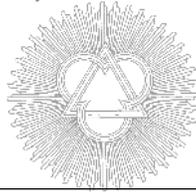

Most Holy Trinity Seminary Newsletter



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My dear Catholic people,

Recently the camp of the Novus Ordo conservatives, or *neocons*, as they are commonly called, seems to have descended into a panic.

Up to now they have bent over backwards to maintain the principle that Vatican II did not change anything substantial in the Catholic Faith. While they may prefer pre-Vatican II rites and ceremonies, they refuse to call what has come out of Vatican II a new and false religion, as we call it.

Consequently we have seen over the years mostly an ostrich approach to anything that seems to contradict this thesis of theirs.

As you know from my past newsletters, continuity of Catholic doctrine, Catholic liturgy, and Catholic disciplines is essential and critical to the Church's very nature as an organization founded by Christ and assisted by Christ until the end of time. Therefore finding continuity since Vatican II has been the source of a lot of angst among traditionalists of all kinds.

We say that continuity is saved by the categorical rejection of Vatican II and its reforms as the

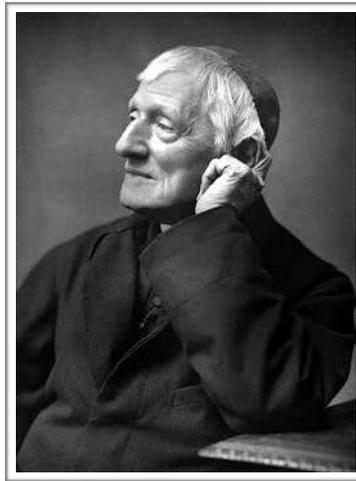
work of Modernist reformers, who have attempted to impose on the Church changes which are lethal to it.

Bergoglio has dismantled little by little, through his outrageous heresies, this neocon model. They are now turning to other "solutions."

The latest is something that appeared recently in the Internet by Christopher Ferrara, a well known figure in neocon circles. He has proposed the idea of "suspended magisterium" during these times. He states: "The answer lies in what Cardinal Newman described as 'the suspense of the functions of the Magisterium' during the Arian crisis, when it seemed almost the entire Church had embraced the Arian heresy."

Mr. Ferrara imagines that the pope and the entire episcopate stopped teaching Catholic doctrine during the Arian crisis, citing Cardinal Newman who said that the pope and the bishops "said what they should not have said, or did what obscured and compromised revealed truth."

According to Cardinal Newman, this went on for sixty years.



Cardinal Newman

It first should be pointed out that Cardinal Newman was a convert from Anglicanism, and that throughout his life was friendly with the Modernists, particularly with the arch-Modernist radical, Baron von Hügel.¹

Secondly, *it is simply not true, historically, that the pope and the entire hierarchy stopped teaching Catholic doctrine.* The popes never taught heresy or anything close to it. The bishops who taught heresy were Arian bishops, who were intruders appointed not by popes but by emperors. Catholic bishops were deprived of their sees and sent into exile. It is furthermore true that the problem was not universal. The West was not nearly as much affected by the heresy as the East. There are, as well, some fine examples of popes during that fourth-century period who unwaveringly taught Catholic doctrine.

Some bring up the case of Pope Liberius who *allegedly* signed an *ambiguous* formula of a council. It is not even certain that he did sign it, but what is certain is that he did not teach it as Catholic doctrine. Consequently the worst that could be said of Liberius is that he fell *personally* into heresy, but it cannot be asserted that he *taught* it to the Church. This is a critical point.

Even this fall, however, is doubtful, for upon his return to Rome from exile, he was hailed as a great hero of the Faith. This was the same Rome which refused the emperor's appointee to replace Liberius, whose name was Felix. The Roman Catholics refused him, not because he was an Arian, but because *he was in communion with the Arians.* Consequently, they never would have hailed Liberius if he had truly fallen.

All the bishops of the Eighth General Council (Constantinople IV), held in 869 and 870, which condemned the schism of Photius, declared: "For we must not forget the words of Our Lord Jesus Christ: 'Thou art Peter, etc.' This saying has been proved by events, because in the Apostolic Chair the Catholic religion has been preserved immaculate, and holy

doctrine ever held." How could they have said such a thing if there had ever been deviation from Catholic doctrine in the Apostolic See?

Furthermore, Pope Pius VI in 1794 condemned as *heretical* the following proposition: "In these latter times there has been spread a general obscuring of the more important truths pertaining to religion, which are the basis of faith and of the moral teachings of Jesus Christ."

How does one reconcile a "suspension of the magisterium" with this condemnation?

Finally, Cardinal Newman, later in life, himself backed off of the precise interpretation that Mr. Ferrara has given to his words, written in 1859.

The reason why Mr. Ferrara is claiming a "suspension of the magisterium" is that Bergoglio's "magisterium" is obviously not Catholic. The solution? Just ignore it, because we are in a time of suspension.

One critic of Mr. Ferrara's position asked this question: "When will we know that the magisterium is functioning again? Will we receive an email?" The point is well taken. Who is Mr. Ferrara, or any other Catholic for that matter, to decide that the magisterium has been suspended? The neocons attack the sedevacantists for usurping authority in saying that the Roman See is vacant because of heresy. But the sedevacantists can cite *a chorus of theologians* to support what they say, whereas no one, except Cardinal Newman, has ever said that there has been a stoppage of the teaching Church, and even he retracted that very idea later in life.² We have already seen that Pope Pius VI condemned this idea as heretical.

Fatal flaw? On the *Fatima Center* website, Mr. Ferrara attacked the sedevacantists for what he calls self-contradiction, a "fatal flaw" in their thinking. He first accurately sums up the sedevacantist position:

So, according to sedevacantist thinking, one cannot legitimately recognize yet resist a true

¹ Newman asserted, for example, "freedom from symbols [creeds] and articles [of faith] is abstractedly the highest state of Christian communion", but was "the peculiar privilege of the primitive Church." Such a statement is thoroughly modernist, and echoes the thoughts of the arch-Modernist excommunicate Alfred Loisy.

² All Catholic theologians (with one exception, which is even doubtful) agree that a heretical pope cannot be a true pope. It is true that they disagree about *how* he falls from office, but they all agree that papacy and heresy are two radically incompatible things. This concerns fall from office due to *personal* heresy. These same theologians are silent about a pope's *teaching* of heresy, since they regard this as an impossible case.

Pope because while not every papal magisterial act is infallible, every papal magisterial act is (1) authoritative, (2) binding on consciences, (3) safe to follow, and (4) free from **pernicious** error. [emphasis added]

He then proceeds to attack this position as containing a contradiction.

What the sedevacantists are really saying, then, is that a Pope who errs in his teaching on a matter of faith and morals, even once, ceases to be Pope (or never was Pope) because every exercise of the papal magisterium must be free from error.

Notice that the word *pernicious* has disappeared. In leaving this word out, Mr. Ferrara has manifested that he does not understand the whole point of the sedevacantist argument.

We are saying that non-infallible papal magisterium is indeed fallible — obviously — but that if it should err, it cannot teach or command something which is evil or pernicious, that is, something contrary to Catholic doctrine or morals. He cannot teach a doctrine which is contrary to the Church's teaching, nor can he teach something condemned by the Church. The pope can teach, for example, that the moon is made of green cheese, but he cannot teach that non-Catholic religions are means of salvation. And I challenge the neocons to produce a single point of pontifical magisterium which violates this rule.

This is not a question of infallibility but of indefectibility, which has a much broader object than infallibility. Infallibility has as its object truths which are immutable and irreformable. Indefectibility has as its object not only doctrine but also discipline, in such a way that the Church could never teach or prescribe or command something contrary to Catholic doctrine, impious, evil, or pernicious. While this gift of indefectibility does not preserve the pope from error in his non-infallible teachings — what we call *pontifical* or *authentic* magisterium — it nonetheless preserves him and the universal Church in general from requiring that the faithful assent to any pernicious doctrine, or observe any discipline which would be sinful to observe. Pope Gregory XVI taught this very thing in his encyclical *Quo graviora* of 1833:

Is it possible that the Church, which is the pillar and ground of truth, and which is continually receiving from the Holy Ghost the teaching of all truth, could ordain, grant, or permit what would turn to the detriment of the salvation of souls, to the contempt and harm of a sacrament instituted by Christ? *Would it not be the most insolent insanity*, as Augustine said, *to dispute whether something, which the universal Church does throughout the whole world, should be done or not?*

Pope Leo XIII, in his encyclical *Sapientiae christianae* said:

Wherefore it belongs to the Pope to judge authoritatively what things the sacred oracles contain, as well as what doctrines are in harmony, and what in disagreement, with them; and also, for the same reason, to show forth what things are to be accepted as right, and what to be rejected as worthless; what it is necessary to do and what to avoid doing, in order to attain eternal salvation. For, otherwise, there would be no sure interpreter of the commands of God, nor would there be any safe guide showing man the way he should live.

Mr. Ferrara is confusing *positive infallibility* with *negative infallibility*, a distinction made by theologians. The first is that which pertains to his solemn declarations, such as the Immaculate Conception, which are the object of divine and catholic faith. The second refers to his non-infallible teaching, such as pontifical magisterium, which is not free from error, *except in that he cannot require religious assent to doctrinal or moral teaching which would be contrary to Catholic doctrine, or command a discipline which would be sinful to observe.*

Anything which falls under the category of pontifical magisterium, that is, non-infallible papal teaching, requires something called *religious assent*, which, although not being the assent of faith, nonetheless is an assent made out of obedience to the Pontiff as Supreme Teacher. In other words, we cannot blithely “blow it off” because we disagree with it. Furthermore, while these teachings could be erroneous, they cannot contain *pernicious* error, that is, something sinful to accept or observe.

Pope Pius XI said in his encyclical *Casti connubii*:

For it is quite foreign to everyone bearing the name of a Christian to trust his own mental pow-

ers with such pride as ... to imagine ... that they must obey only in those matters which she has decreed by solemn definition as though her other decisions might be presumed to be false or putting forward insufficient motive for truth and honesty. Quite to the contrary, a characteristic of all true followers of Christ, lettered or unlettered, is to suffer themselves to be guided and led in all things that touch upon faith or morals by the Holy Church of God through its Supreme Pastor the Roman Pontiff, who is himself guided by Jesus Christ Our Lord.

Pope Pius XII said in the encyclical *Humani generis*:

Nor must it be thought that what is expounded in Encyclical Letters does not of itself demand consent, since in writing such Letters the Popes do not exercise the supreme power of their teaching authority. For these matters are taught with the ordinary teaching authority, of which it is true to say: "He who heareth you, heareth me"

I have given these lengthy quotations from the Roman Pontiffs to show that my assertions about the non-infallible magisterium have not been "pulled out of a hat." Cardinal Franzelin, a very prominent theologian of the nineteenth century, who was the principal theologian at the Vatican Council of 1870, summed it up in this way: "In this sort of declarations [which are not made with the intention of binding infallibly by a definitive sentence], there is not the infallible truth of doctrine, since, in this case, there was not the will to bind; **but there is infallible safety of doctrine**, by reason of which all Catholics can safely embrace it, and it is not safe, nor can it be free from the violation of due submission toward the supreme Magisterium, that they should refuse to embrace it." [emphasis added]

Reducing the Catholic Church to a Protestant church. While Mr. Ferrara is of good will, no doubt, and is doing his best to make sense of the present problem of a deviating "magisterium," what he is proposing is the reduction of the Catholic Church to a Protestant church.

I reiterate: It would be contrary to the very purpose of the founding of the Catholic Church by Our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the assistance He promised to it, if it were capable, through its universal teachings and practices, to lead souls to

hell through pernicious error and/or sinful laws and disciplines.

On the other hand, the Protestants see their preachers and hierarchies as human beings who are not assisted by Christ, but who merely propose to us *what they think* is true doctrine and sound morals. It is up to the individual to decide if he thinks that their their teaching is in conformity with the Scriptures or not. For this reason, there is no unity of faith among the Protestants. It is a dogma-less religion, dogma being the sole domain of the individual. For this reason, despite the variety of their sects, they are all in communion with one another as "Christians." This means that despite their doctrinal differences, in the end it does not matter, since doctrine is your decision, and not the Church's. This is the very soul of Protestantism.

By recognizing as the true Catholic hierarchy the Vatican II "popes," the Recognize-and-Resist people are protestantizing the Catholic Church by treating the hierarchy in the same manner as that of the Protestants. The pope proposes a doctrine, then we see if it is in accordance with Tradition. If not, then we reject it out of hand, but at the same time recognizing the erring pope to be the head of the Church, Vicar of Christ on earth.

The sedevacantist position, on the other hand, insists that if there is a deviation from Catholic doctrine in the teachings and disciplines of a Roman Pontiff, it is an *infallible sign* — as smoke is of fire — that he does not bear, for whatever reason, the assistance of Christ, and therefore *cannot* be a true Roman Pontiff. It is an infallible sign since the indefectibility of the Church is a *de fide* dogma of the Church.

Only this position preserves the nature of the Catholic Church, which is a supernatural organization of which the universally taught and prescribed doctrines and disciplines may and must also be accepted as being safe and conducive to salvation.

Deny this and you destroy the Catholic Church.

Sincerely yours in Christ,



Most Rev. Donald J. Sanborn
Rector