

# ON THE PASTORAL NATURE OF VATICAN II

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June 2022 — mostholytrinityseminary.org

*This article addresses the objection that Vatican II would be “merely pastoral” and therefore not binding, and that it could teach error, even in matters of faith.*

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## FIRST ARTICLE

### THE “PASTORAL NATURE” OF VATICAN II DOES NOT EXCLUDE ITS BINDING CHARACTER

#### **1. Objection: “Vatican II was merely a pastoral council.”**

By the term “pastoral council” is sometimes understood the idea that Vatican II (1) did not intend to define any new doctrine, and that, consequently (2) Vatican II is not infallible. It was intended to be an effort to present the Catholic doctrine in a way suited to modern man.

To this is answered, first, that Vatican II has published both “pastoral constitutions” and “dogmatic constitutions.” *Lumen gentium*, for example, is a dogmatic constitution, whose open aim was to further the presentation of ecclesiology begun at the 1870 Vatican Council, and to deepen the Church’s understanding of the role of the bishops in the Church. No one denies this fact. Hence it clearly taught dogmatic doctrine. The fact that John XXIII desired to give it a pastoral character does not contradict its dogmatic nature, as we shall explain when commenting on John XXIII’s words.

We refer to the chapter dedicated to the

indefectibility of the Church for a deeper explanation of the doctrine of the Church on the magisterium, its authority and its exercise. Let it suffice to repeat a few points, in order to properly assess what sort of authority the Second Vatican Council would enjoy, according to traditional theological principles of ecclesiology.

#### **2. A brief reminder of Catholic doctrine on the magisterium of the Church.**

Leo XIII taught, in his encyclical *Satis cognitum*:

Christ instituted in the Church a living, authoritative and permanent Magisterium, which by His own power He strengthened, by the Spirit of Truth He taught, and by miracles confirmed. He willed and ordered, under the gravest penalties, that its teachings should be received as if they were His own.

The power of magisterium of the Church is not a power to reveal new doctrines, but rather it is the power to safeguard the deposit of revelation (contained in Sacred Scripture

and Tradition), to interpret it, to define it, to explain it. The Church can therefore infallibly judge that such or such a doctrine is contained in the deposit of revelation. She may also condemn a doctrine as contrary to it.

We must distinguish the *pontifical magisterium*, which is the exercise of the power to teach by the Pope alone, from the *universal magisterium*, which is the power to teach, exercised by the entire *Ecclesia docens* (“teaching Church”), namely by the bishops together with, and submitted to the pope.

In this latter category, we must again distinguish the magisterium exercised in a daily, ordinary, way, and the magisterium exercised solemnly in ecumenical councils.

The *universal ordinary magisterium* of the pope and the bishops is exercised when they are dispersed in the whole world and they teach the Church with authority, each bishop in his diocese, united together under the supreme authority of the Roman Pontiff.

The *extraordinary universal magisterium* of the bishops, which is to say: the *ecumenical councils*, is exercised when all the bishops of the world are solemnly gathered together by the authority of the Roman Pontiff, and as one moral body they judge questions of doctrine and discipline for the universal church.

It is important to keep in mind that **the supreme magisterium of the Church is infallible, whether it be exercised in an ordinary or extraordinary manner, and whether it be exercised by the pope alone or by the entire *Ecclesia docens* (“teaching Church”).**

### **3. The teaching of ecumenical councils is infallible.**

This is true because:

1) An ecumenical council, confirmed by the authority of the Roman Pontiff, represents the supreme power of the teaching Church, which is infallible.

2) If an ecumenical council were to err, the whole Church would be led into error, since there is no appeal possible from the definitive judgment of an ecumenical council on matters of faith.

3) The testimony of Tradition has always shown the judgments of ecumenical councils to be irreversible, given under the assistance of the Holy Ghost, whose acceptance has been imposed on all as a criteria of membership in the Catholic Church.

As a consequence, theologians explain that whatever is imposed in a definite way by an ecumenical council is infallible; whatever is imposed to all Catholics without any appeal possible is infallible.

What are not infallibly proposed, however, are discussions had during the Council, arguments brought forth in defense of the proposed doctrine, examples, and things said in passing.

### **4. The absence of anathemas, usually pronounced by ecumenical councils to define the condemnation of heresies, is not a proof of lack of infallibility.**

In an ecumenical council both the “chapters” (*capita*) and the “canons” (*canones*) are infallible. Let us explain. Traditionally, ecumenical councils present Catholic doctrine in a twofold manner. a) They give a positive presentation and explanation of a doctrine, arranged in “chapters”; and b) they also define doctrine in

a negative way, by the fulmination of anathemas against opposed errors (these are called the “canons”). Thus both the Council of Trent and the 1870 Vatican Council have clearly followed this pattern. The doctrine of the Church is first presented in a number of chapters, defining the doctrine, explaining it, giving arguments to support it. Then, at the end of the documents, a number of canons condemn ideas opposed to the doctrine which was just defined in the chapters. Both chapters and canons, however, are infallible, and always have been considered so by the Fathers, doctors, and theologians.

Hence the fact that Vatican II did not publish any formula of anathema (no “canon”) does not in itself mean that it would not be infallible, since it did publish a number of chapters, presented in different dogmatic constitutions.

**5. The different documents published by Vatican II have a traditional confirmation “in the Holy Ghost” by “the apostolic power given by Christ.”**

The documents published by Vatican II end with solemn words of this kind:

Each and all these items which are set forth in this dogmatic Constitution have met with the approval of the Council Fathers. And We by the apostolic power given Us by Christ together with the Venerable Fathers in the Holy Spirit, approve, decree and establish it and command that what has thus been decided in the Council be promulgated for the glory of God.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Thus are indeed the words concluding the promulgation of the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*: “Haec omnia et singula quae in hac Constitutione dogmatica edicta sunt placuerunt Patribus. Et Nos, Apostolica a Christo

Such a solemn conclusion is very characteristic of a document issued by an ecumenical council, which is a solemn gathering of the entire Teaching Church, to whom was promised the assistance of the Holy Ghost and the supreme authority of Christ: “He that heareth you, heareth me” (Lk. X, 16). Such solemn decrees have always been considered to be protected from error by the Holy Ghost.

**6. Certain comments of John XXIII, Paul VI, and of the Theological Commission, are misunderstood by some.**

Some people, especially from the Recognize-and-Resist camp, have taken certain quotes from either John XXIII, Paul VI, and the Theological Commission of Vatican II, out of context, to deny practically any authority to Vatican II, and certainly to deny that it should be protected by the assistance of the Holy Ghost.

This false claim has already been refuted by a number of authors who wrote in defense of Vatican II. And it is continually being refuted by the very existence of the Society of Saint Pius X (SSPX), among others, since their very existence is proof positive of the fact that Vatican II is so obligatory inside the canonical structures of the official “Church” that you cannot remain inside of those structures while rejecting the novelties of Vatican II. It is a very well established and experienced fact that any diocesan priest who begins to question the teaching of Vatican II

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Nobis tradita potestate, illa una cum Venerabilibus Patribus, in Spiritu Sancto approbamus, decernimus ac statuimus et quae ita synodaliter statuta sunt ad Dei gloriam promulgari jubemus. Romae, apud S. Petrum, die XXI mensis Novembris anno MCMLXIV.” (A.A.S. LVII, 1965, n. 1, p. 67).

is swiftly punished, and if unrepentant, he is eventually excommunicated.

In order to refute what could be considered a traditionalist myth, let us go through different interventions of John XXIII and Paul VI, so as to understand what authority Vatican II holds, in their view.

### **7. The opening address of Vatican II, by John XXIII, on October 11<sup>th</sup>, 1962.**

In the opening address<sup>2</sup> given on October 11<sup>th</sup>, 1962, John XXIII clearly makes the point that the Second Vatican Council will be the twenty-first ecumenical council of the Church. He clearly says that it is about to “affirm, once again, the continuity of the ecclesiastical magisterium”, and “to present this magisterium in an extraordinary mode to all men.”<sup>3</sup> He clearly classifies the ecumenical council as “extraordinary magisterium of the Church.”<sup>4</sup>

John XXIII clearly establishes “the safeguarding and promotion of doctrine” as the “principal task of the council.”<sup>5</sup> He says in unmistakable terms:

The supreme interest of the Ecumenical Council is that the sacred deposit of Christian doctrine be guarded and taught

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<sup>2</sup> Allocution *Gaudet Mater Ecclesia* given on October 11<sup>th</sup>, 1962. A.A.S. LIV, 1962, n. 14, pp. 786-795.

<sup>3</sup> “... ut iterum Magisterium Ecclesiasticum, numquam deficiens et ad finem usque temporum perseverans, affirmaretur; quod quidem Magisterium... per hoc ipsum Concilium omnibus hominibus, quotquot in orbe terrarum sunt, extraordinario modo, in praesenti exhibetur.” *Gaudet Mater Ecclesia*, n.2.

<sup>4</sup> “Testimonia extraordinarii hujus Magisterii Ecclesiae, scilicet universalium Synodorum...” *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> “Praecipuum Concilii munus: doctrina tuenda ac promovenda.” *Ibid.* 5.

in a more effective way.<sup>6</sup>

The first mention of the “pastoral nature” of the Council comes in the section of the allocution entitled “How should doctrine be promoted today.”<sup>7</sup> It is therefore very clear that the “pastoral” character of the Council should not be taken as being in opposition to its being doctrinal. On the contrary, John XXIII explains:

But at present it is necessary that the whole christian doctrine, with all of its parts, be received by all in our times with a new eagerness, with a serene and calm mind, taught in that accurate way of formulating in words and expressing, which shines forth particularly from the acts of the Council of Trent and of the first Vatican Council.<sup>8</sup>

Hence, what John XXIII calls a magisterium of “pastoral nature” is that the same doctrine be presented authoritatively by the Church, but in a manner more suited to our times and to modern man, so that it may be better appreciated and understood:

For one thing is the deposit of Faith itself, or the truths which our venerable doctrine contains; and another thing is the mode in which they are presented, in

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<sup>6</sup> “Quod Concilii Oecumenici maxime interest, hoc est, ut sacrum christianae doctrinae depositum efficaciore ratione custodiatur atque proponatur.” *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> “Qua ratione hodie doctrina promovenda sit.” *Ibid.* 6.

<sup>8</sup> “Verumtamen in praesenti oportet ut universa doctrina christiana, nulla parte inde detracta, his temporibus nostris ab omnibus accipiatur novo studio, mentibus serenis atque pacatis, tradita accurata illa ratione verba concipiendi et in formam redigendi, quae ex actis Concilii Tridentini et Vaticani Primi praesertim elucet.” *Ibid.*

the same sense, however, and in the same understanding. And indeed, the greatest importance must be given to this manner [of presenting doctrine], and, if necessary, much patient work should be applied to it. This means that those ways of presenting things must be adopted, that are more in accordance with a magisterium that is primarily pastoral in character.<sup>9</sup>

John XXIII consequently decides to propose doctrine without solemnly condemning the opposed errors:

The Church has always opposed these errors, and she has frequently condemned them with the greatest severity. But at the present time, the Spouse of Christ prefers to make use of the medicine of mercy rather than making use of severity. She considers that she meets the needs of the present day by showing the validity of her teaching rather than by condemnations.<sup>10</sup>

### **8. Explanations given by the Theological Commission of Vatican II on March 6th, 1964, and November 16<sup>th</sup>, 1964.**

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<sup>9</sup> “Est enim aliud ipsum depositum Fidei, seu veritates, quae veneranda doctrina nostra continentur, aliud modus, quo eadem enuntiantur, eodem tamen sensu eademque sententia. Huic quippe modo plurimum tribuendum erit et patienter, si opus fuerit, in eo elaborandum; scilicet eae inducendae erunt rationes res exponendi, quae cum magisterio, cujus indoles praesertim pastoralis est, magis congruant.”

<sup>10</sup> “Quibus erroribus Ecclesia nullo non tempore obstitit, eos saepe etiam damnavit, et quidem severitate firmissima. Ad praesens tempus quod attinet, Christi Sponsae placet misericordiae medicinam adhibere, potius quam severitatis arma suscipere; magis quam damnando, suae doctrinae vim uberius explicando putat hodiernis necessitatibus esse consulendum.”

These explanations were given during the Council and should therefore help to clarify the Council’s intention. In addition, the notifications given on November 16<sup>th</sup>, 1964, were published as an appendix to the official Latin version of the Constitution on the Church, *Lumen gentium*, promulgated a few days later, on November 21<sup>st</sup>, 1964.<sup>11</sup> It clearly shows the importance of these notifications.

It reads as follows:

#### **“Notificationes” given by the Secretary General of the Council at the 123<sup>rd</sup> General Congregation, November 16<sup>th</sup>, 1964.**

A question has arisen regarding the precise theological note which should be attached to the doctrine that is set forth in the Schema *De Ecclesia* [“on the Church”] and is being put to a vote.

The Theological Commission has given the following response regarding the *Modi* [that is, the *modes* or *corrections* suggested by the Council Fathers] that have to do with Chapter III of the *De Ecclesia* Schema: “As is self-evident, the Council’s text must always be interpreted in accordance with the general rules that are known to all.”

On this occasion the Theological Commission makes reference to its Declaration of March 6<sup>th</sup>, 1964, the text of which we transcribe here:

“Taking conciliar custom into consideration and also the pastoral purpose of the present Council, the sacred Council defines as binding on the Church only those things in matters of faith and morals which it shall openly declare to be binding. The rest of the things which the sacred Council sets forth, inasmuch as they are the teaching

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<sup>11</sup> A.A.S. LVII, 1965, n. 1, p. 72.

of the Church's supreme magisterium, must be accepted and embraced by each and every one of Christ's faithful according to the mind of the sacred Council. The mind of the Council becomes known either from the matter treated or from its manner of speaking, in accordance with the norms of theological interpretation."<sup>12</sup>

The norms of theological interpretation are that an ecumenical council is infallible when teaching faith and morals, although examples or arguments brought forth in the exposition of doctrine contained in the chapters may not be covered by the same guarantee.

The same criteria applied by theologians to dogmatic constitutions of past Councils, such as the constitution *Dei Filius* of the 1870 Vatican Council, should be applied exactly in the same way to the dogmatic constitutions

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<sup>12</sup> "Notificationes factae ab Exc.mo Secretario Generali Ss. Concilii in Congregatione Generali CXXIII diei XVI Nov. MCMLXIV.

Quaesitum est quaenam esse debeat qualificatio theologica doctrinae, quae in Schemate de Ecclesia exponitur et suffragationi subicitur.

Commissio Doctrinalis quaesito responsionem dedit, in expendendis Modis spectantibus ad caput tertium Schematis de Ecclesia, hisce verbis:

'Ut de se patet, textus Concilii semper secundum regulas generales, ab omnibus cognitae, interpretandus est'.

Qua occasione Commissio Doctrinalis remittit ad suam Declarationem 6 martii 1964, cuius textum hic transcribimus:

'Ratione habita moris conciliaris ac praesentis Concilii finis pastoralis, haec S. Synodus ea tantum de rebus fidei vel morum ab Ecclesia tenenda definit, quae ut talia aperte ipsa declaraverit.

Cetera autem, quae S. Synodus proponit, utpote Supremi Ecclesiae Magisterii doctrinam, omnes ac singuli christifideles excipere et amplecti debent iuxta ipsius S. Synodi mentem, quae sive ex subiecta materia sive ex dicendi ratione innotescit, secundum normas theologicae interpretationis'."

of Vatican II, such as *Lumen gentium*. That is the clear meaning of these notifications, and is confirmed by the attitude of the official subsequent "magisterium" towards it.

**9. On November 4<sup>th</sup>, 1965, Paul VI explicitly recognized that Vatican II had already at that point issued many points of extraordinary magisterium.**

The very nature of an ecumenical council makes its teaching to belong to what we have described as *extraordinary* or *solemn* magisterium, which is always infallible when teaching faith and morals. And Paul VI himself seems to have acknowledged this fact. Thus, on November 4th, 1965, he declared:

And first let worthy thanksgivings be presented to Almighty God, who, throughout the entire celebration of the Council, has never ceased to be present by his supernatural help and the abundance of heavenly lights. Indeed, if we consider the immense amount of work already accomplished by the Council, we are really taken by admiration, either on account of **the many points of doctrine which have been proposed by the extraordinary magisterium of the Church**, or on account of the norms of discipline wisely issued... [emphasis added]<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> "Ac primum dignae Omnipotenti Deo gratiae referantur, qui toto Concilii celebratione tempore, superna ope sua caelestiumque luminum copia numquam destitit Oecumenicae Synodo praesens adesse. Revera, si spectamus immensam laboris molem, quam Concilium hucusque absolvit, admiratione sane percellimur, sive ob compura doctrinae capita a Magisterio Ecclesiae extraordinario proposita, sive ob disciplinae normas sapienter impertitas, quae quidem, ecclesiastica traditione fideliter servata, actioni Ecclesiae nova patere jubent ininera, et ad

It cannot be denied that at that point Paul VI clearly acknowledged the work of Vatican II to be the work of the extraordinary magisterium of the Church. It is important to realize that the dogmatic constitution *Lumen gentium* had been already published one year earlier, on November 21<sup>st</sup>, 1964. Clearly, therefore, *Lumen gentium* is one of the documents<sup>14</sup> which Paul VI qualified as containing “many points of doctrine proposed by the extraordinary magisterium of the Church.”

**10. Homily given on December 7<sup>th</sup>, 1965, at the last session of Vatican II, in which Paul VI declares that no doctrine has been defined by an extraordinary pronouncement.**

We have already seen that Paul VI considered the documents of Vatican II to be part of the extraordinary magisterium of the Church, and he will reiterate this later on, as we shall see. Paul VI does affirm, however, that Vatican II did not promulgate any new dogma in an extraordinary manner.

This could seem contradictory, but Paul VI wants to make a distinction between the *mode* or *manner* in which the magisterium is exercised by Vatican II, and its *dogmatic authority*. As an ecumenical council, Vatican II is meant to be an extraordinary event of the life of the Church, and thus an *extraordinary* exercise of its magisterium. But, Paul VI claims, Vatican II does not define any new doctrine, and merely presents Catholic doctrine in a new way adapted to the

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animarum bonum procul dubio summopere conferent.” (Apostolic exhortation of November 4<sup>th</sup>, 1965. A.A.S. LVII, 1965, n. 13, p. 866).

<sup>14</sup> Another document which should be mentioned, promulgated the same day as *Lumen gentium* (Nov. 21<sup>st</sup>, 1964), is the decree on ecumenism, *Unitatis redintegratio*.

modern world (“pastoral”), and thus it would not be classified as containing any *extraordinary definition*, but merely an *ordinary* level of teaching.

What is disputed, then, is exactly how to understand this novelty<sup>15</sup> introduced by Paul VI. Some have relegated all the teaching of Vatican II as being *merely authentic magisterium*, that is, a teaching which, although obligatory, is never infallible. But this is clearly false, on many accounts.

Indeed, even the ordinary magisterium is infallible in teaching the faith, were it to merely teach things already defined. Even if the Church does not define any new dogma, she is infallible in transmitting and teaching the faith to every generation, in the entire world. Certainly, then, must she be infallible in such a solemn event as an ecumenical council, even if she is only repeating already defined doctrines. It is inconceivable that the Church, in her ordinary teaching of the Faith, whether through encyclicals of the Roman Pontiff, or even through catechisms approved in the entire world, could impose as binding the consciences something which would contradict previous definitions of the faith. Because the Church would then be binding the consciences of all Catholics to something contrary to the faith. The Church would become a means of damnation, which is

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<sup>15</sup> We say that it is a novelty, since the teaching of ecumenical councils has always been classified by theologians as *extraordinary* magisterium, which is in itself infallible and definitive, although examples and arguments presented to support a doctrine might not themselves be infallible, as explained above. Even if an ecumenical council is merely repeating already defined doctrine, it is traditionally classified as *extraordinary* magisterium, and is certainly infallible. Nor was it ever called *ordinary* magisterium when it did not define any new dogma.

absolutely impossible.

Let us rather apply traditional theological principles to assess the dogmatic value of Vatican II.

To give a comparison with the 1870 Vatican Council, we may say that Vatican II did not issue any solemn profession of dogma such as was promulgated in the dogmatic constitution *Pastor Aeternus*, which defined as a solemn dogma papal infallibility, but rather, that Vatican II teaches the faith in a way similar to the manner accomplished by the other constitution of the 1870 Vatican Council, *Dei Filius*, namely, by giving a rule of faith, without specifically proposing a particular point as a newly defined dogma.

Here is the relevant passage of Paul VI's homily:

Now it is helpful to remark that although the Church did not want to define any point of doctrine by extraordinary dogmatic pronouncements in her magisterium, she has nonetheless on many questions proposed with authority her doctrine, to which norm men are today bound to conform their conscience and their behavior.<sup>16</sup>

Paul VI is not at all saying that “Vatican II is not infallible and can be dismissed,” but on the contrary he actually positively declares that one is bound to conform and hold to the Vatican II doctrine, even though it did not

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<sup>16</sup> “Nunc vero animadvertere juvat, Ecclesiam per suum magisterium, quamvis nullum doctrinae caput sententiis dogmaticis extraordinariis definire voluerit, nihilominus circa plurimas quaestiones cum auctoritate doctrinam proposuisse suam, ad cuius normam homines hodie tenentur conscientiam suam suamque agendi rationem conformare.” (Homilia, December 7<sup>th</sup>, 1965. A.A.S. LVIII, 1966, n. 1, p. 57).

define any new dogma. And the teaching of an ecumenical council, which is made obligatory to hold by the faithful, is certainly guaranteed by the assistance of the Holy Ghost, which is also clearly taught by Paul VI, as we shall later see.

**11. On January 12<sup>th</sup>, 1966, Paul VI ascribed the authority of the “supreme ordinary magisterium” of the Church to Vatican II.**

In a general audience, held on January 12<sup>th</sup>, 1966, Paul VI first recalls that the main goal of the Council was to reaffirm the doctrine of the Church in a manner suited to present times. He thus declares:

It is a great act of the ecclesiastical magisterium; and whoever adheres to the Council thereby recognizes and honors the magisterium of the Church.<sup>17</sup>

Paul VI then refers to the same rules given above, as to what authority should be given to the teachings of the Council:

There are those who ask what is the authority, the theological qualification, that the Council wished to attribute to its teachings, knowing that it has avoided giving solemn dogmatic definitions, engaging the infallibility of the ecclesiastical magisterium. And the answer is known to those who remember the conciliar declaration of March 6<sup>th</sup>, 1964, repeated on November 16<sup>th</sup>, 1964: given the pastoral character of the Council, it avoided pronouncing in an

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<sup>17</sup> “Esso è un grande atto del magistero ecclesiastico; e chi aderisce al Concilio riconosce ed onora con ciò il magistero della Chiesa.” (Paolo VI, *Udienza Generale*, Mercoledì, 12 gennaio 1966, available on the Vatican website vatican.va).



extraordinary way dogmas endowed with the note of infallibility; but it has nevertheless endowed its teachings with the authority of the supreme ordinary magisterium, which ordinary and so clearly authentic magisterium must be accepted docilely and sincerely by all the faithful, according to the mind of the Council regarding the nature and purposes of the individual documents.<sup>18</sup>

Nobody can deny that Paul VI considers the magisterium of Vatican II to be *extraordinary* magisterium, as we have already shown, in the sense that it is the teaching of an ecumenical council, which is an *extraordinary* way of teaching the faith. What Paul VI meant in this audience therefore is that the authority of Vatican II is the same as that of the supreme ordinary magisterium of the Church, which although it does not solemnly and infallibly declare any new dogmatic pronouncement, yet it proposes the faith already defined by the Church (in a new, pastoral way, adapted to modern man, allegedly). And in doing so, the Church is infallible.

It is indeed very important to remember

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<sup>18</sup> “Vi è chi si domanda quale sia l’autorità, la qualificazione teologica, che il Concilio ha voluto attribuire ai suoi insegnamenti, sapendo che esso ha evitato di dare definizioni dogmatiche solenni, impegnanti l’infallibilità del magistero ecclesiastico. E la risposta è nota per chi ricorda la dichiarazione conciliare del 6 marzo 1964, ripetuta il 16 novembre 1964: dato il carattere pastorale del Concilio, esso ha evitato di pronunciare in modo straordinario dogmi dotati della nota di infallibilità; ma esso ha tuttavia munito i suoi insegnamenti dell’autorità del supremo magistero ordinario il quale magistero ordinario e così palesemente autentico deve essere accolto docilmente e sinceramente da tutti i fedeli, secondo la mente del Concilio circa la natura e gli scopi dei singoli documenti.”

that the supreme ordinary magisterium of the Church is as infallible as her solemn magisterium. Let us repeat here the teaching of the 1870 Vatican Council (in the Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Filii*):

By divine and Catholic faith, all those things must be believed which are contained in the written word of God and in tradition, and those which are proposed by the Church, either in a solemn pronouncement or in her ordinary and universal teaching power, to be believed as divinely revealed.

Consequently, as we have already said, the same criteria of interpretation traditionally applied to previous ecumenical councils should be likewise applied to Vatican II. Paul VI himself says it in this very audience:

We must enter into the spirit of these basic criteria of the ecclesiastical magisterium.<sup>19</sup>

## **12. On January 31<sup>st</sup>, 1966, Paul VI indicated proper rules of interpretation of Vatican II.**

In an allocution to the members of the Commission entrusted with the interpretation of the decrees of Vatican II, Paul VI said the following:

A duty is entrusted to you... It is indeed to strive by all means that doubts concerning the decrees of the Council do not arise, and that one may not judge of them or spin them to one’s will. It will be helpful to reiterate here the words employed by Pope Pius IV, our predecessor, when he confirmed the Holy Council of Trent: ‘if however something

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<sup>19</sup> “Dobbiamo entrare nello spirito di questi criteri basilari del magistero ecclesiastico.”

appeared to someone to have been said or established in an obscure manner in them (that is, in the decrees), and because of that, is in need of some interpretation or decision: let him come to the place chosen by the Lord, namely to the Apostolic See, teacher of all the faithful'.<sup>20</sup>

The decrees of an ecumenical council must be understood in the sense that the Church understands them, by her magisterium. Thus it is impossible, in order to save Vatican II, to “spin” its teaching in a way contrary to the interpretation given officially by the authoritative magisterium.

**13. On April 23rd, 1966, Paul VI demanded that we ascribe the conciliar doctrine to the breathing of the Holy Ghost.**

A few months only after the end of Vatican II, Paul VI asked us, in another exhortation, to have an “adhesion entire and without reserve” to the deliberations of the second Vatican Council, and to consider its teaching as the “breathing of the Holy Ghost”:

But now it is necessary to ascribe the conciliar doctrines to the magisterium of the Church, nay, to the breath of the Holy Ghost; and we must with a faith

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<sup>20</sup> “Officium creditur vobis... Est enim omni ope annitendum, ne circa decreta Concilii dubitationes oriantur neque ad suum arbitrium quisquam de iis iudicet vel ea detorqueat. Juvat hic iterare verba, quibus Pius Pp. IV, Decessor Noster, usus est, cum Sacrosanctum Concilium Tridentinum confirmavit: ‘si cui vero in eis (id est decretis) aliquid obscurius dictum et statutum fuisse eamque ob causam interpretatione aut decisione aliqua egere visum fuerit: ascendat ad locum, quem Dominus elegit, ad Sedem videlicet Apostolicam, omnium fidelium magistratam.’” (*Allocutio*, January 31<sup>st</sup>, 1966. A.A.S. LVIII, 1966, n. 2, p. 160).

both sure and unanimous accept the great ‘tome’, that is, the volume, the text of the teachings and precepts, which the Council transmits to the Church.<sup>21</sup>

Let us emphasize the fact that Paul VI clearly declares the teaching of the Council to be part of the Church’s magisterium, and to be ascribed to the breathing of the Holy Ghost. This teaching, he says, must be accepted *with sure and unanimous faith*. Let the reader ponder these words. They have been said after all the comments referenced above, thus proving that our understanding is correct: Vatican II did not intend to solemnly proclaim any new dogmatic pronouncement, but in principle the same rules of interpretation should be applied to its teaching, which are applied to the teaching of previous ecumenical councils, such as the dogmatic constitution *Dei Filius* of Vatican I.

**14. On June 23rd, 1966, Paul VI confirmed the obligatory nature of Vatican II, and that it must be used in teaching the faith as a catechism.**

In an allocution to the Italian Conference of Bishops, Paul VI praised the work of Vatican II and insisted on the duty to safeguard and apply its teaching. He called it the “great catechism” for our times, which is very significant, since a catechism of the universal Church would be given as a norm of faith,

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<sup>21</sup> “Oggi la nostra adesione alle deliberazioni conciliari dev’essere schietta e senza riserve... Ma bisogna oramai ascrivere al magistero della Chiesa le dottrine conciliari, anzi al soffio dello Spirito Santo; e dobbiamo con fede sicura ed unanime accettare il grande ‘tomo’, cioè il volume, il testo degli insegnamenti e dei precetti, che il Concilio trasmette alla Chiesa.” (*Allocution to the Roman Curia*, April 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1966. A.A.S. LVIII, 1966, n. 5, p. 380).

and therefore protected by the infallibility of the Church; and since it confirms what we have explained concerning the pastoral orientation of Vatican II.

We must look to the Council with gratitude to God and with confidence for the future of the Church; it will be the great catechism of the new times.<sup>22</sup>

**15. Paul VI denounced the attitude of Abp. Lefebvre, first in a secret consistory of May 24th, 1976.**

Paul VI addressed the following to the Cardinals:

And this is openly affirmed! They do not even hesitate to assert that the Second Vatican Council lacks any binding force; that the faith would even be in danger because of the norms proposed after the Council; that one must not obey, in order to preserve certain traditions. What traditions? It is to this group, and not to the Roman Pontiff, and not to the Episcopal College, and not to the Ecumenical Council, that it would be up to define, among the innumerable traditions, those which must be considered as standards of faith! As you see, venerable brothers, such an attitude sets itself up as a judge of that divine will which made Peter and his legitimate successors the head of the Church to confirm his brothers in the faith and feed the universal flock. (Cf. Lk. XXII, 32; Jn. XXI, 15 ff.), and who made him the patron and guardian of the deposit of

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<sup>22</sup> “Dobbiamo guardare al Concilio con riconoscenza a Dio e con fiducia per l'avvenire della Chiesa; esso sarà il grande catechismo dei tempi nuovi.” (*Allocutio*, June 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1966. A.A.S. LVIII, 1966, n. 8, p. 575).

faith.<sup>23</sup>

**16. Paul VI sent a direct letter to Abp. Lefebvre, to personally tell him that Vatican II is binding and the New Mass obligatory.**

In this very important letter, of October 11<sup>th</sup>, 1976, Paul VI gives a number of helpful clarifications, against any attempt of dismissal of Vatican II's authority or of the obligatory nature of the New Mass. We will largely quote passages from this letter, since it clearly addresses all the objections which we have refuted, in a letter addressed to none other than Abp. Lefebvre, who is at the origin of these very objections, either directly or through his disciples. Hence this letter of Paul VI is a direct answer, from Paul VI himself, against the objections that he (Paul VI) did not intend to make Vatican II obligatory, or did not consider it protected by the infallibility given to the Church by the Holy Ghost.

Among other things, Paul VI makes it very clear that to reject Vatican II and the New

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<sup>23</sup> “Idque palam affirmatur! Immo asserire non dubitant Concilium Vaticanum II vi obligandi carere; catholicam fidem in discrimine versari etiam propter normas post Concilium propositas; oboediendum non esse, ut quaedam traditiones serventur. Quae traditiones? Ad hunc hominum coetum - non autem ad Romanum Pontificem, non ad Episcoporum Collegium, non ad Concilium Oecumenicum - ius pertineret statuendi quanam ex innumeris traditionibus habendae sint fidei normae! Ut videtis, Venerabiles Fratres Nostri, hac agendi ratione in iudicium vocatur illa divina voluntas quae Petrum eiusque legitimos Successores posuit Caput Ecclesiae, ut fratres in fide confirmaret atque universum gregem pasceret (Cfr. Luc. 22, 32; Io. 21, 15 ss.), eumque depositi fidei sponsorem et custodem constituit.” (*Concistorio Segreto del Santo Padre Paolo VI per la nomina di venti Cardinali*, Lunedì, 24 maggio 1976. Text available on the Vatican website vatican.va).

Mass is to reject the authority of the Roman Pontiff and of an ecumenical council:

What is indeed at issue is the question, which must truly be called fundamental, of your clearly proclaimed refusal to recognize in its whole, the authority of the Second Vatican Council and that of the pope. This refusal is accompanied by an action that is oriented towards propagating and organizing what must indeed, unfortunately, be called a rebellion. This is the essential problem, and it is truly untenable.<sup>24</sup>

Paul VI then declares in unmistakable terms that Vatican II, inasmuch as it is an ecumenical council, is an act of the solemn magisterium of the Church, which is guaranteed to be free from error:

Concerning bishops united with the sovereign pontiff, their power with regard to the universal church is solemnly exercised in the ecumenical councils...<sup>25</sup>

Popes and ecumenical councils have commonly acted in this way, with the special assistance of the Holy Ghost. And it is precisely what the Second Vatican Council did. **Nothing that was decreed in this Council, or in the reforms that we**

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<sup>24</sup> “Ce qui est en cause en effet, c’est la question, qu’on doit bien dire fondamentale, de votre refus, clairement proclamé, de reconnaître, dans son ensemble, l’autorité du Concile Vatican II et celle du Pape, refus qui s’accompagne d’une action ordonnée à propager et organiser ce qu’il faut bien appeler, hélas! une rébellion. C’est là le point essentiel, proprement insoutenable.” (*Lettre de Paul VI à Mgr Lefebvre du 11 octobre 1976*. The original letter in French can be found on the French SSPX website [laportelatine.org](http://laportelatine.org)).

<sup>25</sup> “Quant aux évêques unis au Souverain Pontife, leur pouvoir à l’égard de l’Eglise universelle s’exerce solennellement dans les Conciles oecuméniques...”

**enacted in order to put the Council into effect, is opposed to what the 2,000 year-old tradition of the Church contains as fundamental and immutable. Of this we are the guarantor**, not in virtue of our personal qualities but in virtue of the charge which the Lord has conferred upon Us as legitimate successor of Peter, and in virtue of the special assistance that He has promised to Us as to Peter: ‘I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not’ (Lk. XXII, 32). **With us, the universal episcopate is a guarantor of this.** [emphasis added]<sup>26</sup>

Paul VI continues, indicating that all of the Council documents have to be accepted, and any definitive teaching relative to revealed doctrine would require indeed an assent of faith:

Neither can you appeal to the distinction between what is dogmatic and what is pastoral to accept certain texts of this Council and to refuse others. Indeed, not everything in a Council requires an assent of the same nature: only what is affirmed by ‘definitive’ acts as an object of faith or as a truth related to faith requires an assent of faith. But the rest also forms part of the solemn

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<sup>26</sup> “C’est ainsi qu’ont agi communément les Papes et les Conciles oecuméniques, avec l’assistance spéciale de l’Esprit-Saint. Et c’est précisément ce qu’a fait le Concile Vatican II. Rien de ce qui a été décrété dans ce Concile, comme dans les réformes que nous avons décidées pour le mettre en œuvre, n’est opposé à ce que la Tradition bimillénaire de l’Église comporte de fondamental et d’immuable. De cela, nous sommes garant, en vertu, non pas de nos qualités personnelles, mais de la charge que le Seigneur nous a conférée comme successeur légitime de Pierre et de l’assistance spéciale qu’il nous a promise comme à Pierre: ‘J’ai prié pour toi afin que ta foi ne défaille pas.’ (Lc 22, 32.) Avec nous en est garant l’Épiscopat universel.”

magisterium of the Church to which each member of the faithful owes a confident acceptance and sincere application.<sup>27</sup>

Paul VI makes a similar argument against Abp. Lefebvre's rejection of the New Mass:

From the same erroneous conception springs your abuse of celebrating the so-called St. Pius V Mass.<sup>28</sup>

Paul VI requires with authority a formal retraction, professing adherence to Vatican II as to other ecumenical councils:

This declaration will therefore have to affirm that you sincerely adhere to the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council and to all its documents - *sensu obvio* ("in their obvious sense") - which were adopted by the Council fathers and approved and promulgated by Our authority. For such an adherence has always been the rule, in the Church, since the beginning, in the matter of ecumenical councils.

It must be clear that you equally accept the decisions that We have made since the Council in order to put it into effect, with the help of the departments of the Holy See; among other things, you must explicitly recognize the legitimacy of the

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<sup>27</sup> "Vous ne pouvez pas non plus invoquer la distinction entre dogmatique et pastoral pour accepter certains textes de ce Concile et en refuser d'autres. Certes, tout ce qui est dit dans un Concile ne demande pas un assentiment de même nature: seul ce qui est affirmé comme objet de foi ou vérité annexe à la foi, par des actes 'définitifs', requiert un assentiment de foi. Mais le reste fait aussi partie du Magistère solennel de l'Église auquel tout fidèle doit un accueil confiant et une mise en application sincère."

<sup>28</sup> "C'est à la même conception erronée que se rattache chez vous la célébration abusive de la messe dite de saint Pie V."

reformed liturgy, notably of the *Ordo Missae*, and our right to require its adoption by the entirety of the Christian people.

You must also admit the binding character of the rules of canon law now in force...<sup>29</sup>

In fact, Abp. Lefebvre was told by Paul VI that Vatican II is in certain respects of yet greater importance than the Council of Nicea.<sup>30</sup>

### **17. Letter of Cardinal Seper to Abp. Lefebvre (January 28<sup>th</sup>, 1978).**

Paul VI entrusted the analysis of Abp. Lefebvre's doctrinal positions to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. This congregation (the replacement of the former "Holy Office"), under Cardinal Seper,

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<sup>29</sup> "Cette Déclaration devra donc affirmer que vous adhérez franchement au Concile oecuménique Vatican II et à tous ses textes - *sensu obvio* - qui ont été adoptés par les Pères du Concile, approuvés et promulgués par notre autorité. Car une telle adhésion a toujours été la règle, dans l'Église, depuis les origines, en ce qui concerne les Conciles oecuméniques.

Il doit être clair que vous accueillez également les décisions que nous avons prises, depuis le Concile, pour le mettre en oeuvre, avec l'aide des organismes du Saint-Siège; entre autres, vous devez reconnaître explicitement la légitimité de la liturgie rénovée, notamment de l'Ordo Missae, et notre droit de requérir son adoption par l'ensemble du peuple chrétien.

Vous devez admettre aussi le caractère obligatoire des dispositions du droit canonique en vigueur..."

<sup>30</sup> Abp. Lefebvre received a handwritten letter from Paul VI on September 10<sup>th</sup>, 1975. This fact is attested to by M. Davies (in *Pope John's Council*, Angelus Press, 1977, ch. 14). Abp. Lefebvre, having Paul VI's letter in his hands, directly confided this fact to Bp. Donald Sanborn in Ecône, Switzerland, in 1975.

led a detailed investigation of Abp. Lefebvre positions, and clarified a number of things concerning the binding nature of the Council.

The answer of the Congregation clearly established, among other things, that the declaration on religious liberty, although not a definition, requires the docility and assent of the faithful, and cannot be rejected as erroneous:

By the conciliar declaration, this point of doctrine clearly belongs to the magisterium, and although it is not the object of a definition, it demands docility and assent. It is therefore not licit for the Catholic faithful to reject it as erroneous, but they must accept it in the exact meaning and intent given to it by the Council.<sup>31</sup>

Commenting on Abp. Lefebvre's rejection of the New Mass, the Congregation explained:

Your criticism of the Ordo Missae promulgated by Paul VI goes far above any liturgical preference, but rather has a nature which is essentially doctrinal... The faithful are not allowed indeed to cast doubt on the conformity with the doctrine of the faith of a sacramental rite approved by the supreme Pastor, especially when it is a question of the rite of the Mass, which is at the heart of the life of the Church.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> "Par la Déclaration conciliaire, ce point de doctrine entre clairement dans l'enseignement du Magistère et, bien qu'il ne soit pas l'objet d'une définition, il réclame docilité et assentiment (cf. Const. Dogm. Lumen Gentium, 25). Il n'est donc pas licite aux fidèles catholiques de le rejeter comme erroné, mais ils doivent l'accepter selon le sens et la portée exacte que lui a donné le Concile."

<sup>32</sup> "Votre critique de l'Ordo Missae promulgué par Paul VI va loin au-delà d'une préférence

The Congregation also reproved Abp. Lefebvre for doubting the validity of the new rite of confirmation, as well as the validity of general absolutions.

Lastly, the behavior of the French Archbishop was condemned as being a practical rejection of the authority of an ecumenical council and of the Roman Pontiff. Abp. Lefebvre was given one month to explain himself, and retract his errors.

### **18. Conclusion on this point.**

It is evident that Paul VI is imposing the acceptance of Vatican II as a criteria of catholicity, just as ecumenical councils were made obligatory in the past, which answers any objection that Vatican II would not be binding, because of its misunderstood pastoral character.

In fact, those who construct this claim are the very ones who prove it wrong, since they make it evident that Vatican II is so obligatory that you cannot stay inside the canonical structures of the Church if you reject Vatican II and the new mass.

It is also evident that Paul VI is claiming the assistance of the Holy Ghost, which would guarantee the orthodoxy of Vatican II.

This position was maintained by John XXIII and Paul VI at all times.

Hence we must conclude that the occasions where they referred to the pastoral nature of Vatican II, the refusal to make any new dogmatic definitions, or to pronounce solemn anathemas, does not take away the doctrinal

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liturgique, elle a un caractère essentiellement doctrinal... Un fidèle ne peut en effet mettre en doute la conformité avec la doctrine de la foi d'un rite sacramentel promulgué par le Pasteur suprême, surtout s'il s'agit du rite de la Messe qui est au cœur de la vie de l'Eglise."

nature of the Council, and the fact that it must be followed as a rule of faith.

We may here again repeat that the attitude asked from Catholics towards the doctrinal documents of Vatican II is of the same nature as the attitude required from Catholics towards documents such as the dogmatic constitution *Dei Filius* (excepting the canons, which Vatican II does not have) promulgated by the 1870 Vatican Council. Documents of this kind, even if they do not define any solemn dogma, do nevertheless give an infallible rule of faith, and have always been considered to do so by theologians.

**19. Both the pope and the bishops, according to John Paul II, have an important duty to implement Vatican II.**

John XXIII is responsible for the launching of the Vatican II revolution; Paul VI is responsible for having thoroughly accomplished it; John Paul II is responsible for having confirmed it everywhere.

In the very first address of his “pontificate,” John Paul II lays out the principles by which he intends to guide the Church: they are those of Vatican II.

First of all, we wish to point out the unceasing importance of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, and we accept the definite duty of assiduously bringing it into effect. Indeed, is not that universal Council a kind of milestone as it were, an event of the utmost importance in the almost two thousand year history of the Church, and consequently in the religious and cultural history of the world?

However, as the Council is not limited to the documents alone, neither is it completed by the ways applying it which

were devised in these post-conciliar years. Therefore we rightly consider that we are bound by the primary duty of most diligently furthering the implementation of the decrees and directive norms of that same Universal Synod.<sup>33</sup>

He further explains how he desires to implement the Vatican II ecclesiology and ecumenism. He also wants to make all of its content more explicit:

It is necessary that those things which lie hidden in it or - as is usually said - are “implicit” may become explicit in the light of the experiments made since then and the demands of changing circumstances.<sup>34</sup>

John Paul II will logically remind the bishops of their own duty to implement the council. Hence, in an address to the Spanish conference of bishops, he said the following:

An important part of the episcopal function today will consist in correctly applying the teachings of the last ecumenical council, without any deviation by default or by excess, taking into account the indications given in subsequent pontifical documents...<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> John Paul II, First address “*urbi et orbi*” (to Rome and to the world) given the day after his election, on October 17th, 1978 (available on the official Vatican website [vatican.va](http://vatican.va)).

<sup>34</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> “Una parte importante della funzione episcopale oggi consisterà nell’applicare correttamente, senza deviazioni per difetto o eccesso, gli insegnamenti dell’ultimo Concilio Ecumenico. Tenendo conto delle indicazioni portate dai documenti pontifici successivi...” (Discorso all’Assemblea Plenaria della Conferenza Episcopale Spagnola, Madrid, October 31<sup>st</sup>, 1982).

## **20. A few further confirmations on the binding nature of Vatican II.**

Confirmations could be innumerable, but let us here just give a few of them, showing that this binding nature of Vatican II has been consistently upheld ever since it was promulgated, up to our days.

(1) Cardinal Ratzinger said in a 1985 interview:

It must be stated that Vatican II is upheld by the same authority as Vatican I and the Council of Trent, namely, the Pope and the College of Bishops in communion with him, and that also with regard to its contents, Vatican II is in the strictest continuity with both previous councils and incorporates their texts word for word in decisive points. . . . Whoever accepts Vatican II, as it has clearly expressed and understood itself, at the same time accepts the whole binding tradition of the Catholic Church, particularly also the two previous councils . . . It is likewise impossible to decide in favor of Trent and Vatican I but against Vatican II. Whoever denies Vatican II denies the authority that upholds the other two councils and thereby detaches them from their foundation.<sup>36</sup>

Ratzinger was then the Cardinal Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. It is evident that he considered Vatican II to be upheld by the same authority as were the Councils of Trent and Vatican I, namely the authority of the entire Teaching Church, pope and bishops, united in a solemn ecumenical council. He argued that to reject Vatican II is to reject this authority, and

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<sup>36</sup> Joseph Ratzinger and Vittorio Messori, *The Ratzinger Report*, San Francisco, Ignatius, 1985, pp. 28-29, 31.

therefore for the same reason it is also to reject the authority on which are based the Councils of Trent and Vatican I.

(2) In an audience given to catechists on January 30<sup>th</sup>, 2021, Francis/Bergoglio instructed them to teach the doctrines of Vatican II as the rule of faith. He repeated the words of Paul VI: “it will be the great catechism of the new times” (said on June 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1966), and he added:

This is magisterium: the Council is the magisterium of the Church. Either you are with the Church and therefore you follow the Council, and if you do not follow the Council or you interpret it in your own way, as you wish, you are not with the Church. We must be demanding and strict on this point. The Council should not be negotiated... No, the Council is as it is... Please, no concessions to those who try to present a catechesis that does not agree with the Magisterium of the Church.<sup>37</sup>

Hence, it is impossible to catechize and be catechized without being conformed to the teachings of Vatican II. Vatican II is therefore established as a rule of faith.

## **21. Conclusion: Vatican II is binding and obligatory.**

Anyone who tries to resist the changes of Vatican II will quickly realize that he will be met with strong opposition, and if he is a priest, he will experience the binding character of Vatican II in a very practical way: dissent from Vatican II is not allowed

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<sup>37</sup> *Audience with participants in the meeting promoted by the National Catechetical Office of the Italian Episcopal Conference, 30.01.2021.* This audience has been published by the Holy See Press Office, and is available on the official Vatican website [press.vatican.va](http://press.vatican.va).



and never tolerated. The teachings of the Council must be adhered to and followed without question. The New Mass is likewise mandatory, and cannot be rejected, particularly for doctrinal reasons.

Abp. Lefebvre himself, in a letter sent to John Paul II on December 24<sup>th</sup>, 1978, was begging for the simple right to practice the traditional faith and liturgy:

Most Holy Father, for the honor of Jesus Christ, for the good of the Church, for the salvation of souls, we beseech you to say one word, one phrase, as Successor of Peter, as Pastor of the Universal Church, to the bishops of the whole world: “Laissez faire”; “We allow the free exercise of what has been used by the centuries old Tradition in the salvation of souls.”<sup>38</sup>

This request was not granted to him, since he was expected to fully and publicly accept the teachings of Vatican II and the legitimacy of the liturgical reform.

At this point, Abp. Lefebvre was merely asking for a peaceful coexistence, side by side, in every diocese, of the New Mass and of the traditional liturgy, in terms which were actually asking less than the concessions given by Benedict XVI's *Summorum pontificum*. Fr. Guérard des Lauriers O.P. sharply rebuked the archbishop for considering such a compromise possible, in a famous letter entitled “*Monseigneur*,

*nous ne voulons pas de cette paix*” (“Your Excellency, we do not want a peace of this kind”).

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<sup>38</sup> “Très Saint Père, pour l'honneur de Jésus-Christ, pour le bien de l'Eglise, pour le salut des âmes, nous vous conjurons de dire un seul mot, une seule parole, comme Successeur de Pierre, comme Pasteur de l'Eglise universelle, aux Evêques du monde entier : «Laissez faire» ; «Nous autorisons le libre exercice de ce que la Tradition multiséculaire a utilisé pour la sanctification des âmes».” (Abp. Lefebvre, *Lettre de Mgr Lefebvre au Souverain Pontife du 24 décembre 1978*, published in *Itinéraires* n. 233 - Mai 1979).

## SECOND ARTICLE

# THE “PASTORAL NATURE” OF VATICAN II REFERS TO AN OVEREMPHASIS ON THE HUMAN PERSON AND AN ABANDONMENT OF TRADITIONAL PHILOSOPHY

**22. “Pastoral” is a keyword of the modernists.**

In the mind of the general public, to take a “pastoral approach” to a moral problem, in the context of the Vatican II religion, means to not solve this moral case by a mere conformity to objective norms of morality, but rather to find a solution (a “discernment”) based on the personal experience of the moral law.

In this second part, we shall have a closer look at the meaning of this “pastoral nature” of Vatican II, and we shall show that rather than meaning a simple and clear presentation of the Catholic faith, it actually refers to an abandonment of traditional philosophy to replace it with something more in keeping with modern subjectivist thought.

**23. How Vatican II was a “pastoral council” according to John Paul II.**

To mark the tenth anniversary of the start of the council, in 1972, while he was archbishop of Krakow, John Paul II published a book entitled *Sources of Renewal: Study on the Implementation of the Second Vatican Council*.

In this work, John Paul II fully endorses the “pastoral nature” of Vatican II, and explains:

A “purely” doctrinal Council would have concentrated on defining the precise meaning of the truths of faith, whereas a pastoral Council proclaims, recalls or

clarifies truths for the primary purpose of giving Christians a lifestyle, a way of thinking and acting.<sup>39</sup>

One should recall that John Paul II was one of the main defenders of the title “pastoral constitution” given to the Vatican II document entitled *Gaudium et spes*. While many considered this document to be of a minor importance, and wanted to label it as a mere “decree” or “letter” of the Council, Abp. Wojtyła, who had worked on the draft since 1964, spoke up in favor of the title that emphasized both the importance and the novelty of the document. It was eventually labeled as a “Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World”. It was meant to be the “pastoral” complement and application of *Lumen gentium*, the “Dogmatic Constitution on the Church” already published by the same Council.

*Gaudium et spes* appeared with an explanatory note, presenting how its “pastoral” nature should be understood:

The constitution is called “pastoral” because, while resting on doctrinal principles, it seeks to express the relation of the Church to the world and modern mankind.

As a consequence, if we apply traditional theological principles, the doctrine contained

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<sup>39</sup> K. Wojtyła, *Sources of Renewal: Study on the Implementation of the Second Vatican Council*, Harper and Row, 1980. Emphasis added.

therein is the authentic teaching of the Council, which is meant to be definitive, while the practical applications (its properly “pastoral” aspect) is subject to circumstances, which by nature are not definitive. The same preliminary note quoted above, says it in unmistakable terms:

Some elements have a permanent value; others, only a transitory one. Consequently, the constitution (*Gaudium et spes*) must be interpreted according to the general norms of theological interpretation. Interpreters must bear in mind - especially in part two - the changeable circumstances which the subject matter, by its very nature, involves.

#### **24. John Paul II’s personalism.**

John Paul II is a prominent adept of the philosophy of *personalism*, a system which pretends to reconcile *objectivism* and *subjectivism*, and mingle elements of *Thomistic realism* with *phenomenalism*.<sup>40</sup> Among other works, he wrote *The Acting Person* (1969), recognized as his main philosophical work, in which he rejected a purely objective knowledge of personality, in favor of a personality known through action and experience.

Maurice Blondel (1861-1949) is recognized as one of the fathers of personalism. Traditionally, truth is defined as

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<sup>40</sup> *Objectivism* or *realism* considers to be true *what is objectively*, independently of anyone observing it or experiencing it; while *subjectivism* places truth in the *experience* of something. *Phenomenalism*, a flavor of *subjectivism*, considers that human knowledge is restricted to appearances presented to the senses. On the contrary, *realism* teaches that man is able not only to experience sensations, but to know the objective reality of things.

*the adequation of the mind with reality*, that is, someone knows the truth when his mind is conformed to the objective reality. Blondel replaced this scholastic definition of truth with the following: *truth is the adequation of the mind with life*. Hence, in this system, truth is defined by a conformity to personal experience. This is at the core of modernism, and of the *nouvelle théologie*. Blondel is today acknowledged by many as being the “philosopher of Vatican II,” or the “father of the Council.”

This notion of truth, by Blondel, is somewhat integrated in John Paul II’s concept of personality. Indeed, John Paul II rejects an objective understanding of the human person and of morality, but supports a notion of the human person which integrates the personal experience of his existence and his actions.

Accordingly, it becomes wrong to evaluate morality in a strictly objective manner, without reference to personal experience.

This approach to morality is particularly evident in Vatican II’s Declaration on Religious Freedom, in which freedom of religion becomes defined from the unique point of view of the person, and in relation only to the person’s experience, rather than to an objective truth. This, we believe, is what the “pastoral nature” of Vatican II truly is.

#### **25. John Paul II recognizes that the “pastoral nature” of Vatican II refers to personalism.**

John Paul II describes the “pastoral nature” of Vatican II as a presentation of truth as it is being experienced by men. The aim of the Council, he explains, was not so much

to answer questions like “What should men believe?”, “What is the real meaning of this or that truth of faith?” and so on, but rather to answer the more complex question: “What does it mean to be a believer, a Catholic, and a member of the Church?”... [This question is] difficult and complex, because **it not only presupposes the truth of faith and pure doctrine, but also calls for that truth to be situated in the human consciousness** and calls for a definition of the attitude, or rather the many attitudes, that go to make the individual a believing member of the Church.<sup>41</sup>

As a consequence, John Paul II explicitly identified Vatican II as a “personalist council”:

One of the elements which determines the open character of Vatican II is the place occupied in the conciliar thought by the human person (...). Man has been considered in the situation due to him inasmuch as he is a person. Never perhaps until now has this been said so clearly in a teaching. In this sense, this is a personalist council.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> K. Wojtyła, *Sources of Renewal: Study on the Implementation of the Second Vatican Council*, Harper and Row, 1980, pp. 17-18. Emphasis added.

<sup>42</sup> Quoted by R.P. Louis-Marie de Blienières in *L'enseignement de Jean-Paul II* (Société Saint Thomas d'Aquin, 1983): “L'un des éléments qui décident du caractère ouvert de Vatican II est la place qu'occupe dans la pensée conciliaire la personne humaine (...). L'homme a été considéré en la situation qui lui revient du fait qu'il est une personne. Jamais peut-être jusqu'à présent, l'on n'avait dit cela de manière aussi claire dans un enseignement. En ce sens, c'est là un concile personnaliste.”

## **26. Paul VI confirms that the “pastoral” nature of the Council is this focus on the human person.**

In his homily given at the last general session of Vatican II, on December 7<sup>th</sup>, 1965, Paul VI made the following observations, confirming what we have said:

But, in truth, the Church, gathered in the Council, directs her thoughts with the greatest care, besides to herself and to the close connection by which she is joined to God, also to man, to man as he presents himself today; **to man, we mean, that is living; to man who has given himself up to the advancement of his own self alone; to man who not only considers himself worthy that all endeavors should be devoted to himself alone as if to a certain center, but also is not afraid to affirm that he is the principle and reason of everything whatever.**<sup>43</sup>

Let the reader ponder these words carefully. The doctrine of Vatican II is humanist not merely inasmuch as it focuses on man and everything relative to man. This could still be done in an objective way. But rather, says Paul VI, man is taken as the “principle and reason” of all reality, meaning

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<sup>43</sup> Emphasis added. See the Latin text published in the A.A.S. (Vol. LVIII, 1966, N. 1, pp. 51-58): “Verum enimvero Ecclesia, in Concilio collecta, suam considerationem summopere intendit – praeterquam in semetipsam, atque in necessitudinem, qua cum Deo conjungitur – in hominem etiam, in hominem, sicuti reapse hoc tempore se conspiciendum praebet: hominem, dicimus, qui vivit; hominem, qui sibimetipsi uni provehendo deditus est; hominem, qui non modo sese dignum existimat, ad quem unum, veluti ad quoddam centrum, omne studium conferatur, sed etiam affirmare non veretur, se esse cujusvis rei principium atque rationem.”

that all things are defined not only in relation to man, but through man's experience. This is the doctrine of personalism of which we have spoken. Things become more explicit in the following:

The religion, that is, the worship of God who wished to become man and – for it must be reckoned such - the religion, that is, the worship of man who wished to become God have met one another. But what happened? A fight, a battle, an anathema? That indeed, could have taken place, but did not happen at all.<sup>44</sup>

Again, let the reader notice that personalism and subjectivism is exactly that: man making himself into a god. Objectivism looks at reality as it exists and as it has been created by God. Subjectivism, on the other hand, is this absurd philosophy according to which reality is defined in relation to man's experience. Subjectivism ascribes the definition of reality to man's experience, instead of God's creation. In this sense it makes man into a (false) god, defining reality. Subjectivism has infected our modern world, which denies more and more openly the existence of any objective moral law, to replace it by the slavery of the "general will." Whatever is deemed right by the majority is made into a moral good, and whatever is condemned by the majority is defined as evil. Sins against nature are approved and applauded, because the very existence of the natural law is denied, while the feelings of man are taken as a compass. In this historical

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<sup>44</sup> "Religio, id est cultus Dei, qui homo fieri voluit, atque religio – talis enim est aestimanda – id est cultus hominis, qui fieri vult Deus, inter se congressae sunt. Quid tamen accidit? Certamen, proelium, anathema? Id sane haberi potuerat, sed plane non accidit."

context, the words of Paul VI are absolutely horrific. And it continues:

You humanists of this our age who reject truths that transcend nature, give at least this credit to the Council, and recognize our new devotion to humanity, for we also - nay, we above all others - have the cult of man.<sup>45 46</sup>

This dreadful statement is a call to those denying transcendent truths, that is, it is a call to phenomenologists and subjectivists, who deny man's ability to know objective truth, beyond man's experience. It is a call to ask them to consider Vatican II's effort at

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<sup>45</sup> "Hanc saltem laudem Concilio tribuite, vos, nostra hac aetate cultores humanitatis, qui veritates rerum naturam transcendentis renuitis, iidemque novum nostrum humanitatis studium agnoscite: nam nos etiam, immo nos prae ceteris, hominis sumus cultores."

<sup>46</sup> We translate the expression "*hominis sumus cultores*" by "we have the cult of man." Even though "*cultores*" can sometimes have a milder meaning, both the context of the homily, speaking of the "religion of man who wished to become God," and Paul VI's habitual and religious fascination for humanity explain this sense. Cf. Paul VI's address to the United Nations, of October 4<sup>th</sup>, 1965. See also his Angelus address of February 7<sup>th</sup>, 1971: "Honor to Man! Honor to his thought! Honor to his science! Honor to his technical skill! Honor to his work! Honor to human endurance! Honor to that combination of scientific activity and organization by which man, unlike the other animals, can invest his spirit and his manual dexterity with instruments of conquest. Honor to man, king of the earth, and today prince of the heavens!" (Original Italian: "Onore all'uomo! Onore al pensiero! Onore alla scienza! Onore alla tecnica! Onore al lavoro! Onore all'ardimento umano! Onore alla sintesi dell'attività scientifica e organizzativa dell'uomo, che, a differenza di ogni altro animale, sa dare strumenti di conquista alla sua mente e alla sua mano. Onore all'uomo, re della terra ed ora anche principe del cielo.")

this modern humanism. Instead of an anathema of modern philosophy, Vatican II gave it an embrace. And now Paul VI is expecting “modern humanists” to recognize and appreciate that effort. Vatican II is an attempt of reconciliation of the Catholic Faith with modern philosophy (pompously called “human values”).

And Paul VI confirms that such is indeed the import of Vatican II’s pastoral nature:

All that we have said and could still say as to its [viz., the Council’s] human influence, did it perchance turn the Church’s mind during the celebration of the Council towards the modern mind’s culture, which consists entirely in man? It must be said that the Church did not deviate from the right course, but steered it in that direction. But whoever rightly ponders this chief concern by which the Council considered human and temporal goods cannot fail to recognize that such a concern must be attributed to that pastoral solicitude which the Council willed to follow as the proper note of its labors.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> “Quae omnia de Concilio diximus, quaeque dicere insuper possumus ad humanum ipsius momentum quod attinet, numquid inter Concilium celebrandum, Ecclesiae mentem deflexerunt ad hodiernae mentis culturam, quae tota in homine consistit? Dicendum est, Ecclesiam non a recto itinere decessisse, sed hoc in illam partem direxisse. At qui probe perpendant hoc praecipuum studium, quo Concilium bona humana et temporalia consideravit, facere iidem non poterunt, quin agnoscant huiusmodi studium pastoralis illi sollicitudini tribuendum esse, quam Concilium tamquam propriam laborum suorum notam sequi voluit...”

## **27. Is this a mere abandonment of outdated philosophical notions?**

The architects of Vatican II have overly emphasized that they only desired to express the same doctrine of the faith, but in a manner more in conformity with the modern man. This required, in their eyes, the abandonment of the traditional philosophy of the Church, in order to integrate certain elements of modern philosophy. They claim that this could (and should) be done without detriment to doctrine itself.

This is exactly what was condemned by Pius XII in 1950 in his encyclical *Humani generis*:

In theology some want to reduce to a minimum the meaning of dogmas; and to free dogma itself from terminology long established in the Church and from philosophical concepts held by Catholic teachers...

Moreover, they assert that when Catholic doctrine has been reduced to this condition, a way will be found to satisfy modern needs, that will permit dogma to be expressed also by the concepts of modern philosophy, whether of immanentism or idealism or existentialism or any other system.

This explains why so many people have tried, without success, to properly evaluate the meaning and import of the Vatican II documents, and their dogmatic value. Every so often, a new book is published, for the purpose of shedding light on the “real,” objective, meaning of Vatican II. But Vatican II is full of subjective principles. Vatican II did not intend to teach Catholic doctrine as it is an objective truth, clear and precise, but rather to present it through the lens of

modern philosophy which is poisoned with subjectivism. The faith is presented not as a truth which is in conformity with reality, but as it relates to personal experience, “as it is lived” (so they say). To make sense of Vatican II is in the same order of difficulty as to make sense of modern philosophy.

## **28. Conclusion.**

It is now evident to the reader that the “pastoral nature” of Vatican II is not meant to be understood as referring to the establishment of Catholic and holy disciplines in feeding the flock of Christ. Nor is it meant to be a catechetical exposition of doctrine, such as has been accomplished by the Catechism of the Council of Trent<sup>48</sup>. Rather, this “pastoral nature” refers to an attempt to present the Catholic faith in the vehicle of a new philosophy obsessively centered on the subjectivity of the human person.

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<sup>48</sup> A number of council fathers, together with Abp. Lefebvre (intervention of November 27<sup>th</sup>, 1962), thinking at first that this was the meaning of the “pastoral nature” of the council, made the request of clearly separating the documents meant to be precise and theological, for the pastors and theologians, from the “pastoral” documents, which would be simpler and easy to understand for the average layman (Cf. Abp. Lefebvre, *I Accuse the Council*, Angelus Press, 1982). This request, of course, was rejected, since it meant in both cases an objective and clear presentation of doctrine.