

# Can We Recognize and Resist?

By Robert J. Siscoe

*“Our ultimate purpose is that of Voltaire and the French Revolution: that is, the total annihilation of Catholicism and even of the Christian idea (...) In a hundred years time... the bishops and priests will think they are marching behind the banner of the keys of Peter when in fact they will be following our [Masonic] flag... the reforms will have to be brought about in the name of obedience”. (Alta Vendita)*

Archbishop Lefebvre famously said Satan's masterstroke in our day “is to have succeeded in sowing disobedience to all of Tradition in the name of obedience.” Indeed, over the past 50 years the entire “face” of the Church (what is seen) has been transformed in the name of obedience. Like our Lord during His Passion, the Church today is no longer recognizable, except in those places where Tradition has been maintained. A new religion has emerged within the walls of Holy Mother Church, which has supplanted, and all but eradicated, the “old religion”. This has been accomplished, not only by a corruption of the liturgy, as found in the New Mass (the vehicle of the New Religion), but also by discouraging those aspects of Catholicism that are contrary to the New Religion (Masonry), while encouraging only those aspects of the Faith that can be reconciled with the humanistic teachings of the Masonic sect. Hence, helping the poor and needy, and speaking of the infinite mercy of God (certainly aspects of the Faith), are quite acceptable in the modern Church, while speaking about the frightful justice of God, politically incorrect dogmas such as hell, or No Salvation Outside the Church, are discouraged if not outright forbidden. Overtime, this tactic has transformed much of the Church into a humanistic organization, perfectly compatible with Masonry, and utterly devoid of the supernatural.

## Hold to Tradition

In St. Paul's second letter to the Thessalonians, he discusses the great apostasy that will precede the rise of the antichrist. He notes that during this time men will lack love for the truth, which God will punish by sending them “the operation of error...that all may be judged who have not believed the truth.” He then admonishes the Thessalonians, “stand fast, and hold to the traditions which you have learned, whether by word or by our epistle”, thereby showing that adherence to tradition is the antidote that will protect them from being led astray during the time of apostasy.

Four Centuries later, St. Vincent of Lerins asked what Catholics should do if the entire Church was infected by a “novel contagion”. He explained that, at such a time, the safe path is to cleave to tradition. He wrote:

“What then will the Catholic Christian do, if a small part of the Church has cut itself off from the communion of the universal Faith? The answer is sure. He will prefer the healthiness of the whole body to the morbid and corrupt limb.

“But what if some novel contagions try to infect the whole Church, and not merely a tiny part of it? Then he will take care to cleave to antiquity (tradition), which can never be led astray by any lying novelty.”

In explaining this point further, St. Vincent said we must “take the greatest care to hold that which has been believed everywhere, always and by all”, and then added:

“We shall hold to this rule if we follow *universality*, *antiquity*, and *consent*. We shall follow *universality* if we acknowledge that one Faith to be true which the whole Church throughout the world confesses; *antiquity* if we in no wise depart from those interpretations which it is clear that our ancestors and fathers proclaimed; *consent*, if in antiquity itself, we keep following the definitions and opinions of all, or certainly nearly all, Bishops and Doctors alike.” (1)

Tradition (with a big T) includes both speculative and practical doctrines (2). *Antiquity* and *consent* include principles of practical behavior to help guide us in normal and extraordinary circumstances, as well as the writings of the Saints, Doctors, and Church approved theologians who not only teach these principles, but apply them to various hypothetical situations in which the faithful may find themselves. If we find ourselves faced with an extraordinary situation, such as popes and bishops teaching strange, novel, or apparently heretical doctrines, we can turn with confidence to antiquity (tradition), not only to know what to *believe*, but also how to *judge correctly*, and how to *behave*.

Adherence to tradition, understood in both the strict and broad sense of the term, is always the certain path to follow, while novelty has always been the mark of heretics. In his encyclical against Modernism, Pope St. Pius X said, “for Catholics nothing will remove the authority of the second Council of Nicea, where it condemns those 'who dare, after the impious fashion of heretics, to deride the ecclesiastical traditions, and to invent novelties of any kind'.”(*Pascendi*)

The Seventh Ecumenical Council states, “let everything that conflicts with ecclesiastical tradition and teaching, and that which has been innovated *and done contrary to the examples outlined by the Saints and venerable Fathers*, or that shall hereafter at any time be done in such fashion, be anathema.”

If we turn to tradition to guide us through the current crisis, we will be on the safe path. If we depart from tradition and embrace novelty, as heretics are wont to do, we are sure to fall into error in one direction or another. Therefore, when faced with wayward prelates teaching strange and novel doctrines that undermine the Faith, we need only turn to tradition (*antiquity* and *consent*) to know how to respond.

## Obedience

What is the obligation of Catholics during the unprecedented ecclesiastical crisis in which we find ourselves? Are we required to simply obey in all things, even when such obedience endangers our faith, and is being used by the enemies within to “fundamentally transform” the Church? Or can we resist evil or destructive commands while continuing to recognize those in positions of authority, thereby preserving the visibility of the Church?

We can certainly resist any command that is objectively evil, and even those that constitute occasions of sin, or represent dangers to the faith. According to Suarez, we should even disobey commands that are contrary to good customs – even if the one commanding is the Pope. Wrote Suarez:

“If [the Pope] gives an order contrary to good customs, he should not be obeyed; if he attempts to do something manifestly opposed to justice and the common good, it will be licit to resist him; if he attacks by force, by force he can be repelled, with a moderation appropriate to a just defense.” (3)

In considering the issue of obedience, we should recall that there is a hierarchical order to the virtues. The lower virtues are subordinate to, and meant to serve, the higher. The highest virtues are the theological virtues (faith, hope and charity), which have God for their object. The cardinal virtues (prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance) fall beneath the theological virtues. Obedience is a moral virtue, which is subordinate to (and part of) the cardinal virtue of Justice.

Like all moral virtues, obedience is a balance point – the *rational mean* - between *excess* and *defect*, and as such can be violated in either direction: that is, either by disobeying a just command (defect), or by obeying an unjust command (excess). Unjust laws, which St. Thomas calls “acts of violence, rather than laws” (4) do not bind in conscience, “except perhaps in order to avoid scandal or disturbance.” (Ibid) If the command of one superior conflicts with the command of a higher authority, we must resist the former and obey the latter. Such resistance to a lower authority is not disobedience, but rather *obedience* to the higher authority. No one is obliged to obey a precept that it is morally impossible for him to fulfill, and if any command is contrary to the natural or divine law, it must be steadfastly resisted. “Authority, be it civil or ecclesiastical, can never oblige a man to commit even a venial sin, for we must obey God rather than man”. (5)

Pope Leo XIII said, “where the power to command is wanting, or where a law is enacted contrary to reason, or to the eternal law, or to some ordinance of God, obedience is unlawful, lest, while obeying man, we become disobedient to God.” (*Diuturnum Illud*) In another place he explained that “there is no reason why those who so behave themselves should be accused of refusing obedience; for, if the will of rulers is opposed to the will and the laws of God, they themselves exceed the bounds of their own power and pervert justice; nor can their authority then be valid, which, when there is no justice, is null.” (*Libertas*)

Just as it would be wrong to obey a sinful command, or a command that is “contrary to reason”, so too is it wrong to obey a command that is repugnant to the Faith. This is evident when we consider that the purpose of the lower virtues is to serve, not undermine, the higher. Faith, being a theological virtue, should never be put at risk under the specious pretext of “obedience”.

Now, just as it is sometimes necessary to disobey a *positive* command (a command to *do* something), so too is it sometimes necessary to disobey a *negative* command (a command *not* to do something), such as when obedience to a negative command would prevent a person from *doing* what justice and charity demand. If a superior forbade an inferior from paying a bill that he owed in justice (and if the superior did not make other arrangement to have the bill paid), obedience to that command would be unjust, and therefore excessive. For this reason, Pope St. Gregory the Great said:

“Know that evil ought never to be done by way of obedience, though *sometimes* something good, which is being done, ought to be discontinued out of obedience.” (6)

Notice he doesn’t say that which is good ought *always* to be discontinued out of obedience, but only *sometimes*; that is, when it is not contrary to justice to obey.

The notion of “blind obedience” must be properly understood: it does not imply obedience to a command that is sinful. As Pope Benedict XIV observed, the notion of blind obedience is meant to check prudence of the flesh, not prudence of the spirit:

“A superior is not to be obeyed when he commands anything contrary to the divine law, as we read in Gratian.... Neither is a monk to obey his abbot when he commands anything contrary to the rule, according to the well-known letter of St. Bernard to the monk Adam. A blind obedience excludes the prudence of the flesh, *not the prudence of the spirit*, as shown at length by Suarez.” (7)

Priests who are forbidden by liberal and Modernist bishops to offer the True Mass, when there is no other Mass available, must consider whether obedience to this command is just or excessive. They should also

consider that in our day, when the modernist wolves are devouring the flock, the faithful are in desperate need of help.

Refusing obedience to a particular command of a lawful superior does not require that we reject their authority to rule, as such. St. Thomas makes the important distinction between resisting a superior in the *exercise* of authority, and denying their authority to rule. In his *Commentary on the Book of Galatians*, he wrote the following about St. Paul resisting St. Peter to his face.

“[T]he Apostle opposed Peter in the *exercise* of authority, *not in his authority of ruling*. Therefore from the foregoing we have an example: for prelates, an example of humility, that they not disdain corrections from those who are lower and subject to them; *while subjects have an example of zeal and freedom*, so they will not fear to correct their prelates, particularly if their crime is public and verges upon danger to the multitude.” (8)

In our day, when the Faith is being undermined continuously by ravening wolves in the hierarchy – all the way to the very highest pinnacle of the Church – the faithful are more than justified in resisting them in the *exercise* of their authority without, however, denying their authority to rule. Those who claim it is not permissible to *Recognize and Resist* wayward prelates have themselves departed from *antiquity* and *consent*, in this respect.

### Epikeia

St. Thomas defines law as **an ordinance of reason, for the common good, promulgated by one who has care of the community. The purpose of law is to guide man in his actions, so that he will more easily attain the end for which he was created.** Due to the Fall, man’s intellect has been darkened and his will weakened. Consequently, man often errs in his judgment (defect of the intellect), and chooses what he ought not (defect of the will). Law is intended to serve as a remedy for these defects. The letter of the law informs the intellect what should be done and what should be avoided, while the sanctions help motivate the will to choose correctly. But, since law is a general ordinance which does not foresee all possible circumstances, it sometimes happens that a law, good in itself, becomes injurious, and therefore contrary to the intention of the lawgiver. In such circumstances, as St. Thomas teaches, “it is good to set aside the letter of the law and to follow the dictates of justice and the common good.” (9)

We have various examples of this in the Scriptures. In the Gospel of Matthew, for example, we find our Lord defending the apostles when, being hungry, they violated the letter of the law by picking corn on the Sabbath. When the Pharisees objected – “thy disciples do that which is not lawful to do on the Sabbath” - our Lord defended them by pointing to David who himself violated the letter of the law out of necessity. (Mt 12:1-4).

This exception to the letter of the law is called Epikeia, or “equity”. Epikeia is a moral virtue, a subjective part of justice (10), and can be exercised toward both positive and negative laws (11). Its purpose is to “defend the common good, the judgment of conscience, the rights of individuals ... from oppression by the abuse of power”. (12). Epikeia is good old-fashion common sense applied during extraordinary or unforeseen circumstances. It is a much needed virtue in our day, when the letter of the law is so often used to undermine the faith.

In the current ecclesiastical crisis, one need not scruple when necessity requires that Epikeia be applied. For example, if the only Mass within a reasonable driving distance is celebrated by a liberal priest who regularly preaches heresy from the pulpit, it may be necessary to disobey the general law requiring attendance at Mass, since obedience to the law would constitute a danger to the Faith. In such a case,

obedience to the letter of the law would be contrary to the mind of the lawgiver, and therefore the letter of law would not oblige. St. Thomas went so far as to say: “In the time of necessity *there is no law*”. (13)

### **Beware of False Prophets**

We have seen that obedience to particular commands and to general laws does not always oblige, and refusing to obey a person in the *exercise* of his authority, does not require a rejection of their authority *as such*. But what about listening to and following the teaching of prelates who preach strange and novel doctrines? Is it contrary to tradition for the faithful to refuse to listen to such prelates, and/or resist their novel teachings? Quite the contrary.

St. Bellarmine cites divine law (John 10, Mt 7, Gal 1) to show that heretical bishops should not be listened to by the people. He also notes, however, that according to tradition, heretical bishops can only be deposed by the proper authorities. This shows that one can refuse to listen to a heretical bishop without, however, having to maintain that they have fallen from their office. In the following quotation, Bellarmine uses the term “false prophet” to refer to someone who teaches false doctrines, not one who makes predictions that don’t come to pass. He begins by explaining that the faithful can distinguish a true prophet from a false prophet by “watching carefully to see if the one preaching says the contrary of his predecessors”, and then, one paragraph later, he adds:

“We must point out, besides, that the faithful can certainly distinguish a true prophet (teacher) from a false one, by the rule that we have laid down, but for all that, if the pastor is a bishop, they cannot depose him and put another in his place. *For Our Lord and the Apostles only lay down that false prophets are not to be listened to by the people, and not that they depose them*. And it is certain that the practice of the Church has always been that *heretical bishops* be deposed by bishop’s councils, or by the Sovereign Pontiff.” (14)

If a bishop is found teaching strange, novel, or apparently heretical doctrines, he should not be listened to. Listening to such a one is a danger to the Faith, and therefore an occasion of sin. Since we are required to avoid occasions of sin, we are justified in not listening to bishops who teaching heresy. The same holds true for a Pope who deviates from the Faith by teaching novel or heretical doctrines, which is possible as long as he is not defining a doctrine to be held by the universal Church, since it is only then that the charism of infallibility will prevent him from erring. When not defining a doctrine, popes can, and indeed have, taught error. In such an instance, they can be resisted.

This is explained in the Papal Bull of Paul IV, *Cum ex Apostolatus Officio*, which teaches that a Pope who has deviated from the Faith can be contradicted.

“In assessing Our duty and the situation now prevailing, We have been weighed upon by the thought that a matter of this kind is so grave and so dangerous [to the Faith] that the Roman Pontiff, who is the representative upon earth of God and our God and Lord Jesus Christ, who holds the fullness of power over peoples and kingdoms, who may judge all and be judged by none in this world, *may nonetheless be contradicted if he be found to have deviated from the Faith.*”

Notice, he does not say a *former* pope (who lost his office due to heresy) can be contradicted if he deviates from the Faith. No, he said “the *Roman Pontiff*, who is the representative upon earth of God ... may nonetheless be contradicted if he be found to have deviated from the Faith”. The notion that Catholics cannot recognize yet resist a pope who deviates from the Faith (which is maintained by most Sedevacantists), or that whatever a pope does or says, regardless of how far it deviates from tradition, must be followed blindly and defended (as is maintained by many “conservatives”), *is a complete novelty*.



When Pope Paschal II, under duress, entered into an agreement with the Emperor which permitted lay investiture (which his predecessor, Gregory VII, condemned and forbade), the Archbishop of Vienne, Paschal's own legate in France, called a council and declared lay investitures to be *heretical*. At the Council, three men who were later canonized (Bruno of Cologne, Hugh of Grenoble, and Godfrey of Amiens), as well as the future Pope Callistus II, all demanded that Pope Paschal renounce the agreement he made with the Emperor. They informed him that, should he fail to do so, "we will be obliged to withdraw our allegiance from you". In the end, the Pope admitted he was wrong. "I confess that I failed" declared the repentant Pope, "and ask you to pray to God to pardon me". (15)

Bishop Melchior Cano O.P., a theologian of the Council of Trent, said indiscriminate loyalty to a pope does not strengthen, but rather undermines his authority:

"Peter has no need of our lies or flattery. Those who blindly and indiscriminately defend every decision of the Supreme Pontiff are the very ones who do most to undermine the authority of the Holy See - they destroy instead of strengthening its foundations". (16)

In the following quotation, St. Thomas explains why it is that we must resist the preaching of a prelate when it is contrary to the Faith. He also explains how the faithful are able to discern these errors. He notes that the *habit* of faith (the supernatural virtue of faith) gives the faithful an inclination contrary to such errors. This explains how those with the Faith instinctively know when a prelate is teaching errors (even if they don't know exactly how to refute them), and it also explains why "Catholics" on the Left are utterly blind to such a reality:

"Because, as a man ought to obey a lower power in those things only which are not opposed to the higher power; so even a man ought to adapt himself to the rule in all things according to its mode; on the other hand, a man ought to adapt himself to the *secondary rule* in those things which are not at variance with the *primary rule*: because in those matters in which it is at variance, it is not a rule: On that account, *one is not to give assent to the preaching of a prelate which is contrary to the faith since in this it is discordant with the primary rule*. Nor through ignorance is a subject excused from the whole: since *the habit of faith causes an inclination to the contrary*, since it teaches necessarily of all things that pertain to salvation." (17)

The deposit of faith (Tradition) is the *primary rule*; the teaching of the bishops is the *secondary rule*. If the secondary rule deviates from the primary rule, the secondary rule must not be followed. And if the secondary rule obscures the primary rule through ambiguous and/or contradictory teachings, prudence dictates that the faithful look to the past, when the secondary rule taught the primary rule with clarity. It is interesting to note that Fr. Culleton, in his book *The Prophets and Our Times* (1941), stated that the chastisement will be brought about by the Magisterium (the secondary rule) "failing to preach God's word" (the primary rule).

Our Lord permitted this unprecedented crisis in the Church to erupt during the "information age". This has both a positive and a negative aspect. It is a positive insofar as the faithful have access to catechisms, the writings of the theologians and the Fathers, the Popes, and Councils – all at their fingertips. If someone really wants to know what the Church teaches today, he can find it. The negative aspect of the modern means of communication is that the scandalous actions and statements of the Pope are broadcast for all the world to see.

The prudent person will use the unprecedented availability of good information to study the faith by reading only the catechisms and encyclicals prior to 1960 (when the crisis erupted), and respond to the negative aspect (knowledge of scandals coming from those in authority) by turning a deaf ear to the

novelties emanating from members of the hierarchy – especially those coming from “the very top”, where, according to Cardinal Ciappi, the Third Secret of Fatima predicted that “the great apostasy in the Church will begin.” (18)

There is nothing un-Catholic about paying little or no attention to the currently reigning pope. For the first 1900 years, most Catholics went about their daily lives without being concerned, or even aware, of what was happening in Rome. To demonstrate this, Blessed Juniper Serra, O.F.M, (d. 1784), a missionary priest in California, was so unaware of the goings-on in Rome *that he didn't even know the Pope's name*. In a letter to a confrere in Europe, Fr. Serra asked his friend if he would be so kind as to provide him with the Pope's name: “when you get an opportunity” wrote Fr. Serra, will you “inform me what the most Holy Father, the reigning Pope, is called, that I may put his name in the Canon of the Mass”. (19)

This shows that Catholics have no duty to bother themselves with the daily or weekly events in Rome – especially during the current crisis, when such events could endanger their faith. On the other hand, since the scandals are being broadcast so widely and doing so much harm, it is necessary for those who are strong in the Faith speak up and publicly resist the novelties that undermine the Faith. In extraordinary times such as these, when the Pope himself speaks with the “voice of a stranger,” (John 10:5) our primary duty is to protect and defend the Faith. In *The Liturgical Year*, Dom Prosper Guéranger wrote:

“When the shepherd becomes a wolf, the first duty of the flock is to defend itself. (...) The true children of Holy Church, at such times, are those who walk by the light of their Baptism, not the cowardly souls who, under the specious pretext of submission to the powers that be, delay their opposition to the enemy in the hope of receiving instructions [to do so] which are neither necessary nor desirable.”

## Conclusion

Those who hold fast to *antiquity* and *consent*, as taught by St. Vincent of Lerins, will be preserved from many errors during the present crisis. They will know that Catholics can *recognize* the authority of a prelate, while *resisting* him in the exercise of authority (Galatians 1:8-10). They will know that obedience to particular commands should be refused when the command itself is sinful (Pope Leo XIII), or contrary to good customs (Suarez), and they will know that obedience to general laws can be set aside in extraordinary circumstances (Epikieia, Mt. 12:1-4). By holding to tradition and the teaching of the Magisterium, they will also know that a pope who deviates from the Faith can be contradicted, without having to declare that he has ceased to be Pope. (Pope Paul IV)

To maintain the straight and narrow path during the present crisis, we simply need to follow the teaching of St. Paul by standing fast and holding to tradition (2 Thess. 2:14) which, as St. Vincent of Lerins said, can never be led astray by any lying novelty”.

### Footnotes:

- 1) The Commonitorium of Vincent of Lerins, R. Moxon, (Cambridge Patristic Texts, 1915)
- 2) cf. Summa I Q1, A4
- 3) Suarez, De Fide, (Paris: Vivès, 1958), Vol. XII, pg 321
- 4) Summa I-II Q 96, A 4
- 5) Handbook of Moral Theology, Rev. Antony Koch, D.D. (B. Herd Book Co, 1918) pg. 166
- 6) Moralium, lib. V, c. 10 quoted in *The Destruction of the Christian Tradition*, Coomaraswamy pg 121
- 7) Treatise of Benedict XIV, Vol III (London: Thomas Richardson and Son, 1882) pg 59-60
- 8) Super Epistulas S. Pauli, Ad Galatas, 2, 11-14, lec. III, (Taurini/Romae: Marietti, 1953) nn. 83f.
- 9) Cf. Summa II-II Q 120, A 1 and 2
- 10) Ibid.
- 11) Handbook of Moral Theology, Idem. pg 181
- 12) Moral Theology, McHugh and Callan, (1958), 413

- 13) Summa I-II, Q 96, A.6
- 14) De Membris Ecclesiae, Lib. I De Clerics, cap. 7. (Opera Omnia, Paris: Vives, 1870) p 428-429
- 15) See: *The Destruction of the Christian Tradition*, Coomaraswamy, pg 125
- 16) Quoted in Witness to Hope, George. Weigel, pg 15
- 17) Commento Sent. P. Lombardo, Vol. 6, (Bologna : PDUL - Edizioni Studio Domenicano , 2000) p 198
- 18) The Fourth Secret of Fatima, Antonio Socci, Pg. 122
- 19) The Catholic Pioneers of America, Murray (Kilner & Cp., Philadelphia, 1882) pg 324