

REVIEW OF *PHOENIX FROM THE ASHES*

Phoenix from the Ashes - The Making, Unmaking, and Restoration of Catholic Tradition by H J A Sire [Kettering, Ohio, Angelico Press <http://angelicopress.com/sire-phoenix-from-the-ashes> , 2015] is as admirable as it is timely. It will prove a valuable resource for the modern Catholic troubled over the devastation that has befallen Christ's Church and his Catholic faith, a devastation now approaching its apotheosis with a pope's open embrace of Protestant principle. The book ranks with Michael Davies' trilogy, *Cranmer's Godly Order*, *Pope John's Council* and *Pope Paul's New Mass*, and his *The Second Vatican Council and Religious Liberty*, and with Romano Amerio's *Iota Unum*.

The author is an historian and his first eight chapters set out with clarity a history of the Catholic Church from its institution up until 1963. He pulls no punches in his detailing of the defects of various of the Church's popes. His assessment of the immense value to the Church and to the world of the high Middle Ages with St Thomas Aquinas's endorsement of the philosophy of Aristotle is admirable. "All other thinkers [began] with a theory and sought to fit reality into it ; Aristotle is the only philosopher to have begun with reality and devised a system by which to understand it." [p. 25] His analysis of Galileo's opinions and conduct and the Church's dealing with him is lucid as is his assessment of the Inquisition. The ninth chapter relates the circumstances surrounding the calling of the Second Vatican Council and summarises its course. The remainder of the book (chapters 10 to 15) deals with what has followed.

Sire's mode of expression is elegant and felicitous, as is his use of parallelism and analogy—"If words were sufficient to bring men to Him, God would not have needed to become man and die for us; he could have founded a newspaper." [p. 262] His arguments are rigorous, for the most part.

The book's chief value lies in its almost encyclopaedic listing of the evils that confront the faithful Catholic and of the contribution to those evils by the Council and by the conciliar popes. The reader will begin to understand why his parish priest seems hardly to believe in the mysteries he celebrates, why he engages in systematic de-sacralisation of the Mass, why he feels it necessary to indulge in secular trivia at every chance, why he persists in casting doubt on the Church's teachings and the mysteries of the faith. He will begin to grasp the extent of the evil of the heresy of Modernism.

For Sire is right in categorising as Modernists the cardinals, bishops and priests whose actions have brought the Church to its current crisis. They are true heirs of the heresy Pius X condemned more than 100 years ago, their conduct marked by the arrogance which is Modernism's hallmark.

"It is pride which fills Modernists with that self-assurance by which they consider themselves and... allows them to regard themselves as the sole possessors of knowledge... It is pride which rouses in them the spirit of disobedience and causes them to demand a compromise between authority and liberty."
(*Pascendi Dominici gregis*, 8. 09. 1907, n. 40)

This pride was manifest in the conduct of Suenens, Döpfner, Lienart, Frings, Lercaro, Bea, König, Alfrink, Léger, de Smedt and their ilk during the Council, as of the majority of their *periti* including Congar, Schillebeeckx, Küng and Rahner. It has flourished among their successors. It is the reason some thirty per cent of the bishops at the current synod can see no wrong in allowing adulterers access to the Blessed Eucharist and in seeking to reject Christ's explicit teaching on marriage.

In the forcefulness of his conclusions Sire is stronger than Davies—“[T]he 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.” [p. 205] The Catholic faithful have been waiting for a commentator to say precisely that for the last fifty years.

Yet the book is not without its shortcomings. Sire errs in his constant attribution to the Church of the defective conduct of her ministers, her popes and bishops, as in—“What the Church did before may have been inadequate, but what it has done in the past fifty years is worse than inadequate : it is the desertion of Christian teaching to no benefit whatsoever.” [p. 170] The Church is the spotless Bride of Christ ; she is infallible—she does not err. Her ministers, in contrast, spend more time erring than in getting it right. It is to the great sorrow of the faithful that the Church is frequently condemned for the folly of her ministers, and that by those who ought to know better. Pope John Paul II was a prime offender. [cf. p. 158]

Sire's treatment of the defects of *Dignitatis Humanae* suffers from nescience of the distinctions respecting human freedom outlined by Leo XIII in the most important of his encyclicals, *Libertas praestantissimum* (20. 6. 1888). He argues :

“Among the many incoherences of the Declaration on Religious Liberty, the most patent is that of holding that its teaching is compatible with Catholic tradition. It is clear that a duty to tolerate other religions contradicts what the Church has always believed...

“It requires unusual dishonesty of thought to elude the direct contradiction between the teaching of Pius IX [in *Quanta Cura*, 8. 12. 1864] and that of the Second Vatican Council, but a number of attempts have been made to do so...

“[W]e may... ask by what right Catholics can be expected to prefer [the principle in *Dignitatis Humanae*] over the authoritative condemnation of Pope Pius IX. Neither formal authority... nor accepted principles of doctrine suggest any such right. One may therefore say that the official policy, followed for the past forty years, of requiring traditionalists to assent to the Declaration on Religious Liberty ranks as one of the many abuses of authority with which the Modernist religion of the Second Vatican Council has been imposed.” [pp. 346, 347 & 348]

While these judgements are true, they concede to *Dignitatis Humanae* the Church's authority. But that document has no authority if it be accepted that Vatican II was *not* an ecumenical council. Moreover, he ignores the fact that the evil effects of the 'Declaration' have fallen not only on 'traditionalists', but on all Catholics.

Had he demonstrated a better knowledge of Leo XIII's encyclicals, notably of *Humanum Genus* (20. 4. 1884), *Praeclara Gratulationis Publicae* (20. 6. 1894), *Dall'alto Dell'apostolico Seggio* (15. 10. 1890 and *Inimica Vis* (8. 12. 1892), Sire would have seen that many of the Council's determinations reflected Masonic protocols and demonstrated Masonic influence, consistent with Leo's teaching that—

“no matter how great may be men's cleverness in concealment and their experience in lying, it is impossible to prevent the effects of any cause from showing in some way the intrinsic nature of the cause whence they come. “A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor a bad tree produce good fruit.” [Matt. 7: 18] Now, the Masonic sect produces fruits that are pernicious and of the bitterest savour. “ (*Humanum Genus*, n. 10)

The author is, to the mind of this commentator, too forgiving of the defects of John XXIII. He deals lightly with that pope's act of folly in calling a Council without a valid reason [p. 180]. He neglects to

mention John XXIII's *Opening Speech* to the Council Fathers with its garrulous content and its confusion of indulgence with mercy. Nor does he refer to the evil effects that have flowed, the refusal by his successors to exercise the Church's disciplinary powers for the good of the faithful.

He mentions with favour *Veterum Sapientia*, John XXIII's apostolic constitution on the promotion of study of Latin in the Church's teaching and liturgy, and praises the pope for issuing it, but he fails to mention that his neglect to enforce it rendered the document a dead letter from the outset. Sire is stronger, however, when he criticises John XXIII for allowing three years' exhaustive preparation for the Council based on opinions from the whole world to be discarded at the instigation of "a minority of European radicals". And who could disagree with his judgement that the bungling "of John XXIII inflicted a wound on the Church from which it will take centuries to recover" [p. 182] ?

He is scathing in his criticism of Paul VI for his oversight of the destruction of the Church's liturgy and practice, remarking how the innovations that the pope sanctioned followed the lead of Protestantism in exalting the verbal dimension of the liturgy and reducing the Mass "to a religion of preaching at people." [p. 262] He condemns the abuse of the altar effected by the innovators licensed by Paul VI. In their insistence on substituting for the altar a table, they facilitated the fashion of importing objects that had no place on an altar. "We have all seen altars on which the most prominent object is a microphone..." It will come as a surprise for many Catholics to learn that "[i]n the traditional liturgy as in the primitive Church, neither candles nor crucifix stand on the altar itself." [p. 263]

His study of Giovanni-Batista Montini, the man who became Pope Paul VI, is sobering. He mentions that Pius XII, even as he employed him and valued his service in the Curia, yet suspected Msgr Montini (p. 193). This understates the reality by several parasangs. Pius XII had prohibited his Vatican staff from dealing with the Russians. The Lutheran bishop of Upsala (Sweden), Yngue Torgny Brilioth, who held the Pius XII in high regard, informed him via an emissary that his orders had been contravened. The Pope was reluctant to give credence to the information until he received incontrovertible evidence that Montini had been corresponding with various Soviet agencies. As Pius XI before him, Pius XII had sent priests and bishops clandestinely into Russia to assist Catholics under Communist domination, the bishops to ordain men to the priesthood. Every one of them was arrested by the Russians, tortured and executed or sent to Siberia. A traitor was discovered in the Vatican, Aligheiro Tondi, S.J., one of Montini's advisers. On 30th August, 1954 Cardinal Ildebrando Schuster, the saintly Archbishop of Milan, died and Pius XII lost no time in appointing Montini as his replacement, but he declined to bestow on him a Cardinal's hat, the usual accompaniment of that post.

The relation of these events is supported by no less an authority than Alice von Hildebrand, wife of the celebrated Dietrich, as she told how her husband had sought in vain to get Paul VI to address the chaos descending on the Church.

Though Sire hints at a previous indiscretion of Msgr Montini while he was Archbishop of Milan, he does not go into details nor does he explore the possibility, as explaining the Pope's un-Catholic conduct thereafter, that this indiscretion may have placed him under Masonic control. Certain events occurred after John XXIII had elevated Montini to the Cardinalate. They concerned his attempt to bully Msgr Vincenzo Gremigni, the highly respected Bishop of Novara, who had been an adviser to Pius XII and was aware of the events surrounding Montini's demotion. Montini decided on a certain

course with respect to *Il Popolo d'Italia*, a well-established Catholic newspaper in Lombardy. Gremigni protested that such a decision ought not be made without consultation with the rest of the episcopate. Montini's response, a letter hand-delivered on January 3rd, 1963, was reportedly so violent that Gremigni, who suffered heart problems, collapsed and died while reading it. Apprised of Gremigni's death, Montini went post-haste to recover the letter. An hour after midnight he called on Gremigni's young auxiliary bishop, Ugo Poletti, (appointed 21 July 1958). Poletti made excuses but the Archbishop would not be denied. Some hours went by, however, before Poletti handed him the letter. But the young bishop had taken a copy, and his progression through the ranks of the episcopacy to become progressively, Archbishop of Spoleto and, in 1973, Cardinal, are assessed as flowing from the hold he enjoyed over the Pope.

The reliability of this story might be classed as 'B 2' on a scale of A 1 to C 3 because its authors ('The Millenari') refused to identify themselves (Cf. *Shroud of Secrecy, the Story of Corruption within the Vatican*, Toronto, Canada, 1999, pp.137-8 ; transl. of *Via col vento in Vaticano*, Milano, 1999), yet circumstantial evidence lends it credence. It demonstrates how blackmail might have been used to constrain Paul VI's actions, particularly when one considers what followed.

For there is a third circumstance. Sire adverts to it on p. 368. On the death of Paul VI in August 1978, Albino Luciano was elected Pope by the assembled cardinals and took the names 'John Paul'. The new Pope was approached precipitately by a disaffected Mason, Italian journalist Mino Pecorelli, and provided with a list of some 100 names including those of Cardinals Villot, Casaroli, Suenens and Baggio, as evidence of the extent of Masonic infiltration of the Curia and the Church's higher ranks. One of the names on the list was *Ugo Cardinal Poletti*. The question for consideration is why Pecorelli should have chosen to make his revelations to Paul VI's successor, rather than to Paul VI. (Pecorelli was killed a few weeks later in a Rome street by a pair of assassins.)

Many will take the view that the most appalling action of Paul VI's pontificate was his betrayal of Cardinal Mindszenty [p. 379] which the Pope compounded by failing to see that there was a Church representative present at his burial. But that 'honour' belongs to his sycophantic address to the scrofulous General Assembly of the United Nations on 5th October, 1965. There he formally abandoned the Church's constant teaching against 'religious liberty'—two months *prior* to the Council fathers' mindless Declaration—and submitted the Church of Christ and her dignity to the demands of the secular world. There could hardly be a better indicator that Paul VI was under Masonic control.

As one re-reads Sire's relation of the behaviour of Pope John Paul II in his October 1986 gathering of the leaders of the world's religions 'to pray for peace' at Assisi, with its objective breach of the First Commandment and his indulgence in religious syncretism, one can only wonder over the actions of Pope Benedict XVI and of Pope Francis in raising him to the Church's altars. Even if the best of lights is cast on this incident, that John Paul acted naively and with subjective ignorance of the enormity of what he was doing, such conduct ought *ipso facto* to have disqualified him as a candidate for beatification, let alone for canonisation. Not that this is the only defect in his papal behaviour.

It could similarly be argued that the chaos in the Church to which the decisions of John XXIII led ought to have disqualified *him* as a candidate for canonisation, and that the canonisation was not so much of John XXIII as of the revolution in the Church that he had instigated.

And now Pope Francis is contemplating the canonisation of Paul VI. Notwithstanding the history related above, of which few in the Vatican can be ignorant, Pope John Paul II declared him 'Servant of God' on 18th March 1993, Pope Benedict XVI declared him 'Venerable' on 29th December 2012, and Pope Francis beatified him on 19th October 2014. Sire's criticism of "the way... [in which] the authors of the conciliar revolution are... automatically cranked out as saints..." [p. 452], does not do justice to the scandals associated with these abuses of the Church's processes. They demonstrate the catastrophic effect of Pope John Paul's action, in 1983, of gutting the office of *Promotor Fidei* (the devil's advocate) of effective force. There is no officer now charged with raising objective facts against questionable assertions of sanctity in defence of the Church's rights, her holiness and dignity. The *sensus fidei* that those rights are sacrosanct has been lost in the enthusiasm for 'canonising' the conciliar errors. In this, as in so much that marks the ravaging of Christ's Church since Vatican II, we see the triumph of the subjective over the objective.

These abuses of principle by the conciliar popes must cast the gravest doubts on the theological opinion that invests their declarations of sanctity with infallibility. When sanity finally returns to the leadership of the Catholic Church, the pope charged with restoring the Church's dignity should lose no time in reinstating the office of *Promotor Fidei* and in appointing a commission of theologians and canon lawyers to review *every beatification and canonisation that has taken place since 1983*.

Sire criticises Vatican II comprehensively : "All previous councils of the Church had been called either to settle a doctrinal question or for pastoral reform... the Second Vatican Council was the only one in history called simply for the sake of holding a council, with no specific doctrinal or pastoral objects in view." [p. 180] He is right in insisting that "the validity of councils of the Church must be determined by objective theological rules..." [pp. 220-1], and that "[a] council of heretical tendency, whatever excuses may be made for it, can have no authority." [p. 218] But he could have gone further.

Two principles apply. The first, and fundamental, one involves the doctrine of causality. *Formality* follows on *finality* : *what something is* is determined by *the end for which* it exists. Since there was no objective reason, no end for the Church's good justifying it, the Second Vatican Council was *not* an ecumenical council—despite the insistence of every pope since John XXIII that it was. Michael Davies spoke to the point when he invoked Cardinal Manning on the ends of the ecumenical councils and in his citing of Cardinal Pallavicini, "to invoke a General Council, except when absolutely demanded by necessity, is to tempt God." (*Pope John's Council*, Kansas City, 1977, p. 3)

The second principle, going to the validity of any council's determinations, relies on the teaching of St Vincent of Lerins that the Catholic faith *quod ubique quod semper quod ab omnibus creditum est*. A doctrine is Catholic if it represents a genuine development of revealed principles laid down at the historical origins of the Church and preserved as part of the apostolic deposit of faith. (Cf. Romano Amerio, *Iota Unum*, transl. fr. 2nd Italian edition by Fr John Parsons, Kansas City, 1996, pp. 710-2) If it purports to alter that teaching it is *not* Catholic.

No Catholic is bound by any determination of the Second Vatican Council that departed from the Church's constant teaching. If, as we maintain, that it was *not* an ecumenical council, it follows too that the Council was incapable of producing any development of the Church's teaching, and any

'development' it purported to introduce can safely be ignored.

The only major error in *Phoenix from the Ashes* arises on Sire's criticism of those who condemned Pope Benedict's qualified endorsement of the use of condoms. "It is difficult," he says, "to understand how anyone should think that, because acts of marital intercourse must be open to conception, it is desirable that acts of fornication and adultery should be open to it also." [pp. 403-4] This passage is immediately problematic with its implication that the end of the act of intercourse, conception, is a good that may be sacrificed to avoid some perceived evil. Contradicting the stand he takes elsewhere, Sire here favours the subjective over the objective. He errs in elevating the subsidiary principle *primum non nocere* above its station. The applicable principle is the supreme principle of charity and its subsidiary, the principle of the moral law—*It is not licit to do evil that good may come of it*. Pius XII, the last pope who was also a moral theologian, put the issue concisely in his *Allocutio to the Fourth International Congress of Surgeons* on May 20, 1948 :

"God alone is the Lord of man's life and bodily integrity, his organs, members and faculties, particularly those which are instruments associated in the work of creation."

Dalliance with breaches of the principle of morals has been with us since the Conciliar popes abandoned the metaphysics of St Thomas 50 years ago. Any use of a condom, *as condom*, is evil no matter what good may be supposed to derive from it, and both Benedict XVI and the *Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith*, erred on the question. The root of their error, as of Sire's, is neglect of the distinction between *finis operis* and *finis operantis*, an inevitable consequence of their ignorance of Aristotle's doctrine of causality. (Cf. http://www.superflumina.org/PDF_files/pope_and_condoms.pdf and http://www.superflumina.org/PDF_files/pope_and_condoms_pt_2.pdf)

Which brings us neatly to the instrumental cause of all our problems, the abandonment by the conciliar popes and bishops of the Church's philosophy.

Sire makes no mention of Pope John Paul II's rooted philosophical incompetence. His encyclical *Fides et Ratio* (14. 9. 1998) marks the nadir of the fortunes of the Church's philosophy in the modern era when a pope saw fit not only to pronounce—against the opinion of innumerable of his predecessors—that the Church has no philosophy of her own, but falsely asserted as authority for this proposition, the teaching of Pope Pius XII in *Humani Generis* (12. 8. 1950) *when that pope there said the very contrary*.

In this commentator's view, this objective *if not subjective* dishonesty and the scandal of confusion among the faithful which followed it is sufficient to have disqualified John Paul II as a candidate for canonisation, no matter how heroic his personal life may have been.

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25th October 2015—*Feast of Christ the King in the Tridentine Rite*