

Abstract

The SSPX is a community of non-monastic priests with a structure similar to that of many religious orders. It was founded in 1970 by Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre. Its program is to defend traditional Catholic values against the danger supposedly represented by the reforms initiated by the Second Vatican Council. A wider community of Catholics disagreeing with developments in the Church was formed around the SSPX. Following the breakup of the SSPX with the leadership of the Church in 1988, this community gained strength and a character of a certain denomination.

The Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) carried out a lot of changes, many of which have not yet been fully implemented. They concern the liturgy, pastoral care, interpretation of Scripture, and theology studies, among other issues. The common denominator of the conciliar reforms was to make the proclamation of Christ more comprehensible to modern man and make many things in the church consistent with the spirit of the Gospel and early Christian tradition. The most significant shifts, initiated by the council, were the new approaches to ecumenism, to principle of religious freedom and to interfaith dialogue. Many circles in the Church, however, considered these changes as grinding the truths of faith; these Catholics began to be described as traditionalists. Overcoming the trenches between Christian confessions and aligning the structure of the Church with contemporary spirit as well as with the spirit of early Christian tradition represent challenges arising from the conclusions of the Council still to be dealt with by the Church. Council conclusions were adopted by the majority and strict traditionalists do not have a large representation among Catholics.

In the Czech Republic, SSPX has been active since 1991. In the media it is possible to hear about it in the context of Eurosceptic views, anti-immigrant and anti-Islamic stances, conspiracy theories, and revisionist views of Czech history. At the beginning, the movement did not draw great attention and did not appear to be socially problematic. At the turn of the century, however, controversial issues around the movement intensified.

Theological emphases of the movement involve traditional Catholic understanding of worship and spirituality, exclusivity of the Catholic Church as an institution of salvation and traditional concept of priest's education, theology studies, interpretation of Scripture, pastoral care, and other issues. Common denominator of all the principal distinctive features of the movement can be seen in anxiety – related not only to developments in the Church, but in the entire globalized world – as well as in the conflict between present-day and traditional Catholic view of the world.

A dialogue begins to take place between the leadership of the Catholic Church and the SSPX, which in the future could lead to reintegration of the Society and its supporters in canonical church structures. The best contribution to this development would be mutual openness, empathy and open-mindedness. A similar approach could also help the mutual understanding and tolerance between the movement and the majority secular society.

The aim of this study was to provide an opportunity to become more familiar with the phenomenon of the SSPX, and thus to help to refute unnecessary prejudices against this group of Catholics among the Czech public. These, similarly as uncritical admiration, lead to misinformation and misunderstandings resulting in undesirable consequences. It was also my aim to prove that the SSPX is a response to the reforms of The Second Vatican Council.