

= Marcel Lefebvre =

Marcel François Marie Joseph Lefebvre ( French : [ ma?sʁl fʁɑ̃swa? maʁi josʁf lɛfɛvʁ ] ; 29 November 1905 ? 25 March 1991 ) was a French Roman Catholic archbishop .

Ordained a diocesan priest in 1929 , he joined the Holy Ghost Fathers for missionary work and was assigned to teach at a seminary in Gabon in 1932 .

In 1947 , he was appointed Vicar Apostolic of Dakar , Senegal , and the next year as the Apostolic Delegate for West Africa .

Upon his return to Europe he was elected Superior General of the Holy Ghost Fathers and assigned to participate in the drafting and preparation of documents for the upcoming Council announced by Pope John XXIII , and was a major leader of the conservative bloc during its proceedings . He would later take the lead in opposing certain changes within the Church associated with the Second Vatican Council .

Refusing to implement council @-@ inspired reforms demanded by its members , he resigned from the leadership of the Holy Ghost Fathers in 1968 .

In 1970 , Lefebvre founded the Society of St. Pius X ( SSPX ) as a small community of seminarians in the village of Écône , Switzerland , with the permission of Bishop François Charrière of Fribourg . In 1975 , after a flare of tensions with the Holy See , Lefebvre was ordered to disband the society , but ignored the decision .

In 1988 , against the expressed prohibition of Pope John Paul II , he consecrated four bishops to continue his work with the SSPX . The Holy See immediately declared that he and the other bishops who had participated in the ceremony had incurred automatic excommunication under Catholic canon law , a status Lefebvre refused to acknowledge to his death three years later .

In 2009 , 18 years after Lefebvre 's death , Pope Benedict XVI lifted the excommunication of the four surviving bishops at their request but not to Lefebvre , therefore his excommunication remains until today .

= = Early life and family = =

Marcel Lefebvre was born in Tourcoing , Nord . He was the second son and third child of eight children of textile factory @-@ owner René Lefebvre and Gabrielle , born Watine , who died in 1938 .

His parents were devout Catholics who brought their children to daily Mass . His father was an outspoken monarchist , devoting his life to the cause of the French Dynasty , seeing in a monarchy the only way of restoring to his country its past grandeur and a Christian revival .

Marcel 's father René had run a spy @-@ ring for British Intelligence when Tourcoing was occupied by the Germans during World War I. René would die at age 62 in 1944 in the German concentration camp at Sonnenburg ( in East Brandenburg , Germany ) , where he had been imprisoned by the Gestapo because of his work for the French Resistance and British Intelligence ; the body was never recovered .

= = Initial priesthood = =

In 1923 Lefebvre began studies for the priesthood ; at the insistence of his father he followed his brother to the French Seminary in Rome , as his father suspected the diocesan seminaries of liberal leanings . He would later credit his conservative views to the rector , a Breton priest named Father Henri Le Floch . His studies were interrupted in 1926 and 1927 when he did his military service . On 25 May 1929 he was ordained deacon by Cardinal Basilio Pompili in the Basilica of St. John Lateran in Rome . On 21 September 1929 he was ordained to the priesthood by Bishop ( soon to be Cardinal ) Achille Liénart in Lille , the diocese in which he was incardinated . After ordination , he continued his studies in Rome , completing a doctorate in theology in July 1930 .

In August 1930 Cardinal Liénart assigned Lefebvre to be assistant curate in a parish in Lomme , a suburb of Lille . Even before this , Lefebvre had already asked to be released for missionary duties

as a member of the Holy Ghost Fathers . But the cardinal insisted that he consider this for a year while he engaged in parish work in the Diocese of Lille . In July 1931 Liénart released Lefebvre from the diocese . In September Lefebvre entered the novitiate of the Holy Ghost Fathers at Orly . A year later , on 8 September 1932 , he took simple vows for a period of three years .

= = Holy Ghost Father = =

Lefebvre 's first assignment as a Holy Ghost Father was as a professor at St. John 's Seminary in Libreville , Gabon . In 1934 he was made rector of the seminary . On 28 September 1935 he made his perpetual vows . He served as superior of a number of missions of the Holy Ghost Fathers in Gabon . In October 1945 Lefebvre was ordered by the superior general to return to France and take up new duties as rector of the Holy Ghost Fathers seminary in Mortain .

= = = Bishop in Africa = = =

Lefebvre 's return to France was not to last long . On 12 June 1947 , Pope Pius XII appointed him Vicar Apostolic of Dakar in Senegal ; he received the titular episcopal see of Anthedon ( El Blakiyeh near Gaza in Palestine ) . On 18 September 1947 he was consecrated a bishop in his family 's parish church in Tourcoing by Achille Liénart ( who had previously ordained him a priest ) ; acting as co @-@ consecrators were Bishop Jean @-@ Baptiste Fauret , C.S.Sp. and Bishop Alfred @-@ Jean @-@ Félix Ancel .

In his new position Lefebvre was responsible for an area with a population of three and a half million people , of whom only 50 @,@ 000 were Catholics .

On 22 September 1948 , Lefebvre , while continuing as Vicar Apostolic of Dakar , received additional responsibilities : Pope Pius XII appointed him Apostolic Delegate to French Africa . In this capacity he was the papal representative to the Church authorities in 46 dioceses " in continental and insular Africa subject to the French Government , with the addition of the Diocese of Reunion , the whole of the island of Madagascar and the other neighbouring islands under French rule , but excluding the dioceses of North Africa , namely those of Carthage , Constantine , Algiers and Oran . " With this new responsibility he was appointed Archbishop of the titular see of Arcadiopolis in Europa .

As Apostolic Delegate , Lefebvre 's chief duty was the building up of the ecclesiastical structure in French Africa . Pope Pius XII wanted to move quickly towards a proper hierarchy ( with bishops instead of vicariates and apostolic prefectures ) . Lefebvre was responsible for selecting these new bishops , increasing the number of priests and religious sisters , as well as the number of churches in the various dioceses .

On 14 September 1955 , the Apostolic Vicariate of Dakar became an archdiocese , and Lefebvre thus became the first Metropolitan Archbishop of Dakar . Archbishop Lefebvre was the first and foremost advisor to Pius XII during the writing of the encyclical Fidei Donum ( 1957 ) , which instructed the clergy and laity on the missions in the Third World countries and called for more missionaries .

In 1958 Pope Pius XII died and was succeeded by Pope John XXIII , who , in 1959 , after giving Lefebvre the choice between remaining either as Apostolic Delegate or as Archbishop of Dakar , appointed another to the post of Apostolic Delegate for French Africa . Lefebvre continued as Archbishop of Dakar until 23 January 1962 , when he was transferred to the diocese of Tulle in France , retaining his personal title of archbishop .

= = Second Vatican Council = =

In 1960 , Pope John XXIII appointed Lefebvre to the Central Preparatory Commission for the Second Vatican Council . Lefebvre took part in the discussions about the draft documents to be submitted to the bishops for consideration at the Council .

= = = Superior General of the Holy Ghost Fathers = = =

On 26 July 1962 the Chapter General of the Holy Ghost Fathers elected Lefebvre as the Superior General . Lefebvre was widely respected for his experience in the mission field . On the other hand , certain progressive members of his congregation , particularly in France , considered his administrative style authoritarian and desired radical reforms . On 7 August 1962 Lefebvre was given the titular archiepiscopal see of Synnada in Phrygia .

= = = Coetus Internationalis Patrum = = =

As a member of the Central Preparatory Commission the Archbishop worked for several years upon the draft documents which the Council Fathers were to discuss , a total of seventy @-@ two preparatory schemas .

Within the first two weeks of the first session of the Council ( October to December 1962 ) all seventy @-@ two of the preparatory schemas had been rejected from consideration . The council rules had stipulated a necessary two @-@ thirds supermajority to reject the schemas . Although only 60 % had voted against the schemas , they were regardless discarded at the intervention of Pope John XXIII , upon the request of the liberal Council Fathers .

Lefebvre became concerned about the direction the Council 's deliberations were taking , taking a leading part in a study group of bishops at the Council which became known as the Coetus Internationalis Patrum ( International Group of Fathers ) , with other traditional @-@ leaning bishops Antônio de Castro Mayer , Bishop of Campos and Geraldo de Proença Sigaud , Archbishop of Diamantina .

A major area of concern at the Council was the debate about the principle of religious liberty . During the Council 's third session ( September to November 1964 ) Archbishop Pericle Felici announced that Lefebvre , with two other like @-@ minded bishops , was appointed to a special four @-@ member commission charged with rewriting the draft document on the topic , but it was soon discovered that this measure did not have papal approval , and major responsibility for preparing the draft document was given to the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity . Instead of the draft entitled " On Religious Liberty " , Lefebvre and Cardinal Alfredo Ottaviani had supported instead a text dealing with " Relations between the Church and State , and religious tolerance . "

The Coetus Internationalis Patrum did , however , manage to get the preliminary vote ( with suggestions for modifications ) on the document put off until the fourth session of the Council , but were unable to prevent the adoption , on 7 December 1965 , of the final text of the declaration Dignitatis humanae by the overwhelming majority of the Council . The expressed view of some that this overwhelming majority was only due to intense lobbying by the reformist wing of Council Fathers among those prelates who initially had reservations or even objections , however , is not accepted by all observers . Lefebvre was one of those who voted against the declaration , but he was one of those who added their signature to the document , after that of the Pope , though not all present did sign . Lefebvre later declared that the sheet of paper that he signed and that was " passed from hand to hand among the Fathers of the Council and upon which everyone placed his signature , had no meaning of a vote for or against , but signified simply our presence at the meeting to vote for four documents . " However , the paper on which his signature appears , and which was not " the relatively unimportant attendance sheet which Lefebvre recalled in his interview " , bears " the title Declaratio de Libertate Religiosa ( along with the titles of three other documents ) at the top , " and " ( t ) he fathers were informed that if they wished to sign one or more documents , but not all of them , they could make a marginal annotation beside their name , specifying which documents they did or did not wish to sign . No such annotation is found beside the names of either Lefebvre or de Castro Mayer , which proves that they were prepared to share in the official promulgation of that Declaration on Religious Liberty which they later publicly rejected . "

= = = Padre Pio and Marcel Lefebvre = = =

In April 1967 , three years before founding the SSPX , Archbishop Lefebvre ( left ) briefly met the Italian saint and mystic Padre Pio of Pietrelcina to ask his blessing on a forthcoming general chapter of the Holy Ghost Fathers .

Pascal Cataneo , a priest claiming to be an associate of Padre Pio , claimed in the book " Padre Pio Gleanings " that the saint had prophesied about Abp . Lefebvre . He wrote :

" Padre Pio looked at Lefebvre very sternly and said : " Never cause discord among your brothers and always practise the rule of obedience ; above all when it seems to you that the errors of those in authority are all the more serious . There is no other road than that of obedience , especially for those of us who have made this vow . " ... It seems Archbishop Lefebvre did not see things in quite the same way even if he did respond to Padre Pio with : " I will remember that , Father . " Padre Pio looked at him intensely and , seeing what would soon happen , said : " No ! You will forget it ! You will tear apart the community of faithful , oppose the will of your superiors and even go against the orders of the pope himself and this will happen quite soon ... "

However , Lefebvre dismissed the allegation as a " slander , a fabrication " , giving his own account of the event , as well as photographic evidence backing his counter @-@ claim :

" The meeting which took place after Easter in 1967 lasted two minutes ? I told him in a few words the purpose of my visit : for him to bless the Congregation of the Holy Ghost which was due to hold an extraordinary General Chapter meeting ? Then Padre Pio cried out . ' Me , bless an archbishop , no , no , it is you who should be blessing me ! ' And he bowed , to receive the blessing . I blessed him , he kissed my ring and continued on his way to the confessional ... That was the whole of the meeting , no more , no less ... "

Author Griff Ruby pointed out that Padre Pio had no known associate or acquaintance by the name " Pascal Cataneo " .

= = = Resignation from the Holy Ghost Fathers = = =

Lefebvre was increasingly criticized by influential members of his large religious congregation who considered him to be out @-@ of @-@ step with modern Church leaders and the demand of the bishops ' conferences , particularly in France , for modernization and reforms . An Extraordinary General Chapter of the Holy Ghost Fathers was convened in Rome in September 1968 to debate the direction of the congregation after the changes of the Second Vatican Council . The first action of the chapter was to name several moderators to lead the chapter 's sessions instead of Lefebvre . Lefebvre then handed in his resignation as Superior General to Pope Paul VI . He would later say that it had become impossible for him to remain superior of an institute that no longer wanted or listened to him .

= = Theological and political positions = =

= = = Background = = =

Lefebvre belonged to an identifiable strand of right @-@ wing political and religious opinion in French society that originated among the defeated royalists after the 1789 French Revolution . Lefebvre 's political and theological outlook mirrored that of a significant number of conservative members of French society under the French Third Republic ( 1870 ? 1940 ) . The Third Republic was reft by conflicts between the secular Left and the Catholic Right , with many individuals on both sides espousing distinctly radical positions ( see , for example , the article on the famous Dreyfus affair ) . Thus it has been said that " Lefebvre was ... a man formed by the bitter hatreds that defined the battle lines in French society and culture from the French Revolution to the Vichy regime " .

Lefebvre 's first biographer , the English traditionalist writer Michael Davies , wrote in the first volume of his *Apologia Pro Marcel Lefebvre* :

In France political feeling tends to be more polarized , more extreme , and far more deeply felt than in England . It can only be understood in the light of the French Revolution and subsequent history

... At the risk of a serious over @-@ simplification , it is reasonable to state that up to the Second World War Catholicism in France tended to be identified with right @-@ wing politics and anti @-@ Catholicism with the left ... [ Lefebvre 's ] own alleged right @-@ wing political philosophy is nothing more than straight @-@ forward Catholic social teaching as expounded by the Popes for a century or more ...

In similar vein , the pro @-@ SSPX English priest Fr . Michael Crowdy wrote , in his preface to his translation of Lefebvre 's Open Letter to Confused Catholics :

We must remember that Lefebvre is writing against the background of France , where ideas are generally more clear cut than they are in Great Britain .... Take the word " socialism , " for example ; that means to some of us , first and foremost , a social ideal of brotherhood and justice . We have had our Christian socialists . On the Continent , however , Socialism is uncompromisingly anti ? religious , or almost a substitute for religion , and Communism is seen as the natural development from it . This is the Socialism the Archbishop is writing about . And when he rejects Liberalism , he is not thinking of the [ British ] Liberal Party ... but of that religious liberalism that exalts human liberty above the claims of God or of His Church ...

= = = Theological positions = = =

Lefebvre was associated with the following positions :

The rejection of ecumenism in favor of Catholic exclusivism ;

The espousal of pragmatic religious tolerance instead of the principle of religious liberty ;

The rejection of collegiality within the Church in favor of strict Papal supremacy ;

Opposition to the replacement of the Tridentine Mass with the Mass of Paul VI .

Lefebvre , however , forbade the members of his society from questioning the validity of the reigning Popes , only the prudence of their decisions , referring to Sedevacantist ideology as " imprudent " .

= = = Political positions = = =

Political positions espoused by Lefebvre included the following :

Condemnation of the 1789 French Revolution and what he called its " Masonic and anti @-@ Catholic principles " .

Support for the " Catholic order " of the authoritarian French Vichy government ( 1940 ? 1944 ) of Marshal Philippe Pétain .

Support for authoritarian governments . In 1985 , he spoke approvingly of the governments of Francisco Franco of Spain and António Salazar of Portugal , noting that their neutrality in World War II had spared their peoples the suffering of the war .

Support for the French nationalist leader Jean @-@ Marie Le Pen . In 1985 , the French periodical *Présent* quoted Lefebvre as endorsing Le Pen on the grounds that he was the only leading French politician who was clearly opposed to abortion .

Opposition to Muslim immigration into Europe . In 1990 , Lefebvre was convicted in a French court and sentenced to pay a fine of 5 @,@ 000 francs when he stated in this connection that " it is your wives , your daughters , your children who will be kidnapped and dragged off to a certain kind of places [ sic ] as they exist in Casablanca " .

= = Society of Saint Pius X = =

= = = Lawful formation = = =

After retiring from the post of Superior General of the Holy Ghost Fathers , Lefebvre was approached by traditionalists from the French Seminary in Rome who had been refused tonsure , the rite by which , until 1973 , a seminarian became a cleric . They asked for a conservative

seminary to complete their studies . After directing them to the University of Fribourg , Switzerland , Lefebvre was urged to teach these seminarians personally . In 1969 , he received permission from the local bishop to establish a seminary in Fribourg which opened with nine students , moving to Écône , Switzerland in 1971 .

Lefebvre proposed to his seminarians the establishment of a society of priests without vows . In November 1970 , Bishop François Charrière of Fribourg established , on a provisional ( *ad experimentum* ) basis for six years , the International Priestly Society of Saint Pius X ( SSPX ) as a " pious union " .

= = = Initial attempts at suppression = = =

In November 1972 , the bishops of France , gathered as the Plenary Assembly of French Bishops at Lourdes , whose theological outlook was quite different from Lefebvre 's , treated the then @-@ legal Écône seminary with suspicion and referred to it as *Séminaire sauvage* or " Outlaw Seminary " . They indicated that they would incardinate none of the seminarians . Cardinal Secretary of State Cardinal Villot accused Lefebvre before Pope Paul VI of making his seminarians sign a condemnation of the Pope , which Lefebvre vigorously denied .

= = = Apostolic Visitors = = =

In November 1974 , two Belgian priests carried out a rigorous inspection on the instructions of a commission of cardinals , producing , it was said , a favourable report . However , while at Écône , they expressed a number of theological opinions , such as that ordination of married men will soon be a normal thing , that truth changed with the times , and the traditional conception of the Resurrection of Our Lord were open to discussion , which the seminarians and staff objected to as scandalous . In what he later described as a mood of " doubtlessly excessive indignation " , Lefebvre wrote a " Declaration " in which he strongly attacked the modernist and liberal trends that he saw as apparent in the reforms being undertaken within the Church at that time .

" We adhere with all our heart and all our soul to Catholic Rome , guardian of the Catholic Faith and the traditions necessary to maintain it , and to Eternal Rome , mistress of wisdom and truth . On the other hand we refuse and have always refused to follow the Rome of the neo @-@ Modernist and the new Protestant trend which was clearly evident in the Second Vatican Council and , after the Council in all the reforms which flowed from it . "

The Commission of Cardinals declared in reply that the declaration was " unacceptable on all points " .

In January 1975 the new Bishop of Fribourg , Mgr . Pierre Mamie , stated his wish to withdraw the SSPX 's pious union status .

On 13 February , Lefebvre then was invited to Rome for a meeting with the commission of Cardinals , which he described as " a close cross examination of the judicial type " , regarding the contents of his " Declaration " , followed by a second on 3 March . In May , the commission issued a notification that it had decided to grant approval to the Mgr . Mamie to carry out his intentions , with Lefebvre arguing that according to Canon 493 of the 1917 Code of Canon Law , only the Pope , which he interpreted to mean a direct decree from the Pope rather than mere retroactive approbation , could suppress a religious congregation .

The Bishop put his intention into effect on 6 May 1975 , thereby officially dissolving the Society . This action was subsequently upheld by Pope Paul VI , who wrote to Archbishop Lefebvre in June 1975 . Lefebvre continued his work regardless because " having taken legal advice from competent canon lawyers who advised him that , despite the letter from Pope Paul dated 29 June 1975 , the entire legal process taken against the Fraternity had been so irregular that it could not be considered as having been legally suppressed . The Archbishop was further advised that , as the Vatican had permitted priests to be incardinated directly into the Fraternity on three separate occasions , it could be considered that the privilege of incardinating priests directly into the Fraternity now existed . " Lefebvre also argued that there were insufficient grounds for suppression as the

Apostolic Visitors , by the Commission 's own admission , delivered a positive report , and that since his Declaration had not been condemned by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith ( CDF , formerly known as the Holy Office , or Inquisition ) , he appealed , twice , to the appellate court of the Church , the Apostolic Signatura . Cardinal Villot blocked the move , reportedly threatening the Prefect of the Apostolic Signatura Cardinal Staffa with dismissal if the appeals were not struck out .

In May 1977 , Mamie warned Marcel Lefebvre that saying a Mass in the Tridentine Rite could be a break with orthodox Catholicism .

= = = Clash with the Vatican = = =

In the consistory of 24 May 1976 , Pope Paul VI criticized Archbishop Lefebvre by name and appealed to him and his followers to change their minds .

On 29 June 1976 , Lefebvre went ahead with planned priestly ordinations without the approval of the local Bishop and despite receiving letters from Rome forbidding them . As a result Lefebvre was suspended a collatione ordinum , i.e. , forbidden to ordain any priests . A week later , the Prefect of the Congregation for Bishops informed him that , to have his situation regularized , he needed to ask the Pope 's pardon . Lefebvre responded with a letter claiming that the modernisation of the Church was a " compromise with the ideas of modern man " originating in a secret agreement between high dignitaries in the Church and senior Freemasons prior to the Council . Lefebvre was then notified that , since he had not apologised to the Pope , he was suspended a divinis , i.e. , he could no longer legally administer any of the sacraments . Lefebvre remarked that he had been forbidden from celebrating the new rite of Mass . Pope Paul VI apparently took this seriously and stated that Lefebvre " thought he dodged the penalty by administering the sacraments using the previous formulas . " In spite of his suspension , Lefebvre continued to pray Mass and to administer the other Sacraments , including the conferral of Holy Orders to the students of his seminary .

Pope Paul VI received Lefebvre in audience on 11 September 1976 , and one month later wrote to him admonishing him and , repeating the appeal he had made at the audience . Pope John Paul II received Lefebvre in audience sixty days after his 1978 election , again without reaching agreement .

= = Ecône consecrations = =

In a 1987 sermon Lefebvre , at age 81 , experiencing failing health , announced his intention to consecrate a bishop to carry on his work after his death . This was controversial because , under Catholic canon law , the consecration of a bishop requires the permission of the Pope .

On 5 May 1988 , Lefebvre signed an agreement with Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger ( the future Pope Benedict XVI ) , who was then Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith , to regularize the situation of the Society of St Pius X. The cardinal agreed that one bishop would be consecrated for the society .

= = = " Operation Survival " = = =

Shortly after , however , Lefebvre announced that he had received a note from Cardinal Ratzinger in which he " was asked to beg pardon for [ his ] errors " and thereupon decided that he was obliged both to reject the arrangement he had agreed to and to consecrate a successor ? if necessary , without papal approval . As Cardinal Ratzinger did not specify a date for the episcopal consecration , should he have died before the consecration was granted , the Society would be unable to ordain any seminarians and thus forced into capitulation with the Holy See . He dubbed his plan " Operation Survival " .

" 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 of Cardinal Ratzinger , President of the Roman

Commission , which would have directed us ; we were putting ourselves into his hands , and consequently putting ourselves into 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 . "

The Pope appealed to him not to proceed in " a schismatic act " , warning of " theological and canonical consequences " .

On 30 June 1988 , Archbishop Lefebvre , with Bishop Emeritus Antônio de Castro Mayer of Campos , Brazil , as co @-@ consecrator , consecrated four SSPX priests as bishops : Bernard Tissier de Mallerais , Richard Williamson , Alfonso de Galarreta and Bernard Fellay .

Shortly before the consecrations , Lefebvre gave the following sermon :

" ... this ceremony , which is apparently done against the will of Rome , is in no way a schism . We are not schismatics ! If an excommunication was pronounced against the bishops of China , who separated themselves from Rome and put themselves under the Chinese government , one very easily understands why Pope Pius XII excommunicated them . There is no question of us separating ourselves from Rome , nor of putting ourselves under a foreign government , nor of establishing a sort of parallel church as the Bishops of Palmar de Troya have done in Spain . They have even elected a pope , formed a college of cardinals ... It is out of the question for us to do such things . Far from us be this miserable thought to separate ourselves from Rome ! "

The next day , 1 July , the Congregation for Bishops issued a decree stating that this was a schismatic act and that all six people directly involved had thereby incurred automatic excommunication .

= = = Aftermath = = =

On 2 July , Pope John Paul II condemned the consecration in his apostolic letter *Ecclesia Dei* , in which he stated that the consecration constituted a schismatic act and that by virtue of Canon 1382 of the Code of Canon Law , the bishops and priests involved were automatically excommunicated .

Lefebvre declared that he and the other clerics involved had not " separated themselves from Rome " and were therefore not schismatic . He invoked canon 1323 of the 1983 Code of Canon law that they " found themselves in a case of necessity " , not having succeeded , as they said , in making " Rome " understand that " this change which has occurred in the Church " since the Second Vatican Council was " not Catholic " . In a letter addressed to the four priests he was about to consecrate as bishops , Lefebvre wrote : " I do not think one can say that Rome has not lost the Faith . "

On July 18 , twelve priests and a some seminarians , led by Father Josef Bisig left the SSPX due to the Ecône Consecrations . Father Josef Bisig became the first superior general of the newly formed Priestly Fraternity of St. Peter , coming to a compromise with and placing themselves under the Holy See .

= = Death = =

Lefebvre died on 25 March 1991 at the age of 85 from cancer in Martigny , Switzerland , less than three years after being excommunicated for carrying out the episcopal consecrations . Eight days later he was buried in the crypt at the society 's international seminary in Écône , Switzerland . Archbishop Edoardo Roveda , Apostolic Nuncio to Switzerland , and Bishop Henri Schwery of Sion , the local diocese , came and prayed at the body of the dead prelate . Later that year , on 18 September 1991 , Cardinal Silvio Oddi , who had been Prefect of the Congregation for the Clergy from 1979 to 1986 , visited Lefebvre 's tomb , knelt down at it and prayed , afterwards saying aloud : " Merci , Monseigneur " . Thereafter Cardinal Oddi said he held Lefebvre to have been " a holy man " and suggested that the Society of St Pius X could be granted a personal prelature by the Holy See like that of Opus Dei . In January 1992 , the then @-@ superior general of the society , Fr . Franz Schmidberger , rejected this hypothetical offer by an unpublished private letter to the Holy See . The letter 's content was described by Bishop Richard Williamson ( subsequently expelled from the SSPX ) as basically saying that , " as long as Rome remains Conciliar , a fruitful and open collaboration between the two [ the SSPX and the Holy See ] does not seem possible . "



= = = Lifting of excommunications = = =

In 2009 , at the request of the four surviving bishops , Pope Benedict XVI lifted their excommunications .

The episcopal lineage originated by the 1988 consecrations amounts to 8 bishops as of 2016 , out of whom 7 are alive :

Bp Alfonso Ruiz de Galarreta

Bp Licinio Rangel ( ordained by Bp Bernard Tissier de Mallerais - plus Bp Alfonso Ruiz de Galarreta operating as a consecrator )

Bp Bernard Fellay

Bp Bernard Tissier de Mallerais

Bp Licinio Rangel ( + )

Bp Fernando Arêas Rifan ( ordained by Cal Dario Castrillon Hoyos - plus Bp Licinio Rangel operating as a consecrator )

Bp Richard Nelson Williamson

Bp Licinio Rangel ( ordained by Bp Bernard Tissier de Mallerais - plus Bp Richard Nelson Williamson operating as a consecrator )

Bp Jean @-@ Michel Faure

Bp Dom Tomás de Aquino Ferreira da Costa ( ordained Bp Richard Nelson Williamson - plus Bp Jean @-@ Michel Faure operating as a consecrator )

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