

True Pope? – II

May 7, 2011

By no means everybody agrees with the opinion laid out here one week ago (EC 198) whereby subjective good faith or good will on the part of Conciliar Popes prevents their hair-raising objective heresies from invalidating them as Popes (see Prof. Doermann for John-Paul II's teaching of Universal Salvation, see Bishop Tissier for Benedict XVI's emptying out of the Cross). The opposite opinion is that these heresies are so hair-raising that #1, they cannot possibly have been uttered by true Vicars of Christ, or #2, no amount of subjective good faith can neutralize their objective poison, or #3, subjective good faith is excluded in the case of Conciliar Popes trained in the old theology. Let us gently take each argument in turn:–

Firstly, just how far the Lord God can allow his Vicars to betray him (objectively), God alone knows for sure. However, we do know from Scripture (Lk. XVIII, 8) that when Christ returns, he will hardly find the Faith still on earth. But is the Faith yet, in 2011, reduced to that point? One may think not. In which case God may allow his Conciliar Vicars to do worse yet, without their ceasing to be his Vicars. Does not Scripture declare at exactly the moment when Caiphas was plotting the crime of crimes against God, namely the judicial murder of Christ (Jn. XI, 50–51), that he was High Priest?

Secondly, it is true that the objective heresy of well-intentioned heretics is much more important for the Universal Church than their subjective good intentions, and it is also true that many objective heretics are subjectively convinced of their own innocence. For this double reason when Mother Church is in her right mind she has a mechanism for forcing such material heretics either to renounce their heresy or to become fully-fledged formal heretics, and that is her Inquisitors, whom she endows with her God-given authority to

define and condemn heresy, to maintain the purity of doctrine. But what happens if it is the highest authority in the Church that is swimming in objective heresies? Who is there above the Popes that has authority to correct them? Nobody! Then has God abandoned his Church? No, but he is putting it through a severe trial, all too deserved by the tepid mass of today's Catholics – and, alas, Traditionalists?

Thirdly, it is true that both John-Paul II and Benedict XVI received a pre-Conciliar training in philosophy and theology. But by their time the worms of Kantian subjectivism and Hegelian evolutionism had already for over a century been eating the heart out of the concept of objective and unchanging truth, without which the concept of unchangeable Catholic dogma can make no sense. Now one may well argue that both those Popes were morally at fault – say, love of popularity, say, intellectual pride – for falling into material heresy, but moral faults cannot replace authoritative doctrinal condemnation for purposes of turning them from material into formal heretics.

Therefore since only formal heretics are excluded from the Church, and since the only sure way of proving someone to be a formal heretic is not available in the case of Popes, a certain range of opinion on the problem of Conciliar Popes must remain open. "Sedevacantist" does not deserve to be the dirty word that liberal "Traditionalists" have made of it, but on the other hand the arguments of the sedevacantists are not as conclusive as they might wish or pretend. In conclusion, sedevacantists may still be Catholic, but no Catholic is yet obliged to be a sedevacantist. I for one believe the Conciliar Popes are valid Popes.

Kyrie eleison.