

Fiftiesism Returns

January 12, 2013

Burning question: how could the leaders of the Society of St Pius X, which was founded by Archbishop Lefebvre to resist the Newchurch, now be seeking its favours in order to rejoin it? One answer is that they never fully understood the Archbishop. After the disaster of Vatican II in the 1960's, they saw in him the best continuation of the pre-disaster Church of the 1950's. In reality he was much more than that, but once he died, all they wanted was to go back to the cosy Catholicism of the 1950's. And they were not alone in preferring Christ without his Cross. It is a very popular formula.

For was not the Catholicism of the 1950's like a man standing on the edge of a tall and dangerous cliff? On the one hand it was still standing at a great height, otherwise Vatican II would not have been such a fall. On the other hand it was dangerously close to the edge of the cliff, otherwise again it could not have fallen so precipitously in the 1960's. By no means everything was bad in the Church of the 1950's, but it was too close to disaster. Why?

Because Catholics in general in the 1950's were outwardly maintaining the appearances of the true religion, but inwardly too many were flirting with the godless errors of the modern world: liberalism (what matters most in life is freedom), subjectivism (so man's mind and will are free of any objective truth or law), indifferentism (so it does not matter what religion a man has), and so on. So Catholics having the faith and not wanting to lose it, gradually adapted it to these errors. They would attend Mass on Sundays, they might still go to confession, but they would be feeding their minds on the vile media, and their hearts would be chafing at certain laws of the Church, on marriage for the laity, on celibacy for the clergy. So they might be keeping the faith, but they wanted less and less to swim against the powerful current of the

glamorous and irreligious world all around them. They were getting closer and closer to the edge of the cliff.

Now the Archbishop had his failings, which one may think are reflected in the present difficulties of the Society. Let us not idolize him. Nevertheless he was in the 1950's a bishop who had both the appearances of Catholicism and, deep inside him, its substance, as proved by the rich fruits of his apostolic ministry in Africa. Thus when Vatican II succeeded in crippling or paralyzing nearly all of his fellow bishops, he managed to recreate, almost alone, a pre-Vatican II seminary and Congregation. The appearances of his Catholic oasis amidst the Conciliar desert dazzled many a good young man. Vocations were also attracted by the Archbishop's personal charisma. But from ten to 20 years after his death in 1991 the substance of his heritage came to seem heavier and heavier to push against the ever stronger current of the modern world.

So, disinclined to go on bearing the Cross of being scorned by the mainstream Church and the world, the SSPX leaders began to dream of being once more officially recognized. And the dream took hold, because after all dreams are so much nicer than reality. We must pray for these leaders of the SSPX. The 1950's are gone, gone for ever, and it is sheer dreaming to wish for their return.

Kyrie eleison.