

Chuck Wilson of the St. Joseph Foundation based in San Antonio, TX. Mr. Wilson affirms that this case does not support the SSPX's position because the chapel where the Masses were held was not administered by the Society and the persons involved did not belong to the SSPX.

When St. Thomas More was told by someone that “heresy” was not a likable word, he simply replied that it wasn't a likable thing. The same can be said of schism. Schism is a grave offense that violates the unity of the family of God, and excommunication is a pastoral response to remedy such action. CUF is one of the few organizations where someone attracted to the SSPX can get sound pastoral advice. We urge our members to bear no animosity toward any members of the SSPX, but rather desire that they come into full communion with us in the Roman Catholic Church. This was also Bishop Fabian Bruskewitz's intention in issuing a warning of excommunication to those who formally adhere to the SSPX in the Diocese of Lincoln, Nebraska.

In *Ecclesia Dei*, Pope John Paul II writes: “From this reflection, all should draw a renewed and efficacious conviction of the necessity of strengthening still more their fidelity by rejecting erroneous interpretations and arbitrary and unauthorized applications in matters of doctrine, liturgy, and discipline.”

In defending Vatican II to the core, CUF obviously does not accept as legitimate the aberrations that have occurred in the so-called “spirit of Vatican II.” Rather, we must work to promote the true teaching of the Council, which is now embodied so well in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Choosing

the road of schism is obviously gravely wrong in itself and on a practical level sets back authentic efforts for reform and renewal within the Church. Speaking particularly of the Tridentine Mass, it is likely that bishops would be open to permitting this Mass more frequently if it were not for the concern that such permission might be interpreted as tacit approval of a schismatic, anti-conciliar movement.

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Pamphlet 246

Archbishop LeFebvre and the Society of St. Pius the X

ISSUE: Was Archbishop Marcel LeFebvre really excommunicated? Is the Society of St. Pius X (SSPX), the religious order he founded, in good standing with the Church? And is it morally acceptable for a Catholic to participate in SSPX Masses?

RESPONSE: Archbishop LeFebvre was automatically excommunicated by the Vatican Congregation for Bishops on June 30, 1988, for the schismatic act of ordaining bishops without papal permission. The SSPX remains outside of communion with the Church. Those who “seek to adhere to the schism of Msgr. LeFebvre,” Pope John Paul II says, “incur ipso facto [that is, automatically] the extremely grave penalty of excommunication.” Therefore, Catholics should not participate in any SSPX activities, including their illicit Masses, lest they risk automatic excommunication.

DISCUSSION: The Vatican Congregation for Bishops issued a decree excommunicating Archbishop LeFebvre on June 30, 1988. Two days later, on July 2, 1988, Pope John Paul II issued his apostolic letter *Ecclesia Dei* on the matter. The following are excerpts:

In itself, this act [that is, the unlawful consecration of four bishops by Msgr. LeFebvre] was one of disobedience to the Roman Pontiff in a very grave matter and of supreme importance for the unity of the Church, such as is the ordination of bishops whereby the apostolic succession is sacramentally perpetuated. Hence such disobedience—which implies in

practice the rejection of the Roman primacy—constitutes a schismatic act. In performing such an act, notwithstanding the formal canonical warning sent to them by the Cardinal Prefect of the Congregation for Bishops on June 17, Msgr. LeFebvre and the priests Bernard Fellay, Bernard Tissier de Mallerais, Richard Williamson, and Alfonso de Galarreta, have incurred the grave penalty of excommunication envisaged by ecclesiastical law. ...

In the present circumstances, I wish especially to make an appeal both solemn and heartfelt, paternal and fraternal, to all those who until now have been linked in various ways to the movement of Archbishop LeFebvre, that they may fulfill the grave duty of remaining united to the Vicar of Christ in the unity of the Catholic Church, and of ceasing their support in any way for that movement. Everyone should be aware that formal adherence to the schism is a grave offense against God and carries the penalty of excommunication decreed by the Church's law (original emphasis).

The Holy Father footnotes in the course of the foregoing discussion critical canons from the Code of Canon Law. He cites Archbishop LeFebvre as violating canon 1382, which provides as follows: "A bishop who consecrates someone a bishop and the person who receives such a consecration from a bishop without a pontifical mandate incurs an automatic (*latae sententiae*) excommunication reserved to the Apostolic See."

He also says that Archbishop LeFebvre's act constituted a schismatic act, citing canon 751, which provides in pertinent part: "[S]chism is the refusal of submission to the Roman Pontiff or of communion with the members of the

Church subject to him."

In providing for the automatic excommunication of all those who formally adhere to the schism, the Holy Father cites canon 1364 §1, which provides: "With due regard for canon 194, §1, no. 2, an apostate from the faith, a heretic, or a schismatic incurs automatic (*latae sententiae*) excommunication and if a cleric, he can also be punished by the penalties mentioned in canon 1336, §1, nos. 1, 2 and 3."

It is clear from the language of *Ecclesia Dei* that the Holy Father considers Archbishop LeFebvre and his followers to be in schism. Archbishop LeFebvre had ten days to appeal the decision of the Congregation for Bishops to the Apostolic Signatura, the Supreme Tribunal of the Church. Archbishop LeFebvre did not appeal and thus the excommunication went into effect, regardless of arguments to the contrary by the SSPX. While it is true that "[t]here is neither appeal nor recourse against a decision or decree of the Roman Pontiff" (canon 333 §3), this canon was not an issue because the original excommunication was made by the Vatican congregation rather than the Pope and the decision was not appealed within the specified time period. Further, *Ecclesia Dei* demonstrates that the Pope would have ruled against Archbishop LeFebvre on appeal.

Regarding the case's implications for other Catholics, "formal adherence" implies "full knowledge" and "complete consent" in embracing this grave action (cf. Catechism, nos. 1856-61). Yet, today some people advance interpretations of the above decrees and canons in opposition to the Holy Father's explicit position, even asking whether one may fulfill his Sunday obligation by attending a Mass offered by priests of the SSPX. But given the

above facts, one would be acting at best on a doubtful conscience in attending any Mass of the SSPX and a fundamental principle of moral theology is that one may never act on a doubtful conscience. Further, one is bound to form his conscience according to authentic Catholic doctrine and discipline.

It is important to note that the excommunication provisions apply only to the SSPX and not to those who participate in licit Tridentine Masses, that is, ones permitted by the local bishop in implementing *Ecclesia Dei*. CUF applauds and encourages a broad application of this permission, as was specifically encouraged in *Ecclesia Dei* itself.

The SSPX cite the 1991 "Hawaii Six" case as evidence that those adhering to the Society are not really excommunicated. This case regarded six individuals who were excommunicated by Bishop Joseph Ferrario of Honolulu for participating in unauthorized Tridentine Masses. The Masses were not held in a chapel administered by the SSPX, although priests of the Society sometimes celebrated Mass there. The excommunications were not upheld by Rome because participating in an unauthorized Mass, while a grave matter, is not in itself a schismatic act according to canon law. (Archbishop LeFebvre himself was suspended from priestly functions in July 1976 after he disobeyed and ordained priests against a direct papal order. Yet the Holy See did not excommunicate him for celebrating unauthorized Masses thereafter. It was only after Archbishop LeFebvre's unauthorized ordination of bishops that Rome excommunicated him.) The six individuals in the "Hawaii Six" case were represented canonically by CUF Advisory Board Member