

Vatican II, the Abandonment of Divine Religion

And you shall know the truth: and the truth shall make you free. (John 8:32.)

In an act of Faith we declare our unwavering belief in *One God in three divine Persons, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, etc.*, and then in *all the truths that the Catholic Church teaches* on the ground that *God has revealed these truths, Who can neither deceive nor be deceived.* In this simple formula is expressed a distinction between what are called the *objects of Faith* and the *supernatural virtue of Faith.* The objects of faith are the various doctrines actually taught by the Catholic Church, that is, the existence and perfections of God, His triune nature, the incarnation of the Son of God through the Blessed Virgin Mary, His death and resurrection, etc. The supernatural virtue of faith is that habit of soul by which, with the aid of God's assistance strengthening our wills, we give intellectual assent to *all* that He teaches us through the Catholic Church (i.e. all of the objects of faith, whether we know each of them in detail or not).

In the terrible ferment which characterised the sessions of Vatican II and indeed the entire Church from that time on, both of these two complementary factors, the virtue of faith and its objects, came under sustained attack. It was natural that as one divinely revealed doctrine after another was subjected to distortion, doubt, or open denial, faithful Catholics should focus their efforts on reaffirming and defending each of these precious jewels. However it was quickly apparent that the real crisis was not one of doubt or denial of a single or even many truths of religion; there was a broader, deeper, and if possible more sinister spirit at work. The virtue of faith itself was under assault.

Now it is true that if even one article of faith is doubted or denied, the whole of faith is made shipwreck, because the reason for our belief in the objects of faith is the veracity of God. If we doubt even a single thing He reveals to us, then we are denying His veracity. In this way it is true that every heresy is an assault on the whole of the faith. Yet it is possible to attack the faith even more fundamentally than this, and it is the purpose of this paper to explore how this occurred in the 1960s at Vatican II and throughout the Catholic Church.

The effects produced by what happened at Vatican II were so incredibly devastating and rapid as to be without parallel in the history of the Church. The Arian crisis reached its apex quickly also, almost without warning, but its effects seem to have been much less dramatic on the fabric of the Church. It is true that countless bishops were drawn into heresy so that it appeared that the whole world had gone Arian, but it is also true that most of the faithful remained orthodox in their hearts, even if they were confused about precisely how to express what the Church taught regarding the dual natures of Our Lord Jesus Christ. The religious institutes, such as they were, did not empty, the faithful did not apostatise in huge numbers, the priests did not abandon clerical life *en masse*, and total apostasy did not become the norm. In contrast with this, the era of Vatican II was a tsunami of apostasy. Such effects demand a proportionate cause.

In our anti-philosophical era this most useful, nay necessary, approach of seeking the essential causes of things is often neglected. Effects can never be fully understood unless they are traced to their causes.

In order to grasp the essential nature of the revolution which took place at Rome during Vatican II it is first of all vital to have a clear understanding of the nature of the Church herself as the divinely

appointed teacher of mankind. The Catholic Church was founded by Jesus Christ to be the agency by which He would continue to teach His revealed truths to all men in every age, to the very end of the world. She has other prerogatives also, of course, however it is her office of teacher that is relevant here.

Intrinsically connected with her role as the teacher of mankind is the fact that the Church is *composed* of men who profess the faith. “What do you ask of the Church of God?” the candidate for baptism is asked at the beginning of the ceremony. “Faith” he replies. The members of the Church are the *faithful*. St Paul designates Christians as “those who are of the household of the faith”¹ This supernatural virtue of faith each and every Catholic receives from the Church with baptism, and he must profess it until death in order to remain a member of the Church and be saved. There are several reasons why eternal felicity depends upon profession of the true faith, including the solemn promises made at baptism – he who abandons the faith once professed is a perjurer before God and man. And since the faith is the truth about God and man, and God’s relations with man, it is the body of knowledge required in order to live a supernaturally good life and thereby merit heaven. Further, the supernatural virtue of faith infused at baptism establishes a right relationship with God, and an inexpressibly ennobled relationship, by which man is granted a share in the very life of God Himself. In order for this divine life to persist, the mind of man must be conformed to God, just as his will must be elevated and perfected. The virtue of faith, residing in the intellect, establishes the truth there, the same truth which will be *seen* in heaven.

Moreover, because the profession of the same faith by all of the Church’s members is one of her external bonds of unity, anybody who refuses to profess the true faith leaves that unity behind. He cannot destroy this unity, since it is one of the Church’s necessary perfections, without which she would not be the Church, but he can excise himself from it. He who publicly doubts or denies any dogma is therefore *ipso facto* stripped of his membership in the Church. The one is intrinsically connected to the other.

It is the role exclusively of the Church to preach this faith precisely because Our Lord Jesus Christ speaks through her. As Monsignor Fenton explains, “the Church must not be thought of as a teaching agency in any way separated from Christ. He lives within the Church, according to His promise. He acts as the Head of the Church, in such a way that the essential corporate activity of the Church is produced by Him, acting from within this company. He teaches His own divine message within the Church, in such a way that the man who obtains the objective content of faith from the Church really receives it from Him. The Church is competent, and is alone competent, to give the bread of divine truth to men precisely because of the fact that He is its only supreme Teacher, and that the Holy Father and the hierarchy of the Church act as His instruments in the communication of that truth.”

Now it is the strict duty of the hierarchy of the Church to guard and to preach the faith. This preaching is authentic, that is, authoritative. It is guaranteed to be truly that of the Author of faith, and is presented by His authorised representatives. Our Lord during His public life differed from all other teachers precisely because He spoke *as one having authority* (Matthew 7:29). He continues this authoritative preaching through the instrumentality of the hierarchy of His Church. But what does *having authority* mean? It means simply that those who are subject to one having authority are obliged to accept commands emanating from that authority. In this case it means that the Church is not merely the infallible witness of the truth, she also possesses the right to the acceptance of her teaching by all men. One may accept a truth because the witness is unable to be wrong in witnessing to it, and indeed this is a quality of true faith – the Church is infallible. But in addition to this factor, all men are *commanded* by God to hear His Church. “All power is given to me in heaven and in earth. Going

therefore, teach ye all nations: baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you. And behold I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world.” (Matthew 28:18-20) In this text Our Lord gives to His chosen Apostles His own mission, the mission He had received from the Father.

And "He appeared to the eleven as they were at table... and He said to them: Go ye into the whole world and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be condemned.” (Mark 16:14-20)

This is a hard saying, indeed. From it flows the right of the Church to preach authoritatively to all men, who in turn have the strict duty to assent to what they hear. The members of the Church have the additional duty which arises from their baptismal promises to keep the faith once received. These, the faithful, the Church has actual jurisdiction over, with the right to punish if they fail to obey her commands.

Wilhelm and Scannell, commenting on the text in which Our Lord bestowed the power of the keys upon St. Peter, explain, “This jurisdiction is further denoted by the words, ‘Whatsoever thou shalt bind,’ etc. Binding and loosing signify, in Rabbinical language, ‘prohibition and permission,’ with reference to the various questions submitted to the Rabbis for solution. Hence, it here means much the same as the power of the keys, but with special reference to teaching authority; and Christ promises that the exercise of this authority shall be ratified in heaven – a proof that it must be infallible.”

So it is clear that the Church when teaching is exercising not merely her infallibility but also her jurisdiction, her ruling power. She is commanding, imposing a rule, the rule of faith.

Nor do her rights to be heard end at the limits of her infallibility. The faithful are obliged to give sincere internal assent even to those doctrines which she delivers with a degree of assurance lower than infallibility. The doctrinal jurisdiction of the Church extends beyond her infallibility.

To summarise, God has revealed His truths to the Church, which constitute the deposit of faith, to be guarded and handed down to each generation of men until the end of the world. He has endowed His Church with the charism of infallibility to ensure this. He has in addition endowed the Church with authority so that she speaks not merely as an unfailing witness but also as His mouthpiece, to be heeded under pain of eternal damnation. He has made the profession of the faith a condition of membership in the Church, and has given His Church the jurisdiction by which she commands her members to believe His doctrines and can punish them if they do not. Included in this power is that by which she prohibits the publication or reading of unsound books and the holding or professing of unsound doctrines (even if these are not directly against the faith). Also included is the work of her ordinary teaching office which even when not universal, and therefore not infallible, is authoritative and thereby constitutes a binding command upon the consciences of the faithful.

From all of these closely related truths arises one of the marks of the Church by which she is distinguished from all human institutions – the *confidence* that she has in preaching the Gospel. Coupled with this is her intolerance of all usurpers, that is, all of those who set themselves up as teachers of religion without her sanction, without her divine mission. From this same cause flows her constant refusal to meet on a common platform other religions, as though the bearer of divinely guaranteed truth could have something to learn from the inventions of fallen man. She is able to be

courteous to human infirmity, but she is unable to compromise her rights, for her rights are the rights of God.

Now an essential feature of what became known as the spirit of Vatican II was precisely the absence of this confidence on the part of most of the hierarchy of the Church. Under cover of a charitable desire to lead men more gently to the truth, to be respectful of their prejudices, to avoid breaking the bruised reed, a fundamentally new approach was taken to the truth. This is what is called the “pastoral” purpose of Vatican II. Dogmas would not be defined, accompanied by anathemas against those who did not assent to them. The traditional scholastic formulations, couched in technical language with all of its beautiful precision, would be forgone in favour of a kind of discussion in which various viewpoints would be proffered but without prescription. Questioning would be encouraged as a kind of entree into “dialogue” with the ostensible object of leading the questioner to the truth. This new approach spawned all manner of theories to excuse apostasies of the past, the favourite being scandal allegedly given by the human element in the Church to those who became heretics, schismatics, or apostates. According to this approach even the refusal of the heathen to accept the Gospel would be ascribed to deficiencies on the part of missionaries or the hierarchy of the Church. Emphasis would now be placed on common ground, to the exclusion of points of difference (as if in times past missionary effort had been conducted with a blunt instrument instead of the heroic generosity, sincerity, and sweetness which has in fact characterised it). The difficulties of Catholics, especially the uninstructed, arising from fallen human nature, were blamed on a hierarchy allegedly out of touch with the true condition of mankind. In this way the rebelliousness of youth became a reason to relax discipline, men’s ignorance the excuse for less instruction, the complaint of the few who found Latin an obstacle or discouragement to religious worship became the reason that the many would have their traditions violently wrenched from them, even despite tears and mass protests.

As an essential component of this complex of novelty the hierarchy, led at first by John XXIII and then by Paul VI, ceased to apply the disciplinary power of the Church to those who needed correction. Doctrinal disorder grew rank; even those previously censured by the Church for promoting unsound theories were rehabilitated and even honoured. During October 1962 in the debate on the liturgy, Archbishop Parente, Assessor of the Holy Office, felt obliged to intervene in an attempt to prevent wholesale attacks on the Council floor against the Holy Office itself. “Many things have been said here which were neither prudent, just, nor consistent.” He went on to complain that the Holy Office was continually attacked and held in disdain, and summarised by declaring that “At the Holy Office we are all martyrs! We have already yielded on many points, yet this is the thanks we get! If any changes are to be sanctioned by the Council, they must be made with the greatest prudence.” It seems inconceivable that one of Rome’s most venerable institutions, and one of the Church’s most important – so important that the Pope is always personally the head of it – should be reduced to such a pathetic plea, and to the bishops themselves, the successors of the Apostles. Disgust is the only appropriate emotion.

As a kind of crowning of this process, in 1965, the Holy Office was dismantled, to be replaced by a new congregation (for the Doctrine of the Faith) whose purpose would be, among other objects, to “encourage doctrinal initiative.” A few months afterwards the Index of Forbidden Books was abrogated.

Where before the Catholic Church had always demanded a complete and unqualified acceptance and outward profession of all her teachings on the part of all of her members, suddenly it seemed that belief was optional. Over the few short years from John XXIII’s startling and alarming document, *Pacem in terris* (the public appearance of worldly compromise in place of divine doctrine in Rome), it became apparent that Rome no longer demanded unanimity in the profession of the faith. The feeling of

intoxicating freedom which arose from this realisation on the part of priests and faithful was the heart and soul of the spirit of Vatican II. The defences of the Church were dismantled, and she was laid open to every attack.

Archbishop Lefebvre touched the essence of it in his letter to Cardinal Ottaviani just one year after the close of Vatican II, in which he ascribed the following as universal cause of all of the evils he listed:

“In a more or less general way, when the Council has introduced innovations, it has *unsettled the certainty of truths taught by the authentic Magisterium of the Church* as unquestionably belonging to the treasury of Tradition.”

In reviewing this immeasurably sad course of events, a result of consistent policy informed by a definite philosophy (naturalism, in the form of Modernism), the central cause should have become clear. Faith, which is the foundation of the Church, the first of her bonds of unity, and which consists in the supernaturally aided assent of the mind to truths preached authoritatively by the Church, was made to appear optional. The Church to all appearances ceased preaching *as one having authority*. It appeared that she had ceased to command acceptance of her doctrines. There was no longer any ecclesiastical discipline imposed on those who doubted or denied, led others into error, scandalised the little ones of Christ. To those outside the Church she appeared as uncertain, apologetic for her past, confused about her mission. Conversions dried up.

The root of this refusal by the authorities in Rome to treat the faith as obligatory has been the subject of a great deal of debate. However one fact is surely sufficiently clear – it is that those authorities had accepted the doctrines of Modernism.

At the heart of Modernism is the doctrine of religious immanence. St. Pius X, in his encyclical *Pascendi* explains this false principle,

“[T]he first actuation, so to say, of every vital phenomenon, and religion, as has been said, belongs to this category, is due to a certain necessity or impulsion; but it has its origin, speaking more particularly of life, in a movement of the heart, which movement is called a *sentiment*. Therefore, since God is the object of religion, we must conclude that faith, which is the basis and the foundation of all religion, consists in a sentiment which originates from a need of the divine.”

In this way all faith in God is inverted. From truths revealed by God, faith becomes the product of man’s religious feelings. St. Pius X proceeds,

“It is this sentiment to which Modernists give the name of faith, and this it is which they consider the beginning of religion.

“But we have not yet come to the end of their philosophy, or, to speak more accurately, their folly. For Modernism finds in this *sentiment* not faith only, but with and in faith, as they understand it, *revelation*, they say, abides. For what more can one require for revelation? Is not that religious *sentiment* which is perceptible in the consciousness revelation, or at least the beginning of revelation? Nay, is not God Himself, as He manifests Himself to the soul, indistinctly it is true, in this same religious sense, revelation? And they add: Since God is both the object and

the cause of faith, this revelation is at the same time *of* God and *from* God; that is, God is both the revealer and the revealed.

“Hence, Venerable Brethren, springs that ridiculous proposition of the Modernists, that every religion, according to the different aspect under which it is viewed, must be considered as both natural and supernatural. Hence it is that they make consciousness and revelation synonymous. Hence the law, according to which *religious consciousness* is given as the universal rule, to be put on an equal footing with revelation, and to which all must submit, even the supreme authority of the Church, whether in its teaching capacity, or in that of legislator in the province of sacred liturgy or discipline.”

From this root flow all of the effects of Vatican II, including of course the documents and the spirit of the Council itself. The refusal to impose doctrine takes its origin in the Modernist notion that revelation, rather than being externally revealed by God and testified to by objective and authoritative witnesses, is a product of man’s own inherent faculties. The respect shown toward false religions arises from the same cause. The lack of confidence displayed by most of the hierarchy is explained in the same light. Without an external revelation to preach and defend, there is no vital need for the divine assistance promised by Our Lord to the Church; without a deposit of clear truths which are to be accepted and obeyed in the very hearts of men, there can be no primacy of the objective over the subjective. In a paradigm in which individual conscience is primary, there can be no objective morality, nor can a supernatural rule of law binding consciences be justified or maintained. The reorientation of the liturgy from God to man partakes of the same spirit.

Vatican II was in this way the complete abandonment of divine religion. Not of religion, *per se*, but of divine religion. This analysis is abundantly confirmed by the fruits that flowed from it, which were disastrous without compare.

What are we to say of those who brought about this revolt from the faith?

It might have been possible to defend the distortion of faith held by these men by appeal to a thesis that rested on the ecumenist premise – that by gentler, more “negotiative” methods, *more* conversions would occur – except for two facts which proved the contrary beyond doubt as the crisis developed. The first is the disastrous consequences, and the second is the reaction to them on the part of the same authorities who produced them. To uninformed men of the current day it may seem plausible that the sixties’ revolution in the world somehow bled the Church of members, starting with the religious institutes, and then infected the priesthood with a crisis of identity and caused mass abandonment of vocations even by the most mature of priests. To those who lived through that period and watched events unfold, and to those who have researched the numbers, the dates, the progress of the disaster, such a theory is untenable. The results were too dramatic, and they were too closely related to obvious causes. Men who declared that they were raised in a Church in which tradition was sacrosanct, that nothing substantial ever changed, and that this was because God Himself established this Church, but that now everything was changing they no longer believed in it, were not merely affected by sixties’ liberationism. They were scandalised by the revolution in the Church. Likewise the priests, of whom *tens of thousands* lost their vocations in the decade from the close of the Council.

In the religious institutes the results were beyond belief, as naturalism replaced the supernaturally motivated spirit of sacrifice. Entire communities disappeared in a few short years. The Jesuit Scholasticate at Mt St Michael in Spokane, Washington was closed in 1968 due to the lack of vocations

(its population a few years before had reached several thousand). Countless other religious houses suffered dramatic falls in vocations, and the most astonishing rate of defections. Amongst nuns the rate of apostasy from religion was so great that in the USA alone the total population of sisters fell from over 180,000 during Vatican II to under 60,000 by 2009. But even these striking numbers don't tell the story. Much more enlightening is to note the mode of life of the remaining 60,000, who very often live in nursing homes, retirement facilities, and in small groups almost like refugees in suburban houses, while their old convents where hundreds lived the true religious life in common have been closed and sold off or turned into quasi-museums. And what of their faith? Of those remaining, how many have remained orthodox?

Keeping in mind that the changes were put forward as means which would revive the Church, whereas the results proved to be the complete opposite, did the perpetrators repent and reverse their policies? No. To compound the proof of mendacity, one must recall that the results were predicted by conservative prelates during the Council itself. During a press conference in November 1962 Bishop de Castro Mayer flatly denied that a spiritual revival could be expected in the wake of the proposed introduction of the vernacular for the liturgy. Numerous predictions of disaster were made within and without the Council by others. When these feared results materialised, did the liberals reconsider their novelties? No.

Further, the entire spirit of faux charity which animated the revolution was given the lie by the manner in which those in authority treated their opponents and the faithful themselves who were devoted to the traditions of the Church. In opening the Council John XXIII declared that he "prefers to make use of the medicine of mercy" contrasting this with the condemnations of errors in the past. This mercy revealed itself in the disdain shown to the members of the Holy Office, the ridicule displayed to Cardinal Ottaviani, whose microphone was switched off in order to prevent him continuing to speak (a humiliating cruelty which is barely credible, yet factual all the same), and then after the Council in imposing ruthlessly the changes even when fiercely resisted by parish priests and laymen. For naturalists who professed a love of man superior to the formalism and legalism which supposedly characterised the Church before the Council, these men displayed amazing hardness of heart when it came to telling a priest in tears that no, he could not continue to offer the Mass of his ordination. He would have to update.

The violence with which the revolution was carried forth arose from the same causes which produced the crisis of faith itself. In abandoning the rule of faith the Conciliar Church abandoned objective morality, objective law, and objective doctrine. If every man's conscience was the proximate rule of all things, then there could be no doctrinal unity, nor could there be any real rule of law in the Church. When the Faith was a stable deposit, any layman could challenge any bishop on doctrinal grounds, if the latter went astray, knowing that he was on the solid ground of tradition. In 423 the layman Eusebius did exactly that in the face of the Patriarch of Constantinople, Nestorius, who denied the divine maternity of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The congregation erupted in applause for Eusebius. In the Conciliar Church no such liberty could be enjoyed, and the result was inevitable tyranny. In fact, the unity of faith being lost, only the unity of government remained, with the eventual result that there have been countless accusations of "schism" echoing about the Conciliar Church since the close of the Council (usually directed against traditional Catholics) and almost a complete disappearance of accusations of heresy. The neologism "dissident" has become commonplace, evidence that doctrinal unorthodoxy is no longer seen as violating an unchangeable faith, but is rather a form of disobedience. For the conservative member of the Conciliar Church, the faith is whatever Rome says it is this week and you're a dissident if

you don't agree, whether you're a traditional Catholic or a liberal. As in any tyranny, disobedience is the only real crime, the only fault visited with real penalties. Charity is impossible in the absence of faith.

All of this drives towards the same conclusion – absence of faith in those who perpetrated the revolution in the Catholic Church. And the evil fruits of it all bring to mind Our Lord's instruction, "by their fruits you shall know them."

ⁱ Galatians, 6:10.