

## Archbishop Lefebvre and the Sedevacantist Thesis

*Liberty, courage, and prudence.*

It is of great interest to many people to know what was the late, great Archbishop Lefebvre's attitude to the thesis that Paul VI and John Paul II were not true popes?

The simple answer often proffered in answer to this question is that the Archbishop was not a sedevacantist, which is true as far as it goes, but it only partly answers the question posed. For the question is ambiguous, and each of the questions it implies has its proper answer, which for the sake of understanding the Archbishop's mind it will be useful to examine.

The Archbishop modified his view of this question as the crisis in the Church developed. This should not be surprising, nor is it the only point upon which his judgement evolved. The Archbishop also changed his mind on the grave questions of the necessity, utility, and lawfulness of consecrating successor bishops for the Society of St. Pius X. In an interview in 1978 he stated his lack of concern for the future of the Society insofar as a necessary successor was concerned.

It has also been said that after me, my work will disappear because there will be no bishop to replace me. I am certain of the contrary; I have no worries on that account. I may die tomorrow, but the good Lord answers all problems. Enough bishops will be found in the world to ordain our seminarians: this I know.

Even if at the moment he is keeping quiet, one or another of these bishops will receive from the Holy Ghost the courage needed to arise in his turn. If my work is of God, He will guard it and use it for the good of the Church. Our Lord has promised us, the gates of Hell shall not prevail against her.<sup>1</sup>

Subsequently, in 1988, the Archbishop finally formed the view that come what may, he would have to consecrate successors himself. The change was a response to the concrete situation as it developed. The same thing is evident in the Archbishop's views of the possibility of *sede vacante* over time.

There were two clear changes of mind on this subject, and therefore three distinct periods to consider. The first was from Vatican II until 1978, when John Paul II was elected. The second was from the election of John Paul II until the promulgation of the New Code of Canon Law in 1983. The third period extended from 1983 until the holy death of the Archbishop.

Let us consider the facts. As we do so, it is important to keep clearly in mind the unique position of the Archbishop as one of the most prominent leaders of the traditionalist resistance during the Council, when he was head of the *Coetus Internationalis Patrum*, and then from the founding of the *Society of St. Pius X* until his death on the Feast of the Annunciation in 1991.<sup>2</sup> The responsibility felt by Archbishop Lefebvre for the faithful, religious, and clergy who looked to him for guidance in the crisis fortified his deep native

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<sup>1</sup> Reportedly, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops intervened to prevent this interview from being published, and therefore it has become known as "The Suppressed Interview of Archbishop Lefebvre."

<sup>2</sup> I am sure others have noted the beautiful choice by Providence of this particular day for the Archbishop's departure from the field of battle. It celebrates the foundational dogma of the whole Christian religion, the Incarnation, and is at the same time one of the greatest feasts of Our Lady, so dear to Archbishop Lefebvre's heart.

prudence, and ensured that he always aimed to keep clearly distinct two categories of facts: those which were essential or necessary for maintaining the Faith, and those which were able to be left aside pending further consideration. This explains his insistence that the doctrine concerning true and false obedience was *sufficient* for that minimal set of actions which were absolutely necessary, such as refusing the errors of Vatican II and the reforms to which it gave birth, and continuing to provide the sacraments and ordain priests, and ultimately bishops, for the continuance of the Church. Both charity and prudence also informed his care to avoid commenting upon, or forming judgements about, *persons* wherever possible.

I would ask the reader to believe that I am not writing this book to criticize personalities. That, too, was always the attitude of the Holy Office. It did not examine persons, but only writings. A theologian might complain that they had condemned one of his books without giving him a hearing. But precisely – the Holy Office condemned particular writings and not authors. It would say, “This book contains statements which are at variance with the traditional doctrine of the Church.” Just that! Why go back to the person who had written them? His intentions and his culpability are the concern of another tribunal, that of penance.<sup>3</sup>

The same principles which supported his own apostolate also led him to regard with distrust those in whom he noted rashness, an unhealthy spirit of singularity, or a serious lack of diffidence, that most necessary of virtues by which a man truly distrusts his own judgements and avoids *obstinacy* in disputed matters. This was apparent as the central factor in the Archbishop’s break with the Abbe de Nantes in 1976, and also in his dealings with several sedevacantist individuals in subsequent years.

Archbishop Lefebvre’s position imposed an enormous weight of responsibility, since it was inevitable that whatever he did, and whatever views he expressed, would either be accepted also by countless traditional Catholics, or potentially become terrible stumbling blocks to others. With these realities constantly in mind, the Archbishop proceeded to navigate the virtually insuperable difficulties of the crisis in the Church, endeavouring to ensure that the faithful would have the sacraments and sound doctrine whilst also avoiding the creation of unnecessary practical problems or difficulties of conscience for the clergy or for the faithful.<sup>4</sup>

It is also useful to note a particular aspect of Archbishop Lefebvre’s character, his fundamentally constructive mentality which sought rather to build than to fight.<sup>5</sup> He was creative, willing to experiment, and possessed of a liberty of spirit which was a tremendous asset in his missionary endeavours in Africa, where little was settled and where Christianity had not developed the social traditions which were such a bulwark of the Faith in Europe. It is apparent that when he was persuaded to abandon his retirement and found his seminary

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<sup>3</sup> Archbishop Lefebvre, *Open Letter to Confused Catholics*, Chapter 9, Fowler Wright Books, Herefordshire, 1986. Originally published in French, *Lettre ouverte aux catholiques perplexes*, 1985, Albin Michel, Paris. This comment of the Archbishop’s is factually inaccurate as it stands. The Holy Office of the Inquisition certainly censured persons as well as texts in the past, however during the reign of Pius XII it is true that a milder approach was taken, and this is the era which Archbishop Lefebvre personally experienced and to which he evidently refers in these comments.

<sup>4</sup> This terrible burden surely made the decades of already intolerably difficult decisions and judgements of the Archbishop a veritable *passion*, of which, incidentally, it appears he never once complained. He preached generous *sacrifice* to others, and he provided abundant example.

<sup>5</sup> It is possible to divide energetic Catholics into two broad categories, according to two instructions of Our Lord Jesus Christ with respect to the correct reaction to others. In the Gospel of St. Mark, Our Lord tells his disciples, “For he that is not against you, is for you.” (Mk. 9:39). In the Gospel of St. Matthew, He teaches, “He that is not with me, is against me: and he that gathereth not with me, scattereth.” (Mt. 12:30, cf. Lk. 11:23). These instructions evidently refer to different categories of men, however we can imagine different kinds of Catholics giving emphasis to one or other of these doctrines depending upon their own character and experiences. This is of course a question purely of emphasis in the case of our theoretical categories of Catholics. All know that we are obliged sometimes to fight, always to build.

for the formation of traditional priests, he adopted the same kind of approach that had served him so well in Africa. He aimed primarily to do good work for the priests requesting proper formation, and subsequently for the faithful requesting the sacraments and true doctrine, rather than to lead the fight against Modernism directly. This explains his cautious attitude in the early 1970s towards the already well-known traditionalist resistance movement. He sought to work quietly without unnecessarily irritating the Modernists who possessed all of the official structure of the Church. His attitude was to cooperate to the greatest degree possible without compromising essentials. It was not Archbishop Lefebvre who forced the issue between the Society of St. Pius X and the Vatican, but rather the Vatican which decided finally to stop the work of the Society or turn it Modernist by insisting upon obedience. The Modernists professed to be liberals, letting everybody choose his own way. Archbishop Lefebvre took them at their word and said he was trying "the experiment of tradition." Events proved to him that they were indeed liberals, for liberalism is always a species of tyranny, and his famous declaration of war on the religion of Vatican II and the Conciliar Church was provoked by two Modernists bringing heresy into the seminary at Écône in 1974, scandalising the seminarians and staff.

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

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

All these reforms, indeed, have contributed and are still contributing to the destruction of the Church, to the ruin of the priesthood, to the abolition of the Sacrifice of the Mass and of the sacraments, to the disappearance of religious life, to a naturalist and Teilhardian teaching in universities, seminaries and catechetics; a teaching derived from Liberalism and Protestantism, many times condemned by the solemn Magisterium of the Church.

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The only attitude of faithfulness to the Church and Catholic doctrine, in view of our salvation, is a categorical refusal to accept this Reformation.

*That is why, without any spirit of rebellion, bitterness or resentment, we pursue our work of forming priests, with the timeless Magisterium as our guide. We are persuaded that we can render no greater service to the Holy Catholic Church, to the Sovereign Pontiff and to posterity.*

That is why we hold fast to all that has been believed and practiced in the faith, morals, liturgy, teaching of the catechism, formation of the priest and institution of the Church, by the Church of all time; to all these things as codified in those books which saw day before the Modernist influence of the Council. *This we shall do until such time that the true light of Tradition dissipates the darkness obscuring the sky of Eternal Rome.*"<sup>6</sup>

With this background let us review the words and actions of Archbishop Lefebvre which touched upon the question of *sede vacante*, over the course of his traditionalist apostolate.

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<sup>6</sup> Archbishop Lefebvre, *Declaration*, November 21, 1974. Emphasis added.

The Archbishop's knowledge of Giovanni Montini from before the Council, and his experiences dealing with him as Paul VI during Vatican II, produced a completely certain judgement in his mind that Paul VI was a liberal, but still a Catholic. However, the incredible scandals of Paul VI's reign gave weight to the possibility, already being discussed openly around the world at the time of the foundation of the Society, that Paul VI was in fact not truly the pope. As the situation developed this possibility gained credence in the eyes of the Archbishop, and he tolerated openly sedevacantist seminarians and priests within the Society. His policy was expressed as *I do not say that the pope is not the pope, but I do not say either that one cannot say that the pope is not the pope.*

Already in 1970 Brazilian Professor of Philosophy Arnaldo Vidigal Xavier da Silveira<sup>7</sup>, close collaborator of Bishop de Castro Mayer, had begun publishing his celebrated study of the New Mass, the Catholic doctrine that the Church is incapable of promulgating harmful liturgical rites, and the explosive question of whether a pope can disappear into heresy, and if he did what effect this would have on his claim to the papal office. Bishop de Castro Mayer sent this document directly to Paul VI. Archbishop Lefebvre would later praise it as "the very objective study of Xavier da Silveira on this subject [i.e. the heretic pope question]."<sup>8</sup>

Da Silveira's work is extraordinarily comprehensive (he surveyed the works of no fewer than 136 theologians on the pope heretic question alone), highly refined and subtle, and written dispassionately and with deep insight. He provides no final solution to the problems then facing Catholics, that of Paul VI, the Acts of Vatican II and the promulgation of the *Novus Ordo Missae*, nor to the theoretical question of whether a pope who became a heretic would certainly lose office, but satisfies himself with some tentative suggestions, leaving it to "those who are learned in the matter" to solve the problems ventilated in his work.

At first sight, the answer to this question is, in theory, very simple: since God cannot permit that the whole Church err about who is her chief, the Pope peacefully accepted by the whole Church is the true Pope. It would be the duty of the theologians, on the basis of this clear theoretical principle, to resolve the concrete question which would then be put: either proving that in reality the Pope had not been a formal and notorious heretic at the moment of election; or showing that afterwards he had been converted; or verifying that the acceptance by the Church had not been pacific and universal; or presenting any other plausible explanation.

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<sup>7</sup> Arnaldo Vidigal Xavier da Silveira was born in São Paulo, Brazil, in 1929. Educated through high school by the Jesuits, he graduated in 1956 in Law and Social Sciences from the Catholic Pontifical University of São Paulo. Later, he studied philosophy at the Grand Seminary of the Immaculate Conception Centre, and from 1956 to 1963, he taught Philosophy at the Catholic Pontifical University of São Paulo. He was one of the main collaborators of the monthly journal *Catolicismo*, published under the auspices of Bishop Antonio de Castro Mayer, Bishop of the Diocese of Campos, Brazil.

Da Silveira's major work is entitled *Theological and Moral Implications of the New Ordo Missae*. On page 3 of the English edition is the following information: "The matter contained in this volume was originally published in Portuguese in three independent studies: "*Consideracoes sobre o Ordo Missae de Paulo VI*, São Paulo, Brazil, June, 1970, XX-169 pp., *Modificacoes Introduzida no Ordo de 1969*, São Paulo, Brazil, August, 1970, 20 pp.; and *A Infallibilidade das Leis Eclesiasticas*, Sao Paulo, Brazil, January, 1971, XI-34 pp." In its French translation the work was entitled, *La nouvelle messe de Paul VI: Qu'en penser?* and was published in 1975. An anonymous translator published the English edition in the USA in the mid-1970s. Subsequently, the section of this edition treating of the "pope heretic" question was re-published by *Catholic Research Institute*, Spokane, Washington, 1998, as *Can the Pope Go Bad?* It seems that the author, a layman, under pressure from the Brazilian episcopate to avoid making unnecessary disturbances and disunity in the Church, agreed not to publish the book and only circulated a limited number of private copies, hoping that those with responsibility in the Church would consider his work respectfully and act against the New Mass. Instead, the result was that the book was effectively buried for many years.

<sup>8</sup> Public Statement, *The New Mass and the Pope*, 8 November 1979, reprinted in Michael Davies' *Apologia Pro Marcel Lefebvre*, Volume 2, Chapter XL, *The Angelus Press*, Dickinson, Texas, 1983, p. 371.

A more attentive examination of the question would reveal, nevertheless, that even on purely theoretical grounds, an important difficulty arises, which would consist in determining precisely what is the concept of pacific and universal acceptance by the Church. For such acceptance to have been pacific and universal would it be enough that no Cardinal had contested the election? Would it be enough that in a Council, for example, almost the totality of the Bishops had signed the acts, recognizing in this way, at least implicitly, that the Pope be the true one? Would it be enough that no voice, or practically no voice had publicly given the cry of alert? Or, on the contrary, would a certain very generalized, though not always well defined, distrust be sufficient to destroy the apparently pacific and universal character of the acceptance of the Pope? And if this distrust became a suspicion in numerous spirits, a positive doubt in many, a certainty in some, would the aforementioned pacific and universal acceptance subsist? And if such distrusts, suspicions, doubts and certainties cropped out with some frequency in conversations or private papers, or now and again in published writings, could one still classify as pacific and universal the acceptance of a Pope who was already a heretic on the occasion of his election by the Sacred College?

It is not in the nature of the present work to try to respond to questions such as these. We only wish to formulate them here, asking those who are learned in the matter to clear them up.<sup>9</sup>

These passages reveal that by 1970 doubts about Paul VI's papacy were already widespread. Da Silveira alludes clearly to distrust which had become a suspicion in numerous spirits, a positive doubt in many, a certainty in some, and that this distrust, suspicion, doubt and certainty were cropping out with some frequency in conversations, private papers, even now and again in published writings. The Archbishop's familiarity with these passages quoted from da Silveira might explain why he did not invoke the "universal, pacific acceptance" of a Roman Pontiff as proof that the Modernist claimant was pope until the extraordinarily late date of 1979. Da Silveira's reasoning might also explain why the Archbishop later changed his mind on this point, and openly speculated that both Paul VI and John Paul II might not have been true popes after all.

Da Silveira closes his work with a prayer presumably composed by himself which is worthy of wider distribution.

We beseech the Most Holy Virgin that She assist her children in the midst of the tremendous storms which, in our days, are causing incalculable harm to souls. And we solemnly appeal to Her that She hasten the day in which her Immaculate Heart will triumph. In that day, the Holy Church will appear more radiant than ever, and the Roman Pontificate, the unshakable rock of the Truth will illuminate all the nations of the Earth with a new brilliance.

In his interview with Paul VI in 1976, Archbishop Lefebvre formulated the essential conflict which was tearing at the hearts of millions of the faithful around the world. It was courageous and direct.

On the one side we desire to submit to you entirely, to follow you in everything, to have no reserves about your person, and on the other side we are aware that the lines taken by the Holy See since the Council, and the whole new orientation, turn us away from your predecessors. What then are we to do? We find ourselves obliged either to attach ourselves to your predecessors or to attach ourselves to your person and separate ourselves from your predecessors. For Catholics to be torn like that is

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<sup>9</sup> Da Silveria, *op. cit.*

unheard of, unbelievable. And it is not I who have provoked that, it is not a movement made by me, it is a feeling that comes from the hearts of the faithful, millions of the faithful whom I do not know. I have no idea how many there are. They are all over the world, everywhere. Everybody is uneasy about this upset that has happened in the Church in the last ten years, about the ruins accumulating in the Church.<sup>10</sup>

Archbishop Lefebvre continued to maintain his public position and that of the Society that Paul VI was truly pope, yet he also harboured at least a theoretical doubt, which occasionally he expressed. In the sermon delivered during the famous Mass at Lille, he introduced this radical idea to 12,000 people, stating:

If it happened that the pope was no longer the servant of the truth, he would no longer be pope.<sup>11</sup>

And earlier the same month, August 1976, he referred to the same possibility in clear, theological terms in the newspaper *Le Figaro*.

...a grave problem confronts the conscience and the faith of all Catholics since the beginning of Paul VI's pontificate: how can a pope who is truly successor of Peter, to whom the assistance of the Holy Ghost has been promised, preside over the most radical and far-reaching destruction of the Church ever known, in so short a time, beyond what any heresiarch has ever achieved? This question must one day be answered...

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To whatever extent the pope departed from...tradition he would become schismatic, he would breach with the Church. Theologians such as Saint Bellarmine, Cajetan, Cardinal Journet and many others have studied this possibility. So it is not something inconceivable.

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Heresy, schism, *ipso facto* excommunication, invalidity of election are so many reasons why a pope might in fact never have been pope or might no longer be one. In this, obviously very exceptional case, the Church would be in a situation similar to that which prevails after the death of a Pontiff.

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While we are certain that the faith the Church has taught for 20 centuries cannot contain error, *we are much further from absolute certitude that the pope is truly pope.*<sup>12</sup>

The next year in a prepared text intended to clarify things for the clergy and faithful, the Archbishop stated that one day the Church may judge that Paul VI had not in fact been pope.

The question is therefore definitive: is Paul VI, has Paul VI ever been, the successor of Peter? If the reply is negative: Paul VI has never been, or no longer is, pope, our attitude will be that of *sede vacante* periods, which would simplify the problem. Some theologians say that this is the case, relying on the statements of theologians of the past, approved by the Church, who have studied the problem of the heretical pope, the schismatic pope or the pope who in practice abandons his charge of

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<sup>10</sup> Quoted by Michael Davies, *Apologia Pro Marcel Lefebvre*, The Angelus Press, 1979, vol. I, p. 278.

<sup>11</sup> August 29, 1976.

<sup>12</sup> *Le Figaro*, August 4, 1976

supreme Pastor. It is not impossible that this hypothesis will one day be confirmed by the Church.<sup>13</sup>

One very clear conclusion forces itself upon the mind as these various statements are reviewed in chronological order, and it is a startling conclusion. The continued growth of sedevacantism amongst traditional Catholics, including and especially the seminarians and priests of the Society, was at least partly the responsibility of Archbishop Lefebvre himself. This is another fact, besides purely theoretical considerations, which explains the Archbishop's generally very benign view of this highly controversial thesis.

In 1998, as part of his reflections on the tenth anniversary of the episcopal consecrations, Bishop Tissier de Mallerais summarised the Archbishop's thinking as follows:

He said more than once about these popes – about Paul VI from 1976, and about John Paul II, after the prayer meeting of religions at Assisi in 1986 – that he did not exclude the possibility that these popes were not popes, that one day the Church will have to examine their situation, that a future pope and his cardinals might have to pronounce the finding that these men had not been popes. But for himself, he preferred to consider them as popes.<sup>14</sup>

An important factor in the thinking and actions of the Archbishop in relation to the authority of Rome was his concern to avoid compounding the difficulties he, the Society itself, and the clergy and faithful generally were suffering as a consequence of resisting the Modernism of the New Church. Any rash or unnecessary statement or decision could have disastrous consequences. In reaction to the activities of the Abbé de Nantes in publishing suggestions that “a bishop” must “break with Rome”, Archbishop Lefebvre published a rebuke which began by framing the Abbé's actions as prejudicial to the Archbishop.

The indelicacy of your action is such that I would have kept silent if you had not written most insidious articles prejudicing me personally in your last two issues (of *La Contre-Réforme Catholique*).

The first concerned a Bishop's breaking with Rome - which you deemed to be desirable. Undoubtedly, no explicit allusion was made. However, in the next few lines you mentioned my name in connection with the Credo Pilgrimage (to Rome), and uninformed readers automatically linked the person named with the preceding lines. This kind of thing is odious. I would have you know that if a Bishop breaks with Rome it will not be me. My Declaration (of 21 November) stated this explicitly and emphatically enough.<sup>15</sup>

Likewise, the increasingly public activities of various sedevacantist priests and seminarians within the Society began to cause complications. The Archbishop had a public policy to uphold, even if he did not refuse the right of others to form differing private views, and even if he allowed himself occasionally to express some more nuanced opinions in careful and provisional terms. He judged that public unity was necessary, and acted accordingly to keep

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<sup>13</sup> Archbishop Lefebvre, Écône, February 24, 1977, *Answers to Various Burning Questions*. Michael Davies, who gathered and presented for posterity nearly every important document of the Archbishop's in the three volumes of his *Apologia Pro Marcel Lefebvre* did not include this particular text.

<sup>14</sup> Bishop Tissier de Mallerais in an interview published in the French magazine of the Society of Saint Pius X, *Fideliter*, (n. 123, pp. 25-29. May-June 1998), marking the tenth anniversary of the episcopal consecrations of June 1988.

<sup>15</sup> Quoted by Michael Davies, *Apologia Pro Marcel Lefebvre*, vol. I, p. 50. The position advocated by the Abbé de Nantes was not, as might be supposed, that a bishop must declare the See of Rome vacant. The Abbé was calling for a council of bishops which would demand that Paul VI subject *himself* to a solemn judgement which would, on the Abbé's theory, pit his heresy against his infallibility. This appeared foolish to the Archbishop, and events illustrated its fantastical nature.

any nascent sedevacantism out of the public eye. Those who accuse the Archbishop of inconsistency on this question do not appear to appreciate that his policy was a pragmatic one, not driven primarily by any theoretical considerations. He was managing an organisation whose *raison d'être* was the demands of the faithful for the true sacraments and the unspotted doctrine of the Church, a Society which existed for concrete action, not a think-tank concerned primarily with theoretical considerations. It is possible also that his critics did not appreciate fully his constructive character, his preference for building rather than fighting. Nor do I criticise those who saw that fighting was essential as well as building. The point is that in such chaos every man is forced to take his own path, according to his best judgement.

The facts remain, however, that Archbishop Lefebvre only ever expelled from the Society two priests for public sedevacantism, and never any priest for private sedevacantism. This may surprise some who have a different impression, but those are the facts.

When we review the various texts in which Archbishop Lefebvre appeared not only to reject the sedevacantist solution himself, but to condemn it, we find that in each case he was reacting to the pressure of circumstances, and almost in every case he was referring to concrete cases of sedevacantist individuals rather than to the theoretical question itself. Thus when he stated that sedevacantism is “schismatic” he clearly meant that the mentality of the specific sedevacantists he was then addressing or reacting to had a schismatic mentality – that is, they valued their opinions more than the unity of the faithful. And this interpretation is confirmed by consideration of the various statements made by Archbishop Lefebvre over the years – those presented above as well as of those which will follow below. If he really thought that the notion that Paul VI or John Paul II was not a true pope was essentially schismatic, then how could he possibly have honestly permitted many of his seminarians and priests to hold it, and *a fortiori* to consider adopting it himself?

In assessing the attitude of Archbishop Lefebvre to what we generically call sedevacantism it must also be kept in view what that term meant at that time. By 1978 the thesis that Paul VI was not pope had developed into at least two schools, both of which combined a certain practical dogmatism with theoretical features which seemed at best speculative, and at worst to conflict with essential Catholic doctrine. On the one hand there existed what we might call the sedevacantism of *Cum ex apostolatus*, the apostolic constitution of Pope Paul IV<sup>16</sup> which legislated that a heretic could not only not be pope but also that every one of his jurisdictional acts would be invalid. This famous bull expressed both divine and ecclesiastical law, and the latter was abrogated by the Code of 1917 at the latest, except insofar as its provisions were incorporated in the Code. Relying upon the words of *Cum ex apostolatus*, some thinkers concluded that not only was Paul VI not pope, but that all of his episcopal appointments were invalid, and likewise his cardinals were not cardinals. The same logic was extended by some to John XXIII, with even more drastic effects on the supposed size of the episcopate and the college of cardinals. To many, these ideas appeared to imply the end of the visibility of the Church and to terminate any possibility of a valid papal election in future.<sup>17</sup>

A more sophisticated theory was developed in answer to these apparent difficulties by Écône professor Fr. Guerard des Lauriers, O.P. He aimed to preserve the visible continuity of the hierarchy of the Church by postulating that Paul VI remained *materially* pope even though he was certainly not *formally* pope. Likewise his cardinals were thereby *materially* true cardinals (but not *formally* so) and that this sufficed for the legal continuity of the hierarchy. Fr. des Lauriers also insisted that it would be unlawful to pray in the Canon of the Mass for Paul VI, since he was not formally pope, and he went to work declaring this and

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<sup>16</sup> February 15, 1559.

<sup>17</sup> It is not to the purpose here to criticise these theories in detail, but only to highlight their radical nature.



trying to have it accepted by all. This latter position meant that continued cooperation between sedepelenists and sedevacantists entailed grave practical difficulties.

Whether we recall the schismatic nightmare of Palmar de Troya or the insubordination, as Archbishop Lefebvre viewed it, of the American priests who were ultimately expelled in 1983<sup>18</sup>, or the unproven and implausible theories of Fr. Guerard des Lauriers – especially when combined with a dogmatic insistence that nobody pray for Paul VI as pope – it is clear that in the Archbishop's mind actual sedevacantism had proved to be problematic for peace and unity amongst traditional Catholics.

The death of the *adversary* Paul VI gave the Archbishop cautious hope that the ensuing election might be occasion for a new "divine surprise" by which the crisis would be brought to an end. John Paul I was clearly not that surprise, and in any case he did not last long enough for any sign to appear that the liberal who entered the conclave had exited a Catholic. After the election of John Paul II, Archbishop Lefebvre asked for and received an audience, telling those at Écône that he was going to Rome "to see if we have a pope." John Paul II, the consummate actor, sufficiently impressed the Archbishop and enkindled his hopes. It was with this relatively hopeful mind that Archbishop Lefebvre made his first decisive shift in thinking about several disputed points, including the sedevacantist thesis. He published a new document entitled *The New Mass and the Pope*,<sup>19</sup> and in it he not only reconfirmed the Society's official position on sedevacantism, but he also added that the Society would no longer tolerate sedevacantists in its ranks.

Let us now pass to a second but no less important subject: does the Church have a true Pope or an impostor on the Throne of St. Peter? Happy are those who have lived and died without having to pose such a question! One must indeed recognize that the pontificate of Paul VI posed, and continues to pose, a serious problem of conscience for the faithful. Without reference to his culpability for the terrible demolition of the Church which took place under his pontificate, one cannot but realize that he hastened the causes of that decline in every domain. One can fairly ask oneself how it was possible that a successor of Peter can, in so little time, have caused more damage to the Church than the French Revolution.

Some precise facts, such as the signatures which he gave to Article VII in the Instruction concerning the New Mass, and to the Declaration on Religious Liberty, are indeed scandalous and have led certain traditionalists to affirm that Paul VI was heretical and thus no longer Pope. They argue further that, chosen by a heretical Pope, the great majority of the cardinals are not cardinals at all and thus lacked the authority to elect another Pope. Pope John Paul I and Pope John Paul II were thus, they say, illegitimately elected. They continue that it is inadmissible to pray for a pope who is not Pope or to have any "conversations" (like mine of November 1978) with one who has no right to the Chair of Peter.

As with the question of the invalidity of the *Novus Ordo*, those who affirm that there is no Pope over-simplify the problem. The reality is more complex. If one begins to study the question of whether or not a Pope can be heretical, one quickly discovers that the problem is not as simple as one might have thought. The very objective study of Xaverio de Silverira on this subject demonstrates that a good number of theologians teach that the Pope can be heretical as a private doctor or theologian but not as a teacher of the Universal Church. One must then examine in what measure

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<sup>18</sup> The so-called Oyster Bay Nine. Many of the Nine were sedevacantists. Despite the fact that the expulsions were not due to differences over the pope question, inevitably this thesis was seen by many as being at the root of the affair.

<sup>19</sup> 8 November 1979.

Pope Paul VI willed to engage in infallibility in the diverse cases where he signed texts close to heresy if not formally heretical.

But we can say that in the two cases cited above, as in many another, Paul VI acted much more the Liberal than as a man attached to heresy. For when one informed him of the danger that he ran in approving certain conciliar texts, he would proceed to render the text contradictory by adding a formula contrary in meaning to affirmations already in the text, or by drafting an equivocal formula. Now, equivocation is the very mark of the Liberal, who is inconsistent by nature.

The Liberalism of Paul VI, recognized by his friend, Cardinal Daniélou, is thus sufficient to explain the disasters of his pontificate. Pope Pius IX, in particular, spoke often of the Liberal Catholic, whom he considered a destroyer of the Church. The Liberal Catholic is a two-sided being, living in a world of continual self-contradiction. While he would like to remain Catholic, he is possessed by a thirst to appease the world. He affirms his faith weakly, fearing to appear too dogmatic, and as a result, his actions are similar to those of the enemies of the Catholic Faith.

Can a Pope be Liberal and remain Pope? The Church has always severely reprimanded Liberal Catholics, but she has not always excommunicated them. Here, too, we must continue in the spirit of the Church. We must refuse Liberalism from whatever source it comes because the Church has always condemned it. She has done so because it is contrary, in the social realm especially, to the Kingship of Our Lord.

Does not the exclusion of the cardinals of over eighty years of ages, and the secret meetings which preceded and prepared the last two Conclaves, render them invalid? Invalid: no, that is saying too much. Doubtful at the time: perhaps. But in any case, the subsequent unanimous acceptance of the election by the Cardinals and the Roman clergy suffices to validate it. That is the teaching of the theologians.

The visibility of the Church is too necessary to its existence for it to be possible that God would allow that visibility to disappear for decades. The reasoning of those who deny that we have a Pope puts the Church in an inextricable situation. Who will tell us who the future Pope is to be? How, as there are no Cardinals, is he to be chosen? This spirit is a schismatical one for at least the majority of those who attach themselves to certainly schismatical sects like Palmar de Troya, the *Eglise Latine de Toulouse*, and others.

Our Fraternity absolutely refuses to enter into such reasonings.

We wish to remain attached to Rome and to the Successor of Peter, while refusing his Liberalism through fidelity to his predecessors. We are not afraid to speak to him, respectfully but firmly, as did St. Paul with St. Peter.

And so, far from refusing to pray for the Pope, we redouble our prayers and supplications that the Holy Ghost will grant him light and strength in his affirmations and defense of the Faith.

Thus, I have never refused to go to Rome at his request or that of his representatives. The Truth must be affirmed at Rome above all other places. It is of God, and He will assure its ultimate triumph.

Consequently, the Society of St. Pius X, its priests, brothers, sisters, and oblates, cannot tolerate among its members those who refuse to pray for the Pope or affirm

that the *Novus Ordo Missae* is *per se* invalid. Certainly, we suffer from this continual incoherence which consists in praising all the Liberal orientations of Vatican II and at the same time straining to mitigate its effects. But all of this must incite us to prayer and to the firm maintenance of Tradition rather than to the affirmation that the Pope is not the Pope.

The new policy of intolerance towards sedevacantists was for public consumption only, and the Archbishop actively dissuaded some sedevacantist priests from leaving the Society of their own volition. However it was a definite change, brought about by the hope that John Paul II would respond to signs of good will on the part of the Society with actions which would lead to the restoration of the Church. In a sense it was a return to the early 1970's, during which Archbishop Lefebvre suspended judgement regarding Paul VI and sought to avoid open conflict.

However the good hopes Archbishop Lefebvre had held for John Paul II as a result of that initial meeting were soon dashed as the new claimant made clear that he was prosecuting the identical programme followed by Paul VI. The final straw was the promulgation of the New Code of Canon Law in 1983, which both he and Bishop de Castro Mayer regarded as heretical. Hence the second change of mind on the sedevacantist thesis. From now on the Archbishop would readopt his first policy, which was non-condemnation of the position along with open speculation that he might adopt it himself. This was also perhaps partly due to Bishop de Castro Mayer's own conviction, which was that John Paul II was not truly pope.

Fourteen years later, Bishop Tissier made public a text written by Archbishop Lefebvre in 1984.

The current state of the papacy renders insignificant the difficulties over jurisdiction, disobedience and apostolicity, because these notions suppose the reign of a pope Catholic in his faith and government. Without entering into consideration of the consequences of an heretical, schismatic or non-existent pope, which would lead to interminable theoretical discussions, in conscience could we not and ought we not, after the promulgation of the 1983 Code of Canon Law which clearly affirms the new Church, and after his scandalous declarations concerning Luther, now affirm that Pope John Paul II is not Catholic? We say no more, but we say no less. We had waited for the measure to become full, and it is so henceforth.<sup>20</sup>

And finally we arrive at the Assisi blasphemy of 1986. One of Archbishop Lefebvre's responses to this incredible event was to prepare a complete conference outlining the case against John Paul II's claim to be the pope, which he delivered at least twice to groups of seminarians in the USA, and which he then had published in *The Angelus*. An abbreviated version of the same public declaration was delivered as a sermon which the Archbishop published in *Fideliter*,<sup>21</sup> the French organ of the SSPX. The following is the complete text of the conferences as published in *The Angelus*.

Ever since the Protestant Reformation in the 16th century, society has revolted more and more against God. The apostasy is growing year by year, and slowly, slowly, all society has been coming under the influence of the freemasonic principles of liberty and independence from God - no more law, no more authority, freedom of conscience, freedom of religion. At the beginning of the 20th century, Pius X warned that these errors were penetrating inside the Church, into the clergy. At Vatican II we saw a conspiracy between churchmen and freemasons, and now the Pope, Cardinals and nearly all Bishops accept man's independence of conscience, the

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<sup>20</sup> Quoted by Bishop Tissier de Mallerai, *Fideliter*, n. 123, pp. 25-29. May-June 1998.

<sup>21</sup> Public sermon, March 30, 1986, published in *Fideliter* No. 51 - May-June 1986.

principle of religious liberty and its consequence, the ecumenism whereby all religions are good. This is absolutely against Jesus Christ Who taught us He is the door of heaven, and there is no other way to get into heaven.

For twenty years since the Council, we have waited for the Vatican to realize the error of its ways. The Society has waited for the Pope to realize that the result of these false principles is the self-destruction of the Church. However, we are bound to recognize that the situation is only getting worse, that the false ecumenism is escalating, that since last year's Synod in particular the crisis is merely advancing faster and faster towards the total destruction of the Church.

Since the Council we have been seeing the situation get graver and graver, year by year, but the Synod was gravest of all because there they said, "We are continuing! Despite all difficulties, the Council was the work of the Holy Ghost, a second Pentecost. We must continue in the spirit of the Council. There will be no restrictions, no reprimands, no return to Tradition." So now we see them saying, "Let's go even faster!" Naturally, since there were no objections at the Synod to the spirit of the Council put into practice over 20 years, and since all agreed with the changes in the Church, then there is no reason not to continue even faster, and we are arriving at the total destruction of the Church!

The escalation of this Church-destroying ecumenism is taking place in broad daylight. In Morocco last year the Pope told a crowd of Mohammedans that they pray to the same God as Catholics do. But it is not true. Mohammedans teach that to kill a Christian is good because he is an idolater, worshipping the man Jesus Christ as God. Also last year, in Togo, the Pope poured out on the ground a pagan sacrifice to the god of the animists or African spirit-worshippers. Early this year, in India, he let some Hindu "priestess" mark him on the forehead with the sign of her sect!

Incredible! "All gods of the pagans are devils," says Scripture (Ps.95,5). How can the Pope receive the sign of the devil? Whatever god is not Jesus Christ is not the one and only true God. And most recently, the Pope has been into the synagogue of the Jews in Rome. How can the Pope pray with the enemies of Jesus Christ? These Jews know and say and believe that they are the successors of the Jews that killed Jesus Christ, and they continue to fight against Jesus Christ everywhere in the world. At the end of the Pope's visit, the Jews sang a "hymn" that included the line "I believe with all my heart in the coming of the Messiah," meaning they refuse Jesus as the Messiah, and the Pope had given permission for this denial of Christ to be sung in his presence, and he listened, with head bowed! And the Holy See announces that in the near future he will visit Taize to pray with the Protestants, and he himself said in public at St. Paul Outside of the Walls that later this year he will hold a ceremony gathering all religions of the world together to pray for peace at Assisi in Italy, on the occasion of the Feast of Peace proclaimed by the United Nations due to take place on October 24.

Now all these facts are public, you have seen them in the newspapers and the media. What are we to think? What is the reaction of our Catholic Faith? That is what matters. It is not our personal feelings, a sort of impression or admission of some kind. It is a question of knowing what our Faith tells us, faced with these facts. Let me quote a few words - not my words - from Canon Naz's Dictionary of Canon Law, a wholly official and approved commentary on what has been the Catholic Church's body of law for nineteen centuries. On the subject of sharing in the worship of non-Catholics (after all, this is what we now see Pope and bishops doing), the Church says, in Canon 1258-1: "It is absolutely forbidden for Catholics to attend or take any active part in the worship of non-Catholics in any way whatsoever." On this Canon

the quasi-official Naz Commentary says, and I quote, "A Catholic takes active part when he joins in heterodox; i.e., non-Catholic worship with the intention of honouring God by this means in the way non-Catholics do. It is forbidden to pray, to sing or to play the organ in a heretical or schismatic temple, in association with the people worshipping there, even if the words of the hymn or the song or the prayer are orthodox." The reason for this prohibition is that any participation in non-Catholic worship implies profession of a false religion and hence denial of the Catholic Faith. By such participation Catholics are presumed to be adhering to the beliefs of the non-Catholics, and that is why Canon 2316 declares them "suspect of heresy, and if they persevere, they are to be treated as being in reality heretics."

Now these recent acts of the Pope and bishops, with Protestants, animists and Jews, are they not an active participation in non-Catholic worship as explained by Canon Naz on Canon 1258-1? In which case, I cannot see how it is possible to say that the Pope is not suspect of heresy, and if he continues, he is a heretic, a public heretic. That is the teaching of the Church.

Now I don't know if the time has come to say that the Pope is a heretic; I don't know if it is the time to say that. You know, for some time many people, the sedevacantists, have been saying "there is no more Pope," but I think that for me it was not yet the time to say that, because it was not sure, it was not evident, it was very difficult to say that the Pope is a heretic, the Pope is apostate. But I recognize that slowly, very slowly, by the deeds and acts of the Pope himself we begin to be very anxious.

I am not inventing this situation; I do not want it. I would gladly give my life to bring it to an end, but this is the situation we face, unfolding before our eyes like a film in the cinema. I don't think it has ever happened in the history of the Church, the man seated in the chair of Peter partaking in the worship of false gods.

What conclusion must we draw in a few months if we are confronted by these repeated acts of partaking in false worship? I don't know. I wonder. But I think the Pope can do nothing worse than call together a meeting of all religions, when we know there is only one true religion and all other religions belong to the devil. So perhaps after this famous meeting of Assisi, perhaps we must say that the Pope is a heretic, is apostate. Now I don't wish yet to say it formally and solemnly, but it seems at first sight that it is impossible for a Pope to be publicly and formally heretical. Our Lord has promised to be with him, to keep his faith, to keep him in the Faith - how can he at the same time be a public heretic and virtually apostatize? So it is possible we may be obliged to believe this pope is not pope.

For twenty years, Msgr. de Castro-Mayer and I preferred to wait; we said it was more prudent and more in conformity with Providence to wait because it is so important, so tragic, when it is not just a bishop, archbishop or cardinal, but the man in the chair of Peter. It is so important, so grave, so sad, that we prefer to wait until Providence gives us such evidence, that it is no longer possible to refuse to say that the Pope is a heretic. So, to say that I think we are waiting for the famous meeting in Assisi, if God allows it! Maybe war will break out, and here I take the opportunity to congratulate America and its President on their resolute action in Libya against an enemy of all civilization. In Europe they are all afraid, afraid, afraid of the Communists. Why? Until the Communists occupy all Europe. But President Reagan's action may have delayed war by making the Communists afraid; we don't know, because they are fanatics and could start war any time just to take power.

Now some priests (even some priests in the Society) say that we Catholics need not worry about what is happening in the Vatican; we have the true sacraments, the true

Mass, the true doctrine, so why worry about whether the Pope is a heretic or an impostor or whatever; it is of no importance to us. But I think that is not true. If any man is important in the Church, it is the Pope. He is the centre of the Church and has a great influence on all Catholics by his attitudes, his words and his acts. All men read in the newspapers the Pope's words and on television they see his travels. And so, slowly, slowly, many Catholics are losing the Catholic Faith by the scandal of the Pope's partaking in false religions. This ecumenism is a scandal in the true sense of the word, an encouragement to sin. Catholics are losing faith in the Catholic Church. They think all religions are good because the Pope in this way befriends men of all religions. When the scandal comes from so high in the Church, from the man in the chair of Peter and from almost all the bishops, then poor Catholics who are thrown back on their own resources and who do not know their Faith well enough to keep it despite all, or who do not have priests by their side to help them to keep the Faith, these Catholics are completely at a loss what to do. They are no longer practicing their Faith, or they give up praying, or they are losing the Faith altogether and are joining some sect or other. I ask, what people are keeping the Faith? Where are they? Where are they? And I ask even the Traditionalists!

For I think that many Traditional Catholics enjoy the traditions; they like the old Mass, they like the old sacraments, they like the old teaching of the Church, but they do not really believe in Jesus Christ as the one and only Saviour, God and Creator. That is the bad influence of all the modern errors coming through television and the media - they are so bad, so pagan, so opposed to Jesus Christ and the Catholic Faith that few people remain true Catholics wholly faithful to Jesus Christ. That is why we can't be indifferent to these scandalous events in Rome, we must judge them in the light of our Faith and help Catholics, traditional Catholics, to see that this bad example of the Pope is a great scandal, very dangerous for their souls.

It is very sad. Never in my life did I think I could be saying, the scandal of the Pope, but it is true. What can I do about it? I think we must pray, and pray, morning, noon and night and study our Catholic doctrine very deeply to stay true Catholics and keep the Faith.

Someone may say, I am on the way to saying the Pope is not Pope, in order to consecrate a bishop. That is not true. They are two different problems. Ever since the Council, year after year, I have been praying to God that Providence by the facts and the unfolding of events should show us what we must do. I pray for it to be clear beyond doubt, wholly evident. And I think that now we are in this time, I think that it is the answer of God. I would much prefer Providence to be showing us the Vatican returning to Tradition, but instead we see the Vatican plunging into darkness and error. And so it is sure that now it is not as difficult to see as it was one or two years ago, it is more clear and evident that they are no longer truly Catholic. No persecution or revolution in all history has so destroyed the Church as these years since the Council, because today the Faith is being destroyed by men of the Church, by the Pope himself, by Cardinals, by bishops, priests and nuns. It is the wholesale, worldwide and radical destruction of the Faith.

Yet it is a great grace for us to live in this time. From before the destruction, we were chosen by God to continue the Catholic Church. Even if we are condemned by Rome, even if we are persecuted by the bishops, that is not important. What is important is to stay Catholic, to keep the grace we received at baptism, to save our souls. Nobody can say we are heretics or schismatics for believing as the Popes, Saints and Church of old believed for twenty centuries. It is a great grace of God to have been chosen to continue the Faith and the Church, but it is a great responsibility, and we must pray and remain very humble in order to be faithful to the

grace that we receive.

You seminarians especially, future priests, must study the true Faith to become true missionaries of Our Lord, even if you have to shed your blood, as the martyrs did in olden times. Then young girls would suffer heroic deaths rather than make one sacrifice or breathe one prayer to the pagan gods of ancient Rome, but now, no problem! You want me to say a prayer to your god? Sure! And so they are abandoning Jesus Christ and the true Faith in order to be friends with the enemies of the Church!

We refuse. Instead we resolve to follow the non-ecumenical martyrs, the Saints. Tomorrow at Ridgefield the Church will have three more priests. That is very important. It is not a question of numbers, it is a question of quality, it is a question of true priests. Jesus Christ began with twelve apostles so we need not feel bad that we are so few. Our work is really nothing compared with the world's needs. But that is not our problem, it is God's problem. He asked us to work and to believe in Him and to have confidence in Jesus Christ and in the grace of Jesus Christ. Success lies in God's hands. You know we have much to suffer, many, many sufferings, even in the Society. But we must carry the Cross of Jesus Christ and with the courage and resolution He gives us, we must have a great hope that one day the kingdom of Jesus Christ will return to this world.<sup>22</sup>

That is Archbishop Lefebvre's mature thought on the question. It is by far the longest text extant, and it is the most recent. As far as is known, Archbishop Lefebvre never finally formed the judgement that he here proposed and for which he laid the groundwork. However, it is my opinion that the doubt herein expressed about John Paul II was at the basis of the Archbishop's subsequent consecration of bishops against the expressed will of John Paul II. That is not to say that it was his *explicit* reason justifying those extraordinary acts, yet it would be impossible for any man to have those thoughts in his mind and at the same time believe that there was a dogmatic certainty that the man claiming to be Peter really was Peter. Knowing about this doubt – no matter how slight it might have been – enables us to understand better the psychology behind the decision to proceed with the consecrations. The Archbishop was securing what was *certainly necessary* – the continuance of true Catholic clergy in the world – by acting against what was *not completely certain* – the authority of John Paul II. The very important 1984 text of Archbishop Lefebvre provided by Bishop Tissier in 1998 confirms this view.

*The current state of the papacy renders insignificant the difficulties over jurisdiction, disobedience and apostolicity, because these notions suppose the reign of a pope Catholic in his faith and government.*<sup>23</sup>

Bishop Tissier himself clearly adheres to this interpretation, for he introduced this text in an interview in which the central subject was the legitimacy of the 1988 episcopal consecrations.<sup>24</sup>

It is also a fact that on the day of the consecrations in 1988 Bishop de Castro Mayer walked amongst the assembled Society members and stated several times "We have no pope." Clearly in his mind, the consecrations were *certainly not* being performed against the will of the Roman Pontiff.

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<sup>22</sup> Talks given by Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre, March 30 and April 18, 1986, *The Angelus*, vol. IX, no. 7, July 1986.

<sup>23</sup> Quoted by Bishop Tissier de Mallerai, *Fideliter*, n. 123, pp. 25-29. May-June 1998.

<sup>24</sup> Further, in the light of such a doubt, the consecrations were indubitably lawful, if indeed they were not on other grounds. A doubtful law does not bind.

In summary it will be useful to highlight some points of interest regarding Archbishop Lefebvre's attitude to the sedevacantist thesis.

1. The data available to the average reader via published collections of the Archbishop's writings is seriously lacking in respect of this question. Michael Davies in particular permitted his own horror of the sedevacantist thesis to colour his judgement and he suppressed the numerous texts in which the Archbishop expressed his opinion that both Paul VI and John Paul II were possibly not truly popes. Compounding this unhistorical and perverse approach, Davies took pains to include the few statements of the Archbishop which could be taken to indicate that he rejected both the theory and the potential application of the pope-heretic thesis.
2. Archbishop Lefebvre's thinking altered in response to the changing concrete situation. He formed new judgements concerning the persons of both Paul VI and John Paul II as their actions made their dispositions more clear. In addition, the Archbishop's grasp of the theory of the pope-heretic thesis appears to have evolved also. His later statements on the question display far greater sophistication than those made in the 1970s, when he generally contented himself with relatively brief and simple comments casting doubt upon the papal claim of Paul VI. Clearly he studied the matter further as the crisis deepened.
3. Archbishop Lefebvre's final position was summarised by Bishop Tissier seven years after the Archbishop's death on the tenth anniversary of the episcopal consecrations of June 1988. "[Archbishop Lefebvre] said more than once about these popes – about Paul VI from 1976, and about John Paul II, after the prayer meeting of religions at Assisi in 1986 – that he did not exclude the possibility that these popes were not popes, that one day the Church will have to examine their situation, that a future pope and his cardinals might have to pronounce the finding that these men had not been popes. But for himself, he preferred to consider them as popes."
4. Archbishop Lefebvre was on friendly terms with numerous sedevacantists, and openly tolerated sedevacantists amongst his seminarians and priests, despite the public stance he adopted in 1979 of intolerance to sedevacantism.
5. The Archbishop did not agree with those who hold that it would be unlawful to conclude that the See of Rome is vacant. Clearly he regarded the position as one which it is lawful for Catholics to hold, since he publicly suggested that he might adopt it himself.
6. The Archbishop did not agree with those who say that "the problem of the pope" is unimportant or ought to be ignored. In his 1986 Sermon and Conferences on the subject, he stated, "Now some priests (even some priests in the Society) say that we Catholics need not worry about what is happening in the Vatican; we have the true sacraments, the true Mass, the true doctrine, so why worry about whether the Pope is a heretic or an impostor or whatever; it is of no importance to us. But I think that is not true. If any man is important in the Church, it is the Pope."
7. Archbishop Lefebvre did not agree with those who assert that a heretic can be pope. The argument has sometimes been put by those seeking to defend Paul VI, John Paul II, or Benedict XVI, that even if they are heretics they can remain popes. The Archbishop on the contrary saw an immediate and necessary connection between the loss of the Faith and the incapacity to be pope. "So perhaps after this famous meeting of Assisi, perhaps we must say that the Pope is a heretic, is apostate. ... So it is possible we may be obliged to believe this pope is not pope."



8. The Archbishop did not agree with those who argue that in order to form the judgement that a heretic is not pope a General Council must first declare his heresy, or proceed to a deposition. This is evident from his 1986 Sermon and Conferences also, in which he states the concrete conclusion, "So it is possible we may be obliged to believe this pope is not pope." The Archbishop did not suggest a call for a general council to discuss the question, or any canonical process, or even a further warning to test pertinacity.
9. Archbishop Lefebvre regarded John Paul II as pope until he died, as far as we know. However in the light of his beliefs regarding the pope heretic thesis and his knowledge of Joseph Ratzinger's liberalism, it is impossible to reach certitude that Archbishop Lefebvre would have accepted as valid the papacy of Benedict XVI. We recall his summary of the differences between himself and the SSPX on the one side, and Cardinal Ratzinger and the programme of Vatican II on the other. "I have summed it up to Cardinal Ratzinger in certain words, of course, because it is difficult to sum up this whole situation; but I said to him: 'Eminence, see, even if you grant us a bishop, even if you grant us a certain self-government in relation to the bishops, even if you grant us all the liturgy of 1962, if you grant us to continue the seminaries and Society, as we do it now, we cannot collaborate; it is impossible, impossible, because we work in two diametrically opposed directions: you, you work for the de-Christianization of society, of the human person, and of the Church, and we, we work for its Christianization. They cannot be in agreement.' Rome has lost the Faith, my dear friends. Rome is in apostasy. It is not just words, it is not just words in the air that I say to you. It is the truth. Rome is in apostasy. One cannot have confidence any more in this world. He has left the Church, they have left the Church, they are leaving the Church. It is sure, sure, sure."<sup>25</sup>

Benedict XVI's striking acts abrogating some of the disabilities facing those who try to practice the true religion within the Conciliar Church structure cannot be taken as proof of his Catholic Faith, since he has in no way abandoned his adherence to Vatican II and its reforms, reforms excoriated in the strongest language by Archbishop Lefebvre in his signal declaration of 1974 as well as in the comments to Joseph Ratzinger quoted immediately above as diametrically opposed to the Catholic Faith.

10. Archbishop Lefebvre's repeated open speculation concerning the true status of Paul VI and John Paul II served as a powerful weapon against them, stripping them of some of the power they wielded against the Faith and the faithful. Neither Paul VI nor John Paul II could ever be quite sure that Archbishop Lefebvre would not finally form the judgement that the See of Rome was vacant, that their power was null. This seriously weakened their hand. Likewise the priests and faithful who knew the Archbishop's mind on this question had brought home forcefully to them the enormous gravity of the crimes against Our Lord and His religion which Vatican II and its reforms represented. Ecumenism is apostasy, a direct personal insult against our loving Redeemer.

John Lane

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<sup>25</sup> Archbishop Lefebvre, Conference, 1987.