

As reported earlier today ([here](#)) Pope Francis has suppressed the Pontifical Commission *Ecclesia Dei*. The first Traditionalist organization to react officially to this official action of the Pope comes from the Society of St. Pius X. This is fitting since the Commission was originally founded in reaction to the episcopal consecration of four bishops by Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre and Bishop Antônio de Castro Mayer, as noted in this statement. (Interestingly the participation of Bishop de Castro Mayer always seems to be ignored even in today's reporting. The first version of *Ecclesia Dei Afflicta* forgot to mention him as well and after he contacted the Vatican to make sure they understood he was a co-consecrator they reissued the document a few days later including him the alleged claim of excommunication.) The SSPX statement provides helpful historical context to assist in understanding the Pope's actions. The statement also reaffirms the position of the SSPX that difficulties between the SSPX and the Roman authorities are primarily doctrinal. The liturgical problems that cause the priests of the SSPX (and affiliated religious communities) to offer the Traditional Latin Mass *exclusively* are inextricably connected to doctrinal novelties introduced by Vatican II.

We will continue to post official reactions of other traditionalist organizations and a detailed commentary by some CFN authors as this story develops.

On January 17, 2019, Pope Francis suppressed the Pontifical Commission *Ecclesia Dei*, which had been created in 1988 by his predecessor Pope John Paul II.

The Apostolic Letter in the form of the Pope's *motu proprio* was published at noon on January 19 by the Holy See Press Office and inserted in *L'Osservatore Romano*. From now on, the Commission's responsibilities will be placed entirely in the hands of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, which will designate a special section to take over its activities. This transfer, explains the Sovereign Pontiff, comes in response to a need expressed during a meeting of this dicastery on November 15, 2017, approved by him on November 24, and validated in a plenary session in January 2018.

The pope recalls how, over thirty years ago, the day after the episcopal consecrations in 1988, John Paul II wished to facilitate the "full ecclesial communion of priests, seminarians, religious communities or individuals until now linked in various ways to the Fraternity founded by Archbishop Lefebvre". The goal was to help them "remain united to the Successor of Peter in the Catholic Church while preserving their own spiritual and liturgical traditions". This preservation of the spiritual and liturgical traditions was ensured in 2007 by Pope Benedict XVI's *motu proprio Summorum Pontificum*.

This historical reminder of Pope Francis has the merit of showing how this Pontifical Commission was originally founded on the condemnation of Archbishop Lefebvre and his work. In its thirty years of existence, it mostly limited itself to liturgical questions, with the intention of responding to the “sensitivity” of conservative priests and faithful, and of countering the Society of St. Pius X’s growth throughout the world...

But after the supposed excommunications of the bishops of Tradition were lifted in 2009, Benedict XVI believed that the ongoing doctrinal issues were a good reason to attach the Pontifical Commission Ecclesia Dei to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. The goal was to begin doctrinal discussions with the Society of St. Pius X.

The Primacy of the Doctrine of the Faith

Today, Pope Francis writes that the religious communities that belong to the Pontifical Commission have acquired stability both in their numbers and their activities; they ensure the celebration of the Mass in its “extraordinary form”. But, he points out, “the questions dealt with by the same Pontifical Commission were of a primarily doctrinal nature.” These objections and questions are clearly irrelevant to these communities. It is indeed with the Society of St. Pius X that they continue to be an issue.

This is what the cardinals pointed out on November 15, 2017, when they “formulated the request that dialogue between the Holy See and the Priestly Fraternity of St. Pius X be conducted directly by the aforementioned Congregation [for the Doctrine of the Faith], as the questions being dealt with are of a doctrinal nature.”

One conclusion is evident: as the so-called Ecclesia Dei communities have preserved “their spiritual and liturgical traditions”, they clearly do not count in this discussion. If they remain attached to a section of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, it is incidental. They can have the Mass, the “spiritual and liturgical traditions”, but not the whole doctrine that goes along with them.

That has always been the Society of St. Pius X’s great reproach against Dom Gérard [founder of the Benedictine monastery at Le Barroux who worked with Archbishop Lefebvre until 1988] and all those who thought they should break the unity of Tradition in order to negotiate a purely practical agreement. The crisis of the Church cannot be reduced to a spiritual or liturgical question alone. It is deeper, for it touches the very heart of the Faith and the doctrine of Revelation, Christ the King’s right to reign here below over men and over societies.

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