

THE QUESTION OF VATICAN II'S LEGITIMACY

In necessariis unitas, in dubiis libertas, in omnibus caritas.

Attributed to St Augustine

In an opinion piece on *Settimo Cielo* Sandro Magister has again lambasted Archbishop Carlo Maria Viganò over his criticisms of Vatican II. Notwithstanding His Grace's charitable response (on July 3rd) to his first criticism, Magister persists in asserting that he is on the brink of schism. He takes exception to what the Archbishop had written on the 1st (not 4th) July:

"Anyone with common sense can see that it is an absurdity to want to interpret a Council, since it is and ought to be a clear and unequivocal norm of Faith and Morals. Secondly, if a magisterial act raises serious and reasoned arguments that it may be lacking in doctrinal coherence with magisterial acts that have preceded it, it is evident that the condemnation of a single heterodox point in any case discredits the entire document. If we add to this the fact that the errors formulated or left obliquely to be understood between the lines are not limited to one or two cases, and that the errors affirmed correspond conversely to an enormous mass of truths that are not confirmed, we can ask ourselves whether it may be right to expunge the last assembly from the catalogue of canonical Councils. The sentence will be issued by history and by the *sensus fidei* of the Christian people even before it is given by an official document."

Yet this paragraph is admirable for the way it highlights the flaw in Pope Benedict's approach to Vatican II and the critical issue of the Council's indulgence in error.

Magister quotes Walter Cardinal Brandmüller as correcting Bishop Schneider's assertion that there have been instances of errors in the determinations of ecumenical councils corrected by later councils. He overlooks the fact that (on June 9th) Archbishop Viganò had already performed this service, chiding Bishop Schneider gently over an argument which "although made with the best of intentions, undermines the Catholic edifice from its foundation".

Magister thinks the Cardinal's correction determinative of the challenge to Vatican II's legitimacy. Roberto de Mattei, in an article on *Rorate Caeli* on July 14th (<https://rorate-caeli.blogspot.com/2020/07/de-mattei-fake-news-no-historical-truth.html#more>), begs to differ. The intervention of Cardinal Brandmüller, he says, "refutes nothing of what was affirmed by Bishop Schneider".

The issue of Vatican II's legitimacy may be resolved by the answers to two questions.

1. Was the statement—*Every man is free to embrace and profess that religion which he, led by the light of reason, thinks to be the true religion*—rightly condemned by the Church as n. 15 in the *Syllabus of Errors* attached to the Bull *Quanta Cura* (December 8th, 1864)?
2. Was the statement—*In the worship of any religion whatever, men can find the way to eternal salvation, and can attain eternal salvation*—rightly condemned by the Church as n. 16 in the same *Syllabus*?

If the answer to each is 'Yes', it is impossible that the statement—*This Vatican Synod declares that the human person has a right to religious freedom*—asserted in n. 2 of the *Declaration of Religious Freedom* (December 7th, 1965) could be part of the Church's teaching. St Ambrose

says *Omne verum, a quocumque dicatur, a Spiritu Sancto est*—“Every truth, no matter by whom it may be uttered, is of the Holy Spirit”. St Thomas Aquinas agrees. How, then, could *this Vatican Synod* have been guided by the Holy Spirit?

As we have argued previously, a theoretical possible course open to a future pope is to appoint a commission of theologians to advise him on the question—*Was the Second Vatican Council in fact an ecumenical or general council of the Catholic Church?* Professor de Mattei would place no objection to such a course for he concludes his paper with this paragraph:

“Why exclude [the possibility] then that a day will come when even the Second Vatican Council may be repudiated, in part, or *en bloc*, as happened with the Council of Constance and its decrees?”

Far from Archbishop Viganò and those who agree with him being on the brink of schism, time may prove that it is Sandro Magister and those who adhere slavishly to Vatican II and its irregularities who will find themselves in that position. Division is inevitable when those possessed of authority fail to exercise their authority and the Catholic faithful have suffered extensively in this way for fifty years.

Whereas the evil of heresy lies in a failure of the supernatural virtue of faith, the evil of schism lies in a failure of charity. (*Summa Theologiae* II-II, q. 39, a. 2, ad 3) In this debate, then, charity must rule our minds and hearts. Archbishop Viganò has provided us with splendid example.

Michael Baker

July 22nd, 2020—*St Mary Magdalen*