

Dear Readers,

This year the Society of Saint Pius X is celebrating its 40th anniversary. Bishop François Charrière, bishop of the diocese of Freiburg in Switzerland, signs the official document for the erection of the Society on November 1st, 1970. Shortly after, the new order's small seminary in Freiburg moves to Ecône, receiving many young men knocking at the door. The growing congregation experiences its first serious setback in 1972 when the French bishops brand Ecône as a "wildcat seminary". On November 21st, Archbishop Lefebvre states publicly that the Society holds firmly, with all its heart and mind, to Catholic Rome, but refuses to follow the Rome of Neo-Modernist and Neo-Protestant tendencies, provoking worldwide indignation.



The Archbishop is then summoned before the cardinals Garone, Tabera, and Wright in February and May 1975. Shortly thereafter,

Bishop Mamie, successor of Bishop Charrière, suppresses the Society illegitimately. The Archbishop takes little account of these unlawful machinations and continues with the formation and ordination of priests. The following year Paul VI denounces him as "disobedient to the new liturgy." Cardinal Benelli asks the Archbishop to celebrate the New Mass at least once, promising in the name of the pope that this gesture will suffice to solve all the Society's problems. The Archbishop refuses and on June 29th, he publicly ordains 12 priests. On July 23rd, the Archbishop is struck with a 'suspensio a divinis,' forbidding him to ordain priests and even celebrate Mass – the "New Mass," that is, as Archbishop Lefebvre observes with a smile. Such illegitimate means, however, do not deter this "bishop of iron" and his work for Tradition.

In 1988, after a constant bout of negotiations, Archbishop Lefebvre signs, wanting to show Rome his good faith, signs an obscure protocol on the 5th of May. The following day, the Archbishop realizes that there are no assurances that Rome's end of the bargain will be promptly or properly fulfilled. He withdraws his signature and decides to proceed with the consecrations of auxiliary bishops for the Society. Called "Operation Survival," these episcopal consecrations were absolutely justified considering the unjust persecution of faithful Catholics and the betrayal of the Faith by Roman authorities following the Second Vatican Council.

The day after the consecrations, the Archbishop and the four bishops will supposedly be 'excommunicated.' A media campaign stigmatizes the Society as 'schismatic.' The young bishops promise to continue the work of the Archbishop after his death (which occurs in 1991). Today they continue to ordain priests, administer the Sacrament of Confirmation all over the world, and encourage the faithful in this noble struggle.

In 2000, as a sign of their devotion to Rome and the pope, the four Society bishops travel as pilgrims to Rome to commemorate the Holy Year. Together with more than 300 priests, hundreds of religious, and more than 5000 faithful – the biggest pilgrimage yet recorded for the a Holy Year - they give evidence of the vitality of Tradition. Tradition cannot be overlooked any longer! A first Rosary Crusade, proclaimed in 2007, inspire the pope to write his stunning *Motu Proprio* 'Summorum Pontificum' which emphasizes that the 'Old Mass' was never abrogated and that every priest has the right to celebrate it and every faithful has the right to attend it. The second Rosary Crusade (2009) encourages the pope to remove the stigma of the excommunication imposed in 1988. Since then Tradition is given a voice in the doctrinal discussion between the Society and Rome.

From the beginning, the Society experienced every possible affliction. Be it the persecution from the modernist, liberal forces in the Church or the accusation of betrayal hurled by the confused sedevacantists, be it internal dissensions, quarrels, and even defections on the part of her members: at every moment of her existence the Society has suffered acutely from human fragility and from sin. Yet she has long endured this violent combat and continues to grow worldwide thanks to God's loving providence and his merciful grace. The Society of St. Pius X defends what seems to be outdated and forgotten. It keeps careful watch over what seems already lost. God has called this priestly organization, despite its abundant human frailty, to be a witness of the Faith, a veritable voice crying out in the desert, "Make straight the way of the Lord!" (John 1:23)

Let us, dear faithful, consider this advice of St. Paul, advice the Society strives to put into practice daily: "Preach the word: be instant in season, out of season: reprove, entreat, rebuke in all patience and doctrine. For there shall be a time, when they will not endure sound doctrine; but, according to their own desires, they will heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears: And will indeed turn away their hearing from the truth, but will be turned unto fables. But be thou vigilant, labor in all things, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill thy ministry. Be sober." (2 Tim. 4:2)

Future difficulties are inevitable! May God keep us ever faithful to the heritage of the Church and to the example of our venerated founder, Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre. Let us beg almighty God to fill us with his grace so that we may be aware of the great responsibilities confided to us in these turbulent days, daring in hope and ready to suffer in imitation of our Lord. Thus we will be found worthy to cooperate in the restoration of our Holy Mother the Church.

Sincerely yours in Christ,  
Father Jürgen Wegner