

THE PROBLEMS WITH *ECCLESIA DEI*

Back in July 1988, in his Apostolic Letter *Ecclesia Dei*, Pope John Paul II condemned, or purported to condemn, as schismatic, the act of Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre in consecrating, without a papal mandate, four priests of his *Society of St Pius X* as bishops on the June 30th prior. For the reader's convenience, a copy of the Apostolic Letter is set out in the Appendix.

In n. 4 Pope John Paul said, as may be seen,—

“[t]he *root* of this schismatic act can be discerned in an incomplete and contradictory notion of Tradition. Incomplete, because it does not take sufficiently into account the *living* character of Tradition.”

In support of this proposition, he cited the ‘Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation’ *Dei Verbum* n. 8 of the Vatican synod conducted between 1962 and 1965 tagged by his predecessors, John XXIII and Paul VI, a ‘Second Vatican Council’. This provision runs:

‘The Tradition that comes from the apostles progresses in the Church with the help of the Holy Spirit. There is a growth in insight into the realities and words that are being passed on. This comes about in various ways. It comes through the contemplation and study of believers who ponder these things in their hearts. It comes from the intimate sense of spiritual realities which they experience. And it comes from the preaching of those who have received, along with their right of succession in the episcopate, the sure charism of truth.’

This provision misstated the Catholic Church's teaching comprehensively.

The Church's apostolic tradition, which concluded with the death of the last Apostle, St John, was defined on April 24th, 1870, by the Fathers of the *Vatican Council* in *Dei Filius*, its *Dogmatic Constitution on the Catholic Faith*, citing the proceedings of Session IV of the *Council of Trent* identifying the sources of divine revelation, as follows—

“[T]his supernatural revelation, according to the faith of the universal Church, as declared by the holy synod of Trent, is contained ‘in the written books and in the unwritten traditions which have been received by the apostles from the mouth of Christ Himself, or through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, have been handed down by the Apostles themselves, and have thus come to us.’” [Dz. 1787]

Later, addressing the interplay between faith and reason, the *Vatican Council* taught this:

“For, the doctrine of faith which God revealed has not been handed down as a philosophic invention to the human mind to be perfected, but has been entrusted as a divine deposit... to be faithfully guarded and infallibly interpreted. Hence, also, that understanding of its sacred dogmas must be perpetually retained which Holy Mother Church has once declared; and there must never be recession from that meaning under the specious name of a deeper understanding ‘Therefore... let the understanding, the knowledge, and wisdom of individuals as of all, of one as of the whole Church, grow and progress strongly with the passage of the ages and the centuries; but in its own genus alone, namely in the same teaching, with the same sense and same understanding (*eodem sensu, eademque sententia*; St Vincent of Lerins, *Commonitorium*, 23, 3).” [Dz. 1800]

Since it is false to assert that apostolic tradition ‘progresses’ in the Church, false to assert that tradition is ‘something living’, whatever ‘Church’ on whose behalf Pope John Paul II thought he was speaking in *Ecclesia Dei*, it could not have been the Catholic Church. This is confirmed by what the Pope had to say in the following paragraph:

“[T]he extent and depth of the teaching of the Second Vatican Council call for a renewed commitment to deeper study in order to reveal clearly the Council's continuity with tradition, especially in points of doctrine which, perhaps because they are new, have not yet been well understood by some sections of the Church.”

The attitude displayed here is contradicted specifically by the *Vatican Council in Pastor Aeternus*, the *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, July 18th, 1870, where it defined this proposition:

“The Holy Spirit was not promised to the successors of Peter that by His revelation they might disclose new doctrine, but that by His help they might guard sacredly the revelation transmitted through the Apostles and the deposit of faith, and might faithfully set it forth.” [Dz. 1836]

Since Pope John Paul’s statement was in breach of Catholic teaching as to the limits of the competence of his office, it was therefore erroneous. It was erroneous, also, *in asserting as true*, things which were false namely, (i) that there may be new points of Church doctrine, and (ii) that ‘the Second Vatican Council’ was continuous with (and therefore consistent with) apostolic tradition. The extract from *Dei Verbum* n. 8 proved—if nothing else was available (!)—that that ‘Council’ was *not* part of the Church’s apostolic tradition.

These statements also confirmed that, notwithstanding his claim to be speaking for the Catholic Church, in fact he was speaking for another ‘Church’.

Let us go back to n. 3 of the document. The Pope said there:

“[T]his act... of disobedience to the Roman Pontiff (in ordaining the four priests, bishops)... constitutes a *schismatic* act.”

This claim raised two issues for consideration. First, the canon law penalty for disobeying a specific direction given by a pope; and second, whether such act of disobedience would have constituted an act of schism.

1. At no time in the history of the Church, prior to events in China in 1951, had the illicit consecration of a bishop been visited with the penalty of excommunication. The appropriate penalty was suspension (cf. for example, 1917 *CIC* can. 2370). The reason is obvious. Someone who fails to comply with a law of the Church, whether with or without a specific papal order directing compliance, is not necessarily rejecting the Pope’s authority completely. Hence, the imposition of a penalty of excommunication for doing so is *prima facie* grossly excessive.

In August 1951 a directive of the Holy Office ordered by Pope Pius XII addressed a specific case that occurred under the new Communist regime in China where, because it involved explicit rejection of papal authority, excommunication was an appropriate penalty. In 1976 Pope Paul VI faced something similar with the illegal consecration by Archbishop Ngo Dinh Thuc of bishops in El Palmar de Troya in Spain which, subsequent events demonstrated, entirely justified the imposition of a penalty of excommunication. Consecrators and consecrated rejected the papal authority. The revisers of the Code of Canon Law, influenced no doubt by these recent historical events, saw fit to include a provision in stronger terms than that in the 1917 *Code*. This became Canon 1382 of the 1983 *Code*.

2. The delict (offence) of *schism* demands the penalty of excommunication because the schismatic *cuts himself away from* the Church; he rejects the Pope’s authority absolutely. (*Schism* is a sin against charity; *heresy*, in contrast, a sin against faith—*Summa Theologiae* II-II, q. 39, a. 1, ad 3). The delict of *schism* cannot be committed by a person simply refusing one of the Pope’s commands, for a bishop, priest, religious or member of the laity, *might be entirely justified in doing so* (cf. *Summa Theologiae* II-II, q. 104, a. 5), while continuing to accept the Pope’s authority generally. In elevating an act of apparent disobedience to the level of *schism*, the Pope, as the

author of the Apostolic Letter, revealed himself as *objectively* dishonest.¹ Moreover, since there was no provision in the 1983 *Code* that rendered such a consecration a schismatic act, the document also showed the Pope did not consider himself bound by the law!

A number of qualified Catholic commentators have expressed their concerns over these errors, errors likely to be reprised after July 1st, 2026 when the two bishops of *the Society*, Bernard Fellay and Alfonso De Galarreta, will consecrate a further four of priests as bishops to secure the *Society's* future against the modernist imposition. Among these commentators is Bishop Athanasius Schneider who wrote recently:

“The law that episcopal consecrations carried out without papal authorization—or contrary to the Pope’s expressed will—constitute a schismatic act, was foreign to the era of the Church Fathers. Indeed, this law only came into force in the second millennium. Canon 1387 of the 1983 *Code of Canon Law*, which prohibits the consecration of a bishop without a pontifical mandate, is classified among the “Offenses against the Sacraments”, rather than among the “Offenses against the Faith and Unity of the Church”, where schism is penalized (can. 1364). Were episcopal consecration without a pontifical mandate intrinsically schismatic, it would be located among offenses “against Unity of the Church”. The corresponding canon in the 1917 *Code* was likewise included among the “Delicts in the Administration and Reception of Orders and other Sacraments” (Title XVI), rather than among the “Delicts against the Faith and Unity of the Church” (Title XI).”²

The formal lifting in January 2009 by Pope Benedict XVI of “the excommunications” imposed by John Paul II, restored, in some measure, the injustice that had resulted from the publication of *Ecclesia Dei*, though the new Pope persisted in denying that the *Society* had canonical status in the Church. As to the grounds alleged in *Ecclesia Dei*, it is noteworthy that, in his explanatory letter of March 10th following, Benedict resiled from his predecessor’s allegation that Archbishop Lefebvre and his co-consecrators, and the bishops consecrated, were guilty of schism, when he did no more than say that an episcopal ordination lacking a pontifical mandate “raises the danger of schism”. It is hard to believe that the former head of the *Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith* had had no hand in drafting *Ecclesia Dei*, so this concession marked a change of heart, if not a belated admission of the injustice for which John Paul II was responsible.

So, what ‘Church’ was it that Pope John Paul II served by his Apostolic Letter? It is clear from its text that he thought he was serving the Catholic Church: he was, after all, Christ’s Vicar. But in reality, he was serving the Church’s counterfeit, the entity invented willy-nilly by the popes and bishops responsible for the Vatican synod as they strove to reinvent the Catholic Church along humanist lines. And the name of this counterfeit? Pope Paul VI called it *the Conciliar Church*; Pope John Paul called it *the Church of the New Advent*. But it is best identified (from its deplorable source) as *the Church of Vatican II*.

The reality is that, since 1965, this counterfeit ‘Church’ has not only coexisted with Christ’s Church in the Vatican, but has dominated their inter-relationship. Moreover, each of the popes, and the bishops throughout the world, have exercised since then not just the powers of their

¹ Let the reader understand the importance of the distinction between objective and subjective. Consistent with the position the Catholic Church has ever held, she does not consider the internal workings of the soul, *even the soul of a pope*. *De internis, Ecclesia non iudicat*.

² *The Core Question Regarding The Society Of Saint Pius X*, June 4th, 2026, at <https://rorate-caeli.blogspot.com/2026/06/truth-core-question-regarding-sspx-by.html#more>

office, as pope, as bishop, but powers provided by this human, and diabolical, entity. Each of them has conducted himself on the basis that he has always acted as pope, as bishop, when most of the time he has acted as an agent of this vicious entity.

No man can serve two masters, Our Lord said, for he will either love the one and hate the other, or conversely. The chaos sowed by Popes John XXIII and Paul VI through the Vatican synod under the devil's influence, nurtured by each of their successors down to the present incumbent, has produced fruit appropriate to its cause, utter confusion. Of course, there is confusion. The devil thrives on it; he sows it wherever he can!

Back in 1974 Archbishop Lefebvre identified the process the devil would use in his endeavour to impose the heterodoxy spread abroad by the Vatican synod.

“Satan's master stroke, by which he is bringing about the auto-destruction of the Church, is... to use obedience in order to destroy the Faith: [to set] authority against Truth.”³

It is his assertion of authority over the faithful, to which Pope Leo will appeal as he moves to stifle—as if it were possible(!)—the fifty year struggle the *Society of St Pius X* has maintained against the modernist subversion of the Catholic faithful entrenched by the so-called ‘Second Vatican Council’.

Michael Baker

June 21st, 2026—*Fourth Sunday after Pentecost*

APPENDIX

APOSTOLIC LETTER "ECCLESIA DEI OF THE SUPREME PONTIFF JOHN PAUL II GIVEN MOTU PROPRIO

1. With great affliction the Church has learned of the unlawful episcopal ordination conferred on 30 June last by Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre, which has frustrated all the efforts made during the previous years to ensure the full communion with the Church of the Priestly Fraternity of St. Pius X founded by the same Mons. Lefebvre. These efforts, especially intense during recent months, in which the Apostolic See has shown comprehension to the limits of the possible, were all to no avail. (1)

2. This affliction was particularly felt by the Successor Peter to whom in the first place pertains the guardianship of the unity of the Church, (2) even though the number of persons directly involved in these events might be few. For every person is loved by God on his own account and has been redeemed by the blood of Christ shed on the Cross for the salvation of all.

The particular circumstances, both objective and subjective in which Archbishop Lefebvre acted, provide everyone with an occasion for profound reflection and for a renewed pledge of fidelity to Christ and to his Church.

3. In itself, this act 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. (3) In performing such an act, notwithstanding the formal *canonical warning* sent to them by the Cardinal Prefect of the Congregation for Bishops on 17 June

³ On October 13th, 1974, anniversary of Our Blessed Lady's final appearance at Fatima, in a written work entitled 'Satan's Masterstroke'.

last, Mons. 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. (4)

4. The *root* of this schismatic act can be discerned in an incomplete and contradictory notion of Tradition. Incomplete, because it does not take sufficiently into account the *living* character of Tradition, which, as the Second Vatican Council clearly taught, "comes from the apostles and progresses in the Church with the help of the Holy Spirit. There is a growth in insight into the realities and words that are being passed on. This comes about in various ways. It comes through the contemplation and study of believers who ponder these things in their hearts. It comes from the intimate sense of spiritual realities which they experience. And it comes from the preaching of those who have received, along with their right of succession in the episcopate, the sure charism of truth". (5)

But especially contradictory is a notion of Tradition which opposes the universal Magisterium of the Church possessed by the Bishop of Rome and the Body of Bishops. It is impossible to remain faithful to the Tradition while breaking the ecclesial bond with him to whom, in the person of the Apostle Peter, Christ himself entrusted the ministry of unity in his Church. (6)

5. Faced with the situation that has arisen, I deem it my duty to inform all the Catholic faithful of some aspects which this sad event has highlighted.

a) The outcome of the movement promoted by Mons. Lefebvre can and must be, for all the Catholic faithful, a motive for sincere reflection concerning their own fidelity to the Church's Tradition, authentically interpreted by the ecclesiastical Magisterium, ordinary and extraordinary, especially in the Ecumenical Councils from Nicaea to Vatican II. 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.

To the bishops especially it pertains, by reason of their pastoral mission, to exercise the important duty of a clear-sighted vigilance full of charity and firmness, so that this fidelity may be everywhere safeguarded. (7)

However, it is necessary that all the Pastors and the other faithful have a new awareness, not only of the lawfulness but also of the richness for the Church of a diversity of charisms, traditions of spirituality and apostolate, which also constitutes the beauty of unity in variety: of that blended "harmony" which the earthly Church raises up to Heaven under the impulse of the Holy Spirit.

b) Moreover, I should like to remind theologians and other experts in the ecclesiastical sciences that they should feel themselves called upon to answer in the present circumstances. Indeed, the extent and depth of the teaching of the Second Vatican Council call for a renewed commitment to deeper study in order to reveal clearly the Council's continuity with Tradition, especially in points of doctrine which, perhaps because they are new, have not yet been well understood by some sections of the Church.

c) 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 fulfil 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 offence against God and carries the penalty of excommunication decreed by the Church's law. (8)

To all those Catholic faithful who feel attached to some previous liturgical and disciplinary forms of the Latin tradition I wish to manifest my will to facilitate their ecclesial communion by means of the necessary measures to guarantee respect for their rightful aspirations. In this matter I ask for the support of the bishops and of all those engaged in the pastoral ministry in the Church.

6. Taking account of the importance and complexity of the problems referred to in this document, by virtue of my Apostolic Authority I decree the following:

- a. a *Commission* is instituted whose task it will be to collaborate with the bishops, with the Departments of the Roman Curia and with the circles concerned, for the purpose of facilitating full ecclesial communion of priests, seminarians, religious communities or individuals until now linked in various ways to the Fraternity founded by Mons. Lefebvre, who may wish to remain united to the Successor Peter in the Catholic Church, while preserving their spiritual and liturgical traditions, in the light of the Protocol signed on 5 May last by Cardinal Ratzinger and Mons. Lefebvre;
- b. this Commission is composed of a Cardinal President and other members of the Roman Curia, in a number that will be deemed opportune according to circumstances;
- c. moreover, respect must everywhere be shown for the feelings of all those who are attached to the Latin liturgical tradition, by a wide and generous application of the directives already issued some time ago by the Apostolic See for the use of the Roman Missal according to the typical edition of 1962. (9)

7. As this year specially dedicated to the Blessed Virgin is now drawing to a close, I wish to exhort all to join in unceasing prayer that the Vicar of Christ, through the intercession of the Mother of the church, addresses to the Father in the very words of the Son: "That they all may be one!"

Given at Rome, at St. Peter's. 2 July 1988, the tenth year of the pontificate.

Joannes Paulus PP. II

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- (1) Cf. "Informatory Note" of 16 June 1988: *L'Osservatore Romano*. English edition, 27 June 1988, pp. 1-2.
 - (2) Cf. Vatican Council I, Const. *Pastor Æternus*, cap. 3: *DS* 3060.
 - (3) Cf. *Code of Canon Law*, can. 751.
 - (4) Cf. *Code of Canon Law*, can. 1382.
 - (5) Vatican Council II. Const. *Dei Verbum*, n. 8. Cf. Vatican Council I, Const. *Dei Filius*, cap. 4: *DS* 3020.
 - (6) Cf. Mt. 16:18; Lk. 10:16; Vatican Council I, Const. *Pastor Æternus*, cap. 3: *DS* 3060.
 - (7) Cf. *Code of Canon Law*, can. 386; Paul VI. Apost. Exhort. *Quinque iam anni*, 8 Dec. 1970: *AAS* 63 (1971) pp. 97-106.
 - (8) Cf. *Code of Canon Law*, can. 1364.
 - (9) Cf. Congregation for Divine Worship, Letter *Quattuor abhinc annos*. 3 Oct. 1984: *AAS* 76 (1984) pp. 1088-1089.
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