

Church's Infallibility – III

May 17, 2014

The crazy words and deeds of Pope Francis are presently driving many believing Catholics towards sedevacantism, which is dangerous. The belief that the Conciliar Popes have not been and are not Popes may begin as an opinion, but all too often one observes that the opinion turns into a dogma and then into a mental steel trap. I think the minds of many sedevacantists shut down because the unprecedented crisis of Vatican II has caused their Catholic minds and hearts an agony which found in sedevacantism a simple solution, and they have no wish to re-open the agony by re-opening the question. So they positively crusade for others to share their simple solution, and in so doing many of them – not all – end up displaying an arrogance and a bitterness which are no signs or fruits of a true Catholic.

Now these “Comments” have abstained from proclaiming with certainty that the Conciliar Popes have been true Popes, but at the same time they have argued that the usual sedevacantist arguments are neither conclusive nor binding upon Catholics, as some sedevacantists would have us believe. Let us return to one of their most important arguments, which is from Papal infallibility: Popes are infallible. But liberals are fallible, and Conciliar Popes are liberal. Therefore they are not Popes.

To this one may object that a Pope is certainly infallible only when he engages the four conditions of the Church's Extraordinary Magisterium by teaching 1 as Pope, 2 on Faith or morals, 3 definitively, 4 so as to bind all Catholics. Whereupon sedevacantists and liberals alike reply that it is Church teaching that the Ordinary Universal Magisterium is also infallible, so – and here is the weak point in their argument – whenever the Pope teaches solemnly even outside of his Extraordinary Magisterium, he must also be infallible. Now

their liberal Conciliar teaching is solemn. Therefore we must become either liberals or sedevacantists, depending of course on who is wielding the same argument.

But the hallmark of teaching which belongs to the Church's Ordinary Universal Magisterium is not the solemnity with which the Pope teaches outside of the Extraordinary Magisterium, but whether what he is teaching corresponds, or not, to what Our Lord, his Apostles and virtually all their successors, the bishops of the Universal Church, have taught in all times and in all places, in other words whether it corresponds to Tradition. Now Conciliar teaching (e.g. religious liberty and ecumenism) is in rupture with Tradition. Therefore Catholics today are not in fact bound to become liberals or sedevacantists.

However, both liberals and sedevacantists cling to their misunderstanding of Papal infallibility for reasons that are not without interest, but that is another story. In any case they do not give up easily, so they come back with another objection which deserves to be answered. Both of them will say that to argue that Tradition is the hallmark of the Ordinary Magisterium is to set up a vicious circle. For if the Church's teaching authority, or Magisterium, exists to tell what is Church doctrine, as it does, then how can the Traditional doctrine at the same time tell what is the Magisterium? Either the teacher authorises what is taught, or what is taught authorises the teacher, but they cannot both at the same time authorise each other. So to argue that Tradition which is taught authorises the Ordinary Magisterium which is teaching, is wrong, and so the Pope is infallible not only in his Extraordinary teaching, and so we must become either liberals or sedevacantists, they conclude.

Why there is no vicious circle must wait until next week. It is as interesting as why both sedevacantists and liberals fall into the same error on infallibility.

Kyrie eleison.