has corrupted the sources of grace, which are the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and the Sacraments. This false Church is in an

ever-deeper state of rupture with the Catholic Church. Resulting from these principles and facts is the absolute need to continue the Catholic episcopacy in order to continue the Catholic Church.

...

This is how the succession of bishops came about in the early centuries of the Church, in union with Rome, as we are too in union with Catholic Rome and not Modernist Rome.¹²

In light of these considerations, a strange and terrifying situation appears. What did the Archbishop have in mind, when he used the term “Conciliar Church”? Was it a real entity, consisting of actual members who themselves were its component parts, or merely a kind of metaphor which would assist in explaining the crisis? Fr. Michael Simoulin has answered as follows.

Indeed, for years now we have become accustomed to speak of the eternal Rome and the modernist Rome, the Catholic Church and the conciliar Church, the Catholic religion and the religion of Assisi, etc... two Romes, two churches, two religions which oppose and confront one another, having apparently nothing in common.

These comparisons are excellent. They strongly depict the drama existing in the Church for the past forty years. They are indicative and accurate, *but within the limitations of an analogy*. If one accentuates the strict sense of the terms, they may become a source of terrible confusion and may breed a manicheism (or over-simplification) in which the understanding of the Church, faith in the divinity and a simple sense of the supernatural would be the first victims.

Certainly it is evident that neither Rome nor the Church are made up of material substances or of henchmen, but they are societies, moral entities in which the unity consists of a unity in faith, in hope, and in charity, with a common intention and a will committed to the same goal: the reign of Our Lord Jesus Christ and the salvation of souls, for the glory of God.

Thus, we cannot consider here two entities which are perfectly distinct, unconformable and identifiable, but rather a single moral existence, the sole authentic Catholic Church, but poisoned by a foreign spirit which tends to corrupt and destroy it.

In fact, neither modernist Rome nor the conciliar Church exists distinctly and separately from eternal Rome and the Catholic Church. They cannot, just as the evil cannot exist without leaving its grip on the good which it would like to destroy, and it cannot destroy it without destroying itself.

In reality, what is the conciliar Church? It is precisely the disfigurement of the Catholic Church by the Council and by that which is foreign to its spirit from the interpretation of

¹² Archbishop Lefebvre, Letter to Bishop de Castro Mayer December 4, 1990.

the Council. Under that which we call the conciliar Church, there still lives the Catholic Church, our mother, buried, sleeping and more or less reduced to silence.¹³

On the face of it, this answer appears plausible. But is it what the Archbishop meant when he employed the terms to which Fr. Simoulin refers?

To answer this question, it will be necessary first to enquire, what exactly constitutes a social body, a *society*? It is evident that Fr. Simoulin is applying the principles found in standard manuals of ecclesiology in order to reach his conclusion. We shall do the same.

Fr. Sylvester Berry gives the following detailed definition:

A society may be defined as a union of intelligent beings, entered into for the purpose of attaining a common good by united efforts. A number of individuals is the *material element* necessary for the formation of a society, but they do not form a society unless banded together for the attainment of a common end by united efforts. Hence the union of wills toward a common end is the *formal* element of every society. The specific nature of a society may be literary, political, or religious, according to the end to be attained, and the organization of the society will vary accordingly. Hence the end to be attained may be called the *external formal element*.

The end to be obtained by a society must be more or less permanent. A number of men uniting their efforts to extinguish a fire in a neighbour's house would not constitute a society. The fact that the purpose of a society is to be attained by the united efforts of all its members, does not mean that each and every member must contribute the same kind of effort or perform the same duties. In this respect a society resembles a physical body in which there are many members, each with its own peculiar function, yet all contribute to the well-being of the whole body, which in turn redounds to the good of each member.

Finally, no purpose can be accomplished unless suitable means are used and properly directed. To this end authority is necessary to coordinate and direct the members in the use of these means. Without authority there can be nothing but confusion and discord, and the society itself would soon perish. Those who exercise authority in a society are its *superiors* or *officials*; those subject to this directing or ruling authority are *inferiors* or *subjects*.

Practically speaking, authority is the formal element of every society since it is authority that preserves and strengthens all the bonds by which the members are held together.

From the above considerations we deduce the following conditions necessary for a society:

a) a number of individuals;

¹³ *In this crisis of the Church, let us remain truly ROMAN Catholics*, by Father Michel Simoulin, District Superior of the Society of Saint Pius X for Italy, *Communicantes*, May 2001.

- b) a moral union, *i.e.*, a union of wills;
- c) a common end to be attained;
- d) suitable means to attain that end; and
- e) adequate authority.

These five conditions are essential and sufficient to constitute a society. If they are found realized in the Church founded by our Lord, then that Church is a true society.¹⁴

The Church founded by Our Lord Jesus Christ certainly meets each and every one of these conditions, and is therefore a true society.

But does the Conciliar Church meet all of these conditions? Is it a real society, or merely an *ens ratio*, a being of reason, a useful metaphor, as Fr. Simoulin asserts? Is it a concrete thing, really existing?

We will take each of the conditions enunciated by Fr. Berry and see how they are verified in the Conciliar Church, as understood by Archbishop Lefebvre.

a) A number of individuals

The first question that must be addressed is whether the Archbishop judged that some men had not merely adopted errors, but had actually left the Church. There can be no doubt of his view. The following is from a press conference in 1983.

Question: How do you see the Church in France at this moment?

Archbishop Lefebvre: I think a good number of bishops are no longer Catholic.¹⁵

And from an interview in 1986.

The great majority of the bishops in France are apostate, and have abandoned the Catholic Faith to become Modernist. Their new catechism is evident proof of this.¹⁶

In the same interview, Archbishop Lefebvre contrasted these apostates with two other classes of men who remained in the Church.

[T]here is in France, an extraordinary resistance on the part of many priests, the faithful, and very many young Catholics. This is a great hope. The Catholic Church survives and is organizing itself against the persecution of the Conciliar Revolution.

And:

¹⁴ Rev. E. Sylvester Berry, D.D., *The Church of Christ, An Apologetic and Dogmatic Treatise*. Herder, St. Louis and London, 1927 & 1941, pp. 14-16.

¹⁵ Press Conference, Paris, 9 December 1983.

¹⁶ Interview with Don McLean, Editor of *Catholic*, January 1986.

Many other bishops among those nominated before Vatican II are with us in their heart, but they do not dare to express this publicly.

Finally, on this point, are his now famous words regarding the new Rome which has eclipsed the Roman Church.

For the moment they [those in Rome] are in rupture with their predecessors. This is impossible. They are no longer in the Catholic Church.

...

Rome has lost the Faith, my dear friends. Rome is in apostasy. These are not words in the air. It is the truth. Rome is in apostasy... They have left the Church... This is sure, sure, sure.¹⁷

So there certainly exist a number of individuals who have left the Catholic Church in order to cleave formally to the new religion. It will have been noticed by attentive readers that Archbishop Lefebvre often qualified his expressions so as to avoid making any blanket judgements of all who did not explicitly reject Vatican II. His sense of justice was too strong for such a view. He was careful to express the formal principle of the apostasy of our era, which is adherence to the new religion, in relative terms. For example:

*To whatever extent pope, bishops, priests or faithful adhere to this new Church, they separate themselves from the Catholic Church.*¹⁸

Obviously there exist doubtful cases, such as those in which a given bishop or other individual is materially in error, but is not clearly pertinacious. The Archbishop certainly doubted whether Paul VI or John Paul II formally adhered to the new religion, or were merely confused. However, doubtful cases are irrelevant to the reality that many of the bishops and faithful have apostatised and are no longer members of the Church. *Some* men have definitely departed into heresy and they have done so by adhering to the programme of Vatican II despite awareness of the fact that it is incompatible with the teaching of the Catholic Church. There are even a number of cases in which the culprits are on record asserting that the new doctrines contradict what the Church taught prior to Vatican II, and yet they believed in the novelties anyway.

b) A moral union, *i.e.*, a union of wills

This condition too is verified. If there is one point upon which Archbishop Lefebvre insisted above all others, it was that it is impossible to give an unqualified adhesion to the texts of Vatican II. And he was equally firm in his denunciations of those who firmly cleaved to those texts and showed by their actions that they were determined to implement them despite all their effects, and in the face of every obstacle.

¹⁷ Retreat Conference, September 4, 1987, Econe.

¹⁸ Archbishop Lefebvre, *Reflections on Suspension a divinis*, June 29, 1976. Emphasis added.

The Conciliar Church is bound together by a union of wills to a definite end – the accomplishment of the programme of Vatican II, which is its external formal element, or principle.

c) A common end to be attained

This end is defined in the documents of Vatican II and is evident in the practical application of that programme. It is essentially man-centred, and seeks the “salvation” of man by the realisation of the divine which is immanent in him. The essential doctrinal content of Vatican II can be summarised in religious liberty, collegiality, and ecumenism, and these correspond with the liberty, equality, and fraternity of the French Revolution. Archbishop Lefebvre was as clear about this as he was about the wilfulness of those who prosecuted the revolution in the Church.

d) Suitable means to attain that end

The reforms of Vatican II include new laws, new worship, new doctrinal formulations, new structures of authority, and in fact an entire new culture – a kind of pop religion, with appropriate “hymns”, music, moral priorities, approved behaviour, dress standards, language, etc. The new culture, including its worship, laws, and mode of authority, is democratic, anti-hierarchical, popular, coarse, casual, and non-prescriptive. By these means the doctrinal complex of Vatican II, which constitutes the end to be attained, is effectively inculcated in its victims, and excludes Tradition from their souls. All of this was described and condemned by Archbishop Lefebvre, and most especially by his total refusal to admit any of these elements into the practice of religion in his seminaries, priories and chapels.

e) Adequate authority

Authority is the very banner of the Vatican II revolution in the Church. The employment of this authority is something of a paradox amongst men who disclaim all true hierarchy, however it is certainly real. This is evident in the approach they have taken to traditional Catholics, including the ruthless imposition of the *Novus Ordo Missae* against all priestly and lay protest, the suspension *a divinis* of Archbishop Lefebvre and those ordained by him, the excommunications of the Archbishop, Bishop de Castro Mayer, and the four new bishops in 1988, and the general intolerance of any opposition to the key doctrines of Vatican II. One may express doubts about the Resurrection of Our Lord and incur no sanction in the Conciliar Church, but faithful Catholics are persecuted. One of the central themes of Archbishop Lefebvre’s response to the crisis was the distinction between true and false obedience, which presupposes an authority imposing precepts.

On the basis of this analysis the conclusion is established. The Conciliar Church is a real existing society of men, and was recognised as such by Archbishop Lefebvre.

This reality was referred to in directly theological terms, terms which apply exclusively to the visible social body which is the Catholic Church, by Archbishop Lefebvre in 1989, in an interview reviewing the episcopal consecrations of the previous year.

To stay inside the Church, or to put oneself inside the Church - what does that mean?
Firstly, what Church are we talking about? If you mean the Conciliar Church, then we

who have struggled against the Council for twenty years because we want the Catholic Church, we would have to re-enter this Conciliar Church in order, supposedly, to make it Catholic. That is a complete illusion. It is not the subjects that make the superiors, but the superiors who make the subjects.

...

This talk about the "visible Church" on the part of Dom Gerard and Mr. Madiran is childish. It is incredible that anyone can talk of the "visible Church", meaning the Conciliar Church as opposed to the Catholic Church which we are trying to represent and continue. I am not saying that we are the Catholic Church. I have never said so. No one can reproach me with ever having wished to set myself up as pope. But, we truly represent the Catholic Church such as it was before, because we are continuing what it always did. It is we who have the notes of the visible Church: One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic. That is what makes the visible Church.¹⁹

The Conciliar Church lacks the four theological *notes* which identify the true Church. These notes are found clearly in the body of men known as traditional Catholics. These constitute the Catholic Church, not exclusively, but substantially. All of those who remain members of the Church but have not found their way fully to Tradition are in a position of *obscurity*.

The Conciliar Church consists of apostates from the Catholic Church, and acts as a foreign body obscuring the true Church with which it is to a significant extent entangled, due to the lack of clarity about the membership of a very large number of men.

How do we avoid the danger enunciated by Fr. Simoulin, that these terms, the "Conciliar Church" and "Modernist Rome" may become "a source of terrible confusion and may breed a manicheism (or over-simplification) in which the understanding of the Church, faith in the divinity and a simple sense of the supernatural would be the first victims"?

The answer would seem to be simple enough, and it is the Archbishop's answer, the revelation of Our Lady of La Salette that the Church will be eclipsed. An eclipse is the placement of one body before another, so that the second is obscured. The obscured body is still exactly *what* it was, and *where* it was before the eclipse, and will emerge in due course.

Three weeks before he died, in his final published text, Archbishop Lefebvre declared his belief in the prophecy of Our Lady of La Salette.

The collection sheds such brilliant light on the doctrinal Revolution officially inaugurated in the Church during the Council and continued up to our days that one cannot help thinking of the "seat of iniquity" foretold by Leo XIII, or of Rome losing the faith foretold by Our Lady at La Salette.²⁰

¹⁹ Archbishop Lefebvre, Interview, July-August 1989 issue of *Fideliter*.

²⁰ Preface to Fr. Giulio Tam's *Documentation sur la Révolution dans l'Église*, March 4, 1991.

The apocalyptic references in this document underline the severity of the crisis in the Church. Archbishop Lefebvre believed in the prophecy of La Salette relating to Rome losing the faith and becoming the seat of Antichrist.

The state of the Catholic Church in the post-Vatican II era is a deep and abiding mystery. It is unsurprising that there exist numerous and radically differing theories which attempt to explain it. Nor is it surprising that Archbishop Lefebvre himself wavered somewhat, at least in emphasis, between several of those theories. What I think all of those who recognise his greatness can agree upon, is that his honesty, candour, and courage in the face of such an impenetrable mystery was unsurpassed. We owe him an incalculable debt of gratitude for his words as well as his actions, both of which shed a great deal of light on *the Passion of the Mystical Body of Christ*.