

**Letter sent to the Pontifical Commission Ecclesia Dei from
the Council of the Una Voce International Federation**

His Eminence Angelo Cardinal Felici Pontificia Commissio "Ecclesia Dei"

cc: His Eminence Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, His Eminence Jorge Cardinal Medina Estévez

22 October 1999

Your Eminence,

Not wishing to aggravate existing tensions we are addressing Your Eminence in the form of a private letter in the hope of contributing thereby to an early and equitable solution of the conflict within and around the Fraternité Sacerdotale Saint-Pierre (hereafter referred to as the FSSP).

1. In its letter of July 13th 1999 to the Superior General of the FSSP, Rev. Father Josef Bisig, the Pontifical Commission "Ecclesia Dei" (hereafter referred to as "the PCED") had appeared to endorse almost unquestioningly, the various criticisms voiced by the 16 signatories of the Canonical Recourse dated June 19th 1999. This is made clear by the entire contents of the first three paragraphs of the Commission's letter, and such phrases as "You are certainly not ignorant . . . the facts enumerated in the letter of recourse... such a lack of confidence was already at the origin of the schism...avoid a similar evolution in your institute." It was therefore most gratifying to learn, from the PCED's subsequent letter of September 10th 1999, that no such endorsement had been intended. Despite this welcome and necessary clarification, the decisions announced in the earlier letter have not been revoked. They can be justified solely on the grounds of the rebel priests' allegations. As long as these decisions are being upheld, the PCED unfortunately continues to give the impression of a strong bias in favour of the rebellious members of the FSSP.

2. This impression (hopefully false) is furthered by the fact that the PCED has not yet rectified its statement that the Canonical Recourse had been signed by "about one-third of the FSSP's incardinated members". 16 out of 100 is at best one-sixth! The correct figures were given to the PCED in the letter dated September 9th, 1999, signed by 71 priests and deacons of the FSSP, united in the defence of their Superior General.

3. The same bias manifested itself when the PCED, in line with the rebels' plea that "an urgent situation" has arisen, "decided to act without delay", i.e. without prior

consultation with the FSSP's Superior General. Contrary to all natural justice, Father Bisig was not only not given the opportunity to respond to the grave allegations of the 16 contesting priests before the letter of July 13th was sent to him, but when he came to Rome subsequently to defend himself, the Commission's Cardinal-President refused to see him, in sharp contrast to the warm welcome given to the spokesmen of the 16 dissidents. Nor was any response made to the canonical recourse presented to the PCED by Fr. Bisig.

4. After reviewing these and other facts surrounding the dissenting priests' agitation and the PCED's reactions thereto, the Council of the INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION UNA VOCE was left with the following disturbing impressions:

(i) The eruption of open minority dissent within the FSSP did not happen spontaneously. It was preceded by intensive consultation between the leaders of the rebel group and certain French and Roman Prelates.

(ii) Instead of dissuading the dissenters (who were fully conscious of "committing a grave act") and of calling them to order, the PCED appears to have aided and abetted them in their disloyal purpose.

(iii) "To stop their progress [i.e. the FSSP's] we have to find a Trojan Horse". This obiter dictum is reliably attributed to a very senior French Prelate. If true, it would reveal the dissent as at least partially due to outside prompting.

5. With the three decisions communicated to Fr. Bisig in the Cardinal-President's letter of July 13th 1999, the PCED seems to disown not only the direction given to the FSSP - with the PCED's consent and approval since 1988 - but also the ecclesial perspectives under which it was constituted and canonically erected. These perspectives arose from the "Protocol d'accord" of May 5th 1988, signed between H.E. Cardinal Ratzinger and the late Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre. The place foreseen therein for a "traditional" Priestly Society of the Apostolic Life was left vacant by the withdrawal of Monseigneur Lefebvre from this agreement, and was then filled - with active support from the Vatican - by the FSSP. It is more than surprising to learn, from H.E. Cardinal Felici's letter to Fr. Bisig of September 10th, 1999, that the FSSP is now expected "to take account of the problems that the Fraternity itself poses for other members of the Church, as well as for many Bishops, and to better situate itself in the reality of the Church." **6.** Finally, we wish to emphasize three things:

(a) The FSSP has, under the able and conscientious direction of Fr. Bisig and his assistants, successfully fashioned the FSSP into a vital and promising part of "the reality of the Church" in strict accordance with the thrust of the Motu Proprio "Ecclesia Dei adflicta". To talk of "problems that the Fraternity itself poses for other members of the Church, as well as for many Bishops" can only mean that these other members of the Church, including many bishops, have, from the start, refused to align themselves with the papal directives, or that new problems have arisen which did not exist, or could not be foreseen, in 1988. In neither case can the FSSP itself and its present leadership be blamed for the resulting difficulties. Consequently, their solution should not be sought - either in justice or prudentially - through any form of reprimand or demotion of the FSSP's directorate nor through a "change of course" imposed from above.

(b) The Motu Proprio contained a number of assurances addressed to the Catholic faithful at large. They saw these assurances partly fulfilled through the canonical erection of the FSSP and other similarly orientated Societies of the Apostolic Life dedicated inter alia to the celebration of the Roman liturgy as ordered in the liturgical books in force in 1962. This is an essential part of the specific charisma and a prime cause of the very generous moral and material support which they have received from the faithful. Another cause is the constant (if discreet) backing given to these institutes by the PCED. Withdrawal of this support, particularly as regards the continued use of the unmodified Roman Missal of 1992 will be seen as a "breach of faith" by the PCED vis-à-vis its clientele, who will not cease to make their protest heard.

(c) The Cardinal President's formal denial of any intention on the part of the PCED "to impose upon the Fraternity of Saint-Peter the celebration of the Roman Liturgy reformed by Pope Paul VI" should go some way towards reassuring the faithful. However, the uncertainties created by the "Official Replies" (Prot.N.1411/99, drafted on July 3rd by the Congregation for Divine Worship) will unfortunately rob this assurance of much of its salutary impact. What is needed is a clear statement by the PCED that it will guarantee to the FSSP the peaceful and energetic pursuit of the aims for which it was created in 1988. If the small group of dissenters are to be "accommodated" by the PCED, then they should be invited to apply for recognition as a separate Society of the Apostolic Life, with aims and statutes corresponding to their different orientation. The FSSP will certainly assist each individual priest opting

for this new Society in effecting the canonical transfer as smoothly and rapidly as possible.

With the assurance of deepest respect we remain,

Your Eminences,

your obedient servants in Jesus Christ and ask your blessing for ourselves and for our Federation.

Michael Davies, President

Dr Eric M. de Saventhem President d'honneur

Count Neri Capponi, Michel Grüneissen Ralf Siebenbürger Vice-Presidents

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Professor Robert Spaemann Vice President and the Ecclesia Dei Society, Australia
Hugh Henry Secretary