

## HOW TO REGARD VATICAN II

Trust in the Lord, wait patiently upon Him.

Psalm 36

In an opinion piece on the *Rorate caeli* website, an anonymous Italian priest who calls himself Don Pietro Leone recently published a criticism of Vatican II with the above title<sup>1</sup> which raises important issues, among them the purpose of the Second Vatican Council and the correct principle of interpretation to be applied to the Council's documents. The opinion piece is reproduced in the Appendix and the reader is invited to peruse it there or at its source before considering the comments below.

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### *The Purpose of Vatican II*

The author writes —

"[T]he Second Vatican Council did not declare Catholic doctrine in the same sense as it had been declared before, nor did it declare it with greater depth and clarity than before: rather it declared it in an obscure manner. In so doing it made an inadequate use of the Church's *munus docendi*, and thereby failed in its purpose."

With respect, this puts the cart before the horse : it assumes the purpose, or end, of the Council to have been identical with that of an ecumenical, or general, council.

While the Church has ruled that an ecumenical council's determinations are infallible, she has yet to define what it is that makes it such a council. Clearly, however, since formality follows on finality—*why* something is determines *what* it is—the *essence* (speaking analogically) of an ecumenical council is tied up with the end for which it is convoked. There is a proportionality between essences (or natures), powers, acts and ends.<sup>2</sup> This proportion is demonstrated in the Apostolic Letter *Apostolicae curae* where Leo XIII ruled on the Anglican formula of ordination to the priesthood.<sup>3</sup> To achieve the *end*, the making of a priest, the essential *form* of the words of ordination had to be observed, and this the Anglican formula failed to do.<sup>4</sup>

The end or *final cause*, as St Thomas says following Aristotle, is that for the sake of which something is, or is done.<sup>5</sup> It is the cause of all other causes and the first of them, for without it the other causes would not operate. Final cause may be considered under two respects, the order of intention (initial act) and the order of execution (terminal act). In the order of intention its formal reason is the good as appetible, some goodness or perfection capable of terminating the movement of will. In the order of execution, final cause is distinguished into the *natural* or necessary

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<sup>1</sup> Search <http://rorate-caeli.blogspot.com/> under the title 'How to regard Vatican II'.

<sup>2</sup> A brute animal possesses the nature of its kind and the powers of such a creature ; it does the acts of those powers for an end concomitant with its nature. Man has a human nature, that of an animal with intellect, and the appetite proper to intellect, will ; has the powers of that nature and acts in accordance with them for an end fitting to a rational being.

<sup>3</sup> 13.9.1896 ; *Acta Leonis XIII*, Vol. XVI (Typ. Vat. 1897), pp. 258-275.

<sup>4</sup> This was the secondary defect : the primary defect was the loss of *power* in Anglican bishops to ordain brought about by the serial failure of the transmission of the priesthood in those who had purported to ordain them, and in their predecessors.

<sup>5</sup> *Summa Contra Gentiles*, I, c. 75 ; *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 28, a. 6.

end (*finis operis* <sup>6</sup>) and the *intended* end (or purpose) of the agent (*finis operantis* <sup>7</sup>), for the one acting may have an end in view other than the natural end. The action of heating water from itself (*per se*) tends to hot water ; it is accidental (*per accidens*) that it serve the washing of dishes, or the making of tea. The action of alms-giving tends *per se* to the relief of the needy ; it is *per accidens* that the alms-giver intend that it serve his personal glory. The act of intercourse tends *per se* to the procreation of children though the participants may intend only enjoyment of sexual pleasure.<sup>8</sup> The *intended* end in each case cannot alter the *natural* end ; it can only serve to colour it.

It is noteworthy that each of the twenty Councils the Church has confirmed as ecumenical (or general) addressed some pressing matter of doctrine or of practice.<sup>9</sup> The focus of each, its *natural* end, was the resolution of some issue essential to the well-being of the Church and to the practice of the faith or matters incidental thereto. It was this essentiality of the need for certainty that gave each its character of infallibility. The same need for certainty underlay the charism of infallibility the (first) Vatican Council ruled the pope enjoys in certain of his teachings.<sup>10</sup>

Pope John XXIII convoked the Second Vatican Council and established its end which he summarised it in a word, *aggiornamento*. The Council was ‘to bring the Church up to date’. Now *aggiornamento* might be interpreted as bringing the world to the Church, but the more likely interpretation is bringing the Church to the world, in the sense of adapting the Church’s teaching and practice to the World’s demands.

The former interpretation would not, without more, have been sufficient to render the Council an ecumenical one because it is no more than the end for which Christ established His Church—*Go out to the whole world and proclaim the Gospel*—a task at which the Church had been engaged for 1,900 odd years. The latter interpretation would seem even less to have been sufficient to render the Council an ecumenical one, for the Church exists precisely for the contrary end—to counter the world, to bring its members to heaven. The world exists in time and is as changeable. Yet Christ had told his disciples, *Fear not for I have overcome the world*, and it is precisely in His Church that He has done so. For, while the Church, too, exists in time, she is essentially something Divine amid the mundane.<sup>11</sup> She is timeless, and immutable. She has no need to be ‘brought up to date’.

Pope John tacitly acknowledged this immutability in his *Opening Speech*—

“The salient point of this Council is not... a discussion of one article or another of the fundamental doctrine of the Church which has repeatedly been taught by the Fathers and by ancient and modern theologians, and which is presumed to be well known and familiar to all. For this a Council was not necessary...”

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<sup>6</sup> Literally, ‘the end of the operation’.

<sup>7</sup> Literally, ‘the end of the operator’.

<sup>8</sup> This abstracts from the willed impeding of the natural end as occurs in contraception.

<sup>9</sup> See *What Went Wrong With Vatican II* at [http://www.superflumina.org/PDF\\_files/vatican\\_ii\\_www.pdf](http://www.superflumina.org/PDF_files/vatican_ii_www.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> Decree *Pastor Aeternus*, 18<sup>th</sup> July, 1870 ; DS 3074-5 ; D 1839.

<sup>11</sup> Her Head is Jesus Christ ; her soul is the Holy Spirit ; her end is the union of her members with God the Father.

The last sentence is significant. It seems to indicate that *this* Council was to have another focus. The Pope continued—

“But from the renewed, serene, and tranquil adherence to all the teaching of the Church in its entirety and preciseness, as it still shines forth in the Acts of the Council of Trent and First Vatican Council, the Christian, Catholic, and apostolic spirit of the whole world expects a step forward toward a doctrinal penetration and a formation of consciousness in faithful and perfect conformity to the authentic doctrine, which, however, should be studied and expounded through the methods of research and through the literary forms of modern thought. The deposit of faith itself, or the truths which are contained in our venerable doctrine, are one thing ; the manner in which they are set forth, though with the same sense and the same meaning, is another. Much attention must be given to this matter, and patience is needed, in elaborating it ; that is, in the exposition of the subject, those considerations which are most in accordance with the predominantly pastoral character of the Magisterium should be given prominence.<sup>12</sup>

Hence the Council’s focus, its *natural* end (*finis operis*), was the presentation of the Church’s teachings and practice to the world using “the methods of research and literary forms of modern thought” to provide “a doctrinal penetration and formation of consciousness” in “faithful and perfect conformity to the [Church’s] authentic doctrine”, to “[t]he deposit of faith [and] the truths [there]... contained... with the same sense and the same meaning”. The focus of the Council was the presentation of the Church’s teaching ; it was not the Church. Thus, the Council’s *natural* end was inconsistent with the end of an ecumenical council.

But it was otherwise with the Council’s *intended* end (*finis operantis*). Pope and bishops intended that the Council should be classified ‘ecumenical’ and enjoy the charisms of such a council. They passed this intention to their successors. But this classification *per accidens* could not serve to alter the *natural* (*per se* or essential) end of the Council, only to colour it. Which, of course, is just what it has done.

### *The Claims about Vatican II*

The assertion that Vatican II was an ecumenical council has been repeated by every pope since John XXIII. At issue is the underlying vice of the age, subjectivism, whose burden it is that truth is determined by assertion rather than by reality. An ecumenical council is such in virtue of something objective, conformity with a fitting end. A pope may *assert* that a council is ecumenical but if in fact it is *not* ecumenical, no repetition of the assertion will make it so.

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<sup>12</sup> The translation of these last sentences is the subject of much debate. This is a correct translation from the official text in Latin. The problem arises from the fact that Pope John preferred an Italian version which omitted the reference to the phrase, derived from the teaching of St Vincent of Lerins, *eodem tamen sensu eademque sententia*. The version published in English in Walter M Abbott S.J., *The Documents of Vatican II*, London, 1966, runs : “The substance of the ancient doctrine of the deposit of faith is one thing, the way in which it is presented is another. And it is the latter that must be taken into great consideration with patience if necessary, everything being measured in the forms and proportions of a magisterium which is predominantly pastoral in character.” (p. 715) See generally on the topic, Romano Amerio, *Iota Unum, A Study of Changes in the Catholic Church in the XXth Century*, (transl. from Second Italian Edition by Rev. John P. Parsons), Kansas City (Sarto House), 1996, pp. 73-79 ; John Jay Hughes, *Pontiffs: Popes Who Shaped History*, Indiana, 1994, p. 278

It may be objected that, since a pope is infallible, if he *says* a council is ecumenical it must be so. But a pope is infallible only under certain conditions, and the mere assertion of a fact does not satisfy those conditions. A pope must do more than assert the fact. He must,—

- i. define it so ;
- ii. as a doctrine of faith ;
- iii. to be held by the whole Church ;
- iv. citing that he is doing so in discharge of his office as shepherd of all Christians.<sup>13</sup>

*The Correct Principles of interpretation of the Documents of Vatican II.*

There is force in Don Leone's argument that "if [the Council texts] need to be interpreted, then they are unclear", as also is his questioning of Pope Benedict XVI's 'hermeneutic of continuity', and his bemusement over whether Pope Benedict's expression means that the texts must be understood in continuity with Catholic doctrine, or that they already stand in continuity with it. His attack on the body of the Council's teaching is, however, problematic. His quoting of the maxim *bonum ex integra causa* is out of context<sup>14</sup>. This may be seen from his tacit concession that some doctrines of the Council, Catholic in nature, were expressed in the same sense as they had been expressed previously. Such teachings were not vitiated by errors the Council fathers may have committed elsewhere. Moreover, the mind of the Church is against him, for she holds the Sixteenth Council, the *Council of Constance* (1414-1418), to have been ecumenical only in its last sessions (42 to 45), and the Seventeenth Council, the *Council of Basle/Ferrara/Florence* (1431-1439), as ecumenical only to the end of its 25<sup>th</sup> session, Pope Eugene IV approving few only of its decrees.

However, one need not embark on analysis of these questions because the correct principles have been exposed in a recent paper by Dr John Lamont, *Catholic Teaching on Religion and the State*<sup>15</sup> as follows :

"The general principles that govern the interpretation of magisterial documents stem from the fact that they are official documents that have a legislative character, since they establish norms that Catholics are obliged to follow. They resemble civil legislation in that they are intended to agree with other legislation and to be interpreted in harmony with it, unless they explicitly state that previous legislation is to be suppressed and replaced by them. They also use an official vocabulary that is to be interpreted according to the received meaning that the vocabulary has acquired in legislative acts. The principal norms for interpretation of magisterial teachings are thus other teachings and the established meaning of official terminology."

Dr Lamont criticised a looser method of interpretation :

"If the document was, say, a Platonic dialogue or a paper by Bertrand Russell, we would be quite right to interpret its central assertion by looking closely at the reasoning offered in its support, even if this reasoning was not very coherent. This is because the reasoning offered for an assertion by an author is the most important guide to the

<sup>13</sup> *Pastor Aeternus* ; cf. footnote 9 above.

<sup>14</sup> The Pseudo-Denis enunciated the principle embodied in the maxim in chapter IV of *The Divine Names*. In his commentary St Thomas remarked—" [B]onum procedit ex una et perfecta causa, malum autem procedit ex multis particularibus defectibus." (*In Div. Nom.*, IV, XXII, 572).

<sup>15</sup> Available at [https://www.academia.edu/877072/Catholic\\_teaching\\_on\\_religion\\_and\\_the\\_state](https://www.academia.edu/877072/Catholic_teaching_on_religion_and_the_state)

author's thought and purposes in making the assertion, and it serves as such a guide whether or not it is any good. With an official magisterial document, however, the reasoning offered for its assertions is not the most important guide to [its] meaning ; the most important guides... are other official teachings and the standard meaning of official terminology. That is because such documents are not intended to convey what their authors think about a given subject, but to lay down what the readers of the document must believe and do..."

And he offered this conclusion :

"The norms are necessities for all interpretation of official documents, whether ecclesiastical or civil ; if they are abandoned, the task of establishing the meaning of legal texts and of all official documents becomes impossible."

Dr Lamont's approach involves a radical reconsideration of the content of the Council's documents, especially those containing teachings which *prima facie* cannot be reconciled with existing teaching. In remarking the failure of the many attempts to reconcile the teaching in *Dignitatis Humanae* with previous Catholic teaching, he makes a point which has been repeated on this website for the last five years, namely that the directives of Pius IX and Leo XIII against the so-called right to religious freedom constituted infallible teaching of Christ's Church.<sup>16</sup> The contradiction of that teaching in *Dignitatis Humanae* presents insuperable obstacles to a 'hermeneutic of continuity'. It also provides a suasive *a posteriori* argument, balancing the *a priori* argument set out above, against Vatican II having been an ecumenical council.<sup>17</sup>

#### *Conclusion*

If these arguments are correct the consequences are profound. Nothing the Council fathers said which departed from the Church's constant teaching, the novelties, can bind the faithful or the Church.

It is open for a future pope to determine the status of Vatican II definitively. To ensure the unity of the faith it seems inevitable that this will occur in the not too distant future. Until then, Dr Lamont has provided the best approach to the often problematic content of the Council's documents.

How, then, are we to regard Vatican II ? With the greatest caution. The Holy Spirit has allowed the evils that afflict the faithful in consequence of the follies committed at that Council—evils which seem to be growing rather than diminishing as the years go by—for some greater good which, in due course, will be revealed.

In the meantime we must follow the counsel set out in Psalm 36.

Michael Baker

30<sup>th</sup> March 2014—*Fourth Sunday in Lent*

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<sup>16</sup> Cf. papers collected at [http://www.superflumina.org/contents\\_dignitatis\\_humanae.html](http://www.superflumina.org/contents_dignitatis_humanae.html)

<sup>17</sup> The two are distinguished in this : an argument *a priori* proceeds from cause to effect, from principle to its elaboration ; an argument *a posteriori* proceeds from effect to cause. That the Council produced teaching clearly in breach of the Church's infallible teaching demonstrates that, to this extent at least, its determinations could not possibly be the teachings of an ecumenical council.

## APPENDIX

### HOW TO REGARD VATICAN II

Don Pietro Leone

Posted 10<sup>th</sup> March, 2014 on <http://rorate-caeli.blogspot.com/>

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The *Vaticanum Secundum* is characterized by a number of declarations lacking in clarity. An example is the statement : 'The Church of Christ subsists in the Catholic Church' (*Lumen Gentium*, 8). In this essay we shall present three criteria for understanding the Council as a whole in relation to this un-clarity.

The criteria are as follows:

- 1) the accomplishment of the objective purpose of Vatican II as a Council ;
- 2) the assistance of the Holy Spirit ;
- 3) the 'Hermeneutic of Continuity'.

#### **I. The Accomplishment of the Purpose of the Council *qua* Council**

The purpose of a Church Council is to exercise the Church's *munus docendi*.

The Church has three *munera* or offices: the *munus docendi*, (the teaching office), the *munus regendi* (the office of government), and the *munus sanctificandi* (the office of sanctification).

The *munus docendi*, or teaching office, was entrusted to the Church by Our Lord Jesus Christ together with the *Depositum Fidei*, in order that she might teach the Faith, the content of the Faith, or, in other words, that she might teach Catholic doctrine.

The Church has the competence to teach this doctrine, she has no competence to teach any other doctrine. This doctrine is immutable ; it is re-iterated over the ages as the same doctrine and in the same sense ; it is always to be understood in the same manner (*in eodem scilicet dogmate, eodem sensu, eademque sententia, Dei Filius*, First Vatican Council, s. 3, ch. 4). The only change to which it is subject is the change in its expression, namely the increase in the depth and clarity of its expression over the ages.

Now, the Second Vatican Council did not declare Catholic doctrine in the same sense as it had been declared before, nor did it declare it with greater depth and clarity than before : rather it declared it in an obscure manner. In so doing it made an inadequate use of the Church's *munus docendi*, and thereby failed in its purpose.

To illustrate this last paragraph let us return to the example given above : 'The Church of Christ subsists in the Catholic Church'.

Now it is *de Fide* : it is an infallible doctrine of the Church, that is to say, a dogma, that the Catholic Church was founded by Our Lord Jesus Christ and constitutes His Mystical Body.

As to the first fact, St. Pius X declares in the *Antimodernist Oath* (1910) : 'the Church was founded by the true and historical Christ Himself in the time of His earthly life, immediately and personally.'

As to the second fact, Pope Pius XII, repeating the doctrine he expressed in his encyclical *Mystici Corporis* (1943), declares in the encyclical *Humani Generis* (1950, § 27) : ‘...the Mystical Body of Christ and the Roman Catholic Church are one and the same thing.’

From the fact that the Catholic Church was founded by Our Lord Jesus Christ and constitutes His Mystical Body it follows that the Church of Christ is identical to the Catholic Church.

What we now need to do is to compare the proposition : ‘The Church of Christ is identical with the Catholic Church’ with the proposition : ‘The Church of Christ subsists in the Catholic Church’. And we shall ask whether the latter is the same doctrine as the former ; whether it has the same sense ; whether it is understood in the same manner ; and, if it is different in any way, whether this difference is simply a difference in expression, which consists in an increase in depth or clarity of that expression.

We must reply that it is not in a clearer way the same doctrine, it does not have the same sense, it cannot be understood in the same manner *vi verborum*. Rather it is different, and this difference does not represent a clearer and deeper expression of the former doctrine. In a word, it is obscure. Therefore, at least in this declaration, the Council has failed in its purpose.

Someone might object that other doctrines of the Council, which are Catholic in nature, are indeed expressed in the same sense as they were previously, so that we must conclude that the Council accomplished its purpose as a Council, if not in all its texts, then at least in some of them.

To this objection we must reply that if the body of the texts is vitiated in part, it is vitiated as a whole, according to the principle : *bonum ex integra causa*. This is particularly true where it is hard to distinguish that which is vitiated from that which is not, where we need experts to do so, experts with the requisite formation in theology and Church history. And where do we find such experts to-day ?

Take the example of a consignment of buns, some of which contain food-poisoning. If some are bad, then the consignment as a whole is bad, especially if it is hard to distinguish which buns are good and which are bad.

## **II. The Assistance of the Holy Spirit**

The Holy Spirit may assist a Council in two manners : a positive and a negative manner. He assists a Council in a positive manner in helping the Church to accomplish the purpose of the Council qua Council : that is to say in expressing Catholic doctrine adequately : in the same way as, or with greater depth and clarity than, it was expressed in the past ; He assists the Council in a negative manner in preserving the Church from heresy in its various declarations.

Now since the Council did not express Catholic doctrine adequately, we may conclude that the Holy Spirit did not assist it in a positive manner. Since, by contrast, no formal heresies have been discovered in the Council texts, we may conclude that the Holy Spirit did at least assist it in a negative manner.

## **III. The Hermeneutic of Continuity**

Pope Benedict XVI stated that the Council texts should be read in the ‘Hermeneutic of Continuity’. Several remarks may be made about this.

1) The mere word 'hermeneutic', when used of the Council texts, indicates that the Council has failed in its purpose in the way that we have outlined above, for if they need to be interpreted, then they are unclear. The same is true of the statement : 'The Council must be understood in the light of Tradition', for if it is in need of light, it is obscure, and therefore unclear by that token as well.

2) The phrase 'Hermeneutic of Continuity' is itself in need of a 'hermeneutic' because it too is unclear. Does it only mean that the texts must be understood in continuity with Traditional Catholic doctrine, or does it also mean that the texts already stand in continuity with that doctrine ?

The former proposition is true, and is simply the application of the 'remote rule of Faith', which determines the meaning of any official Church declaration by its conformity with Tradition.

The latter proposition, by contrast, is untrue, inasmuch as many of the said texts, in addition to a Catholic sense, have a non-Catholic sense as well : in other words a sense which is at variance, which is not in continuity with, Traditional Catholic doctrine. This discontinuity is manifest historically in the act of *force majeure* by which the Preliminary Schemes containing traditional Catholic teaching were abrogated at the very outset of the Council. [*Rorate* note : Five of nine original Preliminary Schemes, with footnotes and commentary, have been made available in English translation by Fr.Komonchak, a priest in the Archdiocese of New York known for his more liberal positions. The original Vatican II *schemata* available in English are : On the Sources of Revelation, On Defending Intact the Deposit of Faith, On the Christian Moral Order, On Chastity, Marriage, the Family and Virginitly, and the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church.]

3) The phrase 'Hermeneutic of Continuity' suggests that the only problem with the Council texts is their un-clarity : as though as an effect of the sublimity of their content, or the theological sophistication of their form. It suggests that this problem may be solved simply by interpreting the texts correctly in the light of Tradition; after which they may be accepted as orthodox without demur.

The truth, however, is that the texts are not simply unclear but, as we have just observed, ambiguous, and ambiguous between a Catholic and a non-Catholic sense ; it is not enough, then, simply to interpret them, but rather to evaluate them, in the light of Tradition ; and to accept their Catholic sense and reject their non-Catholic sense accordingly.

4) The 'Hermeneutic of Continuity' is offered as the definitive solution to the problem of the Council texts. As such it presents their problem as solely a linguistic one. This is however not the only problem with the texts, for there is another problem which is the deeper and underlying problem, the source of the linguistic one, and that is a problem of a moral nature.

We have noted that the texts are ambiguous between a Catholic and a non-Catholic sense. We should add that the non-Catholic sense is the *prima facie* sense of the texts, and is the sense, moreover, that was intended by their authors. The texts are in fact the work of the Conciliar 'periti', a number of whom had already been censured for heterodoxy prior to the Council ; together they constitute a body of doctrines condemned by various of the previous Popes under the name of 'Modernism', a body of doctrines, furthermore, which was to cause untold damage to the Church in the years succeeding the Council.



Let us look again at the declaration : ‘The Church of Christ subsists in the Catholic Church’. The *prima facie* sense of these words is that the Church of Christ is not identical with the Catholic Church, (otherwise why not say so?) : but this sense is non-Catholic.

5) There is a certain continuity between Tradition and the Council, that is to say between Tradition and the Catholic sense of the ambiguous doctrines ; whereas there is discontinuity between Tradition and the Council in their non-Catholic sense. But, because the latter sense is, as we have just noted, the *prima facie* sense of these and of many of its doctrines, because it corresponds to the deliberate intention of its authors, and because it is in this sense that the Council as a whole has been both understood and implemented, we must conclude that what is more remarkable in the Council is its discontinuity with Tradition, rather than its continuity.

6) The promotion of the ‘Hermeneutic of Continuity’ corresponds to the *pacifist* approach to Modernism typical of those of neo-conservatist bent : ecumenism is good ; the new Mass is good if it is celebrated with dignity ; the Council is good, or some bizarre action or statement of a modern Pope is good, once we know how to interpret it.

The *pacifist* approach is, however, mistaken, because it places peace with others or peace of mind, above Truth : it gives precedence to the Order of the Good over the Order of the True. Furthermore, in relegating Truth to second place, it is both unrealistic and irresponsible.

To illustrate this approach to the Council, and at the same time to contrast it with the Modernist and the Traditionalist approaches, let us return to the example given at the beginning of the present essay.

Imagine that the Rector of a seminary with 100 students decides to switch from a relatively expensive, old-fashioned bakery at some distance from the seminary to a cheaper, modern one in easier reach, and then discovers that out of the 100 buns which it delivers every day, approximately 71 regularly contain food-poisoning. What is he to do?

a) Continue feeding the seminarians contaminated goods for 50 years despite their illnesses and perhaps even death, as if there were nothing wrong with the buns, and indeed speaking euphorically of a ‘Golden Age of the Bun’ the while ? or issuing some bland, conciliatory statement such as ‘The Church has a high regard for all types of bun, without discrimination. All types of bun are white, edible, and the fruit of human endeavour. With these she seeks to satisfy the inner needs of man.’

b) Continue feeding them these goods while eulogizing the 29 buns which are uncontaminated ?—‘So light! so white! so fluffy! and not poisonous either !’

c) Or as soon as he has realised his mistake, reveal the truth to all concerned and return to the old bakery, even if it requires courage to do so and sacrifices for every-one ?

Such then are the various ways of evaluating the Second Vatican Council on the part of the Modernists, the Pacifists, and the Traditionalists respectively.

## **Conclusion**

The purpose of a Church Council is to declare the Faith in a way which can change over time only by increasing in depth and clarity. Vatican II did not do so, and thereby failed in its purpose.

For this reason we cannot claim that it enjoyed the positive assistance of the Holy Spirit but only a negative assistance, in **preserving the declarations of the Council from formal heresy**.

The obscure texts are ambiguous between a non-Catholic sense which is primary, and a Catholic sense which is secondary. In the primary sense they represent a rupture with Tradition and the Faith, whereas in the secondary sense they represent a line of continuity with Tradition and the Faith.

The purpose of a Church Council is to exercise the Church's *munus docendi* : to teach the Faith, but the Council in question is obscure. For this reason it cannot be used for teaching the faithful or seminarians, but must be set aside : an unreliable teacher must be dismissed from service.

It has the status of an incoherent body of doctrines, a mixture of Catholic and non-Catholic elements, like the output of some obscure medieval mystic : *male sonans* and *offensivum piis auribus*. If the Church desires to draw some benefit out of this body, she must consign it to such experts as are competent to evaluate it, as we have said above.

But this is not the priority. The priority is that faithful and seminarians come to know the Truth, to practise it, and so to save their souls and those of the others entrusted to their care. To this end they must have recourse to a more reliable teacher, namely that incontestable authority to which the Pope submitted the Council texts themselves : the Church's Tradition.

As for the Council, we may treat it in the way in which it treated Tradition : with silence. And we shall call this silence the '*Hermeneutic of Forgetfulness*'.

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