

AMORIS LAETITIA—A LOGICAL CONSEQUENCE OF VATICAN II

Pope Francis's position in *Amoris Laetitia*, that it is appropriate to favour the conscience of the individual over objective moral principle, is not a Catholic, but the Protestant, position. It reflects the truth adverted to by Sir Maurice Powicke when he said, of the Protestant revolt in England, that "the claim of conscience in the end took the place of Rome"¹.

Compromise has marked every step of Protestantism's retreat from Catholic principle over the 500 years since the Revolt, most notably, compromise on the indissolubility of marriage and on the place of the natural order in human sexuality (the ruling in favour of contraception by the 1930 Lambeth Conference) which opened the way for 'justifying' abortion and the aberrant behaviour of homosexuals.

The problem for the Catholic Church is not, as vast numbers of Catholic bishops and clergy aver, an effect of 'the spirit of Vatican II' (as if this Modernist aberration could call in aid nothing but the Council's name) but of the Council's very ethos. Pope Francis, a true son of Vatican II, brings to its logical conclusion the collective neglect of Catholic principle in favour of the Protestant in which the Council's bishops indulged.

Here, for readers who have not read H.J.A. Sire's *Phoenix from the Ashes* (Angelico Press, Kettering Ohio, 2015), is his summary of the Council's effects. (pp. 201-5) The author deals in passing with the content of *Gaudium et Spes*. Readers may care to compare the bishops' teaching there with the Church's teaching exposed so thoroughly by Christopher Dawson in 1935 and reproduced on this website a few months ago.² We commend *Phoenix from the Ashes* to our readers.³

The Second Vatican Council as a Betrayal of Faith

The... examples of irregularities in the Council [referred to in earlier text] are taken from R. M. Wiltgen's account⁴. They gain force from the fact that the author was a sympathiser with the progressives' aims, but could not help marvelling (if not rebelling) at their tactics. It should be noticed that, with one exception, the bias went all one way, towards the imposition of the liberal programme and silencing of its opponents; even the single exception, the attempt to prevent a chapter on the religious orders appearing in the schema on the Church, represented the wish of Cardinal Döpfner to force through German decisions made at Fulda. There is no counterbalancing action of the other side constraining the modernisers. The first two sessions of the Council were distinguished by the campaign to present the Curia as a tyrannical imposition on the Church's liberty; yet the Curia was in fact powerless, because both John XXIII and Paul VI left it in the lurch.

¹ *The Reformation in England*, London (OUP), 1941

² See http://www.superflumina.org/PDF_files/dawson_cath_doctrine_of_state.pdf

³ See http://www.superflumina.org/PDF_files/review-phoenix-from-the-ashes.pdf for a review.

⁴ Fr Ralph M. Wiltgen, S.V.D., *The Rhine Flows Into The Tiber, A History Of Vatican II*, Rockford, Illinois, (Tan), 1985.

The only tyranny was the one exercised by the progressives. One hardly needs to point out the gap between the Council's tactics and its claims of introducing a regime of tolerance and benignity in the Church. Tolerance, to the liberals, meant tolerance only for themselves.

Nevertheless, such partisanship in action is not exceptional in a church council and does not in itself vitiate its decrees. More peculiar to the Second Vatican Council were the undue influences of the *periti*, of national blocks in the council, of the world press outside it, and of the rage of the time for an 'ecumenical'—in practice a Protestantising—policy. In the first two respects, the Council can be compared to that of Florence, with its preponderance of the lower clergy and its organisation by national groups; and we may think it no coincidence that that assembly generated the heresy of conciliarism.

Accompanying these faults is the un-Catholic spirit that permeated the Second Vatican Council. A striking example of it is in the war waged by the progressives, in the name of ecumenism, against devotion to Our Lady. The trend had set in before the Council opened, when John XXIII visited the Shrine of Loreto in October 1962 and was criticised for his tactless offence against the ecumenical movement. In the Council itself the contamination was taken further. One can trace the bitter spirit of the progressives in the remarks of Yves Congar, who spoke contemptuously in private of 'Mariano-Christianity' and of 'fanatical Mariologists'. In 1964, at the prompting of Karl Rahner, the German bishops urged the rejection of the schema On the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church, and wished to restrict mention of Our Lady to the schema on the Church. These attempts ignored the expression of Eastern opinion: the Eastern rite fathers urged a separate schema on Our Lady on the grounds of that opinion, common to both Uniates and Orthodox, but they could not deflect the Europeans from their bias. When it was proposed to include Our Lady's title of Mediatrix in the Council's texts, the progressive cardinals, including Leger (of Montreal), Döpfner, Bea, and Alfrink, led the opposition to it. An unholy bargaining produced the compromise that they would accept the use of this title on condition that the Council dropped the proposal to declare Mary Mother of the Church. The spectacle of a council of the Church playing politics with the titles of the Virgin Mary, to win applause of heretical onlookers, is among the most offensive provided by the Second Vatican Council. Here again, Pope Paul was moved to act against the ascendancy he had himself set up. On November 21, 1964, he proclaimed the title on his own authority, an action that caused Hans Küng to denounce "the promulgation of the misleading title *Mater Ecclesiae* against the expressed wish of the council majority, which will arouse in non-Catholic Christendom great indignation, and grave doubts as to the genuinely ecumenical sympathies of the pope". These words, with their assumption that non-Catholic Christendom was to be identified with Protestantism, are representative of the progressive outlook; and the indignation attributed to those outside the Church was all on the part of the Modernists inside it. It did not occur to these malcontents that a more fruitful form of ecumenism might be to encourage among Protestants a love of Our Lady. As Protestant thinkers such as Wesley have recognised, the dogma that Mary is the Mother of God, which is recognised by all the Protestant churches, precludes a merely negative attitude to her place in the economy of salvation; and in the Anglican churches at least there can be found a readiness to give reverence to the Virgin Mary which puts the baseness of the Catholic Modernists to shame.

From the zeal for ecumenism sprang some other distortions. Nowadays, when the ecumenical movement has been virtually killed off by its failures, it is difficult to appreciate how strong its influence was at the time, and modern defenders of the Council try to minimise it; but in the 1960s the strength of ecumenical considerations was paramount and dictated great deference to the Protestant observers. Thus, the Lutheran delegate Professor Oscar Cullman was to be found remarking early in the first session, "I am more and more amazed every morning at the way we really form a part of the council". In an article in January 1964, Fr Schillebeeckx avowed, "One is astonished to find oneself more in sympathy with the thinking of Christian, non-Catholic 'observers' than with the views of one's own brethren on the other side of the dividing line. The accusation of connivance with the Reformation is therefore not without foundation". The astonishment, one must say, was all on Schillebeeckx's side. Describing the debates of the Council, the Anglican observer Dr. J Moorman wrote, "If some Father forgot himself

and said things which were bound to cause a flutter in the observers' tribune, he was sometimes rebuked by some later speaker"; and he noted that "although the observers were not allowed to speak in the council, their speeches were sometimes made for them by one or other of the Fathers". In the Council's documents the effects of this influence were seen concretely in the definition of the sources of Revelation in a Protestantising sense and in the decrees on ecumenism and on the priesthood.

The question of explicit heresy brought in through the Council documents will be dealt with later... Here it would be appropriate to comment on *Gaudium et Spes*, the programmatic utterance of the Council, officially known as 'The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World'. While free of actual heresy, this is a deplorable document. The first point that invites remark is the eponymous opening phrase, so characteristic of the optimism that the Council made its trademark, and so ironical in the light of the age of dissension and decline that it ushered in. As to the content of the document, the first impression left by it is of the humanistic tone deliberately given by the repetition of the phrases 'human race' and 'human person'. The social teaching of the constitution discards that of the recent popes; in particular the doctrine of the kingship of Christ receives no mention in it and cannot be reconciled with it. The papal condemnations of socialism are dropped, and the refusal to condemn Communist tyranny is deliberate. A 'basic equality' is proclaimed, by which all forms of social difference, including apparently the traditional hierarchy of Christian society, are condemned as "contrary to God's intent". The document is pervaded by modern materialist standards, as shown in the urging that "created goods should be in abundance for all", and in recommendations, at best out of place in a statement of Christian teaching, advising the abandonment of "antiquated methods of farming" and even the adoption of "scientific advances in regulating the number of children". The capitalist regime of unfettered competition is accepted as the norm in society, even in regard to the mutual relation of the sexes. In its obsequiousness to modern mores, the constitution finds itself unable to teach that the role of parenthood ought to be cherished without adding, "though the legitimate social progress of women should not be underrated on that account". A more realistic teaching would have noted that it was precisely the plea of the social progress of women that was undermining traditional family life. As a more general comment, one must feel how incongruous it is to see the Council preaching to the modern world, at great length, principles which are all too obviously taken from the world, and which have figured large in its historical campaign against the Church.

Looking at the council documents as a whole, we see the prevalence of the 'only theological school' with which the progressives had charged the preparatory schemas. Although the Liberated countries did not get their way in everything, it would not be right to say that the council documents show a balance between the modernising and traditional view. What we find is a text written by the progressives, with an occasional bleat of caution from the conservatives, weakening its force without providing any balance of doctrine. The question may then be asked why one can go through long sections of the Council's documents without the sense that one is reading anything new. Part of the reason is that the progressives were not in fact very original. Since on many subjects they had nothing in particular to say, large tracts of the documents consist in unimpeachable statements of the Church's traditional teaching. This fact is used by some to rebut accusations that the Council innovated in doctrine. In most of its teaching, indeed, it did not; but the question hinges on the parts in which they did.

In a similar line, there are the efforts of some traditionalists to distinguish between the Council itself and the wave of heresy that later overwhelmed the Church. That position has a great deal of truth in it; the appeal made to the Council to justify the subsequent demolition of the Church cannot be justified by its real teaching. Nevertheless, the Council cannot be wholly acquitted, as pious Catholics would wish. The bias shown in it was directly responsible for the movement that followed, however much this outstripped the intentions of the council fathers at the time. The bishops who permitted the collapse of the Church in the sixties and seventies were the same ones who had initiated the process in Rome. Some did so because they were too much compromised with the original assault on tradition to reverse their course; others because they lacked the strength to resist the tide.

Leaving aside the question of orthodoxy, there is also that of the Council as a practical blunder. As with any council, one may look not merely at the doctrine declared but at the wisdom of its policy, a historical question to be judged by effective consequences. The most obvious mistake of the Second Vatican Council must be the failure of the modernisers, in their self-assurance, to foresee the collapse that followed it. The greatest share of the blame must fall on Paul VI, and on the partisanship he showed in his direction of the Council. One reason for it may stem from his very tentativeness. He shrank from the idea of himself as one invested with power, one whose action would be decisive in the Church, and it did not seem to strike him how shamelessly he was loading the dice in favour of the progressives. Thus the pope who had proposed a serene re-assessment of the Church's doctrine in fact arranged a three-year turkey shoot of the curialists and traditionalists. Instead of ensuring balance, with perhaps some benign encouragement to the liberal side, he handed over absolute control to the modernisers, and then had to intervene from time to time to counter the results of his own policy; the only effect of this was to incur unpopularity and weaken his authority. It was thus due to Paul VI more than any individual that the Council was fundamentally flawed.

The one-sided nature of the Council's proceedings has been amply documented since R. M. Wiltgen wrote his account of it, but it makes little headway against the line that the Council represented a great dawn of enlightenment in the Church. Any objections are dismissed on the assumption that the progressive party was triumphantly in the right. This resembles the position of the infallibilists in the First Vatican Council who dismissed criticism of their methods on the simple plea that they were right and their opponents wrong. On pastoral grounds, if we look at the Church's progress in the following ninety years, it would be hard to argue that history gave them the lie. With the Second Vatican Council, the case is very different; the verdict on it is pronounced by the history of the Church in the next half-century. In the light of the invasion of secularism, of the atrophy of the spiritual life, of the drying up of vocations, of the vast loss of influence and respect suffered by the Church, the conclusion on practical grounds must be that the modernisers were wrong. They were wrong because of the aggressive imposition of their policy; they were wrong because of their ideological priorities at the expense of genuine pastoral concerns; they were wrong because their reformism was reckless of orthodoxy and tradition; they were wrong in their pseudo-ecumenism which ignored the Eastern tradition of Christianity; and they were wrong above all in their determination to blur the line between the Catholic faith and the Protestant denial of it. The fact needs to be clearly stated: the Second Vatican Council was a betrayal of the Church's faith. Its consequences cannot be put right until that betrayal has been recognised and reversed.
