

Monastic Scribe 105 – June 5, 2026

THAT WE MAY BE ONE

What I want to write about is mainly a Roman Catholic issue. But the secular media is dealing with it and sometimes gives a very simplistic, incomplete understanding about what is happening and seeking to cast good guys and bad guys. I am referring to the impending schism of the Society of Saint Pius X. The implications are large. The crux of the problem lies in the forthcoming acts of SSPX on July 1st to ordain bishops without the authorization of the Pope and Vatican as is the usual way.

Let me sum up the history of this society in a brief way. It is an involved story with twists and turns. It began with Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre after the end of the Second Vatican Council (1962 – 1965). He initiated a legitimate “pious union” of a group of conservative followers. It became clearer that they rejected teachings of the Council such as ecumenism, religious liberty and collegiality. Ironically, they thus believed that salvation only comes through Christ and the Church. Rejection of the revised ritual of the Mass has been part of their difference but the Latin Mass is not the main issue. Conflicts with Rome began to be pronounced. In 1976 Pope Paul VI rebuked Lefebvre and advised him to change their minds, forbidding him to ordain priests.

Pope John Paul II followed in his decree, “*Ecclesia Dei*,” in which he condemned the society and threatened automatic excommunication for any bishops involved in consecrating new bishops. The latter occurred in 1988 when Lefebvre ordained four bishops. All five were automatically excommunicated. Some priests withdrew from the society wishing to remain faithful to Rome and formed the “Priestly Fraternity of Saint Peter.” Efforts to reconcile the group followed. In 2009 Pope Benedict XVI lifted the excommunications but the society still refused to honor the Council.

An ecumenical Council is the highest form of teaching in the church. When the Pope and all the Bishops accept a position, it is doctrine and is to be honored in the same way as the Church embraces the teachings of the Council of Ephesus, Trent, Vatican I and all those that occurred in-between. Historical and cultural developments, “the signs of the times,” may mean new understanding and implementation of conciliar teaching without abandoning it.

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There is an old saying that relates how groups differing with the church settle such disagreements. It says that “Protestants found a new church; Catholics found a new (reforming) religious order.” The latter, as in the case with Francis of Assisi, brings forth new ideas without separating from the church.

The Roman Church really abhors schismatic breaks. A schism is a split in the church. They see the problem not as an of power or control, but of unity. The church should be “one, holy, catholic and apostolic.” At the Last Supper, Jesus prayed for unity among his followers as he said, “I pray ...also on behalf of those who will believe in me through your word that they may all be one. As you, Father are in me and I in you, may they also be in us that the world may believe that you have sent me.”

This is not a call of uniformity. The church is unity in diversity, many gifts but one Lord and one Spirit. There can be disagreements. I don’t always agree with decisions of the church, of the Pope, of my religious superior or my community. But I don’t always have to have my own way; that is a lesson to learn. The diversity of religious orders such as Benedictines and Jesuits shows that there are different ways to live one’s Christian calling. James Joyce once said about the Catholic Church, “Here comes everybody!” Or, as Pope Francis said, “Todos, todos, todos.” Everyone belongs. We are unified by the Bishop of Rome. At present, the Pope is the strongest voice for morality in the world. His recent encyclical is a wonderful testimony to responsible humanity.

I do not want to blame anybody or judge anybody. The main feeling I have about the impending schism is sadness. The body of Christ is again torn apart. Though I disagree with the move to consecrate bishops apart from the Bishop of Rome, I realize they are good people and, I am sure, true believers. I pray for them and pray this move will be averted. You are welcome to agree or disagree. I pray and write as: joycet@glastonburyabbey.org.

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Please note that I do not speak on behalf of Glastonbury Abbey, the Archdiocese of Boston or the Catholic Church, though I hope my faith is in harmony with all these. Any error in judgment should be credited to me and not anyone else.