Most Holy Trinity Seminary Newsletter

NOVEMBER 2026

Published by Most Holy Trinity Seminary, 1711 Hampden Boulevard, Reading, Pennsylvania 19604. This newsletter is sent free of charge to all Seminary benefactors who contribute $100.00 or more annually. If you would like to be on our mailing list, please contact us by mail, or **contactform@mhtseminary.org.** Please visit our website at **mostholytrinityseminary.org**

My dear Catholic people,

Recently I had some questions from listeners on the livestream which I would like to share with you, since they may interest a number of our readers.

The first question is why I consider the priests of the Society of Saint Pius X to be Catholics, when they have adopted an objectively schismatic position?

My response. It is a principle of moral theology that heresy must be formal in order that it cause one to be separated from the Church. The same is true for schism. Heresy is formal if the person pronouncing the heresy is aware of the fact that the Church teaches the contradictory, e.g., Martin Luther. Schism is formal if the person willingly renounces submission to the Roman Pontiff, knowing that he is head of the Roman Catholic Church. Heresy is merely material if the person is not aware that his doctrine contradicts Catholic teaching. Schism is merely material if the person is not aware that he is committing a schismatic act. In other words, as the saying goes in moral theology: *Ignorance excuses, but it does not justify.* If someone posits an act which is objectively wrong, but if, through no fault of his own, he is unaware of the evil nature of the act, then he is not guilty of the sin. This is known as *invincible ignorance.*

The SSPX regards Leo XIV as a true pope. Given that premise, namely that he be a true pope, then it is clear that they have objectively committed a schismatic act. Since, however, *in fact* Leo is not a true pope, *in fact* they are not in schism.

I would say, therefore, that they have a schismatic attitude, inasmuch as they are ignoring the person whom they perceive as the Roman Pontiff, and are carrying on an apostolate independent of him and against his explicit orders. This is condemned both by the Council of Trent and by Pope Pius IX. The Council of Trent says: "Those who by their own temerity take these offices upon themselves, [i.e., a ministry] are not ministers of the Church, but are to be regarded as 'thieves and robbers, who have not entered by the door.'" But the SSPX has taken on a ministry apart from what they perceive to be the hierarchy of the Catholic Church. Pope Pius IX condemned as schismatic in his encyclical *Quartus supra* the idea that one can ignore the disciplinary commands of the pope. He says: "For the Catholic Church has always considered schismatic all those who obstinately resist the authority of her legitimate prelates and especially her supreme pastor."

Likewise in his encyclical *Quæ in patriarchatu,* the same pope says:

> In fact, Venerable Brothers and beloved sons, it is a question of recognizing the power [of this See], even over your Churches, not merely in what pertains to faith, but also in what concerns discipline. He who would deny this is a heretic; he who recognizes this and obstinately refuses to obey is worthy of anathema.

Pius IX also said in the Apostolic Letter *Non sine gravissimo:*

"All those who glory in the title of Catholic must not only be united to him [the Roman Pontiff] in matters of faith and dogmatic truth, but also be submissive to him in matters of liturgy and discipline."

So there is no doubt that, given their recognition of Leo as pope, they have a schismatic attitude and position.

Nonetheless, I think that they are innocent of both the sin and crime of schism inasmuch as they feel justified by their blind and exaggerated attachment to Archbishop Lefebvre. They regard him as the saint and prophet sent by God to lead us through the modernist heresy crisis. They do not think beyond that. There is no theology in their heads. I know, I lived with them and have spoken with them.

I therefore think that, due to this blindness, they are exonerated from the guilt of the sin and the crime of schism. They are convinced that they are doing God's will, manifested to them by the "saint" and "prophet" Archbishop Lefebvre.

Yet another question was asked: Do you really think that the SSPX is still excessively attached to Archbishop Lefebvre?

My response: Yes, I do think that they are still very attached to him. In order to explain this, it is necessary to understand Archbishop Lefebvre.

Archbishop Lefebvre changed his mind a lot. At times he pursued a hard line with the modernists, at times a soft line.

From 1970 to 1976, his idea was to have the SSPX approved by the Vatican to become something like the FSSP. But when he was suspended by Paul VI in 1976, he lashed out against the modernist Vatican. This hard-line attitude lasted until 1979, when he met with John Paul II, who rekindled the hope of having his organization approved. Then Archbishop Lefebvre lashed out at all of the hard-liners in the SSPX, and expelled them. During the 1980's, he pursued negotiations with the Vatican until 1988, when he signed the famous protocol, which was a disastrous concession to the new religion. Then he repudiated it the next day, and in June of 1988, called John Paul II an antichrist. He died in 1991.

So the result is that there are two Archbishop Lefebvres, so to speak. You can quote him any way you want. As a result, there are two camps of his followers, those who follow his hard line, and those who follow his soft line. The SSPX since 1991 had followed the soft line, but since July 1st of this year, they have switched back to the hard line. But each line can legitimately claim to be following Archbishop Lefebvre.

In 2012, when the SSPX was on the brink of a reconciliation with the modernist inmate of the Vatican, Bishop Williamson reacted and created his own movement of hard-line SSPX priests. Some even split from Bishop Williamson, finding him too liberal. So you have now the SSPX, the XSSPX, and the XXSSPX. There is even an XXXSSPX.

Each of these groups blindly follows him. Theological discussion is generally impossible with them. They do not respond to objections. For them, Archbishop Lefebvre, whichever side of him you choose, is the saint and the prophet sent by God to lead us through the modernist crisis. Anything outside of that line of thought is anathema to them.

Bishop Goldade. Among the newly consecrated, Bishop Goldade seems to be the most promising. He is not afraid to say what is.

Already he said in July that the Vatican is imposing a *new religion*. More recently in a letter, he stated:

> How did we come to the point where the controversies in the Church have sunk to the level of such things as Communion for the divorced and remarried...?
>
> The simple answer is that the theologians of the Second Vatican Council who had been silenced under Pope Pius XII, reinstated under Pope John XXIII, and granted privileged positions by Pope Paul VI, planted their formulations and innovations into the documents of the Council that grew into the official teaching of the Church. What were initially ambiguous formulations became contradictions of the deposit of Faith.

Here he is positing one of the logical elements of the argument supporting sedevacantism. Certainly he does not intend to, but nonetheless it is there.

The sedevacantist argument is that the Vatican II "popes" have promulgated doctrines which contradict the deposit of Faith. But this is contrary to the dogma of the indefectibility of the Church. Therefore it is impossible to consider the Vatican II "popes" as true popes, since otherwise one would be logically obliged to concede that the Church has defected.

To say, therefore, that Vatican II promulgated a new religion and contradicts the deposit of Faith, is to implicitly assert that the Roman See has been vacant since John XXIII.

Why do they not see it? Why do the SSPX members not see the obvious logic here? There are a number of reasons.

(1) They do not fully comprehend indefectibility. The dogma of the Church's indefectibility is based on the promises of Our Lord. In Matthew 28:20 we read: "And behold I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world." Matthew 16:18: "And I say to thee: That thou art Peter; and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." The Douay-Rheims bible comments: "By this promise we are fully assured, that neither idolatry, heresy, nor any pernicious error whatsoever shall at any

time prevail over the Church of Christ." Luke 10:16: "He that heareth you, heareth me; and he that despiseth you, despiseth me; and he that despiseth me, despiseth him that sent me."

Theologians teach that indefectibility means that the Church cannot be altered with regard to its *existence* or its *essence. Existence* means that as an institution it will last until the end of time. *Essence* means that it cannot undergo any essential changes in doctrine, moral teaching, worship, or discipline.

The Church Fathers and some popes considered the *gates of hell* to refer to heresy[1]. The word *prevail,* furthermore, and particularly from the original Greek, indicates a struggle between the Church and the devil.

Indefectibility has been also taught by the Church's magisterium:

Pope Pius VI condemned as *heretical* the following tenet of the Synod of Pistoia: "The proposition which asserts that 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." Pope Saint Pius X condemned this doctrine of the modernists: "The organic constitution of the Church is not immutable; but Christian society, just as human society, is subject to perpetual evolution."

The members of the SSPX, however, do not comprehend that the imposing of a *new religion* and the contradicting of the *deposit of Faith* by the Novus Ordo hierarchy would be a defection of the Catholic Church.

Furthermore, in their attempt to justify the July 1st episcopal consecrations, they made appeal to the idea that they must *save souls,* since the Novus Ordo hierarchy was not saving souls. But this also asserts that the Church has defected, if its hierarchy is not accomplishing the Church's essential mission from Christ. But Pope Leo XIII said in *Satis cognitum:* "The apostolic mission was not destined to die with the Apostles themselves nor to end with time since it was destined for all people and instituted for the salvation of the human race." "The Church," he tells us, "continues forever the mission of the Savior." He says again: "It can never be that the Church committed to the care of Peter shall succumb or in any wise fail. Therefore God confided His Church to Peter so that he might guard it safely by His unconquerable power."

Because the SSPX members somehow do not understand these principles of indefectibility, they are unable to draw the conclusion that it is impossible that the Vatican II "popes" be true popes. If they were true popes, we would be bound logically to say that the Catholic Church has defected.

Furthermore, by refusing, in principle, to take the New Mass, which Archbishop Lefebvre called the Mass of Luther, the SSPX members incur the anathema of the Council of Trent:

> If anyone says that the ceremonies, vestments, and outward signs, which the Catholic Church uses in the celebration of Masses, are incentives to impiety rather than the services of piety: let him be anathema.

(2) They have a false notion of the universal ordinary magisterium. The SSPX members think that they can refuse the teachings of Vatican II on the alleged basis that "they are not infallible, and therefore they are fallible, and in fact some of the teachings are heretical."

The universal ordinary magisterium (UOM) occurs when these three things coincide: (1) a doctrine is taught by the pope, (2) which is contained either explicitly or implicitly in divine revelation, and (3) which is also taught by all the bishops in the world, i.e., with moral unanimity.

A perfect example of UOM is the doctrine of the Guardian Angels. Nearly *all* of the moral teaching of the Catholic Church pertains to the UOM. Pope Pius XI said that the UOM happens every day. It occurs by the common teachings found in approved catechisms, in the sermons of priests and deacons who are approved by the bishop of the diocese, and in the teachings of approved theologians.

All Catholics owe the *assent of divine faith* to doctrines which meet these criteria of UOM and which are promulgated by the Catholic Church.

Extraordinary or solemn magisterium occurs when the pope speaks by solemn declaration, as in the case of the definition of the Immaculate Conception, or when a general council of the Church defines a dogma, as in the case of papal infallibility at the First Vatican Council, or when a pope or general council anathematizes a doctrine, in which case we must hold its opposite to be true by divine faith. An example would be the doctrine of Martin Luther on justification which was condemned by the Council of Trent.

---

[1] Origen, St. Epiphanius, Theodoretus, Theophylactus, Bessarion, Saint Ambrose, Saint Leo the Great, Saint Gregory the Great, Saint Gregory VII, and Pope Saint Nicholas I.

The Second Vatican Council certainly qualified for ordinary universal magisterium. It means that anything which it taught as divinely revealed would qualify as UOM, because it was promulgated by a (supposed) pope, and was also promulgated by all the bishops of the world. An example would be the doctrine on religious liberty, which is, of course, a heresy.

Paul VI declared in early 1966 that the decrees of the council had to be accepted. He said:

> Some wonder what authority, what theological qualification, the Council intended to attribute to its teachings, knowing that it avoided giving solemn dogmatic definitions that would engage the infallibility of the ecclesiastical magisterium. The answer is well known to those who recall the conciliar declaration of March 6, 1964, repeated on November 16, 1964: given the pastoral nature of the Council, it avoided pronouncing extraordinary dogmas endowed with the note of infallibility; however, it did endow its teachings with the authority of the supreme ordinary magisterium, which ordinary and so clearly authentic magisterium must be accepted docilely and sincerely by all the faithful, according to the mind of the Council regarding the nature and purposes of the individual documents.

He also said in the *Credo of the People of God* in 1968:

> We believe all that is contained in the word of God written or handed down, and that the Church proposes for belief as divinely revealed, whether by a solemn judgment or by the ordinary and universal magisterium. We believe in the infallibility enjoyed by the successor of Peter when he teaches ex cathedra as pastor and teacher of all the faithful, and which is assured also to the episcopal body when it exercises with him the supreme magisterium.

It is impossible, by the infallibility of the Catholic Church, that it could teach a doctrine, which is heretical or even erroneous, either by its solemn magisterium or by its universal ordinary magisterium.

For if the Church could err in such matters, that is, in its official and universal teachings, then it would have no credibility, and would be a useless, even dangerous institution. In other words, how would we know when it is teaching error and when it is teaching the truth?

Archbishop Lefebvre expressed it this way: "We have to *sift* the [post-conciliar] magisterium to know what is Catholic and what is false."

In such a case, which is the authority? The Catholic Church or the sifter?

The theory of the Society Saint Pius X concerning the universal ordinary magisterium. They hold that the UOM does not occur until there is historical continuity of the doctrine. In other words, if there are some historical lapses, in which opposing doctrines were taught by the Church concerning the same subject, then there is no UOM. There must be, therefore, unanimity of time, and not only of space, i.e., it is not sufficient that the doctrine be universally taught all over the world at the present time, but it is also necessary that it be universally taught in past time. This theory implies that the Church could teach error from time to time in its past. It is only when you get constancy, they say, that you have UOM. And who decides the constancy?

Ironically, this theory reflects very closely the position of the modernist arch-heretic Hans Küng.

The Society of Saint Pius X is the sifter. Based on their false notions of the universal ordinary magisterium, the SSPX ends up as the sifter of what is to be believed and what is to be rejected. So they have no trouble setting themselves up as the Great Sifter, thereby superseding the authority of the Catholic Church. So they can say, "We are with the pope, but we reject his teachings, his disciplines, and his liturgy, except what makes it through our sifter."

How does this picking and choosing differ from heresy? The very word *heresy* comes from the Greek word *haeresis,* which means "choosing."

Conclusion. I hope that I have explained how the members of Society of Saint Pius X cling to principles which have no basis in Catholic doctrine, and because of this, they are incapable of performing the logic which would bring them to the sedevacantist conclusion. For it is only by unmasking the modernist "popes" and "prelates" as false popes and prelates that the indefectibility and the infallibility of the Catholic Church can be preserved.

I would add, however, that all traditionalists, despite their differences of theological position, are simply trying to be good Catholics in their own way, and had this modernist heresy never presented itself, they would all just be good Catholics without any disagreements.

Nonetheless, at the same time we should not be indifferent as to what is the true explanation of what has occurred in the Catholic Church, and how to counteract it.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

+ Donald J. Sanborn

Most Rev. Donald J. Sanborn, Rector