

Archbishop Lefebvre dies at 85

MARTIGNY, Switzerland (CNS) — Traditionalist Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre, who provoked a schism in 1988 by ordaining bishops against papal orders, died March 25, 1991, at a Martigny hospital after suffering from cancer. He was 85.

At the Vatican, Pope John Paul II prayed for the archbishop and asked God's mercy on his soul.

According to a Vatican statement, the pope had been ready "up to the last moment" to lift the excommunication if Archbishop Lefebvre had shown some remorse for his actions.

Archbishop Lefebvre's funeral was scheduled for March 26 in Ecône, Switzerland, where he had founded a seminary. Canonical approval for the seminary was given in 1970, but withdrawn in 1975.

The French archbishop was suspended from priestly ministry in July, 1976, by Pope Paul VI for ordaining priests without church approval. He and his followers reject the reforms of the Second Vatican Council, especially the council teachings

on ecumenism, religious liberty and liturgical reform.

News of the archbishop's death was received with "sadness," the Vatican statement said. The statement said the Holy See had not forgotten his years of faithful service in Africa.

The disciplinary action against Archbishop Lefebvre was necessary, however, to "make him understand the seriousness of the wound that his successive behavior inflicted on the communion of the church," it said.

The pope "until the last moment hoped for a gesture of repentance," the statement said.

"He had shown himself willing to lift the canonical punishment, if there had been a sign in this sense" by Archbishop Lefebvre, it said.

When informed of the archbishop's death, the pope immediately "raised a prayer of supplication, entrusting the soul of the deceased to the mercy of God," the statement said.

Activities of the traditionalist society were likely to continue as before following the death of Archbishop Lefebvre, who had handed over the post of superior general of the Priestly Society of St. Pius X to Father Franz Schmidberger in 1983.

Father Schmidberger and the Ecône seminary director, Father Michel Simoulin, said in a March 25 statement that Archbishop Lefebvre's life was "fully consecrated to the defense of the Catholic faith and to serving the church in giving it a new generation of priests."

Vatican officials said they expected the division would remain between Archbishop Lefebvre's society and the Holy See.

"I don't think his death will make that much difference, in that regard," said one official. He noted that the archbishop had prepared the society for this moment by illicitly ordaining bishops.

Another official said that despite the Vatican's efforts to convince Archbishop Lefebvre's followers to return to the fold,



File photo
Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre in 1988.

his society has grown in recent years. Its influence has been largely limited to France, however, the official said.

Officials at the society count 1 million followers worldwide; Vatican officials estimate the number to be around 500,000.

Born Nov. 29, 1905, in Tourcoing, France, Marcel Lefebvre was ordained a priest of the Diocese of Lille, France, on Sept. 21, 1929, but later joined the Holy Ghost Fathers.

Ordained a bishop on Sept. 18, 1947, he served as apostolic delegate to French West Africa from 1948 to 1959, during which time he was first apostolic vicar and later archbishop of Dakar, Senegal.

In 1962, Pope John XXIII made Archbishop Lefebvre the bishop of Tulle, France, with the personal title of archbishop. He headed the diocese for about eight months before being elected superior general of the Holy Ghost Fathers. He broke with the order in 1968.

During a 1983 visit to Trent, Italy, Archbishop Lefebvre said he did not consider himself a rebel.

"Me, a rebel? Certainly, a rebel against modernism, progressivism, socialism, communism. But certainly not a rebel against the church," he said.

Before the 1988 episcopal ordinations — leading to his excommunication and that of the four bishops he ordained — Archbishop Lefebvre said he was taking the action so that his Priestly Society of St. Pius X could continue to effectively "guard against the spirit of Vatican II."

"Radically opposed to the destruction of our faith and resolved to stay within the traditional doctrine and discipline of the church, we feel the absolute need to have church authorities who take up our concerns and help us to guard against the spirit of Vatican II and the spirit of Assisi," he said in a letter to Pope John Paul.

The Assisi reference was to a 1986 inter-religious prayer service convened by Pope John Paul in that Italian town. Archbishop Lefebvre had called it an act of "public blasphemy."

Contributing to this story was John Thavis in Rome.

Congress introduces parental notification bills

By Patricia Zapor
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — Two bills that would require parental notification when minors seek abortions and would apply to institutions receiving federal funds have been introduced in the House of Representatives.

One of the measures, introduced March 19 by Rep. Christopher H. Smith, R-N.J., would require entities that receive federal money for any health services to notify parents when their minor daughters seek abortions.

A similar bill amending Title X of the Public Health Service law to require parental notification as a part of federally funded family planning services was introduced March 13, by Rep. William E. Dannemeyer, R-Calif.

Currently, Title X prohibits recipients of federal family planning funds from making abortion referrals in nearly all cases. But Dannemeyer's bill would require the notification in any cases of medical emergency, the exceptions to the Title X restriction.

Participants at a March 19 press conference sponsored by Smith said that laws in Massachusetts and Minnesota — requiring parental notification — have resulted in dramatically reduced numbers of minors seeking abortions as well as in lower birth rates.

Speakers included a young woman who underwent an abortion without discussing it with her parents, the mother of another girl who had serious medical complications after an abortion and James Rogers, a psychology professor from Wheaton College in Illinois. Rogers recently published a study about the effects of a parental notification law in Minnesota.

Published in the March issue of the *American Journal of Public Health*, Rogers' study said the number of abortions in Minnesota performed on juveniles after the law was enacted in 1981 dropped by 28 percent from the previous three years. The law, which was struck down in 1986 but re-enacted last July, requires girls under 18 to notify both parents or obtain court permission before an abortion can be performed.

Birth rates for minors also fell, Rogers reported. "One possibility is that when minor women are restricted from abortion without notifying parents or seeking court approval ... they are more likely to take measures to avoid pregnancy."

In testimony later that day before the House Subcommittee on Health and the Environment, Rogers acknowledged that when a parental notification law in Massachusetts was adopted, abortion rates also dropped, but that there was an equal increase in juveniles who went to adjacent states to receive abortions. He said the relative isolation of Minnesota cities accounted for the fact that the Massachusetts experience wasn't repeated in that state.

"The Massachusetts parental involvement law was more demanding in that it required parental consent, not just notification," he added.

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