

ERRORS OF OUR RECENTLY CANONISED POPES

“The modern, and quite excessive, personality cult of Roman Pontiffs inevitably results in the cry *santo subito* after they are dead. Arguably, in the case of popes, the 'cooling off' period after their deaths *ought to be very much distinctly longer* than in the case of other people, and any technical obstacles... the more irremovable. This would also make possible a relaxed consideration, undertaken with a long view, of *doctrinal* questions. Because, for the media and for ordinary priests and people, canonisation of a pope can easily be misunderstood as implying the infallibility of everything which he did or said.”

Fr John Hunwicke ¹

A recent comment on the *Rorate Caeli* blogsite invoked the private revelations that St Catherine of Siena received from Almighty God in the fourteenth century as it lamented the state of the Church in the twenty first. ²

“No rank, whether civil or divine law, can be held in grace without holy justice. For those who are not corrected and those who do not correct are like members beginning to rot. If the doctor were to do no more than apply ointment without cauterizing a wound, the whole body would become foetid and corrupt. So it is with prelates and anyone else in authority. If they see their subjects rotting because of the filth of deadly sin and apply only the ointment of soft words without reproof, these will never return to health. Rather, they will infect the other members with whom they form one body under their shepherd. But if those in authority are truly good doctors to these souls, as were those glorious shepherds [the saints], they will not use ointment without the fire of reproof. And if the members are still obstinate in their evildoing, they will cut them off from the congregation so that they will not infect the whole body with the filth of deadly sin...

...

“They [the evil clergy] do not pay me my due of glory, nor do they do themselves the justice of holy and honourable living, a desire for the salvation of souls or a hunger for virtue. They commit injustice against their subjects and neighbours and neglect to correct them for their sins. Indeed, moved by their perverse fear of incurring the displeasure of others, they act as if they were blind and ignorant and let them sleep in their sickness. They do not consider that by wishing to please creatures they are displeasing both them and me, your Creator...³

Where, in our own era, did the rot at the heart of the Church begin, the rot exemplified in the great number of prelates who teach theological and moral error, who neglect to preach the saving truths of Divine Revelation or who fail to implement the laws and discipline of the Church ; the rot exemplified in those who defend or downplay their errors and failings ? The disturbance of the psyche brought about by two world wars and the disruption of the natural order left in their wake had much to do with abandonment of acknowledgement of the authority of God as Creator and Conserver of the universe. The Modernist spirit among the faithful which seeks to replace God’s authority with human authority, suppressed in the 1900’s, gained vigour with the burgeoning of the *Nouvelle Theologie* movement, and the rejection by its followers of the Church’s long held philosophy in favour of one or other of the versions of modern philosophy. The imminence of the danger to

¹ Fr Hunwicke’s *Mutual Enrichment* blogsite, 26th April, 2014. Emphasis in original.

² <http://rorate-caeli.blogspot.com/> for 2nd December 2014 sub cap. *Bishops and Holy Justice*.

³ *The Dialogue*, chs. 119, 122.

the faith moved Garrigou-Lagrange, doyen of the Church's theologians, to condemn the movement out of hand⁴, and spurred Pius XII to catalogue its evils in *Humani Generis* (12th August 1950). Regrettably, they were unsuccessful. The evil flourished.

The vehicle of its proliferation was the Second Vatican Council and the signal of its invasion of orthodox Catholic thinking was the now sainted John XXIII's *Opening Speech* to the bishops of that Council on 11th October, 1962.

"In the daily exercise of our pastoral office, we sometimes have to listen, much to our regret, to voices of persons who, though burning with zeal, are not endowed with too much sense of discretion or measure. In these modern times they can see nothing but prevarication and ruin. They say that our era, in comparison with past eras, is getting worse, and they behave as though they had learned nothing from history... They behave as though at the time of former Councils everything was a full triumph for the Christian idea and life and for proper religious liberty.

"We feel we must disagree with those prophets of gloom who are always forecasting disaster, as though the end of the world were at hand.

"In the present order of things, Divine Providence is leading us to a new order of human relations which, by men's own efforts and even beyond their very expectations, are directed toward the fulfillment of God's superior and inscrutable designs. And everything, even human differences, leads to the greater good of the Church...

And, somewhat later —

"At the outset of the Second Vatican Council, it is evident, as always, that the truth of the Lord will remain forever. We see, in fact, as one age succeeds another, that the opinions of men follow one another and exclude each other. And often errors vanish as quickly as they arise, like fog before the sun.

"The Church has always opposed these errors. Frequently she has condemned them with the greatest severity. Nowadays, however, the Spouse of Christ prefers to make use of the medicine of mercy rather than that of severity. She considers that she meets the needs of the present day by demonstrating the validity of her teaching rather than by condemnations. Not certainly, that there is a lack of fallacious teaching, opinions, and dangerous concepts to be guarded against and dissipated. But these are so obviously in contrast with the right norm of honesty, and have produced such lethal fruits, that by now it would seem men of themselves are inclined to condemn them, particularly those ways of life which despise God and His Law, or place excessive confidence in technical progress and a well-being based exclusively on the comforts of life. They are ever more deeply convinced of the paramount dignity of the human person and of his perfections, as well as of the duties which that implies. Even more important, experience has taught men that violence inflicted on others, the might of arms, and political domination, are of no help at all in finding a happy solution to the grave problems which afflict them..."

John XXIII's public abandonment of the exercise of the Church's medicinal powers to reprove, his opposing of severity to mercy when the right exercise of the one is an essential element of the other, the wrong-headedness of his prophecies and the general naïvety of his words provided a catalyst for abandonment of Catholic principle in favour of the secular, the flourishing of theological and moral error, neglect of the truths of Divine Revelation and disobedience of the Church's laws.

⁴ Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *La nouvelle théologie où va-t-elle ?* translated as *Where is the new theology leading us ? Angelicum* 23 (1946): 126-145.

He was not alone. There are instances of error just as grievous in the teachings of St John Paul II and the-no-doubt-soon-to-be-proclaimed-saint Paul VI.

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The Italian theologian, Don Pietro Leone, has just published an important study entitled *The Family Under Attack*. He makes some compelling points there on the abandonment of Catholic principle over the last fifty years.

One of the features of Paul VI's *Humanae Vitae* was the abandonment of the Church's perennial teaching upholding the absolute priority of the procreative finality of marriage, teaching which had been confirmed as recently as March 1944 (Declaration on certain modern authors, AAS XXVI p. 103). Don Leone remarks—

“We are not far from *Familiaris Consortio* here. We can trace the inversion of the finalities of marriage in the present Magisterium to the 'modern authors', through the personalism of Pope Paul VI... and the new theories bruited about on the floor of the [Second Vatican] Council, even by cardinals such as Léger and Suenens, which reduced the importance of the procreative purpose of marriage and opened the way to its frustration by elevating its unitive end and the gift of self to an equal or higher level.”

Once a principle is admitted (as we have remarked on this website time without number) consequences flow. Paul VI's endorsement of this departure from Catholic teaching served to ground developments even more un-Catholic.

The confusion of the natural with the supernatural, a characteristic of the *Nouvelle Théologie*⁵, flourished during the Second Vatican Council. One of the Council's leading lights, Archbishop Karol Wojtyla, suffered the same confusion.⁶ Notwithstanding that certain of his studies had been conducted at the *Angelicum*, the young Fr Karol Wojtyla's first doctorate was bestowed by the Jagiellonian University in Poland. In his consideration of Fr Wojtyla's thesis, Garrigou-Lagrange had remarked a fundamental problem affecting the priest's understanding of objectivity.⁷ His early immersion in subjectivism, a consequence of a vain attempt by the seminary teachers of his day to reconcile the teaching of St Thomas with the subjectivism of Emmanuel Kant, ensured Pope John Paul's philosophical views would be ever problematic.

It was these views that led the newly installed Pope in his *Wednesday Audiences* to attempt to force Sacred Scripture into conformity with Feminist ideology. The interpretations of passages in *Genesis* and in the letters of St Paul he produced were bizarre to say the least. He seemed quite unconscious of their disagreement with the

⁵ The root problem with modern philosophy, its preoccupation with the subjective, prevents, indeed *precludes*, it from correctly distinguishing the objective. It does more : it denigrates, so as to destroy, the critical instrument of philosophy which is the facility to distinguish. In the theological order this results in a loss of comprehension of the total other-ness of the supernatural and the natural.

⁶ Especially in his early writings. It rendered his first, encyclical, *Redemptor Hominis*, almost incomprehensible.

⁷ *The Doctrine of Faith according to St John of the Cross*, December 1948. George Weigel (*Witness to Hope*, London, 2005) asserts that the *Angelicum* required a dissertation be published before a degree was conferred and Fr Wojtyla could not afford the printing (p. 87). But there may be more to the failure of conferral than that. The Jagiellonion also conferred on him a second degree (in January, 1954) on the thesis *An Evaluation of Constructing a Christian Ethics on the Basis of the System of Max Scheler*,

Church's constant teaching. The pastiche he produced was grounded in the defective teaching on the finality of marriage bruited during Vatican II and taught formally by Paul VI in *Humanae Vitae*. Pope John Paul was to go on to reduce his novel teaching to a corpus of 'doctrine' with the inherently contradictory title 'Theology of the Body'. Don Leone's comment upon it is apposite :

"Theology of the Body is a personalist, phenomenological system. As such it is concerned with the subjective realm, such as the person and love, and neglects the objective realm, be it Catholic dogma (as with the doctrine that the primary end of sexuality and marriage is procreation ; or as with the distinction between the natural and supernatural orders), or scholastic theology, philosophy, or morality (as with the distinctions between the different forms of love). The outcome is a shift from the virtue of love to the passion of love, from supernatural love to natural love, and in the final analysis from sanctity to sexuality.

"In this lack of Catholicity, Theology of the Body, although presented as the praise of Catholic conjugal love, becomes instead a paean to Eros, with greater resonance for the World than for the Church. As such, it certainly constitutes one of the more remarkable fruits of the much vaunted rapprochement (or "aggiornamento") between the Church and the World." (pp. 349-350)

Each of these papal errors flowed from a failure in right understanding of final causality⁸, an inevitable consequence of rejection of the Church's philosophy, the philosophy of St Thomas Aquinas, by the neo-Modernist adherents of the *Nouvelle Theologie*. The high water mark of this abandonment of Catholic principle was reached on 14th September 1998 when Pope John Paul announced to the world that the Church had no philosophy of her own ⁹, falsely citing as authority for that proposition words of Pius XII *which said the very contrary*, and contradicting the express teaching of innumerable of his predecessors.

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The *Rorate Caeli* article quoted one further extract from *The Dialogue* of St Catherine :

*"Once she [the Church] is reformed with good shepherds, her subjects will certainly change their ways. For in a way, the guilt for the subjects' sins is due to their evil shepherds, because if the latter had reprimanded them as they should and the pearl of justice had been luminous in their holy and honourable living, the subjects would not have behaved in this way."*¹⁰

Let us pray that a further such reformation is at hand.

*Veni Sancte Spiritus et emitte caelitus lucis Tuae radium...
Lava quod est sordidum ; riga quod est aridum ; sana quod est saucium ;
Flecte quod est rigidum ; fove quod est frigidum ; rege quod est devium...*

Michael Baker

8th December 2014—*Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception*

⁸ The helplessness that besets those in ignorance of philosophical principle is nowhere better illustrated than in the inability of the *Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith* and of Pope John Paul II himself to grasp the solution to the dilemma of the ongoing existence of cryogenically stored human embryos.

⁹ *Fides et Ratio*, n. 49 and footnote 54.

¹⁰ *The Dialogue*, ch, 129.