

Context Upended

September 20, 2014

Starting out from arguments against sedevacantism as being a short-sighted error in a wholly abnormal situation, an Italian friend (C.C.) takes a longer view of that situation. Without being a priest or theologian, he ventures the opinion that sedevacantism is merely one of several attempts in the Church to fit the crisis of today into the categories of yesterday. There is no question of Catholic theology changing, but the real situation to which that theology has to be applied underwent a sea-change with Vatican II. Here is a key paragraph of his on that upended reality:—

“By its refusal of the objective reality of God’s existence and of the need to submit to his Law, today’s world is not normal, and the present Catholic unity is not normal either which has put man instead of God at the centre of things. Nor is it by a sudden swerve that the Church has arrived at this abnormal state of things, but following on a long and complex process of moving away from God, the disruptive effects of which showed up at Vatican II. For hundreds of years the germs of dissolution have been fostered within the Church, as have the men harbouring these germs, and they have been allowed to occupy all ranks of the hierarchy, up to and including the See of Peter.”

My friend goes on that if one fails to take into consideration this overall abnormality of the present state of the Church, which is unbelievably, yet truly, worse than ever, one runs the risk of dealing with a reality that no longer exists, in terms of reference that no longer apply. Thus for example the sedevacantists will say that today’s churchmen must know what they are doing, because they are intelligent and educated men. Not so, says C.C.: their preaching and practice may well no longer be Catholic, but they are convinced that they are wholly orthodox. The whole world has gone mad. They have

merely gone mad with it, not by a loss of reason but by having given up the use of it, and as their Catholic faith grows weaker, so there is less and less to stop them from losing it altogether.

But then, one might object, God must have abandoned his Church. To reply, CC resorts to three quotations from Scripture. Firstly, Lk.XVIII, 8, where Our Lord wonders if he will even find the Faith on earth when he comes back. Obviously a small remainder of priests and laity (with perhaps some bishops) will be enough to ensure the indefectibility of the Church until the end of the world (one thinks of the present difficulties of the "Resistance" in taking shape). Likewise, secondly, Mt.XXIV, 11-14, where it is foreseen that many false prophets will deceive many souls, and charity will grow cold. And thirdly, Lk.XXII, 31-32, where Our Lord instructs Peter to confirm his brethren in the faith after he has converted, strongly suggesting that his faith will first have failed. So almost the whole hierarchy can fail, including Peter, without the Church ceasing to be indefectible, somewhat like when the Apostles all ran away in the Garden of Gethsemane (Mt.XXVI, 56).

In conclusion, CC's vision for the Church of tomorrow or the day after strongly resembles that of Fr Calmel: let each of us do his duty according to his state of life, and take part in building a network of little forts of the Faith, each with a priest to ensure the sacraments, but with no henceforth inapplicable theology of the Church, nor unobtainable canonical approval, nor with any out-dated dividing-walls over the top of which the Faith will have flowed. The forts will be united by the Truth and will have mutual contacts of charity. The rest is in God's hands.

Kyrie eleison.