

Anti-Lefebvrisism – II

April 14, 2018

Is there a reason why NM (see last week's "Comments"), in order to deal with the problem of the Conciliar Popes, resorts to the dramatic solution of declaring that they have not been Popes at all? There would seem to be. The Catholic Church is both human (a society of human beings) and divine (specially animated by the Holy Ghost), and it is important not to confuse the two. Human beings as such are all fallible. God alone is infallible. The mistake of Catholics resorting to the dramatic solution of NM is that they are attributing to the human Popes too much of the infallibility that can come from God alone. Let us take an illustration from any modern home.

When I put an electric plug into a socket in the wall, the electric current does not come from the plug, it comes from the power station through the wall and socket into the plug and whatever appliance needs the electric current. The power station is God. The wall and socket are the Church. The current is the Church's infallibility, coming from God. The plug is the four conditions which the Pope alone can insert into the socket. Those conditions are of course that he 1) speaks as Pope 2) in order to fix once and for all 3) a point of faith or morals 4) with the intention of binding all Catholics to accept it. Through the Pope's engaging the four conditions, he and he alone has guaranteed access as a human being to the Church's divine infallibility. The four conditions are the Pope's to engage. The infallibility is God's to engage.

Also of course, this particular socket, known as the Church's Extraordinary Magisterium (EM), is not the only access of human beings to the Church's infallibility. They accede to it much more by the Church's Ordinary Magisterium (OM), which is Catholic Tradition, or, what all the Church's teachers, Popes and Bishops in particular, have taught all over the world ever

since Jesus Christ as God deposited that Deposit of the Faith with His Church, confirmed infallibly in the Apostles at Pentecost and handed down infallibly by them until the last of them died. From then on that doctrine was in the hands of fallible human beings, to whom God left their free-will to teach error if they chose to do so. But if ever human error made doubtful what belonged to the infallible doctrine and what did not, God gave to His Church also the Extraordinary Magisterium, precisely to fix once and for all what does and what does not belong to the Ordinary Magisterium. Thus OM is to EM as dog to tail, and not as tail to dog!

The problem of Catholics without number ever since the solemn definition in 1870 of the Church's infallibility is that since the access of the EM to the Church's infallibility is automatically guaranteed in a way in which the access of the OM is not, then the EM seems superior, and Catholics tend to exaggerate the EM and to transfer to the Pope personally that infallibility which in reality belongs automatically only to the Church. This means that if the Pope makes serious errors like those of the Conciliar Popes, then the only possible explanation is that they are not Popes. Or, if they are Popes, then one must follow their errors. The logic is good, but the premise is false. Popes are not as infallible as all that. They can make serious errors, as Vatican II and its Conciliar Popes have shown, as never before in all Church history! But the Church remains infallible, and therefore I know that Catholic Tradition will last to the end of the world despite the very worst that any poor Popes may try to do between now and then.

But how do I know that to the Pope as Pope belongs only the privileged access (four conditions) to the electric current (infallibility), and not the current itself which belongs to the wall (the Church)? Because the very definition of infallibility in 1870 says so! I need only read:—when the Pope engages the four conditions (mentioned above), then he “is

possessed of that infallibility with which the Divine Redeemer willed that his Church should be endowed in defining doctrine regarding faith or morals."

So Catholic Popes are free to make terrible mistakes without the Church being any less infallible.

Kyrie eleison.