

Sedevacantism and Antipopes

From "Religions of the World: A Comprehensive Encyclopedia of Beliefs and Practices"

ABC-CLIO Copyright 2010 by ABC-CLIO, LLC

In the wake of the Second Vatican Council, several arch-conservative Roman Catholic groups began to adopt a critical attitude toward the hierarchy. The largest of these groups later became the Society (or Fraternity) of Saint Pius X, under the leadership of French archbishop Marcel Lefebvre (1905-1991). Lefebvre, however, never questioned the legitimacy of Pope Paul VI (1897-1978), or that of his successors. Lefebvre's view was that they were leaders of dubious doctrines and actions (thus justifying Lefebvre in promoting what, according to Rome, amounted to a schism), but did not conclude that such wrongdoings should automatically invalidate their papal canonical role. Inside and outside the Society of Saint Pius X, more radical groups emerged, each concluding that, after the Second Vatican Council, the popes had lost their legitimacy as a result of their heretical teachings; this implied that the Holy See of Rome (Latin: **Sedes**) was technically "vacant"—that is, there was no legitimate pope. Hence the name of Sedevacantism was given to the movement, which was vehemently critical of Lefebvre and his Society. The latter, in fact, although critical of the pope, continued to pray for him in its Masses with the ritual formula **una cum Pontifice nostro** (in unity with our pope). Sedevacantists regarded what they called the **una cum** Masses as ipso facto invalid, just as both Sedevacantists and members of the Lefebvre movement regarded Masses celebrated according to post-Second Vatican Council liturgical renewal as invalid.

Sedevacantism was never a well organized movement, consisting as it did of several small groups, often divided on questions of leadership and on the finer points of how non-**una cum** Masses should be celebrated. The very fact that they considered the Holy See to be vacant meant that Sedevacantists by definition could not recognize an international authority, and it kept the movement divided. Some influential centers did emerge, however. Many Sedevacantist leaders were consecrated as bishops in the late 1970s and early 1980s by arch-conservative Vietnamese archbishop Pierre-Martin Ngo-Dinh Thuc (1897-1984). Those consecrations, not authorized by the Vatican, were, according to Roman Catholic canon law, illicit but not invalid (and they led ultimately to Thuc's excommunication). That meant that Thuc's consecration of the Sedevacantist leaders as bishops was regarded as valid, although they were automatically excommunicated. They were, however, according to Roman Catholic canon law, "real" bishops, with the power to consecrate other bishops in turn and to ordain priests (forthwith excommunicated by virtue of the fact of their ordination by an excommunicated bishop). The question is quite important in Catholic canon law and doctrine, which states that a validly ordained priest (although excommunicated), when pronouncing the words of the consecration in the Mass, really does convert the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ (something an invalidly ordained priest is not empowered to do). Thus, thanks mostly to Archbishop Thuc (who died in 1984 fully reconciled with Rome) and to more than 100 "Thuc bishops" ordained directly or indirectly by him, Sedevacantists could rightly claim to have "real" priests and to be able to offer "real" Masses to their followers.

Among those consecrated by Thuc was Father Michel Guérard des Lauriers (1898-1988), who prior to the Second Vatican Council had been a respected Catholic Dominican academic theologian and had joined Lefebvre in 1970 and left him in 1977. Guérard was initially regarded as a leading intellectual light in the international Sedevacantist network. He insisted, however, that he was not technically a Sedevacantist and that his position was slightly different. In his Cassiciacum theory (originally expounded in 1979 in the journal

Les Cahiers de Cassiciacum), Guérard explained that the Holy See was vacant only “materially”; “formally” Paul VI (as, later, his successors) could still be regarded as pope. Only if a significant number of cardinals and bishops were prepared to start a canonical process against the pope would he cease to be the “real” pope also “formally” (and not only “materially”). Guérard criticized both Lefebvre (who regarded Paul VI as pope both formally and materially) and the Sedevacantist majority (for which Paul VI was not the pope, neither formally nor materially). Guérard’s complicated theory succeeded in rallying only one section of the Sedevacantist network around him. The Cassiciacum theory is currently promoted by the Italian-based Mater Boni Consilii Institute and by a number of U.S. groups, in part originating from former Dominican bishop Robert McKenna (b. 1927), who was consecrated bishop by Guérard himself in 1986. Among them are the Saint Dominic Chapel in Highland, Michigan (www.stdominicchapel.com), founded by Robert L. Neville (b. 1972), ordained to the priesthood into the Society of Saint Pius X in 1996, who was consecrated a bishop by McKenna in 2005; and the Most Holy Trinity Seminary, founded in September 1995 and directed by Donald J. Sanborn, also a former member of the Society of Saint Pius X, who in 2002 was also consecrated a bishop by McKenna.

Sedevacantism (not connected with the Cassiciacum theory and regarding the Holy See as vacant in both the formal and the material sense) has its main centers in Mexico, thanks in particular to the activities of a “Thuc bishop,” Moisés Carmona-Rivera (1912-1991), who, together with Adolfo Zamora Hernandez (1910-1987, yet another “Thuc bishop”), founded the Union Católica Trento and the Seminar of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary in Hermosillo (Sonora, Mexico). In the early 1980s, a popular Sedevacantist leader in the United States was Francis Schuckhardt (1937-2006), who in 1967 had founded the Congregation of Mary Immaculate Queen (CMRI, from its Latin name) at Mount Saint Michel near Spokane, Washington, and subsequently broke with Rome in 1970. Schuckhardt, however, was accused of a number of personal wrongdoings and had to leave his own community in 1984; in 1987 he was found in possession of illegal drugs and arrested in California. After his release from jail, he established a semi-clandestine organization known as the Oblates of Mary the Immaculate (not to be confused with the Roman Catholic religious order of the same name). Some former members also claim that Schuckhardt was preparing to declare himself Pope Hadrian VII and had begun dressing as a pope (a website by his supporters is available at <http://www.bishopschuckhardt.com>). CMRI survived, however, and even prospered in its post-Schuckhardt phase, with the help of the Mexican Sedevacantists and under the leadership of Bishop Mark Anthony Pivarunas (b. 1958), consecrated by Carmona-Rivera in 1991. In 1993, Pivarunas in turn consecrated as bishop Father Daniel L. Dolan (b. 1951), who converted his parish of St. Gertrude the Great in Cincinnati from a Society of Saint Pius X Mass center to the central point of a network of priests following the Cassiciacum theory extending to several nearby states. Loyal to a “pure” form of Sedevacantism (as opposed to the Cassiciacum theory) is, on the other hand, the Society of St. Pius V, established in New York in 1983 by nine priests who left the Society of Saint Pius X. The majority of them later adopted the Cassiciacum theory and left the Society of St. Pius V, which currently continues its activities under the leadership of Father Clarence Kelly (b. 1941), who was ordained a bishop in 1993 by Mons Alfredo Méndez-Gonzalez (1907-1995), retired bishop of Arecibo, Puerto Rico, at that time a Roman Catholic bishop in good standing.

There may be some 10,000 Sedevacantists throughout the world, with the most important centers in the United States, Mexico, France, Italy, Germany, and the Czech Republic. The small Japanese group Seibo no Mikuni, founded in 1970 by Yukio Nemoto (1925-1988), remains largely isolated because of its peculiar millennial beliefs. Most of them believe that forming a central organization would be tantamount to establishing a schismatic alternative to the Roman Catholic Church. They prefer to remain a network of small groups and see themselves as the only surviving remnant of the one true post-Second Vatican Council Catholic Church. One of their main problems is how to respond to the issue of the future of Catholic authority. By definition, they regard the pope as essential for the church’s very survival and infallibility, but, at the same time, they maintain that there is no (legitimate) pope in Rome at present. A large majority of Sedevacantists dismiss as non-canonical, and even ridiculous, the very idea that they could convene a conclave and elect a pope of their own; they prefer to wait for a solution to come directly, and perhaps unpredictably, from God, whose ways, they say, are after all not human ways. A few Sedevacantists, on the other hand, are “conclavist”—that is, they believe a conclave should be called (composed of all, or at least most, Sedevacantist bishops) and a new pope duly elected. Conclavists realize nonetheless that, should a

conclave be organized, the majority of the Sedevacantist bishops would refuse to attend it, and that some groups (such as the Italian Association of St. Mary Salus Populi Romani, headquartered in Turin, Italy) regard a conclave as certainly desirable but, at least for the time being, impracticable. Attempts have been made to organize a conclave, however: in 1994, for example, some 20 Sedevacantist bishops from 12 different countries met in Assisi, Italy, and elected as pope a South African priest (and former student at Lefebvre's seminary), Victor Von Pentz (b. 1953), under the name of Linus II. He currently resides in the United Kingdom and maintains but a limited following.

Some conclavists have, on the other hand, joined other alternative popes ("antipopes," according to Roman Catholic theology), who, even before the full development of the Sedevacantist network, had claimed that their role was based both on the alleged heresies of the Second Vatican Council and on mystical visions calling them to the pontificate without the need of any conclave or election. One of the earliest "pretenders" was a French priest, Michel-Auguste-Marie Collin (1905-1974), who claimed to have been called by heaven itself to become Pope Clemens XV during the Second Vatican Council, in 1963. Collin established an alternative Vatican in Clémery, Lorraine, where he also founded a Renewed Church of Christ, known outside France as the Church of the Magnificat. After Collin's death in 1974, his church nearly collapsed entirely, and it is now reduced to a small remnant of what it once was. One of Collin's followers, however, the Québec priest Gaston Tremblay (b. 1928), had already ceased to recognize the French claimant in 1968 and had proclaimed himself Pope Gregory XVII. His movement is called the Apostles of Infinite Love.

Tremblay's main competitor was Clemente Domínguez y Gómez (1946-2005), one of the seers in the alleged Marian apparitions of Palmar de Troya, Spain (1968-1976), and later a "Thuc bishop," consecrated by the Vietnamese archbishop on January 11, 1976. In 1978, Domínguez (in the meantime blinded in a car accident in May 1976) revealed that he had been mystically designated by Jesus Christ as the new pope in a 1976 vision, and his followers confirmed his election as Pope Gregory XVII (the same name adopted by Tremblay in Québec). His Catholic, Apostolic, and Palmarian Church (named after the town of Palmar de Troya) is probably the single largest organization bowing to the authority of an "alternative" pope, with more than 1,000 followers in Spain and several hundreds more internationally. In the 1990s, however, Domínguez was accused of sexual immorality with several nuns of the order he had established in the meantime; in 1997 he admitted his sins and asked for his community's forgiveness. Most followers remained loyal to Domínguez and, after his death in 2005, to his handpicked successor, former lawyer and "Thuc bishop" Manuel Alonso Corral, who became Pope Peter II. Others, however, have both doubted the sincerity of Domínguez in his apology and questioned his decision to appoint a successor rather than leave this choice to a conclave including the many cardinals he had in the meantime appointed from among his bishops. At the end of 2000, 17 bishops with a couple of hundred followers left the Palmarian Church and formed a splinter movement known as The Tribe.

Other claimants to the role of pope have included Father Gino Frediani (1913-1984), the parish priest of Gavinana (province of Pistoia, Italy), who in 1973 claimed to have been mystically consecrated by Jesus Christ and several Old Testament prophets as Pope Emmanuel I. He gathered several hundred followers; after his death, a hundred have remained active in his New Church of the Holy Heart of Jesus under the leadership of his successor, Father Sergio Melani (who, however, makes no claim to being the new pope). A couple of dozen rival "antipopes" operate in several countries, but none of them have more than a handful of followers. Among them are Father Lucian Pulvermacher (b. 1918), who in 1998 proclaimed himself the new pope under the name Pius XIII (<http://www.truecatholic.us>); and David Allen Bawden (b. 1959), living in the Kansas countryside, once a seminarian with the Society of Saint Pius X (where he had never been ordained to the priesthood), who on July 16, 1990, was elected by a group of six laypeople (including three women) as Pope Michael.

A special position is nonetheless maintained by William Kamm (b. 1950), a German-born Catholic lay preacher living in Australia and known as "Little Pebble." It is claimed that the Virgin Mary has revealed to Kamm that the post-Second Vatican Council popes, including John Paul II and Benedict XVI, are indeed legitimate (contrary to the Sedevacantist thesis). On the other hand, heaven has designated Kamm as a future pope under the name Peter II. Kamm gathered more than 1,000 followers in several countries, some of them living communally and most of them members of a religious order known as the Order of Saint

Charbel (named after the popular Catholic Lebanese saint Charbel Maklouf [1828-1898]). The Australian Catholic bishops, despite his protests, have repeatedly branded Kamm's organization as schismatic and not a legitimate part of the Catholic Church. Their position seemed vindicated when in 2005 and 2007 Kamm was sentenced to two jail terms for sexual relations with two minor girls. Kamm did not deny the relations, but claimed that the Virgin Mary in an apparition had authorized him to take as many as 84 "mystical wives." Kamm is now in jail and will not be eligible for parole before 2013. Many followers have left the Order of Saint Charbel and only a handful remain loyal to Kamm.

Mater Boni Consilii Institute Località Carignano 36 10020 Verrua Savoia (Torino) Italy
<http://www.sodalitiumpianum.com>

Most Holy Trinity Seminary 1000 Spring Lake Highway Brooksville FL 34602

St. Gertrude the Great 4900 Rialto Road West Chester OH 45069 <http://www.sgg.org>

Our Lady of the Rosary Chapel 15 Pepper Street Monroe, Connecticut 06468 <http://www.rosarychapel.net>

Seibo no Mikuni 33-2 Aza Ubasaku Oaza Matuzuka, Sukagawa-shi Fukushima 969-04 Japan

Catholic, Apostolic, and Palmarian Church Abad Gordillo 5 Apartado 4058 41080 Sevilla Spain

Congregation of Mary Immaculate Queen (CMRI) Mount St. Michael 8500 N. St. Michael's Road Spokane, WA 99217-9333 <http://www.cmri.org>

St. Pius V Church Eight Pond Place Oyster Bay Cove, NY 11771 <http://www.sspv.net>

One Holy Catholic Church Inc. (Pope Michael) Box 74 Delia KS 66418-0074 www.vaticaninexile.com

See also:

[Apostles of Infinite Love](#); [Fraternity/Society of Saint Pius X](#); [Roman Catholic Church](#).

References

- **Cekada, Anthony.** *The Nine vs. Lefebvre: We Resist You to Your Face*. 2008.
www.traditionalmass.org/images/articles/NineVLefebvre.pdf.
- **Cuneo, Michael.** *The Smoke of Satan: Conservative and Traditionalist Dissent in Contemporary American Catholicism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.
- **Delestre, Antoine.** *Clemens XV: prêtre lorrain et pape à Clémery*. Metz, France: Serpenois, 1985.
- Des Lauriers, Michel Guérard. "Le Siège Apostolique est-il vacant?" *Cahiers de Cassiciacum* 1 (1979).
- **Historia Sagrada o Santa Biblia Palmariana de Grado Superior según el Magisterio Infalible de la Iglesia**. 3 vols. Seville, Spain: Santa Sede Apostolica, 2001.
- **Le ultime volontà di Dio per la Terra nascoste nei Profeti dell'Antico e del Nuovo Testamento**. Gavinana, Italy: Aggeo, 1984.
- **Paladino, Francesco Maria.** *Petrus es tu?* Chateaufort, France: Delacroix, 1997.
- **"The Little Pebble": The Last Pope: A Man of Contradiction: Petrus Romanus, Sinner or Saint?** Nowra, New South Wales: William Kamm, 1999.

Introvigne, Massimo

Zoccatelli, PierLuigi

Persistent URL to the Entry:

https://literati.credoreference.com/content/entry/abcrw/sedevacantism_and_antipopes/0

APA

Zoccatelli, P. (2010). Sedevacantism and antipopes. In J. Melton & M. Baumann (Eds.), *Religions of the world: A comprehensive encyclopedia of beliefs and practices*. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO.
Retrieved from http://ezproxy1.library.arizona.edu/login?url=https://literati.credoreference.com/content/entry/abcrw/sedevacantism_and_antipopes/0

MLA

Zoccatelli, Pierluigi. "Sedevacantism and Antipopes." *Religions of the World: A Comprehensive Encyclopedia of Beliefs and Practices*. Eds. J. Gordon Melton and Martin Baumann. Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2010. *Credo Reference*. Web. 26 Oct 2015.

Chicago

Zoccatelli, Pierluigi. 2010. "Sedevacantism and Antipopes". In *Religions of the World: A Comprehensive Encyclopedia of Beliefs and Practices*, edited by J. Gordon Melton and Martin Baumann. Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO. http://ezproxy1.library.arizona.edu/login?url=https://literati.credoreference.com/content/entry/abcrw/sedevacantism_and_antipopes/0

Harvard

Zoccatelli, P (2010) Sedevacantism and antipopes. [Online]. In J Melton & M Baumann (eds.). *Religions of the world: A comprehensive encyclopedia of beliefs and practices*. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO. Available from: http://ezproxy1.library.arizona.edu/login?url=https://literati.credoreference.com/content/entry/abcrw/sedevacantism_and_antipopes/0 [Accessed 26 October 2015].