

Podcast Q: How can the Church give us a bad Mass?

Context

This is just one of a whole series of questions that touch the infallibility of the Church:

- Doctrinal infallibility: How can the Church promulgate errors in an ecumenical council?
 - Religious liberty
 - Ecumenism
 - Collegiality
- Disciplinary infallibility: How can the Church promulgate bad laws in a new Code of Canon Law?
 - Inversion of the ends of marriage (mutual help placed above procreation)
 - Lack of protection to the faith in the case of a mixed marriage (no oath required to raise the children Catholic)
 - Allowance of doubtful matter for Confirmation (vegetable oils other than olive oil)
 - Permission to give Communion to heretics and schismatics who manifest faith in the sacrament
- Liturgical infallibility: How can the Church promulgate a rite of Mass that is irreverent and dangerous to the faith?
 - Propitiatory sacrifice now resembles a commemorative meal to please Protestants
 - Lack of reverence to the Blessed Sacrament undermines faith in Real Presence
 - Priest is perceived as the president (first among equals) who represents the assembly and conducts worship; not a minister of Christ who alone offers sacrifice in Christ's name and intercedes for the congregation
- Sanctoral infallibility: How can the Church canonize men who are not models of virtue?
 - Popes (John XXIII, Paul VI, JP2) of questionable orthodoxy who led the Church into auto-destruction

Two opposing extremes—or two sides of the same coin?

Our enemies attack us from on all sides on this issue:

- Mainstream/conciliar Church:
 - Major: The Church is infallible
 - Minor: The Church promulgated these things
 - Conclusion: Just accept them blindly
- Sedevacantists:

- Major: The Church is infallible
- Minor: Paul VI, the Council Fathers, the other post-conciliar Popes promulgated these things, which we know contain errors.
- Conclusion: Therefore, these men (i.e., the visible hierarchy) are not the Church. The “conciliar church” is an anti-church. The true Church subsists in the minds and hearts of “true believers”—those few who still have the faith.

Neither of these extremes is acceptable.

- Conciliarism requires that we blind ourselves and abdicate the use of our reason. It means ignoring all the objective evidence that has already been put forward about the problems in the Second Vatican Council, the New Mass, etc.
 - Doctrinally, this is the “hermeneutic of continuity.” It means believing that contradictory statements can somehow be reconciled.
 - Ultimately, the philosophical justification for this is a Kantian view of faith in which the subject somehow enters into the object (the deposit of faith) and conditions how it is understood. Only a Kantian-style subjectivism allows us to bridge the gap between contradictory statements and call both of them true.
 - Liturgically, this means accepting the New Mass as good and licit, despite all the evidence that it is deficient and puts the Faith in danger.
 - Practically, it means that we never free the Church from the crisis that she is in.
 - To deliver her from the present crisis, we must acknowledge its root causes; but these are to be found in the novelties of Vatican II and of the New Mass.
- Sedevacantism is not acceptable either. It requires that we adopt a basically Protestant view of the Church, according to which she is an invisible assembly of true believers.
 - This definition saves the holiness and infallibility of the Church, but it destroys her nature as a society and takes away the rest of her essential marks and attributes.
 - No visibility. — She might retain a certain material visibility, meaning that she is composed of visible members; but she has lost her *formal* visibility, which makes her visible precisely as a hierarchical society, in which there are men duly constituted with authority to teach and govern. Where are these men? What has happened to the visible Magisterium?
 - No unity. — There is no unity of government, consisting in submission to a common authority acknowledged by all. The innumerable sedevacatist sects, all fighting against each other, furnish proof of this.
 - No catholicity. — The Church is no longer spread throughout the whole world with an abundance of members. She is reduced to a handful.

- No apostolicity. — The Church (as conceived by the sedevacantists) may go back to the Apostles in the sense that she still retains the doctrine taught by them (doctrinal apostolicity); but she has lost the transmission of *authority*, or ordinary episcopal jurisdiction, which consists in the perpetual succession of Popes as successors of St. Peter, and of duly constituted residential bishops as successors of the Apostles (also called *formal* apostolicity, or apostolic succession). — She has even lost an overwhelming percentage of her *material* apostolicity (valid priestly and episcopal orders) in the opinion of those who reject the validity of the new rite of episcopal consecration promulgated by Paul VI in 1968.
 - No indefectibility. — The Church, having lost these notes and properties, has undergone a substantial change.
 - Sedevacantism is riddled with practical difficulties, not the least of which is, *Who will elect the next pope*, if there are no cardinals and no residential bishops?
 - Conclavism: the small remnant of true believers must proceed to an election. Result: schisms and anti-popes.
 - Divine interventionism: God himself will designate the next Pope in a miraculous manner. — Answer: would God really deprive the Church of any legitimate human means of arriving at an election? Are we really just to sit helpless while we wait for an intervention from above? This goes against the *prudential* position of Archbishop Lefebvre and the SSPX, to be discussed later.
 - Cassiciacum thesis (Fr. Guérard des Lauriers): we have material popes and material cardinals. Once the material pope removes the *obex*, or obstacle, of public heresy, he will automatically become the legitimate Pope duly vested with authority. Same with the cardinals. — Answer: this is a novelty with no basis in tradition; and it suffers from grave difficulties.
 - *Philosophically* it is an error, because there is no real distinction between legitimately holding office and possessing the authority that corresponds to that office. It is precisely *by* receiving authority that one comes to hold office. The two are inseparable. — To illustrate this, we may ask the holders of this opinion: if a material pope appoints material cardinals, by what authority does he appoint them? How can one who only *potentially* holds an office exercise an *act* of that office, such as appointing?
 - *Practically* it does little to resolve the issue, since there exists no authority in the Church capable of declaring for all the faithful that the *obex* of public heresy has been removed from the papacy; and the impossibility of such a declaration will lead to interminable disagreements.

Solution: narrow interpretation of infallibility

The SSPX escapes the dilemma by accepting a narrow or *minimalist* interpretation of infallibility. What does this mean?

We might represent the response of the SSPX as follows:

- Major: The Church is infallible – *I distinguish*:
 - The Church *as such* (the spotless bride of Christ), YES
 - The Church *in her human authorities* – I further distinguish:
 - When they fulfill all the conditions required for infallibility, YES
 - Otherwise, NO
- Minor: Paul VI, the Council Fathers, etc., have promulgated errors – *I apply the same distinction*:
 - In acts which fulfill all the conditions required for infallibility, NO
 - In other acts, YES
- I deny the conclusion (the dilemma of blind obedience or sedevacantism) because *Tertium datur* (there is a third possibility): RECOGNIZE AND RESIST
 - Recognize the authority
 - Resist the abuse of authority

The key point of controversy is our assertion that none of the acts of the conciliar or postconciliar magisterium that are problematic (because they contain error or are harmful to souls) have fulfilled the conditions required for infallibility.

- Doctrinally, this is fairly easy to prove—for example, the Second Vatican Council was a “pastoral” council and issued no solemn declarations or definitions of faith.
- But in discipline and liturgy the difficulties are greater—why?

We think it is because the precise limits of disciplinary infallibility have not yet been definitively established, and much passes for infallible which is not so.

To explain why we think this, we will discuss the nature and extent of disciplinary infallibility as it appears in:

- The manuals of theology
- The acts of the Magisterium

Theologians on disciplinary infallibility

- Infallibility is the negative *charism*, or special gift of God, which prevents the Church from erring in a way that would make her fail *definitively* in her mission of teaching (=doctrinal infallibility), governing or sanctifying (=disciplinary infallibility).

- We say *definitively*, because the Church, in her human element, is capable of imperfections that are truly detrimental to the salvation of souls, although these imperfections or failing can never reach the point that the gates of hell shall have prevailed against her.
- Infallibility is directly doctrinal (concerned with the Church's mission of teaching), indirectly disciplinary (concerned with her missions of governing and sanctifying). The Holy Ghost will not allow the Church to fail in any of these.
- Doctrinal infallibility has a primary and secondary object.
 - Primary object = the deposit of faith, that is, the truths publicly revealed by God and committed to the Church before the death of the last of the Apostles.
 - Secondary object = whatever is necessary for safeguarding revealed truths. Usually divided into dogmatic facts and theological conclusions.
 - Dogmatic facts: truths of a historical or factual character that are intimately connected with the deposit of faith: e.g., the legitimacy of a general council or of a pope who defines a truth of faith. — E.g., If Pius IX was not a legitimate Pope, we cannot be certain of the Immaculate Conception, which he solemnly defined.
 - Theological conclusions: whatever is easily deduced from a truth of faith and an evident truth of natural reason. The Church has the authority to approve of these conclusions and condemn the contrary errors because this is necessary for safeguarding the faith. Doubting a theological conclusion can put one in proximate danger of doubting the revealed truth that it is logically connected to. For example, if personality consists in self-consciousness (the condemned proposition of Gunther), then we are led to deny the unity of our Lord's person, since he had self-consciousness both as God and as man—therefore, it would follow that He was two persons.
 - There is a twofold organ, or instrument, of doctrinal infallibility: the ordinary and universal magisterium (OUM), and the extraordinary magisterium. (cf. Vatican I, Session 3 Chap. 3 [on faith] and Session 4 Chap. 4 [on papal infallibility]; Pius IX, *Tuas libenter*; also, CIC 83 can. 749ff).
 - The extraordinary magisterium is that of the Pope alone, or of the Pope and bishops united to him in council, who solemnly define a doctrine of faith or morals to be definitively held by all the faithful. — The extraordinary magisterium attains to infallibility in one definitive act.
 - The ordinary and universal magisterium (OUM) is that of the Pope and bishops spread throughout the world who *unanimously* teach that a certain doctrine of faith or morals is *definitively* to be held by all the faithful. — Here, infallibility results from the providential convergence of many acts which, taken in isolation, are not of themselves infallible.

- As the Code of Canon Law adds: No doctrine should be understood as infallibly defined unless that is *manifestly* the case. (Minimalist interpretation of doctrinal infallibility!)
- Disciplinary infallibility is commonly held to extend to universal laws and liturgical rites, the approval of religious orders and the canonization of saints.
 - While all theologians admit the thesis of disciplinary infallibility *in general*, they are far from agreeing as to its precise nature and extent.
 - Many theologians¹ consider the Church to be infallible in her discipline only insofar as by her universal disciplines she *indirectly* teaches dogmatic truths, at least through the OUM.
 - E.g., the universal and century-old discipline of giving Holy Communion under one species points to the dogma of concomitance, i.e., that the whole Christ is really present under each sacramental species. (If this were not proposed by the OUM as definitively true, then the practice of giving Holy Communion under one species would have been considered unsafe and thus could not have received universal acceptance in the Church.)
 - But the discipline of the Church *as such* (i.e., in its prudential aspect) is not *per se* infallible; there is no guarantee that it will always be “good” or successful on the disciplinary level, meaning well-calculated to promote the salvation of souls. — In fact, we would argue, divine providence might permit a time of crisis when laws are passed that are positively *harmful*, that is, not conducive to the salvation of souls, especially if these are duly *resisted* by at least a vigilant minority, since this situation would not, of itself, compromise the mission of the Church in a definitive way.
 - “At least through the OUM” — It can be doubted if the disciplinary infallibility of the Church ever belongs to the extraordinary magisterium; that is, if the Church would ever infallibly *define* a doctrine of faith or morals *indirectly* through a disciplinary decree; or if the infallibility of such decrees is to be sought exclusively in their pertaining to OUM spread throughout space and time.
 - For example, when a Pope first officially sanctioned communion under one species for the whole Church, did that decree amount to an infallible *definition* of the doctrine of concomitance, or of any other doctrine?

¹ □E.g., Van Noort: “disciplinary laws are only indirectly an object of infallibility, i.e., only by reason of the doctrinal decision implicit in them.”

- In other words, does the mere fact of promulgating a universal law really imply the intention to solemnly define all doctrines that may be logically connected to it?
 - The Dominican theologian Melchior Cano, who was the first to formulate the thesis of disciplinary infallibility, said quite the opposite: “The mere fact that something is contained in a book of canon law, does not mean that it must be believed as a dogma of faith” (*De Locis*, bk. 5, ch. 5).
- If there is lacking the intention or the wording necessary to teach infallibly, a disciplinary decree does not achieve infallibility of itself as an act of the extraordinary magisterium, but only by being incorporated into the OUM, which presupposes its conformity to Tradition.
 - There is also debate about the *scope* of disciplinary infallibility. For example, does it include the canonization of saints? If so, how certain are we?
 - St. Thomas classified the infallibility of canonizations as something “piously to be believed” (*pie credendum est*—Quodlibet IX, q. 8).
 - Manualists of the early 20th century generally regarded it as theologically certain or even close to being a truth of faith (e.g., Salaverri), although others still classified it merely as “common opinion” (Van Noort, Tanqueray).
 - Recently there has been a departure, or backpeddling, among good theologians (probably due to the evident problems with the postconciliar canonizations). E.g., Msgr. Bruno Gherardini does not believe that they are infallible; nor does Prof. Roberto de Mattei; etc.

The magisterium on disciplinary infallibility

Leaving aside theological opinions, what does the Church’s official magisterium teach about disciplinary infallibility?

- There seems to be an *indirect* affirmation of disciplinary infallibility, since the General Councils, and especially Trent, sometimes invoke liturgical praxis in support of a given doctrine, e.g.,
 - The sacramental nature of Holy Orders — If anyone says that by sacred ordination the Holy Spirit is not imparted, and that therefore the bishops say in vain: ‘Receive ye the Holy Spirit’...let him be anathema (Trent, Ses. 23, can. 4: Dz 964).
 - Eucharistic adoration — If anyone says that in the holy sacrament of the Eucharist the only-begotten Son of God is not to be adored even outwardly...nor to be

borne about in procession according to the praiseworthy and universal rite and custom of the holy Church...let him be anathema (Trent, Ses. 13, can. 6: Dz 888)

- Some observations:
 - The appeals of Trent to liturgical praxis as manifesting the infallible faith of the Church do not amount to a direct *definition* of liturgical infallibility. It has not become a truth of faith.
 - As Bellarmine says, “[In the ecumenical councils] neither the disputations that precede the decrees, nor the reasons that are adduced, nor the things that are introduced to explain and illustrate them, but only the bare decrees themselves are *de fide*—and not all decrees, but only those that are proposed as *de fide*” (Bellarmine, *De Controversiis*, On the Authority of the Councils, bk. 2, ch. 12). — So, the appeals of Trent to liturgical praxis might *support* a thesis of liturgical infallibility, but these appeals do not, of themselves, make the liturgical infallibility into a dogma of faith, as they do not constitute the object of a special definition.
 - Moreover, it is not clear whether the intention of the Council is to appeal to liturgical praxis as an absolutely *infallible* rule of faith, or merely as an *authentic* source of doctrine, which of itself provides great probability, but not always infallible certainty.
 - Later on we will examine certain cases where the liturgy apparently taught things that are certainly incorrect, or even, in the light of recent definitions, truly heretical.
- Some acts of the Papal magisterium may also suggest a kind of disciplinary infallibility.
 - Pius VI, in his Constitution *Auctorem Fidei*, condemned the synod of Pistoia for “includ[ing] and submit[ting] to a prescribed examination even the *discipline* established and approved by the Church, as if the Church which is ruled by the Spirit of God could have established discipline which is not only useless and burdensome for Christian liberty to endure, but which is even dangerous and harmful and leading to superstition and materialism.” — Pius VI branded this proposition as “false, rash, scandalous, dangerous, offensive to pious ears, injurious to the Church and to the Spirit of God by whom it is guided, at least erroneous” (Dz 1578).
 - Observations:
 - Pius VI does not condemn the proposition of Pistoia as *heretical*, but as “at least erroneous” and “injurious to the Church and to the Spirit of God by whom it is guided.”
 - This implies that the disciplinary infallibility of the Church is *not* a truth of faith, even if, understood in a general way and within proper limits (to be discussed later), it is theologically *certain*.

- Pius XII, in his Encyclical *Mediator Dei*, condemned the error of *antiquarianism* while affirming that: “The more recent liturgical rites likewise deserve reverence and respect. *They, too, owe their inspiration to the Holy Spirit*, who assists the Church in every age even to the consummation of the world” (*Mediator Dei*, n. 61)
- Observation:
 - There is no doubt that the Holy Ghost assists the Church in every age, especially in the formulation of her liturgy. However, the Holy Ghost acts through human instruments who are capable of resisting the movements of grace. This resistance is impossible only where the *charism of infallibility* intervenes.
 - The question to be resolved is whether this charism applies equally to *every* liturgical rubric by the mere fact of its promulgation; and this is far from apparent. The words of Pius XII need not be interpreted in that sense.
- An important *caveat*:
 - In the case of Trent and as well as of Pius VI, an appeal is made to centuries-old liturgical practices that represent an organic development of the liturgy in logical continuity with the past; these practices, moreover, had been universally and peacefully received in the Church; in consequence, they could be considered to be connected in some way to the teaching of the OUM and the *sensus fidei* of the faithful.
 - Even the “more recent liturgical rites” alluded to by Pius XII were still centuries old—e.g., the use of black vestments, of sacred images and statues in the church, of polyphony—and represented an organic development of previous liturgical praxis.
 - Therefore, it would be an illegitimate leap of logic to conclude from this that every liturgical or disciplinary practice enjoys infallibility by the mere fact of its *promulgation*, especially if it were imposed as a *novelty* upon the Church and met with determined *resistance*. Whatever some theologians may opine, there is no absolute guarantee that the Holy Ghost would prevent such a thing from happening.
 - In fact, some classical theologians of great authority more or less openly admit of this possibility.
 - Francisco Suarez, S.J., envisioned the case of a schismatic pope who would try to “change all the liturgical ceremonies that rest on apostolic traditions” (*Tractatus de Caritate*, disp. 12, sect. 1, n. 2)
 - John of Torquemada, O.P., conceded that the Pope might “command something contrary to...natural or divine law” (*Summa de Ecclesia*, Part I, Bk. IV, c. 11) or even “undertake something contrary to the constitution of

the universal Church...which would introduce disorder into the Church” (Ibid., Bk. II, c. 106).

- St. Robert Bellarmine, S.J., hypothesized about a Pope who “attacks souls or...tries to destroy the Church” and taught that it will be “licit to resist him by not doing what he orders and by impeding the execution of his will” (De Romano Pontifice, II, 29).
- Therefore, it remains debatable if and under what conditions the act of promulgating a universal disciplinary law amounts to an infallible act of the extraordinary magisterium requiring unconditional assent.
- This is probably why there is nothing on the subject of disciplinary infallibility to be found in:
 - The codes of Canon Law, old or new.
 - The Catechisms of the Council of Trent, of St. Pius X and the Baltimore Catechism.
- The treatment of infallibility in the Catechisms—as opposed to manuals of ecclesiology in which theologians express, not only the sure teaching of the Church, but their private opinion—is very restrictive. For example, the Baltimore Catechism only touches on the *doctrinal* infallibility of the *extraordinary* magisterium in relation to its *primary* object (formally revealed truths) and leaves aside all else.

Summary

This brief review of the teaching of the magisterium and of theologians on the subject of infallibility suggests that the Church’s infallibility in relation to liturgy and ecclesiastical discipline is still subject to some uncertainty, especially regarding:

- Its object—does it include disciplinary matters *as such* (precisely as beneficial or harmful to souls), or only in their connection to dogma (indirectly teaching truth or falsehood)?
- Its scope—does it include canonizations? All the elements of Canon Law? Every liturgical rubric?
- Its force—does this infallibility resemble that of the OUM, which consists in a convergence of non-infallible acts across space and time, or does it ever rise to the level of the extraordinary magisterium? If the latter, under what conditions?

Due to this uncertainty, the SSPX does not consider itself obliged to answer in a definitive fashion how its own position vis-à-vis the New Mass, the new Canonizations, etc., can be harmonized with the common teaching of pre-conciliar theologians on disciplinary infallibility. These authors certainly did not anticipate the dire conditions in which the Church finds herself today, and perhaps they would have expressed themselves differently if they had foreseen what would come to pass. In any case, the opinions that they expressed were not infallible, and these opinions themselves lack the precision and certitude necessary for application to the present crisis.

The solution: a prudential attitude

It must be remembered here, as in all topics touching the crisis of the Church, that the position of Archbishop Lefebvre was not a dogmatic one, but a *prudential* one.

This prudential position recognizes that:

“[The problem that we face] is a concrete problem, not a theoretical, mathematical, or metaphysical one, although metaphysics has some bearing on it... [it is] a crisis situation to which no one can furnish an apodictic and completely satisfying theological explanation” (*Sedevacantism: a False Solution to a Real Problem*, p. 1).

In the absence of direct, *dogmatic* certitude, the virtue of prudence, whose office is to apply general principles to a concrete situation for the sake of acting rightly, seeks to achieve at least an *indirect* certitude, based on reflex principles, which is sufficient for prudent action, even if it not entirely satisfying on the speculative level.

“[This prudential approach] aims to act on the basis of a *sufficient* number of elements, without contemplating a definitive solution to the problem...” (*Ibid.*, p. 22)

For example, if I am uncertain whether a certain food is forbidden by the law of Friday abstinence, but I find myself faced with the necessity of deciding, here and now, whether I may eat it, I can act prudently by applying the *reflex* principle that “a doubtful law does not oblige,” or that “laws which impose a burden are to be interpreted narrowly (*odiosa sunt restringenda*).” These principles do not furnish me with direct certainty about the speculative question of whether the food is forbidden; but they provide me with an *indirect* certainty about what I may do here and now. This means that, even if I am mistaken about the speculative question—for example, if I mistakenly judge that I may eat cow liver on a Friday—my judgment will nevertheless be correct from the standpoint of prudence. This is because, as St. Thomas teaches,

“Truth in the speculative intellect is measured by the mind’s conformity to reality; but truth in the practical intellect [which is perfected by prudence] is measured by the mind’s conformity to a *right appetite* [that is, the tending of the will toward an honest good as it is known here and now]” (ST I^a-II^ae q. 57 a. 5 ad 3).

Finally, it is important to realize that the practical certitude required for acting prudently is not an absolute or dogmatic certitude that precludes all possibility of error, but what is called “moral” certitude:

“We must not seek the same kind of certitude in everything, but in each domain we should seek the kind of certitude that corresponds to it. Because prudence is concerned with individual, contingent things—which are the proper domain of human activity—, the certitude that prudence requires cannot be so great as to take away all solicitude” (ST I^a-II^ae q. 47 a. 9 ad 2).

“Therefore it is enough to have a probable certitude, which is accurate most of the time, even if occasionally it is mistaken” (ST I^a-II^ae q. 70 a. 2 co).

The prudential attitude of Archbishop Lefebvre

The attitude of Archbishop Lefebvre toward the crisis in the Church was precisely of this kind. In all humility, he recognized that there were certain problems that he could not resolve with absolute certainty in the speculative order. There was no reasonable doubt, however, as to the prudential course of action to be taken.

A classic example will be the problem of papal authority, or of sedevacantism.

- Many theologians of great authority, such as St. Robert Bellarmine, teach that a heretical pope whose heresy achieves a certain minimum degree of notoriety—enough for him to be considered a “manifest heretic”—will fall *ipso facto* from the papacy without the need of any judgment or sentence from the Church.
- Speculatively speaking, there could be doubt as to how notorious a certain Pope’s heresy is, and consequently it will be uncertain whether, following the opinion of these theologians, he might be judged to have fallen from his dignity.
- Archbishop Lefebvre was aware of this theological opinion, which he had read about in the “very objective study” of the Brazilian lay theologian Arnaldo da Silveira. On various occasions—and especially after the scandal of Assisi in 1986—the Archbishop was led to wonder if it could be applied to the case of the reigning Pope (John Paul II). He explained to the seminarians at Ecône in his Easter Sunday sermon:

“We are faced with a serious dilemma which, I believe, has never existed in the Church: the one seated on the chair of Peter takes part in the worship of false gods. What conclusions will we have to draw, perhaps in a few months’ time, faced with these repeated acts of taking part in the worship of false religions, I do not know. But I do wonder. It is possible that we might be forced to believe that the Pope is not the Pope. Because it seems to me initially—I do not yet want to say it solemnly and publicly—that it is impossible for a Pope to be publicly and formally a heretic” (Marcel Lefevre: *The Biography*: p. 536)

- Nevertheless, the Archbishop always returned to the *dogmatic* truth of the Church’s visibility, as well as the *practical* necessity to remain attached to Rome—which implies, in the concrete, the recognition of the Roman authorities.

[Dogmatically:] “The visibility of the Church is too necessary to its existence for it to be possible that God would allow that visibility to disappear for decades. [Practically:] The reasoning of those who deny that we have a Pope puts the Church in an inextricable situation. Who will tell us who the future Pope is to be? How, as there are no Cardinals, is he to be chosen? ...Our Fraternity absolutely refuses to enter into such reasonings. We wish to remain attached to Rome and to the Successor of Peter, while refusing his Liberalism through fidelity to his predecessors” (Letter to Friends and Benefactors, 8 November 1979).

- In a spiritual conference to his seminarians at Ecône, the Archbishop explained:

“If only we were tolerated [by Rome], that would be progress; lots of priests would come back to the Mass, and lots of faithful would rejoin Tradition... This is why I cannot allow individuals in the Society to refuse to pray for the Holy Father or to refuse to recognize that there is a Pope: taking that road would lead to an impasse. I don’t want to lead you to an impasse or put you in an impossible situation” (*Marcel Lefebvre, the Biography*, p. 507).

- The Archbishop’s entire attitude to the question might be summarized in these words:

“Perhaps one day, in thirty or forty years, a meeting of cardinals gathered together by a future Pope will study and judge the reign of Paul VI; perhaps they will say that there were things that ought to have been clearly obvious to people at the time, statements of the Pope that were totally against Tradition [and which should have made it obvious to all that he had lost the papacy].

“At the moment, I prefer to consider the man on the chair of Peter as the Pope; and if one day we discover for certain that the Pope was not the Pope, *at least I will have done my duty*” (*Marcel Lefebvre: The Biography*, p. 506).

- In his Letter to Friends and Benefactors, 28 April 1983, he clarified that:

The basic principle of the Society’s thinking and action in the painful crisis the Church is going through is the principle taught by St. Thomas Aquinas in the *Summa Theologica* (II, II, q. 33, a.4): that one may not oppose the authority of the Church except in the case of imminent danger to the Faith...

The Society acts on the assumption that Pope John Paul II is Pope and so prays for him and strives to bring him back to Tradition by praying for him, by meeting with those around him, and by writing to him.

It could not be clearer: the basic principle of the Society’s thinking and action in the painful crisis that the Church is going through is the right of *resistance to authority* whenever obedience entails an immanent danger to the faith. This principle is *certain*, being elucidated by the Church’s greatest theologian, St. Thomas Aquinas.

There is no need to go *further* in declaring that authority *vacant* on the basis of a theological *opinion* whose application in the concrete circumstances is dubious at best. Such a posture goes against *prudence* because it puts it puts the Society in an “impossible situation, an impasse” to use the words of the Archbishop. If the Pope is Pope, we must bring him back to Tradition; but if he is not, what is there to do? Let us act on the assumption that he is Pope, and if it turns out that he is not Pope, at least we will have done our duty!

The Archbishop’s stance on disciplinary infallibility was similar.

“One has had to live from 1960 to the present moment to discover that Popes can lead the Church to her ruin. Such a thing seemed impossible to us, given the promises of the Holy Ghost’s assistance. *Contra factum non fit argumentum*. Against the facts, there is no argument. The facts are there before our eyes. So, we have to conclude that, when our Lord spoke of “help until the end of time,”

he did not exclude periods of darkness and a time of Passion for His mystical Spouse.” (Letter to a friend written in 1984, quoted in Marcel Lefebvre: the Biography, 1st edition, p. 534)

Like the preconiliar theologians, Archbishop Lefebvre had assumed, prior to the Council, that the disciplinary infallibility of the magisterium would prevent the kind of things that he later saw unfold before his eyes. But he did not blind himself on the basis of this *a priori* assumption:

“Against the facts, there is no argument. The facts are there before our eyes” (*Ibid.*).

Because he would not deny the facts, nor resort to sedevacantist theories that destroy the existence of a visible magisterium, he concluded that the charism of disciplinary infallibility must not be as *extensive* as previously imagined. This is the only remaining solution.

We conclude that the magisterium still *exists*, but those vested with authority are failing to engage the charism of infallibility because their acts do not fulfill all the required conditions.

Probably what is lacking to all these acts taken in general is the express will to use the fulness of papal authority and thus to commit the Church definitively and irrevocably to something truly necessary for the fulfilment of her divine mission. There is instead an intention to teach, to direct, but toward the fulfilment of an earthly and humanitarian vision of peace, of the “civilization of love” of JP2.

Application to the *Novus Ordo Missae*

Without attempting to define the exact limits of liturgical infallibility, we will attempt to show the *plausibility* that the attempted promulgation of the *Novus Ordo Missae* did not engage this infallibility and therefore did not violate it.

- We say *plausibility*, because our objective is not to establish something speculatively certain, but merely to show that the opposing objection is not *conclusive*.
 - Similarly, when theologians defend the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, they do not try to positively demonstrate its real possibility—which is impossible to natural reason—but only to show that the philosophical objections against the doctrine of the Trinity are not cogent.
- We say *attempted* promulgation, because the law imposing the *Novus Ordo Missae* is not for the common good of the Church and therefore fails to fulfill the conditions for a true law.
 - Nevertheless, the obligation to answer the objection remains, since the disciplinary infallibility of the Church should prevent her from promulgating even a pseudo-law, just as her doctrinal infallibility prevents her from promulgating a pseudo-definition of faith, i.e., a definition of something that is objectively erroneous.

The best study on this subject seems to be the one of the Brazilian lay theologian Arnaldo da Silveira: *Theological and Moral Implications of the new Ordo Missae*, translated into English by John Spann.

In this study, Silveira raises three important points:

1. Historical investigations have revealed evidence of *doctrinal errors* in liturgical texts that enjoyed widespread or even universal use in the Latin Church. Therefore, the universality of a liturgical text cannot, of itself, guarantee infallibility. Examples:
 - a. *Consecration by contact* — In many Roman Pontificals of the 13th century, for the communion of the sick, there was a rubric indicating that unconsecrated wine would become the Blood of Christ when the sacred host was dipped into it prior to administration to the sick person. (Cf. Oppenheim, *Institutiones Systematico-Historicae in Sacram Liturgiam*, Marietti edition [1947], vol. VII, pp. 121-12; also M. Andrieu, *Immixtio et Consecratio*, Picard, Paris, 1924.)
 - b. *Matter of priestly ordination* — Until the year 1950, when the rubric was suppressed,² the Roman Pontifical used to contain a recommendation to the bishop to “instruct the ordinands to touch the instruments, *in whose bestowal the character is impressed*,”³ despite the fact that two years earlier (1948) Pope Pius XII had defined that the sole matter of priestly ordination was the imposition of hands (Apostolic Constitution *Sacramentum Ordinis*, AAS 1948 p. 6). Prior to this decision of the Pope, it was freely debated if the matter of ordination consisted in the touching of the instruments, the laying on of hands, or both; the teaching of a rubric in the pontifical was never thought to decide the question. (Cf. Oppenheim, *Ibid.*)
 - c. *Doubt about the bodily assumption of Mary* — The lessons of the office of the Assumption used to contain a passage from a certain “letter to Paula” falsely attributed to St. Jerome, in which the author questions Mary’s bodily assumption. This lesson was later withdrawn and replaced with other, more suitable readings (cf. Fr. Manuel Pinto, S.J. *O’Valor Teologico da Liturgia* [“The Theological Value of the Liturgy”], Livraria Cruz, Braga, pp. 296-297).
2. Certain truths of faith (the Immaculate Conception, the Assumption) were commemorated universally in the liturgy for centuries prior to their dogmatic definition; but they were not, by that fact, accounted to be truths of faith. Therefore, universality does not suffice for infallibility.
 - a. In 1708 Pope Clement XI extended the solemnity of the Immaculate Conception to all the Church, yet without condemning the contrary opinion. Pope Benedict XIV, in his study on canonizations, concluded that, “the cult, the feast and everything else which had been approved in honour of the Virgin as having been preserved

² AAS 1950 p. 449.

³ “Moneat ordinandos, quod instrumenta, *in quorum traditione character imprimitur*, tangant.”

from Original Sin in her Conception, absolutely do not result in that preservation (from Original Sin) being held as certain, as a matter of Faith” (Benedict XIV, *De Serv. Dei Beat.*, lib. I, cap. 42, n. 14, p. 143). — Le Bachelet, in his article on the Immaculate Conception, explains that this imposition of the liturgical feast on the entire Church provided only a certainty of the *moral order*, that is moral certitude, which is *not* absolute (cf. X. Le Bachelet, article “*Immaculee Conception*”, in the *Dict. de Theol. Cath.*, col. 1186).

- b. Regarding the bodily assumption of the Blessed Virgin into heaven, the same Pope wrote that the common opinion of theologians in his day was that the liturgical feast of the Assumption, although it had been universally adopted by the Church for many centuries past, *could not* of itself furnish proof that this was a truth of faith. (Benedict XIV, *op. cit.*, lib. I, cap. 42, n. 15, p. 143.)⁴
- c. The presentation of the Blessed Virgin in the Temple is not a dogma, despite centuries of universal liturgical celebration (cf. M. Pinto, *op. cit.*, p. 120). The same could be said of the translation of the Holy House of Loretto, the apparitions at Lourdes, etc.
- d. The inscription of a saint’s name in the martyrology is not considered an infallible indication of sainthood, for as long as he is not solemnly canonized.

3. Analogy with dogmatic texts.

- a. It is illogical to attribute greater infallibility to the Church’s discipline or liturgy than to her acts that are of a directly doctrinal character, such as papal encyclicals or the decrees of ecumenical councils. — But, it is universally acknowledged that these doctrinal acts are *not* infallible of themselves, except where they contain a solemn definition or conform to the infallible teaching of the OUM. — Therefore, it is absurd to attribute infallibility uniformly to *all* legislative and liturgical texts as such.

These three points—the existence of errors in liturgical texts, the dubitability of certain teachings in liturgical texts, and the analogy of these texts to dogmatic ones—demonstrates that liturgical texts are *not* infallible of themselves, unless there is a *manifest intention* to teach infallibly.

Now, in the attempted promulgation of the *Novus Ordo Missae*, this intention to teach infallibly is lacking. For, Paul VI, in a discourse to the general audience of Nov. 26, 1969, stated that:

⁴ “In spite of the certainty which the Feast already gave to the doctrine of the Corporal Assumption at the time of Saint Peter Canisius, the Church had not made a pronouncement, and the same Saint explained, distinguishing three classes of truths of the faith: *explicit dogmas*, which one must believe under pain of heresy; the truths accepted by the faithful and sanctioned by the *practice of the Church* which it is rash to deny, and certain truths expressed by the *public worship*, whose authority continues to increase as the teachers of the Church go corroborating them with more interest and as they go penetrating into the convictions of the faithful. In this latter category was, at the time of Saint Peter Canisius, the doctrine of the Assumption of Mary as he says immediately afterwards” (M. Pinto, *op. cit.*, pp. 296-297).

“The rite and the respective rubrics [of the new Order of Mass] ARE NOT by themselves A DOGMATIC DEFINITION: they are SUSCEPTIBLE OF THEOLOGICAL QUALIFICATION OF VARYING VALUE, according to the liturgical context to which they refer; they are gestures and terms which are related to a religious action, lively and living, of an ineffable mystery of the divine presence, which is not always realized in the same manner, an action which only theological criticism can analyze and express in doctrinal formulae which are logically satisfactory” (Insegnamenti di Paolo VI, vol. VII, p. 1123).

Although there is much that is unclear in this statement, what *does* come through clearly is the non-definitive character of the new rite of Mass. The various rubrics are capable of receiving various theological qualifications. Therefore, they are not all protected by infallibility.

Since the New Mass lacks this character of infallibility, it is possible to question both the doctrinal value of this Mass, and, with even greater reason, its suitability for worshiping God and leading souls to heaven. In fact, the present circumstances compel us to do precisely this.

A semantic question

Finally, we return to the *status quaestionis*: How could the Church give us a bad rite of Mass? Our basic answer is that her infallibility was not engaged.

But we might wish to further distinguish and say that it was not the *Church* that gave us this bad rite. For, we do not attribute to the Church the sins of her members. It was the objectively very grave sin of Paul VI to attempt to impose upon the Church this bad rite of Mass. We cannot attribute this action to the Church as such, but only to the particular man who was governing her.

It was not the action of her principal head, Jesus Christ, but of her secondary and vicarious head, the Pope. We can say in truth that *this man*, Pope Paul VI, by an abuse of his authority, gave us a bad rite of Mass; but we cannot say that the Church gave us this rite, since not even the sins of the Pope belong to the Church. She is free of them. So, the Church did not give us the *Novus Ordo*; it was Paul VI who gave us the *Novus Ordo*.

In this, too, we are only following the line of thought of the Archbishop:

“It is not the Church, nor the successor of Peter [as such] who strikes us, but rather *men* of the Church imbued with liberal errors, occupying high positions in the Church and profiting of their power to obliterate the past of the Church and to establish a new Church which has nothing of Catholic” (Letter to Friends and Benefactors, 9 Sept. 1975).

A.M.D.G.