



si si no no

"But let your speech be, 'Yes, yes,' 'No, no', and whatever is beyond these comes from the evil one. (Mt. 5:37)"

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The Consecrations of Archbishop Lefebvre and Some Uninstructed Persuaders

Dear Editor,

Let me try your patience with an argument that may be stale, hut that unfortunately presents itself every time that the Society of St. Pius X comes up in conversation. Here is the situation.

We recently invited a close friend of the family to attend Holy Mass at Albano [*i.e.*, the priory of the Society of Saint Pius X nearest Rome, Italy-^d.]. She politely responded that she had asked the advice of the priest whose celebrations of the Conciliar Mass she habitually attends. As she told me, she had posed the question in more or less the following terms: "Does the Mass of the followers of Lefebvre [sic] fulfill the obligation of sanctifying the Sunday?" The response offered was a decisive "no" motivated by the lack of a valid and recognized priesthood in view of the fact that Archbishop Lefebvre had consecrated bishops without authorization, which bishops in their turn had consecrated priests without the required authorization. In conclusion: the whole process being unfounded, the Mass is not valid.

Perhaps the priest in question has some specific preparation in other areas, but this response indicates such an ignorance of the real validity of the consecrations of the Society of St. Pius X as to amount to active disinformation. My father used to say, "A lie may be fast, but truth catches up with it." It is no exaggeration to say that the Church lives today in the reality of her apostolic Tradition thanks to the courage of Archbishop Lefebvre and other consecrated bishops in the past and the present. To spread disinformation on the basis of prejudice, or of having read some articles in the popular press rather than valid and irrefutable official documents, is as it were to keep the "little ones" from approaching Jesus. It is to impede the ignorant from acquiring adequate, honest information—the truth, in short. But even today the Catholic world is full of persuaders...uninstructed, albeit capable of defending the most implausible positions. This is why I have addressed myself to you....Would you be so kind to address the statement of this young Conciliar priest?

[Signature]

Recently, a reader sent us this letter with the question to which we must repeatedly respond in order to expose the errors of those pretending to have all the answers.

Dear Friend,

The priest seems to be unaware of two basic and fundamental concepts: **1)** The difference between *invalidity* and *illicitness*, and **2)** Catholic doctrine on the *state of necessity*, which can render lawful (licit) an action that would otherwise be prohibited.

We shall briefly summarize what we have already written on this subject in the past since, in order to act with a clear conscience, one must also have an informed conscience.

The *validity* of an episcopal consecration is one thing, its *licitness* (lawfulness) is another. By virtue of his episcopal consecration a bishop has by divine right the power of consecrating other bishops, and therefore he always does so validly. Moreover, the episcopal consecrations by Archbishop Lefebvre and the priestly ordinations of the bishops he consecrated are not only valid but also licit. They are in fact necessary by virtue of the state of general or public necessity which today prevails in the Catholic Church. In fact, all limitations imposed by canon law fall away in cases of the extreme or virtually extreme spiritual necessity of an individual (danger of death) or the grave spiritual necessity of many (*e.g.*, in case of the unopposed diffusion of heresy), when the help of the ordinary pastors is lacking. In this situation any minister of God (priest or bishop) has the obligation to act, and thus does so licitly, even "without the required authorization," when he does all that he can validly do by divine right in virtue of his power of orders. If he were not to do so, he would commit a mortal sin. This is because natural and positive divine right obliges him to help anyone in a state of grave necessity.¹ Therefore (and this is the most usual case) any priest has the obligation to absolve the sins of a dying man by the side of the road, and thus absolves them validly and licitly, even "without the required authorization" of the local bishop. Likewise, a bishop has the obligation to consecrate other bishops—and therefore does so not only validly but also licitly—even "without the required authorization" of the pope, when the grave necessity of many souls demands it. This in fact has often happened in the history of the Church, as in the times of the Arian crisis and, more recently, behind the Iron Curtain. This is because the highest law of the Church is the *salus animarum*—the salvation of souls. Therefore, whenever the salvation of one or many souls is in danger, it is certain that "the Church supplies the jurisdiction"² or, in the language of the young Conciliar priest, the Catholic Church confers the necessary authority in making up for the lack of "required authorization" demanded by ordinary ecclesiastical laws.

An Obligation of Station and of Charity

St. Thomas Aquinas explains that "any priest, by virtue of the power of orders, has power indifferently over all the faithful and for all sins. The fact that he cannot absolve everyone from all sins results from the jurisdiction imposed by *ecclesiastical* law. But since "necessity does not submit to the law," in a case of necessity the order of the Church does not prevent him from absolving sins sacramentally, provided that he has *the power of orders* (*Summa Theologica*, Suppl., Q.8, Art.6). Any bishop, by virtue of the power of orders, has the power to consecrate another bishop. The fact that he cannot do so without the necessary authorization of the pope results from ecclesiastical law. But, since "necessity does not submit to the law," in a case of necessity ecclesiastical law does not impede him from consecrating other bishops, given that he has the power of orders.

Every bishop, therefore, like every priest, has not only an obligation towards souls based on his own office, which he exercises in ordinary cases and within the framework of ecclesiastical strictures (which, like all laws, regard ordinary cases), but also an obligation imposed by charity that he is bound to exercise in extraordinary circumstances, under no limitation but that of his power of orders. Not without reason did our Lord Jesus Christ, in conferring the primacy on Peter, abstain from personally and directly determining the jurisdictional limits of episcopal power. In fact, as Billot observes,

it would not have been appropriate that something intrinsically subject to change by virtue of changing circumstances and times—by virtue of the greater or lesser ease of recourse to the Holy See and other similar causes—should have been immutably determined by divine law (*De Ecclesia Christi*, Q. XV, §2)

It should be noted that impossibility of recourse to the Holy See can be not merely physical but also, as today, moral. However, since the distinction between divine law and ecclesiastical law is made with regard to the immediate institutor of the norm, it is certain that the primacy of the pope is founded on divine law, since his primacy has been directly instituted by our Lord Jesus Christ. The pontifical restriction over episcopal consecrations, on the other hand, belongs to ecclesiastical law, because it has been directly instituted by the pope and because, like every other "order of the Church" (St. Thomas Aquinas) it must yield to a higher law, that is, to the divine right (natural and positive) that obliges under pain of mortal sin that one come to the aid of souls in a condition of grave spiritual need.

It should be noted that **1)** this grave obligation of charity obliges even if it is the pope himself who puts souls in a state of necessity, because "charity is not concerned with the source of the necessity, but only with its existence,"³ and **2)** it is imposed even in circumstances where others, for reasons of interest, ignorance, or superficiality, deny the existence of a state of necessity. Such denials do not in fact eliminate the state of necessity, but render it graver by eliminating the hope of remedy.

And this is precisely the case of Archbishop Lefebvre and those bishops he consecrated. Today a process of "self-destruction" of the Church is underway, as Pope Paul VI himself admitted (June 30, 1972). Modernist heresies are so rampant, by the admission of Pope John Paul II himself, that "Christians today to a great extent feel themselves lost, confused, perplexed," and "are tempted by atheism, agnosticism, a vaguely moralistic illuminism, a sociological Christianity, without definite dogmas and without objective morality" (*L'Osservatore Romano*, Feb. 7, 1981). And the ordinary pastors, who would have the official duty of helping souls in such great necessity? They are complicit, conniving, or fearful—in any case, virtually absent. When people from all over the Catholic world turned to Archbishop Lefebvre he did nothing but apply Catholic doctrine on the state of necessity in making use of his power of orders to provide for the needs of souls.

The Law of Supplied Jurisdiction

Since the case of a bishop authorized by the necessity of souls to consecrate another bishop even "without the required authorization" is rarer than that of a priest who, without required authorization, licitly absolves a dying man on the side of the road, let us make a simple but relevant comparison. A pope and bishop are in the Catholic Church by divine law something like a husband and wife in a family. The latter is subordinated to the former, but both are directed to the same goal—the salvation of souls. It sometimes falls on the wife to supply, within the limits of her possibilities, for a husband who does not provide for the needs of their children in a suitable manner. Likewise the duty of supplying, within the limits of his own power of orders [which includes the power of consecrating other *bishops-Ed.*] can fall upon a bishop when the pope, for whatever reason—culpable or not—does not provide "in a sufficient manner" for the spiritual needs of souls. Dom A. Grea, whose attachment to papal primacy is beyond all suspicion, writes that "thus in the 4th century St. Eusebius of Samosata traveled among the eastern churches devastated by the Arians and consecrated Catholic bishops *without having any special jurisdiction*"⁴ or, as the young Conciliar priest might put it, "without the required authorization." Other Catholic bishops, defenders of Catholic orthodoxy whom the Church today venerates on her altars, acted in the same way. "Without the required authorization" they conferred not only the power of orders, as Archbishop Lefebvre did, but also, when necessity demanded it, the power of jurisdiction over individual dioceses. Dom Grea calls this action "the extraordinary action of the episcopate," called by extraordinary circumstances to "supply a remedy to the pressing need of the Catholic faithful," and he writes that in such cases the episcopate acts "with the tacit consent of its head made certain by the necessity."

It should be noted that it is not the consent of the pope that makes the bishops certain of the state of necessity, but rather the necessity that makes them certain of the consent of the head. Why is this so? Because in a state of necessity for souls the consent of the pope is obligatory. By virtue of the primacy, the pope has from Christ the power to enlarge or restrict the power of orders, but always so as to provide "in a sufficient manner" for the salvation of souls,⁵ which is the reason for being of the Church and of the papacy itself.

A "No" Which Does Not Oblige

It should now be clear why the pope does not have the right to prohibit a priest from absolving a dying man on the side of the road, or to prohibit a bishop from consecrating another bishop when the needs of souls demand it. This is so for the same reason that a father who does not fulfill his own duties (with or without fault) does not have the right to prevent his wife from providing, insofar as she is able, for the needs of their children. In the case, therefore, that the pope might oppose such an action, his "no" is no more binding than that of such a husband to his wife. And just as the state of necessity makes it morally impossible for the subject to obey his superior, so too does it deprive the superior of his power to oblige. In order to obey, in fact, the subject would have to sin against a precept of divine law which is by its own nature "graver and more binding" than ecclesiastical law,⁷ and the superior, for his part, would sin in obliging a subject to act contrary to divine law, "to which no human precept of the Church can oppose itself."⁸ Therefore St. Thomas Aquinas says that "necessity brings dispensation with itself."⁹ Suarez adds that, when the superior's refusal can be foreseen, there is no necessity to ask his consent, because the superior would sin by refusing it and the inferior by obeying the refusal.¹⁰ Likewise, in our example, the wife would not be obliged to ask the consent of her husband to fulfill her own supplied obligation. In so doing she would sin by obeying his "no" and the husband would sin for his part in saying "no."

Unknown to Many, But Not in the Vatican

This teaching on the state of necessity is little known to most Catholics. Since it applies to special cases in which extraordinary principles apply, it is not the subject of ordinary preaching. This teaching, however, should not be unknown to a priest who, in any case, can find its principles spelled out in any encyclopedia or dictionary of canon law under the entries "charity," "equity," "cessation of legal obligation," "necessity," "resistance to unjust power," and elsewhere.

Nor was this doctrine unknown to the Vatican authorities, who did not undervalue the weight of the exculpatory argument professed by His Excellency Archbishop Lefebvre. Therefore they limited their response to replying that there was no state of necessity, thus recognizing that, should such a state exist, the action of Archbishop Lefebvre would be fully justified, even in the face of a papal refusal.

The true question, therefore, is neither that of the validity of the consecrations by Archbishop Lefebvre and of the ordinations performed by the bishops he ordained, nor of their licitness. It is rather a question of the existence of a state of necessity, which is the foundation for the licitness of the consecrations. We believe that today, 15 years later, in the face of an ecclesiastical situation that deteriorates daily, there should no longer be any doubts concerning the *real existence* of a general state of necessity for souls. Catholic souls are no longer fed by the bread of Truth, but by that of doubt, heresy, and even of immorality, as for example in the case of "divorced remarrieds," in sermons, catechesis, the "Catholic" press, in the pronouncements of episcopal conferences, the actions of the Holy See, and even in papal allocutions. Doctrinal corruption is no longer characteristic of small groups, as at the time of the first modernism. Today it appears rather as "a public action of the Church body."¹¹ Unfortunately there are souls who, because of a lack of adequate information, deprive themselves of the help that Providence has wanted to offer them in the work of Archbishop Lefebvre. To these souls we dedicate these remarks, that they might act in good conscience, without fear of offending God—a risk constantly run by those who adhere to the "conciliar Church."

To those responsible for the current ecclesiastical catastrophe, we limit ourselves to asking how they can reconcile their denial of a general state of necessity for souls with their other statements of a contrary character, beginning with the "self-destruction" of the Church and the "smoke of Satan in the temple of God" denounced by Pope Paul VI. Is it possible that the Church could be destroyed from within without souls perishing in the ruins? Can the windows of the temple of God be opened to the "smoke of Satan" without any soul being suffocated? All the more since, in this state of grave general or public necessity, not only is no remedy applied, but rather the condition is aggravated by persistence in an increasingly fatuous and arbitrary ecumenism.

Hirpinus

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1. See for example the first book of the *Theologia Moral*is of St. Alphonsus.

2. F. Cappello, *Summa Iuris Canonici*, Vol. I, p.258, n.258 §2.

3. E. Genicot, S.J. *Institutiones Theologiae Moral*is, Vol. I, n.85.

4. F. Suarez, *De Charitate*, Disp. IX, sect. II, n.3.

5. Dom A. Grea, *De l'Eglise et de sa divine constitution*, Vol. I, p.218.

6. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles*, I, IV, c.42

7. F. Suarez, *De Legibus*, I, VI, c; VII, nn.11, 12.

8. St. Alphonsus, *Theologia Moral*is, 1. 6, Tract. 4, n.560.

9. *Summa Theologica*, I, III, Q.96, Art.6.

10. F. Suarez, *De Legibus*, I, VI, c. VIII, nn.1, 2.

11. R. Amerio, *Iota Unum*, 1st. ed. (Italian), p.597.

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