

Is Vatican II infallible?

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## INTRODUCTION

1. Part of crisis in Church arises from confusion as to status of documents of Vatican II. Are they infallible or no? Part of this confusion stems from comments of not a few Church authorities.
  - a. John XXIII
    - i. Spoke of Council as “New Pentecost” in *Humanae Salutis* (encyclical convoking the Council)
  - b. Paul VI
    - i. Infine, per andare fino in fondo a questa enfaticizzazione di un concilio semplicemente pastorale, papa Paolo VI, il 29 giugno 1975, in una lettera ufficiale a Mons. Lefebvre, ha finito con l’usare queste parole significative: “ Il secondo concilio del Vaticano non ha minore autorità, sotto certi aspetti è perfino più importante di quello di Nicea ”
      1. Comment: Nicea taught definitively that Jesus has two natures united in the one person of the Word. It gave to us the principal expression of our Faith throughout the centuries, which is repeated every Sunday Mass.
  - c. Pre-eminence of citations from Vatican II in Papal & Vatican documents
    - i. Per fare solo un esempio, il Catechismo della Chiesa cattolica, pubblicato nel 1992, comporta più di 800 citazioni del Vaticano II, mentre i venti concili specificatamente dottrinali che l’hanno preceduto hanno diritto a sole 200 menzioni.
    - ii. Speech of JP II of 22 December 1986 (explaining the Assisi prayer meeting)
      1. 22 references to Vatican II

2. 12 to the Bible
  3. 1 to a pre-Vatican II Church authority. St Augustine's famous quote: "Our hearts are restless until they rest in thee."
2. Thus, these quotes appear to imply Vatican II must be most important text for a faithful Catholic, and so it would seem logically to be infallible, and thus so would the teachings of religious liberty, ecumenism, on the Church as sacrament of the unity of mankind which justified the Assisi prayer meeting. But is this really true?

#### WHAT IS INFALLIBILITY?

3. Meaning. Distinction between inspiration & revelation.
  - a. Catholic Encyclopedia teaches: **Revelation**, on the other hand, means the making known by **God**, supernaturally of some **truth** hitherto unknown, or at least not vouched for by Divine authority; **whereas infallibility is concerned with the interpretation and effective safeguarding of truths already revealed**. Hence when we say, for example, that some **doctrine** defined by the **pope** or by an **ecumenical council** is infallible, we mean merely that its inerrancy is Divinely guaranteed according to the terms of **Christ's** promise to His **Church**, not that either the **pope** or the Fathers of the Council are inspired as were the writers of the **Bible** or that any new revelation is embodied in their teaching.
4. When is the Church infallible?
  - a. Ordinary magisterium
    - i. Universal teaching of all bishops in space and time.
      1. Added note: common teaching of the theologians. These "theologians" are understood to be the recognized teachers of the Scholastic method, especially from 12-17<sup>th</sup> centuries.
    - ii. On matter of Faith or Morals
    - iii. As being divinely revealed by Our Lord Jesus Christ
    - iv. It is this to which +Lefebvre refers when he was asked: 'don't you feel alone being against all the bishops in the world' and he responded 'no, since I am with the bishops of all time'

- b. Extraordinary magisterium
  - i. Papal definition
    - 1. Vatican I solemnly defined that the Pope could teach infallibly.
      - a. We *teach and define* as a divinely revealed dogma that when the Roman pontiff speaks **EX CATHEDRA**, that is, when, in the exercise of his office as shepherd and teacher of all Christians, in virtue of his supreme apostolic authority, he defines a doctrine concerning faith or morals to be held by the whole church, he possesses, by the divine assistance promised to him in blessed Peter, that infallibility which the divine Redeemer willed his church to enjoy in defining doctrine concerning faith or morals. *Therefore*, such definitions of the Roman pontiff are of themselves, and not by the consent of the church, irreformable.
    - 2. Not unlimited. In fact, Council fathers of Vatican I explicitly taught that the charism of infallibility was not given to define new doctrine, since Revelation closed with the death of the Last Apostle, St John..
      - a. “For the holy Spirit was promised to the successors of Peter not so that they might, by his revelation, make known some new doctrine, but that, by his assistance, they might religiously guard and faithfully expound the revelation or deposit of faith transmitted by the **apostles.**” [Pastor Aeternus]
  - ii. Definitions of ecumenical councils.
    - 1. Example: Trent

WHAT IS THE AUTHORITY OF AN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL?

5. The last point leads us to heart of question: if Vatican II is an ecumenical council, is it infallible? What is the character of its teaching?
6. The authority of any council depends ultimately on ratification and promulgation of Pope.
  - a. Level of authority depends on what he intends to communicate to it.
  - b. Thus, not sufficient for a body of bishops to gather, even with the convocation of the Pope.
7. Anti-councils
  - a. I.e., group of bishops convened and passed canons and definitions, but which were repudiated by the pope
  - b. Council of Ephesus (449)
    - i. Legitimately convened, with papal delegates. However, Dioscorus rejected papal legates and proceeded to reject the mind of the Pope.
    - ii. St Leo the Great rejected its decisions and called another council which was held at Chalcedon in 451.
8. Conciliarism
  - a. Council of Constance (end of Great Western Schism). Taught that a council of bishops is superior to and can judge Pope.
  - b. Council of Basel (begins 1432)
    - i. Legitimately invoked by Martin V
    - ii. Was later disbanded by Eugene IV, but a number of prelates refused to disperse. They continued to make decisions and pass decrees. These are not accepted as legitimate decrees of an Ecumenical Council.

## APPLICATION TO VATICAN II

9. To learn the authority of the Council, we must turn to the Popes who oversaw it. They and they alone could define the scope and authority of the council.
10. What were stated intentions of Popes John XXIII & Pope Paul VI?
  - a. John XXIII
    - i. Opening address of Council (11 October 1962):

1. Often errors vanish as quickly as they arise, like fog before the sun. The Church has always opposed these errors. Often she has condemned them with very great severity. But today, 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 today by demonstrating the validity of her teaching rather than by condemnations.
2. "The greatest concern of the Ecumenical Council is this: that the sacred deposit of Christian doctrine should be guarded and taught more efficaciously. . . . The substance of the ancient doctrine of the deposit of faith is one thing, and the way in which it is presented is another."

b. Doctrinal Commission/Secretary

- i. NB: this commission did nothing more than reflect the mind of Pope Paul VI.
- ii. The Secretary of the Council on November 29, 1963, when the Council was to vote on the Constitution on Liturgy and the Decree on the Media for Communication, said (*Osservatore Romano* Nov.30,1963,p.3): "The schemas which are to be voted and promulgated the next Dec.4 are of a solely disciplinary nature." We note one of these was a Constitution - which really contains little of dogmatic nature - it is mostly legislative.
- iii. Doctrinal Commission on *Lumen Gentium* (Nov 16, 1964): The Commission was asked about the doctrinal note of LG. It referred the questioner back to its own declaration of March 6,1964: "Considering the Conciliar custom and the pastoral goal of this Council, this Holy Synod defines that only those things about matters of faith and morals are to be held by the Church which it will have declared clearly as such. As to other things which the Holy Synod proposes as the doctrine of the Supreme Magisterium of the Church, all and individual faithful persons must accept and embrace them according to the mind of the Holy Synod itself, which becomes

known either from the subject matter or from the manner of speaking, according to the norms of theological interpretation."

1. In other words, the Council is only defining a dogma when it clearly states that it is doing so. Without such a clear and solemn definition, it cannot be asserted that the Council is teaching in an infallible and extraordinary manner.

c. Paul VI

- i. NB: Paul VI is ultimately more important to understand than John XXIII, since no documents were promulgated under John XXIII, who died between the 1<sup>st</sup> & 2<sup>nd</sup> sessions of the Council. All 16 documents of Vatican II were promulgated under Paul VI.
- ii. Paul VI, in an address to the opening of the second session on Sept 29, 1963, said (AAS 55.848-49): "It seems to us that the time has come to explore, penetrate and explain more and more the doctrine about the Church of Christ; but not with those solemn statements which are called dogmatic definitions, but rather in the form of declarations in which the Church in more explicit and considered teaching presents that which she holds
- iii. **[Pope Paul VI, Discourse closing Vatican II, 7 December 1965]**
  1. "But one thing must be noted here, namely, that the teaching authority of the Church, even though not wishing to issue extraordinary dogmatic pronouncements, has made thoroughly known its authoritative teaching on a number of questions which today weigh upon man's conscience and activity, descending, so to speak, into a dialogue with him, but ever preserving its own authority and force; it has spoken with the accommodating friendly voice of pastoral charity; its desire has been to be heard and understood by everyone; it has not merely concentrated on intellectual understanding but has also sought to express itself in simple, up-to-date, conversational style, derived from actual experience and a

cordial approach which make it more vital, attractive and persuasive; it has spoken to modern man as he is.”

2. Another point we must stress is this: all this rich teaching is channeled in one direction, the service of mankind, of every condition, in every weakness and need. The Church has, so to say, declared herself the servant of humanity, at the very time when her teaching role and her pastoral government have, by reason of the council's solemnity, assumed greater splendor and vigor: the idea of service has been central.
- iv. General Audience of 12 January, 1966 “There are those who ask what is the authority, the theological qualification, which the Council wished to attribute to its teachings, knowing that it has avoided giving solemn dogmatic definitions, committing the infallibility of the ecclesiastical magisterium. And the answer is known to those who remember the conciliar declaration of March 6, 1964, repeated on November 16, 1964: given the pastoral character of the Council, it avoided pronouncing in an extraordinary way dogmas endowed with the note of infallibility.”
1. Vi è chi si domanda quale sia l'autorità, la qualificazione teologica, che il Concilio ha voluto attribuire ai suoi insegnamenti, sapendo che esso ha evitato di dare definizioni dogmatiche solenni, impegnanti l'infallibilità del magistero ecclesiastico. E la risposta è nota per chi ricorda la dichiarazione conciliare del 6 marzo 1964, ripetuta il 16 novembre 1964: dato il carattere pastorale del Concilio, esso ha evitato di pronunciare in modo straordinario dogmi dotati della nota di infallibilità; ma esso ha tuttavia munito i suoi insegnamenti dell'autorità del supremo magistero ordinario il quale magistero ordinario e così palesemente autentico deve essere accolto docilmente e sinceramente da tutti i fedeli, secondo la mente del Concilio circa la natura e gli scopi dei singoli documenti.

- d. Cardinal Ratzinger
  - i. In un discorso pronunciato il 13 luglio 1988 davanti ai vescovi del Cile e facendo il punto sulle consacrazioni fatte da Mons. Lefebvre, il cardinale Ratzinger, futuro Benedetto XVI, ha riassunto la scelta fatta dal Vaticano II nel seguente modo: “ La verità è che il Concilio stesso non ha definito alcun dogma ed ha tenuto a situarsi su un livello più modesto, semplicemente come un concilio pastorale ”

## IS VATICAN II INFALLIBLE?

11. Not with extraordinary magisterium. The supreme authority of the Church has made this abundantly clear.
  - a. Fr William Most: “Paul VI said it falls on Ordinary Magisterium level, as in the quote above from audience of Jan 12,1966. This means we have nothing on level I, solemn definitions.”
12. However, it could be said that some parts could fall under infallibility of ordinary magisterium.
  - a. All this would mean is that those teachings which repeat what the Church has always taught are as infallibly true as they have been through the ages.
    - i. Example: Lumen Gentium #25 "His [the Pope's] definitions of themselves, and not from consent of the Church, are rightly called unchangeable, for they are pronounced with the assistance of the Holy Spirit, an assistance promised him in blessed Peter. So they need no approval from others, nor is there room for an appeal to any other judgment."
      1. This is basically a restatement of what Vatican I taught.
    - b. This is the meaning, in part, of Archbishop Lefebvre's desire to “interpret the Council in the light of tradition”.
13. However, in neither case can any doctrine which opposes the perennial teaching of the Church be protected by infallibility.
  - a. Again, the Church has specifically, definitively and infallibly stated in Vatican I that the most solemn use of her infallibility cannot introduce new doctrines.



Thus, neither can a Council nor could the universal and ordinary magisterium contradict itself or be said to reveal “new” doctrines.

- i. This is the issue at stake. John Paul II admitted as much in *Ecclesia Dei* (1988): “Indeed, the extent and depth of the teaching of the Second Vatican Council call for a renewed commitment to deeper study in order to reveal clearly the Council's continuity with Tradition, especially in points of doctrine which, perhaps because they are new, have not yet been well understood by some sections of the Church.”
- b. Paul to Galatians
  - i. Miror quod sic tam cito transferimini ab eo qui vos vocavit in gratiam Christi in aliud Evangelium: 7 quod non est aliud, nisi sunt aliqui qui vos conturbant, et volunt convertere Evangelium Christi. 8 Sed licet nos aut angelus de caelo evangelizet vobis praeterquam quod evangelizavimus vobis, anathema sit. 9 Sicut praediximus, et nunc iterum dico: si quis vobis evangelizaverit praeter id quod accepistis, anathema sit.
- c. Concern with use of term “new Pentecost”. Compare with St Paul’s discussion of the “new” versus the “old” testament. John XXIII’s expression seems to imply a doing away with the “old Pentecost”.
  - i. Hebrews 8, 7 & 13: Nam si illud prius culpa vacasset, non utique secundi locus inquireretur. Dicendo autem novum: veteravit prius. Quod autem antiquatur, et senescit, prope interitum est.