

THE PROBLEM WITH CANONISATIONS SINCE VATICAN II

In August 1950 in a succinct encyclical, *Humani Generis*, Pope Pius XII condemned tendencies in philosophy and theology deriving from the Modernist heresy which threatened the Church and the Catholic faith. Of their proponents he wrote:

“While scorning our philosophy, they extol other philosophies of all kinds... by which they seem to imply that any kind of philosophy or theory, with a few additions and corrections if need be, can be reconciled with Catholic dogma. No Catholic can doubt how false this is...”¹

The Pope’s warning went unheeded. Four years after his death in 1958 the Church’s bishops assembled at the Vatican. A coterie was determined on promoting the errors Pius XII had condemned. Aided by *periti* immersed in the thinking that gave them rise this group managed to persuade their more orthodox peers to entrench these errors in the life of the Church to the enduring harm of the Catholic faithful.

The root of the evils is philosophical. The very title of the heresy which is its expression derives from a wilful decision to abandon the philosophy on which western man had settled, the sanity of Aristotle’s moderate realism, in favour of ‘modern’ thinking which owes its provenance to the Enlightenment. The Enlightenment’s originators, Bacon and Descartes, had sought to justify at the philosophical level Martin Luther’s revolt at the theological. In *Modernism* their philosophical errors returned to attack the religion whose rejection had given them birth. The initiative by the Church’s bishops to embrace a way of thinking grounded in rejection of the Church’s authority was irrational. It was inevitable that it would lead them into heresy which is where great numbers of their successors find themselves today.

In place of the Church’s theology, grounded in St Thomas’s teaching following Aristotle, there appeared new thinking which in 1946 the doyen of the Church’s philosophers and theologians, the Dominican Fr Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, addressed with the title Pius XII had earlier given it, '*la nouvelle theologie*'. He spelled out the consequences for the Church in an article: *Where is the New Theology leading us*.² Once the bishops embraced the fatuities of the *nouvelle theologie* they committed themselves inevitably to the defective modern philosophy on which it was founded.

The root of the evils is philosophical. Aristotle insisted that what we know is what is (which accords with common sense) and that as reality is one thing so is truth. Truth is one. This is manifest in the supreme principle of logic and of reality, the *Principle of Non-contradiction* which may be stated in this fashion: *A is A; A is not non-A; between A and non-A there is no third.*³

¹ Pius XII, *Humani Generis* (12.08.1950), n. 32

² In the publication of the *Angelicum Pontifical University* reproduced by *Catholic Family News* at <https://ia902804.us.archive.org/26/items/Garrigou-LagrangeEnglish/Where%20is%20the%20New%20Theology%20Leading%20Us%20-%20Garrigou-Lagrange%2C%20Reginald%2C%20O.P..pdf>

³ In his encyclical condemning modernism, *Pascendi Dominici Gregis* (September 8th, 1907), Pius X identifies this defect in the heresy that reflects the errors of modern philosophy. In his syllabus of modernist errors, *Lamentabili sane* (July 3rd, 1907), he condemns specifically these propositions: n. 58 ‘Christ did not teach a determined body of doctrine applicable to all times and all men, but rather inaugurated a religious movement adapted or to be adapted to

The advance of their theories that materialism and subjectivism were adequate to explain reality was accompanied by the implication that they were not bound to conform to the supreme principle. There could, moreover, be different truths: what was true in one discipline need not be true in another. Not only was their grasp of reality defective, so was their logic.

The Church's Bishops Lose Their Way

At the Second Vatican Council the bishops of the Catholic Church chose to ignore the warnings in *Humani Generis*. Deferring to the postulates of modern philosophy they used their new found 'freedom' to try and reinvent Catholic doctrine. There is no better instance of this than their displacement of the Church's understanding of what is meant by tradition. Sacred tradition was defined by the Council of Trent whose expression the Fathers of the (first) Vatican Council (under Pius IX) repeated —

"[Sacred tradition is contained] in the written books and in the unwritten traditions which have been received by the apostles from the mouth of Christ Himself or, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, have been handed down by the Apostles themselves and have thus come to us." [Council of Trent, *Contra Novatores*, Session IV, April 8th, 1546, Dz. 783; Vatican Council, *Dei Filius*, Dogmatic Constitution on the Catholic Faith, Dz. 1787]

Then, addressing the interaction between faith and reason, they added this:

"For, the doctrine of faith which God revealed has not been handed down as a philosophic invention to the human mind to be perfected, but has been entrusted as a divine deposit... to be faithfully guarded and infallibly interpreted. Hence, also, that understanding of its sacred dogmas must be perpetually retained which Holy Mother Church has once declared; and there must never be recession from that meaning under the specious name of a deeper understanding 'Therefore... let the understanding, the knowledge, and wisdom of individuals as of all, of one as of the whole Church, grow and progress strongly with the passage of the ages and the centuries; but in its own genus alone, namely in the same teaching, with the same sense and same understanding (*eodem sensu, eademque sentential*, Vincent of Lerins, *Commonitorium*, 23, 3) [Dz. 1800]

In *Dei Verbum* n. 8 the bishops of Vatican II, rather than endorse the Church's settled position as Vatican I had endorsed the teaching of Trent the Council that preceded it, proclaimed that they knew better. They asserted:

"The Tradition that comes from the apostles progresses in the Church with the help of the Holy Spirit. There is a growth in insight into the realities and words that are being passed on. This comes about in various ways. It comes through the contemplation and study of believers who ponder these things in their hearts. It comes from the intimate sense of spiritual realities which they experience. And it comes from the preaching of those who have received, along with their right of succession in the episcopate, the sure charism of truth."

It is false to assert that apostolic tradition *progresses* in the Church: the Church's tradition was complete with the death of the last Apostle. It is false to assert it is something *living*. Their claim savoured of heresy (*propositio haeresim sapiens aut de haeresi suspecta*). Thus *Dei Verbum* n. 8 was not a reflection of Catholic truth but of Modernist intent to contradict that truth.

different times and places' ; n. 64 'Scientific progress demands that the concepts of Christian doctrine concerning God, creation, revelation, the Person of the Incarnate Word and Redemption be re-adjusted'; n. 65 'Modern Catholicism can be reconciled with true science only if it is transformed into a non-dogmatic Christianity; that is to say, into a broad and liberal Protestantism.'

That their abandonment of the Church's philosophy was accompanied by abandonment of the supreme principle of logic and reality is exemplified in *Dignitatis Humanae*, the so called 'Declaration on Religious Liberty'. In its first section the bishops said this—

"The council professes its belief that God Himself has made known to mankind the way in which men are to serve Him, and thus be saved in Christ and come to blessedness... [and]... that this one true religion subsists in the Catholic and Apostolic Church, to which the Lord Jesus committed the duty of spreading it abroad among all men."

Then, in the fourteen sections that followed they proceeded to contradict this assertion comprehensively.

Rules of Terminology

In logic a *term*, e.g., 'man', is said of individuals, for instance, James, Joseph, Margaret and Mary – called (in the science of Logic) 'its inferiors' – *univocally*. The term signifies the *same* character in each of the four: each is a man, a rational animal.

In contrast a term may be used *equivocally*. For example the term 'board' may be said of a group of executives of a company, or of a length of timber, its 'inferiors', and then it is said equivocally. Here the term signifies a character in each which is utterly diverse. The only commonality is nominal, i.e., in the word, the name, used. In similar fashion is the term 'cricket' is said of the game and of the insect of the order *orthoptera*.

There is a third category. A term may be said of differing realities analogically. For instance, the term 'healthy' may be said of rosy cheeks, of good food, of mountain air, of daily exercise or of a normal functioning organic constitution. Here the term signifies in each inferior a character which is somewhat similar and somewhat dissimilar *but more dissimilar than similar*, as analysis shows. For rosy cheeks are a *sign* of health; good food, mountain air and daily exercise are *causes* disposing to health - but in differing ways - and only the last, normal functioning organic constitution, *is* the essence of health. When a term is used in this way it is said of its inferiors analogously according to analogy of attribution or proportion.⁴ We use the word 'thing' in this way, applying it to realities which are utterly diverse. Let the reader note the critical qualification of any *analogical* term. It signifies a character in its inferiors which, while it is somehow same and somehow unsame, *is more unsame than same*.

Now until 1965 the term 'saint' was always used *univocally* in the Catholic Church. It signified one who, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, was possessed by, and demonstrated in his life and conduct, outstanding holiness and heroic virtue. When the Church denominated each of Paul of Tarsus, Gregory the Great, Augustine of Hippo, Catherine of Siena, Joan of Arc, Teresa of Avila, Ignatius Loyola and Thérèse of Lisieux, 'saint', this is what she meant.

La Nouvelle Théologie

Actions have consequences. One of the streams of the philosophy underlying the *nouvelle théologie* is materialism which rejects what is formal in reality. The formal cause is the

⁴ There are two species of analogy. The other, *analogy of proportionality*, need not concern us here. Cf. A. M. Woodbury Ph. D, S.T.D., *Logic*, 1947, nn. 152 et seq. Access to Dr Woodbury's texts may be obtained via the website <https://austinwoodbury.com/> after registration.

influence that determines matter to be this thing or that. Its presence is reflected in the condign power of the mind to distinguish in one thing different formalities, as Professor G. H. Joyce explained in his classic text on Logic in 1916:

“It is the intellect... which has the... power of distinguishing two things which in nature are inseparably conjoined, of severing its roundness from the sun, its transparency from the glass. Thus I can look at a single object, e.g., the paper I am using, and consider separately its whiteness, its smoothness, its oblong shape, its opacity, etc. The mind’s power of... separating in thought things which in the real order are one, is known as its power of abstraction.”⁵

The intellect apprehends forms. What I know when I know a tree is not its matter but the form that makes it be a tree, as St Thomas explains: “To know is to have something in self formally and not materially.”⁶

Because of the intimate connection between philosophy and logic, the Enlightenment philosophers’ rejection of the formal in reality was accompanied by its rejection also in logic, that is, a rejection of the mind’s ability to distinguish. The materialist philosopher divides; the metaphysician (the follower of Aristotle’s common sense) distinguishes. Once this is understood, no one will be surprised at the failure by modern popes, bishops and theologians of the Catholic Church to exercise the intellect’s power to distinguish.

Loss of Rigour in Terminology

One of the marks of the Enlightenment’s abandonment of logical principle – filtered down into the thinking of the general populace – is looseness in terminology. ‘Heroism’ and ‘hero’ are applied indiscriminately to one whose only claim to the epithet is that his conduct reflects in some faint measure what was understood of one who exercised determinate will in the face of extreme adversity even at the risk of death, the univocal replaced by the analogical.

The term ‘martyr’ has been similarly abused. It was first misused by the Protestant John Foxe in the reign of the first Elizabeth in his *Actes and Monuments of these Latter and Perilous Days etc.* when he extended it to one who gives up his life for the Protestant principle that the believer’s authority is superior to that of Almighty God. The rot manifested itself within the Catholic Church in 1964 when, in the course of his homily on the canonisation of the Ugandan Martyrs, Pope Paul VI said that the shedding of blood had “become a common inheritance of Catholics Orthodox Anglicans and Protestants...” Pope John Paul II repeated the solecism in comments made at the end of the Way of the Cross at Rome’s Coliseum on Good Friday, 1994.⁷ In February 1441, Pope Eugene IV had taught this:

“[The sacrosanct Roman Church] firmly believes, professes and proclaims that those not living within the Catholic Church, not only pagans but Jews, heretics and schismatics cannot become participants in eternal life but will depart into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels unless before the end of life the same have been added to the flock... and that no one, whatever almsgiving he has practised, even if he has shed his blood for the name of Christ, can be saved, unless he has remained in the bosom and unity of the Catholic Church.”⁸

⁵ George Hayward Joyce, *Principles of Logic*, London, 1916. (My copy a reprint in 2013 by Isha Books, New Delhi) Ch. II, p. 16.

⁶ *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 14, a. 1; *In Librum de Causis*, lect. 18.

⁷ The term has been misused even more profoundly by Muslims who apply it indiscriminately to one who dies in support of Mohammedanism, even where his action has occasioned the death of the innocent.

⁸ Decree on behalf of the Jacobites, from the bull *Cantata Domino*, February 4th, 1441 (date a/c to Florentine style; modern dating 1442); Dz.714.

The two modern popes had thus contradicted a theologically certain truth of the Catholic Faith. That each indulged in this scandal was an inevitable consequence of the dysfunctional thinking that accompanied the ruminations of the bishops at Vatican II.

Pope John Paul's Initiative

Among the popes since Vatican II, John Paul II was the one most immersed in modern thinking, his philosophical incompetence patent in his confusion over the distinction between act and potency, a foundation of the Church's theology.⁹ This was one of the many defects that flowed from his philosophical formation.¹⁰ Whenever a man speaks he is understood as indicating things *in act*, the factual, not things *in potency*, things possible. Time and again in his writings John Paul II would proclaim "all men are saved". The statement is not true. It is true only *in potency*. It is *possible* for all men to be saved – except those who have already died separated from God. To misuse language is to mislead, and the Pope was objectively guilty of misleading faithful and unfaithful alike. (This is not to say he was *subjectively* culpable: God alone is judge of the soul.)

John Paul's philosophical incompetence was demonstrated again in his encyclical *Fides et Ratio* (September 14th, 1998). With breathtaking nescience of the Church's history since at least the sixteenth century he asserted –

"[t]he Church has no philosophy of her own nor does she canonise any one particular philosophy in preference to others" (n. 49) –

for which erroneous proposition he cited as authority Pius XII in n. 15 of *Humani Generis*.

Whatever Pius XII had said there, in nn. 30 to 32 of the same document he said this:

"Let no Christian... whether philosopher or theologian, embrace eagerly and lightly whatever novelty happens to be thought up from day to day, but rather let him let him weigh it with painstaking care and balanced judgment lest he lose or corrupt the truth he already has, with grave danger and damage to his faith. If one considers all this well, he will easily see why the Church demands that future priests be instructed in philosophy "according to the method, doctrine, and principles of the Angelic Doctor," since, as we well know from the experience of centuries, the method of Aquinas is singularly preeminent both for teaching students and for bringing truth to light; his doctrine is in harmony with Divine Revelation, and is most effective both for safeguarding the foundation of the faith and for reaping, safely and usefully, the fruits of sound progress.

"How deplorable... that this philosophy, received and honoured by the Church, is scorned by some, who shamelessly call it outmoded... Our traditional philosophy... with its clear exposition and solution of questions, its accurate definition of terms, its clear-cut distinctions, can, they concede, be useful as a preparation for scholastic theology, a preparation quite in accord with medieval mentality; but this philosophy hardly offers a method of philosophising suited to the needs of our modern culture..."

The basic principles of documentary interpretation require that cited material be quoted in context. Pope John Paul's failure to do so confirms his immersion in false philosophy.

⁹ St Thomas Aquinas *In IX Metaphysics* Ll. 1 et seq., and see Aristotle's *Metaphysics* 1045b et seq.

¹⁰ His teachers thought it possible to blend the thought of Kant with the teaching of St Thomas, a task akin to blending water with oil. See George Weigel, *Witness to Hope: the Biography of Pope John Paul II*, London (Harper & Collins), 2005, pp. 125 et seq.

It should not be thought it was mere whimsy that moved him to change the Church's law on beatification and canonisation. The defective logic associated with false philosophy to which he, Pope Paul VI who had preceded him, and the Council's bishops in general, subscribed was at work. In the Apostolic Constitution *Divinus Perfectionis Magister* (January 25th, 1983) John Paul abandoned the rigour set forth in the processes set forth by the celebrated canon lawyer Prospero Lambertini afterwards Pope Benedict XIV.¹¹ He reduced to insignificance the office of *Promoter of the Faith*, ('the Devil's Advocate') whose task it was to defend the Church and her rights by testing assertions of sanctity, looking for character flaws and checking for misrepresentations. The result was that the univocal meaning of the term 'saint' was replaced by an analogical meaning.

Thereafter it would suffice that a candidate had *manifested signs of sanctity*, or had *adopted a course of life disposing to sanctity*, or had *acted from time to time in a manner* said to be saintly, sufficient to satisfy a pope and his advisers who shared the inevitable confusion following on rejection of the Church's traditional philosophy.¹² Moreover, the change removed the burden of proving the case beyond any doubt, evidenced by the removal of the requirement at each stage of the process for two miracles attributable to the instrumentality of the candidate after prayers for his intercession. (One miracle might be explicable; two provided the necessary certitude.) The result is that in a majority of cases persons 'beatified' or 'canonised' after 1983 might never, under the previous salutary dispensation, have received the benefit of the Church's fiat.

Actions have consequences. The writer is not alone in contending that every 'canonisation' since January 1983 will need to be revisited and tested against the searching process the Church had codified under Benedict XIV to determine whether the candidate was indeed a saint in the univocal sense, *the proper* sense of that term. As a precondition the former law will need to be restored in full.

The next orthodox pope to rule the Church will have much to do to reestablish her wonted glory. Among the more pressing of his concerns will be restoration of the processes of beatification and canonisation but also rectification of the damage done to the Church's reputation following the ersatz ecumenical council responsible for it, and by the popes who put its errors into practice.

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January 25th, 2023—*Conversion of St Paul*

¹¹ Prospero Cardinal Lambertini, Archbishop of Bologna, Doctor of Theology and of Civil and Canon Law, in his treatise *Doctrina de servorum dei beatificatione et beatorum canonizatione* (1734-1738). Benedict XIV is regarded as one of the greatest popes of the last 500 years.

¹² Theologians may care to weigh the initiative of Pope Francis in his motu proprio *Maiorum hac dilectionem* (July 11th, 2017) of adding to the causes for beatification and canonisation—martyrdom for the faith or a life of heroic virtue—a new category, *oblatio vitae*, 'the offering of (one's) life', to assess whether it can be justified objectively.