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*to unite the faithful from all walks of life in order to
support, defend and advance the efforts of the teaching Church*

This article is a summary of CUF's FAITH FACT on the Society of St. Pius X (SSPX). Space limitations in Lay Witness require us to shorten the presentation here. For a copy of the FAITH FACT, please call CUF 1-800-MY FAITH (693-2484).

Conscientious Objection, Schism, or Heresy? Catholics and Their Participation with the Society of St. Pius X

By: Gregory Downs and Philip C. L. Gray

Because it is like the sin of witchcraft, to rebel: and like the crime of idolatry, to refuse to obey. Forasmuch therefore as thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, the Lord hath also rejected thee from being king (1 Sam. 15:23; DRV).

The Priestly Fraternity of St. Pius X (Fraternité Sacerdotale Saint-Pie-X), aka: the Society of St. Pius X (SSPX), is an association intended for priests founded in 1970 by Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre, CSSp. He intended to form priests in the traditional theology of the Latin Church. A public critic of Vatican Council II opposed to the promulgation of a new Missal for the Roman Church, Archbishop Lefebvre insisted that a primary characteristic of the SSPX would be the exclusive celebration of the sacraments according to the 1962 Missal.

Recently, circumstances and misinformation have led to erroneous opinions about the legitimacy of receiving sacraments celebrated by SSPX priests. The intention of this article is to provide clarity for *Lay Witness* readers regarding the status of SSPX members and whether attending sacraments celebrated by them is lawful.

Historical Summary

In 1929, Marcel Lefebvre was ordained a priest for the Diocese of Lille, France. Two years later, he entered the Congregation of the Holy Spirit (aka: Holy Ghost Fathers or Spiritans; C.S.Sp.). Over the next 39 years, Lefebvre served as a priest, vicar apostolic, apostolic administrator, apostolic delegate, was the founding Archbishop of Dakar, Senegal, accepted transfer to

become the Bishop of Tulle, France, was elected Superior General of the Spiritans, and served as a Council Father at all four sessions of Vatican Council II. In 1970, he founded the SSPX as a pious union¹ with the intent of preserving tradition in the Catholic Church.

Because of Lefebvre's well known and highly critical opinions about the Second Vatican Council, the Most Reverend François Charrière, Bishop of Lausanne-Genève-Fribourg, reluctantly agreed to erect the SSPX as a pious union of diocesan right for an experimental time (*ad experimentum*) of six years.² The intention was to provide it permanent status if the experimental period went well.

For four years the work of seminary formation progressed, but with a growing tension between the SSPX and bishops throughout Europe. The SSPX, with its clear traditional leanings and anti-modern rhetoric, became a beacon of controversy.³

Because of the growing controversy and its nature, Pope St. Paul VI established a Commission of Cardinals in 1974 to investigate the situation. The Commission organized an apostolic visitation to the SSPX seminary in November 1974. Archbishop Lefebvre was very

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displeased with the views expressed by the visitors, and soon after published a declaration in which he questioned the legitimacy of the Second Vatican Council and the disciplines established from it. As Lefebvre put it:

*... we refuse and have always refused to follow the Rome of neo-Modernist and neo-Protestant tendencies such as were clearly manifested during the Second Vatican Council, and after the Council in all the resulting reforms.*⁴

In response to Lefebvre's declaration and its findings from the apostolic visitation, the Commission recommended the SSPX be suppressed. The Pope approved the recommendation *in forma specifica* (as his own action), and the Bishop of Lausanne-Geneva-Fribourg executed the Decree of Suppression on 6 May 1975. Lefebvre appealed to the Apostolic Signatura, arguing that the suppression was not valid. The Supreme Tribunal rejected the appeal, noting that the act of suppression came from the Pope and therefore no appeal was possible. The Pope himself confirmed this in a personal letter to Lefebvre.⁵

With no opportunity to maneuver except by dialogue with Rome or continued public rhetoric, Lefebvre chose the latter. Soon after the suppression, on 29 June 1975, Lefebvre ordained Bernard Tissier de Mallerais a priest of the SSPX.⁶ This action by Lefebvre resulted in an undeclared, automatic suspension from ordaining for a period of one year (c.f. Canon 2373, 1917 Code of Canon Law). In early 1976, Lefebvre held a press conference and blamed His Eminence Jean-Marie Cardinal Villot, the Vatican Secretary of State, for placing obstacles between the Pope and Lefebvre. The Pope declared the allegation false, and Lefebvre responded with further antagonism. He accused Pope St. Paul VI, who was famous for declaring that the "smoke of Satan" had entered the Church, of modernism, of collaborating unintentionally with freemasonry, and Lefebvre declared his intention to continue his pursuits without change. The situation was serious enough that the Pope characterized Lefebvre's behavior as "*tactics...illegitimate undertakings...inane and false doctrinal principles...[and] harm to the Universal Church*".⁷

In July 1976, Lefebvre illicitly ordained the first class of SSPX seminarians in violation of canons 2373.1 and 2374 of the 1917 Code of Canon Law. He incurred an automatic suspension from conferring Holy Orders (Canon 2373), and those he ordained were automatically suspended from the Orders received (Canon 2374). The Vatican immediately declared the effects publicly and

the Pope expanded the suspension to exclude the Archbishop from exercising any priestly function (suspension *a divinis*). Regarding the men ordained, the Vatican expressly noted that those Lefebvre had ordained "*are ipso facto suspended from the order received, and, if they were to exercise it, would be in an irregular and criminal situation.*"⁸ This decades long suspension has not changed.

Between 1976 and 1988, Lefebvre illicitly ordained additional SSPX seminarians. Despite his harsh rhetoric, continuous expressions of false doctrinal principles, and serious violations of Church discipline, the Vatican was patient and moderate in its responses. During this time, Pope St. John Paul II was elected to the Office of Pope. He would appoint then Archbishop Joseph Ratzinger as Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF). In 1983 a new Code of Canon Law was promulgated. On multiple occasions during these years, Popes Sts. Paul VI and John Paul II, Cardinal Ratzinger, and many bishops of the Catholic Church attempted to engage Lefebvre in constructive dialogue.

In 1988, despite Lefebvre's expressed intent to consecrate four men as bishops of the SSPX, the efforts to reconcile him with the Church seemed to be working. Intense dialogue between Lefebvre and Ratzinger had resulted in a mutual recognition of parameters within which an agreement might be reached. Further, there was open recognition of two particularly complex issues: the reception by the laity of certain sacraments in the communities of the society and the question of certain SSPX communities practicing the rule of a religious institute as though they belonged to it.⁹

On 5 May 1988, Lefebvre signed a Protocol Agreement that provided that he:

- 1) *Promise fidelity to the Catholic Church and to the Roman Pontiff, head of the body of bishops.*
- 2) *Accept the doctrine contained in No. 25 of the dogmatic constitution Lumen gentium...*
- 3) *Commit himself to an attitude of study and communication with the Apostolic See, avoiding all controversy regarding points taught by Vatican II or later reforms which seemed difficult for them to reconcile with tradition.*
- 4) *Recognize the validity of the Mass and of the sacraments celebrated with the required intention and according to the...typical editions promulgated by Paul VI and by John Paul II.*
- 5) *Promise to respect the common discipline of the Church...without prejudice to the special*

*discipline accorded to the society by particular law.*¹⁰

In turn, the Vatican agreed to lift all suspensions from Lefebvre and the SSPX priests, and provide:

1) The Priestly Society of St. Pius X would be constructed as a society of apostolic life...with a certain exemption regarding public worship, care of souls and apostolic activities...

2) ...access to liturgical books in use before the post-conciliar reform.

3) [T]o...resolve possible...disputes, the Holy Father would set up a Roman commission including two members of the society ...

4) Finally...a bishop be nominated from among its members, who normally should not be the superior general.¹¹

The following day, Lefebvre reneged on his signed agreement and announced his resolution to consecrate four men as bishops on 30 June 1988. Despite intense communication with Cardinal Ratzinger and Pope St. John Paul II up to the day of the consecrations, Lefebvre would not budge. He proceeded with the consecrations. In accord with Canon 1382 of the 1983 Code of Canon Law, Lefebvre, the four new bishops, and Antônio de Castro Mayer, of Campos, Brazil, who acted as co-consecrator, suffered the automatic penalty of excommunication reserved to the Holy See for the crime of schism.

The next day, 1 July 1988, the Holy See formally declared the excommunications. All his followers were sternly warned “*not to support the schism of Monsignor Lefebvre, otherwise they shall incur ipso facto the very grave penalty of excommunication.*”¹²

On 2 July 1988, Pope St. John Paul II issued *Ecclesia Dei*, a *motu proprio* letter confirming the excommunications, warning against the movement, which was now formally in schism, and providing a way to reconciliation for members of the SSPX who wished to remain in the Catholic Church.

A dozen priests and some seminarians of the SSPX immediately made use of the Pope’s letter *Ecclesia Dei* and reunited with Rome. Acknowledging the authority of the Popes and the Second Vatican Council but



Sainte Anne concevant la Vierge,
Jean Bellegambe. Musée de la Chartreuse, Douai.

retaining the traditional theology and liturgy of their former Society, they took the name of the Priestly Fraternity of St. Peter. Sadly, Archbishop Lefebvre died under the pain of excommunication in 1991.

In a letter of 15 December 2008, Bishop Bernard Fellay, then Superior General of the SSPX, requested the removal of the declared excommunication *latae sententiae*. He wrote,

*...we continue firmly resolute in our desire to remain Catholics and to put all our strength at the service of the Church of our Lord Jesus Christ, which is the Roman Catholic Church. We accept her teachings in a filial spirit. We firmly believe in the primacy of Peter and in his prerogatives, and for this reason the current situation causes us much suffering.*¹³

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In 2009, in response to the SSPX's willingness to reconcile with Rome, Pope Benedict XVI authorized the lifting of the canonical excommunications against the four bishops on the premise that *"It is hoped that this step will be followed by the prompt attainment of full communion with the Church on the part of the whole Society of St Pius X".*¹⁴

In a subsequent letter to all the Catholic bishops, the Pope explained the scope and the limits of the deed:

The fact that the Society of Saint Pius X does not possess a canonical status in the Church is not, in the end, based on disciplinary but on doctrinal reasons. As long as the Society does not have a canonical status in the Church, its ministers do not exercise legitimate ministries in the Church. There needs to be a distinction, then, between the disciplinary level, which deals with individuals as

*such, and the doctrinal level, at which ministry and institution are involved.*¹⁵

In essence, although there was hope for full reconciliation and perhaps a unique canonical structure to accommodate the whole membership of the SSPX, the lifting of the excommunication did not actually change the moral rightness of its members. The doctrinal problems still needed to be worked out, and priestly functions needed to cease until the reunion was complete.

In 2015, during the Jubilee Year of Mercy, Pope Francis declared, among other initiatives, that he was legitimizing Confessions for the SSPX, to a certain extent:

I trust that in the near future solutions may be found to recover full communion with the priests and superiors of the Fraternity. In the meantime, motivated by the need to respond to the good of these faithful, through my own disposition, I

*establish that those who during the Holy Year of Mercy approach these priests of the Fraternity of St Pius X to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation shall validly and licitly receive the absolution of their sins.*¹⁶

The status of the SSPX did not change with the lifting of excommunication from its members. Nor did the status change with the granting of the faculty to absolve sins. As provided by the Pope, *"the Society has no canonical status, and its ministers... do not legitimately exercise any ministry in the Church. [Rather], those who... approach these priests... shall validly and licitly receive the absolution of their sins."*¹⁷ In other words, Pope Francis granted faculties to absolve sins to the SSPX priests *for the good of the faithful*. Despite this concession, the ministry of the SSPX priests remain an act in defiance of the Holy See.

In 2016, Pope Francis indefinitely extended the faculties granted for Confessions to the SSPX, yet again refraining from saying that the SSPX had a legitimate ministry, preferring to focus on the legitimacy of the faithful receiving absolution from them.

For the Jubilee Year I had also granted that those faithful who, for various reasons, attend churches officiated by the priests of the Priestly Fraternity of Saint Pius X, can validly and licitly receive the sacramental absolution of their sins. For



The Virgin of Guadalupe with the Four Apparitions, painting by Nicolás Enríquez (MET, 2014.173)

the pastoral benefit of these faithful, and trusting in the good will of their priests to strive with God's help for the recovery of full communion in the Catholic Church, I have personally decided to extend this faculty beyond the Jubilee Year, until further provisions are made, lest anyone ever be deprived of the sacramental sign of reconciliation through the Church's pardon (Misericordia et Misera 12).

In 2017, Pope Francis granted the latest, similarly cautious, favor. It regards marriages.

The Pope authorized “*local ordinaries the possibility to grant faculties for the celebration of marriages of faithful who follow the pastoral activity of the Society*” under the following conditions: 1. If at all possible, the marriage in question is to be witnessed by “*a fully regular*” priest of the diocese while the Mass itself is celebrated by a priest of the SSPX; or 2.

*Where the above is not possible, or if there are no priests in the Diocese able to receive the consent of the parties, the Ordinary may grant the necessary faculties to the priest of the Society who is also to celebrate the Holy Mass, reminding him of the duty to forward the relevant documents to the Diocesan Curia as soon as possible.*¹⁸

Continued Concerns

As noted by Pope Benedict XVI, distinctions must be made between the disciplinary and doctrinal (theological) situations of the SSPX. Ambiguity in this matter results in a mistaken understanding of whether participation in sacraments celebrated by the SSPX is morally or canonically lawful.

Disciplinary concerns: The disciplinary concerns are best recognized by five historical actions: 1) the ordination of priests by Lefebvre, and subsequently by the bishops of the SSPX; 2) the ordination of bishops by Lefebvre, and subsequently by the bishops of the SSPX; 3) the excommunications declared in 1988; 4) the lifting of the excommunications; and 5) the granting of the faculty to absolve sins and the possibility of a diocesan bishop to allow an SSPX priest to witness a marriage in the bishop's diocese.

If a Latin Rite bishop ordains a man without dimissorial letters and that man is not his subject, the bishop is suspended from ordaining for one year and the man ordained “*is suspended ipso facto from the order received*” (Canon 1383). This is an automatic penalty incurred by both the ordaining bishop and the receiving priest. Every priest ordained for the SSPX labors under

this penalty. This penalty of suspension has never been lifted.

When a Latin Rite bishop ordains a bishop without the permission of the Holy See, and the act deliberately violates a warning or directive by the Pope, the result is schism (Canon 751) and automatic excommunication (Canon 1364§1). Both the consecrating bishops and those receiving the episcopal ordination suffer the results. In addition to the penalty of excommunication, if the schism is declared, the consecrating bishops and those consecrated become irregular to the exercise of Holy Orders (Canon 1044§1.2). Simply put, they cannot exercise their powers.

As noted above, Lefebvre and the bishops he ordained entered schism and they suffered the penalty of excommunication. Having been previously warned and acting against that warning, the schism was declared public. This public declaration triggered the irregularity of exercising orders. The effect of the irregularity for both the priests and bishops is the same. The celebration of a sacrament that requires an exercise of a faculty are invalid. All other sacraments are gravely illicit. The only exceptions are anointing and absolution if given in danger of death.

In 2009, the excommunication was lifted from the bishops of the SSPX, but the irregularity to exercise orders remained. Like the priests they have ordained, they cannot exercise Holy Orders. It must be further noted that only the excommunications of the bishops were lifted. The suspensions incurred due to Canon 1383 remain in effect and the irregularities remain.

With Pope Francis granting SSPX priests the faculty to absolve sins outside danger of death, he removed only one aspect of irregularity. When he granted local ordinaries the discretionary power to allow an SSPX priest to witness marriage, this did not give the SSPX priests the faculty to do so. Without the express permission of the local ordinary, any marriage witnessed by an SSPX priest is invalid.

Simply put, from a disciplinary point of view, the bishops, priests, deacons, seminarians, and anyone embracing the doctrines and decisions of the SSPX remain in formal adherence to a public schism. All clerics remain suspended and irregular to the exercise of orders. By privilege of the Pope, the priests can absolve sins for the good of the faithful, the other expectations of law being met (see below). And if a local ordinary allows, an SSPX priest can witness a marriage, but only under certain conditions.

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The Faithful must understand an important point. The SSPX has established ties with other priests and bishops who are not on good terms with their own ordinaries or the Holy See. These clerics are not members of the SSPX, but in certain circumstances they staff their chapels. These clerics did not obtain the privileges extended to the SSPX by Popes Benedict XVI and Francis. These priests still labor under their own irregularities and penalties. The Faithful should be wary as the priest hearing their confession may not be an SSPX priest and lack the faculty to absolve their sins.

Doctrinal Concerns: Here we identify two general concerns and a harmful characteristic of the SSPX that perpetuates the doctrinal concerns. The first is the rejection of the Pope's authority and that of an Ecumenical Council. It is important to distinguish between refusing to submit to papal authority and rejecting that same authority. The former is an act of schism. It entails a recognition of the authority and a willful choice not to submit. Because the possession of authority by the Pope is a matter of Catholic and divine Faith, the rejection of papal authority itself is an act of heresy. The SSPX has denied the authority of the Pope to regulate the liturgical disciplines of the Church.

The SSPX has also denied the authority of the Second Vatican Council. At times, their arguments and doctrines have questioned the legitimacy of other Ecumenical Councils as well. Because the authority of an Ecumenical Council is a matter of Divine and Catholic Faith, rejecting that authority is an act of heresy.

A second doctrinal concern is the claim of authority used by the SSPX to justify its continued schism and attacks on the Catholic Church. By its own admission, the SSPX claims to obtain its authority from the people, not from God or from mandate given by the Church. On the occasion of his consecrating an illegitimate successor to Bishop Mayer in Argentina, Archbishop Lefebvre said that there is "*no other basis for jurisdiction [of the new bishop] than that which comes from the requests of the priests and the faithful to take care of their souls and those of their children.*"¹⁹ In the same statement, Lefebvre repeated this claim in this manner: "*Since the jurisdiction of the bishop is not territorial but personal and has as its source the duty of the faithful to save their souls, if a group of faithful in the diocese calls upon the bishop to have a priest, this group gives by this very fact, authority to the bishop to watch over the transmission of the Faith and of grace in this group.*" Oddly, the personal nature of a bishop's office is part of the doctrines expressed

by Vatican II. Even more interesting, this concept of obtaining jurisdiction from the people is a doctrine of the Free Masons and Protestants. Of particular note, Lutherans explain their doctrine of consubstantiation of the Eucharist in this way. Pope Leo XIII condemned this heresy in his encyclical letter, *Humanum genus* (20 April 1884).

In truth, the authority of a bishop comes by the grace of God and the favor of the Holy See. By the power of Holy Orders received, a bishop receives divine power; his jurisdiction to exercise that power comes by mandate of the Pope. Any belief that the people give jurisdiction to a bishop violates Divine and Catholic Faith; it is a heresy.

The actions and doctrinal positions of the SSPX demonstrate an open hypocrisy. On many occasions, Lefebvre and his successors accused the Pope of being or colluding with the Free Masons, yet Lefebvre embraced a masonic principle of authority by which to justify his schism. Lefebvre attacked the authority of the Pope to regulate sacramental discipline, yet claimed the personal authority, *as given by the people*, to interpret and apply tradition. Lefebvre denied the authority of Vatican II and elements of Vatican I and Trent, yet used doctrines from all three Ecumenical Councils to justify his actions. Lefebvre would have people believe the SSPX defends Catholic tradition, but a close look at their doctrines and actions demonstrates a hypocrisy rooted in subjectivism.

Attendance at Sacraments of the SSPX: Because the priests of the SSPX labor under public schism, the penalty of suspension, and irregularity to the exercise of Holy Orders, all celebrations of the sacraments by them are unlawful, even if valid. All marriages witnessed by them are invalid, unless the local ordinary in union with the Holy Father has given express faculty to witness a specific marriage. Because there remain unresolved doctrinal questions that would affect the validity of their sacraments, their ministry remains illegitimate. As explained by Pope Benedict XVI:

*In order to make this clear once again: until the doctrinal questions are clarified, the Society has no canonical status in the Church, and its ministers – even though they have been freed of the ecclesiastical penalty – do not legitimately exercise any ministry in the Church.*²⁰

Because of these disciplinary and doctrinal concerns, Catholics may not participate in the sacraments offered by SSPX priests except in limited circumstances. As provided by Canon 844§2:

Whenever necessity requires it or true spiritual advantage suggests it, and provided that danger of error or of indifferentism is avoided, the Christian faithful for whom it is physically or morally impossible to approach a Catholic minister are permitted to receive the sacraments of penance, Eucharist, and anointing of the sick from non-Catholic ministers in whose Churches these sacraments are valid.

The 2015 and 2016 granting of the faculty to absolve given by Pope Francis allowed the valid reception of the Sacrament of Penance. His 2017 concession adds the possibility of exchanging wedding vows before an SSPX priest. The other sacraments (Baptism, Confirmation, Holy Orders) are excluded from this list. The reception of these sacraments requires the presence of four conditions:

1) *The presence of necessity or true spiritual advantage:* An example would be danger of death and no other priests is available. Another would be the recent COVID-19 lockdowns in those places where the SSPX chapels opened sooner than the Catholic parishes.

2) *Error and indifferentism must be avoided:* Error occurs when the intellect moves the will in ignorance. Indifferentism occurs when the will is moved by personal desire rather than facts. Put another way, the truth of the situation is of less importance than fulfilling an intended desire.²¹ For example, error and indifferentism manifest themselves in the position of those who claim that “true spiritual advantage” or “morally impossible” give them a right to receive the Sacraments according to the Old Rite, which the Church has never said. We have a right to the Sacraments, but not to the Sacraments according to a certain liturgy. For all the beauty and legitimacy of the Old Rite, to deny that the 1970 Missal—or any of the other Catholic Missals—fulfills the necessary spiritual goods for the faithful is to reject the Pope’s authority. As taught for centuries and confirmed by the Council of Trent and Vatican I, the Pope *does* have authority over the sacramental disciplines of the Church. If lawfully promulgated (almost two dozen have been), perceived imperfections in the Rite itself are usually subjective imperfections based on spirituality preferences.²² To reject this is to fall into heresy. This position must be avoided, especially if necessity drives one to attend or receive sacraments from priests who hold to this grave error.



Mary and Joseph seeking shelter in Bethlehem,
Bento Coelho da Silveira

3) *When it is physically or morally impossible to approach a Catholic minister:* Physical impossibility means that reasonable efforts would not result in the ability to attend the necessary sacrament. Moral impossibility can only be understood in the context of avoiding error and indifferentism. It exists when a properly informed conscience does not allow a person to receive the sacraments from a particular priest or within a particular situation. For example, a victim of sexual misconduct could invoke the moral impossibility of approaching his perpetrator in confession. When impossibility exists, the person has an obligation to use reasonable means to remove the impossibility.

All three conditions must be met for a member of the Catholic Faithful to morally and licitly receive a sacrament from an SSPX priest. It must be noted that a person does not fulfill a Mass obligation when attending Mass at an SSPX chapel and one or more of these conditions are not met. Regular, willful attendance in the absence of one or more of these conditions places one in close proximity to formal adherence to the schism. Financially supporting the SSPX increases that moral danger.

When attendance at an SSPX chapel is necessary and the three conditions are met, the Catholic must remember that the SSPX was born out of rebellion, not forced circumstances. On many occasions, the SSPX has been given the opportunity to embrace full communion with concessions that would allow it to continue under its current leadership with official recognition to its structure. On every occasion, after having made a written profession of faith and agreement, the authorities in the SSPX have reneged. These well-documented

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occurrences represent bad faith. A faithful Catholic has a moral obligation to avoid supporting the SSPX or participating beyond the sacraments allowed. Attending catechism offered by the SSPX or obtaining spiritual direction from one of its priests does not fall within the bounds of legitimate participation. Because of the doctrinal concerns associated with the SSPX, these should be strictly avoided. Any situation in which one might lawfully attend an SSPX church to receive the sacraments ceases when one or more of the conditions are removed. The faithful Catholic must then return to the Sacraments given by priests in communion with the Church.

Final Thoughts

Recently, many Catholic priests and laity have migrated to the SSPX. Whether by culpable or invincible ignorance, they have made a significant error in judgment. Undoubtedly, the horrible response to COVID-19 by most Latin Rite bishops in the western world contributed to this error in judgment. In addition, decades of liturgical innovation and spiritual decay within the Latin Church have provided fodder for the SSPX to advance false doctrines under the mask of tradition.

One particular error comes to mind. Namely, comparison of the illicit episcopal consecrations of Archbishop Lefebvre to those of His Eminence Josyf Cardinal Slipyj, the Archbishop of Lviv and the Major Archbishop of the Ukrainian Catholic Church of the Byzantine Tradition. Such a comparison is invalid. Cardinal Slipyj was the highest authority of the Ukrainian Catholic Church, had the favor of the Pope at the time he consecrated successor bishops for the Ukrainian Catholic Church, and was not subject to the 1917 or 1983 Codes of Canon Law. Finally, the tradition of Eastern Rite Canon Law excludes the use of automatic penalties, such as incurred by Archbishop Lefebvre and those he consecrated as bishops.

The invalidity of this comparison demonstrates the need for bishops and priests to challenge the errors of the SSPX and instruct the Faithful in the truth. This is particularly necessary if an SSPX chapel is located in their territories. The Faithful themselves must avoid these errors. At all times, prayer ought to be made to God for the reconciliation of the SSPX and their return to the Church, along with all similar groups, and their future entrusted to Mary, Mother of the Church and Mother of the Eucharist.

(Endnotes)

- 1 A pious union in the 1917 Code of Canon Law is known as an association of the faithful in the 1983 Code of Canon Law.
- 2 Cf. Peter John Vere (Vere), "A Canonical History of the Lefebvrite Schism." Section 1.1. as found on: <https://www.catholicculture.org/culture/library/view.cfm?recnum=1392>.
- 3 Ibid, Section 1.2.
- 4 Marcel Lefebvre, "La Déclaration du 21 novembre 1974," 21 November 1974, *Itinéraires*, n. 195, trans. in *The Collected Works of His Excellency Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre*, vol. 1, Dickinson, Texas, The Angelus Press, 1985, p.34. Quoted in: Vere, 1.2.
- 5 Apostolic Signatura Decree, 10 June 1975; as reported in: *Canon Law Digest (CLD)*, ed. James O'Connor, SJ, vol. 8, pp. 456-457; see also: Op. cit., Vere, 1.3.
- 6 <https://catholic-hierarchy.org/bishop/btissdm.html>
- 7 Ibid. p.936.
- 8 R. Panciroli, Press Conference, 1 July 1976, trans. in M. Davies, *Apologia Pro Marcel Lefebvre*, p. 215. Quoted in Vere, 1.3.
- 9 Letter of Pope St. John Paul II to Cardinal Ratzinger, 8 April 1988. As found in: *Canon Law Digest (CLD)*, Canon Law Society of America, Washington, DC, vol.12, p.798.
- 10 Chronology of Communication between Pope John Paul II and Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre, as provided by the Holy See on 16 June 1988. As found in CLD, vol.12, p.800.
- 11 Ibid. p.801
- 12 Bernardinus Card. Gantin Prefect of the Congregation for Bishops. *Decree of Excommunication*. Accessed at <https://www.ewtn.com/catholicism/library/decrees-of-excommunication-of-archbishop-lefebvre-1984>.
- 13 Congregation for Bishops, *Decree Remitting the Excommunication "Latae Sententiae" of the Bishops of the Society of St. Pius X*, 21 Jan. 2009, Accessed at: https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cbishops/documents/rc_con_cbishops_doc_20090121_remissione-scomunica_en.html.
- 14 Giovanni Battista Cardinal Re. "Decree Remitting the Excommunication "Latae Sententiae" of the Bishops of the Society of St. Pius X." Accessed at: https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cbishops/documents/rc_con_cbishops_doc_20090121_remissione-scomunica_en.html.
- 15 Pope Benedict XVI, "Letter of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI to the Bishops of the Catholic Church Concerning the Remission of the Excommunication of the Four Bishops Consecrated by Archbishop Lefebvre." Accessed at https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/letters/2009/documents/hf_ben-xvi_let_20090310_remissione-scomunica.html.
- 16 Pope Francis. Letter "To My Venerable Brother Archbishop **Rino Fisichella**, President of the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization." 1 September 2015. Accessed at <http://www.iubilaeummisericordiae.va/content/gdm/en/giubileo/lettera.html>.
- 17 Ibid.
- 18 Gerhard Card. L. Müller. Letter to Ordinaries "from the Offices of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 27 March 2017." Accessed at: <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/it/bollettino/pubblico/2017/04/04/0218/00485.html#ing>.
- 19 Source: <http://www.archbishoplefebvre.com/bishop-mayer-replacement.html>.
- 20 Op. Cit., Pope Benedict XVI, "Letter of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI to the Bishops of the Catholic Church Concerning the Remission of the Excommunication of the Four Bishops Consecrated by Archbishop Lefebvre."
- 21 These are basic principle of moral theology. For error, the ignorance may be vincible or invincible. Regardless, the will is moved by misinformation and not facts. For indifferentism, the person simply doesn't care about the facts.
- 22 Innovations and illicit celebrations are not imperfections in a Rite. Such anomalies should be challenged properly and removed swiftly. Not doing so leads to error and indifferentism.