

The Fraternity of St Peter and the Vatican - A Dossier

On 5th May 1988 a Protocol of Agreement was signed by Cardinal Ratzinger and Archbishop Lefebvre which brought joy to traditional Catholics throughout the world. It was hoped that the priests of the Society of St. Pius X, whose apostolate was not recognized by the hierarchy of the Church, would now be able to pursue it within diocesan structures. Archbishop Lefebvre had serious misgiving concerning the protocol soon after he had signed it. He feared that the Vatican could not be trusted to keep its side of the agreement. He was particularly disturbed by the fact that his repeated requests for a definite date for the ordination of a bishop from within the SSPX, as promised in the protocol, received evasive answers, and the fact that the commission to be established to implement the protocol would contain only a minority of traditionalist members (2 out of 5). He eventually announced that he did not feel in conscience that he could implement the protocol and that he would ordain four bishops from within the SSPX. He was then given the date of 15 August for the ordination of a bishop chosen by him, on 2nd June 1988 he informed Pope John Paul II that he felt unable to accept this offer and would ordain four bishops on 30 June.

A number of priests and seminarians within the SSPX felt that they could not in conscience accept the Archbishop's decision to ordain bishops contrary to the express command of the Sovereign Pontiff and agreed to accept the protocol of 5th May with one significant change, that no promise was given to ordain a bishop from within the ranks of the new society, the Priestly Fraternity of Saint Peter (FSSP). The founding principles and purpose of FSSP were grounded in the Protocol of Agreement of May 5th 1988, and included a priestly ministry exercised for the good of the whole Church through the use of the liturgical books of the Roman Rite in their 1962 edition. The Decree of Election (see Addendum I, A) given at Rome, from the Pontifical Commission Ecclesia Dei, the 18th of October 1988 states specifically: "The Priestly Fraternity of St. Peter, as well as other priests who are guests in houses of the Fraternity or who exercise the sacred ministry in their churches, are conceded the use of the liturgical books in force in 1962." The manner in which the FSSP is to be governed is set out in great detail in its Constitutions which contain ample provision for settling differences of opinion internally in an ordered and fraternal manner. The relevant section is provided below as Addendum 2.

Father Bisig, the First Superior General, was re-elected in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution and has governed the FSSP strictly in accordance with this Constitution, the Decree of Election, and the provisions and spirit of the Protocol of 5th May 1988. Those who would contest this are morally bound to specify precisely when and precisely how he has failed in any of these respects.

In his Apostolic Letter *Ecclesia Dei* of 2nd July 1988 Pope John Paul II stated *motu proprio*:

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...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.

Unfortunately, many bishops have failed to respond in a positive and pastoral manner to the manifest will of the Holy Father. They have argued that this expression of his will cannot be considered as a law which they are bound to obey, and that they are free to decide whether or not to conform to his will. This lack of loyalty has been maintained despite the renewed appeal made by His Holiness on 26 Oct 1998 “I therefore extend a fraternal invitation to Bishops to show understanding and renewed pastoral attention to the faithful who are attached to the former rite...” In an address to the General Assembly of the International *Una Voce* Federation in 1995, Alfons Cardinal Stickler remarked that, as a Salesian, he upheld the principle enunciated by Don Bosco, that once the will of the Holy Father has become manifest it constitutes a law for true Catholics. Dozens if not hundreds of appeals have been made to the *Ecclesia Dei* Commission to intercede with bishops who ignore the clearly expressed will of the Pope, but, since the presidency of Augustin Cardinal Mayer, with a very few exceptions, these appeals have been ignored. It is not unusual for bishops who permit any and every form of liturgical abuse within their dioceses to reject respectful appeals for access to the 1962 Missal in a crudely offensive and sarcastic manner. Instances of such rejections have been pointed out to the *Ecclesia Dei* Commission

without any positive action being taken. The Commission claims correctly that it does not possess the authority to command bishops to conform to the wishes of the Pope, but it could at least make the wishes of the Holy Father clear to those bishops who ignore them. The laity who ask for the help of the Commission tend to be advised to exercise patience and submission to their bishop, rather than the bishop being advised to conform to the will of the Holy Father. The Commission also has the authority to grant a celebret to any priest of the Roman Rite authorizing him to celebrate Mass according to the Missal of 1962, but has declined to do since 1990. It has "... the faculty of granting to all who seek it the use of the Roman Missal according to the 1962 edition, and according to the norms proposed in December, 1986, by the commission of Cardinals constituted for this very purpose, the diocesan bishop having been informed." (See Addendum, 1 B). It would thus seem that any priest of the Roman Rite has the right to have recourse to the 1962 Missal.

The Priestly Fraternity of Saint Peter has in recent years come under increasing pressure from various quarters, if not to allow its members to use the Missal of 1970 as well as that of 1962 as a matter of general practice, at least to allow its members to do so under particular circumstances. This pressure has been particularly strong as regards concelebrating with the diocesan bishop at the Chrism Mass on Holy Thursday. As superior of the Fraternity, Father Bisig has discouraged this on multiple grounds: fidelity to the mission within of the FSSP within the Church, avoidance of further unrest among its faithful and members, consolidation and identity of its apostolate, and unity of life and discipline according to its Constitutions. Some bishops have insisted on priests of the Fraternity using both Missals or at least concelebrating on Holy Thursday as a condition for exercising their ministry within their dioceses. This is the case in most French and German dioceses and can certainly be considered as a form of moral blackmail.

Some priests of the FSSP, especially in France, have expressed their desire to concelebrate on occasion the Novus Ordo. In the moderate and charitable manner which has characterized his government of the Fraternity, Father Bisig explains: "Although they are largely moved by apostolic zeal in the face of what one might consider an unfair limitation on their ability to minister to the vast needs of the faithful, the superiors of the Fraternity have discouraged this for the sake of the common good of our institute. I believe that our particular mission in serving the hierarchy and the faithful is at present not so much the quantitative expansion of our

apostolate as the qualitative witnessing to the immemorial liturgical tradition of the Church.”

In a letter dated 29 June 1999 (see Addendum 3), a group of 16 French priests of the Fraternity of St. Peter contacted Cardinal Angelo Felici of the Ecclesia Dei Commission without the knowledge of their legitimate superior, Father Joseph Bisig. They accepted that this was a very grave act contrary to the behaviour normally expected from priests, but justified themselves by claiming that the situation within the FSSP was so urgent that it was necessary for them to go over Father Bisig's head directly to the Holy See.

A General Chapter of the FSSP had been arranged to take place in Rome in August 1999, and the “urgent situation” referred to by the 16 priests is that following the properly-conducted elections preparatory General Chapter, all those elected came from “a group strongly opposed to any adaptation of the rite of 1962 to the wishes of the Council Fathers” in favour of “a parallel and marginal ecclesiastical position”. The sixteen claim that they constitute a third of the 92 incardinated members of the FSSP, indicating a somewhat inadequate grasp of mathematics.

What do the sixteen mean by “the parallel and marginal ecclesiastical position” held by the overwhelming majority of their confrères? In neither its Decree of Election nor its Constitution is there one word suggesting that the 1962 Missal should be adapted “to the wishes of the Council Fathers”, whatever these wishes may have been. In his book, *The Reform of the Roman Liturgy*, Msgr. Klaus Gamber writes: “One statement we can make with certainty is that the new Ordo of the Mass that has now emerged would not have been endorsed by the majority of the Council Fathers.”[1] The so-called “parallel and marginal ecclesiastical position” of the loyal Fraternity priests is simply their decision to remain faithful to the principles and purpose for which their Fraternity was erected, principles and a purpose which the sixteen freely accepted and to which they were morally bound when they were incardinated into the Fraternity.

It is argued that although members of the FSSP are conceded the right to use the liturgical books in use in 1962 every priest of the Roman Rite has the legal right to use the 1970 Missal. Although this is correct there is not the least doubt that when the FSSP and similar priestly societies were established it was understood that they would celebrate Mass only according to the 1962 Missal, and it was on this basis that these societies received such extraordinary financial support from the laity. The

statutes of the Ecclesia Dei Commission accept that priests belonging to these societies are bound to the 1962 liturgical books (See Addendum 1, B.). The Commission has: "...the faculty of canonically erecting as Institutes of consecrated life or as societies of apostolic life those communities which are already in existence and which are bound to the ancient liturgical forms and discipline of the Latin tradition (*antecedentibus formis liturgicis et disciplinaribus traditionis Latinae sunt devinctae*), this with the consent of the Prefect of the Congregation for Religious and Secular institutes."

The sixteen priests are therefore trying to substitute their own view of what the aim of the FSSP should be, an aim which was rejected overwhelmingly in the preparatory elections to the General Chapter, in place of the position clearly stated in its Decree of Erection. They all fully understood the aims and ethos of the Fraternity when they joined it, and if they no longer subscribe to these aims and ethos, and are unable to persuade a majority of Fraternity members to accept their position, the only logical and honourable step for them to take is to leave and either found a new fraternity or join one sharing those aims. The Congregation of Jesus and Mary comes to mind in this respect.

The Constitution of the FSSP gives all the scope necessary for resolving differences of opinion internally, and for a minority group to go over the head of its legitimate superior without notifying him simply because it could not obtain majority support for its standpoint is deplorable. These priests had been in touch with the Ecclesia Dei Commission and the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Administration of the Sacraments for several months before their letter of 29 June 1999, also without the knowledge of their superior. The Congregation replied to them with the letter protocol 1411 dated 3rd July 1999 (see Addendum 4), stating that this reply had been composed with the approval of the Pontifical Council for the Interpretation of Legislative Texts, and the Pontifical Commission Ecclesia Dei. In this letter it is stated that priests who are members of an institute which enjoys the faculty of celebrating the rite in force before the liturgical restoration of Vatican II may use the 1970 Missal when celebrating as individuals or concelebrating, and that their superiors may not prohibit them from doing so. This means that traditional priestly societies can no longer be considered as self-governing in accordance with their approved constitutions, as can such orders as the Jesuits of Franciscans, and that the Curia can overturn decisions made by legitimately elected superiors and General Chapters without even consulting those superiors or chapters. This can certainly be

termed an offence against natural justice, even if in conformity with the statutes of the Commission see Addendum 1 A).

This is made even more clear by examining the letter Protocol 512 dated 13 July 1999 from the Ecclesia Dei Commission to Father Bisig. This letter was prompted by the the recourse of the 16 dissident priests made on 29 June 1999. It will be noted that in dramatic contrast to its practice with regard to recourses made to the Commission by laymen, whose bishops refuse to conform to the will of the Holy Father as regards the 1962 Missal, this reply was dispatched with what can be fairly termed “unholy haste” after a delay of only two weeks (It is appended as Addendum 5.) One might have hoped that upon receiving the scandalous letter of the sixteen, His Eminence Cardinal Felici would have replied at once admonishing them for the deceitful and uncatholic manner in which they had gone behind the back of their legitimate superior, and that he would have instructed them to be loyal to Father Bisig and to the Constitution of their Fraternity. He did not, alas do this, but actually conceded their outrageous demands, among which were demands that the General Chapter of the Fraternity scheduled for August should be postponed, and that Father Bisig should be replaced by an apostolic administrator who would take the destiny of the Fraternity into his hands. The Chapter was indeed postponed and will be replaced by what is termed a plenary session to be held in November. Father Bisig was not actually replaced by an apostolic administrator, but has been, to all intents and purposes, deprived of his authority by the Ecclesia Dei Commission, and thus is unable to expel the disloyal priests from the Fraternity.

“... you are requested to manage only those current affairs of the institute and to abstain from making changes which are not strictly necessary.” The Cardinal also commanded that an assembly of all the incardinated members of the Fraternity should be convoked during the Autumn of 1999. It will take place in Rome in the first week of November. Cardinal Felici did this without even contacting Father Bisig or giving him a chance to give his side of the story, and when he came to Rome in October Cardinal Felici refused to receive him. It would appear that since the Second Vatican Council the principle *audi alteram partem* no longer applies. The treatment that Father Bisig has been accorded certainly makes clear to all traditionalists the reality of the Conciliar Church almost exactly one year after the mood of optimism generated by the Pilgrimage to Rome in October 1998 to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the establishment of the Fraternity of St. Peter. It was on 25 June 1976 that the future Cardinal Benelli, then substitute to the Secretary of State, warned Archbishop

Lefebvre that he must ordain no more seminarians, but that there “is nothing desperate in their case: if they have good will and are seriously prepared for a presbyteral ministry in genuine fidelity to the Conciliar Church.”

In his letter protocol 512, Cardinal Felici states:

Given the quite important number of signatories of this recourse, equivalent to about a third of the incardinated members of the institute, and given the gravity of the problems raised, this Pontifical Commission cannot but take into consideration this action. The facts enumerated in the letter of recourse add to other facts which have already, in recent times, come to the knowledge of this Pontifical Commission.

For these reasons, this Pontifical Commission has decided to act without delay, in order to avoid negative and damaging consequences to the Fraternity itself and to the work of integrating the traditionalist faithful into the reality of the Church. The root cause of the present difficulties seems to be a lack of confidence in the hierarchy of the Church at all levels, from the Holy See to the Bishops.

It will be noted that the allegations made by the 16 priests (one third of ninety-two!), provided in full in Addendum 3, are presented as undisputed facts. Father Bisig was not only not given the opportunity to respond to the allegations of the disloyal sixteen before Protocol 512 was dispatched to him, but, when he came to Rome to defend himself, in contrast to the warm welcome given to the spokesmen for the sixteen, Cardinal Felici refused to receive him, and His Eminence has also made no response to the canonical recourse presented to his Commission by Father Bisig.

What the charges against Father Bisig and his General Chapter actually mean is that they are governing the FSSP in accordance with its Decree of Election, its Constitution, and the wishes of the vast majority of its members. Whatever confidence members of traditional priestly societies and their faithful may have had in the Curia before this letter, they certainly have every reason for having no confidence in it whatsoever since its publication.

The most alarming phrase in Protocol 512 is that the Commission reveals, inadvertently perhaps, that its ultimate aim is that of “integrating the traditionalist faithful into the reality of the Church” - precisely what Archbishop Lefebvre had warned would happen. In his letter to Cardinal Ratzinger dated 24 May 1988, the Archbishop stated: “Upon reflection, it appears clear that the goal of these dialogues is to reabsorb us within the Conciliar Church...” Now what is the reality of the Church

today? While it is expanding rapidly in Africa and Asia, this is very far from the case in what is known as the First World. In Europe today, and in English-speaking countries throughout the world, the reality is what Father Louis Bouyer described as “accelerating decomposition”. The Church in the First World is disintegrating. This is not a matter of opinion but of fact, of indisputable fact (unlike the so-called “facts” in the letter from the 16 dissident priests). Let the Commission cite an English, French, or German-speaking country where the Church is not decomposing, and the same is true for the Latin countries in Europe and Central and South America. “Catholic” Italy and Spain have the lowest birthrates in Europe, in Brazil alone 600,000 Catholics a year join Protestant sects. The Congregation for Divine Worship has accepted that liturgical abuses have become institutionalized. An editorial in *Notitiae* for October 1992, laments the fact that:

Thirty years are too many for an incorrect praxis, which in and of itself tends to be already fixed in place. The malformations born in the first years of the application still endure, and gradually, as new generations follow one another could almost become a rule.

The 3 September 1999 issue of England's *Catholic Herald* reports the fact that shortly before his death the late Cardinal Hume lamented the fact that in that country the “Church has lost devotion to the Eucharist”. An editorial in the same issue condemned the religious syllabi used in primary and secondary schools in England as “truly dreadful.” The official 1998 *Catholic Directory* for the USA reveals that the number of seminarians has declined from 48, 992 in 1965 to only 1700 in 1998, a decline of almost 97% from the 1965 figure. This is known as the renewal of seminary life! Similar figures could be produced for countries throughout the First World. And this is the reality into which the *Ecclesia Dei* Commission wishes to integrate traditionalist Catholics! Archbishop Lefebvre once remarked that: “Our future lies in our past.” Whatever their opinion regarding the 1988 consecrations, every traditionalist Catholic throughout the world would agree with him wholeheartedly. What is there in the reality of the contemporary Church that would have the least attraction for a Catholic with a sense of Tradition and a concern for the salvation of his soul?

In a letter dated 30 August 1999, Father Bisig made it clear that he is determined not to compromise in his policy of keeping the Fraternity faithful to its founding principles. (See Addendum 6.) He writes: “First of all, let me assure you of our commitment to maintain the integrity of the founding principles and purpose of the

Priestly Fraternity of Saint Peter. These principles, grounded in the Protocol of Agreement of May 5th 1988 signed by Cardinal Ratzinger and Archbishop Lefebvre, include a priestly ministry exercised for the good of the whole Church through the use of the liturgical books of the Roman Rite in their 1962 edition.” In pursuing this aim he certainly deserves and certainly will receive the support of the overwhelming majority of those lay Catholics whose generous moral and financial support has played so important a part in the rapid expansion of the Fraternity at a time when most priestly societies within the Latin Rite are suffering a vocations crisis. Cardinal Felici has accused Father Bisig and the vast majority of the members of the FSSP of “a lack of confidence in the hierarchy of the Church at all levels”. His Eminence can be sure that if measures which undermine the founding principles and purpose of the Priestly Fraternity of Saint Peter are imposed upon it by the Ecclesia Dei Commission, that Commission will certainly lose the confidence of traditional Catholics throughout the world.

Addendum 1. A

Pontifical Commission Ecclesia Dei

Since the particular charge given to the Pontifical Commission Ecclesia Dei necessitates certain acts which are not provided for by the law, the president of the same commission humbly sought from the Supreme Pontiff certain faculties enumerated below. They are to be exercised, should the case arise, with the consent of the Moderators of the Dicasteries concerned. The faculties requested are the following:

- 1.** the faculty of granting to all who seek it the use of the Roman Missal according to the 1962 edition, and according to the norms proposed in December, 1986, by the commission of Cardinals constituted for this very purpose, the diocesan bishop having been informed;
- 2.a)** the faculty of dispensing from the irregularities listed in Canon 1004, s. 1, nn. 1, and 2, according to the terms of the Motu Proprio “Ecclesia Dei”;
- b)** the faculty of validating the marriages performed in the presence of these same priests, null on account of the defect of form required by Canon 1108;

3.a) the faculties of erecting the Priestly Fraternity of Saint Peter as a clerical society of apostolic life with pontifical right, keeping its particular characteristics as referred to in the Motu Proprio *Ecclesia Dei*, n. 6, a, and of approving the constitutions of the said fraternity;

b) the faculty of erecting at Wigratzbad In the diocese of Augsburg the seminary of the Fraternity of Saint Peter, with the previous consent of the diocesan bishop;

4. the faculty of canonically erecting as Institutes of consecrated life or as societies of apostolic life those communities which are already in existence and which are bound to the ancient liturgical forms and discipline of the Latin tradition (*antecedentibus formis liturgicis et disciplinaribus traditionis Latinae sunt devinctae*), this with the consent of the Prefect of the Congregation for Religious and Secular institutes;

5. the faculty of erecting confraternities of lay people with the same outlook who, after fitting preparation and the accustomed period of approbation, seek to become institutes of consecrated life or societies of apostolic life;

6. the faculty of exercising the authority of the Holy See over the same societies and confraternities until otherwise

The Supreme Pontiff, in an audience granted to the undersigned Cardinal President of the Pontifical Commission *Ecclesia Dei*” on 18 October 1988, deigned to grant the faculties enumerated above and commanded that they should be communicated to those concerned.

AUGUSTINUS Card. MAYER

President

Addendum 1. B

PONTIFICAL COMMISSION ECCLESIA DEI

Decree

This Pontifical Commission Ecclesia Dei, in virtue of the special faculties granted to it by the Supreme Pontiff, and graciously accepting the petition of the Reverend Father Josef Bisig, by this selfsame decree erects the Priestly Fraternity of Saint Peter as a clerical society of apostolic life with pontifical right, according to the prescribed norms of Canon Law and with all the legal consequences involved. This same Fraternity of Saint Peter proposes the sanctification of priests through the exercise of the pastoral ministry, particularly in conforming its life to the Most Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and by observing the liturgical and disciplinary traditions invoked by the Roman Pontiff in the Apostolic Letter Ecclesia Dei of 2 July 1988, published Motu Proprio.

This erection brings with it the rights enumerated in Canon 611.

The Priestly Fraternity of St. Peter, as well as other priests who are guests in houses of the Fraternity or who exercise the sacred ministry in their churches, are conceded the use of the liturgical books in force in 1962.

In order that the necessary unity of the Church might be better fostered, the members of the Priestly Fraternity of St. Peter are with particular diligence to seek communion with the bishop and diocesan priests according Canons 679_683. In the exercise of the pastoral ministry the prescriptions of the law are to be observed, particularly in what concerns the valid and licit celebration of the sacraments of Penance and Matrimony, as well as what is laid down in Canon 535 concerning the transcription of these events in the parish registers.

The Constitutions of the Priestly Fraternity of St. Peter, having been accepted by this Pontifical Commission, are approved for three years “ad experimentum”.

The Reverend Father Josef Bisig is named Superior General of the same Fraternity, equally for three years.

Bearing in mind what is set out in this Decree, the Priestly Society of St. Peter is under the authority of the Supreme Pontiff as transmitted to this Pontifical Commission for all that concerns it, until otherwise provided for.

The Supreme Pontiff John Paul II, in audience on 18 October 1988 with the undersigned Cardinal of the Pontifical Commission Ecclesia Dei, ratified and ordered, the publication of this Decree, erecting the Priestly Fraternity of St. Peter as a society of apostolic life and approving its constitutions “ad experimentum”.

Anything to the contrary notwithstanding.

Given at Rome, from the Pontifical Commission Ecclesia Dei, the 18th of October 1988.

AUGUSTINUS Card. Mayer President

CAMILLUS PERL Secretary

Addendum 2

THE GOVERNMENT OF THE PRIESTLY FRATERNITY OF ST. PETER

A. The Superior General and His Council

16. The superiors will fulfill their duty according to the norms of universal Church law and the Constitution of the Fraternity.

17. Under the titles of Major Superiors (cf. Can. 620) will be the Supreme Moderator of the Fraternity (the Superior General) and his vicar, who will be chosen by the Superior General from his assistants.

18. The Supreme Moderator of the Fraternity is instituted by a canonical election by the General Chapter. The assistants, of whom there must be at least two and the two consultors, are also elected by the General Chapter.

19. The Superior General is elected for a term of six years. The two general assistants and two consultors are also elected for six years. The number of terms is not limited.

20. The Superior General, his assistants, and consultors are always chosen from among the clerics who have definitively pledged themselves to the Fraternity, and who have been priests in the Fraternity for at least five years.

21. The Superior General is aided in his work by the General Council. The General Council is comprised of the two assistants and the two consultors. The ordinary council is comprised of the Superior General and his two assistants; the two

consultors will also attend for any question which would be of a major consequence according to the judgment of the Superior General.

22. The Superior General designates in his Council the General Secretary and the General Treasurer. These last assist the Council without active voices; the positions of General Secretary and General Treasurer are assigned for a period of three years.

The General Chapter

23. The General Chapter possesses supreme authority according to the norms of universal law and the Constitution (cf. Can. 631, paragraph 2). It must preserve the proper spiritual patrimony of the institution, while being a sign of truth and charity.

24. The Chapter is composed of members by law and delegate members, according to the capitulary regulations. The delegate members are elected according to a proportional representation determined by the capitulary law; they should always constitute at least half of the members of the Chapter, which should not have more than 35 members, except the necessity to respect the former proportion.

25. The role of the General Chapter is to elect the Superior General of the society and his two assistants, to regulate the most important business on the spiritual, apostolic and administrative plane, to propose and modify the Constitution, to revise the decisions of the previous Chapter, to keep the directories up to date, and to be informed of the reports of the major superiors. Directories are normative documents other than the Constitution. (cf. Can. 587, paragraph 4).

26. The rules governing elections and deliberations are those of universal law, excepting the particular law of this Fraternity. The manner in which the Chapter functions, the organs of preparation, their composition and their choice, and the way in which they will discharge their functions will be regulated by the Chapter.

Addendum 3

Rome, Le 29 juin 1999

En la fete des saints Apotres Pierre et Paul

Fraternité Saint_Pierre

Un groupe de prêtres.

S.E.le Cardinal Angelo Felici

President de la Commission Pontificale Ecclesia Dei

Cité du Vatican

Eminence,

The signatories to this letter are priests, members of the Fraternity Saint Peter. We are conscious, in addressing ourselves directly to you and bypassing the authority of our Superior, of committing a grave act, one contrary to clerical custom. It is trusting in the primacy of the Pope's paternalism and in his overall jurisdiction, that we have formulated this recourse to the Apostolic See. The present situation in our Fraternity seems to us sufficiently urgent for it to become necessary, after advice and prayer, to submit this request to you.

It is eleven years now, consequent upon the schismatic act of 30th June 1988, since the Holy Father promulgated the Motu Proprio Ecclesia Dei adflicta allowing the continued usage of the liturgy according to the books of 1962, within the living Tradition of the Church. On 18 October 1988 the Commission Ecclesia Dei established the Fraternité Saint_Pierre.

On 26th October 1998, the tenth anniversary of this Motu Proprio, the Holy Father desired that “all be lived in the spirit of Vatican Council II, in full harmony with Tradition”. H.E. Cardinal Ratzinger on his part specified that “The Council has given a definition of what is the Liturgy, and this definition establishes a criterion for every liturgical celebration (in the new rite as well as in the rite of 1962). If one were to disregard these fundamental rules and put aside the *normae generales* set out at numbers 34_36 of the Constitution De Sacra Liturgia, then, in that case, one would be in violation of the obedience due to the Council!”

During the elections preparatory to the General Chapter of the Fraternité Saint Pierre scheduled for summer 1999, the totality of members elected formed a group firmly opposed to all adaptations of the rite of 1962 to the wishes of the Conciliar Fathers, including those accepted until then, and to all concrete liturgical sign of unity with the local bishop, preferring a strict preservation of a parallel and marginal ecclesial position.

For all that, approximately a third of the members of the Fraternité Saint_Pierre, wishes to continue to work along the path clearly set out as much in the Motu Proprio itself as in the addresses of October 1998 or the propositions made by the Commission Ecclesia Dei in 1989 with a view to a just management of the norms of the Missal of 1962 with the conciliar directives.

The Motu proprio noted the presence “at the root of the schismatic act” of 30th June 1988 of “an incomplete and contradictory notion of Tradition”. If the generosity of the Holy Father was well received by all those who wish to live the Latin Liturgical Tradition, has the warning that he expressed then been at all times well heard?

So far as our Fraternity is concerned, this hard line in matters of liturgy seems nothing less than an open manifestation of a far more serious opposition to the visible Church, to its teaching and its present hierarchy, in spite of its (the Society's) official declarations to the contrary.

The reasons for this fundamental opposition to the ecclesiastical hierarchy

- (a) are not only liturgical;
- (b) they are not actually doctrinal, for lack of a thorough study of the matters considered litigious in 1988
- (c) they are rather psychological, indeed sociological, and thus uncontrollable, as shown by the increasing exacerbation of tensions.

One finds, step by step, in this constant march towards a sense of separation, that imperceptible sliding which led, in 1988, the Fraternity of Saint Pius X to refuse the Roman propositions:

- (a) the liturgical aspirations were satisfied, the principle of the nomination of a bishop to be chosen from within the ranks of the said Fraternity was accepted, as was that of a theological discussion on certain points on the present teaching of the Church.

(b) all this was expunged at a stroke by a lack of confidence in the Church.

One has to fear a similar development in the Society of Saint Peter, which risks absorbing into this state of mind numerous families which, until then, would have been alien to such a mentality.

In practice, the disproportionate insistence on certain points of liturgical detail (crystallization of the 1962 Missal) has led to oversight and then to a de facto disregard of other essential aspects of the life of the Church, such as :

- listening to the living Magisterium: in the two seminaries of the Fraternité Saint_Pierre, the Apostolic Exhortation Pastores dabo vobis has not been truly applied, and documents regarding the preparation of the Jubilee have not found a response.
- evangelisation: when a bishop proposes certain territorial parishes involving certain liturgical management necessary for local conditions, this is met by a refusal justified on the grounds of fidelity to its (the Society's) Constitutions. This was the case of Mgr. Thomazeau, bishop of Beauvais, a year ago.

Moreover, it is surprising to note that many of those who had not known the so-called “traditionalist” movement and its history before 1988 are fascinated by the figure of Mgr. Lefebvre and want to make of the Fraternité Saint_Pierre an exact replica of the Fraternité Saint_Pie X, minus the episcopal consecrations but, in addition, with Pontifical right.

Obviously, one has to illustrate these statements with the help of a few examples.

1.(a) Many seminarians, pursuing their studies in our two seminaries, refuse with impunity to serve the Mass of visiting professors who celebrate it according to the Novus Ordo Missae

(b) Largely allowed since a few years now, the chanting of the Pater by the congregation is now strictly forbidden: in spite of his explicit request, Mgr. Guillaume, bishop of Saint Die, had the sad experience of this refusal during the last pilgrimage of Chartres.

(c) The Liturgical Directory adopted in 1995, which provided in its annexes some special provisions for France, has not been presented to the seminarians; a large number of them, after having discovered the traditional rite in the months preceding their entry to the seminary become, after a few months' training, vigilant guardians

of an exact obedience of the rubrics of 1962, especially by priests of the Fraternity suspected of “liberalism”.

2. The concelebration with a bishop, whatever the circumstances, is deemed an attack on the unity of the Fraternity and a grave offence. Certain members of the Fraternity who have concelebrated have been reprimanded; to avoid this unpleasantness and the opprobrium of their colleagues others find themselves obliged to conceal this “reprehensible” act. Before receiving the tonsure candidates have henceforth to undertake not to concelebrate under pain of exclusion.

3. Several priests, even Superiors, doubt the authority of the Commission Ecclesia Dei on the “liturgical question” or, generally, pretend to a precise fidelity to the 1962 rite and to the “founding acts”. Thus, prior to the canonical visit to the seminary at Wigrazbad, the seminarians were requested by their Superiors to remain silent in front of the visitor, to safeguard the interior unity of the Fraternity.

We are also concerned about a serious misuse in the exercise of the powers of a Superior General who regularly ignores the advice of the General Council and acts independently. It is thus that the Superior of the seminary in the United States was able to be replaced *motu proprio* without the Council being advised.

The list of examples could be lengthened substantially, but it seems to us that the nub of the matter does not lie therein.

The increasing rigidity observed over the years and the distinct hardening expected at the next Chapter is based on the following reasoning:

1. The systematic refusal of all 'compromise' is portrayed as

(a) the will of the Holy Father himself, indicated by the *Motu Proprio* and

(b) simultaneously, as the indispensable guarantee for the preservation of the “charisma of the founders” and fidelity to the Society's Constitutions.

2. All accommodation (“adaptation”) must therefore be rejected to avoid being drawn further.

3. It is therefore a matter of holding firmly to a “tradition” frozen in 1962, pending a hypothetical collapse of dioceses and of local ecclesiastical structures.

In fact, the permanent mistrust of the structures and men of the Church is accompanied by a pernicky archaeologism that delves incessantly into old books, curiously interpreted, searching for matters concerning liturgical practices that have fallen into disuse or are not “aesthetic”. Thus is lost the Catholic concept of a faithfully received liturgical tradition, lived serenely and joyously transmitted in the service of the Church's mission. Does the Fraternity of Saint Peter fear being unfaithful to its origins if it does not sufficiently underline its particular liturgy?

“It is necessary that such anxieties and fears should now cease, finally!” exclaimed Cardinal Ratzinger at the close of the conference of last October.

After the several Roman meetings of last October, the Abbé Aulagnier, one of the first members of the Society of St. Pius X, was able to congratulate the Abbé Bisig on his intransigence over the question of concelebration, and vehemently reprimanded Dom Gerard Calvet for declaring that he had on 27th April 1995 concelebrated with the Holy Father in a “spirit of peace and communion”.

This reprimand, frequently and sadly taken up within the ranks of the Fraternity of Saint Peter, especially after the declaration made by the Father Abbot of Barroux of his intention to continue along this path, has returned to trouble the serenity of a large number of the faithful.

This anxiety is currently generalised thus: a certain number of our colleagues do not hesitate to expose in public the internal difficulties of our Society and announce the approaching departure of elements within it who have liberal' or 'modernist' tendencies. Many lay people are aware that the Fraternity of Saint Peter is “at a cross_ roads” and ask themselves which road it will follow.

1. Your Eminence,

- (a) we venerate the traditional Latin liturgy which the Holy See permits us to use;
- (b) without calling into question the orthodoxy of the Novas Ordo Missae, we do not wish for a 'bi-ritualism' that would aggravate the current situation;
- (c) however, we are not priests for a rite, but for the Church and souls.

2. It is for this reason, and preoccupied

- (a) by all the faithful who, fully and without any feeling of guilt, wish to live this liturgy in communion with the Roman Church,

(b) by the seminarians who, tomorrow, will feel constrained to escape from a suffocating atmosphere

(c) also, by the thought of so many young diocesan priests aware of this evolution that we plead, humbly but with all the firmness that it is permitted to a son before his father, that you intervene in this situation which, unless you do, will lead us to a definite impasse.

3. In view of all these factors, and without prejudging any decision that you may reach, we ask you:

(a) to postpone the Chapter scheduled for next summer,

(b) to appoint a canonical visitor for the Fraternity as a whole, in order that he may ascertain for himself the reality of the situation,

(c) to nominate as a matter of urgency an apostolic administrator to take in hand the future of our Society.

The Church is Mother _ she has so proved it by the act of our foundation, as well as by the great patience which she shows us unceasingly. We ask her today, in all confidence to be also Mistress through your authority.

Be pleased to receive, Eminence, the assurance of our filial and grateful sentiments.

Prêtres de la Fraternité Saint-Pierre signataires

Michel Berger, responsable de l'apostolat à Périgueux

Thibaut Desgrées du Loü, supérieur de la maison Sainte-Jeanne d'Arc à Epinal

Marc-Antoine Dor, en apostolat à Bruxelles

Etienne Dumoulin, responsable de l'apostolat à Dion

Xavier Garban, supérieur de la maison Sainte-Thérèse à Nantes

Laurent Guimon, en apostolat à Lyon

Eric Journu, en apostolat à Versailles

Albert Kühlem, économe du district de Suisse, en apostolat à Lausanne

Tancrède Leroux, supérieur de la maison Saint-Jacques à Perpignan

Fabrice Loiseau, responsable de l'apostolat à Créteil

Bernard Malmezat, responsable de l'apostolat à Agen

Hugues de Montjoye, en apostolat à Perpignan

Bruno le Pivain, supérieur de la maison Saint-Thomas d'Aquin à Lausanne

Denis le Pivain, assistant du supérieur général, supérieur de la maison Saint-Dominique Savio à Versailles

René de Reboul, économiste du district de France, supérieur de la maison Sainte-Odile à Besançon

Gérald de Servigny, supérieur de la maison Sainte-Blandine à Lyon

Addendum 4

CONGREGATIO DEI CULTU DIVINO ET DISCIPLINA SACRAMENTORUM

Prot. 1411/99

Official Replies

After the Liturgical Restoration mandated by the Second Vatican Council, a certain group of the Catholic faithful appeared, strongly attached to preceding forms of the Roman Liturgical tradition. This group that is, those who are in communion with the Catholic Church's manifested the desire of using the Roman Missal (so-called) of Saint Pius V. The Supreme Pontiff, John Paul II, moved by his paternal desire to meet the liturgical and religious sensitivities of these groups, conceded to them the use of the Roman Missal of 1962 with the authorization of the bishop of the place. This same Supreme Pontiff also asked of the bishops that they would freely and generously receive those faithful attached profoundly to the preconciliar rite and at the same time manifesting a sincere assent to the magisterium of the Church and obedience to her legitimate pastors. The desire of the Roman Pontiff was made known by the Motu proprio "Ecclesia Dei adflicta" (2 Jul. 1988, AAS 80/1988 pp. 1495_98). A series of questions arrived at this Dicastery concerning the possibilities and impediments connected to the use of the 1962 missal conceded by indult by the legitimate authority. After proper consultation and with the approval of the Pontifical Council for the Interpretation of legislative texts, and the Pontifical Commission Ecclesia Dei, we communicate the response to the questions asked, as follows.

(1) Question: Can a priest who is a member of an institute which enjoys the faculty of celebrating the rite in force before the liturgical restoration of Vatican II freely use the Roman Missal promulgated by the Supreme Pontiff Paul VI when he celebrates the Eucharistic Sacrifice for the good of a community in which the Mass is celebrated according to this missal even if occasionally?

Response: Affirmative and “ad mentem” (according to the following reasoning) “Mens” Since the use of the preconciliar missal is conceded by indult, it does not remove the common liturgical right to the Roman Rite, according to which the missal in force is that promulgated after the Second Vatican Council. Moreover, the above mentioned priest must celebrate with the post conciliar missal, if, by chance a celebration takes place in a community which uses the modern Roman Rite. This in order that there be no wonderment (confusion) or inconvenience for the faithful and also that he might be a help to his brother priests who ask this service of pastoral charity. In communities accustomed to the modern missal the use of the preceding missal gives rise to several difficulties for example: the differences in the liturgical calendar, the discrepancies between the biblical texts for the liturgy of the word, the variety in gestures liturgical - in the mode of receiving Holy Communion - the variety in the duties of the ministers, etc., etc.

(2) Question: Can superiors of whatever rank of institutes enjoying the indult to use the Roman Missal of 1962 for the celebration of the Eucharistic Sacrifice - can they prohibit priests of these same institutes from using the post conciliar Roman Missal when such priests celebrate for the good of any community (even if only occasionally) in which the modern Roman Missal is used?

Response: No! The use of the Roman Missal of 1962 consists of an indult for the use of the faithful who are joined by the special bond to the preconciliar Roman Rite. Its use cannot be imposed on communities which celebrate the Holy Eucharist according to the missal renewed by order of the Second Vatican Council, in virtue of whom the superiors of such institutes have no authority.

(3) Question: Can a priest, a member of an institute which enjoys this indult, can he concelebrate Mass according to the modern order of the Roman Rite without any impediment?

Response: Affirmative, because the indult does not take away from priests the liturgical Rite common to all (clergy) of the Roman Rite of celebrating according to the current Roman missal in force. Moreover, he cannot and must not be prohibited

from concelebration by his superior or by the ordinary of the place. Indeed, it is praiseworthy that the above mentioned priests would concelebrate especially at the Mass of Holy Thursday with the diocesan bishop presiding. Although “each priest has the faculty of celebrating an individual Mass, not however at the same time in the same church no on Holy Thursday” (cf Vat. II Sacrosanctum Concilium #57, para 2.2). The sign of communion inherent in concelebration is so particular that it must not be omitted in the Chrism Mass unless for grave reasons (Sacrosanctum Concilium #57, 1.1a).

From the Seat of the Congregation, 3 July, 1999

George Cardinal Medina Estévez, Prefect

Franciscus Tamburrino, Secretary

Addendum 5

PONTIFICAL COMMISSION ECCLESIA DEI

Protocol N. 512/99

Rome, 13 July 1999

Very Rev. Joseph Bisig,

Superior General,

Priestly Fraternity of St. Peter.

Dear Father,

You are certainly not ignorant of the action undertaken by a group of priests of the Fraternity of St. Peter, who presented a formal recourse to the Holy See on 29 June last. In this recourse, they declare their opposition to the following points:

- the actual line of the Fraternity in liturgical matters and the implementation of the major lines set out by the Second Vatican Council
- the convocation of the General Chapter foreseen for this year as the manner of preparing for the election of the participants in this election, which, according to the opponents is destined to perpetuate this line by inserting it definitively in the Constitutions
- the manner of governing the Fraternity, which tends to silence all voices in opposition to the actual line, and which does not encourage a fraternal

understanding between the members, but carries the danger that the Fraternity is totally isolated in the Church.

Given the quite important number of signatories of this recourse, equivalent to about a third of the incardinated members of the institute, and given the gravity of the problems raised, this Pontifical Commission cannot but take into consideration this action. The facts enumerated in the letter of recourse add to other facts which have already, in recent times, come to the knowledge of this Pontifical Commission.

For these reasons, this Pontifical Commission has decided to act without delay, in order to avoid negative and damaging consequences to the Fraternity itself and to the work of integrating the traditionalist faithful into the reality of the Church. The root cause of the present difficulties seems to be a lack of confidence in the hierarchy of the Church at all levels, from the Holy See to the Bishops. Maybe there is at the foundation of this attitude a certain disdain\mistrust of the work of the Second Vatican Council which above all implies the liturgy reformed by Pope Paul VI at the end of this Council. The refusal of all concelebration in the Mass celebrated according to the rite in force is unfortunately the manifestation of this. As is known, such a lack of confidence was already at the origin of the schism of Archbishop Lefebvre and persists there still. It is our duty to take preventative measures to avoid a similar evolution in your institute.

Having consulted the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and with its agreement, this Pontifical Commission, exercising the authority of the Holy See over the Fraternity of St. Peter, in virtue of the faculties which were given to it by the Sovereign Pontiff, John Paul II, has decided the following:

1. The authorization given on 3 March 1999 (Prot. 443/99) to be able to anticipate the general Chapter of the Fraternity of St. Peter by a year and to hold it during the course of the summer of the present year is withdrawn.
2. An assembly of all the incardinated members of the Fraternity is to be convoked during the Autumn of 1999, either at Wigratzbad, Rome or indeed somewhere else. This assembly will have as its aim the discussion of disputed ecclesiological and liturgical questions in a free exchange of ideas under the presidency of the Cardinal President of this Commission or of his delegate. The Cardinal President will, at the end, set out the dispositions for the future, not only of the future governance of the Fraternity but also for the liturgical practice, which will

certainly guard the liturgical identity, guaranteed by indult, granted to the fraternity at its moment of foundation.

3. While waiting for this assembly - which does not require publicity or antecedent discussions among the priests and indeed even less so amongst the seminarians - you are requested to manage only those current affairs of the institute and to abstain from making changes which are not strictly necessary.

This Pontifical Commission hopes that you, Father, as Superior General of the Priestly Fraternity, will collaborate with it to re-establish the internal peace of the Fraternity and to guarantee in it a mature healthy development which, while maintaining its specified, will give it the possibility of finding its place amongst the other institutes of consecrated life and of apostolic life.

Please accept, Father Superior General, the expression of my highest consideration.

Angelo, Cardinal Felici, President.

Camillo Perl, Secretary.

Addendum 6

FRATERNITAS SACERDOTALIS SANCTI PETRI

DOMUS GENERALIS

August 30, 1999, Feast of Saint Rose

Dear Members and Friends of the Fraternity,

By now most of you have been made aware of some recent developments in the life of our institute. The purpose of this letter is to communicate, to you, accurate information so as to prevent disquiet due to the many rumors currently circulating. The enemy of mankind is always ready to stir the waters and cause confusion and discouragement.

There are two important events I would like to share with you. The first is the Protocol 1411/99 issued by the Congregation for Sacred Worship in reply to some questions regarding the use of the Novus Ordo Missæ by those priests involved with the traditional Roman liturgy. The second is the cancellation of the General Chapter of the Fraternity, due to meet this month of August, and the convocation instead of a plenary meeting in Rome for the month of November.

First of all, let me assure you of our commitment to maintain the integrity of the founding principles and purpose of the Priestly Fraternity of Saint Peter. These principles, grounded in the Protocol of Agreement of May 5th 1988 signed by Cardinal Ratzinger and Archbishop Lefebvre, include a priestly ministry exercised for the good of the whole Church through the use of the liturgical books of the Roman Rite in their 1962 edition. The reasons for this are twofold, one that we may call positive, and one that we may call negative. Positively, the Holy See has willed that we serve the Church by witnessing to the perennial tradition of the Roman liturgy in a time of rapid liturgical change. Negatively, the Holy See has allowed us to initiate a respectful and open study of the objections and concerns we have towards some of the liturgical reforms begun after the Second Vatican Council.

By a wide and generous application of the Motu Proprio of John Paul II, *Ecclesia Dei Adflicta*, the Holy See has until now blessed the apostolic work of the Fraternity and those others committed to the traditional Roman liturgy. In spite of this generosity, the Priestly Fraternity of Saint Peter has in recent years come under increasing

pressure from various quarters, if not to celebrate the Novus Ordo, at least to allow its members to do so under particular circumstances. As superior of the Fraternity, I have discouraged this on multiple grounds: fidelity to our own mission within the Church, avoidance of further unrest among our faithful and members, consolidation and identity of our apostolate, and unity of life and discipline according to our Constitutions.

Our commitment to the traditional Roman liturgy has been the occasion for some to give credence to the false suspicion that the Fraternity rejects the validity of the Novus Ordo Mass. In addition, certain bishops and bishops' conferences have deemed it necessary to limit severely the pastoral activity of the Fraternity because of our preference to maintain the exclusive use of the ancient liturgy in our ministry. Finally, in a time when concelebration has become the main (and sometimes only) expression of ecclesial unity, our will to live in unity with all Catholics according to the old customs and rites has become easily misunderstood.

Due to these difficulties and misunderstandings, some of our priests, especially in France, have expressed their desire to concelebrate on occasion the Novus Ordo. Although they are largely moved by apostolic zeal in the face of what one might consider an unfair limitation on their ability to minister to the vast needs of the faithful, the superiors of the Fraternity have discouraged this for the sake of the common good of our institute. I believe that our particular mission in serving the hierarchy and the faithful is at present not so much the quantitative expansion of our apostolate as the qualitative witnessing to the immemorial liturgical tradition of the Church.

This situation led these priests, a small group among our members, to submit without my knowledge an official recourse to the Ecclesia Dei Commission on June 29 of this year. Following this presentation, two matters now concern us: the "Official Reply" of the Sacred Congregation of Divine Worship, July 3rd, Protocol 1411/99, and the cancellation of the General Chapter of the Fraternity and the convocation instead of a plenary meeting of our members in Rome, during the month of November.

For the good of the Church and of our Fraternity, I have taken appropriate and legitimate steps to ensure that the proper authorities reconsider these measures. In fact, we ardently desire that the November plenary meeting might provide the opportunity for an honest and respectful exchange regarding our difficulties with some of the liturgical reforms. We have to understand the need for a dialogue both

seriously theological and fraternally open, in order to ensure that the legitimate points of all parties are taken into consideration and harmonized in a common policy. I will continue to do everything possible to protect the identity and character of the work that the Fraternity carries out on behalf of the whole Church. I request your prayers for myself, for our members, and for those in the Church who have responsibilities towards the Fraternity. With confidence, I lay our needs and hopes at the feet of the Virgin Mother, of our patron the Apostle Peter, and of his successor, the Holy Father.

Our defense of the identity and mission of the Fraternity rises from our desire to be faithful to the Church and to the members and faithful who have trusted us with their vocations and concerns. However, a strong defense of our convictions cannot take place without a humble submission to Providence and the Magisterium of the Church. Trials, when lived in the desire to obey God's will, are a tremendous occasion for purification and growth. It is in this light that we see our present difficulties. May this be an opportunity for us to renew our commitment to study and dialogue with others regarding those issues with which we are associated by our very mission. May this be an occasion to promote the knowledge and love of the Roman liturgy, and to enrich others by the faithful keeping of our vocation and particular laws. May this be also a circumstance in which we strengthen the unity that can only be the result of loyalty to our mission and the sanctity of our lives. Finally, may this be an occasion to deepen our experience of and love for the mystery of the Church, the immaculate Bride of our glorious Lord, Jesus Christ.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Fr Joseph Bisig, FSSP

Superior General

LETTER FROM 71 FRATERNITY PRIESTS

Le 8 septembre 1999

à Monsieur l'abbé Josef BISIG Supérieur général de la Fraternité Saint_Pierre

Copies à :

Son Eminence le Cardinal Josef RATZINGER Préfet de la Congregation pour la Doctrine de la Foi

Son Eminence le Cardinal Jorge Arturo MEDINA_ESTEVEZ Prefet de la Congregation pour le Culte divin et la discipline des sacrements

Son Eminence le Cardinal Angelo FELICI Président de la Commission pontificale Ecclesia Dei

Monsieur Le Supérieur général,

Par cette lettre, les 71 pretres et diacres signataires désirent vous faire part de leur surprise attristée à la lecture des graves accusations contenues dans la lettre envoyée le 13 juillet par la Commission "Ecclesia Dei" à vous notre Supérieur général, et dont vous nous avez donné connaissance, avec l'accord de Mgr Peri.

Son Eminence le Cardinal Felici pense que "la cause profonde des difficultés actuelles semble être un manque de confiance vis-à-vis de la hiérarchie de l'Eglise à tous les niveaux, tant le Saint_Siège que les évêques". Monsieur l'abbé, une telle affirmation nous blesse profondément dans la fidélité que nous avons toujours vécue vis-à-vis de l'Eglise et de sa hiérarchie. Depuis 1988, date où les sacres conférés par Mgr Lefebvre ont obligé nos membres fondateurs à rompre avec la Fraternité Saint_Pie X, nous n'avons eu de cesse que de construire notre Fraternité dans cette fidélité, heureux que le Saint_Pere nous ait confié cette mission spécifique de l'usage des livres liturgiques de 1962.

Il nous semble, Monsieur l'abbé, que cette réaction de la Commission "Ecclesia Dei", suite à la démarche de quelques confrères français au début du mois de juillet, ne reflète pas l'état d'esprit exact de la plus grande partie des membres de la Fraternité. En effet, les quelques confrères qui se sont arrogés le devoir de porter ces dures critiques, quand elles ne sont pas mensongères, n'ont pas respecté, quant à eux, ce qu'exige la règle canonique comme ce que suggère la délicatesse fraternelle.

D'une part, ils vous ont mis devant le fait accompli, sans vous avoir jamais présenté d'abord leurs revendications précises. D'autre part, certains d'entre eux n'ont pas hésité à poser des actes répétés de désobéissance. Il nous est dès lors difficile d'accepter avec sérénité des reproches visant à faire croire que nous refusions systématiquement toute obéissance à l'Eglise et à sa hiérarchie.

Ces quelques pretres, presque uniquement français, ne représentent par ailleurs qu'une petite partie de la Fraternité Saint_Pierre (16 prêtres sur 100). De plus, aucun d'entre eux ne fait partie des prêtres fondateurs de la Fraternité. C'est pourquoi nous agissons à notre tour auprès de vous, notre Supérieur général, car nous ne pouvons accepter la suspicion jetée ainsi sur vous_memes et sur l'autorité interne de la Fraternité.

Par ailleurs, il est de notre devoir de soulever le probleme extrêmement grave qui ne manquera pas de se poser si la Fraternité Saint_Pierre devait demeurer dans la situation actuelle.

Le texte signé en juillet 1988 par les fondateurs de la Fraternité Saint_Pierre a eu pour base le Protocole d'accord du 5 mai, que Mgr Lefebvre a par la suite remis en cause. Dans son esprit cet accord prévoit bien pour la Fraternité Saint_Pierre le droit exclusif de célébrer et conférer les sacrements dans le rit de 1962. C'est la raison pour laquelle la concélébration pose plus de problèmes qu'elle n'en peut résoudre : certes, nous reconnaissons absolument la légitimité du nouvel Ordo. Mais cette reconnaissance ne nous ôte pas le droit, reconnu en 1988, de faire part de nos difficultés vis_d_vis de ce même nouvel Ordo.

Depuis notre fondation, nous n'avons pour but que de respecter ce que l'Eglise Elle_même nous a donné. Si, par malheur, la démarche de nos confrères devait obtenir comme résultat de nous ôter cette exclusivité, non seulement notre Fraternité n'aurait plus de raison d'exister, mais leséfidèles eux_mêmes, totalement désorientés, n'y verraient qu'une nouvelle occasion de division. Quant à nous, nous ne pourrions comprendre facilement ce qui ressemblerait fort à un retour en arrière de la part de l'autorité.

Monsieur l'abbé, lors de notre fondation en 1988, il a bien été affirmer que notre existence était souhaitée pour éviter que de trop nombreux fidèles et pretres demeurent en dehors de l'Eglise. A l'heure ou nous vous écrivons, nous ne pouvons ignorer que ce péril est plus que jamais présent, au cas où la Fraternité Saint_Pierre viendrait de perdre sa spécificité liturgique. Or c'est ce qui ne peut qu'arriver si les

critiques de quelques confrères ne sont pas remises à leur juste place, et si ces confrères ne veulent pas agir avec loyauté vis_à_vis de leurs supérieurs et de l'ensemble de la Fraternité.

Sous votre direction, la Fraternité Saint_Pierre a affirmé depuis onze ans dans les faits comme dans les écrits un attachement sincère et définitif de l'Eglise romaine. Preuve en a été faite lors de notre pèlerinage à Rome à la Toussaint 1998, par lequel de très nombreux _Fidèles ont été confortés dans cette double fidélité.

Pour toutes les raisons énumérées ci_dessus, nous désirons continuer notre apostolat dans la paix, sous votre autorité, autorité reconnue par les divers chapitres et ce depuis la fondation de la Fraternité. Nous vous prions donc de bien vouloir faire connaître à la Commission pontificale

“Ecclesia Dei” le soutien que nous vous apportons, ainsi qu'à votre gouvernement.

Avec l'assurance de notre prière fervente, veuillez agréer, monsieur le Supérieur général, l'expression de nos sentiments filiaux et respectueux.

Signé par 71 prêtres et diacres.

Translation

September 8, 1999

To Reverend Father Josef BISIG, Superior General Fraternity of St. Peter.

Copies to:

His Eminence Cardinal RATZINGER Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith.

His Eminence Cardinal Jorge Arturo MEDINA ESTEVEZ Prefect of the Congregation for the Divine Cult and Discipline of Sacraments.

His Eminence Cardinal Angelo FELICI President of the Pontifical Commission (of) Ecclesia Dei.

Reverend General Superior,

By this letter, the 71 priest and deacon signatories wish to share their sad surprise in reading about the grave accusations contained in the letter sent i.e. July 13 by the “Ecclesia Dei” Commission to you our General Superior and that you have made known to agreement of Monsignor Peri.

His Eminence, ie Cardinal Felici thinks that “the profound cause of the actual difficulties seems to be a lack of confidence vis a vis the hierarchy of the Church at all levels, including the Holy See and the bishops.” Reverend Father, such a statement grieves us deeply because we have always faithfully abided by the precepts of the Church and its hierarchy. Since 1988, the date when Monsignor Lefebvre forced us to break away from the St. Pius X Fraternity, we have exerted all of our efforts to build our fraternity in this faithfulness, happy that His Holiness had entrusted us with the specific mission of using the 1962 liturgical books.

It would appear to us, Reverend Father that this reaction of the Ecclesia Dei Commission, following the undertaking of a few French brothers at the beginning of the month of July, does not reflect the true state of mind of the majority of the members of the Fraternity. The fact is that the few brothers who took it upon themselves to bring these harsh criticisms, when not outright lies, did not respect for their part the requirements of Canon Law nor the tactfulness one might expect amidst our fraternity.

First of all, they placed you in an awkward position by their failure to ever submit to you any specific complaints beforehand. Secondly, some of them did not hesitate to repeatedly commit certain acts of disobedience. Under the circumstances it is difficult for us to accept quietly reproachful statements, which insinuate that we systematically refuse any form of obedience to the Church and to its hierarchy.

Furthermore, these few priests, almost exclusively French, represent only a small fraction of the Fraternity of St. Peter (16 priests out of a 100). In addition, none of them belong to the group of founding fathers of the Fraternity. This is why we in turn wish to bring this issue to your attention, as our general superior, because we cannot accept the aura of suspicion cast upon yourself and your internal authority of the fraternity. In addition, it is our duty to point out the extremely grave problem which will undoubtedly arise should the Fraternity of St. Peter remain in the present situation.

The text signed in July 1988 by the founders of the Fraternity of St. Peter had for basis the protocol of the agreement of May 5, which Mgr. Lefebvre later rejected. In its spirit, this agreement gives the Fraternity of St. Peter the exclusive right to celebrate and confer the sacraments according to the rites of 1962. It is for this reason that the concelebration raises more problems than it can resolve: admittedly we acknowledge absolutely the legitimacy of the new order. But this acknowledgment does not deny us the right, recognized in 1988, to point out the difficulties brought about by this same new order.

Since our foundation, we have had no other goal but to respect what the Church itself had given us. If, unfortunately, our brothers' undertaking should deprive us of this exclusivity, not only would our fraternity no longer have any reason to exist, but also the faithful themselves, completely baffled, would see in this, a new element of division. For our part, we would fail to understand what would appear to be backtracking on the part of authority.

Reverend Father, at its creation in 1988, it was duly stated that at our existence was desirable to prevent a large number of faithful and priests from remaining outside of the Church. At the time of this writing we cannot ignore the fact that this peril is now more than ever present, in the event that our fraternity should lose its liturgical specificity. Alas what else would likely happen should we not place the criticism of a few brothers in their proper place, and should these brothers not wish to behave loyally towards their superiors and the fraternity as a whole.

Under your guidance, the Fraternity of St. Peter has made known for eleven years through its deeds as well as its writings, a sincere and definitive link to the Roman Church. Our Pilgrimage to Rome on All Saints' Day in 1998, through which a very large number of faithful were comforted in this double allegiance gives proof of this.

For all the above-mentioned reasons, we wish to continue our apostolic mission in peace, under your authority, which authority has been acknowledged by the various chapters since the foundation of the Fraternity. We, therefore respectfully ask you to let the pontifical Commission "Ecclesia Dei" know that we give you, as well as your government our full support.

With the assurance of our fervent prayers, we wish to express Mr. Superior general our dutiful and respectful regards.

Signed by 71 priests and deacon