

# Benedict's reconciliation move stirs controversy

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**Lefebvre:** Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre presides at the 1988 ordinations of Bishops Richard Williamson, Bernard Tissier de Mallerais, Bernard Fellay and Alphonso de Galarreta in Ecône, Switzerland. (CNS photo/Catholic Press Photo) In a gesture billed as an “act of peace,” but one destined both to fire intra-Catholic debate about the meaning of the Second Vatican Council and to open a new front in Jewish/Catholic tensions, the Vatican today formally lifted a twenty-year-old excommunication imposed on four bishops who broke with Rome in protest over the liberalizing reforms of Vatican II (1962-65).

Ironically, news of the move came just one day before the 50th anniversary of the announcement by Pope John XXIII of his intention to call Vatican II.

The four bishops had been ordained in defiance of the late Pope John Paul II in 1988 by French Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre, whose Priestly Fraternity of St. Pius X clung to the old Latin Mass after Vatican II and also expressed deep reservations about both ecumenism and religious freedom. Lefebvre died in 1991.

The four prelates involved are Bernard Fellay, superior of the Fraternity of St. Pius X; Alfonso de Galarreta; Tissier de Mallerais; and Richard Williamson. Their legitimacy as bishops has never been in question, since under Catholic law, Lefebvre was a legitimately ordained bishop and hence any ordination he performed is considered “valid” but “illicit.”