

## WHAT WENT WRONG WITH VATICAN II<sup>1</sup>

The infallibility promised to the Church is... present in the body of bishops when, together with Peter's successor, they exercise the supreme Magisterium, above all in an ecumenical council.

*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 891

In 1998, Dr Ralph McInerny, Professor of Mediaeval Studies and Director of the Jacques Maritain Center at the University of Notre Dame, Indiana, USA, wrote a book bearing the above title.<sup>2</sup> In the *Introduction* he summarised the vigorous state of the Church before the Council, then documented the decline that followed.

"It is estimated that in the wake of the council, ten million Catholics stopped attending Mass regularly, a decline of thirty per cent..."

"Comparing the preconciliar Church and the aspirations of Vatican II with events of the past thirty years forces us to ask: What went wrong? Can anyone pretend that things have improved? There are some bright spots, but it is undeniable that the faith of Catholics has been shaken... And sometimes it seems as if we are being told that this bad news is good news if only we can understand the spirit of the Second Vatican Council.

"As we near the third millennium of the Christian era, it seems an apt time to reflect on Vatican II. It is the central event of Church history in our time. Clearly it was a providential occurrence. Its sixteen documents, although with varying force, are the measure of the Faith of Roman Catholics. Properly understood, it was a great blessing for the Church—properly understood."<sup>3</sup>

This he put as his task, properly to understand the Council, adding a sentiment with which most of his readers would have agreed, "and a formidable one it is indeed."

But the approach he took limited the scope for criticism—

"I take as a necessary premise the fact that we are bound by the teachings of the Second Vatican Council. Yes, I grant that many passages in the sixteen documents of Vatican II require careful study and interpretation, but study that begins with an animus against the council is bound to go astray..."<sup>4</sup>

He cited the then head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in support—

"What went wrong with Vatican II? Not its teachings, said Cardinal Ratzinger—not the documents that were promulgated, but the false interpretations of them in the postconciliar period..."<sup>5</sup>

What went wrong with Vatican II? According to Dr McInerny—*nothing*. It was impossible; for the truth of what the Council taught was guaranteed by the Holy Spirit. While the title of his book was catchy, then, it was misleading. Given the extent of concern among Catholics over various of the Council's teachings, there

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<sup>1</sup> The views expressed in this article, as with all the articles published on this website, are subject to the ruling of the Catholic Church.

<sup>2</sup> Ralph M McInerny, *What Went Wrong With Vatican II, The Catholic Crisis Explained*, Manchester [New Hampshire] (Sophia Institute Press), 1998.

<sup>3</sup> *What Went Wrong With Vatican II*, op. cit., pp. 13, 14.

<sup>4</sup> *What Went Wrong With Vatican II*, op. cit., p. 15.

<sup>5</sup> *What Went Wrong With Vatican II*, op. cit., p. 114, reporting what was said in *The Ratzinger Report*, the results of a long interview between the Cardinal and Vittorio Messori.

must have been many who were unconvinced the book had fulfilled the claim in its subtitle—*The Catholic Crisis Explained*.

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The presupposition Dr McNerny adopts leads to curious results. If there was nothing wrong with Vatican II, why were dissentients concerned in 1985, as he reports, that the publication of the results of a long interview with Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger by Vittorio Messori (published as *The Ratzinger Report*) and the convocation of the Second Synod of Bishops might amount to “efforts to roll back history, to repudiate the council, to effect a restoration”?<sup>6</sup> If there *was* material in the Council documents to which the dissentients could appeal, how could it be said that everything in the Council documents was guaranteed? The Holy Spirit would hardly guarantee material which provided scope for dissent from Catholic truth.

The first thing to be said about his approach is that one cannot arrive at the truth by working from a presupposition. That is the *modus operandi* of the subjectivist. The *modus* of the realist philosopher and theologian, in contrast, is to weigh assertions *against reality*, for it is reality which is the measure of truth. Secondly, if, as Dr McNerny says, the Holy Spirit guaranteed the truth of the Council’s teachings, why should there be anything to fear? Is He not also the Author of reality? The truth of the teachings of the Council Fathers—each and every one of them—should be manifest in any objective study.

Let us, then, look at the realities, or sufficient of them for our purposes.

What impresses the reader of any of the histories of the Council is the disorder that frequently characterised its activities, a disorder that began at the top with John XXIII’s departure from laws he himself had laid down for the Council’s proceedings. Two years prior to the Council’s inception, the Pope had established a Central Preparatory Commission to oversee the preparation of schemas for discussion. There were five of them: four of the five, the four over whose content it had exercised little influence, offended an influential body of bishops with a liberal bent, predominantly German, French and Dutch. The rules approved by the Pope required a two-thirds majority vote by the Council Fathers against the acceptance of a preparatory schema. Under the influence of this cadre, some 60% of the bishops voted against these four. The cadre then put pressure on the Pope who overrode the law he had promulgated, ruling that the four preparatory schemas in question should be abandoned. Two years of careful work involving hundreds of bishops and their advisers was rendered void at a stroke; and, it might reasonably be argued, years were added to the Council’s length.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> *What Went Wrong With Vatican II*, op. cit., p. 111.

<sup>7</sup> This established a precedent making departure from principle itself a principle, a weakness which has continued to afflict the Church’s ministers ever since. A telling instance was Pope John Paul’s breach of the Church’s existing laws by personal *fiat* in permitting women and girls to serve on the sanctuary.

The Council Fathers often conducted themselves like squabbling children rather than adults. Neither John XXIII nor Paul VI, even when present at one or other of the Council's sessions, appeared to exercise the discipline that his position demanded. Dr McNerny refers (as well he might) to the Council Fathers' scandalous treatment of Cardinal Ottaviani during the First Session on 30<sup>th</sup> October 1962 as he argued zealously against the refashioning of the Mass. The lack of charity exemplified there ought to have moved Pope John to bring the Council proceedings to a halt, if temporarily, to remind the Fathers of their obligations, and to impose himself. But he did not. *Not to will is to will not*: the toleration of inappropriate behaviour grants it permission. And, indeed, the Pope had acknowledged the abandonment of the exercise of discipline as a principle in his Opening Address—

“Nowadays... 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.”

Like his predecessor, Paul VI failed adequately to discipline the Council Fathers or to impose himself. These failures indulged, indeed encouraged, the politicking tendency which permitted certain bodies of bishops to dominate much of the Council's proceedings. It was not charity at work among them, but ambition.

Dr McNerny treats the frequent disorders of the Council dismissively:

“There is little doubt that in the minds of many observers... a struggle was going on... Even if this mirrored a struggle among the Fathers of the Council, when the dust settled, when the final vote was taken, when a document was approved and promulgated by the Pope, it was the product of the teaching Church.”<sup>8</sup>

No matter how vigorous or adversarial the process of debate may have been, no matter what breaches of charity, or rank injustices, may have been committed in the course of its conduct, the end result had to reflect Catholic truth because of the guarantee of the Holy Spirit.<sup>9</sup> The objective reader of the Council's history would be unlikely to share his view. With what concern, for instance, would he not read the comment of Msgr Pavan on the debate preceding the vote on 22<sup>nd</sup> September 1965 on the fourth schema of the document that became the *Declaration on Religious Liberty*, as “perhaps the most violent ever to have taken place in the *aula*.”<sup>10</sup>

There is not space or time to address each of the areas of concern over the Council Fathers' ruminations, or determinations. Nor is it necessary. If the Council Fathers' teaching on just one topic was defective, it is sufficient to show the falsity of the assertion that the Holy Spirit guaranteed all their teachings. We will confine ourselves to the issue that has caused the greatest concern, the *Declaration on Religious Liberty*.<sup>11</sup> The Council Fathers pronounced formally in n. 2 of this document:

“This Vatican Synod declares that the human person has a right to religious liberty.”

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<sup>8</sup> *What Went Wrong With Vatican II*, op. cit., p. 31.

<sup>9</sup> This demonstrates the problem of working to a preconception. You go nowhere; or, better expressed, you end up where you started.

<sup>10</sup> Reproduced in Michael Davies, *The Second Vatican Council and Religious Liberty*, Long Prairie, Minnesota (The Neumann Press), 1992, p. 153.

<sup>11</sup> We set forth in summary form here the arguments elaborated in previous articles on this website *sub nom The Trouble With Dignitatis Humanae*; cf. the index of articles to be found at [http://www.superflumina.org/contents\\_dignitatis\\_humanae.html](http://www.superflumina.org/contents_dignitatis_humanae.html)

The balance of the document, fifteen sections in all, teases out the consequences of this statement of principle and endeavours to show that it may be read in conformity with the Church's previous teaching.

On 8<sup>th</sup> December 1864, in the *Syllabus of Errors* attached to his encyclical, *Quanta Cura*, Pius IX formally condemned (in n. 15) the following proposition:

"Every man is free to embrace and profess that religion which, led by the light of reason, he thinks to be the true religion."

Analysis of the terms in which Pius IX expressed himself, their formality and precision, show that this condemnation constitutes infallible teaching of Christ's Church. Pius IX's expression conforms to each of the four requirements for infallible teaching set forth by the (first) Vatican Council in the decree *Pastor Aeternus* less than six years later. On 20<sup>th</sup> June 1888, Leo XIII expounded the reasons behind the condemnation in his encyclical, *Libertas praestantissimum*, 'On Human Liberty'. In *The Second Vatican Council and Religious Liberty*<sup>12</sup>, Michael Davies reports that Pius IX's formal condemnation of religious liberty was the initiative of his adviser, Gioacchino Cardinal Pecci, who succeeded him as Pope Leo XIII. *Libertas praestantissimum* can, therefore, be regarded as the authoritative exposition of the reasons for the Church's condemnation.

The statement of principle in *Dignitatis Humanae* contradicts this infallible teaching explicitly.

Now the Catholic Church does not contradict herself. It is impossible, therefore, that *Dignitatis Humanae* could constitute valid teaching of the Church. It follows that the claim that all of the teachings of the Second Vatican Council are guaranteed by the Holy Spirit is false.

In any age but the present where, as a result of the nostrums of subjectivists and materialists, men live in a state of intellectual confusion, the contradiction by *Dignitatis Humanae* of the Church's previous infallible teaching would be clear to all. As it is, there are theologians who have spent much of their energies, and thousands of pages of tortured reasonings, in efforts to reconcile *Dignitatis Humanae* with the Church's constant teaching—all of it in vain.

Despite the fact that the focus of his book is Vatican II, Dr McNerny spends a great deal of time on the dissent to Pope Paul's encyclical, *Humanae Vitae*. "It is clear," he says,

"that 1968 marked the beginning of dissent in the Church. It would be impossible to find at any earlier time a claim that theologians had the professional task of appraising and assessing magisterial teachings of accepting or rejecting them. Now it was as if, when the Pope spoke, the theologians first scrutinized what he had said to see whether it was acceptable to them or not. This was utterly new, and it did not begin with Vatican II, but with *Humanae Vitae*."

He is wrong. The revolution of the theologians against the Church's magisterium *did* begin with Vatican II. Indeed, in *Dignitatis Humanae* it achieved a victory never

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<sup>12</sup> Long Prairie, Minnesota (The Neumann Press), 1992.

afterwards replicated, even with *Humanae Vitae*. For *Dignitatis Humanae* marked the triumph of the thinking of dissident theologians—the chief of them, the American Jesuit *peritus*, John Courtney Murray—over the Church’s Magisterial teaching. This triumph provided, at the doctrinal level, the precedent for the rebellion that was precipitated with *Humanae Vitae*, and has continued ever since.

Dr McInerny sets out the statement rejecting the authority of *Humanae Vitae* of Fr Charles Curran, Associate Professor of Theology at the Catholic University of America, subscribed by two hundred theologians, published in the *New York Times* on 30<sup>th</sup> June 1968. No one will be surprised to find among their reasons the claim that the “[p]ast authoritative statement on religious liberty... [had] been corrected at a later date”. *And with justice!* If the Church’s bishops could ignore the Church’s previous infallible teaching, why should not theologians?

That the dissent to *Humanae Vitae* had its origins in Vatican II may be seen, too, from another analysis. The *matter* of the dissent was the agitation by various members of the Catholic faithful: the *form* which made the agitation rebellious was a resurgent evil which had long afflicted the Church, and to which excessive attention was given by the Council Fathers, Protestantism.<sup>13</sup> Protestantism’s signal characteristic, as English historian Sir Maurice Powicke remarked in 1941, is the assertion of the supremacy of conscience.<sup>14</sup> This was the refuge to which the dissentients appealed. It is the refuge to which they have appealed ever since. In his little book on the crises that followed Vatican II, Fr John McKee quotes the splendid words of William Philbin, Bishop of Down and Connor, to his flock rejecting the Protestant assertion:

“As Christians we have already exercised our conscience, that is, our moral judgement on the larger and more fundamental question of whether we accept Christ and His Church as holding authority from God to teach. Once we have made this acceptance we are obliged, and obliged by our conscience, to follow the authoritative guidance that comes from these sources.”<sup>15</sup>

Quite apart from the *theological* errors to which the dissentients appealed, the orchestrated objection to the encyclical followed inevitably upon the *disciplinary* errors in the conduct of the Council. If bishops and their *periti* could misbehave themselves in the Vatican’s public forum, and their misconduct be tolerated by the Pope, why should renegade theologians be precluded the same liberty? Again, there is a measure of justice in this attitude. As the failure of a father to exercise discipline over his children provides bad example and leads to disorder in his family, so did the failures of John XXIII and Paul VI lead to disorder in the family of the Church.

Dr McInerny criticises Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre’s schismatic movement for its internal incoherence—

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<sup>13</sup> The distinction of reality into *matter* and *form* is explained later in this article.

<sup>14</sup> “The claim of conscience in the end took the place of Rome.” Sir Maurice Powicke, *The Reformation in England*, London, 1941

<sup>15</sup> Fr John McKee, *The Enemy Within The Gate*, Houston (Lumen Christi Press), 1974, p. 227.

“[Archbishop Lefebvre] sought to appeal to earlier councils in order to discredit Vatican II. But that which guarantees the truth of the teaching of one council guarantees the truth of them all...”<sup>16</sup>

But, once again, Dr McNerny is relying on his presupposition. Archbishop Lefebvre recognised the truth: God’s Holy Church does not contradict herself. If Vatican II produced teachings that contradicted what the Church had previously taught, there had to be something wrong with it. While Archbishop Lefebvre made a grave error in consecrating bishops without a papal mandate, on this issue he was right.

Dr McNerny refers in the fifth chapter of his book to the dilatoriness of the Vatican in addressing the dissent that followed the Council—

“For twenty years [after *Humanae Vitae*], dissent was allowed to continue unabated. It became institutionalized. Catholic universities became the usual habitat of dissenting theologians, and many Catholic universities, in Msgr Kelly’s phrase, essentially declared independence from the Catholic Church... The situation was aggravated by the fact that dissenters controlled the means of communication. It was dissenters whose opinion was sought whenever the Vatican spoke, the secular media knowing they could count on a negative reaction... In retrospect, it seems incredible that this situation went unaddressed until 1985, but so it was...”<sup>17</sup>

But he does not ask why this occurred, or why (in 1998) it was continuing. The very chapter title—*The Vatican Finally Responds To Dissent*—begs an answer, but it is not forthcoming. The refusal to act, and the dilatoriness which has characterised any action since, was (and is) a manifestation of the problem. It has its source in John XXIII’s abdication of the Church’s authority, part of the platform on which Vatican II was constructed, and on which its implementation continues today. Dr McNerny refers to the publication of *The Ratzinger Report* in 1985 and the holding of the Second Extraordinary Synod of Bishops the same year, as marking some sort of watershed. Indeed good effects flowed, for seven years later there resulted the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. But the watershed that will enable the Church to return to her former vigour is still to be reached, let alone crossed.

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Pope John XXIII first decided to call an ecumenical council, then set about determining the issues it should address.<sup>18</sup> On Pentecost Sunday, 1959, he created an Ante-Preparatory Commission, presided over by his Secretary of State, Tardini—

“to assist him in determining the subject matter of the Council... Twelve days after... Cardinal Tardini invited the Sacred Congregations of the Roman Curia to make a comprehensive study of all matters under their authority, and to offer specific proposals on matters which they felt could usefully be presented to the future preparatory commissions. Three weeks later [Cardinal Tardini] sent out 2,593 copies

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<sup>16</sup> *What Went Wrong With Vatican II*, op. cit., p. 33.

<sup>17</sup> *What Went Wrong With Vatican II*, op. cit., extracts on pp. 108, 110 and 113.

<sup>18</sup> “He had been Pope for scarcely three months when he told seventeen astonished cardinals of his intention to call an ecumenical council, on January 25, 1959, in the Benedictine monastery adjoining the basilica of St Paul Outside the Walls.” Fr Ralph M Wiltgen, S.V.D., *The Rhine flows into the Tiber, A History of Vatican II*, New York, 1967; my copy Tan Books Reprint, Rockford (Illinois), 1985, p. 13.

of a letter to as many prelates around the world, informing them that Pope John XXIII desired their assistance in drawing up topics for discussion at the Council...<sup>19</sup> While such a course might have been appropriate for any other convocation of the Church's bishops it was inappropriate for, and misconceived the essence of, an ecumenical council. At the heart of the business is the charism of extraordinary infallibility attending such a council. There can be only one justification for the existence of such a *gratia gratis datae*, the need to determine some issue essential to the Catholic faith. *The end* in an ecumenical council comes first: it is the cause, not some incidental side effect. To understand this, we must first discuss infallibility.

Because she is of God, the Church is infallible. St Irenaeus wrote:

"Where the Church is, there is also the Spirit of God, and where the Spirit of God is, there is the Church and all grace; but the Spirit is truth."<sup>20</sup>

She is also, for the same reason, indefectible; the spotless Bride of Christ. The Pope, or the Pope and bishops together in Council, are infallible not by nature, as is the Church, but by participation. They participate—for the moment—in the Church's infallibility and serve to manifest it. To put the matter in another way, the Church is infallible *by essence*, the Pope and the bishops *by accident*, the accident of their being called to serve the Church at this time and in this place. The critical issue to be grasped is that it is the Church's, not their own, infallibility that Pope, or Pope and Council, exercise as occasion demands.<sup>21</sup>

An ecumenical (or general) council of the Catholic Church is comprised, as is every other element of reality, of two principles, one indeterminate, one determinate, called respectively, matter and form. The *matter* is the gathering of all the bishops of the world at the Pope's instigation. The *form*, that which makes the gathering an ecumenical council (that constitutes its *essence*), is the end (or purpose) that the bishops should with the Pope address an issue, or issues, whose determination is essential to the Catholic faith. This end embraces the liberty and advancement of the Church founded by Jesus Christ in the exercise of its office to secure the salvation of all men.<sup>22</sup> Thus, a council does not become ecumenical simply because the Pope elects to call it "ecumenical", but because some issue essential to the good of the faith arises for determination and the Pope moves to address it by summoning the Church's bishops. The *end* comes first; the *means* to the end, the council, is

<sup>19</sup> *The Rhine flows into the Tiber*, op. cit., pp. 19-20.

<sup>20</sup> *Adv. haer.* III, 24, 1.

<sup>21</sup> The remarks of Pope Benedict XVI in his impromptu address to the priests of Aosta on July 29, 2005, shortly after his elevation to the Papacy are to the point: "The Pope is not an oracle; he is infallible in very rare situations, as we know..." Nor are the bishops oracles, unerring whenever they open their mouths, even when gathered in Rome with the Pope. Something more is required.

<sup>22</sup> The relevant principle is the Principle of Indeterminacy—that which can be many from itself is not one of the many. Leo XIII illustrates it in his Apostolic Letter, *Apostolicae Curiae* (13.9.1896), On the invalidity of Anglican ordinations: "[T]he *matter* of [the sacrament of Order] is by itself the indeterminate part which becomes determinate through the *form*... [T]he *matter* is the imposition of hands. This by itself does not signify anything definite, being used equally for the conferring of certain orders and administering Confirmation... [T]he *form* [of words uttered must] signify... the order of the priesthood." [nn. 24, 25] (*my emphases*). The Pope can summon the bishops of the world for any number of purposes as, for instance, Pope John Paul summoned them in 1985 to attend the Synod that marked the Council's 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

determined by it: *finality determines formality*. Pope Pius IX, in his address opening the (first) Vatican Council in 1869, included the following criteria among the issues which might precipitate the calling of an ecumenical council—

“to decide prudently and wisely on all that can help to define the dogmas of the faith; to unmask new errors; to defend, illustrate and develop Catholic doctrine; to preserve and tighten the bonds of ecclesiastical discipline; to strengthen the relaxed morals of peoples.”<sup>23</sup>

Set out in the Appendix to this paper is a list of the twenty Ecumenical Councils of the Church prior to Vatican II with the reasons for their convocation, showing that each of them conformed to this end.

It is manifest that neither Pope John XXIII nor his advisors understood this critical issue. In his Opening Address to the Council Fathers, the Pope said this.

“The salient point of this Council is not... a discussion of one article or another of the fundamental doctrine of the Church which has repeatedly been taught by the Fathers and by ancient and modern theologians, and which is presumed to be well known and familiar to all...”<sup>24</sup>

Here is a clear admission that there was no issue essential to the Catholic faith for the bishops to determine. Indeed, the end of Vatican II was something else, *aggiornamento*—the asserted need “to bring the Church up to date”—a euphemism for adapting the Church’s teaching to the demands of the secular world. *But the Church had no such need*. Why? Because the Church is timeless: she exists that men, caught up in time, may be incorporated into eternity.

With Vatican II the ordination which had marked each of the previous twenty ecumenical councils was reversed: instead of the resolution of an issue giving legitimacy to a council, a council resolved to give legitimacy to an issue. Or, to put it more bluntly, instead of the resolution of a *doctrinal* issue giving legitimacy to the Second Vatican Council, the Second Vatican Council resolved to give legitimacy to a *secular* issue.<sup>25</sup> The *end* being absent, the *form* which would ensure that the Council’s determinations were infallible was also absent. Notwithstanding the intentions and expressions of Pope John XXIII and of his successor, Paul VI; notwithstanding the expectations of the bishops who took part in it, and the belief of the Catholic faithful; the Second Vatican Council was not an ecumenical council of the Catholic Church.

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<sup>23</sup> Quoted in Charles Journet, *The Church of the Word Incarnate*, London (Sheed & Ward), 1955, (transl. of *L’Église du Verbe Incarné*, Desclee de Brouwer et Cie., Paris), p. 420.

<sup>24</sup> Opening Speech in *The Documents of Vatican II*, Walter M Abbott S J, General Editor; London, 1966, p.710 at p. 715.

<sup>25</sup> Even the best, and most faithful, of Catholic thinkers is influenced by the pervasive evils of modern philosophy. Part of its defective thinking is called *Nominalism* according to which there are no such realities as the natures of things, just *names* which, by convention, men give to blocks of reality that resemble each other. The obverse of this intellectual vice is that a man is free to give to some thing whatever name he chooses, whereupon the thing assumes the reality to which the name corresponds. Of such, we suggest, is the label “ecumenical” applied to the Second Vatican Council. The Popes, the bishops, the theologians, have all labelled it “ecumenical”; *therefore*, following this reasoning, *it must be ecumenical!* But whether it was, in truth, ecumenical is determined not by what men chose to call it, but by reality; for it is reality, not men’s opinion, which is the measure of truth.



What, then, is the authority of the Council's teachings? The fact that the Pope endorsed each of the Council's sixteen documents cannot operate to cure defects in them, for two reasons: first, because the Council was not an ecumenical council; and secondly, because the Pope's endorsement was made on the erroneous supposition that it *was* ecumenical, and nothing done in error can bind the faithful. Yet the bishops retained their *ordinary* infallibility when they taught in union with the Pope. It would seem, then, that the Council Fathers' authorisation was limited to matters within the ambit of the Church's constant teaching. It might properly be concluded that in none of the documents of Vatican II can it be said the Council Fathers spoke for the Church except where they dealt with the Church's constant teaching. In all other matters, they spoke only for themselves.

*What went wrong with Vatican II?* The Council was flawed in its very conception, and that flaw has given rise to innumerable evils, the chief of which is the disruption of the Church's unity. The effects may be seen in every Catholic community —

- religious life largely destroyed, thousands of vocations wasted;
- houses of religion abandoned and sold for profit;
- religious libraries ransacked, their contents dissipated;
- churches de-sanctified and despoiled of sacred images;
- the sense of the sacred lost;
- the Mass and the sacred liturgy de-sacralised;
- the priesthood emasculated, with innumerable priests ignorant of the infinite dignity to which they have been raised; and,
- thousands upon thousands lost to the faith.

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Towards the end of his book Dr McNerny makes a telling point.

*"The Ratzinger Report* called attention to this crisis of authority; the Vatican has attempted to resolve it with efforts such as the 1985 synod, the 1989 Profession of Faith and Oath of Fidelity, the 1992 Catechism, and, just recently, the 1998 apostolic letter *Ad Tuendam Fidem*, which makes dissent a violation of canon law and threatens dissenters with punishments. And there has been a flood of other documents and action intended to reverse the tide of dissent. None have worked."<sup>26</sup>

None have worked because the root of the problem is yet to be addressed. Dr McNerny says the answer is prayer and fasting. He is right—up to a point. But this call addresses not the solution, i.e., the cause, but something in the nature of a condition (*removens prohibens*) to bring the cause into play. Almighty God has given us the means to solve the problems besetting the Church in the power of reason, and the wisdom (reason's right application) stored in the Church's archives. He will move the Church's ministers to apply these means if we pray diligently.

The Church will not return to her proper vigour until the Church's ministers—

- acknowledge the shortcomings in the conduct of John XXIII and Paul VI, and the defects in the principles they applied in the Church's government;

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<sup>26</sup> *What went wrong with Vatican II*, op. cit., pp. 156-7.

- reverse the application of those principles;
- resume the exercise of the Church's executive power by punishing all breaches of the Church's laws; and
- submit the question of the authority of Vatican II to the determination of an ecumenical council.

There is precedent for the *review* of the determinations of one ecumenical council by another. The *Second Council of Constantinople* (553) confirmed the first four Councils; the *Second Lateran Council* (1139) endorsed the decrees of the (first) *Lateran Council*. There is precedent for the *rejection* of a council as not being ecumenical, albeit for reasons other than a failure in form, in the following—

*Council in Trullo or Quinisext Council* (692) held in Constantinople, because it was not convoked by the Pope;

[The Eastern Orthodox] '*Fourth Council of Constantinople*' (879-880), because it was convoked, not by the Pope, but by Eastern Orthodox bishops.

*Council of Pisa* (1409), because it was convened by the Church's Cardinals out of necessity, as they thought, because of the difficulties in assessing the identity of the rightful Pope, to resolve the Great Western Schism.<sup>27</sup>

A council called to consider whether Vatican II was an ecumenical council would, as an incident of its determinations, be in a position to declare the circumstances in which a council is ecumenical, thus resolving this issue for ever.<sup>28</sup>

The Soul of the Catholic Church is the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Blessed Trinity: the Church is His charge. The offence given to Almighty God in the evils precipitated during and after Vatican II may be said to have been aimed, then, primarily at the Holy Spirit, the gentle and creative love of the Father and the Son.

"It is the Spirit of God who lifts up our hearts, takes the weak by the hand, makes perfect those who are progressing. He it is who forms in us through faith the image of God through the common union we have with Him."<sup>29</sup>

Michael Baker

7<sup>th</sup> June 2009—*Trinity Sunday*<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> In addition, the Church does not recognise the *Council of Siena* (1423) convened by Pope Martin V at Pavia in April but transferred almost immediately to Siena because of the plague. The Pope dissolved the Council in the February following without endorsing its determinations.

<sup>28</sup> While the Church has, in *Pastor Aeternus* (18.7.1870), spelt out the circumstances in which a pope is infallible, She has not as yet made the same determination in respect of a council.

<sup>29</sup> St Basil the Great, *On the Holy Spirit*.

<sup>30</sup> This paper was amended on 29 June 2009 to correct an error with reference to the date of *Pastor Aeternus*.

## APPENDIX

### *The Twenty Ecumenical Councils Prior to Vatican II*

1. **Council of Nicaea** (325) repudiated Arianism and adopted the Nicene Creed; fixed the date of Easter; recognized the primacy of the sees of Rome, Alexandria and Antioch and granted to the See of Jerusalem a position of honour.
2. **Council of Constantinople** (381) repudiated Arianism and Macedonianism; revised the Nicene Creed in regard to the Holy Spirit by adding *qui simul adoratur*.
3. **Council of Ephesus** (431) defined the true personal unity of Christ; proclaimed the Virgin Mary as the Theotokos (The Mother of God); repudiated Nestorianism; and repudiated Pelagianism.
4. **Council of Chalcedon** (451) defined the two natures of Christ against Eutyches and excommunicated him; deposed Dioscorus, Patriarch of Alexandria; and elevated the bishoprics of Constantinople and Jerusalem to the status of patriarchates.
5. **Second Council of Constantinople** (553) repudiated certain propositions known as 'The Three Chapters' as Nestorian; condemned Origen of Alexandria, and certain writings of others; confirmed the first four Councils of the Church.
6. **Third Council of Constantinople** (680-681) defined the two wills of Christ as two distinct principles of operation, thus repudiating Monothelism.
7. **Second Council of Nicaea** (787) restored the veneration of icons (condemned at the iconoclast *Council of Hieria*) and repudiated iconoclasm.
8. **Fourth Council of Constantinople** (869-870) condemned the acts of a Council convoked by the Patriarch Photios of Constantinople against the Pope; deposed Photius as usurper and reinstated his predecessor, Ignatius. [The Photian schism triumphed in the Greek Church, however, and no further Councils were held in the East.]
9. **Lateran Council** (1123) abolished the right of lay princes to investiture of the Church's bishops to benefices; dealt with Church discipline; and recovery of the Holy Land.
10. **Second Lateran Council** (1139) reaffirmed the determinations of the Lateran Council; addressed clerical discipline (including dress and marriage).
11. **Third Lateran Council** (1179) restricted papal election to cardinals; condemned simony; introduced minimum ages for ordination (thirty for bishops); condemned the Albigensians and Waldensians.
12. **Fourth Lateran Council** (1215) defined transubstantiation; addressed papal primacy and clerical discipline.
13. **First Council of Lyon** (1245) deposed the Emperor Frederick II; introduced a levy to support the Holy Land; directed a new Crusade against the Saracens and Mongols under King Louis IX of France (St Louis) to the Holy Land.
14. **Second Council of Lyon** (1274) confirmed the doctrine of the procession of the Holy Spirit—adding the word *filioque* to the Creed; approved the Franciscan and Dominican Orders; established the procedures for the conclave to elect the Pope.
15. **Council of Vienne** (1311-1312) addressed the errors of the Knights Templar, the Fraticelli, and others; addressed the reformation of the clergy;
16. **Council of Constance** (1414-1418) met to resolve the Great Western Schism. It did not become ecumenical until its confirmation by Gregory XI who endorsed only its last four sessions. It condemned the errors of Hus and Wycliffe.
17. **Council of Florence** [of Basel, Ferrara and Florence] (1431-1445) addressed church reform and reunion with the East. The Pope confirmed only its first 25 sessions.
18. **Fifth Lateran Council** (1512-1514) addressed church discipline.

19. **Council of Trent** (1545-1563) addressed church reform and repudiated Protestantism; redefined the role and the canon of Sacred Scripture and confirmed the seven sacraments; strengthened clerical discipline and education.
20. **Vatican Council** (1869-70) defined the primacy of the pope and the circumstances in which he spoke infallibly; repudiated rationalism, materialism and atheism; addressed the question of revelation and the interpretation of sacred scripture and the relationship of faith and reason.

In addition to these, the authority the **Council of Orange II**<sup>31</sup> (529), was given ecumenical authority by Pope Boniface II in 531 so that its various canons on original sin, grace and predestination are established as infallible.

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<sup>31</sup> Orange in what is now France.