



Try It for Yourself

Sir, Having received my January copy of *Catena*, I read a letter signed by 13 brothers of Canterbury Circle regarding the SSPX. Clearly they are distressed by what they see as being a weakening of the fruits of Vatican II. They make a number of accusations and, as is often the case, they are incorrect.

These brothers write "Clearly the partial lifting of the excommunications..."

This is rather like saying that Miss X is partially pregnant! There were five excommunications, viz, the late Archbishop Lefebvre and four priests whom he consecrated as bishops. Since Archbishop Lefebvre is now deceased, his excommunication is in the hands of God, but the four bishops are still alive and their excommunications have been lifted. Yes. Lifted! Totally! No living member of the SSPX, apart from the four bishops, have ever been excommunicated and all members of the SSPX are members of the Mystical Body of Christ, like it or not. All their priests are validly ordained and all the Masses which they offer are valid Masses.

The only quibble which I have as regards the ministry of these priests is with regard to them hearing Confession. In order for any priest to licitly hear Confession within any diocese, they must first obtain the permission of the local ordinary. I know of no case in which the priests of the SSPX have sought the permission of the local ordinary. Then these brothers write "We urge the Holy Father to see [the] SSPX as a threat to a healthy future for the Catholic Church and that they are essentially an external sect".

What a laugh!

The SSPX are Catholics faithful to the teachings of the Church. They pray for our Holy Father at every Mass. They know how to behave in church. All their women wear either a hat or a mantilla in church. They all genuflect before the Blessed Sacrament. They have maintained the language of the Church in that all Masses are in Latin and they do not use dumbed down English which the Church is now trying desperately to correct....or at least improve, given the resulting language which the English speaking Church uses at present and already there are dissenting voices grumbling about the proposed changes. The postlude of Vatican II has seen a drop in attendance at Mass, a catastrophic drop in vocations, the ongoing scandals of paedophilia amongst a section of the clergy, an increase in "cafeteria" Catholicism in which we have so-called Catholics who

think that they can make up what rules they will obey and which they will ignore. I could go on and on about the fruits of Vatican II as seen by some.

I go, from time to time, to my local SSPX chapel because I love singing the Mass in its original Latin entirety. I love the palpable reverence with which these Masses are conducted. Try it for yourselves and see what I mean.

John Rayner
Liwara Circle

Greatly Exaggerated

Sir, I am neither a member nor a supporter of the Society of St Pius X, but I believe that the fears expressed in the letter from several members of Canterbury Circle concerning the current discussions with this society are greatly exaggerated. Firstly, the nonsensical views of Bishop Williamson on the Holocaust are something of a red herring. There is no evidence that they are widely held within the society. Williamson has been disciplined by his own superior, Bishop Fellay, and has offered a rather grudging apology for the damage he has done, though he has not retracted his idiotic opinions. He may be something of a weirdo, but unfortunately weirdos are to be found within the mainstream church as well, even sometimes on the episcopal bench (the name of Archbishop Milingo comes readily to mind).

Secondly, Pope Benedict has reiterated on numerous occasions his total commitment to the teaching of Vatican II. He has stressed that it is to be interpreted in accordance with a "hermeneutic of continuity", that is to say in a way which harmonises with the teaching of earlier councils. He has no time for the view, fashionable in certain liberal circles in the immediate aftermath of the council, that Vatican II somehow abolished all the teaching of earlier councils and, in effect, created a new post-conciliar Catholic Church different from the pre-conciliar one. Indeed, if it were possible for a general council of the Church to change fundamental doctrine, it would open the way for some future council to disown Vatican II, an outcome which he would certainly not wish to contemplate.

Your correspondents describe the members of the SSPX as fundamentalists, reactionaries and isolationists, but unless they can explain exactly what they mean by these terms, and in what way they apply to the SSPX, they amount to little more than name-calling.

Finally, your correspondents proclaim a belief in "progressive dialogue and understanding between all faiths". If they are sincere in this (and I am sure that

they are), why are they so opposed to any such dialogue with the SSPX or any attempt to reach any understanding with them?

Philip Goddard
City of London Circle

Out of Kilter?

Sir, Nearly two pages of letters in February's issue take Canterbury Brothers to task for their concerns about the Society of Saint Pius X (SSPX) with just one (mercifully shorter) letter supporting them. No doubt this reflects the balance of views from your correspondents.

As ever, events have moved on a little.

We say congratulations to the Canterbury Brothers for their thoughtful, well-reasoned and restrained letter ("Concerned", Letters, *Catena* 963).

We fully endorse their views. The SSPX and Bishop Williamson make strange bedfellows for those of us who claim to be "proudly Catholic".

We endorse too the Canterbury Brothers' concerns about undermining the statements made by the Church at the Second Vatican Council. It is worrying to observe to whom the Holy See appears not so keen hold out the hand of reconciliation. Apparently, if you are a liberal Sri Lankan theologian or a liberation theologian from Latin America, you seem less likely to be invited to a summit at the Vatican. Reconciliation, for Christ, is indeed available to all, not just to some. Division damages our Church, whether viewed from the inside or from without. Reconciliation is good. But it is usually accompanied by repentance and a resolve to change behaviour in the future - if appropriate, from both sides of a debate. Bishop Williamson and SSPX might well reflect on the Pope's visit to a Synagogue in Rome last week (at the time of writing). It was clear from that very public event that Italian Jews still acutely feel the pain caused by Catholic statements and action (or lack of them) concerning the Holocaust, whether now or in the past.

In the 1930s and 1940s, heroic individual Catholics stood shoulder to shoulder with those of other faiths against the evils of Fascism. Some died in concentration camps as a result. How often must some in authority in our Church act, or fail to act, in ways that are out of kilter with the faithful, before lessons are learned?

Mark Darlow (President)
Bob Hughes
Steve O'Neill
Chris Power
Ian Monger
Wharfedale Circle