

## VATICAN II – INSPIRED BY GOD?

[This article, by AS Fraser, the Editor, first appeared in *Apropos* No. 28, Christmas 2010. It has been posted on the *Apropos* website [www.apropos.org.uk](http://www.apropos.org.uk) ]

Monsignor Ronald Knox in his study, *Enthusiasm*<sup>1</sup>, remarks:

*‘Shaftesbury tells us that “inspiration is a real feeling of the Divine Presence, and enthusiasm a false one”; but this easy habit of labelling and docketing is everywhere the enemy of truth. What right have we to assume that the man who lays credit to heavenly illumination must be either a saint or a fraud? Even where a canonised saint is concerned, we know that his revelations are binding on himself alone; we others are free to doubt them. We shall hesitate still more about the ipse dixit of some religious leader, inside or outside the Church, whose credentials we must needs assess on their own merits....’*<sup>2</sup>

Does this advice apply equally to the *ipse dixit* [say so] of a Pope who may have claimed to have received some inspiration or illumination or indeed none? We suggest that it does unless it conforms to the already revealed teaching of the Church. We have no less a teacher than St Paul on this question who in *Galatians* (1:8-9) warns us that we must test what we are told against what has already been revealed:

*‘But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach a gospel to you besides that which we have preached to you, let him be anathema.  
As we said before, so now I say again: If any one preach to you a gospel, besides that which you have received, let him be anathema.’*

### St Vincent of Lerins

We are not well enough versed in Scripture to claim that such a warning doubly voiced is unique, but it is nevertheless salutary and St Paul even cautions us against himself should he ever, for whatever reason, preach a gospel other than that received and already preached by him. Here we find the basis of St Vincent of Lerins’ formula that:

*‘Curandum est, ut id teneamas quod ubique, quod semper, quod ab omnibus creditum est.’ – ‘We must take care to hold that which was everywhere, always and by everyone believed.’*

St Vincent adds: *‘Hoc est enim vere proprieque catholicum’* - *‘For that is truly and in the strictest sense “Catholic”’.*

It is true that St Paul’s warning is directed against false teaching but nevertheless it does suggest to us that a degree of discernment is required when appraising what a churchman or even a pontiff might say where what is said does not fall within the remit of the extraordinary or ordinary Magisterium of the Church.

### Can one disagree with the Pope?

For Catholics inclined to papolatria<sup>3</sup> and who hang on any papal *ipse dixit*, we also cite the modern and entirely reasonable argument of Fr. Calmel which was related by Jean Madiran in his postscript to Fr. Calmel’s book, *Brève apologie pour l’Eglise du toujours*. Monsieur Madiran recounts that, in the reign of Pius XII, traditionalists (in France) were intemperate and imprudent regarding the papacy, an attitude which led to the accusation of papolatry. He identified Marcel Clement as particularly remiss

<sup>1</sup> *Enthusiasm – A Chapter in the History of Religion*, RA Knox, OUP (Clarendon Press), 1950.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p.8

<sup>3</sup> Literally, worship of popes – those who hang on every word of a Pope as if it were revealed truth.

in this regard and cites the occasion when Monsieur Clement, following Jean Ousset's example, 'repeated St Pius X's phrase: "It is not possible to have holiness where there is disagreement with the Pope"'. Madiran continues:

*'Fr. Calmel put much energy into rejecting this proposition. The authority invoked did not weaken his conviction. St Pius X is St Pius X – Fr. Calmel venerated him with all his heart but in this matter the pope was expressing a private opinion which was incorrect. The history of the Church shows us canonized saints who disagreed with popes who were not canonized. Fr. Calmel also appealed to theology and to common sense. St Pius X in this same discourse to priests of 2<sup>nd</sup> November 1912 ... declared, "One cannot limit the field in which the Pope may and must exercise his will"<sup>4</sup>. Fr. Calmel tells us that if one understands this in the sense that the field has no limit or only the limit prescribed by each pontiff, in the absence of all objective criteria, one falls into manifest error. He spoke in vain, the error was not apparent to us. The course of events served to instruct us better.'*<sup>5</sup>

The most dyed-in-the-wool supporters of Vatican II, however, are unlikely to suffer from papolatrist or ultramontane sentiments or at least they would have us so believe. They can, however, be as equally papolatrist when the Pope conforms, at least in their estimation, to their Modernist ideas or when his actions or motivations appear to suit their aims or aspirations.

### **John XXIII's Inspiration**

Inspiration for the Second Vatican Council is generally attributed to Pope John XXIII and by his own admission to inspiration from on high. In his convocation of the Council, the Pope makes reference to an inspiration which led him to call the Council:

*'For this reason, welcoming as from above the intimate voice of our spirit, we considered that the times now were right to offer to the Catholic Church and to the world the gift of a new Ecumenical Council, as an addition to, and continuation of, the series of the twenty great councils, which have been through the centuries a truly heavenly providence for the increase of grace and Christian progress.'*<sup>6</sup>

There is no doubt therefore that the Second Vatican Council was called as a result of Pope John's response to the 'intimate voice' of his spirit which he welcomed 'as from above'. As Ronald Knox advised us in *Enthusiasm*, we are perfectly free to doubt, or at least to question the Pope's illumination. And in the light of the Council's fruits, the average Catholic Fruit Inspector, as Robert Hickson would put it, has the right to draw his own conclusions.

### **Reasoned consideration or impulse?**

In his opening speech to the Council, John XXIII gives us what we will later show is an edited version of his account of the inspiration which led to the Council – a deliberation arrived at, it seems, not as a result of reasoned consideration but in response to what seemed an impulse:

*'As regards the initiative for the great event which gathers us here, it will suffice to repeat as historical documentation our personal account of the first sudden bringing up in our heart and lips of the simple words, "Ecumenical Council". We uttered those words in the presence of the Sacred College of Cardinals on that memorable January 25<sup>th</sup>, 1959, the feast of the Conversion of St Paul, in the basilica dedicated to him. It was completely unexpected, like a flash of heavenly light, shedding sweetness in eyes and hearts. And at the same time it gave rise to a great fervour throughout the world in expectation of the holding of the Council.'*<sup>7</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Alas, Paul VI subscribed to much the same sentiments, as those expressed by St Pius X, in his attempted abrogation of the traditional Mass.

<sup>5</sup> Louis Salleron was one of the few to share Fr. Calmel's opinion at that time.

<sup>6</sup> *Humanae Salutis*, December 25<sup>th</sup> 1961, *The Documents of Vatican II*, Abbot version. 1966, p.705

<sup>7</sup> *The Documents of Vatican II*, Abbot version. 1966, p.711.

Subsequent accounts of this inspiration seem to conflict with this ‘historical’ account presented to the Council Fathers in such effusive terms. Perhaps, however, it was merely an extremely redacted version to highlight the inspiration rather than the actual circumstances thereof.

Peter Hebblethwaite in his biography, *John XXIII – Pope of the Council*, devotes a chapter to the subject of inspiration of the Council. He reports the testimony of Cardinal Ottaviani, given in an interview in *Epocha* on 8<sup>th</sup> December 1968<sup>8</sup>, that he had visited Cardinal Roncalli in his cell during the conclave and had said to him: ‘Your eminence, we have to think about a council’. Cardinal Ottaviani then recalls:

*‘Cardinal Ruffini who was also present, was of the same opinion. Cardinal Roncalli made this idea his own, and was later heard to say, “I was thinking about a council from the moment I became Pope.”’*<sup>9</sup>

Hebblethwaite remarks that, ‘Ottaviani was of course here claiming credit for having been the first to propose the summoning of the Council. It would be ill-becoming to accuse the pro-prefect of the Holy Office of bare-faced lying’. Hebblethwaite, to be fair, records that both Cardinals Ruffini and Ottaviani had form in their calls for a Council. He reports that Ruffini had encouraged the newly elected Pius XII to call a council, and that Ottaviani and Ruffini were associated in a 1948 project for a council.

Hebblethwaite admits, however, that it is John XXIII’s accounts of how and when the idea or inspiration came to him, ‘that have muddled and misled everyone’.

These accounts are recorded thus by Hebblethwaite:

### **History of that inspiration**

October 30<sup>th</sup> 1958: Archbishop Capovilla states that John XXIII on this date first mentioned ‘the necessity of holding a council.’<sup>10</sup>

November 2<sup>nd</sup> 1958: John XXIII noted in a memo after meeting Cardinal Ruffini that they had discussed the possibility of calling a council.<sup>11</sup>

November 2<sup>nd</sup> 1958: John XXIII says to Capovilla: ‘There should be a Council’.<sup>12</sup>

November 4<sup>th</sup> 1958: John XXIII crowned Pontiff

Early November 1958: ‘He [John XXIII] spoke about the Council to Giovanni Urbani, his successor as Patriarch of Venice, and Girolamo Bortignon, bishop of Padua.’<sup>13</sup>

January 8<sup>th</sup> 1959: John XXIII meets Don Giovanni Rossi and tells him: ‘I want to tell you something marvellous, but you must promise to keep it secret. Last night I had the great idea of holding a Council... The Holy Spirit doesn’t help the Pope. I’m simply His helper. He did everything. The Council is His idea.’<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> Testimony he repeated in a conversation with Bernard R Bonnot, an American graduate student in February 1975. cf. *Pope John XXIII*, Peter Hebblethwaite, p. 283.

<sup>9</sup> *John XXIII*, Peter Hebblethwaite, p. 283

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, p.307

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*. p.312

January 20<sup>th</sup> 1959: The Pope meets Cardinal Tardini and gauges his reaction to the proposal of an Ecumenical Council.

January 22<sup>nd</sup> 1959: John XXIII ‘now bubbling over with enthusiasm’ announces his intention to hold a Council to the Andreotti family who were sworn to secrecy.

January 25<sup>th</sup> 1959: John XXIII announces his intention to hold a Council to assembled Cardinals at St Paul’s—without-the-walls.

May 8<sup>th</sup> 1962: In an address to Venetian Pilgrims, John XXIII told them how the Council came about:

*‘Where did the idea of an Ecumenical Council come from? How did it develop? The truth is that the idea and even more its realisations were so unforeseen as to seem unlikely. A question was raised in a meeting I had with the Secretary of State, Cardinal Tardini, which led on to a discussion about the way the world was plunged into so many grave anxieties and troubles... What should the Church do? Should Christ’s mystical barque simply drift along, tossed this way and that by the ebb and flow of the tides? Instead of issuing new warnings, shouldn’t she stand as a beacon of light? What could that exemplary light be?’*

*‘My interlocutor listened with reverence and attention. Suddenly my soul was illumined by a great idea which came precisely at that moment and which I welcomed with ineffable confidence in the divine Teacher. And there sprang to my lips a word that was solemn and committing. My voice uttered it for the first time: a Council.’<sup>15</sup>*

### **Embarrassed commentators**

Hebblethwaite could find it no more becoming to accuse the Pontiff of bare-faced lying than to accuse Cardinal Ottaviani. But he does acknowledge that this account poses a problem, and that it would be simply false for the Pope to claim that he had never pronounced the word ‘Council’ prior to 20<sup>th</sup> January 1959. Hebblethwaite admits too that a passage in John XXIII’s *Journal* in which he asserts a similar account ‘has embarrassed commentators’. Hebblethwaite concludes that ‘the January 20<sup>th</sup> 1959 meeting cannot have happened exactly as he later described it because he himself had already admitted to Felici that the proposals for a Roman Synod and the revision of canon law [also aired at the meeting] came to him from others. Hebblethwaite suggests by way of explanation, ‘That [Pope] John’s memory faltered and that his unconscious editing of his reminiscences is designed to emphasise, yet again that the idea of the Council was an “inspiration” in the sense defined above.’<sup>16</sup>

The account of the inspiration for the Council given to Council Fathers for the historical record, was, it seems, not quite that ‘flash of heavenly light, shedding sweetness in eyes and hearts’. Nor could his uttering of the words ‘ecumenical Council’ there be remotely described as completely unexpected nor as a flash of heavenly light, particularly so when he had already aired the idea with Tardini among others. According to Hebblethwaite:

*‘The seventeen cardinals were unresponsive to his dramatic announcement. For all they appeared to care, he might have been reading out his laundry list. He was bitterly disappointed. He said so plainly: “Humanly speaking, we would have expected that the cardinals, after listening to our address, might have crowded round to express their approval and good wishes.” But they did nothing of the kind.’<sup>17</sup>*

<sup>15</sup> Quoted by Peter Hebblethwaite, *John XXIII*, p.316

<sup>16</sup> Peter Hebblethwaite, *John XXIII*, p. 318

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.* p.322.

### **Wild fantasy or binding inspiration**

The whole question of inspiration nevertheless was something that clearly figured in John XXIII's mind. Hebblethwaite is of the opinion that the Pontiff did not understand this as a private revelation nor as a special vision or other such manifestation. He proffers the opinion that such an inspiration was of the nature of ideas that came in prayer and that Pope John would have discerned these spirits using the Ignatian 'discernment of spirits', winnowing or evaluating them 'according to their persistence and the "consolation" or "desolation" they brought.' According to Hebblethwaite:

*'What Pope John most wanted to know was whether the idea was "not some wild fantasy or spectacular improvisation, but an inspiration (ispirazione) that bound him, as ever, to submit to the Lord's will" (Lecture p.266). He feared in other words that it might be no more than a temptation, a deceiving will o' the wisp or an indulgent ego-trip. He wanted to know whether it was "of God", a grace, an inspiration.'*<sup>18</sup>

One can only conjecture that this thought continued to haunt him even years later, and perhaps accounts for his repeated redaction of the circumstances surrounding his inspiration. If it was an idea that arose out of prayer rather than a private revelation why was it expressed more in the language of the latter rather than the former: 'the flash of heavenly light', 'the shedding of sweetness and light', 'a soul illumined with a great idea'? Was his discernment of spirits exacting enough when he told his friend Rossi that the night before he had had a great idea to hold a Council? Certainly, both Paul VI and John Paul II held the opinion that John called the Council under divine inspiration. Paul VI in his opening speech to the Second Session of the Council suggested that gratitude and praise be given to Pope John, 'for having resolved - doubtless under divine inspiration - to convoke this Council...'. John Paul II made reference too in his audience of Wednesday 25<sup>th</sup> November 1981 to 'the mysterious and irresistible inspiration of the Holy Spirit' which led John to convoke the Council.

### **It must be the Holy Spirit**

There is no indication, however, that Pope John, sought, as Peter Hebblethwaite charitably suggests, that discernment of spirits through counsel other than his own. It appears that it was he alone who decided the source of that inspiration - even though it is now admitted that another voice or inspiration suggested a less than divine source to him. This admission perhaps expresses the Pontiff's fears more acutely than those we have already quoted. He was not so much afraid of his inspiration being a wild fantasy as something more sinister. Cardinal Franz König recounts:

*In January 1959, while he was still finally making up his mind whether he should call a council or not, he seemed at times to be amazed by his own courage. Soon after he had announced that he was summoning a council, he confided to me in a private audience how, during the Octave of Prayer for Christian Unity in January 1959, the idea suddenly came to him. 'My first thought was that the devil was trying to tempt me. A council at the present time seemed so vast and complicated an undertaking. But the idea kept returning all that week while I was praying. It became more and more compelling and emerged ever more clearly in my mind. In the end I said to myself, "This cannot be the devil, it must be the Holy Spirit inspiring me".'*<sup>19</sup>

One can only read this with amazement. The Pontiff made the decision that his inspiration was divine rather than diabolic because it became more and more compelling and emerged ever more clearly in his mind. Such is hardly sufficient reason for determining the source of an inspiration.

---

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.* p. 308

<sup>19</sup> Cardinal Franz König, 'It must be the Holy Spirit - How Vatican II changed the Church' *The Tablet* 21<sup>st</sup> December 2002.

As Romano Amerio reminds us, ‘In the case of Vatican II, there were no prior consultations as to whether the council was necessary or opportune’,<sup>20</sup> and as Cardinal Pallavicini, historian of the Council of Trent, remarked, ‘to convoke a General Council, except when absolutely demanded by necessity, is to tempt God.’<sup>21</sup>

### **Was God tempted?**

It is not for us mere mortals to decide whether God was tempted or not. But we can assess the fruits thus far of the Council not only according to our own calculation but by the Popes themselves. John XXIII died before the Council began in earnest. He had been full of what some have described in various ways as over-optimism. Had he lived to see the post-conciliar period and the immediate inheritance of the Council he might have questioned again from whence his inspiration came.

We know that Paul VI in a sermon on the Feast of Saints Peter and Paul, 1972<sup>22</sup> was constrained to suggest that the smoke of Satan had somehow entered the temple of God and that the Devil came to suffocate the fruits of Vatican II. He also stated that ‘The Church is in a disturbed period of self-criticism, or what would better be called auto-demolition. It is an acute and complicated upheaval which nobody would have expected after the council. It is almost as if the Church were attacking herself.’ Cardinal Ratzinger too, in his *Jesus Interview*, admitted that the results of the Council ‘seem cruelly opposed to everyone’s expectations, beginning with those of John XXIII and then of Paul VI.’ He proceeded to acknowledge that ‘The net result therefore seems negative: I am merely repeating here what I had already said ten years after the close of the Council’s work – it is incontrovertible that this period has definitely been an unfavourable one for the Catholic Church.’<sup>23</sup> Cardinal Ratzinger did not blame this upon the Council but upon what he called the *Konzilsungeist*, ‘the anti-spirit of the council’ which ‘held that everything that is new (or can be considered as such: how many ancient heresies re-surfaced during those years, to be hailed as novelties!) is always superior to what already exists. And according to this “anti-Spirit”, the history of the Church was to be seen as making a fresh start as from the Ecumenical Council of Vatican II.’<sup>24</sup>

### **Widespread apostasy**

And in his meditation on the ninth station of the Via Crucis in 2005 a few days before his election as Pope Benedict XVI, the Cardinal made his famous observation about ‘filth’ in the Church. But his meditation was perhaps not so much about child abuse, as was presumed generally, but rather about widespread apostasy of which child abuse was but one manifestation:

*‘Should we not also think of how much Christ suffers in His own Church? How often is the holy sacrament of His Presence abused, how often must He enter empty and evil hearts! How often do we celebrate only ourselves, without even realizing that He is there! How often is His Word twisted and misused! What little faith is present behind so many theories, so many empty words! How much filth there is in the Church, and even among those who, in the priesthood, ought to belong entirely to Him! How much pride, how much self-complacency! What little respect we pay to the Sacrament of Reconciliation, where He waits for us, ready to raise us up whenever we fall!’*

<sup>20</sup> *Iota Unum*, p. 48.

<sup>21</sup> *Hist. Conc. Trid.* Lib. XVI. C. 10, tom.ii. p.800. Antwerp, 1670.

<sup>22</sup> Only a summary exists in Italian of this Papal homily on the Vatican website. In the volumes, *The Teachings of Pope Paul VI*, published by *Libreria Editrice Vaticana*, the homily is missing in its entirety!

<sup>23</sup> An interview with Vittorio Messori in *Jesus* magazine. 1985 See ‘*Why the Faith is in a State of Crisis*’: Supplement to *Approaches* No. 89. p. 9.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

In the prayer following that unprecedented meditation, he describes the Church of today in terms utterly devoid of the post-conciliar optimism which his predecessors repeated mantra-like upon the deck as, in natural terms, the barque of Peter, appeared to be sinking:

*'Lord, your Church often seems like a boat about to sink, a boat taking in water on every side. In your field we see more weeds than wheat. The soiled garments and face of your Church throw us into confusion. Yet it is we ourselves who have soiled them! It is we who betray you time and time again, after all our lofty words and grand gestures. Have mercy on your Church; within her too, Adam continues to fall. When we fall, we drag you down to earth, and Satan laughs, for he hopes that you will not be able to rise from that fall; he hopes that being dragged down in the fall of your Church, you will remain prostrate and overpowered. But you will rise again. You stood up, you arose and you can also raise us up. Save and sanctify your Church. Save and sanctify us all.'*

### **Vigilant and hostile intelligences**

None of us will know this side of Heaven whether John XXIII's inspiration was of divine or diabolic origin. We do know, however, as the Catholic Encyclopedia tells us, that the *'the activity of Satan does much more than merely add a further source of temptation to the weakness of the world and the flesh; it means a combination and an intelligent direction of all the elements of evil...'* and that *'the perils of the situation are incalculably increased when all may be organized and directed by vigilant and hostile intelligences.'*<sup>25</sup> We know from the experience of such great Saints as the Curé d'Ars, that even saints can be deceived by the Evil One who *'imitates the inspirations of the Holy Ghost'*. The Curé d'Ars almost succumbed to temptation on occasion because such *'had worn the disguise of love for God.'*

When we consider John XXIII's inspiration to hold a Council, therefore, we cannot know whether such was an inspiration or an imitation. All we do know is that following from that inspiration, the Church was subjected to a great revolution which has led to widespread apostasy – an apostasy which has all the hallmarks of having been devised by *'vigilant and hostile intelligences'*. Did not Sister Lucy of Fatima too, in a letter to her friend, write about the *'diabolical disorientation invading the world and deceiving souls?'*

Cardinal Ratzinger's prayer, at the Ninth Station of the Cross in 2005, was a clear recognition of that apostasy and its diabolic author. The Apostle Paul has taught us how we must combat this powerful enemy:

*'Put you on the armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the deceits of the devil. For our wrestling is not against flesh and blood; but against principalities and powers, against the rulers of the world of this darkness, against the spirits of wickedness in the high places.'* (Ephesians 6:11, 12).

Perhaps above all its great faults, the post-conciliar Church in its over-optimistic hubris completely underestimated, or even ignored, Satanic power – a power which can only be exorcised by *'prayer and fasting'* both of which were casualties of the post-conciliar revolution. These tools are undoubtedly a prerequisite to *'a grand and possibly definitive ordering of the last Council in all its dimensions and content'* at the highest level of the Magisterium – as called for by Mgr Brunero Gherardini in his important work: *The Ecumenical Vatican Council II – A Much Needed Discussion*. Until such a definitive ordering occurs we feel that John XXIII's legacy, the Second Vatican Council, will continue to frustrate his concern in his opening speech, *'that the sacred deposit of Christian doctrine should be guarded and taught more efficaciously'*.<sup>26</sup> In that same speech he declared: *'We feel we must disagree with those prophets of gloom, who are always forecasting disaster, as though*

<sup>25</sup> Entry for *"The Devil"*.

<sup>26</sup> Opening Speech to the Council, *The Documents of Vatican II*, Abbott version, p.713.

*the end of the world were at hand.* That his successors should speak of the state of the Church in terms of near despair is testimony to how wrong he was to consider that *'Divine Providence is leading us to a new order of human relations which by men's own efforts and even beyond their very expectations, are directed toward the fulfilment of God's superior and inscrutable designs.'* This new order does not sit well with his successor's assessment on Good Friday 2005 of a Church filled with *'pride and self-complacency'* - the first of which is the vice of the Father of Lies, he who *'imitates the inspiration of the Holy Ghost'*. Would Pope John XXIII have felt so confident in his inspiration had he been granted a vision of the consequences of the Council thus far?

ASF