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Let your speech be “Yes, yes: no, no”; whatever is beyond these comes from the evil one. (Mt. 5:37)

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TWO INTERPRETATIONS OF VATICAN II? MYTH OR REALITY



More than 40 years after the Council's close, we are faced with the paradox of a Council that meant to speak a new language more comprehensible to modern man, yet which today remains the object of discussions about its correct interpretation. We have grown accustomed to hearing of the “two hermeneutics of Vatican II,” two interpretations of the conciliar documents that have been championed in the turbulent post-conciliar period with two very different, if not opposite, readings of the same documents.

The Hermeneutic of Rupture

The first reading is that of the progressivists, incarnated in Italy by the Bologna School, inheritor of the school founded by Don Giuseppe Dosseti. Theirs is the revolutionary view. This view places the emphasis on the points of rupture between Vatican II and the pre-conciliar Church, which include some doctrines (papal primacy, the powers of the bishop, the priesthood, religious freedom, ecumenism, the role of the People of God, marriage and sexual morality, liturgy) comprised under the heading of ecclesiology.

According to the revolutionary view, the Council was the occasion of a “new Pentecost,” a radical refounding of the Church by a purification of all the blemishes that disfigured its face and hindered its mission. The new Church would be a more “spiritual” Church, outlined in Pope Paul VI’s famous speech closing the Council and in the “sympathy” this speech expressed for the modern world. The ecclesiology underlying the hermeneutic of rupture adopts as its strategic axis the *laicization of the clergy* and the *clericalization of the laity* for the purpose of bringing about a utopia imagined by some to be the way to redouble the fervor and intensity of the life of faith. It consists in dissolving boundaries between clergy, religious, and laity; confusing the secular and religious worlds, to culminate in an indistinct, egalitarian, gnostically hyper-democratic reality. In this view, several theologically central and symbolically decisive aspects of the “ancient” Church are questioned: the celibacy of priests and the power of Peter and the bishops.

But it is equally obvious that in this interpretation, the new idea of “the People of God” could not have prevailed without effecting the *desacralization* of the holy sacrifice of the Mass, which, in the Tridentine Missal, was much too evocative of the majesty of God and the kingship of our Lord Jesus Christ. In the Dossettian view outlined here, the new, post-conciliar Church is conceived of as true insofar as it aligns with the values that came to the fore in the Enlightenment, the French Revolution, and in socialist and modern liberal-democratic political theories. Salvation is no longer conceived of as a supernatural reality, ultimately, the result of the action of grace and the free cooperation of the baptized with it; rather, it is seen as a process—it matters little that it is implicit—of immanentizing the Christian eschaton as a politico-social terrestrial praxis of redeeming humanity by freeing it from war, injustices, poverty, divisions, and the lack of rights or of work. Salvation thus becomes the result of man’s work, of which Jesus becomes merely the perfect symbol or human archetype, and the Church is conceived of as the conscious and most enlightened forerunner of this process.

For the hermeneutic of rupture (or revolution), the crisis in the Church after the Council is not disturbing for two reasons: like every revolutionary view of history, it is based on the conviction that the *destruction of the past* and of every sign referring to it is the indispensable condition of the inauguration of the New World Order and the full incarnation of Good in history, and that this destruction coincides with the advent of the revolutionary world dreamt of by the utopians. In the second place, the forms which are weakening or becoming extinct (ministerial priesthood, cloisters and monasticism, liturgy, confession, the authority of bishops, Catholic schools, *etc.*) were seriously imperfect and would have hindered, had they remained, the

dawning of the new *Church of the Spirit* esoterically adumbrated in the documents of Vatican II. If the Church is sick, its current crisis is in reality a sign of healing and rebirth. It is not out of bad faith that they choose not to complain or speak of it (they know there is a crisis, but tactically prefer not to say so), but because they really think that nothing negative is happening. Those who resist this transformation by defending the now pathetic “ancient forms” and their embodiment of the Faith are not containing the spread of error and iniquity so much as hindering the chiliastic advent of the Age of the Holy Spirit. Those who, like Cardinal Martini, call for a Vatican Council III are calling for an explicit, public ratification of the “new Church” announced obscurely and equivocally in the documents of Vatican II.

The hermeneutic of rupture is based inevitably upon a theology of modernist inspiration, that is to say, subject to modern philosophy, anthropology, and political philosophy. Consequently, it sees no difficulty in speaking of a rupture, a surpassing, a revolution, a change on the level of authority, theology, dogma and morals: the essence of modern culture, indeed, is the negation of the very idea of immutability and the eternity of Truth, and hence the refusal, in general of the fact that problems can be expressed in terms of truth and falsehood, that is, of non-contradiction. But if the essence of modernity is the negation of truth in general (which, if it is, is immutably and eternally equal to itself), then its essence is the negation of the Word, the negation of God—atheism. Now it is evident, on the theological plane, that the hermeneutic of rupture is indefensible, for were it correct, that would mean that for almost 2,000 years, the Church has taught error—which is impossible given its holiness and infallibility—or that a truth of faith, a dogma, can change, which is logically absurd. “Rupture” would mean that in fact the Church is not a divinely founded institution, and that the Christian faith is thus false.

Hermeneutic of Continuity

What is presented to us as the *hermeneutic of continuity* aims to propose the thesis according to which there is no break, no discontinuity, between Tradition, the Magisterium before Vatican II, and the doctrines advocated during and after the Council. According to this view, the Council must be read and interpreted in light of Tradition as a homogeneous development, as a modernization and restatement of the same truths in a language and with a cultural awareness adapted to modern man. In this view, there has been no leap, no qualitative break between the pre-conciliar and the post-conciliar Magisterium. In this view, indeed, only the application of a bad interpretation by many theologians or churchmen has deformed the spirit of Vatican II and disoriented the faithful, making them believe they were dealing with a *new Church*, and not simply a *renewed Church*. The hermeneutic of rupture is herein abstractly condemned as erroneous, without, however, disciplinary

measures being taken against its defenders by the hierarchy and the Roman authorities.

A very high price must be paid by those who decide to adopt this strategy of interpretation, for the destruction of the Church is being brought about especially by churchmen themselves. By acting in accordance with this view, slowly, day after day, even doctrines or practices that are repugnant to a truly Catholic mind will be accepted: first they are tolerated unwillingly, then they become customary, and finally they are accepted with conviction. By diminishing the combat against the novelties that destroy the Faith, by ceding interiorly on the level of cultural forms and modalities of philosophical thought which underpin the heterodox new theology, the adherents of the hermeneutic of continuity eventually become convinced that there is really nothing negative in the modernist doctrine now professed universally by entire episcopates and multitudes of priests. Faced with veritable heresies or extreme positions, they are no longer scandalized, refusing as they do to see in these positions the fruits of the Council, its inevitable culmination, and taking refuge in the myth of erroneous interpretations that deformed its meaning and spirit. It is easy to identify the doctrinal domains in which, slowly, the defenders of the hermeneutic of continuity have come round with conviction to the new doctrines: ecumenism, religious freedom, the liberal conception of the relation between Church and State, and conjugal morality.

If, in the case of the hermeneutic of rupture, the danger is loss of faith, in the case of the hermeneutic of continuity, the danger is renunciation of the principle of non-contradiction, logical rigor, correct thinking, because one must convince oneself that two things placed in a relation of contradiction are in fact the same thing, like post-conciliar ecumenism and the condemnation of ecumenism by the preceding Popes; the traditional vision of the relation between Judaism and the new heterodox conception of Judeo-Christian “dialogue”; the condemnation of religious liberty and liberalism by the Syllabus and the new Catholic-liberal conception of politics. This deterioration of thought cannot, in the long run, fail to have an effect upon the life of faith. Moreover, the proponents of the hermeneutic of continuity renounce, or rather, avoid addressing the crisis in the Church; they minimize it, they do not speak of it for the simple reason that they have excluded *a priori* that the crisis might have been caused by Vatican II. In the Catholic journals on the right, secretly opposed to the conciliar novelties but tied to the hermeneutic of continuity, excellent, worthwhile articles are to be found against Communism or abortion, but at no price will they dare to speak of the shortcomings of the Council, of the heterodoxy of numerous stances taken by the hierarchy who have followed the Council, or of the sometimes openly heretical positions of priests or Catholic theologians; the condemnation of a seriously erroneous position or

declaration by a bishop or cardinal will never occur. The crisis will be blamed on the world, secularization, or left-wing culture, while it will be forgotten that the triumph of these anti-Christian positions in countries that had been Catholic for 15 or 16 centuries is the *result* and not the *cause* of the crisis. It will be forgotten that the laws in favor of divorce, abortion, pornography, homosexuality, and against every principle of order and authority, were imposed on the countries of Christian tradition during the decade that followed Vatican II. Indeed, for the enemies of the Church, it is clear that with the Council, the Church—or rather the men of the Church who represented it then—renounced the fight against the world and its perversity. In this view, in order to avoid giving the lie to the absurd myth of continuity between Tradition and the Council, the proponents of the hermeneutic of continuity explain the documents of the Council and the post Council in such a way as to emphasize in every way possible the coherence between the Church’s constant teaching and the new doctrines professed, by extrapolating on their common elements and by never pointing out the essential differences between them, whether in the letter or the spirit, which irremediably divide Tradition and Vatican II. The crisis is an embarrassment, for it is the proof that the Council not only was not fruitful, but that it caused an unprecedented collapse in the life of faith, the sacraments, vocations, religious orders, and liturgical practice. To recognize or admit the crisis would cast doubt upon the presumed continuity between Vatican II and the previous Magisterium. The result is an impasse: either minimize or deny the crisis, or else admit it but refuse to explain it by its only likely cause, by linking it to the Council.

Why Two Hermeneutics?

We must consider the conditions that made possible the coexistence for 40 years of two radically different interpretations of Vatican II within the bosom of the Church. Normally, after a Council, a period follows in which special commissions are created with responsibility for resolving the most difficult points of interpretation, and answering the doubts and questions that a part of the episcopacy or clergy might express. Quickly, the exercise of the Church’s magisterium at every level of authority should concur to give a clear and unequivocal interpretation of the conciliar documents: *Roma locuta, causa finita est*. The papal magisterium, as the first norm of Revelation (Sacred Scripture and Tradition) ought first and foremost to fulfill this duty: *to prevent heterodox, erroneous, or heretical elements from being introduced into the theological interpretation of traditional texts, including those of a recent council*. But the “theological stabilization” of the interpretation of conciliar texts cannot go on for 40

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years and more. It seems that what we have here is an *infinite hermeneutic* and an insoluble conflict between two contradictory interpretations in the case of the Council. What is happening is clearly one of the signs—one of the most important signs—of the current crisis in the Church: in effect, the Magisterium, the proximate norm of Revelation, is becoming “the proximate norm of the proximate norm”: it has been sterilely exercising its authority on itself; it no longer interprets Revelation, but its own interpretation, all the while skeptically doubting its own competence in the matter. By a kind of transcendental, dubitative, questioning, dialogical, and circular self-absorption, instead of studying and interpreting the grand Tradition, the Church’s teaching authority is progressively transformed into a vague and uncertain gesture, perhaps fascinating culturally, but incapable of guiding and orienting the faithful. Moreover, it should be noted that, since two contradictory, mutually exclusive visions of Vatican II exist, one of the two should appear to the papal authority as not only *different* but also erroneous and dangerous to faith. It is not enough to oppose an error solely by enouncing the correct interpretation, for that is not enough to eradicate the error itself. If those who are mistaken refuse to abandon their error, it must be necessary to invoke against them the sanctions and penalties provided by the Code of Canon Law. The abnormality and perversity for the Church of having two contradictory hermeneutics coexisting for 40 years leads us a step further.

Beyond the Myth of Two Hermeneutics

So far we have considered the theme of the hermeneutic of the Second Vatican Council abstractly, stating the problem in terms of a conflict between interpretations or of opposition between differing schools of thought. But certain clarifications are necessary. In the first place, if it is true from an academic standpoint that two hermeneutics exist, it is also true that the dominant hermeneutic till now has been that of *rupture*. Indeed, given the general mood in the Church, the majority opinion among the faithful, and the convictions increasingly taking root amongst the clergy, we are painfully obliged to recognize that we are confronted with a situation in which an ensemble of doctrines increasingly unrecognizable as Catholic has spread. Heterodoxy in every domain and at every level is now so widespread that it has come to seem normal and not symptomatic of a grave pathology in the life of the Church. On many issues of paramount doctrinal importance, such as the theology of marriage and sexual morality, the vast majority of the faithful, and part of the clergy, are no longer in agreement with Catholic teaching and act according to their own heterodox ideas without regard for authority,

convinced that it is the Church that is “backward” and will eventually change its doctrine. This means that the Lutheran notion of *universal priesthood* and sectarian, protestant anarchy have become a *habitus* of the majority of Catholics. While the number of the few who profess allegiance to the hermeneutic of continuity is diminishing, the hermeneutic of rupture has in fact triumphed, at least materially, in the hearts of the Catholic people. Thus the “School of Bolgna” [or the revolutionary school] is not the cause of the doctrinal deviations: despite its ideological dominance, it merely rides the neo-modernist wave that has swept away the majority of churchmen, even at the top.

The unprecedented crisis in the Church will not be brought to an end by expatiating on the different hermeneutics and their value, but by denouncing false or heretical interpretations and excluding their authors from ecclesiastical functions or teaching. Infallibility in matters of faith and morals is not the prerogative of the theologians of Tübingen, the editorialists of *La Repubblica* or *Avvenire*, or of the “historians” of the Bolognese School, but of the Sovereign Roman Pontiff, who is the Vicar of our Lord Jesus Christ on earth, and who alone possesses the power, the authority, the means, the duty, and the assistance of the Holy Ghost, to destroy infallibly heresy and error, and like a beacon to enlighten the people of God, the new Israel, the holy Catholic Church. The fact that after 40 years the debate over the proper interpretation of Vatican II is still going on is proof that, for these 40 years, there has only been an appearance of magisterial activity. Indeed, if it is true that there are two hermeneutics in opposition, and if we admit, as we seem compelled to do, that at least one of the two is completely erroneous, there can be no authentic act of the Magisterium unless this is accompanied by or implies the condemnation of the error that must be refuted. But since the Council, these errors—beginning, symbolically, with the Council’s scandalous failure to denounce Communist tyranny—have been granted official standing beside Rome’s teaching. This fact alone suffices to belie this teaching and to reveal its interlocutory, non-authentic character, lacking as it does the will to forcefully impose itself with indisputable, universal authority over the Church militant and every man. Our most fervent wish and liveliest hope is that Peter, who since the Council *was and continues to be Peter*, no longer content himself with *being* Peter but that he *act* as Peter. In these hours of uncertainty and hope, we all have the duty to pray for this intention with renewed fervor. ☩

Matteo D’Amico (*La Tradizione Cattolica*, No.1, 2008). Translated exclusively for Angelus Press from the *Courier de Rome* (Mar. 2008, pp.1-4).

THE EROSION OF THE COUNCIL'S AUTHORITY

More than 40 years after its close, the debate about the correct interpretation of the Council continues. But an even more fundamental question must be examined: What authority can a council have when the contending interpretations of its documents involve the Church in something far more serious than academic disputes? For if the thesis of rupture with the previous magisterium were true, there would be two legitimate teaching authorities without continuity between them; it would spell the birth of a new magisterium and thus a new Church. If, on the contrary, the conservative, typically Ratzingerian thesis of continuity between the pre- and post-conciliar Church were true, it would be necessary to reconcile the irreconcilable: ecumenism, collegiality, religious liberty, and modern ecclesiology with the traditional magisterium; the dogmatic tenor of the Tridentine Mass with the dogmatic tenor of Pope Paul VI's Mass, and so on. In the first case, the Church of all time would be finished for ever, having given way to a new Church; in the second case, the Catholic Church would continue to exist while legitimately and magisterially teaching the opposite of what was taught by the traditional Magisterium. The first thesis affirms the truth about "the rupture" between the two Teaching Authorities, but it destroys the indefectibility of the Church, which would have ended and then recommenced under a new identity; the second certainly saves the indefectibility of the Church but, despite considerable efforts, it entails renunciation of the principle of *non-contradiction*.

Solution

The solution to this impasse is literally *Lefebvrian*: this conciliar magisterium, which has succeeded in imposing itself as the keystone of the whole theological, liturgical, and pastoral edifice of the Council, never availed itself of the supernatural guarantees that make the Church's magisterium what it is, as distinguished from simple affirmations having another value, another scope, and other objectives. This explanation certainly is not new; what is new, however, are the frank and important admissions of a prelate of considerable authority, the former Archbishop of Bologna and *papabile*, Cardinal Biffi. It is in light of his recent statements concerning the authority of the Council that we would like to reflect on this crucial problem. But we must first recall what the Council itself affirmed on the subject of the authority and scope of its decrees.

The Council Secretary's Notices

On several occasions the Council was obliged to examine and to express itself on the dogmatic weight of its decrees, a clear sign of the doubt and unease which the Council Fathers did not conceal, aware as they were of the decidedly atypical character of the Council. An initial official declaration of the Theological Commission on the question dated March 6, 1964, was reprised several times by the Secretary General of the Council, Msgr. Pericle Felici, in particular on November 16, 1964 (in regard to a question about the theological qualification of *Lumen Gentium*), and on November 15, 1965 (in regard to a similar question about *Dei Verbum*). We cite in full the text of this last announcement, nearly identical to the others:

The question has been raised, what ought to be the *theological qualification* of the doctrine which is set forth in the schema of the dogmatic constitution on Divine Revelation and is being voted on. The Theological Commission gave the answer to this question by referring to its own *Declaration* of March 6, 1964...:

"In view of conciliar practice and the pastoral purpose of the present Council, this sacred Synod defines matters of faith or morals as binding on the Church only when the Synod itself openly declares so.

"Other matters which the sacred Synod proposes as the doctrine of the supreme teaching authority of the Church, each and every member of the faithful is obliged to accept and embrace according to the mind of the sacred Synod itself, which becomes known either from the subject matter or from the language employed, according to the norms of theological interpretation."¹

The repeated questions of the bishops and the repeated responses about the theological qualification of the conciliar documents clearly indicate that the Council Fathers themselves were aware that they were dealing with a Magisterium *sui generis*, about which they could not but question themselves as to its obligatory character long before the Society of Saint Pius X did.

It becomes evident that we are far from the uncritical, enthusiastic acceptance that made of the Council a super-dogma, so imposing as to silence not only every objection but even the preceding magisterium of the Church. A detailed examination of the conciliar texts themselves to determine what the Council "explicitly intended to impose upon

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the Church,” yields the response that, concretely, it imposed nothing except what had been declared as such by the previous magisterium. And it could not be otherwise, “according to the spirit of this holy Synod.” The very finality of the Council, convoked with the *explicit*² intention not to define truths of faith and not to condemn error (cf. *Gaudet Mater Ecclesia*), inaugurated a magisterium with a novel method and approach, even before its content is considered: a magisterium which, in the last analysis, was not intended to constitute an act of teaching, but rather a new style of conduct towards the world, a way to present the Church in a less strictly doctrinal, more existential aspect. The goal was to impart a completely new spirit rather than to communicate dogmatic content. According to the explicit intention of the Sovereign Pontiff who initiated it, the Second Vatican Council was convoked not to define dogmas, correct errors, or condemn doctrinal deviations as in the past, but to bond with the modern world. This decision to leave aside any intention of imposing certain truths of faith meant that the Council was intended to abstain from teaching in the objective, traditional, and magisterial sense of the term.

It is because of this novel intention that the Council was deprived of the assistance of the Holy Ghost, who would have guaranteed the infallibility of its affirmations, which, in fact, are no longer teachings. It must be remarked that in this regard, it is not *a posteriori* that Vatican II appears bereft of infallibility, that is, by the fact that errors can be found in its documents; rather, it is the fact that it deprived itself *a priori* of this infallibility because of an intention objectively not in conformity with the intention of a Church council, hence allowing the introduction of error. In other words, our argumentation does not consist in an examination of the errors of the Council, in light of which we desire to discuss its authority, in the measure that it is not possible for there to be contradictions in the assisted infallible magisterium: we do not wish to adopt a behavior towards the magisterium equivalent to that of the Protestants towards Sacred Scripture, that is to say, a sort of free examination; rather, we simply wish to verify if the Council actually constitutes an act of the infallible Magisterium, or whether it involves something else.

The Assertions of Cardinal Biffi

In his recent autobiographical work, Cardinal Biffi, through his extremely lucid and balanced judgments on the Council, authoritatively confirms the reading which to us seems the only one possible.

John XXIII aspired after a council that would obtain the renewal of the Church not by condemnations, but by the “remedy of mercy.” By refraining from reproving errors, the Council *by that very fact* avoided formulating definitive teach-

ings that would be obligatory for all. And in fact, this original indication was continually followed.³

The Cardinal’s remark is fundamental, especially the weight of this “by that very fact” contained in this statement. Why should this be so? Because to affirm a notion while categorically refusing to deny the opposite notion precludes the will to consider the enounced notion as definitive and obligatory for all minds. This does not exclude the possibility that subsequently such a notion might be imposed peremptorily (as is the case for the conciliar documents after 40 years), but this imposition would not be the consequence of the intrinsic and absolute truth of the notion, which would imply “by that very fact” (that is to say, by a logical exigency) the condemnation of the opposite, but would be due to other, more or less valid, contingent motives: dialogue with the modern world, ecumenical relations, international relations (cf. the case of the “silence” about Communism), the politically correct, *etc.* It is thus clear that this way of teaching is alien to that traditionally present in the ecumenical councils of the Catholic Church, which consisted in clearly “formulating definitive teachings obligatory for all.” Pope John XXIII had no explicit intention of so obliging. To express this difference of intention from the traditional intentions of the Church, the designation “pastoral council” was adopted. Cardinal Biffi comments on this nomenclature as follows:

...in spite of myself, I felt rising within me some difficulties. The notion [pastoral council] struck me as ambiguous; and the emphasis with which “pastorality” was attributed to the sitting Council, a little suspicious: did they mean to imply that the previous councils had not had been “pastoral” or that they were not “pastoral” enough? Was it not pastoral to affirm clearly that Jesus of Nazareth is God and consubstantial with the Father, as they defined at Nicaea? Was it not pastoral to clarify the reality of the Eucharistic presence and the sacrificial nature of the Mass, as they did at Trent? Was it not pastoral to set forth the primacy of Peter in its full value and with all its implications, as was taught by Vatican Council I?

Clearly, the explanation of truth and the condemnation of error cannot but be pastoral in that they confirm the faithful in the Faith and shelter them from heresy and error. Thus, as the Cardinal points out, every council is pastoral. For what reason did they wish to define Vatican II as a pastoral council? “One understands,” continues the Cardinal, “that the declared intention was to study the best ways and the most effective means of reaching the hearts of men without diminishing their positive consideration for the traditional teaching of the Church.” This last affirmation comprises two fundamental elements: **1)** the declared intention of the Church was “original,” extraneous to the safeguard of the *depositum* and the condemnation of errors; **2)** the avowal that Vatican II (and John XXIII, who convoked it) did not want to “diminish positive consideration for the traditional magisterium of the Church” signifies that this Council is placed beside the tradition of the ecumenical councils,

and not necessarily in continuity with it. Vatican II was limited to not diminishing the Church's traditional magisterium, rather than being in perfect continuity with it. We can deduce that a particular intention characterized the Council different from the will to impose a teaching.

The Intention to Teach: The Theological Viewpoint

Let us take, for example, the case of the inspiration of Holy Scripture. What particularly distinguishes the Catholic point of view from the Islamic point of view is the fact that divine inspiration in no wise substitutes itself for the faculties of the authors of Sacred Scripture, as would be the case if their writing were considered to be a kind of dictation. On the contrary, divine intervention supposes and uses their human capacities. We meet with the Thomistic principle according to which the first cause (the divine inspiration) conserves all the characteristics proper to the secondary cause (the human author) such that the latter is, in his proper order, a true cause. Now let us think of a sacramental action. The Church teaches that the minister of the sacrament must have the intention, even if it is not actual, to do what the Church does, that is to say, to ordain his action to the end for which Jesus Christ instituted it, so that without this intention, the sacrament is invalid. If this principle holds for the sacraments (*munus sanctificandi*), all the more true is it for the magisterium (*munus docendi*). Indeed, whereas in the case of inspiration or the sacramental economy, man is merely an instrument, in the case of the magisterium, the Catholic hierarchy acts in a way so as to be simply "assisted" to be preserved from error. In other words, the hierarchy is not "inspired," as in the case of the authors of Holy Writ; this means that in the case of the hierarchy, God leaves men a much wider sphere of freedom than exists in the case of scriptural inspiration or the administration of the sacraments. Teaching the Faith is accomplished by ministers ordained to that end. These ministers are human beings and they keep their proper human characteristics. If then the pope or a council in the act of presenting a teaching does not intend to teach it as something revealed by Jesus Christ, as always taught by the Church, or if they do not intend to authoritatively demand assent, there seems to be no reason why God should guarantee the help promised to the Church Teaching when it has no intention of teaching. This human will is a condition both necessary and sufficient for guaranteeing its preservation from error by the Holy Ghost. The key Thomistic principle comes into play, according to which grace does not destroy nature but perfects it. In His assistance to the Church, God does not replace the mediations of men, but supposes them in the integrity of their faculties and uses them by elevating them above simple human possibilities. The acts of the Magisterium corroborate this understanding. Let us take for example

the document of Vatican Council I that defines the Sovereign Pontiff's infallibility. It affirms:

...the Roman Pontiff, when he speaks *ex cathedra*, that is, when carrying out the duty of the pastor and teacher of all Christians in accord with his supreme apostolic authority he explains a doctrine of faith or morals to be held by the universal Church, through the divine assistance promised him in blessed Peter, operates with that infallibility with which the divine Redeemer wished that His church be instructed in defining doctrine on faith and morals; and so such definitions of the Roman Pontiff from himself, but not from the consensus of the Church, are unalterable.⁴

We can thus deduce that infallibility presupposes the pope's free will to exercise his function of supreme doctor of the Church by binding the Church, that is, by imposing upon every mind the content of its definitions. This is what we call teaching; when the pope does not intend to exercise this function, the assistance promised him does not come into play. Another text, cited this time from the Ordinary Magisterium, affirms:

But if the Supreme Pontiffs in their official documents purposely pass judgment on a matter till then under dispute, it is obvious that that matter, according to the mind and will of the Pontiffs, cannot any longer be considered a question open to discussion among theologians.⁵

We again find a reference to intention expressed in this passage; absent an intention to define, to decide definitively, or to condemn anything, infallibility is not guaranteed.

The Intentions of the Council

In this article we cannot examine everything that researchers have learned about the direction John XXIII intended to impart to the Council; however, we will summarize the declared intentions of the Council so that we can understand that they objectively differ from the Church's intentions. These are John XXIII's intentions:

1) *Aggiornamento*: "The salient point of this Council is not, therefore, a discussion of one article or another of the fundamental doctrine of the Church," but to study and expound doctrine "through methods of research and through the literary forms of modern thought."⁶

2) The unity of the human race: "...such is the aim of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, which... prepares, as it were, and consolidates the path toward that unity of mankind which is required as a necessary foundation, in order that the earthly may be brought to the resemblance of that heavenly city ..."⁷

3) The non-condemnation of errors: "Nowadays, however, the Spouse of Christ prefers to make use of the medicine of mercy rather than that of severity. She considers that she meets the needs of the present day by demonstrating the validity of her teaching rather than by condemnations."⁸

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The declarations of Paul VI are equally clear:


1) The self-awareness of the Church: "The time has come...when the truth concerning the Church of Christ must be explored, arranged, and expressed more and more, not perhaps in the solemn formulas called dogmatic definitions, but rather in declarations by which the Church may declare with greater clarity and understanding what she understands about herself."⁹

2) Ecumenical intention: "...the convocation of this Council...tends towards an ecumenism seeking to be total, universal."¹⁰

3) Dialogue with the contemporary world: "Let the world know that the Church regards it with a profound understanding and genuine admiration, and is sincerely disposed not to subjugate it but to serve it; not to depreciate it, but to enhance its dignity; not to condemn it, but to sustain and save it."¹¹

Conclusion

For teachings of the Magisterium to engage the guarantee of infallibility, the intention with which they are pronounced is an essential factor. An act of the Magisterium must be made with the intention of teaching a truth of faith or morals, or condemning error, or settling a controversy, *etc.* Using Cardinal Biffi's recent contribution, we have shown that the Council's intention was different from the habitual intention of Ecumenical Councils of the Catholic Church. To us the conclusion seems obvious: It is legitimate to question the Council. All of contemporary theology, as well as the encyclicals of the last Pope, has been built upon the shifting sands of the Second Vatican Council. It has not been built on the rock of Peter because Peter did not wish to teach, but to propose; he did not wish to oblige, but to dialogue; he did not wish to avail himself of the guarantees our Lord promised him to confirm his

brethren when he teaches. Yet this is what man today desperately needs. 

Fr. David Pagliarini, SSPX (*La Tradizione Cattolica*, No. 1, 2008). Fr. Pagliarini is the District Superior of Italy for the Society of St. Pius X. Translated exclusively for Angelus Press from the *Courrier de Rome* (Mar. 2008, pp.4-7).

¹ English version: *The Documents of Vatican II*, Walter M. Abbott, S.J., general editor (New York: The America Press, 1966), pp.97-98.

² It is necessary to distinguish between the explicit intention, openly declared, and the secret intention, of which God alone is judge. Of course, we can only speak of the first.

³ Giacomo Biffi, *Memorie e digressioni di un Italiano Cardinale* (Sienna, 2007).

⁴ Vatican Council I, *Pastor Aeternus*, July 18, 1870 (Denzinger, *The Sources of Catholic Dogma*, 1839).

⁵ Pius XII, *Humani Generis*, August 12, 1950, §20.

⁶ John XXIII, Pope John's Opening Speech to the Council, *The Documents of Vatican II*, p.715.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p.718.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p.716.

⁹ Paul VI, Speech Opening the Council's Second Session, September 29, 1963.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

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