

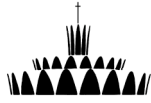
Faithfulness to the Magisterium of the Universal and Local Church

After the introductory chapter two weeks ago, I would like now to begin the series of chapters on the Rule and Constitutions. And first, before considering the Prologue of the Rule, I want to draw attention to General Norm 1 of the Constitutions, which defines the nature of the monastery and its relationship to the universal and local Church, and so provides a kind of preface to the Rule itself, and the declarations on it.

General Norm 1 says this:

The nature of the English Benedictine Congregation is this: it is, generically, a religious congregation, whose specific difference is that it is monastic, with a specific origin and tradition, and is of pontifical right, that is, immediately and exclusively under the law or authority of the Holy See with respect to internal governance and to discipline (canon 593); the monasteries of the Congregation are houses of it which are *sui juris*, that is, autonomous, except in the matters to which the Abbot is subject to the Abbot President (canon 613), and without prejudice to the Abbot's and house's subjection to the authority of the Holy See.

I will come back to much of this in later chapters, but the point I want to emphasize in this chapter is that the Congregation, as a religious congregation, is subject in a special manner to the supreme authority of the Church (canon 590, s. 1), and as a congregation of pontifical right, is subject immediately and exclusively to the authority of the Holy See with respect to internal governance and to discipline. This means that this monastery, as a house of this congregation, is likewise subject in a special manner to the supreme authority of the Church, and is likewise subject immediately and exclusively, except in matters over which the Abbot President has authority, to the authority of the Holy See with respect to internal governance and to discipline. Moreover, as both the canon law (canon 590, s. 2) and the Constitutions (Declaration 83 (b)) state, individual monks “are . . . bound to obey



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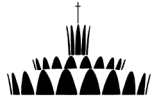


the Supreme Pontiff as their highest superior by reason of the sacred bond of obedience.”

I therefore put forward to you that in our whole life as monks, in all that we do, and yes, in all that we say and indeed think, and in any planning for the future that we do, a fundamental and exceptionless principle must be *faithfulness to the magisterium and discipline of the Church*, that is, to the teaching of the Church as to what we must believe, and to the prescriptions of the Church as to how we must act -- and the latter includes moral, juridical and liturgical prescriptions. Habitual dissent, a spirit of dissent, are utterly ruled out by our vow of obedience and are, in fact, objectively sinful. Moreover, it is abundantly clear to any outside observer of the Church, although in the last forty years it has not been clear, tragically, to many members, especially leaders, of some or even many religious institutes, that there is absolutely no future in dissent. Institutes which have permitted a spirit of dissent to lodge within them will, unless they dislodge that spirit, surely die out. For since such an institute, and the Church and its supreme authority, contradict one another, and since it was the Church and its supreme authority, not the religious institute as such, which was founded by the Lord and given the promise of indefectibility, it is the institute, not the Church and its supreme authority, which will die out. If we at Saint Louis Abbey wish to have a future, to continue to grow and flourish, we must be and remain faithful to the magisterium and discipline of the Church.

But our faithfulness, to be true, authentic faithfulness, must be intelligent, free, and completely informed by love. It is these three qualities which distinguish it from that sham faithfulness which, one fears -- although it is not ours to make a definitive judgment -- but which, one fears, to a greater or lesser degree characterizes religious institutes of the so-called “traditionalist” or “neo-traditionalist” kind -- and their way is to be rejected as firmly as the way of institutes characterized by the spirit of dissent. What are these three qualities in authentic faithfulness of being intelligent, free, and informed by love?

Intelligent faithfulness is a faithfulness which constantly



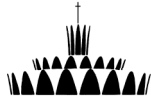
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thinks and reflects about the truth, which is not afraid thoughtfully to examine all opinions on matters of teaching and discipline which may be proposed, and carefully and indeed respectfully searches out both the errors and the truths in dissenting opinions, seeks ever clearer and more persuasive reasons for doctrines and prescriptions of the magisterium, and so on. Such intelligent faithfulness resists the tendency of the human mind, arising from its weakness and sometimes from its sinfulness, to substitute labeling for true thinking, and so transcends the still-omnipresent labels of our time, so alien to the true nature of the Church, of 'liberal' and 'conservative'. The one faithful to the magisterium and discipline of the Church is neither "liberal" nor "conservative"; some of the teachings of the Church would be labeled by the media, the high priests of today's secular civilization, as conservative, but others, e.g., in the sphere of political, social and economic teaching, if only they were known and understood, would appear to the world very liberal, even shockingly radical. God forbid that we should ever become an unthinking community, when our tradition, as Benedictines, as English Benedictines, as Benedictines of this house, has such a strong element of the intellectual service of God.

Then, free faithfulness, i.e., faithfulness which is freely chosen by a mature and adult human being, and is not a manifestation of some kind of psychological hang-up, of a childishness or immaturity persisting into adulthood, of some kind of need for a dependency relationship, etc. No, authentic faithfulness to the magisterium and discipline of the church is an authentic form of a human being's highest practical act, viz., free and reasonable choice, free because reasonable, and the reason in this case is one's God-given faith that the Lord has granted to his Church through the Holy Spirit a guidance which will not permit it to mislead and which gives it in certain circumstances the grace of infallibility.

Then, finally, and the quality of supreme importance, a faithfulness fully and completely informed by love, by charity. So frequently the chief criticism raised against those who *appear* to be faithful to the magisterium and discipline of the Church is that they are so lacking in charity toward all others, toward any whom they



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believe do not agree with them, or do not see what they see, a lack of charity which does not stop short of ascribing motives, including sinful motives, to the words and actions of others when such motives cannot be known, which seems to have a strong element of arrogance and pride in it, and which -- the ultimate tragedy -- is prepared to consider, explicitly, or implicitly but in effect, schism as a way forward in the Church. This criticism is, I say, very common, and I will simply make the I hope common sense remark that where there is so much smoke, there is bound to be some fire. I utterly reject, and entreat and enjoin you, utterly to reject such loveless faithfulness to the magisterium and discipline of the Church, for it is not only a violation of the Lord's supreme command of love, but, as loveless, is not true Catholic faithfulness. I want also to warn you that we should not think that we are immune to this in our own house. I gave a chapter a couple of times ago about sins of talking about one another behind one another's backs, of in effect writing off, condemning, a brother monk because he does not agree with our opinions and views, e.g., about the liturgy, our opinions and views which we are convinced are the ones in accordance with the teaching and discipline of the Church. Well, even if we are right about our opinions and views, this kind of calumny, of rejection and disrespect for another, and for a brother monk, can never be anything but a grave failure in the Lord's greatest commandment, the commandment to love.