Opinion
Guest Voices



Pope Leo XIV greets visitors from the popemobile while riding around St. Peter's Square at the Vatican before his weekly general audience June 17, 2026. (CNS/Vatican Media)



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The Catholic Church's latest objection to restoring women to the ordained diaconate is that it will cause a schism.

News flash: There already is one. In fact, there have been many schisms, and there will be more.

There is no need to reach back to the Great Schism of 1054, between the Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Church, or to the schisms of the Protestant Reformation, or even the 16th-century English Reformation, which resulted in the Anglican Communion. Schism has been in the air, and it will only continue.

Most schismatics deny papal authority. The approaching illegal ordinations of bishops in France for the Society of St. Pius X or in Scotland for the Sons of the Most Holy Redeemer are only symptoms, not causes, of the ongoing splintering from Rome. Each group has a hardened, almost jaded view of the Second Vatican Council, the synod on synodality, Pope Francis and now Pope Leo XIV. Their new bishops — four for the Society of St. Pius X and one for the Sons of the Most Holy Redeemer — will join a long line of *episcopi vagantes*, or wandering bishops, that most recently added excommunicated Archbishop Carlo Maria Viganò to its roster.

While these groups and individuals that are part of the so-called Catholic right are supported by equally extreme media, their stories tend to focus on excommunications for one or another offense. But ordaining bishops without

permission is something Rome will not overlook.

In 1970, French Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre founded the Society of St. Pius X in Ecône, Switzerland. Pope John Paul II declared his excommunication in 1988, following Lefebvre's illegal consecration of four bishops.

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A rapprochement followed, but now two Lefebvrist bishops are scheduled to ordain four more bishops, and Leo is warning of their break from the church.

Elsewhere, on the island of Papa Stronsay, Orkney, Scotland, the Sons of the Most Holy Redeemer superior general has planned his illegal ordination for July 25 by three bishops who deny the authority of Leo.

There are also several illegal bishops better connected with the Catholic left, but they are not so worrisome because they are female. Roman Catholic Womenpriests-USA counts six, five in the U.S. and one in Canada. In 2024, the group mourned the death of its Bishop Patricia Fresen — a former nun ordained a priest by Argentine Bishop Rómulo Antonio Braschi, along with six other women, on a riverboat on the Danube River.

Which brings us back to wandering bishops.

Braschi, ordained a priest in Argentina in 1966, established his own church in Buenos Aires in 1975 and was later ordained as bishop by Roberto Garrido Padin, a bishop of the Brazilian Catholic Apostolic Church, and Hilarios Karl-Heinz Ungerer, a bishop of the Free Catholic Church in Germany. In 2003, Braschi ordained Fresen as bishop. By then, just about everyone involved had been excommunicated, either by decree or automatically because of the ordinations.

But the Women Priest movement is not as worrisome to the church as the Society of St. Pius X or the Sons of the Most Holy Redeemer, simply because the women ordained as priests and bishops are female. The church views their ordinations as both illegal and invalid.

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Modern schisms are not as well populated as earlier ones. Yet, each has its arguments and causes, and each disagrees with Rome on major points of doctrine. But the energizer for modern schismatics is electronic media, which supports anger from the left or the right and is much more effective in gaining followers. And a growing paucity of Catholic priests connected to Rome through territorial dioceses or recognized religious orders lends credence to the schismatics and creates space for their chapels.

The church's current schisms are not so different from those of centuries earlier. They all hold in common a rejection of papal authority. We return to the changes mandated by the Second Vatican Council and the various discussions in the ongoing synod on synodality.

The latest argument against restoring the abandoned practice of ordaining women as deacons is that it would cause a schism. But Leo can reinstate the practice. The people who reject papal authority are already out the door. The women who have given up hoping for change are on the way out, too.

There is no Catholic doctrine banning women as deacons. Ancient conciliar canons, medieval papal letters and even modern canon law of the Maronite Catholic Church allow for the ordination of women as deacons.

Not returning to tradition is a common complaint of modern schismatics. How can anyone who accepts papal authority fear the restoration of an abandoned practice?