

by Raymond B. Marcin

Editor's note: We are happy to reprint this previously lost article of a former edition of CFN from Professor Emeritus Raymond Marcin. This is in many ways a second part of [his new article that we have also published](#).

In his 1982 treatise on Catholic theology, Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger – currently the Cardinal Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith – made some astonishing statements. He suggested that the documents of Vatican II, and especially *Gaudium et Spes* (Vatican II's Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World), were intended to “correct” what he called the one-sidedness of the position adopted by the Church under Pope Pius IX and Pope Saint Pius X, the Popes whose *Syllabi of Errors* and Encyclicals warned against the dangers of the heresy of Modernism, called by Saint Pius X “the synthesis of all heresies”. Cardinal Ratzinger's statements began as follows:

“If it is desirable to offer a diagnosis of the text [of *Gaudium et Spes*] as a whole, we might say that (in conjunction with the texts on religious liberty and world religions) it is a revision of the *Syllabus* of Pius IX, a kind of counter syllabus.”

In a footnote to that quote, Cardinal Ratzinger explained that “[t]he position taken in the *Syllabus* [of Pope Pius IX] was adopted and continued in Pius X's struggle against ‘Modernism’.” Returning to his main text, Cardinal Ratzinger went on to write that

“the one-sidedness of the position adopted by the Church under Pius IX and Pius X in response to the situation created by the new phase of history inaugurated by the French Revolution was, to a large extent, corrected *via facti*, especially in Central Europe, but there was still no basic statement of the relationship that should exist between the Church and the world that had come into existence after 1789.”

Cardinal Ratzinger's observation that at the time of Vatican II “there was still no basic statement of the relationship that should exist between the Church and the [post-1789] world” will seem curious to those familiar with the great encyclicals of the post-1789 popes condemning the modernist errors of the post-1789 world. One presumes that when Cardinal Ratzinger wrote that sentence he meant that there was no such basic statement *except* the basic statements of

- Pope Gregory XVI (*Mirari Vos* – On Liberalism, 1832);
- Pope Pius IX (*Quanta Cura* – On Current Errors, 1864, and *Syllabus of Errors*, 1864);
- Pope Leo XIII (*Diuturnum Illud* – On Government Authority, 1881, *Humanum Genus* – On Freemasonry and Naturalism, 1884, *Libertas Praestantissimum* – On the Nature of

True Liberty, 1888, *Rerum Novarum*

- On the Condition of the Working Classes, 1891, and *Graves de Communi Re* – On Christian Democracy, 1901);
- Saint Pius X (*Lamentabili Sane* – Syllabus Condemning the Errors of the Modernists, 1907, *Pascendi Dominici Gregis*, On Modernism, 1907, *On the “Sillon”*, 1910, and *Sacrorum Antistitum* – The Oath Against Modernism, 1910)
- Pope Pius XI (*Quas Primas* – On the Feast of Christ the King, 1925, *Mortalium Animas* – On Fostering True Religious Unity, 1928, and *Divini Redemptoris* On Atheistic Communism, 1937)
- Pope Pius XII (*Humani Generis* – On Certain False Opinions Which Threaten to Undermine the Foundations of Catholic Doctrine, 1950).¹

In other words, there was, at the time of Vatican II, no basic statement of the relationship that should exist between the Church and the post-1789 world, *except* the several basic statements, over several post-1789 generations, and several post-1789 papacies which, with remarkable internal consistency over those generations and those papacies, bespoke a “relationship” of clear *opposition* between the Church and the post-1789 world – statements with which the majority of the participants in Vatican II apparently wanted to disagree. Cardinal Ratzinger seemed candidly to admit exactly that when he wrote:

“Let us be content to say here that the text serves as a counter syllabus and, as such, represents, on the part of the Church, an attempt at an official reconciliation with the new era inaugurated in 1789.”²



Cardinal Ratzinger

The Oath Against Modernism

At first glance, the statements of Cardinal Ratzinger may not seem to be “astonishing”. He was, after all, only stating the obvious, wasn’t he? He was only being candid. His statement was actually quite unremarkable. Reconciling the Church with the modern world was the whole point of Vatican II, wasn’t it?

To place Cardinal Ratzinger’s statements in context, however, one must go back to events that occurred a half century before Vatican II, in the midst of the era in which the Church was consistently articulating its statements of opposition towards the tenets of liberalism and Modernism that came to characterize the post-1789 age.

On July 3, 1907, Saint Pius X issued a decree called *Lamentabili Sane*, listing and condemning the errors of the Modernists. Two months later in that same year, on September 8th, he issued an Encyclical called *Pascendi Dominici Gregis*, a more lengthy explanatory discussion and condemnation of the heresy of Modernism.³ Three years later, on

September 1, 1910, he issued a *motu proprio* entitled *Sacrorum Antistitum* in which he mandated that an Oath Against Modernism, the text of which was prescribed in the *motu proprio*, be taken by all Catholic clergy before being ordained to the subdiaconate.

That mandate was not rescinded until 1967,⁴ and this is the important point. The requirement that all Catholic seminarians who were being ordained to the subdiaconate on their way to the priesthood take the Oath Against Modernism was not rescinded until more than one year *after* the closing of Vatican II.⁵ Every Catholic priest ordained between the years 1910 and 1967 was obliged to take the Oath Against Modernism.

The implications are startling. Every single bishop, Archbishop, and Cardinal who participated in Vatican II and every single Vatican II *peritus* (expert advisor) who was also a priest, without exception, had taken the Oath Against Modernism mandated for all Catholic clergy by Pope Saint Pius X in 1910 and not rescinded by the Vatican until 1967. To use a portion of the words of the oath, every single participant in Vatican II was under an oath-bound obligation to God Almighty “with due reverence [to] submit and adhere with [his] whole heart to the condemnations, declarations, and all the prescripts contained in the encyclical *Pascendi* and in the decree *Lamentabili*”.

Seen in this light, Cardinal Ratzinger’s statements are truly astonishing. How could the participants of Vatican II set out, intentionally, to “correct”, or to set up a “counter syllabus” to, that to which they all, without exception, had sworn, “with [their] whole heart,” to “submit and adhere”? It is a puzzlement.

What are we to believe? Are we to believe that those who voted in favor of the “counter syllabus” documents of Vatican II which were intended to “correct” the pronouncements of Pope Pius IX and Saint Pius X (and presumably the pronouncements of Popes Gregory XVI, Leo XIII, Pius XI, and Pius XII as well) *violated* the Oath Against Modernism which they all had taken? That they *forgot* their oath? In either case, it is difficult to accept that God the Holy Spirit would watch over and guide the violating or the discarding of an oath taken to God. At the very least this implication would seem to cast serious doubt on the very legitimacy of the Vatican II “counter syllabus” documents that, according to Cardinal Ratzinger, were intended to “correct” or “counter” (“reverse” might not be too strong a word) teachings which all the participants in Vatican II were oath-bound to *uphold*.

If we are to judge by the fruits of Vatican II, what are we to believe? We have Pope Paul VI’s own evaluation of the aftermath of Vatican II:

“We looked forward to a flowering, a serene expansion of concepts which matured in the great sessions of the Council. [Instead, i]t is as if the Church were destroying herself.⁶ ...

“We have the impression that through some in the wall the Smoke of Satan cracks has entered the temple of God: doubt, uncertainty, questioning, dissatisfaction, confrontation. We thought that after the Council a day of sunshine would have dawned for the history of the Church. What dawned, instead, was a day of clouds and storms, of darkness, of searching and uncertainties.”⁷“

The clouds, the storms, the darkness, the searching, the uncertainties – who can say that they are not still with us today, thirty-four years after the close of Vatican II? And if the Church herself is to judge Vatican II by its fruit, should she not heed Our Lord’s injunction given at the close of His Sermon on the Mount: “Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit, shall be cut down, and shall be cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits you shall know them.”⁸?

If one ponders the matter for but a moment, it does not seem a wonder that the fruits of decisions to *counter* or *correct* those teachings that the decision makers were oath-bound to *uphold* would turn out to be clouds, storms, darkness, searching, and uncertainties. Nor does it seem a wonder that it should appear as if the smoke of Satan has entered the temple of God.

Do we, perhaps, overstate the case? Are we, perhaps, to think that the Oath Against Modernism was, after all, merely a “form” oath, taken only as a matter of routine over all those years between 1910 and 1967 by all those being ordained to the subdiaconate with very little conscious advertence, and then more or less promptly forgotten – just a relic of a past age? Such a mode of thought may, perhaps, provide an explanation or even an *excuse* for those at the Council who apparently decided to “counter” what they were oath-bound to uphold, but it still leaves the question of whether God the Holy Spirit would actually *guide* people to discard an oath-bound obligation in that manner, and it still leaves intact the Holy Father’s own candid assessment of the fruits of that discarded oath: the dawning, not of sunshine in the Church, but rather of clouds, storms, darkness, searching, and uncertainties.

In the minds of some, however, there may be another way of resolving the puzzlement. It may be that it was Cardinal Ratzinger who was overstating the case somewhat. It may be that the participants in Vatican II who approved the documents in question saw no conflict at all between, on the one hand, what they were approving and, on the other hand, the prescriptions of the Oath Against Modernism which they had taken. But the implications here are almost as startling. If nothing contrary to the prescriptions in the Oath Against Modernism was intended by the Council participants – and that is, of course, what one would like to believe – then all the Council documents must be *interpreted* with that fact in mind. In other words, none of the documents of Vatican II can rightly be interpreted as in

any way inconsistent with Saint Pius X's condemnations of Modernist thinking within the Church.

The point here is that any attempts at understanding the “spirit” of Vatican II and any interpretations of the content of its documents must take into account the fact that every Vatican II Father was, at the time he approved those documents, under the prescriptions of the Oath Against Modernism, and presumably intended not to violate that oath. It is, of course, an open question as to whether all the documents of Vatican II *can* be interpreted consistently with Saint Pius X's condemnations of Modernist thinking within the Church.⁹ If what Cardinal Ratzinger wrote in 1982 is correct, then the “counter syllabus” documents most certainly *cannot* be interpreted consistently with Saint Pius X's condemnation of Modernist thinking within the Church. According to Cardinal Ratzinger, those documents were intended to “correct” or “counter” Pope Pius IX's and Saint Pius X's syllabi on the subject.



Pope St. Pius X

Vatican II: A Violation of the Oath?

Despite that very real qualm, however, it does seem to follow that, unless we accept that the Vatican II Fathers violated or discarded their Oath Against Modernism, every interpretation of the documents of Vatican II and every invocation of “the spirit of Vatican II” which over the years has been, or is now, in any way inconsistent with any of the prescriptions of the Oath Against Modernism must be rejected as being contrary to the intent of the Vatican II Fathers. The text of the oath is lengthy, but its purport is clear. In part it states:

“I firmly embrace and accept each and every definition that has been set forth and declared by the unerring teaching authority of the Church, especially those principal truths which are directly opposed to the errors of this day [“this day” being September 1, 1910] ...

“Furthermore, with due reverence, I submit and adhere with my whole heart to the condemnations, declarations, and all the prescripts contained in the encyclical *Pascendi* and in the decree *Lamentabili*, especially those concerning what is known as the history of dogmas. I also reject the error of those who say that the faith held by the Church can contradict history, and that Catholic dogmas, in the sense in which they are now [“now” being 1910] understood, are irreconcilable with a more realistic view of the origins of the Christian religion ...

“... The purpose of this [oath] is, then, not that dogma may be tailored according to what seems better and more suited to the culture of each age; rather, that the absolute and immutable truth preached by the apostles from the beginning may never be believed to be different, may never be understood **in** any other way.

“I promise that I shall keep all these articles faithfully, entirely, and sincerely, and guard them inviolate, in no way deviating from them in teaching or in any way in word or writing. Thus I promise, this I swear, so help me God ...¹⁰

It would seem also that, if each and every participant in Vatican II was under the prescriptions of Saint Pius X’s mandated Oath Against Modernism – and recall that they *were*, since the Oath Against Modernism obligation was not rescinded until more than a year *after* Vatican II was completed, Catholics concerned with a proper interpretation of the Vatican II documents and a proper understanding of the “spirit” of Vatican II would want to know exactly what the Vatican II Fathers were oath-bound to uphold. They would want to know the full content of the Oath Against Modernism.¹¹ Michael Davies, an authority on both Modernism and Vatican II,¹² has described the content of the oath as follows:

“The first part of the oath is a strong affirmation of the basic Catholic truths opposed to Modernism: the demonstrability of God’s existence by human reason; the value and suitability of miracles and prophecies as criteria of revelation; the historical institution of the Church by Christ; the inviolable character of Catholic tradition; the reasonableness and supernaturalness of faith.

“The second part of the oath is an expression of interior assent to the decree *Lamentabili* and the encyclical *Pascendi* with their contents.”

Davies described *Lamentabili Sane* as Saint Pius X’s condemnation of “sixty-five propositions which were incompatible with the Catholic faith,” and he closed with the common observation that has since been made by many that “[w]hen reading the condemned propositions of *Lamentabili* it is hard to believe that the decree was not addressed to the errors which have been circulating in the Church since the Second Vatican Council”.¹³ One might rightly observe that a similar reading of Saint Pius X’s much more lengthy and explanatory encyclical, *Pascendi Dominici Gregis*, would yield the similar conclusion that the encyclical was prophetically addressed to all the errors and confusions that are besetting orthodox Catholics today and that are being foisted in the name of the “spirit of Vatican II”.¹⁴

Every Catholic who wishes to know the root cause of the errors and confusions that are besetting and dividing the Church today would do well to become familiar with Saint Pius X’s oath and with the Encyclical *Pascendi Dominici Gregis* and the Syllabus *Lamentabili Sane*.¹⁵



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"For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you" (1 Corinthians 11:23)

Bishop Richard Williamson and Dr. David Allen White: Requiescant in Pace

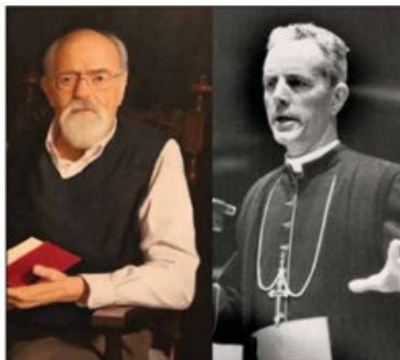
By Murray Rundus

Bishop Williamson

The beginning of 2025 has been a tragic month for traditionalists, losing two heroes of the traditionalist movement. The first was Bishop Richard Williamson, formerly of the SSPX who after suffering a brain hemorrhage passed away on Wednesday Jan. 29, 2025. Just less than two weeks later, his friend and fellow traditionalist pioneer Dr. David Allen White passed away in his home on Feb. 11. Both men were monumental in their influence on the traditional Catholic movement. Many people owe their vocations, ordinations, conversions, and more to these men. We ought to remember their legacies, pray for their souls, and continue to pass on what we received from them.

His Lordship was born in England during the year of 1940 to English and American parents. A gifted student, young Richard Williamson excelled at school and even went on to study at the University of Cambridge. This intellectual life would translate to his later time with the Society of St. Pius X where he emphasized the need for the seminarians to be cultured, and we can see his academic excitement in his now well-regarded lectures that so many are familiar with. Dr. White, in his introduction to a set of the Bishop's letters, said of him: "One of the great insights granted to Bishop Williamson that reappears throughout his writing is the need for such cultural grounding to keep a soul centered and a mind ordered, especially in the noise and devastation

of the contemporary scene. Inclining to analyze things intellectually (which of course makes him a true devotee of St. Thomas Aquinas and the *Summa Theologica*, the bedrock of all seminary training), he also nevertheless understands the special need in our time for artistic beauty to fill the heart and artistic truth to move the soul, helpful complements to the ultimate truths of the Catholic faith."¹ Williamson was born into Anglicanism, but like many Protestants of the modern age became discontented with it and became an atheist. Williamson in reflecting on these times often said that rather than being a Protestant or an atheist, he was a liberal. I relate to this, as the boundaries of "Protestant" or "intellectual atheist" culture are so blurred in the modern



Dr. David Allen White, left, and Bishop Richard Williamson, right

period, and I believe anyone who has spent time as an adopter of either of these positions will know that the same spirit animates them, the one of narcissistic, hedonistic Liberalism. He would later break out of this liberal shell in 1971, being received into the Catholic Church and soon advised to pursue the seminary. Williamson did not fit the mold of what the seminaries

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Reviewing Trump's First Days

By Stephen Kokx

It is obvious Donald Trump has learned a thing or two since first winning the presidency in 2016. The flurry of executive orders he has signed, coupled with a much-improved cabinet and messaging team, is a massive upgrade since the last time he lived at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue.

So far, Trump 2.0 seems to be relying on a "flood the zone" approach that makes it nearly impossible for Democrats and their media allies to keep up with him.

I laughed out loud when 86-year-old Congressman Maxine Waters and a group of her fellow aged Democrats were scolding an innocent security guard outside the Department of Education's headquarters in Washington DC last month for not allowing them to enter. What they would have done after entering is anyone's guess. Maybe use the bathrooms?

By all indications, Trump's second term is shaping up to be one of the most consequential four years of any president since Franklin

Roosevelt. In some ways, it could be as impactful, if not more so, than Abraham Lincoln's time in office. But that depends on many factors and it is important to look at current events through a Catholic and not a "conservative" lens so our judgment is not clouded.

The Pro-Life Movement and Trump

The biggest surprise over the past month and a half has been President Trump's pro-life policies. While he hasn't walked back his support for in-vitro fertilization yet, Trump did get rid of a Biden-era rule that directed the military to pay for travel expenses for service members who were crossing state lines to obtain abortions.¹ He also signed an executive order committing the federal government to abide by the Hyde Amendment,



which prohibits taxpayer dollars from being used for abortions.²

Trump surprisingly delivered remarks to this year's March for Life by way of recorded message. His Catholic Vice-president J.D.

Vance spoke at the event in person, telling the exuberant crowd that "no longer will the federal government direct FBI raids on the homes of people like Mark Houck and

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March Issue out now!**Footnotes:**

1. The texts of all these documents are reproduced in *The Popes Against Modern Errors* (ed. Anthony J. Mioni, TAN Books and Publishers, Inc. 1999).
2. Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology* (tr. Sister Mary Frances McCarthy, Ignatius Press 1987), pages 381-382; originally published in German under the title *Theologische Prinzipienlehre* (Erich Wewel Verlag, Munich 1982).
3. For an excellent discussion of the heresy of Modernism in general and of *Pascendi Dominici Gregis* in particular, see Michael Davies, *Partisans of Error: St. Pius X Against the Modernists* (Neumann Press 1983).
4. In 1918, the Sacred Congregation of the Holy Office declared that the prescriptions of the Oath Against Modernism must remain in full force until the Holy See declares otherwise. See *The Code of Canon Law: A Text and Commentary* (eds. James A. Coriden, Thomas J. Green & Donald E. Heintschel, Paulist Press 1985), page 585. The mandate was rescinded by a decree of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in July of 1967. See "Oath against Modernism" in *The Harper Collins Encyclopedia of Catholicism*, on page 926.
5. Pope Paul VI's discourse closing Vatican II was delivered on December 7, 1965.
6. Pope Paul VI, *Address to Lombard College*, December 7, 1968.
7. Pope Paul VI, *Address on the Ninth Anniversary of His Pontificate*,
8. June 29, 1972.
9. Matthew 7:19-20 (Douay-Rheims).
10. See, e.g., Michael Davies' *The Second Vatican Council and Religious Liberty*, contending that the stand taken on religious liberty in the Vatican II Declaration on Religious Liberty is not reconcilable with previous papal teaching.
11. EWTN Internet site, "www.ewtn.Com/library/PAPALDOC/P10MOATH.HTM".
12. The full text of the Oath Against Modernism can be easily accessed on several sites on the Internet, and is reproduced in many books, including Michael Davies' *Partisans of Error* (Neumann Press 1983) on page 104.
13. Davies' publications on both topics are many, but see, e.g., Michael Davies, *Partisans of Error* (Neumann Press 1983) and Michael Davies, *Pope John's Council*, vol. 2 of *Liturgical Revolution* (Angelus Press 1977).
14. Michael Davies, *Partisans of Error* (Neumann Press 1983), on pages 104 and 71.
15. Not surprisingly, Michael Davies drew that conclusion in his book *Pope John's Council*, on page 277.