

## Vatican by Maria Cristina Fiocchi

### The Lefèbvre schism

*Part of a vaster pattern of attacks on the pontificate of John Paul II, which aim to stop the Church's political mission.*

**T**he schismatic action carried out by Msgr. Marcel Lefèbvre, who consecrated four bishops without the papal mandate, is part of a vaster scheme of attack on the Roman Catholic Church and the pontificate of John Paul II.

If there is any Pope who has tried to comprehend, with fatherly love and infinite patience, provoked by the defiant and critical behavior of Monsignor Lefèbvre, it is John Paul II. The efforts carried out in that direction by Edouard Cardinal Ganon, named by the Pope as Apostolic Visitor to the Fraternity of St. Pius X founded by Lefèbvre, are well known. Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, had drawn up a protocol of accord, signed by the rebel bishop on May 5, and by many other cardinals and bishops.

The abrupt shift by Monsignor Lefèbvre, who denounced the May 5 protocol and proceeded to ordain four bishops on June 30 in Ecône, without a "mandate," in an act which is automatically schismatic under Canon 751 of the Code of Canon Law, suggests that the elderly bishop was a pawn of the political motivations of the forces that steer him.

Lefèbvre wiped out with one stroke the openings of the Vatican, and launched into unparalleled charges against the Pope and the Church: "The chair of Peter is occupied by the Antichrist. Antichrists occupy the posts of responsibility in the Church of Rome."

What does Lefèbvre find at fault in the Church of Rome? That it aban-

doned Tradition; in particular, he rejects the post-Vatican II form of the mass, and calls for a return to the old mass with the Latin rite. He accuses the 1960s' Vatican II Council of having omitted the condemnation of communism. He rejects the conciliar document *Dignitatis Humanae* on the "freedom of religion." In short, his major criticisms are leveled against Vatican II.

Monsignor Lefèbvre ignores the fact that Vatican II was not the only Council of the Church, and that John Paul II called an extraordinary Synod in 1985 to clarify the teachings of Vatican II, and to put an end to the abuses and errors of interpretation which followed that Council. In substance, Lefèbvre's is a schism prompted by reasons which are not linked to dogma, but to discipline.

This peculiarity of the schism fuels hopes in the more conservative circles in the Vatican, that the rupture with the Church of Rome may eventually be stitched back together. Such a view was expressed by Silvio Cardinal Oddi, who, until a few months ago, was Prefect of the Congregation for the Clergy, and hence has been in touch with Lefèbvre for years. Cardinal Ratzinger himself, in reiterating the act of excommunication, had words of respect and concern toward the elderly bishop.

But the act of disobedience has not found any apologists. Cardinal Oddi, in an interview with the Italian daily *La Stampa*, attributed it to influences in Lefèbvre's entourage: "Golden bridges were built for him, he had obtained the essential, but he continued

to say no. He is not free, he is not completely free."

But who are the powerful political, financial, and even ecclesiastical circles which gave such bad advice to the rebel bishop, that he was pushed into a suicidal act which hurts even the Lefèbvrists, now doomed—unless reconciliation is brought about—to become a sect with a tinier and tinier following?

There is talk of right-wing groups, of old European oligarchs, and even of intelligence agents tied to U.S. Protestant high finance.

It is no surprise that such forces would want to inflict a painful blow to the Church and John Paul II's pontificate. He is considered a dangerous Pope because he does not fit any definition of the old political terminologies of *progressive* or *conservative*; he has vigorously relaunched the missionary spirit of the Church, and confronted the real problems of humanity with courage and realism. The Pope's social encyclicals, his defense of life, liberty, and truth, have given the shivers to both Western and Eastern oligarchists.

The story put out by the U.S. television network ABC, alleging that police discovered a plan to kill the Pope during his recent pastoral visit to Austria, is alarming. The plan called for sharpshooters to fire on John Paul II while he was in St. Stephen's Cathedral in Vienna. Austrian Interior Minister Karl Bleche denied the report, although he did confirm that two Turks were stopped by police.

We cannot say whether these reports refer to a real assassination plot or a fabrication, but even if the latter is the case, the news is troubling. Between schisms, plots, and terrorist attempts, one may very well wonder who is trying to put a stop to the Church's intervention into the world.