

Our Duty to Resist!

*Taken from **Crucial Truths to Save Your Soul**
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There is a famous maxim attributed to the 5th Century Pope, St. Felix III, about standing up for the truth:

“Not to oppose error is to approve it; and not to defend truth is to suppress it.”

This saying is especially true in regard to opposing doctrinal errors and defending the true Faith – regardless of the source of those errors. Even a Pope may be legitimately resisted if he were to act in a way that is contrary to the Faith or otherwise harmful to the Church.

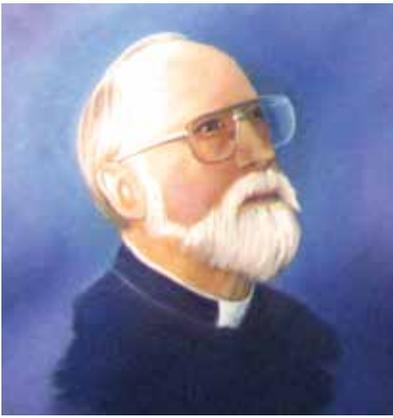
When the Pope and bishops preach the truth of the Catholic Faith to us, as they have received it from authentic magisterial sources, God expects us to believe them. And when they tell us to do something within the realm of their jurisdiction, He expects us to obey.

But if the Pope tells us to do something contrary to the manifest good of the Church, or to profess a belief in something contrary to the Catholic Faith

(such as a fourth Person of the Blessed Trinity), we don't have to obey him. We must “disobey” him – that is, we must resist him, and obey God rather than men, as St. Peter said.¹ Otherwise we make ourselves guilty of a sinful false obedience (or as St. Thomas calls it, indiscreet obedience).²

At the turn of the 17th Century, Protestants were slandering the papacy as a sort of despotism. The Pope, in their view, was an absolute monarch whose power was unrestrained by any law. Saint Robert Bellarmine answered this charge, demonstrating that the Pope's authority is by no means unlimited or arbitrary:

“Just as it is licit to resist the Pontiff that aggresses the body, it is also licit to resist the one who aggresses souls or who disturbs civil order, or above all, who attempts to destroy the Church. I say that *it is licit to resist him* by not doing what he orders and by preventing his will from being executed; it is not licit,



however, to judge, punish or depose him, since these acts are proper to a superior.”³

It shouldn't be necessary to belabor this point, but truly there are so many Catholics today who have a dangerous misunderstanding of the papacy. They seem to believe that they are somehow expressing a loyalty to Christ or to the Church by saying such things as, “I'd rather be wrong with the Pope than right without him!” Some foolish, ignorant Catholics have even said to me they would rather follow the Pope and go to hell with him rather than disobey the Pope. There is nothing Catholic about such slogans.

The great 16th Century theologian Francisco Suarez, whom Pope Paul V praised as “the Exceptional and Pious Doctor” (*Doctor Eximius et Pius*), taught:

“If [a Pope] gives an

order contrary to right customs [morality], he should not be obeyed; if he attempts to do something manifestly opposed to justice and the common good, it will be lawful to resist him....”⁴

Before Suarez, the eminent medieval theologian Cardinal Juan de Torquemada (who formulated the definitions issued at the Council of Florence) had written on the same subject:

“Were the Pope to command anything against Holy Scriptures, or the articles of faith, or the truth of the sacraments, or the commands of the natural or divine law, he *ought not to be obeyed*, but in such commands he is to be disregarded.”⁵

And before Torquemada, St. Thomas Aquinas had demonstrated the right and *duty* of the faithful (including members of the clergy) to publicly correct and even rebuke ecclesiastical superiors whose actions endanger the faith of Catholics or otherwise harm the common good of the Church. Here is St. Thomas' answer to the question, “Whether a man is *bound* to correct his prelate”:

“It must be observed, however, that if the faith were endangered, a subject *ought*

to rebuke his prelate even publicly. Hence Paul, who was Peter's subject, rebuked him in public, on account of the imminent danger of scandal concerning faith...."⁶

(St. Peter had unwittingly given scandal to the Gentile converts in Antioch by making an appearance of continuing to follow some of the Mosaic dietary laws by refusing to eat with the baptized, uncircumcised Gentiles.⁷) This teaching of St. Paul and the Catholic Church is because the Mosaic ceremonial law was – after the Crucifixion – now forbidden to be practiced by Christians. St. Thomas notes that resistance to teaching or practices against the Faith by anyone – even the Pope – is neither unlawful nor presumptuous, but is both a *duty* and an *act of charity*.

We could continue multiplying examples of such teachings by Church Doctors and Saints, but I hope that the point is made. There are no personality cults in the Catholic Church. We have no license to turn off our minds and follow an authority figure to hell. For Heaven's sake, remember Our Lord's warning (repeated many times by Sister Lucy) that when the blind follow the blind, they both fall into the pit! (And Sister

Lucy, as if it were the essence of the Third Secret, spoke of the diabolical disorientation of high churchmen in our time. We need to be careful not to follow those who knowingly follow the devil or who even unwittingly do the devil's bidding because they are themselves so confused.)

As Catholics, we sometimes have not only the right but even the *duty* to voice our loyal obedience to God and our opposition to the errors of doctrine or practice advanced by our lawful superiors who are going beyond their legitimate authority. When the Pope speaks not in line with the Ordinary and Universal Magisterium, we have to use our prudence in receiving his teaching. There is no temerity on our part in refusing an assent to any such teaching which is a novelty. And when it is manifestly at odds with prior Church teaching, we must not ever accept this erroneous and/or heretical teaching. **FC**

Footnotes: (1) Acts 5:29. (2) St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II-II, Q. 104, A. 5, ad 3. (3) St. Robert Bellarmine, *De Romano Pontifice*, Book II, Chapter 29. (4) Francisco Suarez, *De Fide*, Disp. X, Sec. VI, N. 16. (5) Juan de Torquemada, *Summa de ecclesia*, Venice, M. Tramezzium, 1561, Book 2, Chapter 49, p. 163B, emphasis added. (6) St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II-II, Q. 33, A. 4, ad. 2. (7) Cf. Galatians 2:11-14.