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By Father Gregor Hesse

Editor's Note: The following is an edited transcript of a lecture given by Father Hesse at the Fatima 2000 Conference in Rome titled 'Discernment of Spirits', Nov. 18-24th. To our knowledge, this is the first time that the content of this presentation has been published on the internet. This conference in particular is especially relevant for our time, with Father Hesse identifying certain errors made by defenders of the post-conciliar revolution that are now quite common in polemical debate.

The title of my presentation is "The Discernment of Spirits". It will treat of how to distinguish if some statement has been made by Our Lord or by the devil ... if some statement bears the truth or is just a lie.

The only metaphysical certitude we can have (that is, absolute safety in knowing that we are presented with the truth) is, of course, in Revelation and Sacred Tradition. Everything else has to be examined in accordance with Divine Revelation and Sacred Tradition.

In his Spiritual Exercises, St. Ignatius points out that the devil first gives good thoughts, then *more* good thoughts and then he lets the bad thoughts creep in. The devil will tell you a lot of truths. He will continue for a long time to tell you the truth and then he will start to let the errors and the lies creep in.

About the discernment of spirits, the famous Jesuit theologian, Scaramelli, says that one of the best ways to find out if something corresponds to the truth or not is by checking it against the Church Magisterium (with the teaching of the Catholic Church). The same is said by Cardinal Bona, who wrote a book on the discernment of spirits. He said that whenever the devil talks, you have 90 percent truth and 10 percent lie. And it is the 10 percent lie that causes all the havoc, confusion and loss of souls.

Two Principles

How do we know if something is true or not?

There are two principles.

The first principle is that we have to check it against the teaching of the Church.

The second principle is contained in Our Lord's words "a tree is recognized by its fruits".

You watch for awhile, see what is happening and then you will find out if the source of everything has been divine or evil. Don't forget that Our Lord talked about the wolves in sheep's clothing. And St. Thomas said, "The worst wolves in sheep's clothing are the heretics and then, bad prelates."

Why did he say the bad prelates? He was talking about the bishops who enable heretics to spread their lies. Because if a heretic is silenced by a bishop, then the heretic is finished (of course, we are talking about the old days when there was no mass communication). The problem was that all too often, the bishops did not silence the heretics. They just listened or they didn't care.

St. Thomas, who noted that the divine truth never changes, and who also noted that Our Lord warned "Fear ye not them that kill the body ... but rather fear him that can destroy both soul and body in hell," concluded that capital punishment for heretics could be justified, because it is our souls that are at stake here, and not our bodies.

I do not fear a murderer, I fear a subtle, intelligent heretic.



Two Mistakes

I said that one of the best ways to find out if some statement is coming from the devil or from God is to compare it with the teaching of the Church.

Now, what exactly do the words “teaching of the Church” mean? What has to be understood by the term “Magisterium of the Church”? There are two basic errors in understanding this.

The first mistake is to believe that only a defined Dogma is binding in the faith. The second mistake is to think that everything the Pope says and does, and everything the bishops say and do has to be repeated or followed. This of course, is ridiculous. A speech or sermon given by the Pope is not ordinary teaching (Magisterium). It is simply a sermon given by the bishop of bishops.

Humani Generis

Pope Pius XII in his encyclical *Humani Generis* made very clear what is to be understood under the term of "binding" teaching of the Church. Precisely, Pope Pius XII taught that nobody should suppose that whatever is said or written in the encyclicals does not demand consent just simply because the Popes in writing encyclicals do not exercise their extraordinary teaching.

Those encyclicals are statements with the power of ordinary teaching of the Church. Ordinary does not mean vulgar or base, ordinary simply means "according to the rules." And he quotes the Lord saying "He who hears you hears Me." Pius XII further explains that, most of the time, what a Pope says in one of his encyclicals has been said before ...either by a council, by a predecessor of the reigning Pope, or even by an encyclical of the same Pope.

So Pius XII underlines the fact that the teaching of the Church has to be obeyed even if it is not extraordinary teaching defining a dogma. It is sufficient to have a Papal Encyclical, it is sufficient to have a Papal Bull.

How About Contradictions?

Now, let's suppose that you find contradicting lines between two different encyclicals. Let's say that Pope "A" says "yes" to something and Pope "B" says "no" to something. What do you do? Well in that case, you choose what has been said previously and choose what is consistent with the traditional teaching of the Church. You follow this course for the very simple reason that the Pope is the supreme person in the Church. He is not the supreme principle. The supreme principle of the Church is the truth, and the truth is laid down in the faith. The basis of the faith (as the Dogmatic Constitution of the First Vatican Council entitled *Dei Filius* says) is based on Revelation and Tradition. And those two cannot change, cannot be changed, and cannot be "updated" to the times.

Liturgy

The unchangeableness of Liturgy reflects this. Liturgy is a source of the faith in the sense that liturgy has to contain everything the Church believes. This is why I will quote from the Pope St. Pius V's famous Bull *Quo Primum*, the first document you find in the old Missal. Pope Pius V declares that "this decree is valid from now on until forever". Now this was said on July 14, 1570 and he says that this missal that he is publishing with *Quo Primum* must never be changed. It must never be changed by whomever. That means his successors too. This is not just the ordinary phrase used in every papal document saying "this has value from now on forever". He specifies, that nobody, whoever it may be would ever be able to

abolish this, his decree. Otherwise, he would have just utilized the usual formulations. But he says explicitly, this document can never be recalled or reduced by whomever. And that binds his successors who have indeed sworn the Coronation Oath to be found in the Liber Diurnus Romanorum Pontificum which is one of the- oldest collections of Papal decrees - probably put together in the 9th Century with texts that contain centuries of tradition. And in this Coronation Oath, the Pope swears an oath and says that he will never change what he has inherited from his God-willed predecessors.

Intellect and Will

I mentioned the wolves in sheep's clothing. How do they operate? How do they spread their error? To understand how easy it is to spread error, we just have to consider the following facts.

First of all, a complete collection of church teachings containing only important Papal decrees is so massive that it is something no human being can memorize. So we have one source of error, lack of memory.

Second, it would be absolutely naive to believe that every single member of the Church is a holy person and always speaks the truth. It is all too common with human beings to make their wishes father of their thoughts. And it is all too common for them to want to spread certain ideas simply because it suits their own purpose. This is the second source of errors and heresies.

You see the human soul has two faculties, the intellect and the will. So you can sin against the truth in your intellect and/or your will.

You can sin against the truth in your intellect by just simply forgetting some truth and saying something different. You can sin against the truth in your will by just simply not wanting to tell the truth. An example of this is to be found in some of the official heretics of our day (mind you there are thousands who are not official heretics but there are others, like Hans Kung, whose teachings have been formally declared heretical by the official Magisterium).

When you ask them what they think, they will give you a different answer every year. They don't want to tell the truth or maybe they just have bad memories. Both are sources of confusion.

Pascendi

On September 8, 1907, St. Pius X published probably his most important encyclical, *Pascendi*. He talks about the teachings of the modernists. The name modernists has been given to them by St. Pius X himself. In 1907, the modernists were neither new nor original.

Basically, the characteristic of the modernist is not to be explicitly, clearly a heretic, but implicitly and subtly. The modernist will not necessarily tell you that he does not believe in the Immaculate Conception. He will tell you that the term "Immaculate Conception" has to be understood in a different way today than it would have to be understood in 1854 when the Dogma was pronounced by Pope Pius IX.

The modernists will not directly deny the Divinity of Christ. No. The modernists will tell you everything about Our Lord's human nature, about Our Lord being a man, about Our Lord being the man, about Jesus of Nazareth being the man who saved the world, about Jesus of Nazareth being the man on whom everything is concentrated. He will not say, "Jesus was not God", but he will not speak anymore about the fact that Jesus was and is God, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity become man.

Calculated Unclarity

He will deliberately clothe the content of his speech in sheep's clothing, in the clothes of "charity and understanding", and in the clothes of being nice and wanting happiness. He will not speak about saving our souls. He will not mention the fact that everything Christianity is about is to save our souls for the greater glory of God. He will never speak about the greater glory of God. But he will constantly remind us that we have to be kind and nice. So he will do the negative by saying the positive.

It is like the famous American phrase, "think positive!" This is exactly what the modernists want us to do. Think positive, be kind, be charitable, be nice, be happy, smile. The modernists will repeat, until we can't even stand it anymore, all the "niceties" of the faith, but will never mention the threat of eternal condemnation, the trouble that heresy will bring and the problem of sin.

St. Pius X says the modernist is deliberately ambiguous in his terminology. To make sure that you cannot hunt him down as a heretic, he will not pronounce his heresies as such, but will simply leave out the essentials.

But this is not all. There are two groups of modernists. See, to make things more confusing, you have to have two groups of modernists. You have to have the conservatives, so in case a liberal comes up you can point out a conservative modernist, and you have to have the progressive ones so in case a conservative comes up, you are able to point out a progressive

modernist.

And believe it or not, all that I am saying here has been prophesied by St. Pius X in 1907, when he explains that the easiest way to understand the modernists is to reduce their evolution to the battle between two forces, the one that tends towards "progress" and the other one that tends away from "progress" by being conservative. If you'll pardon a personal comment, this is why I don't like to be called a conservative, because I do not believe I am a modernist, I am a traditionalist.

St. Pius X says that, the "conservative" influence is dominating in the Church because it is contained in tradition. Keep in mind, this is what the modernists believe, not what the Church, St. Pius X or I believe. The modernists contend that "the conserving force exists in the Church and is found in tradition; tradition is represented by religious authority", and this is quite natural, because it is in the essence of authority to guard tradition. They also hold that authority is quite remote to real life, removed from reality. They say that authority resists the force that wants to move it towards progress. In essence, "conservative" modernists do not speak about an unchangeable truth. In their view, truth does not bind because it is unchangeable, but because it comes from authority.

Now this is nonsense.

Authority on its own, never makes the truth, never changes the truth, and never can take anything away from the truth. Remember Our Lord said "I am the truth." He is the truth, and His truth is contained in the Gospel and in Sacred Tradition... a Sacred Tradition that does not know "progress" as we have heard somewhere recently, but Sacred Tradition that has been concluded forever with the death of the last apostle. This is what Vatican I defines. So they say the conservatives are conservatives because they don't understand anything about real life and because they have simply been endowed with a lot of authority and they want to defend their own authority.

Opposed to this, the "progressive" modernists hold that there is a force that tends towards progress, and this progress corresponds to the "innermost needs of the consciousness of the laity." This is the literal translation of what St. Pius X says. He is speaking about the modernist desire to adapt truth and to adapt the teaching of the Church, to the "innermost needs of the consciousness of the laypeople." In fact, you will find the term "consciousness," substituting many truths of the Magisterium in our day.

The one who came up with the idea that everything is "consciousness" was a German philosopher, and this idea was later on adapted to medicine by the famous Sigmund Freud. Well, according to my knowledge, Sigmund Freud has never been granted Church authority,

has never been made a member of the Church Hierarchy, and has never been quoted as Church teaching. However, you will frequently find his terminology in today's sermons, pastoral letters and other documents.

Quite frankly, the "innermost needs of the consciousness of the laity" are not interesting to the Church or Christ. Our Lord Jesus Christ wants us to be saved, that means He wants us to make our innermost needs correspond to His teaching - that same teaching of which no single jot can ever be lost - that same teaching of which He said "Heaven and earth shall pass away but My words would be for ever." He wants this innermost need to correspond to His will. In fact, our innermost needs are to fulfill the will of Christ, to listen to His Mother at Fatima and not to listen to the modernists who want to destroy our souls.

So, "the consciousness of the laity" is something the Church is simply, plainly not interested in. Because the consciousness of the laity is either some self-appointment to authority never granted or it is the conformation of the individuals will with the will of Christ. In other words, either we obey what Our Lord says or the Church has no interest in our consciousness.

St. Pius X further warned, "and in this, reverend brethren, We see this dangerous and destructive teaching which proclaims the laity as the seed of progress in the Church".

Not a "Church of the Laity"

You see, this is the point. The Church by definition, by it's own definition is essentially a priestly Church. And if I would want to bore you, I could give you some 50 quotations from Denzinger Schonmetzer on that point - quoting the popes and councils, especially the Council of Trent and Vatican Council I. The Church is not a church of lay people. The Church has been founded by Our Lord Jesus Christ whose power has been vested in His Vicar on earth. It is the Vicar of Christ who grants jurisdiction of this power to His most reverend Cardinals, bishops and priests. If there has ever been a vocation of the laity, this vocation comes from the priests and the bishops. The Church is governed by the Pope the Cardinals and the bishops, not by a democratic agreement of the laity. "You are Peter and upon this rock I will build My Church." Peter was not a layman. St. Peter was one of the first bishops and he was the first Pope. The fact that John Paul II, and before him all the other 263 popes were successors of St. Peter is a dogma of the faith. It is not an agreement of the faithful, or by the faithful.

On Papal Infallibility

On July 18, 1870, Pope Pius XI together with the Vatican Council I, pronounced the Dogma

of Papal Infallibility. In this dogma however he made clear what this means.

First of all he says St. Peter was truly pope, St. Peter was truly the Vicar of Christ and St. Peter was definitely and truly not the last Vicar of Christ. He then explains that all the successors of St. Peter, all the popes throughout history have been the Vicars of Christ - the supreme teachers on earth, the supreme pastors and the supreme judges.

This is why, not so long ago, the Popes used to wear the tiara with the three crowns, for the three priestly offices.

Pius IX and Vatican Council I then say that St. Peter having been the supreme teacher - and his successors having been the supreme teachers - they therefore have the right and the power to come to a final decision binding their successors, and binding all the faithful on earth for ever. And in the 4th chapter of this decree of Vatican I, Pius IX defines and says who does not believe this does not belong to the Church.

However, he also defines that the Holy Spirit has not been given to St. Peter or his successors to define a new doctrine. It has been given to St. Peter and his successors so that they may guard tradition and explain tradition.

So Pius IX binds his successors too. He binds his successors to safeguard the tradition. By proclaiming this dogma of infallibility, Pius IX did not empower his successors to do what they want. On the contrary, the same Pius IX approved with his own signature a letter written by the German bishops in 1871 to Bismark and to some others who had trouble with this new dogma. Pius IX explained that this does not mean that the pope can do whatever he wants, but that the pope is the only one on earth who can solve a problem that has not yet been solved with absolute certainty and forever. He is the only one who can answer a theological question that has not yet been answered definitely and forever.

But the same document explains that this does not mean that the pope has the right to change the tradition or to proclaim something new. In fact, Pius IX is very strict with his successors. For example, he doesn't say that if a bishop does not fulfill his duty, the pope may act. No, Pius IX says, in agreement with the German bishops that if a bishop does not fulfill his duty, the Pope has to act. Pope Pius IX says this twice in a document that bears his own signature.

I remind you again of the Coronation Oath where the pope says, "We put under strict exclusion from the church anybody who wants to change tradition be it somebody else or We". So you see the Papal duty to keep to tradition, the duty to explain the faith the way it has always been done. Pius IX also used the phrase *eadem sententia eodem sensu* (the same

sentence in the same sense). That means, if somebody tries to explain to me that the dogma of the Trinity has to be understood in a different way at the Council of Nicea than it has to be understood today, I will say right in his face that he is not a Catholic.

The Dogma of Transubstantiation is the Dogma which says that at the moment of consecration at Mass the bread and wine are changed substantially into the Body and Blood of Our Lord. If somebody tries to tell us that this was something to be understood differently at the Council of Trent than it has to be understood today, then I'm sorry, whoever says this is a heretic.

And to show you how serious these things are I mention one point that I will develop later on.

In 1794, Pope Pius VI condemned the so-called Synod of Pistoia. This was a few dozen bishops assembling at Pistoia here in Italy, and pronouncing some new so-called "doctrines". Eight years after this synod, Pope Pius VI, having examined every line that had been published, condemned several of those lines and condemned the whole Synod of Pistoia as such.

Pius VI explained that those who participated in this Synod knew the tricky art of betraying the faith the way the modernists do. He didn't actually call them modernists, but "renewers". Because they are afraid of hurting Catholic ears, they try to throw out their nets by covering their words and making them ambiguous. By this, they hide the error contained in their words so as to allow it to enter souls.

Pius VI then said that the purpose of a Synod is not to be ambiguous, but to avoid ambiguities and to clarify what is obscure, clear up any kind of confusion and to make sure the doctrine is explained explicitly.

The purpose of the Council of Trent was to do away with the error of the Protestants, not to create new ambiguities, not to create new errors.

In fact, until the 20th Century, there was never an ecumenical council that had been called for anything but defining doctrine - that means, turning ambiguous terms into certain terms. And only one of those ecumenical councils, the Council of Lyon, for historic reasons, did not manage to define Dogma, the others did. And the only reason they were called was to make sure that the doctrine of the Church was clear, understandable and corresponding to the wisdom of Our Lord.

And this is why I quote this. It is relevant to our times because the greatest source of

confusion in our day is the ambiguities and errors of the Second Vatican Council of which I will treat in [Part II](#).



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