Fr. Perozich comments —

The following article will not deepen faith in Jesus as I intend to do with most of the posts.

Rather, it is offered to respond to the concerns of Catholics about church unity, authority, and tradition that have been exposed with the ordination of bishops for the Society of St. Pius X (SSPX) without the papal mandate.

Linked documents are highlighted in blue.

If this is not an interest for you, hit the delete key.

Can Écône Wound the Church by Preserving What Rome Has Abandoned?

Professor Daniele Trabucco challenges my defense of the SSPX consecrations. His thoughtful critique deserves an equally serious answer about authority, necessity, and Catholic unity.

CHRIS JACKSON
4 HOURS AGO



A Serious Criticism Deserves a Serious Answer

On July 2, I published an article titled "Écône Did Not Create the Crisis. It Exposed It." In that article, I defended the Society of Saint Pius X's decision to consecrate four bishops on July 1, 2026, despite the absence of a pontifical mandate.

The article subsequently appeared in Italian translation on Sabino Paciolla's website.

A few days later, Professor Daniele Trabucco published a thoughtful response entitled "The Paradox of Écône: Seeking to Save Tradition While Wounding the Catholic Form of Tradition."

I am grateful that Professor Trabucco took the argument seriously. His response avoids much of the reflexive indignation that ordinarily accompanies discussion of Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre and the Society he founded. He acknowledges the doctrinal and liturgical crisis, recognizes the genuine spiritual fruits associated with the SSPX, and correctly insists that Catholic

Tradition cannot be separated from the visible constitution of the Church.

These are substantial points, and I share his conviction that apostolic succession involves considerably more than the mechanical preservation of valid episcopal consecrations.

Our disagreement concerns what follows when ecclesiastical authority, established to preserve the Catholic faith, appears to act against the very inheritance it exists to safeguard.

Professor Trabucco believes Écône has responded to a genuine crisis through a remedy that injures the Church's apostolic constitution. I believe his argument, notwithstanding its considerable sophistication, presupposes what must first be demonstrated: that the ordinary exercise of hierarchical authority remains capable of protecting Tradition under the extraordinary conditions created since Vatican II.

That question cannot be settled by invoking the importance of ecclesiastical form. Both sides affirm its importance.

What we must determine is whether the Church's visible constitution necessarily requires Catholics to accept decisions that, in their reasoned judgment, progressively undermine the doctrinal and sacramental inheritance that constitution exists to defend.

The Distinction Between Episcopal Orders and Jurisdiction



Professor Trabucco's central objection is that the consecrations establish a continuing episcopal structure operating independently of the judgment of Peter.

He argues that a society cannot claim the right to preserve episcopal succession on its own initiative without establishing an alternative principle of ecclesiastical authority.

This is his strongest argument. It is also where his critique becomes vulnerable.

In its May 26, 2026 communiqué, the Society expressly disclaimed any intention of claiming jurisdiction or establishing a parallel ecclesiastical hierarchy.

Its declared purpose was to ensure continued access to episcopal functions necessary for its apostolate, particularly Holy Orders and Confirmation.

This distinction is fundamental.

Classical Catholic theology distinguishes the sacramental power received through episcopal consecration from the jurisdiction necessary for the government of the faithful.

A bishop may possess the fullness of Holy Orders without governing a diocese. Auxiliary bishops and bishops holding titular sees provide familiar examples.

The SSPX maintains that its bishops exercise sacramental functions without claiming ordinary territorial jurisdiction. It recognizes that jurisdiction and sacramental order are distinct, even while its position on supplied jurisdiction in particular circumstances remains disputed.

Professor Trabucco does not adequately confront this distinction.

Instead, he treats the perpetuation of episcopal succession outside the ordinary approval process as though it necessarily establishes a rival governing authority.

But the distinction matters precisely because the Society has denied claiming such authority.

Its bishops have not established competing dioceses, elected an alternative Roman Pontiff, or purported to replace the universal jurisdiction of the papacy with their own ecclesiastical government.

There remains an important objection: an unauthorized consecration may still gravely violate ecclesiastical discipline and threaten communion even without a formal claim to jurisdiction. The absence of a parallel hierarchy does not by itself establish the liceity of the act.

Nevertheless, that is a different argument from the one Professor Trabucco advances.

Professor Trabucco's deeper concern is that successive unauthorized consecrations give the Society a continuing practical independence from Rome, even without any formal claim to jurisdiction. That is a serious objection.

But he must still establish why the preservation of limited sacramental functions, under the extraordinary necessity the Society alleges, necessarily amounts to creating a rival ecclesiastical authority. The continuation of an exceptional

remedy does not, by itself, establish that the exceptional circumstances have ceased.

The two propositions cannot simply be treated as interchangeable.

Does Necessity Create Authority, or Does It Limit the Application of Law?



Professor Trabucco next contends that the existence of an ecclesiastical crisis cannot automatically authorize extraordinary measures.

I agree.

A grave injustice does not make every response proportionate and good intentions cannot transform an intrinsically evil act into a morally acceptable one.

But this is not the actual question presented by Écône.

The question is whether a grave and prolonged necessity can justify an exceptional departure from an

ecclesiastical requirement when the ordinary means of securing an essential spiritual good have become effectively unavailable.

Catholic moral theology has long recognized that possibility.

St. Thomas Aquinas, in the Summa Theologiae (II-II, q. 120), explains the virtue of epikeia, or equity. Human legislation ordinarily serves the common good, yet unforeseen circumstances may arise in which strict adherence to the letter of a law frustrates the very purpose for which it was established.

Aquinas does not authorize individuals to discard laws whenever compliance becomes inconvenient. He recognizes that the moral purpose of legislation must remain intelligible even in exceptional circumstances.

The Church's own penal law reflects this principle.

Canon 1323 recognizes necessity and grave inconvenience as circumstances that may exclude penal responsibility, subject to important limitations concerning acts intrinsically evil or harmful to souls.

Canon 1324 provides for diminished penalties in other circumstances and, in paragraph three, specifies that certain mitigating circumstances exclude the automatic incurrence of a latae sententiae penalty.

These provisions do not automatically vindicate the SSPX. Whether the claimed necessity satisfies their requirements remains a disputed question.

But their existence demonstrates that Catholic law itself refuses to identify every material violation with full penal culpability.

Professor Trabucco presents necessity chiefly as an assertion made by a particular group about its own circumstances.

Yet the SSPX has not simply announced an emergency and demanded immunity from ecclesiastical judgment.

It has advanced a sustained critique of postconciliar doctrinal developments, liturgical reforms, restrictions on the

traditional Roman rite, and the conditions imposed upon reconciliation with Rome.

One may reject that critique. It cannot be dismissed merely as subjective distress.

A proper evaluation requires examining the evidence and determining whether the normal means of preserving the Society's priestly and sacramental apostolate were realistically available.

That is precisely the examination my original article demanded.

By 2026, the Society had only two bishops remaining to serve its worldwide apostolate. Its superior general had sought an audience with Leo XIV, presented the proposed candidates to Rome, and engaged Cardinal Fernández in discussions that failed to resolve the underlying doctrinal disagreements.

The Society therefore confronted a concrete problem involving the continued administration of Holy Orders and Confirmation, not merely an abstract dissatisfaction with ecclesiastical authority.

Whether these circumstances establish canonical necessity remains disputed, but they cannot fairly be dismissed as an emergency invented for convenience.

Tradition Cannot Be Reduced to the Preferences of the Present Hierarchy



Professor Trabucco argues that Catholic Tradition possesses an essentially ecclesial form and cannot become the private property of a society claiming greater fidelity than Rome.

Again, I agree with the principle.

Tradition belongs to the Church. No priestly society may claim ownership of divine Revelation or appoint itself the supreme interpreter of the Catholic faith.

But a difficulty arises when the argument assumes that the contemporary exercise of hierarchical authority always provides a sufficiently reliable practical expression of Tradition.

The authority of the Roman Pontiff is real. It is also ordered toward a determinate purpose.

The papacy exists to preserve and transmit the apostolic deposit, not to manufacture a new doctrinal inheritance according to the theological preferences of successive pontificates.

This distinction lies at the heart of the traditionalist controversy.

Consider the treatment of the ancient Roman Mass.

In 2007, Benedict XVI acknowledged that the 1962 Missal had never been juridically abrogated. Under Summorum Pontificum, priests received substantially broader freedom to celebrate according to that missal.

Fourteen years later, Francis issued Traditionis Custodes, sharply restricting that freedom and requiring bishops to prevent the formation of new groups attached to the older liturgy.

The same sacramental inheritance was treated first as a legitimate expression of Roman Catholic continuity and subsequently as a practice requiring severe institutional containment.

This raises a profound question about authority and continuity.

When the practical policies of successive pontificates move in sharply different directions, Catholics cannot be expected to pretend that the conflict has no consequences for the stability of ecclesiastical life.

Professor Trabucco rightly insists that Tradition cannot serve as a convenient justification for private judgment.

But neither can the visible hierarchy serve as an unrestricted criterion for determining what Tradition is permitted to mean.

The Catholic understanding of authority requires continuity in the faith received from the Apostles.

To identify the present exercise of authority with the full measure of Catholic Tradition, without adequately examining its relationship to previous authoritative teaching and practice, risks the very ecclesiastical positivism Professor Trabucco wishes to avoid.

The Mandate of Tradition Is a Moral Claim, Not a Rival Papacy



In my original article, I described the declaration read at Écône in place of the customary apostolic mandate as an appeal to the mandate of Tradition.

Professor Trabucco regards this as especially dangerous.

If Tradition itself can supply a mandate, he asks, who possesses the authority to identify that mandate? If the SSPX supplies the answer, has it not made itself the final judge of its own ecclesiastical mission?

The objection deserves an exact response.

The Society's appeal to Tradition should not be understood as an assertion that divine Revelation has conferred ordinary pontifical jurisdiction upon the SSPX.

Nor does the existence of an emergency automatically create the canonical mandate normally required for episcopal consecration.

The Society acted without that mandate. It expressly acknowledged the abnormality of doing so.

Its argument is that a supreme obligation to preserve the Catholic priesthood, sacramental life, and faith can, under extraordinary circumstances, justify an act ordinarily prohibited by ecclesiastical law.

That claim is open to rigorous moral and canonical examination.

But it differs fundamentally from claiming to possess an alternative source of supreme jurisdiction.

The distinction between the moral justification of an exceptional act and the acquisition of ordinary ecclesiastical authority is essential.

Professor Trabucco's formulation tends to collapse the two.

If the Society's bishops began claiming independent jurisdiction over the universal Church or establishing diocesan structures designed to replace the Catholic hierarchy, his objections would carry considerably greater force.

But that is not what the Society has declared itself to be doing.

We may still disagree about whether the present necessity justified episcopal consecrations. Yet the disagreement should concern the actual claim made by Écône, rather than a more sweeping claim of alternative ecclesiastical sovereignty.

The Problem of Visible Unity



Professor Trabucco's deepest concern is the visible unity of the Church.

He rightly reminds readers that Catholic communion involves the profession of faith, participation in the sacraments, and hierarchical communion.

A merely intellectual attachment to Catholic doctrine cannot substitute for the visible society established by Christ.

I would go further: anyone proposing that fidelity to Tradition can dispense permanently with the divinely instituted papacy has abandoned an essential element of traditional Catholic ecclesiology.

But this recognition does not eliminate the question presented by the current crisis.

What happens when the very authorities charged with preserving the Church's doctrinal and sacramental inheritance appear to promote principles or practices at variance with that inheritance?

Catholics can disagree over the theological explanation.

Some advocate recognizing the postconciliar claimants to the papacy while resisting particular doctrinal and disciplinary innovations. Others argue that the magnitude of the apparent rupture raises more fundamental questions about the legitimacy of the governing authorities themselves.

I do not pretend that the SSPX has resolved every difficulty involved in these competing approaches.

Indeed, one of the Society's enduring tensions is precisely its effort to maintain recognition of Roman authority while resisting policies it considers destructive of Catholic Tradition.

But the existence of unresolved theological difficulties does not establish that the Society's concern is imaginary.

Nor does it prove that obedience to contested disciplinary decisions necessarily supplies an adequate answer.

The Church's visible unity is ordered toward unity in the revealed faith.

Professor Trabucco acknowledges that unity cannot legitimately be founded upon error. Yet the implications of that concession receive insufficient attention in his final judgment.

If preserving the external appearance of unity requires accepting the progressive marginalization of practices and

doctrines the Church previously defended, then the question becomes considerably more difficult than the simple application of canonical categories.

That difficulty is what Écône has exposed.

The Spiritual Fruits of Tradition Are Evidence, Even If They Are Not Proof



Professor Trabucco also challenges my emphasis upon the families, priests, religious, seminarians, and faithful gathered at Écône.

He rightly notes that spiritual vitality does not automatically establish canonical legitimacy.

History offers examples of religious communities possessing discipline, devotion, and apparent spiritual fruitfulness while remaining separated from Catholic communion.

Yet the argument I advanced was narrower.

The extraordinary devotion to the traditional Roman liturgy, the growth of traditional seminaries, and the willingness of families to endure considerable sacrifices for access to traditional Catholic worship reveal a genuine pastoral phenomenon.

These people have not assembled around the SSPX because they consider episcopal irregularity a spiritual advantage.

They are seeking the Mass, sacraments, doctrinal formation, and continuity that they believe have become precarious within ordinary diocesan structures.

Their presence does not settle the canonical question.

It does establish that the Society responds to spiritual needs that cannot be explained away through denunciations of disobedience.

And the continued existence of approved traditional communities does not entirely resolve this difficulty.

Those communities perform valuable work, but their stability remains subject to the policies of local bishops and the Roman authorities. The restrictions imposed through Traditionis Custodes have made that vulnerability unmistakable.

The Church cannot treat the desire for her own liturgical inheritance as a problem created by the faithful themselves.

A serious pastoral response must account for why so many Catholics have concluded that the most stable access to that inheritance exists outside ordinary diocesan arrangements.

Rome's Selective Severity Is More Than a Tu Quoque



Professor Trabucco characterizes my criticism of Rome's selective severity as a tu quoque argument.

If ecclesiastical authorities tolerate progressive abuses, he reasons, their failures cannot justify comparable disobedience from traditionalists.

That is correct as far as it goes.

Another person's wrongdoing cannot transform one's own wrongdoing into virtue.

But my argument concerns something more substantial than an appeal to inconsistent punishment.

It concerns whether the governing authorities themselves have contributed to the conditions that produced the necessity claimed by the Society.

If Rome restricts traditional worship, imposes disputed doctrinal conditions upon reconciliation, and refuses the sacramental arrangements considered necessary by a longstanding priestly apostolate, those decisions become directly relevant to evaluating the resulting crisis.

The Society's 2026 correspondence with Rome confirms that it sought engagement concerning the proposed consecrations. A meeting with Cardinal Fernández took place in February, and Leo appealed to the Society in June to abandon its plans.

There is also an important subsequent development. On July 11, the Society filed preliminary canonical recourse against the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith's July 2 decree, invoking Canon 1734 and maintaining that Canon 1353 suspends the decree's execution while the challenge proceeds.

On October 13, the Society announced that it had pursued further avenues of canonical recourse, observing the applicable procedures and deadlines. Its bishops are now seeking formal examination of their juridical and doctrinal objections to Rome's decrees.

The precise consequences of the appeal for penalties declared to have been incurred automatically remain disputed. Nevertheless, the Society's continued pursuit of canonical remedies is hardly the behavior of an organization that has simply repudiated ecclesiastical authority.

Rome therefore cannot fairly be accused of absolute silence or refusing every discussion.

But the essential doctrinal disagreements remained unresolved, and the Vatican's proposed continuation of dialogue was conditioned upon postponing the consecrations.

The Society judged that further delay threatened its apostolate.

Rome judged that proceeding would constitute a schismatic act.

A serious examination must consider the objective circumstances underlying both judgments.

Professor Trabucco insists upon the canonical consequences of Écône's decision. I ask that the same seriousness be directed toward the decades of ecclesiastical decisions that brought the conflict to this point.

A Question Professor Trabucco Has Not Answered



There is one question I would respectfully put to Professor Trabucco.

If the Society's understanding of the postconciliar crisis is substantially correct, what concrete remedy would he propose?

Should it accept reconciliation conditioned upon the acceptance of disputed conciliar and postconciliar teachings?

Should it cease ordaining priests when its existing bishops can no longer exercise their ministry?

Should it entrust the future of its apostolate entirely to an ecclesiastical administration that has repeatedly restricted the traditional Roman liturgy?

Or does he believe that the actual ecclesiastical crisis, however serious, can never justify an extraordinary consecration without pontifical authorization?

That final position is coherent, but it requires a defense extending beyond the ordinary legal prohibition.

It requires demonstrating why the preservation of episcopal succession in extraordinary circumstances necessarily destroys the very communion the episcopate exists to serve.

And it must explain how the preservation of Catholic sacramental life is to be secured when the ordinary arrangements are alleged to have become instruments of its progressive suppression.

I do not suggest that these are easy questions. They are among the most difficult ecclesiological questions confronting traditional Catholics.

But they cannot be avoided by restating the very norms whose application under extraordinary circumstances is being disputed.

Conclusion: The Form of the Church Exists to Preserve Her Faith



Professor Trabucco concludes that Écône sought a genuine good through a formally disordered means.

I understand the force of that judgment.

The Catholic Church is a visible, hierarchical society. Her constitution cannot be disregarded simply because particular Catholics believe themselves more faithful than their superiors.

At the same time, the purpose of ecclesiastical authority is inseparable from the preservation of divine Revelation, the sanctification of souls, and the transmission of the apostolic inheritance.

The SSPX's decision may be disputed on grounds of necessity, proportionality, prudence, and canonical law.

But its defenders are entitled to have the decision evaluated according to the concrete emergency they allege, the limited sacramental purpose they expressly identify, and the distinction between episcopal orders and ecclesiastical jurisdiction that forms an essential part of their argument.

Those distinctions do not automatically justify the consecrations. They prevent the discussion from being concluded by assuming that every unauthorized episcopal consecration necessarily creates an autonomous Church.

I remain grateful to Professor Trabucco for engaging my original argument with intellectual seriousness and an evident concern for Catholic unity.

His response identifies genuine dangers inherent in extraordinary ecclesiastical action. Yet it does not persuade me that the Society's intervention has necessarily inflicted the injury he describes.

The deeper wound is the unresolved contradiction between ecclesiastical authority and the inheritance that authority exists to preserve.

Écône did not invent that contradiction.

And the canonical condemnation of its response does not make the underlying contradiction disappear.

The Church's unity must be defended. So must the Catholic faith, the sacred priesthood, and the

sacramental traditions through which that faith has been transmitted.

The tragedy of the present crisis is that Catholics have increasingly been placed in circumstances where fidelity to these goods appears to demand choices that ordinarily should never arise.

A genuine resolution will require considerably more than the restoration of procedural obedience.

It will require a restoration of confidence that ecclesiastical authority is faithfully preserving what it received.

Until then, the question raised by Écône will remain before us: **how can Catholics preserve the Church's visible unity when the very authorities responsible for that unity appear to place its inherited faith and worship in jeopardy?**

That question deserves an answer worthy of the Catholic Tradition Professor Trabucco and I both seek to defend.

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