

# A look back at the consecrations of June 30, 1988

We thank Fr. Jean-Michel Gleize, SSPX, who recently reiterated the point of view of the Society of St. Pius X on the legitimacy of the consecrations conferred on June 30, 1988 without a pontifical mandate<sup>1</sup>, for giving us the opportunity to return to this important question. Having lived closely through what preceded and followed these consecrations, in the summer of 1988 we made the choice to live in full fidelity to the rites of the Latin Tradition within hierarchical communion. We then suffered through the painful separation from Bishop Marcel Lefebvre, the bishop who ordained us in 1977, and whose great priestly and missionary spirit has always edified us.

We are both founders of Fraternities canonically erected by the Holy See in October 1988. Archbishop Lefebvre and many of the priests who followed him predicted that our Fraternities would not remain faithful to their founding acts, that we would be contaminated by "modernism," and that we would eventually be suppressed within a short time. The past thirty-four years have shown the inaccuracy of these predictions. Our Institutes, in spite of various pressures, both internal and external, have remained faithful to their initial *raison d'être*. Despite multiple oppositions, they have undergone significant growth. This point sheds a telling light on what those who favor the consecrations call "survival operation": the 1988 consecrations were, they say, absolutely necessary for "the Tradition" to survive. Our existence proves just the opposite.

Let us return to the basic reasons for our disagreement with the 1988 consecrations and our rejection of the separation from the Catholic hierarchy that followed and has continued ever since.

Father Gleize affirms that our reflection is "devoid of any foundation in the data of Tradition." We invite the reader who would like to verify the validity of this assertion to refer to our studies at the time.<sup>2</sup> He will see that they are abundantly and solidly founded on the doctrine of the Fathers and on the Magisterium. Those studies are accessible on-line.<sup>3</sup> We restrict ourselves here to highlighting what is opposed to Fr. Gleize's assertions in his most recent work.

His approach can be outlined as follows.

Father Gleize insists on the difference in nature, in the episcopate, between the power of order (transmitted by the sacred rites of consecration) and the power of jurisdiction (transmitted by the injunction of the Supreme Pontiff). He affirms a "perfect separability" of these two powers.

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<sup>1</sup> In three articles published in the *Courrier de Rome* 655 (July-August 2022): "Pie XII et l'épiscopat," 1-5; "L'Opinion commune des théologiens sur l'épiscopat," 5-9; "La Fraternité Saint Pierre et l'épiscopat," 10-12.

<sup>2</sup> L.-M. de Blighnières, *Réflexions sur l'épiscopat « autonome »*, Supplément doctrinal n° 2 *Sedes Sapientiae* (June 1987); *Du sacre épiscopal contre la volonté du pape, avec application aux sacres conférés le 30 juin par Mgr Lefebvre*, Collaborative essay by FSSP members, Fr. Josef Bisig ed., (n.d.; early 1989).

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.chemere.org/blog/2022/9/30/du-sacre-episcopal-contre-la-volonte-du-pape>  
<https://www.chemere.org/blog/2022/9/30/etude-episcopat-autonome>

Schism, in this view, consists only in wanting to transmit the power of jurisdiction without the pope's consent, as the Chinese bishops did in the 1950s. The pure transmission of the power of order then constitutes at most a disobedience, and is justified in certain cases of necessity. Archbishop Lefebvre, on June 30, 1988, denied that he was transmitting any jurisdiction whatsoever and considered that there was a case of necessity: "His goal was to give Tradition and the Church the means to perpetuate the priesthood, without compromising with the novelties of Vatican II."<sup>4</sup>

This reasoning is invalidated by several considerations.

**1° Let us hypothetically grant the "perfect separability" of order and jurisdiction. It is worth noting that Fr. Gleize omits to mention that, in a legitimate consecration, the exercise of jurisdiction always intervenes.** Indeed, the act by which the Pope designates the subject to be consecrated does not belong to the power of order, but to the government of the Church. A bishop who ordains a priest not designated by the Pope, even if he does not intend to pass on to that priest any jurisdiction, is indeed usurping the Pope's jurisdiction by choosing that priest as his bishop. This is disobedience in a grave matter and, according to the criterion put forward by Fr. Gleize (schism is only in the usurpation of jurisdiction), it is indeed a schismatic act.

**2° The perfect separability of which Father Gleize speaks must be nuanced.** It is true that there are bishops who do not have actual jurisdiction, but all of them (unlike simple priests) have, in virtue of their consecration, an aptitude of divine right for this jurisdiction. There is, in the episcopal dignity itself, a relationship to the Mystical Body, which is not reducible to the power of ordaining and confirming the baptized. This relationship concerns the very *regency* of the Church, including in this notion the power to teach and to govern. This power becomes jurisdiction only through the designation of subjects. However, it calls for this designation; it is intrinsically ordered to it by the very will of Christ, so much so that the ordering to jurisdiction (of the external forum) is part of the very notion of the episcopate. "It would be a contradiction in terms to conceive of a consecrated bishop who did not have, in the character itself, any relation to the government of the Church."<sup>5</sup> This truth is independent of the question of the sacramentality of the episcopate.

He who receives the episcopate without an apostolic mandate thus receives a spiritual power intrinsically ordered to the government of the Church, yet without any injunction from those who have authority in the Church. He receives a power essentially ordered to an act reserved, by divine right, to those in authority in the Church. This is a serious vitiation, which is, if not schismatic, at least in the very line of schism. This is why Pius XII describes the

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<sup>4</sup> Gleize, "L'Opinion," 9.

<sup>5</sup> Mazzella, *De Religione et Ecclesia* (Rome, 1880), 788. Fr. de Balignières, 26-28n33, quotes seventeen classical theologians who mention this relationship of the bishop to the government of the Church, described by them as a radical aptitude of vocation, need, ordination, purpose.

consecration received without the apostolic institution as "a very serious attack on the very unity of the Church."<sup>6</sup>

The Pope expresses very clearly the illegitimacy of a consecration without a pontifical mandate: "No one can legitimately confer episcopal consecration without the prior certainty of a pontifical mandate."<sup>7</sup> Father Gleize quotes this passage without making clear its meaning, which is nevertheless obvious.<sup>8</sup>

**3° Schism occurs when consecrations are made with the intention of withdrawing from pontifical jurisdiction or from communion of the universal Church.** This was the case for the constitution of the Chinese "Patriotic Church." This is what happened with the consecrations of June 30, 1988. Archbishop Lefebvre did not intend to *transmit* a jurisdiction but to *withdraw* from one. This is what emerges from the principal motive recalled by Father Gleize: to evade the "modernist authorities," to carry out a survival operation of "Tradition" outside of the hierarchical structures.<sup>9</sup>

That is why John Paul II, in the motu proprio *Ecclesia Dei*, rightly spoke of a "schismatic act." It was clear to all that it was not only a question of promoting a few priests to the episcopate, but the stated goal was to take the means to dispense the sacraments and teaching *independently from the Catholic hierarchy, the Pope, and the bishops in communion with him.*

In fact, since 1988, the SSPX has *officially*<sup>10</sup> behaved as if it had no subordination to the Catholic hierarchy. It has intensified this attitude since 2018. No authorization (apart from what is physically indispensable, such as the use of a basilica for a pilgrimage) is requested for any pastoral, apostolic, or teaching activity. No directive from the hierarchy as such is followed.<sup>11</sup> No document from the Magisterium after 1962 is received. They are sometimes criticized all the more for containing good elements that might be "traps" (e.g., the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, *Veritatis splendor*, *Dominus Jesus*).

More serious yet is the fact that the SSPX grants dispensations from marriage impediments and judges the nullity of marriages internally. This is clearly attributing to itself a power of jurisdiction.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Pius XII, Enc. *Ad Apostolorum Principis*, 29 June 1958, AAS 50 (1958): 612, *Osservatore Romano* 8-9 Sept. 1958, reprinted in St. Maurice Edition (1958), 337.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> Gleize, "Pie XII," 4.

<sup>9</sup> Gleize, "La Fraternité Saint Pierre," 12. Cf. in Fr. Josef Bisig's brochure, 34-36, the motivations set out by Archbishop Lefebvre on 30 May 1988.

<sup>10</sup> Fortunately, there are some priests and many faithful who attend SSPX chapels who do not share this attitude and sometimes even deplore it.

<sup>11</sup> Sometimes, however, leaders of the SSPX support on their own initiative what is commanded or advised by the hierarchy.

<sup>12</sup> Since 1991, during Archbishop Lefebvre's lifetime, the SSPX has arrogated to itself over its faithful (and potentially over all Catholics), through the creation of the "St. Charles Borromeo Commission," the "power to bind and loose," usurping the power of jurisdiction that only the Pope can give. In May 2017, eight deans of the SSPX District of France and three religious superiors affirmed, "We will continue to recognize only the St. Charles Borromeo Commission . . . as the ultimate judge of these [matrimonial] matters," *Le Chardonnet* 928, p. 4.

**4° Father Gleize's definition of schism is incomplete.** He restricts schism to the relationship with authority. "And if schism is defined as the claim of being able to give what the Pope alone can give, this power communicated by a consecration accomplished against the will of the Pope is schismatic."<sup>13</sup> However, here, does not Fr. Gleize "falsify the most elementary data of Catholic doctrine," as he so kindly imagines we do? We rather think that, carried away by the needs of his argument, he has forgotten another dimension of schism: the attack of the unity among the faithful.

"Those who refuse to submit to the Sovereign Pontiff and *those who refuse communion with the members of the Church who are subject to him are called schismatics,*" writes the Common Doctor.<sup>14</sup>

The SSPX openly asserts its separation from the other members of the Church. Father Pagliarani, in 2016, referred to "the objective fact that Catholic life within the official structures is currently impossible."<sup>15</sup> According to the directives of the superiors, one should not even attend the services of the *Ecclesia Dei* Institutes, or at least not receive Holy Communion there. One must distance himself not only from the faithful who frequent the new rite, but also from the "ralliés"<sup>16</sup> so as not to be contaminated by the "modernist" spirit that the latter are supposed to convey. Priests who are present at a religious ceremony of the "ralliés" must attend it outside the choir, and in any case without the choir habit (in bare cassock without surplice). The faithful or priests who follow these directives are not behaving as parties in the Church. The great theologian Cajetan recalled on this subject:

He is schismatic who refuses to act as part of the Church. It does not matter what the reasons are: as soon as one refuses to act as part of the one Catholic Church, one falls into schism. However varied the reasons and passions may be that impel Christians to withdraw from communion, to want to sanctify and be sanctified, to instruct and be instructed, to lead and be led . . . , not as parts of the Catholic Church, but as if they were themselves separate "wholes," they are schismatics.<sup>17</sup>

These four reasons lead us to consider that our 1988 judgment remains entirely valid. Consecrations without a papal mandate (and a fortiori against the express will of the Pope) are not legitimate and constitute a very serious attack on the unity of the Church. Carried out with the intention of evading the jurisdiction of the Pope and the bishops, they constitute a "schismatic act." The fact that the group to which they have given rise refuses hierarchical communion (even after having received such positive offers) is a clear confirmation of this situation of deliberate separation.

Let us clarify an important point. We are aware of the dramatic situation of crisis in the Church. We see that many pastors are not performing their duty, even when they do not give scandals in faith and morals. We see that certain acts and omissions of the hierarchy favor heresy and the destruction of structures. We understand that many of the rank and file faithful, being

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<sup>13</sup> Gleize, "La Fraternité Saint Pierre," 11.

<sup>14</sup> S. Th, II.II, q. 39, a. 1. This definition was restated by the Code of Canon Law: CIC/1917, canon 1325 § 2; CIC/1983, canon 751.

<sup>15</sup> The lecture he gave on January 15, 2022 at the XVth Congress of the *Courrier de Rome* has the same tenor.

<sup>16</sup> "Rallié" = rather derogative term to designate a person who has joined a cause, after having been its opponent.

<sup>17</sup> Cajetan, *Commentary on S. Th*, II.II, q. 39, a. 1, n°2.

disoriented, cling to zealous priests who dispense the sacraments in their traditional form.<sup>18</sup> We are not here accusing persons. We are not saying that our confreres of the SSPX and their faithful, whose qualities we know, are all subjectively schismatic.

However, we have a duty as theologians to affirm fundamental theological truths. The text of Father Gleize gives us the opportunity to recall that one does not fight an error with another error, nor heresy with schism. We therefore do not share the pragmatic point of view of those who say to us: "No enemies on the right, we want the sacraments and the catechesis of Tradition, period!" This primacy of efficiency is a kind of "primacy of pastoral concerns" in its traditionalist version. It is a short-term pragmatism that neglects the primacy of doctrine and distorts the minds of the faithful.

As priests, we have a duty to bear witness to the fact that, whatever the cost, we must remain faithful to all aspects of Catholic doctrine: the importance of Tradition, as well as that of hierarchical communion. As founders, we also see that this has been possible and that, in fact, by the grace of God, it has been fruitful.

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<sup>18</sup> The fact that Pope Francis, as of September 2015, conceded for the benefit of the faithful that those who confess to SSPX priests "will receive a valid absolution" does not mean that SSPX priests are in full communion with the Church. The Pope can entirely give powers to those who are separated, even if they do not ask for them, without this meaning that he recognizes their full communion with the Catholic Church. According to many theologians, this is the case for the confessions of dissident Eastern Orthodox priests.