

St. Anthony of Padua R.C. Church

160 Court Street, Buffalo, New York

TRADITIONALLY SPEAKING by S. Casarotto, CS 2/8/09

ECCLESIASTICAL PENALTIES

Excommunication and Suspension are penalties imposed by the Church according to the Code of Canon Law. They are given primarily for the spiritual good of the person who does wrong so that he/she may repent and as a warning to the community about the seriousness of certain offenses.

Excommunication is the most severe penalty imposed on a Catholic. Any serious sin, by taking away sanctifying grace, cuts off our relationship with God. However, not all serious sins cause excommunication which breaks the visible and hierarchical communion with the Body of Christ. Excommunications are divided into two groups:

- Latae sententiae: the very fact of committing an offense contemplated in the law causes the excommunication to take immediate effect (ex. desecration of the Eucharist, attempted ordination of women, consecration of a bishop without the Pope's consent, procured abortion, etc.). If the offense is public, the legitimate authority may state that the offense occurred and the excommunication occurred "ipso facto". The modality of the lifting of the excommunication is established also by law.

- Ferendae sententiae: the excommunication follows the sentence of the legitimate authority (Pope, Bishop), following a canonical and personal warning with the possibility for the offender to explain and/or retract within a specified time.

Suspension "a divinis" is serious penalty imposed on ordained clerics forbidding the administration and reception of all Sacraments, except in danger of death (celebration the Mass, hearing confessions, etc.). The suspension may or may not be tied to the excommunication.

Archbishop Lefebvre and the bishops he ordained excommunicated themselves according to Church Law (*Can. 1382*). Their ordination and the ordination of the priests of the SSPX are valid but illicit. Attending masses in the Lefebvrist chapels are also valid but forbidden, unless one has a serious reason to do so and there is no scandal or danger to the integrity of one's Catholic faith.

On February 4, 2009, the Vatican's Secretary of State, reminded that, even after the lifting of the excommunication, the 4 Lefebvrist bishops "*do not have a canonical mandate and, strictly speaking, can not be considered members of the Catholic episcopate.*" The Note states that the lifting of the excommunication is tied to a commitment by the Lefebvrist bishops and their SSPX toward complete obedience to the Successor of Peter, (and *specifically* to John XXIII, Paul VI, John Paul II and Benedict XVI), the Magisterium and the authentic teachings of Vatican II to be interpreted in the light of Tradition ("*hermeneutics of continuity*" - Benedict XVI).

We must remember that the Pope's authority extends only on matters of faith and moral order and not on any imprudent or erroneous remark on secular matters made by a bishop, priest or lay person.

Worth noting is also the fact that the excommunication of the Lefebvre bishops was actually lifted by the Congregation of the Bishops with a mandate by the Pope (underlining the collegiality of the Bishops in union with the Pope), while the above mentioned Note was issued by the Vatican's Secretary of State (clarifying the legal status in the Catholic Church of the SSPX and their bishops, also in relation to the position of the Vatican State on the Holocaust).