

# Archbishop Lefebvre repudiated Vatican II

By Father Richard P. McBrien  
Syndicated columnist

Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre died last month in Switzerland at age 85. He was the founder and leader of the Fraternity of St. Pius X, a schismatic association of ultra-conservative — or traditionalist — Catholics.

His followers were said to include some 300 priests and between 50,000 and 100,000 lay persons — many more than that if you believe the archbishop's spokesmen rather than the Vatican's.

In 1988, after rejecting Vatican efforts at compromise and accommodation, Archbishop Lefebvre went ahead with his plans to ordain four bishops against the direct orders of the pope. For that he was automatically excommunicated, in accordance with

the provisions of Canon Law.

Although his schismatic movement caused great personal pain for the Holy Father and key curial officials, it has never really amounted to very much.

However, because the Vatican tended to overestimate its threat to Catholic unity, some church officials went to excessive lengths to mollify the archbishop.

For example, he was offered the opportunity to nominate a traditionalist bishop to be ordained by the pope and was granted direct access to the Holy Father, right up to the moment of his final break.

Another possible reason for the remarkably patient and gentle handling of Archbishop Lefebvre is that more sympathy and support existed for Archbishop Lefebvre's ecclesiology in the Vatican than Vatican

officials were willing to admit publicly.

Although they did not explicitly reject the Second Vatican Council as the archbishop did, some of these officials probably shared his disdain for the liturgical reforms it generated, for the ecumenical atmosphere it created, and for the democratic and self-critical spirit it introduced into the church.

Because Archbishop Lefebvre's opposition to the changes in the Mass attracted most of the media's attention over the years, many Catholics were led to believe, mistakenly, that if only he and his followers had been allowed to keep the traditional Tridentine Latin Mass, no schism would have resulted.

But the archbishop's problems with the Second Vatican Council went far beyond



## ESSAYS IN THEOLOGY

the matter of liturgical reform. Indeed, for him liturgical reform was only the tip of the iceberg.

What can't be forgotten is that Archbishop Lefebvre was — like his father — a monarchist. Nothing was more despicable for monarchists than the French Revolution, with its subversive, tripartite program of liberty, equality, and fraternity.

Lefebvre viewed the council as the belated triumph of the French Revolution inside the Catholic Church.

Liberty. The council proclaimed the principle of religious freedom for all. No one is to be coerced in matters of faith, as they had been, for example, in Spain under Franco, a regime which Lefebvre admired.

For the archbishop the council's embrace of religious freedom was tantamount to denying the singular truth of the Catholic faith. For him all non-Catholic churches and religions were false. And error has no rights.

Equality. The council proclaimed the fundamental equality of all baptized Christians — laity, religious and clergy alike, as well as rich and poor. We are all members of the people of God.

For the archbishop this was a tantamount to rejecting the divine plan according to which Christ established his church. Authority was given only to the hierarchy. At the same time, wisdom is vested in the rulers and the aristocracy, not the masses.

Fraternity. The council proclaimed that the universal church is a communion, or college, of local churches, and that the bishops who preside over those local churches form a college with one another.

The pope is himself a bishop. He stands in the midst of his brother bishops, not above them, as a sign and instrument of their unity with one another and of the unity of their churches in the one Body of Christ.

For the archbishop this was tantamount to denying the monarchical nature of the church. For him the pope is like the king of France. Just as Louis XIV had identified himself with the state (*"L'etat, c'est moi"*), so the pope is to be identified with the church. To oppose the pope is to oppose the church.

But that is exactly what Archbishop Lefebvre did in the end.

## Apostles decide to preach teachings of Christ

By Cindy Bassett  
Courier columnist

"John, is Jesus with you?" James asked through the locked door.

"No, I'm alone," John called back as his brother let him into the upper room of a friend's house in Jerusalem. He looked around at all of the other apostles as he entered the room.

"John, you have the look of a person with something on his mind," Peter said. "You've seen Jesus haven't you?"

John didn't answer directly. "It's not right that we stay here locked away in fear. Not after all that has happened."

"John, what would you have us do?" James asked. "The chief priests are just looking for a reason to come and arrest us all."

"I don't care about being arrested," the apostle known as Simon the Zealot chimed in. "Only I just wish Jesus would hurry up and overthrow the Romans and let everyone know that the new kingdom has begun!"

John sighed heavily. "The new kingdom has begun, but it's up to us now."

"I'm sure I speak for everyone here when I say that as soon as Jesus tells us to start preaching again with him, we're willing and ready," Peter remarked.

"The time is now," John said.

"Well where is Jesus then?" Thomas asked.



John hesitated, not certain what kind of response his words would have on his peers. "Jesus will be leaving us very soon."

"Leaving? You must be mistaken!" cried Peter.

They were stunned. Finally James spoke, echoing the sentiments of everyone who stared at John with disbelief. "To lose Jesus a second time would be too much for us to bear!"

"Jesus has fulfilled everything that was written about in him in scriptures. His work is finished and now he will return to his father in heaven. And, in a different way, he'll still be here with us."

"I still don't understand," Thomas said.

"Jesus is coming back for us someday," John explained. "In the meantime, there is much work for us to do if we are to continue what Jesus began when we were together."

"I think I'm starting to see," James said. "We should go around and tell everyone else about what it means to be a follower of Jesus."

"We'll baptize everyone who decides to

become a follower," Simon added.

Peter grinned sheepishly. "Jesus gave us the authority to forgive people who are truly sorry for their sins."

"And we, ourselves, must forgive those who offend us," Matthew added.

"What about sharing our food and money with the poor?" Andrew asked.

"And when we gather together for a meal, we can remember Jesus in the breaking of the bread and the blessing of the wine," John said.

"Did Jesus say how long it would be before he comes back for us?" Matthew asked.

"Jesus just told me to be ready always for his return," John replied.

"Maybe I should write down everything that happened," Matthew suggested. "It's an incredible story."

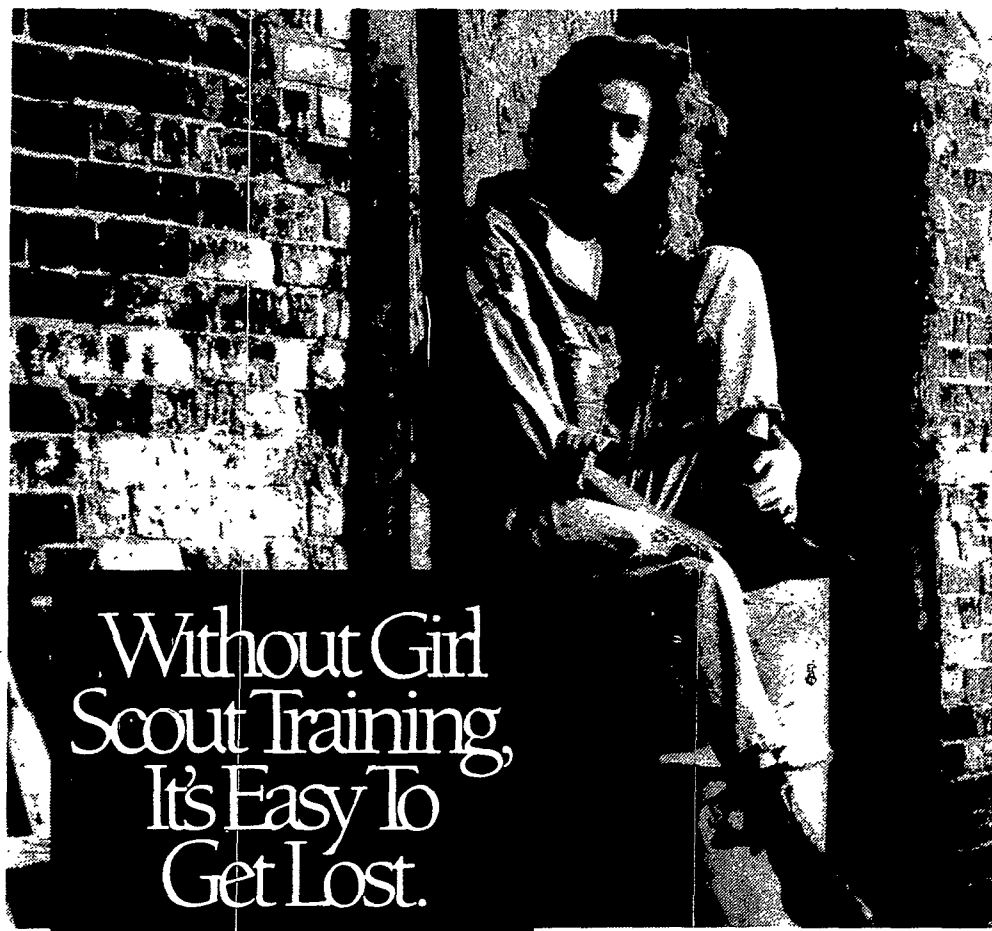
"Will people believe us?" Thomas asked.

"Oh, I think many of them will," John said. "It's up to them. But, the important thing is for us to try."

An unexpected knock at the door interrupted their conversation.

Peter went to answer it. He was smiling when he returned followed by a man and a woman. "The first thing we are going to do is unlock the door. These people have heard about Jesus. They want to know the rest of the story."

**Meditation:** "We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and his Son, Jesus Christ." (1 John 1:3).



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