THE POPE & THE PERILS OF SUBJECTIVISM

It is reported that on 5th June 2017, by rescript, Pope Francis formally decreed that his private letter addressed to the bishops of Buenos Aires, Argentina, approving their guidelines for the application of his Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* (19th March 2016), and the guidelines themselves, be promulgated in the *AAS* as "authentic (exercises of the) Magisterium".   Are they indeed !

1.   Truth (logical truth) is the identity between what is asserted and what is : its measure is reality. The philosophical error of subjectivism reverses the definition : truth is determined by assertion, not by reality. For the subjectivist, an assertion is true because someone says it is true.

Take the issue which we have argued on superflumina *ad nauseam,* Pope John XXIII's declaration that the Second Vatican Council was an ecumenical (or general) council of the Church. Was this true simply because he said it was an ecumenical council ? Or did it depend on whether the Council fulfilled the necessary requirements of an ecumenical council ?   If the Council did not fulfil those requirements it was not an ecumenical council no matter what Pope John may have declared.

Now Pope Francis's *ipse dixits* in his letter of commendation of the Argentinian bishops' guidelines—as the remarks in the guidelines themselves—breach the constant teaching of Christ's Holy Church on matrimony, as they breach the teaching of Christ Our Lord on the topic. It follows that, no matter what the Pope may say it is IMPOSSIBLE that his commendation of the guidelines, or the guidelines themselves, could constitute authentic teaching of the Church. It is not Pope Francis's church of which we are members ; it is Christ's Church.

Accordingly, the assertion that his letter to the bishops concerning the guidelines and the guidelines themselves are authentic exercises of the Church's Magisterium is false.

2.   The terms of Canon 752 of the 1983 *Code of Canon Law* seem to complicate the issue.

>   While an assent of faith is not demanded, religious submission of mind and will is to be given to any doctrine which either the Supreme Pontiff or the college of bishops, exercising their authentic magisterium, declares upon a matter of faith or morals, even if (he or) they do not intend to proclaim that doctrine by definitive act. Christ's faithful are to ensure, therefore, that they avoid whatever does not accord with that doctrine.

The demand in the canon for "religious submission of mind and will" relies on words found in *Lumen Gentium* 25. If, as we maintain, Vatican II was *not* an ecumenical council of the Church, their adoption in a provision of the Code is problematic. The authority for the demand for such submission derives not from Christ's Church and long usage, only from the opinion of the Council's bishops.

Pope Pius XII used the expression in *Humani Generis* (12.08.1950) limiting its application to a particular case.

>   "If the Supreme Pontiffs in their official documents purposely pass judgement on a matter up to that time under dispute, it is obvious that that matter, according to the mind and will of the same Pontiffs, can no longer be considered a question open to discussion among theologians" (n. 20)

The bishops of Vatican II sought to extend its burden—

"In matters of faith and morals, the bishops speak in the name of Christ and the faithful are to accept their teaching and adhere to it with a religious assent. This religious submission of mind and will must be shown in a special way to the authentic magisterium of the Roman Pontiff, even when he is not speaking ex cathedra ; that is, it must be shown in such a way that his supreme magisterium is acknowledged with reverence, the judgments made by him are sincerely adhered to, according to his manifest mind and will. His mind and will in the matter may be known either from the character of the documents, from his frequent repetition of the same doctrine, or from his manner of speaking." (*Lumen Gentium* n. 25)

The perils of extending the burden may be illustrated by reference to Pope John Paul's tortured interpretations of *Genesis* and St Paul's *Letter to the Ephesians* resulting from his besottedness with Feminist theory. These he taught in his early Wednesday Audiences and reproduced in the Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem* (15.8.1988) and in a number of public statements, including his egregious *Theology of the Body*. They contradicted the Church's interpretations maintained over twenty centuries and conflicted with the content of parallel passages in sacred scripture. The result was systematic theological error over the place of woman in creation which contradicted the teaching of the Church's Fathers and Doctors. The fixity of the Pope's "will and mind in the matter" were patent. If the faithful had accepted *Lumen Gentium* 25 at face value and ignored the *sensus fidelium*, they would have become enmeshed in the Pope's error.

How much more sane an approach to the proclivities of a reigning pontiff was that expressed by Melchior Cano, theologian to the Council of Trent.

"Peter has no need of our lies or flattery. Those who blindly and indiscriminately defend every decision of the supreme Pontiff are the very ones who do most to undermine the authority of the Holy See— they destroy instead of strengthening its foundations." [Quoted in George Weigel, *Witness to Hope : The Biography of Pope John Paul II*, New York 2001, p. 15]

Canon 752 is a novelty. It had no parallel in the 1917 *Code of Canon Law* or in the corpus of the Church's laws from the time of Gratian codified by Pius X and promulgated by Benedict XV. The confusion it engenders provides a good argument for its rescission.

3.   Regardless of whether the faithful feel themselves bound by the canon or not, no appeal to it may be made to disturb their serenity over adherence to the Church's constant teaching on marriage because the Pope's rescript is NOT an exercise of the Church's authentic Magisterium.

Michael Baker
8th December, 2017—*Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin*