

Doctrine – Why? – I

September 11, 2010

Why is doctrine in general so important to Catholics? And why in particular does the Society of St. Pius X, following Archbishop Lefebvre and now Bishop Fellay, insist that agreement on doctrine must precede any other kind of agreement with Conciliar Rome? Why can the SSPX not accept to be regularized by Rome now, and leave the doctrinal differences to be worked out later? Here are two connected but different questions. Let us start with the general question.

The word “doctrine” comes from the Latin doceo, docere, meaning, to teach. Doctrine is a teaching. In our liberal world where everybody wants to think and talk just as he likes, the word “indoctrination” has become a dirty word. Yet to put an end to indoctrination, one would have to close down all schools, because wherever a school is open, indoctrination is going on. Even if a teacher is teaching that all doctrine is nonsense, that is still a doctrine!

However, everyone in fact agrees on the need for doctrine. For instance, who ever would climb into an aeroplane about which he was told beforehand that its designer had defied the classic doctrine of aerodynamics, and turned the wings upside down? Nobody! Aerodynamic doctrine which is true, saying for instance that wings must taper downwards at the back and not upwards, is not just words being spoken or written out of the blue, it is life and death reality. If a plane is to fly and not to crash, true aerodynamic doctrine, in fine detail, is essential to its design.

Similarly if a soul is to fly to Heaven and not crash into Hell, Catholic doctrine, teaching it what to believe and how to act, is essential. “God exists,” “All human beings have an immortal soul,” “Heaven and Hell are eternal,” “I must be baptized to be saved,” are not just words being imposed on

souls to believe, they are life and death realities, but of eternal life and eternal death. St. Paul tells Timothy to teach these truths of salvation in or out of season (II Tim. IV, 2), and for himself he says, "Woe to me if I do not teach the Gospel" (I Cor. IX, 16). Woe to the Catholic priest who does not indoctrinate souls with the Church's infallible doctrine!

But the question remains: surely the SSPX, to obtain from Rome that precious regularization which Rome alone has the authority to grant, could come to a practical agreement by which no Catholic doctrine would be denied, but by which the doctrinal differences between Rome and the SSPX would merely be bracketed out for the moment? Surely there need be here no betrayal of those great truths of salvation mentioned above? Bishop Fellay himself answered that question briefly in an interview which he gave to Brian Mereshon in May of this year, published in the "Remnant." Here are his words: "It is very clear that whatever practical solution would happen without a sound doctrinal foundation would lead directly to disaster . . . We have all these examples in front of us – the Fraternity of St. Peter, the Institute of Christ the King and all of the others are totally blocked on the level of doctrine because they first accepted the practical agreement." But need that be so? Interesting question . . .

Kyrie eleison.