

breach

The Lefebvrians reject the Pope's appeal and opt for schism

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On reading the **response** from the Superior General of the FSSPX to the **letter** sent to him a few hours earlier by Pope Leo, it becomes quite clear that Menzingen has erected a rubber wall against the Holy See; whatever proposal or instruction comes from 'Rome'

is not given the slightest serious consideration, but is simply bounced back to the sender, not without first having, in true Jesuit fashion, turned the tables.

Kicking the ball straight back into the opposition's half is the current Superior General's approach—a strategy designed to avoid having to spend even a few minutes considering the problematic nature of his own position. And so, to the Pope who asks the Fraternity to hold its ground, to take its time and refrain from committing what, ever since the Catholic Church has existed, has constituted a schismatic act, Fr Pagliarani replies that it is the Pope himself who must take his time before issuing a notification of excommunication: 'I ask you only to consider the authenticity of this intention before making a decision regarding the Society of St Pius X. It is not too late.' To the Pope, who implores him not to tear the robe of Christ, the Superior of the FSSPX replies that he should 'do everything possible to mend the robe of Christ, torn by forces and pressures incompatible with an authentically Catholic spirit'.

The moral of the story is that, if the decree of excommunication is issued in the coming days, it will not be a consequence of the episcopal consecrations carried out against the will of the Apostolic See, but will be a sign that the Pope has acted hastily: "I take the liberty of asking you, as a son, to take the time necessary for this discernment," urges Father Pagliarani. It would also show little concern for unity and little paternal care, given that 'a gesture of understanding on your part, far from harming unity, can only demonstrate to the world and to all Christians your concern for unity and your fatherly kindness'. The Fraternity is causing a rift; the Pope must be understanding.

The Holy See has repeatedly emphasised—and not only in reference to the FSSPX—that ordaining bishops, despite the Roman Pontiff's refusal, constitutes a schismatic act because it is based on the practical rejection of the Roman primacy. It is therefore an extremely grave act, which cannot be justified for any reason whatsoever, nor can it be remedied by the mere assertion that one does not wish to bring about a schism; an act which draws all those who adhere to the schism outside the Church, placing them in serious danger of losing their souls. The desire to 'serve the Church', which Father Pagliarani – clearly wishing to set the record straight – states he would have liked to express in person to the Pope, but 'unfortunately, the opportunity did not arise', if it were not only sincere (a subjective element) but also upright (an objective element), he would have realised that it is not possible to serve the Church against the one who is the head of the Church, insofar as he acts within the prerogatives entrusted to him by Jesus Christ. And the prerogative to approve or reject an episcopal consecration is fully part of

these prerogatives.

Instead of reflecting on the gravity of the usurpation of papal authority, Father Pagliarani puts forward a rather embarrassing argument: 'The Fraternity was already declared schismatic in 1988, for reasons and under circumstances absolutely analogous to the present ones; yet, after so many years, we are speaking to one another as a father to his son, and His Holiness is paternally exhorting me to avoid a schism which – theoretically – has already taken place. Does he not think that perhaps this very attitude of his own—whose concern I appreciate—is proof that the Fraternity is neither schismatic nor hostile to the Church?'

Once again, the actions of the Apostolic See are being turned against it. Yet it is not difficult to understand the meaning of Leo XIV's words, provided one has a little goodwill. The decision by the then Superior General of the FSSPX, Monsignor Bernard Fellay, and his assistants to enter into talks with the Holy See, with a view to achieving canonical regularisation, had led Benedict XVI to regard this stance as a sign that the desire for absolute independence from the Catholic Church – and thus the state of schism – had ceased to exist. As a gesture of conciliation and goodwill, Benedict XVI had chosen to accede to Fellay's requests: he lifted the excommunications and restored the freedom to celebrate Mass and administer the sacraments using the liturgical books predating the post-Vatican II reform. But it is clear that the SSPX's recent decision to proceed with episcopal ordinations regardless, even in the face of the Pope's opposition, confirms and cements a change in the situation which, to tell the truth, had already begun with the election of Fr Pagliarani in 2018. He seems unable to see the log of schism in his own eye, whilst seeking to remove the speck from the Pope's letter, subtly accusing him of contradiction.

Even less honest is the reference solely to Monsignor Vitus Hounder and Athanasius Schneider, who are deemed 'worthy' of having 'recognised the profoundly Catholic spirit of the Fraternity' and of having 'publicly borne witness' to it. We have already had occasion to discuss Monsignor Schneider's rather serious errors of judgement ([here](#), [here](#) and [here](#)). But what of Father Pagliarani's selectivity, which omits the objections—even those expressed publicly—by Cardinals Gerhard Müller and Raymond Burke?

If this is the attitude of the FSSPX—never wishing to take the Holy See's corrections and warnings seriously, but simply reiterating that it is 'Rome' that must approve whatever the Fraternity decides regardless—then it seems quite clear that any

possibility of reaching a common solution is lost.