

+DiNoia's Letter to SSPX

Michael Sean Winters | Jan. 21, 2013 | Distinctly Catholic

This weekend, the text of a letter from Archbishop J. Augustine DiNoia, O.P., Vice President of Ecclesia Dei charged with trying to achieve a reconciliation between the Society of St. Pius X and the Holy See, was released. You can read the full text by clicking [here](#) [1], and you should do so.

The letter is a profound call to unity and reminds not only the SSPX but all Catholics that the unity of the Church is a gift from God that must be preserved, that such unity, rooted in our shared faith, baptism, and eucharist, is more foundational than any theological divergence and that all theological controversies must, in fact, be seen through the lens of this prior unity of the Church. The paragraph that jumped out at me states:

?If we concentrate only on the most difficult and most controversial questions?which, by all means, need to receive careful attention?we might over time lose a sense of the analogy of faith and begin to see theology mainly as a sort of intellectual dialectic of competing claims, rather than as a sapiential engagement with the living God who has revealed himself to us in Jesus Christ and who inspires our study, our preaching, our pastoral care through the Holy Spirit.?

This letter could have been sent, with a few changes, to Father Tony Flannery, the Irish priest who has been silenced by the Holy See because of his public dissent from certain teachings of the Church and who, in [an article in the Irish Times](#) [2], makes his case. He, too, is missing the forest for the trees, forgetting that all authentic theology flows from the one faith, and that, in our Church, theology must serve the unity of that faith. If you want to see what happens to ecclesial unity when the most controversial questions are placed before the unity of the Church, look to the worldwide Anglican communion that is ripping itself apart.

The letter to the SSPX could have been a game-changer. Unfortunately, we must now see Bishop Fellay's recent comments about the Jews, and about the Second Vatican Council's teachings on the Jews and on religious liberty, in a much darker light ? and his comments were dark enough to begin with. It is becoming clear that the SSPX is not serious about reconciliation. That is a shame. But, it is their shame, not the Holy See's.

The other thing about this letter that strikes me is the way it touches on something I have mentioned previously, the need not to let secular ways of thinking displace a properly formed Christian way of thinking. It is no coincidence that the person who suggested this to me is the same archbishop who penned this profound letter. In every sentence of this letter, one discerns a desire to think with the mind of Christ. In every sentence, we see the tradition at work, the quotations from the Scripture, from Augustine and Aquinas, all of which bespeak the priority of faith in the life of the mind. And, I love the warning from Aquinas against ?inordinate zeal.? But, all of us, not just the SSPX, need to ask, and ask again, each day, this challenging question: Are we thinking with the mind of Christ? Are we thinking with the mind of the Church? And, on what authority could we claim to be doing the first and not the second? What would characterize such a divergence other than patient suffering and a quiet confidence in the truth? These are not easy questions. They are not questions exclusive to the Lefebvrists

either.

We know that the unity of the Church is essential. We know, as this letter states, that the Lord himself expressed the wish that "all may be one - ut unum sint." Therefore, pursuing, doggedly, determinedly, the unity of the Church is an act of obedience to the Lord Himself. We should also look to the history of the Church and recognize that we never know when or how that unity will be challenged, from within or without. But, the history of schism is a thoroughly sorry tale, breeding only more schism, more disunity, less obedience to the Lord and, ultimately, removing Christ from the center of the story and replacing Him with a human agenda. Please, dear readers, take this letter to heart - and to mind!

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Links:

[1] <http://ilsismografo.blogspot.it/2013/01/vaticano-full-text-of-advent-letter.html>

[2] <http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/opinion/2013/0121/1224329102657.html>