

## THE STORMY SEAS OF SCHISM TOSSING THE BARQUE OF PETER

Ella Fitzgerald had it right: “Potato, potahto, tomato, tomahto. Let’s call the whole thing off.” When it comes to this week’s topic, schism, I begin with its pronunciation. Is it 'skɪzəm or 'sɪzəm? I prefer it without the “K” sound, but most pronounce it the other way. The same holds for certain words during the Stations of the Cross. I stress the first syllable of “impious” and pronounce gibbet with a “j” sound. In any case, schism may be hard to pronounce, but not quite as difficult to define. Schism is defined in Canon Law (Canon #751) as “the refusal of submission (*subditis detrectatio*) to the Supreme Pontiff or of communion with the members of the Church subject to him.” Short and sweet, but packed. The word *detrectatio* in the Latin phrase above gives rise to our word detraction. It connotes a disparaging intent, **wounding the communion** we are called to preserve and foster in the Church. Some Latin dictionaries even list “detraction” as the first meaning, and “refusal” as a secondary meaning. Any act of **refusal to submit** to the authority of the Roman Pontiff is grave and is rightly seen as a form of detraction towards his divinely revealed role as successor of St. Peter.

Following the changes of the Second Vatican Council, French missionary **Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre** († 1991) established the traditionalist **Priestly Society of St. Pius X** in Switzerland. It soon ran afoul and in 1976 the Vatican demanded he cease ordaining priests in his seminary. When he disobeyed, he was suspended. Twelve years later, in 1988, he **consecrated four new bishops**, leading to his **automatic excommunication** in what was viewed as a schismatic act. The four bishops were ordained validly, but not legitimately. Pope Benedict XVI noted in 2009: “An episcopal ordination lacking a pontifical mandate raises the danger of a schism, since it jeopardizes the unity of the College of Bishops with the Pope.” Note that the pope wrote of a “danger of schism,” since it is a unique situation in which a priestly society accepts the legitimacy of the Pope (i.e. not intending to start a new Church), yet openly defies the very same pope whom they accept as legitimate.

In an attempt to facilitate preconditions for possible reconciliation with the SSPX, Pope Benedict XVI lifted the excommunication of those four bishops consecrated in 1988. That caused its own backlash, especially when it became known that one of those four bishops flatly denied that six million Jews died in concentration camps during the Nazi era. (Any Vatican official could have “googled” his name or watched the interview on YouTube!) It was a public relations nightmare, and one entirely preventable. But the ecclesiological issues involved are significant. Clearly, **progress has been made** towards the regularization of the SSPX, for which I fervently pray, provided specific doctrinal clarification occurs. It was not merely about the 1962 Latin Mass. Archbishop Lefebvre attended all four sessions of Vatican II, but his doctrinal and liturgical concerns surfaced shortly thereafter. He eventually rejected many of the very documents that he had signed as a Council Father. But enough of history—today has enough troubles of its own.

Last month **Cardinal Reinhold Marx** of Munich announced that the German Bishops’ Conference had unanimously agreed to undergo “a binding synodal process” to discuss three key issues: “priestly celibacy, the Church’s teaching on sexual morality and a reduction of clerical power.” This is **manifestly troubling**, not least of all because it seems to imply that a single episcopal conference could undertake to make “binding” decisions on matters of doctrine and discipline. With all due respect, it doesn’t work that way! Marx thinks that in the area of sexual morality, the Church has yet to account for **significant recent discoveries** from theology and the humanities. Recent discoveries...such as? The Church has taught beautifully and consistently on the nature of the human person. St. John Paul II’s teachings and the Catechism combine for a compelling vision of God’s gift of sexuality, both for those in the single and married state.

In truth, liturgical and doctrinal abuses were common after Vatican II, and heterodox teaching wounds the Body of Christ, leading in no small measure to people questioning the direction of the Church and her leadership. Still, we are called to remain united to the **Barque of Peter**. The lay faithful are not powerless—by virtue of baptism, they have a right to express themselves on matters of importance in the Church. In its 2014 document “*Sensus Fidei* in the Life of the Church,” the International Theological Commission stated as much, quoting the Angelic Doctor: “For **St. Thomas Aquinas**, a believer, even without theological competence, can and even must resist, by virtue of the *sensus fidei*, (sense of faith) his or her bishop if the latter preaches heterodoxy.” (Paragraph # 63)

Here are St. Thomas' words more fully: "[The believer] must not give assent to a prelate who preaches against the faith.... The subordinate is not totally excused by his ignorance... Also, because one must not give credence too easily to every spirit, one should not give assent to strange preaching but should seek further information or simply entrust oneself to God without seeking to venture into the secrets of God beyond one's capacities." (*Scriptum*, III, d.25, q.2, a.1, q.4, ad 3) Notice Aquinas counsels us to "seek further information." We neither judge presumptuously, nor uncritically accept everything at face value. Today, people often question; if done in a spirit of sincerity, it leads us all to a better understanding and appreciation of the truth. Above all, we pray for our shepherds, begging God to **give them the wisdom** to lead us in the ways of faith. We strive to do so always as members of the Church in full communion with our shepherds. (Next week: Apostasy)

- Q: What percentage of native Minnesotans still live within a **50-mile radius** of where they were born? A: An estimated 68%, including me. That ranks us 12th in the country. Q: Which state comes in first? Answer (spelled backwards) below...guess before checking.
- Q: How many priests native to Saint Paul have managed to finagle for nearly thirty years without being assigned to a parish anywhere within the geographical confines of Minneapolis? A: At least one!
- It's always a delight to attend opening Day for the **Minnesota Twins**. I am glad they asked former Twin Justin Morneau to throw out the first pitch. He was cheered on by his wife and four young children sporting matching #33 jerseys– with baby #5 clearly on the way. It was a wonderful atmosphere all around.
- We would love your help this coming Saturday morning, **April 13 from 9:00-10:30 a.m.** for our **pre-Easter Church cleaning**. It is a great way to give back to the Cathedral. All cleaning materials **and refreshments** will be provided. Hope to see you here!

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. John L. Ubel

Rector

A: A full 78% percent of anaisiuoL residents were also born there.



The barque of Peter is an ancient image for the Church, tossed as she is on the stormy seas of life. Barque means "small boat," recalling the fisherman being tossed on the stormy Sea of Galilee.