

Archbishop's Authority – I

February 15, 2020

Let us illustrate the relationship between Catholic Truth and Catholic Authority with the concrete example of the Athanasius of modern times that God gave us to show us the way through our pre-apocalyptic crisis: Archbishop Lefebvre (1905–1991). When the mass of the Church's leaders were persuaded at Vatican II to change the nature of the Faith, and a few years later in the name of obedience to abandon the true rite of the Mass, by the strength of his faith the Archbishop remained faithful to the Church's unchanging Truth and showed that it is the heart and soul of its divine Authority. As the Spanish proverb says, "Obedience is not the servant of obedience."

Certainly the Archbishop believed in the Church's authority to give commands to its members at all levels for the salvation of their souls. That is why in the first few years of the existence of the Society of St Pius X (1970–1974) he took care to obey Canon Law and the Pope, Paul VI, as far as he was able, but when officials sent from Rome to inspect his Seminary in Écône departed far from Catholic Truth in things they said to seminarians, he wrote his famous Declaration of November, 1974, in protest against the whole of Rome's abandoning the Catholic faith for the new Conciliar religion, and this Declaration served like a charter for what emerged as the Traditional movement at the Mass of Lille in the summer of 1976.

Now the Archbishop himself always resolutely denied that he was the leader of Tradition, because to this day Catholic Tradition is an unofficial movement and has no kind of official structure. Nor was he the only leader among Traditionalists, nor did all of them agree with him or pay him homage. Nevertheless a large number of Catholics saw in him their leader, trusted him and followed his lead. Why? Because in him they saw the continuation of that Catholic Faith by

which alone they could save their souls. In other words the Archbishop may have had no official authority over them, because jurisdiction is the prerogative of Church officials duly elected or appointed, but he built up until his death an enormous moral authority by his faithfulness to the true Faith. In other words his truth created his authority, unofficial but real, whereas the officials' lack of Truth has been undermining their Authority ever since.

The dependence of authority, at least Catholic authority, upon truth, was as clear as clear could be.

However, with the Society of St Pius X which the Archbishop founded in 1970, things were slightly different, because here he did receive from the official Church some jurisdiction from Bishop Charrière of the Diocese of Geneva, Lausanne and Fribourg, a jurisdiction which he cherished because it proved that he was not making things up as he went along but was doing work of the Church. And so he did his best to govern the SSPX as though he was the normal head of a normal Catholic Congregation under Rome, which the defence of the true Faith gave him every right to do. However, the public and official Romans used all their jurisdiction to give him the lie, thereby alienating from him a mass of Catholics who would otherwise have followed him.

Moreover, the Newchurch that they were creating all around him meant that even inside the Society his authority was seriously weakened. For instance, if before the Council a priest dissatisfied with his diocesan bishop applied to enter the diocese of another, the second bishop naturally consulted the first about the applicant, and if the first advised the second to have nothing to do with him, that was the immediate end of the application. On the contrary, if a Society priest dissatisfied with the Society applied to join a Newchurch diocese, the Newchurch bishop was liable to "welcome him back into the official fold" as a fugitive from the "Lefebvrist schism." Thus the Archbishop was not supported by his brother

bishops, which meant that he could not discipline his priests inside the Society as he should have been able to. His authority was walking on eggshells, insofar as he had at his disposal no sanction with which to keep wayward priests in check. Thus lack of truth in the Newchurch left truth in the Society without the Catholic authority due to it to protect it.

Therefore to make up for the lack of unity in Truth coming from the hierarchy, Traditional priests today must exercise a more than normal forbearance towards one another, and Traditional Catholics must pray more than usual for their priests to find this forbearance. It is not impossible.

Kyrie eleison.