
Doctrine : The Hermeneutic of Ambiguity

THE HERMENEUTIC OF THE HERMENEUTIC OF CONTINUITY

By Don Davide Pagliarani
A Summary

INTRODUCTION

In his allocution of 22nd December 2005 to the Consistory, Benedict XVI admitted that there were ill-feelings in the Church since Vatican II. These ill-feelings could not come from the Council itself, said the Pope, since it was an act of the Magisterium, and as such, it cannot be bad since in the Magisterial teaching of the Church there can be no rupture with its past. Therefore, these ill-feelings can only come from the post-Conciliar period, and a faulty interpretation of the Council, the so-called hermeneutic of rupture. Thus, the only solution to the crisis which followed Vatican II is to interpret it in line **with Tradition. This is the “hermeneutic of continuity”.** This is the mind of the Pope. However, this postulates a series of elements which do not save the Council, but rather indirectly prove its failure.

PART ONE: THE ECLIPSE OF THE MAGISTERIUM

(cf. Our Lady of La Salette)

It is of the specific nature of the Magisterium to teach (magister, in Latin, means teacher). The Magisterium is the proximate rule of faith; its *raison d'être* is to teach us what to believe and how to live. Scripture and Tradition, on the other hand, are the remote rules of faith because they need to be interpreted. Now, Vatican II certainly did not teach properly if it needs, 40 years later, to be interpreted (e.g. if a teacher needs another teacher to explain to his pupils his lesson, he is a bad teacher!). Vatican II, therefore, did not fulfil the requirements of an act of

the Magisterium as it did not teach properly.

Furthermore, Vatican II claimed throughout its four sessions to be a pastoral Council, which means a Council giving a clearer teaching, something to be understood more easily by the common people. Now, if it needs further interpretation, then it was obviously not clear in the first place, which means that it was not very pastoral either.

It is the Magisterium which made and approved Vatican II, and is thus the sole interpreter of the Council. Now if, as the pope says, it is the post-Conciliar period which failed to interpret the Council properly – such is the hermeneutic of rupture – then it is the post-Conciliar Magisterium that failed. The hermeneutic of continuity thus accuses the post-Conciliar Magisterium of having failed. The hermeneutic of rupture is, moreover, clearly the unanimous position of all the bishops and theologians even since the Council; a proof of this is their hostile attitude with regards the *Motu Proprio Summorum Pontificum* bringing back the traditional Mass.

Here are two proofs that the post-Conciliar Magisterium interpreted the Council as a rupture. First, the liturgical reform of 1969. It was a rupture with Tradition, but it was not an abuse, it was fully approved by Paul VI, and thus imposed by the post-Conciliar Magisterium. Secondly, the ecumenical meeting of Assisi in 1986 was the clear and most visible fruit of the Council and the post-Council

Magisterium, to use expressions of John Paul II himself. Now this meeting was in clear rupture with Tradition. Thus, until Pope Benedict XVI, the Council was officially interpreted by the Magisterium itself as a rupture with the past. To try to impose a new interpretation, the hermeneutic of continuity, leads to the admission that something went wrong with the exercise of the authority of the Magisterium ever since.

Msgr. Pozzo, the secretary of Ecclesia Dei, said, on 2nd July 2010, that the first cause of the hermeneutic of rupture (N.B. he is implying here the rupture between the Council and the post-Conciliar period, and not between the Council and Tradition), was the fact that in the post-Conciliar period there was a systematic renunciation of the use of anathemas (condemnations of errors). But he omitted to say that the post-Conciliar period simply continued the practice of the Council which also renounced the use of anathemas (cf. the opening discourse of John XXIII). The rupture in fact is not between the post-Conciliar period and the Council, but between the Council and Tradition. The Council and the subsequent period are truly in perfect continuity.

PART TWO: THE ULTIMATE CONSEQUENCES OF THE HERME- NEUTICS OF CONTINUITY: VATICAN II IS NOT INFALIBLE

An infallible definition of the Church **is always clear, doesn't need to be interpreted.** If a definition does need an inter-

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pretation, it is that interpretation that is infallible, and no longer the definition itself. Now, if Vatican II needs an interpretation, as we are now told, it immediately implies that it was not infallible.

By using the expression ‘pastoral’, the Council clearly stated that it was speaking to the modern man of the day, of the 1960s. But this modern man is always changing. So, if the Council wanted to speak to a constantly changing man, it does not need interpretation, it needs a complete reformulation, because man in the 2000s is no longer the same as in the 1960s.

If Benedict XVI were to re-write his discourse of December 2005 today, he would certainly change many things as a result of his experience of the last six years.

If the Church has renounced its role of defining (because no Conciliar and Post-

Conciliar text even pretends to have a definitive, universal, perennial meaning for a constantly changing man), then it has also renounced its role to teach, and is therefore unable to govern.

One might object that, just as patience was required to apply the decisions of previous Councils, then we should also be patient with this one. The answer to this objection is that the fundamental cause of the difficulties in applying previous Councils is the very opposite of those which plague Vatican II. Texts of previous Councils were sometimes disputed because of their dogmatic and disciplinary clarity; they were self-explanatory. Vatican II, on the other hand, was generally received with enthusiasm by subsequent popes and clergy, but we are now told that it was not properly understood!

Finally, although it was denied that **Vatican II was a “super-dogma”** (which is a

meaningless expression, as one can never exaggerate a true dogma), nevertheless, it has certainly been regarded as an absolute owing to its absence of links with the past.

CONCLUSION

The issue of the hermeneutic of continuity has the merit of highlighting the fundamental problem of the Council: it is a structural problem, before being one of content.

It did not teach, nor can it teach since it refused to define anything; it will need constant re-interpretation for a constantly changing man. It clearly manifests that both the Council and the post-Conciliar **Magisterium have failed.** Ω

Summarised by Fr. Daniel Couture.

The full text of this study can be found at <http://www.stas.org/component/content/article/6/502.html>



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ISLAM MUST ADOPT THE SPIRIT OF VATICAN II

The interreligious dialogue promoted by the Second Vatican Council is based on principles that sprang from Enlightenment philosophy. It would be rash, however, to think that the notion of religious freedom is common to all the religions that are supposed to be involved in this dialogue. To declare that the writings of the Encyclopedists of 18th century Europe are the universal and eternal expression of human aspirations is easy to do in Paris or Rome, but not in Tunis or Tripoli. Unless you make an imam out to be a reluctant Voltairean or an unwitting disciple of Rousseau.

Interreligious dialogue is based on the presupposition that Enlightenment ideas are shared by all the inhabitants of the

planet, that they make up a common platform allowing them to engage in a fruitful exchange. But we must not forget that these ideas themselves are very new in the Catholic Church. They were condemned by the popes until Pius XII. And it took Vatican II to bring about what Cardinal Joseph Suenens called a “[revolution of] 1789 in the Church”.

Hence, in order for real interreligious dialogue to take place, it is necessary and sufficient for Islam, for example, to adopt the spirit of the conciliar Declaration *Dignitatis Humanae* on religious freedom. In plain language, Vatican II must be exported to Cairo!

Rev. Fr. Alain Lorans