

Emotional Arguing

March 21, 2015

An old-fashioned comparison has the advantage of being very clear: on the back of a mule a heavy pack can be difficult to balance. If it shifts to the left, one must push it to the right. If it tilts to the right, it must be pushed to the left. But such double pushing is not contrary – it has the single purpose of keeping the pack balanced. Similarly, for these “Comments” to argue repeatedly against sedevacantism is not to push towards liberalism, nor is it to suggest that sedevacantism is as bad as liberalism. It is merely to recognize that the outrageous words and deeds of the present occupant of the Holy See are tempting many good Catholics to renounce their reason and to judge of reality by their emotions. That is a common practice today, but it is not Catholic.

For instance sedevacantist arguments are, upon examination, never as strong as they can seem. Let us look at two that have crossed my desk recently, both from devout Catholics, strong in the Faith. Here is the first: Conciliar Popes, especially Francis, have not confirmed their brethren in the Faith. But it is of the essence of a Pope to do that. Therefore the Conciliar Popes are not essentially Popes. In reply one must distinguish a Pope in his being from a Pope in his action. A Pope becomes essentially Pope in his being by his valid election in a Conclave of Cardinals, or by his election, if it was invalid in itself, being convalidated by his subsequent acceptance as Pope by the Universal Church (which may have been the case for more than one Conciliar Pope, God knows). On the contrary, by confirming his brethren in the Faith a Pope is essentially Pope in his action. The two things are different and can be separated. Therefore a Pope can fail in action without necessarily ceasing to be a Pope in his being. That is surely the case of several, if not all, the Conciliar

Popes.

And here is the second argument: for the individual and fallible Catholic to set himself up as judge of error by the Church's infallible Magisterium is ridiculous. Faced then by obvious error (e.g. Conciliarism) by that Magisterium (e.g. the Conciliar Popes), he can only conclude that they have not been true Popes. But, in reply, the Pope is not necessarily the Church's infallible Magisterium. If he neither engages all four strict conditions of the Extraordinary Magisterium, nor teaches in accordance with the Church's Ordinary Magisterium, then he is fallible, and if he contradicts that Ordinary Magisterium then he is certainly in error, and can be judged to be such by any Catholic (or non-Catholic!) making the right use of his God-given mind. Otherwise how could Our Lord have warned us to beware of false prophets and of wolves in sheep's clothing (Mt. VII, 15–20)?

In fact both arguments can come from an emotional rejection of the Conciliar Popes: “They have so maltreated the Church that I simply cannot accept that they were Popes!” But what if I had been a bystander watching the original Way of the Cross? – “This is such maltreatment of Jesus that I simply cannot accept any longer that he is the Son of God!” Would not my emotional rejection of the maltreatment have been right, and yet my conclusion wrong? There is a mystery involved in the Conciliar Popes which sedevacantism passes by.

Now it may be, when the Church one day comes back to her senses, that the alone competent authority will declare that the Conciliar Popes were not Popes, but between now and then the arguments so far brought forward to prove the See of Rome to be vacant are not as conclusive as they can be made to appear.

Kyrie eleison.