

Sedevacantism, the “Una Cum” and the Church

John Lane

Two broad tendencies, reflective of two fundamental conceptions of what is most important, most certain, and therefore decisive, in the Church, manifest themselves in the traditionalist milieu.

The first displays a primary concern for the very root of the life of the Church, faith. According to this general view, faith was attacked at Vatican II and afterwards, and everything else follows inevitably from that fact. In its favour this outlook on the crisis has the truth that faith is indeed the very foundation of the Church, the tap-root and trunk of its life, so that it is obvious that everything else depends upon it. It also has the merit of noticing that Vatican II was not merely infested with errors more or less contrary to the deposit of faith, but also that it expressed a more fundamental, ultimate, radical principle which undermines all supernatural faith; viz. the principle of liberalism, that man is the final judge and criterion of religious knowledge. In line with this notion, John XXIII and successors, before, during, and after the Council, abandoned any credible attempt at authoritative imposition of truth, and replaced it with the offering of advice, in the context of dialogue.

The second governing view takes its point of departure from the social unity of the Church, which is charity. It has in its favour the fact that if faith is the first of the social bonds of the Church, charity, the second, remains essential. It may be dependent upon faith, so much so that without faith there cannot be charity, but nevertheless, faith without charity is dead. This outlook notices the dissolution of the Church and reacts by trying to strengthen and repair all possible bonds between Catholics. It rightly sees that in many accusations of a lack of faith there is some degree of exaggeration. It deplores these because a false accusation of error or heresy tends to dissolve what is otherwise still actually intact, and thus bring about the very effect that the putative defender of the faith is trying to avoid – dissolution, disunity. The unity of social charity is closely associated in theology with the role of the hierarchy. Consequently, those with a primary concern for this bond will tend to look for approval of their actions from putative authority.

Analysing the different streams of traditionalist thought and practice in the light of the two external bonds of unity of the Church, faith and charity, is helpful for several reasons. First, it aids us to appreciate realities that otherwise may escape our comprehension. Second, by benefiting our understanding, it generates a healthy tolerance, for, at least within certain limits, to understand is to forgive. Finally, it is a corrective of the tendency, inevitable in limited human nature, to imagine that what we see clearly is the whole of what is to be seen.

The most obvious type of traditionalist with a focus on faith, is the sedevacantist. Less radically, yet still with a primary emphasis on doctrine, is the non-sedevacantist SSPX. The most obvious type of traditionalist with a predilection for the social unity of charity, is the conservative within the *Novus Ordo*

milieu.¹ The second type, more concerned with doctrine, yet still with a primary emphasis on the unity of communion, is the Indult or, to a lesser extent, *Motu Proprio* attendant.

At one extreme is the dogmatic sedevacantist, defined as the individual who has forgotten that his judgement of a contingent fact is merely his own. At the other extreme is the traditionalist who accuses of schism anybody who assists at a mass not positively approved by the “official church.” The sincerity of each type is not in question; nor is it to be assumed that each is mistaken because his view is radical. Truth does not lie in the middle, virtue does. But in my estimation both are mistaken.

For present purposes it suffices to state that the moderate sedevacantists (i.e. sedevacantists with a consistent and accurate understanding of the crisis), and the students of Archbishop Lefebvre,² have *essentially* the same view. Both begin by noticing that the crisis in the Church is profound, touching her very essence, and therefore constitute a *mystery*. This mystery demands explanation. Fr. Gleize and Bishop Tissier are of this school, as is the leadership of the Society generally.³ The very recognition of the situation as *mysterious* immediately forestalls any dogmatic and *a priori* stance on lawfully disputed questions. But it also mitigates the natural tendency of any Catholic to explain away inconvenient facts, when these appear on their face to be incompatible with the divine prerogatives and perfections of the Church, such as the evil nature of the New Mass, or the possible invalidity of the new sacramental rites.

What is immediately noticeable about all “Indult” type discussion of the crisis is that it always displays a strong tendency to explain the crisis as accidental, not substantial. This view of the crisis as one which, in its official elements, at least, does not touch anything truly important, results in a profoundly different view of questions such as the lawfulness of the New Mass. Archbishop Lefebvre forbade the faithful to assist at the New Mass, on the grounds that it is objectively false worship. Such a view horrifies Indult thinkers. The same fundamental difference of outlook created a split between the two kinds of traditionalists in 1988, when the Society proceeded with the consecration of the new bishops. For the Indult thinker, the largest and most important fact is the authority of the pope; for the sedevacantist and the followers of the Archbishop, it is the faith.

The *Catechism of the Crisis in the Church*, published by the SSPX, after pointing to various statistical facts illustrating the depth of the crisis, proceeds to state the essential cause underlying them:

¹ By the conservatives I do not mean the neo-Catholics, for whom faith is whatever the pope says it is this week, and you’re a dissident if you don’t immediately adopt an explanation defending it. I refer to the not insignificant number of Catholics who go along with the new liturgy and other external changes, precisely because they feel bound in obedience to do so, but who hold fast to the faith of our fathers nevertheless. Examples are men like Romano Amerio, Giuseppe Siri, and many religious, an obvious example of which is the body of monks at the Grand Chartreuse. See the film, *Into Great Silence*, for evidence of this reality.

² That is, the SSPX generally, leaving aside the “liberal” element within it, who never quote Archbishop Lefebvre’s more profound comments except to patronize him by explaining how he was *tempted* by radical thoughts, but *resisted* them heroically, making him like themselves. Such men do not take the Archbishop seriously, no matter how sincere their view may subjectively be.

³ There have been a series of articles published confronting this mystery and attempting to explain it in the light of true ecclesiology, by several observers, including Fr. Gleize, Bishop Tissier, and the present writer. These are published, or summarized, respectively, here: <http://stobertbellarmine.net/viewtopic.php?f=13&t=1201>

What lesson can we draw from these statistics? They show the true extent of the crisis. It is above all a crisis of faith. Not only is the number of those who consider themselves to belong to the Church diminishing, but even the majority of those who are officially members of the Church no longer hold the Catholic faith! Someone who denies a truth of the Faith has lost the Faith, for the Faith must be held as a whole. If 72% of Catholics reject belief in hell, not even one Catholic in three still has the Faith.⁴

Again, the Archbishop publicly highlighted that the “official church” as he called it, lacked the visible unity of faith which the Church must have, and pointed out that traditionalists have retained that same unity of profession. To the Indult thinker, this is “sedevacantist” talk and leads logically to schism, a breach of the unity of charity.

Archbishop Lefebvre repeatedly made his position clear. For example:

Certainly the question of the liturgy and the sacraments is very important, but it is not the most important. The most important is that of the Faith.⁵

And, explaining the fundamental cause of the divergence between the SSPX and the Ecclesia Dei communities in 1988:

The stakes are not small. We are not content when they say to us, “You may say the traditional Mass, but you must accept the Council.” What opposes us is doctrine; it is clear.

This is what Dom Gérard did not see, and what confused him. Dom Gérard has always seen the liturgy and the monastic life, but he does not clearly see the theological problems of the Council, especially Religious Liberty.

He does not see the malice of these errors. He was never too much worried about this. What touched him was the liturgical reform and the reform of the Benedictine monasteries. He left Tournay, saying, “I cannot accept this.”⁶

Regarding Vatican II itself, the two different perspectives are starkly different.

The “Indult” or *Motu Proprio* position is that the texts of Vatican II are ambiguous, but not actually erroneous, and that the real problem lies in their misinterpretation by liberals after the Council. Both the SSPX and sedevacantist conviction is that the texts contain actual error – i.e. there exists logical contradiction between texts of the Council and the true doctrine of Church.

With respect to the New Mass the same divergences occur.

The “Indult” position may be summarized: the Novus Ordo is a definitely inferior mass, not unlawful, and certainly not invalid. However, the SSPX and the sedevacantists hold that it is a mass that does not

⁴ *Catechism of the Crisis in the Church*, Fr. Matthias Gaudron, Angelus Press, Ch. 1.

⁵ Interview, *Fideliter* No. 79, January-February 1991

⁶ Interview, *Fideliter* No. 66, November-December 1988

express the faith, and consequently destroys the faith of those who assist at it; that it is unlawful at least because it represents false worship, is possibly invalid *per se*, and definitely invalid in countless concrete cases.

The Archbishop, explaining the document that he signed at the behest of the Vatican in 1988, which he repudiated the next day, had the following to say:

Then came the question of the liturgy. We recognized “the validity of the Sacrifice of the Mass and the Sacraments celebrated with the intention of doing what the Church does, and according to the rites indicated in the typical editions of the Roman Missal.” *It was maybe too much*, but since they had put that there were some points in the liturgy that were ultimately against Tradition... I wanted to add, “taking into account what was stated in no. 3...” but they did not accept it.⁷

Note that the text does not assert that the new sacramental rites are *lawful*, but rather, *valid*. This, the Archbishop suggested, was too great a concession to make to the Modernists. This is entirely logical and consistent with his other views. If the New Mass was doubtfully promulgated by Paul VI, as Archbishop Lefebvre had pointed out, then one could not argue that it must be valid since it was approved by the Church. The two things hang together – either the New Mass was fully authorized and therefore certainly valid because guaranteed by the Church, or the New Mass was not certainly authorized and therefore also open to doubts about its validity.

On the state of the Church the two outlooks are even more radically divergent, if that be possible.

“Indult” representatives insist that nothing *essential* has been changed, so that the state of the Church represents no real mystery. It can be explained purely by reference to the fact that the human element in the Church is not indefectible, that the members of the hierarchy retain their free will and may sin. This type of thinker does not recognise any real problem with the four marks of the Church, the marks by which she may be recognised with certitude by all.

Sedevacantists, along with the SSPX, consider that the condition of the Church represents a genuine mystery, due to many facts which cannot easily be explained in the light of the traditional doctrine *de ecclesia*. For example, both the SSPX and sedevacantists seek to exculpate the Catholic Church of responsibility for the New Mass: the SSPX and some sedevacantists by pointing out that Paul VI didn’t promulgate it as binding upon anybody, other sedevacantists by arguing that he wasn’t pope when he promulgated it. Parallel arguments are put by both kinds of thinkers in respect of Vatican II and also the infallibility of the *magisterium*. All of these arguments start from the common ground that the Catholic Church *cannot* have done these things; they must have been foisted by deception upon Catholics, without proper and clear approval by Rome. On the four marks, both Archbishop Lefebvre and the sedevacantists have pointed out the lack of unity in the profession of the faith, the lack of holiness in the new religion, the absence of catholicity, and the spirit of novelty that is a direct contradiction of the

⁷ Conference for SSPX priests, at St Nicolas du Chardonnet, May 5, 1988. Bishop Tissier, the best representative of the mind of Archbishop Lefebvre, stated publicly in his sermon at the priestly ordinations at Econé, June 29, 2016, “Obviously, we cannot accept this new, tampered with ordination rite, which casts doubts on the validity of numerous ordinations according to the new rite.”

apostolicity that must always be a clear sign of the Church. In September 1988, the Archbishop explained in a conference to his priests at Econé:

Where is the visible church? The visible church is recognized by the features that have always given it visibility: one, holy, catholic and apostolic.

I ask: Where are the true marks of the Church? Are they more in the official church (this is not the visible Church, but the official church) or in us, in what we represent, what we are?

Clearly we are who preserve the Unity of the faith, *which disappeared from the official Church*.

...

If there is still a visibility of the Church today is thanks to you. These signs are already not in the other.

There is no longer in them the unity of the faith; now it is the faith which is the basis of all of the visibility of the Church.

Catholicity is the unity of faith in extension.

Apostolicity is the unity of faith in time.

Holiness is the fruit of faith, as embodied in the soul by the grace of God, by the grace of the Sacraments.

This detail is adduced in order to clarify the broad categories of thought to which the overall analysis refers. The sedevacantists and the SSPX focus primarily on faith, the first and most fundamental of the external bonds of unity of the Church; the Indult, *Motu Proprio* and Conservative analysis has eyes chiefly for the unity of social charity. The latter bond is more closely associated in theological presentations with the unity of government, which properly exists in order to protect and foster *both* of the bonds of unity. The association of the bond of social charity with government, however, explains why those with a less radical view of the crisis of faith are generally very concerned with gaining *approval* for the practice of religion from those with ostensible authority. If your outlook is focused on the unity of charity, especially as it is dependent upon the action of the hierarchy, any “independent” action smells of schism. If your attention is primarily upon the faith as the foundation of the whole life of the Church, you will see that when apparent authority opposes the faith, that authority is null – either in this particular case, or *in toto*.

In the light of this structure, certain facts can be seen in a clear light, facts which otherwise may appear obscure, or inconsistent, or incompatible with the unity of the Church.

Archbishop Lefebvre’s repeated questioning of the legitimacy of the Conciliar popes, is incompatible with a sedepenism which is dogmatic and *a priori* in nature. It is perfectly compatible, however, with a definite and energetic rejection and condemnation of dogmatic sedevacantism. For dogmatic sedevacantism is precisely a usurpation of authority, the imposition of personal judgements of contingent facts *upon others*, which is the very mark of authority. A man *with* authority has a duty of

forming a judgement, personally, with or without prior consultation, and an equally clear duty, in certain circumstances, to impose it under pain of some kind of sanction, upon those subject to him. A man *without* authority has no right to expect others to agree with him, beyond his capacity to persuade them by argument. St. Thomas is perfectly clear about this.

Likewise, that peace and mutual communion which has always existed between moderate sedevacantists and moderate sedeplenists can be seen as merely the mutual recognition that each has a different opinion about a question which, no matter how important, and pregnant with gigantic theoretical and practical implications, remains within the realm, "lawfully disputed." The peace of the Church cannot be breached over lawfully disputed matters. To do so would be to sacrifice the unity of charity out of a mistaken conviction that the unity of faith requires it.

This principle is apparent in disputed theological theses, in which theologians take opposing sides. The Church condemns any breach of peace by the theologians. The Church is not saying that the dispute doesn't matter; she is not saying that there is no truth; she is only preserving peace until she herself finally judges the point of dispute. In the mean time, even the theologians who err are not sinning in holding their false opinion, and it would be a sin to condemn them or to separate from communion with them. St. Augustine praised St. Cyprian precisely because although St. Cyprian was wrong about baptism, he preserved peace. On the other hand, the Church excommunicated the great defender of the faith against the Arians, Bishop Lucifer of Cagliari, because he refused to make peace with repentant Arians.

This principle also explains the fact that most sedevacantist clergy, at least in the USA, no matter how strong their sedevacantism, decline to teach their flocks that they must avoid the masses of priests who hold that Francis is pope. The few who maintain the "anti una cum" stance so vehemently and publicly are exceptions to the general rule. Many individual sedevacantists, and many sedeplenists, find this reality somewhat mysterious, and they imagine that the CMRI, for example, is merely inconsistent with its own principles, but this judgement rests on a facile analysis. Even on the hypothesis that the entirety of what has been said above is wrong, one must still see that in the light of it there is *no inconsistency* in the practical conclusion of mutual peace and sharing in the Sacrifice and sacraments of the Church that follows. That is, if you disagree with this analysis, you must nevertheless acknowledge that for those who see things this way, our practical actions are consistent with our stand. The CMRI clergy, for example, are not inconsistent with their sedevacantism, strongly held as it is. SSPX parishioners who hold the view that the See of Rome is presently vacant are not inconsistent with their view. The SSPX clergy, who happily consider sedevacantists as fellow Catholics, are not in any way in conflict with their own principles. The SSPX milieu generally, and the sedevacantist milieu generally, faithful and clergy, are not contradicting their own professed views when they very freely acknowledge that the Indult and *Motu Proprio* people are fellow Catholics, even though there cannot be any real prospect of practical cooperation.

However, this analysis is sound. Its strength is evidenced by the fact that those who forbid such sharing of Sacrifice and sacraments usually attempt to undermine these fundamental principles by proving that the vacancy of the Holy See is not a personal judgement at all, but a dogmatic fact. A dogmatic fact is

the conclusion of a syllogism, the first premise of which is a truth revealed by God, and the second a truth known with certitude by the light of reason. Actually, by their nature dogmatic facts involve the authority of the Church, which is infallible in defining them. What our opponents more likely mean when they assert that the status of Francis is a dogmatic fact is that this truth is evident in the light of faith, and therefore obliges all. The arguments used to arrive at this conclusion generally derive from the indefectibility of the Church. For example, the Church cannot authorize an evil mass, a liturgy which does not express the faith. But the Conciliar Church has authorized such a liturgy; ergo, it isn't the Catholic Church, but a sect. This argument lacks precision. Archbishop Lefebvre openly and clearly declined to accept that Paul VI really promulgated the New Mass as a lawful rite of the Catholic Church. Whether he was mistaken or not in this view, what it reveals is the need to enter into the nature of the question of what exactly is implied by the indefectibility of the Church in relation to her liturgy. I would argue that the Church cannot even *offer* such an evil to her children, still less impose it administratively upon all of her Latin-rite priests over generations. But SSPX thinkers will counter that it is in the very nature of the Church to establish things by law, and if there's doubt over the law in relation to the liturgy, then the conclusion is not established with certain, only with some degree of probability. Against this we would point out that for the Roman Pontiff to tolerate something for forty years is to approve it and establish it as law, and that this is explicitly stated in the Code of Canon Law, so that the New Mass has been approved, even made legally obligatory, in the New Church. But now we are several steps of reasoning away from our major premise, and no longer in the realm of those things which are immediately evident in the light of faith. Hence, the conclusion is not of a nature to oblige all, by law, but only of a nature to oblige all who see its validity.

Actually, there's a reverse logic that leads to a quite striking conclusion at the other end of the chain. In brief it is this: If you cut off communion with other Catholics, they must somehow be schismatics, because otherwise, *you* are.⁸

Here it might be worthwhile to expose a sophism which is sometimes present in attempts to defend dogmatic sedevacantism. This sophism is found in the efforts of those who describe moderate sedevacantism as "opinionism," and they define an *opinion* as a probable judgement, with a founded fear that the opposite view may be true. This definition belongs properly to criteriology, and concerns *certitude* not *authority*. Moderate sedevacantism does not differ from dogmatic sedevacantism in maintaining that it is possible to achieve *certitude* about the status of the Conciliar popes. Where the two views differ essentially is in the *status* that each accords to its judgement. For the dogmatic sedevacantist, his judgement of this contingent fact – is Francis the pope? – is universally binding; it is obligatory; somebody who does not see it, who does not arrive at this same judgement, is objectively sinning; he is guilty at least of a sin of negligence; his view has no right to be professed or defended, for error has no rights. This, as has been stated above, is the essence of dogmatic sedevacantism, for it is the error of making one's own judgement of a contingent fact equivalent to the Church's judgement. Recalling what was said above regarding theological disputes, let us take as an example the dogma of

⁸ This, of course depends in turn upon the nature of the separation. A practical separation because people cannot cooperate due to differences of opinion on important things, is not schism, as Paul and Barnabas showed. On the other hand, that separation that involves bitter recrimination and personal attacks, suggests real schism, which after all is a breach of charity.

the Immaculate Conception. Many, perhaps most, of those who defended this doctrine prior to its definition held it as *certain*, according to their own judgement. Yet, despite their personal certitude, those theologians did not think it lawful to attack, or deride, or treat as anything but holy and good men, those opposing theologians who were unconvinced. This has nothing to do with certitude, as such, and everything to do with recognizing one's *own* fallibility, and equally, implicitly acknowledging the infallibility of the Church, which alone by her authority could settle the matter in a way that would bind all, without exception. In this light, the ironical observation can be made that the dogmatism of the dogmatic sedevacantists is a species of liberalism, for liberalism's absolute essence is the replacement of authority with private judgement.

Now, to some objections.

1. If you go to a mass "una cum" Francis, this means that you are in communion with Francis.

The prayer in the *Te igitur* is not an expression of common offering, but rather a prayer *for* the Church which, naturally, incorporates prayers for her leading members. In this manner we certainly do express our recognition of the pope and bishop as fellow Catholics, but the purpose of that prayer is not to offer the mass together with them. The Latin is clear, even if some translations are a little confusing. So the priest isn't "offering together with" Francis, and neither are the faithful who assist.

Pope Benedict XIV explains,

Still in reference to the Latin practice, We will also note that when a bishop is celebrating Mass, he prays for himself as an "unworthy servant." This practice is in harmony with the words of the apostolic constitutions where the celebrant, after praying for others, prays for himself in these words: "We now beseech Thee for a man of no worth, for myself who am offering to Thee" etc. (*Ap. Const.*, bk. 8, in Cotelierius, *Opera Patrum Apostolicorum*, vol. 1, p. 407).

Moreover it should be known that in Rome commemoration is made only of the Roman Pontiff since he is not only Supreme Pontiff, but also the bishop of the city of Rome in particular. When the Pope himself says Mass, he prays for himself in precisely the same way as any bishop prays for himself during Mass. In reply to the bishop of Orense who enquired how the Pope commemorated himself during the celebration of Mass, Innocent III, in a letter not yet published but preserved in the Vatican archives (bk. 9, no. 33) replied as follows: "You have also asked to be instructed as to the words used by the Roman Pontiff at the place in the canon of the Mass where a priest of lower rank says *together with our Pope*, since the Pope is then obviously praying for himself and is subordinate to no bishop. Our reply to your devotedness is this: at that place We say *together with me Thy unworthy servant.*"⁹

Gihl teaches the same thing:

The general fruit of the sacrifice falls the more copiously to the share of the individual members of the mystical body of Christ in proportion as they contribute to the common welfare of the Church; hence we

⁹ Benedict XIV, *Ex quo*.

have now a special offering and prayer for the pope and for the chief pastor of the diocese in which the Mass is celebrated.

Then is added a general intercession for all those persons who not only preserve the true faith in their heart and confess it with their lips, but who, moreover, according to their ability defend and propagate it.

It is proper that throughout the entire Church the pope should be prayed for and the sacrifice be offered for him, for he is the vicar of Jesus Christ, the infallible teacher and supreme pastor of all the faithful, the head and father of all Christendom.¹⁰

Numerous authorities could be quoted on this point – they appear to be unanimous in teaching that the *una cum* phrase is intercessory – that is, it is a prayer *for* those named in it.¹¹ No translator of laymen’s missals seems to make the commemoration of the pope a form of co-offering; nor was this discovered by any of the authors whom I have consulted on the meaning of the *Te Igitur* (e.g. Cochem, Kearney, Fortescue, O’Callaghan, Lallou, Martindale); nor by St. Robert Bellarmine or Pope Benedict XIV; nor by any of the manifold ancient authors quoted by Benedict, Fortescue, and some of the others. Not one of them says that the *Te Igitur* is oblatory – on the contrary, they all refer to it as intercessory.

2. Even if not expressing communion with Francis, the layman in the pew is compromising in some other way in assisting at such a mass.

He would do so, it seems to me, if he could be said to be *agreeing* with whatever choices the priest makes in inserting the required names in the Canon. But this doesn’t seem to be verified. All know that the Church is in a state of confusion at present, and the layman is not presumed to agree with the priest about very many things at all! More profoundly, if we examine the character of the human act involved, according to the principles of St. Thomas, it seems obvious that the priest’s act is a virtuous and wholly good act, even on the hypothesis that he is mistaken in fact about the names he pronounces. The question of fact does not enter into the rectitude of the act, considered morally; but this is purely a moral question, therefore the act is simply good. This may appear surprising on the face of it, but it may be clearer if you consider other human acts which involve mistakes of fact about which the Church herself has not judged. An example: If the priest thought it was one day on the calendar and you realized it was another, and therefore he used the wrong Proper. Your assistance at mass would not be seen as agreement with his *mistake*, but rather, if anything, with his good intention to follow the rubrics.

So insofar as you could be said to cooperating with the priest in his mentioning the pope and bishop in the canon, you would be cooperating with a morally *good* act.

In the present case if you assisted at Holy Mass offered by a priest who doesn’t agree with your opinions, it seems to me that you would not be compromising, you would instead be witnessing to the peace of unity of the Church. It would perhaps not be too much to say that you are showing your submission to the Church by recalling that it is for *her* to judge all such questions finally, and that until

¹⁰ Rev. Dr. Nicholas Gehr, *The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass*, B. Herder, St. Louis and London, 1951, pp. 638, 639.

¹¹ The entire Mass and therefore every prayer in it is oblatory in a general sense, because the Mass is “The Clean Oblation.” But the precise point at issue is whether or not this prayer expresses a *common* oblation “with the pope” or whether it is a prayer offered *for* him.

she does, we are to keep that unity which is one of her marks and one of her essential characteristics. Archbishop Lefebvre always supplied mass and the sacraments to sedevacantists, no doubt on this same principle, and he was certainly no compromiser.

3. It is a scandal to go to such Masses, as Catholics may believe, rightly or wrongly, that you are in communion with Francis.

As explained, this is not verified in fact. All manner of opinions are held by the faithful, precisely because there's no clear authority acting, and therefore such assumptions are rare, if they ever exist.

4. If we can go to the mass "una cum" with a man who is clearly not a Pope, in this case, Francis, why not masses "una cum" with other claimants, Michael, Pius XIII, etc?

This objection rests upon confusion over the nature of the "una cum" clause, explained above. In any case, there are other reasons to avoid such masses.

If, alternatively, this objection is meant to be an accusation of schism against those who accept Francis's claim, this is equally baseless. The papal claims of Paul VI through Francis have strong arguments in support of them, especially the adherence of every single member of the hierarchy, at least publicly. Such arguments could easily convince a reasonable Catholic either to believe such claims, or at least to judge them probable. The traditionalist who acknowledges Francis as pope does so, essentially, in a provisional manner. This is clear if you ask, would this man adhere to Francis if he knew he wasn't pope? The question is seen to be rhetorical! But is this not a clear sign that adherence is precisely conditional upon the *truth* of the Conciliar popes' claims? In the presence of these two elements – a plausible claim, and a conditional acceptance of that claim, there is no place for schism. On the other hand, all of the other minor claimants to date have no basis for their claims whatsoever; no support from the legitimate hierarchy, nor from the clerics of Rome, and certainly no argument from the universal adherence of the Church. The first foundation for adherence to them is lacking, and therefore there can be no objective basis for adhering to them.

5. Attendance at Mass "una cum" the antipope is only justifiable for those who are ignorant of the antipope's status. They are excused through ignorance. Those better informed and educated cannot claim ignorance.

Ignorance is irrelevant to the question at issue, which is whether one may assist the masses of those who regard Francis as pope, as the above principles prove. There's no *objective* problem, therefore *subjective* considerations do not enter in. (Subjective considerations do apply to the question of whether another is a schismatic, or a heretic, of course, but that question is quite distinct and handled separately above.)

6. The Conciliar Church is a schismatic church, to go to a mass that is publicly adhering to this sect, makes one, *de facto*, a member of the sect. It is the sin of schism to knowingly participate in a liturgy that is objectively schismatic.

The priests concerned are not members of the Conciliar Church, on any sane understanding of that term. The Conciliar Church is that body of men who have definitely departed from the Church by heresy and/or schism, and who adhere formally to the programme of Vatican II for a new religion, a religion of man. One cannot accidentally leave the Church; it is a conscious act, publicly manifested. That there are doubtful cases does not mean that there cannot be certain cases. Those who have left the Church for the New Church are the men who fomented the revolution, and those who welcomed the reforms with joy, in a word, those who celebrate them and hold fast to them even in the face of clear proofs that they are contrary to the tradition of the Church. Many priests and bishops went along mournfully and reluctantly out of obedience to putative authority, some dying of broken hearts. Such men did not leave the Church, and there is no *beginning* of an argument that they did.

It's an unsettling fact that the great majority of Catholics are in visible communion with Francis, but this is the reality. If Francis, or the New Church, had been declared schismatic, then all would be obliged to acknowledge the fact and fly from the occasion of sin. But this has not occurred, and therefore there exists no universally binding law which would form the basis of a universal presumption. This can easily be seen to be in contrast with the condemned sects, such as the Anglican Church or those of the Eastern Schismatics. All who publicly adhere to those sects are presumed to be outside the Church.

And in fact we are *forbidden* from making judgements concerning individuals *unless necessity demands it*. While we can make a judgment that a sect does indeed exist that is operating side by side with the Catholic Church and even claiming to be the Church, we cannot make a judgment that any particular person is a member of that sect unless it is clear that they are knowingly and wilfully adhering to the sect, or have knowingly adopted the heretical teachings of the sect, while seeing the conflict between their heretical views and the teaching of the Church.

7. At the very least, attendance at such masses is a public demonstration of a grave inconsistency. On one hand you reject the Pope who has jurisdiction over this mass, and then assist at this mass under his jurisdiction.

There's no inconsistency at all in such an act, as we have shown. In order to prove it wrong, one must begin by establishing that the vacancy of the Holy See is a dogmatic fact, which therefore obliges all Catholics without exception.

8. Since the Church is visible, public liturgical prayer in communion with the Pope demonstrates one's submission to the Pope named in the worship.

This is perfectly true, in normal conditions, that is, when the identity of the pope is not a lawfully disputed matter. If this argument proves anything, it proves that *only* the faithful who recognized Benedict XIII as pope could lawfully attend St. Vincent Ferrer's masses, yet he was a saint, and Benedict XIII almost certainly an antipope.

9. The position of sedevacantism has evolved and matured since the early days of the crisis when there was more confusion. It has become more evident and obvious that the Conciliar claimants could not

have been legitimate popes. With this greater clarity, it has become inexcusable for a Catholic to maintain communion with them (the antipopes) and with that attend masses under their jurisdiction.

This argument is a disguised form of the argument that all non-sedevacantists are schismatics, which we reject *ex hypothesi*. If it were true, it would require its own proof, and we'd not be discussing the "una cum" clause but rather, *communicatio in sacris cum acatholicis* (i.e. common worship with non-Catholics).

10. Bishop Sanborn and Fr. Cekada, both seminary professors, and some others of note who are trained experts in theology, have made a compelling case which demonstrates that attending una cum (antipope) masses is sinful and scandalous and have proven that it is an objectively schismatic act. Is it not the greater good to trust the judgment of those who are experts in their field, as this very complex area of theology, rather than trust one's own less informed judgment?

This is a case of the logical error, *argumentum ad verecundiam*. That is, an appeal to authority where there isn't any. The proponents of these theses must prove their assertions, just like any other private individuals, for they are not authorities.

The singular opinions of approved theologians would not have to be accepted on their authority, for they really have none, in the sense that matters in this context. When we speak of the "authority" of theologians, we are using the term in an informal manner. What we really mean is that the Church approves their works, in general, and not that they must be believed because they, the theologians, say it. This is why the *common* teaching of theologians has "authority" – it has the support of the authority of the Church, which would never permit the body of theologians to agree in error. So a singular opinion of one or perhaps a few theologians has little weight. How much more does this apply to men who are not theologians at all?

It seems to me to be the height of pride to arrive a private conclusion by one's own reasoning, and then seek to impose that conclusion on others as though it is a binding truth to which all must agree.

As far as the relative *weight* of writers is concerned, we should also remember that we are following the constant tradition of sedevacantists from early in the crisis in the Church. The anti-una cum position is relatively new, and remains a minority view. Fr. Martin Stepanich, OFM, STD, a pre-Vatican II priest with a *doctorate* in sacred theology, openly disagreed with Fr. Cekada on this question. Fr. Cekada himself only came to the anti-una cum view in around 1999, at least twenty years after he became a sedevacantist. There's no pride in holding fast to a venerable tradition, supported by serious, educated, clerics, such as Fr. Stepanich.

11. There is a distinction of full communion with the antipope, and a *de facto* rejection of him, while professing communion with him. The SSPX has always fallen into the latter category. If for the sake of argument one states that the SSPX are practically not in communion with the antipope, this fact will change if an agreement of full submission is approved, which appears likely. Once this happens, and the public profession of submission is given, it would then certainly be a sin to attend such masses as there

is no longer a doubt that mass would fall under the jurisdiction of the antipope, it would be fully incorporated into the sect, and lastly that it would be a scandal.

This argument presumes that “approval” by the Vatican necessarily involves some truly practical acceptance of the new religion – either the profession of its errors, or the adoption of its evil novelties, the New Mass and sacraments. This appears unlikely, but in any case, an agreement seems chimerical.

In any case, in the event of approval of the SSPX by the Vatican, the applicable principles do not change, as applied to pre-1969 Latin-rite clerics or Eastern-rite priests. Our clergy have always been approved by the Vatican, with few exceptions, and it didn’t make us question their availability for mass and the sacraments. The faithful didn’t flock to the SSPX, for example, in 1988, because its leadership was then excommunicated and freed from the influence of the Modernists. Quite the contrary, as a matter of fact; many *departed* at that time.

12. Even if one was to concede as unproven or incorrect the previous points, it would still fall under the “scandal of the little ones.” Since some Catholics may perceive this as sin or scandal, it would be the higher good to not risk scandalizing such people who do not grasp the complexity of the principles involved, therefore such masses must be avoided.

The principles involved are actually perfectly simple, and indeed instinctively felt by Catholics of even the most rudimentary education. We are, after all, talking primarily about the distinction between something declared by the Church, on the one hand, and the judgement of a private individual, on the other. Most people can easily tell the difference!

Scandal taken is not necessarily scandal given. If scandal is taken without proportionate cause, it is pharisaical scandal and sinful. Although St. Thomas¹² clearly warns against the “scandal of the little ones,” he also makes the distinction that in relation to spiritual goods, once such matters are explained, the scandal would be due to malice.

I answer that, Whereas scandal is twofold, active and passive, the present question does not apply to active scandal, for since active scandal is “something said or done less rightly,” nothing ought to be done that implies active scandal. The question does, however, apply to passive scandal, and accordingly we have to see what ought to be foregone in order to avoid scandal. Now a distinction must be made in spiritual goods. For some of them are necessary for salvation, and cannot be foregone without mortal sin: and it is evident that no man ought to commit a mortal sin, in order to prevent another from sinning, because according to the order of charity, a man ought to love his own spiritual welfare more than another's. Therefore one ought not to forego that which is necessary for salvation, in order to avoid giving scandal.

Again a distinction seems necessary among spiritual things which are not necessary for salvation: because the scandal which arises from such things sometimes proceeds from malice, for instance when a man wishes to hinder those spiritual goods by stirring up scandal. This is the “scandal of the Pharisees,” who were scandalized at Our Lord's teaching: and Our Lord teaches (Matthew 15:14) that we ought to treat such like scandal with contempt. Sometimes scandal proceeds from weakness or ignorance, and such is

¹² S. Th., II, Q. 43, Art. 7

the “scandal of little ones.” On order to avoid this kind of scandal, spiritual goods ought to be either concealed, or sometimes even deferred (if this can be done without incurring immediate danger), until the matter being explained the scandal cease. If, however, the scandal continue after the matter has been explained, it would seem to be due to malice, and then it would no longer be right to forego that spiritual good in order to avoid such like scandal.

Finally, it would be difficult to imagine anything more scandalous, actually, than the dispossession of the goods of the Church of the faithful based upon personal judgements about a contingent question. We would be depriving ourselves of *certain* and *infinitely valuable* goods, for an uncertain, indeed wildly improbable, possibility that others will take scandal.