

Vatican II and crisis in the theology of baptism

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1. Vatican II and theological crisis in the Church

Leo XIII's magisterial teaching in *Immortale Dei* is clear. The gospel requires that the state recognize the truth of Catholicism and unite to the Church in a single Christian community as body to the Church's soul, legally privileging Catholicism as the true religion.¹ This magisterial teaching is now generally rejected within the Church – not in opposing magisterial teaching but through what I shall refer to as official theology. Official statements that do not themselves carry any magisterial authority – that come from office-holders within the Church but which merely express a prevailing theological opinion – constantly suggest, against Leo XIII, that the true ideal is for the state to be separate from the Church and to remain effectively neutral in matters of religion.

We have then a conflict between magisterial teaching and official theology – between what the formal teaching of the Church obliges us to believe, and prevailing theological opinion in official circles. But does this conflict, about this particular issue, really matter? Since there is little actual prospect of the kind of Church-state unity that Leo XIII required, it is tempting to think that the issue of the desirability of such a unity is no more than academic. But that would be a mistake. This conflict between magisterial teaching and current official theology about Church and state is not isolated or without significance. It is one central expression of a wider crisis of erroneous official theology within the modern Church. This is a revolution in the official theology of grace and baptism – and that involves at its root a deficient conception of the Fall. The new official theology does not just oppose magisterial teaching on Church and state, but on many other matters too – such as the very necessity of the sacraments for salvation.

¹ See especially:

‘The Almighty, therefore, has given the charge of the human race to two coercive authorities [*potestates*], the ecclesiastical and the civil, the one being set over divine, and the other over human, things...There must, accordingly, exist between these two authorities a certain orderly connection, which may be compared to the union of the soul and body in man.’ *Immortale Dei* §§13-14

This revolution in official theology is not obviously and explicitly taught by the magisterium at Vatican II, and does in fact involve clear conflict with magisterial teaching of that very Council. But the revolution is a crisis of the Second Vatican Council nonetheless. It arose in the period of the Council, and has been deepened by official actions, by and under Paul VI and his successors, that constantly invoke that very Council.

This revolution in the official theology of baptism is having dire consequences. It is sapping the Church's mission from within. It lies at the heart of the current crisis over *Amoris Laetitia* and the indissolubility of marriage. The *Amoris Laetitia* crisis is not isolated. It is an instance of a type – a crisis very much of the Second Vatican Council, and the revolutionary change in official theology following that Council. Until the deeply questionable nature of that new theology is clearly identified and understood, there will be more crises of this type; in other words, the underlying crisis of the Council will continue.

2. Official theology

Many have debated whether Vatican II involves a crisis within magisterial teaching itself. Does *Dignitatis Humanae* teach magisterially in a way that conflicts with the earlier magisterium, such as that of *Quanta Cura* or *Immortale Dei*? I have argued that at least in respect of *Dignitatis Humanae*, Vatican II does not involve a crisis of that kind, in the very integrity of the magisterium itself, but it is not my intention to argue the matter further here.² Others claim that a crisis of magisterial teaching is occurring within the post-conciliar period – such as between *Amoris Laetitia*, with the subsequent papal clarification of it in the *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, and *Familiaris Consortio*. Now that may or may not be so. But I shall also not attempt to resolve the question of whether the post-conciliar magisterium has been consistent.

My immediate subject here is rather different. For whether or not there has been a crisis within the magisterium itself, it is anyway overwhelmingly clear that Vatican II has been followed by a serious crisis of another kind – a crisis not of magisterial teaching, but of *official theology*, and of which *Amoris Laetitia* and the officially promoted theology surrounding it is certainly a part. Whether or not Vatican II or the period since has seen contradiction at the level of the magisterium, it has very definitely seen such contradiction at the level of what I shall term official theology.

What is official theology? The term 'official theology' is not a current term of art

² See especially my 'The interpretation of *Dignitatis Humanae*: a reply to Martin Rhonheimer' *Nova et Vetera*, English Edition, Vol. 11, pp77–121, 2013, online here

https://www.academia.edu/2911284/The_Interpretation_of_Dignitatis_Humanae_A_Reply_to_Martin_Rhonheimer

and 'Dignitatis Humanae: continuity after Leo XIII' in *Dignitatis Humanae Colloquium* Dialogos Institute Volume 1, eds Thomas Crean OP and Alan Fimister, (Dialogos Institute 2017) pp105-46, online here

https://www.academia.edu/32742609/Dignitatis_Humanae_continuity_after_Leo_XIII

among Catholic theologians; but we need it to pick out something that has always existed in the life of the Church, and which plays a very important role in the day to day life of Catholics. Official theology is the Church's theological account of herself and her mission where the provision of this account is official – it involves official bodies or persons – but does not of itself impose any obligation on our belief as Catholics. Official theology may convey magisterial teaching, or it may go beyond magisterial teaching. It may even, unfortunately, obscure or even contradict magisterial teaching. But official theology is not itself a further case of magisterial teaching.

The Church constantly produces official theology. It is an ever present and essential element in the Church's life. Nowadays its existence is especially clearly advertised, because there are in the modern Church official bodies that make theological statements in the Church's name, but which disavow any claim to be teaching magisterially in so doing. Such bodies include the International Theological Commission and – as we shall discuss – the Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews. But the phenomenon is far more widespread, and far older.

The Church constantly has to explain herself, her teaching and her practices both to Catholics and to those outside the Church. And she has to be able to do so without ipso facto teaching magisterially – without the explanation provided of itself imposing an obligation to believe based on the Church's authority. This is especially important where policy has to be followed and explained in cases where the Church does not yet feel able to determine a question magisterially, or where the officials involved anyway lack the authority to teach magisterially. Official theology is communicated in the training of clergy, through seminary manuals and lectures. It can be found in what passes as usual in sermons, homilies and ecclesially provided devotional literature. It can be found in all manner of official explanations of liturgy or pastoral practice. It can be found especially in what is not said. Official theology can reveal itself in silence – in what is not treated as of significance or comment in the Church's life, as well as what is.

Not all concerning faith and morals asserted even by popes and bishops is magisterial teaching. This must be so otherwise (for example) it would have made no sense for Pope Francis recently to have determined that the conclusions of Synods of Bishops are henceforward to possess magisterial status, when they did not before, or for theologians to distinguish between those assertions made by a pope as a theologian, and those made by him as magisterial teaching. Much here remains theologically undecided. But magisterial teaching seems to be teaching that engages on the part of the faithful something more than a mere reason for them to believe what is asserted. Magisterial teaching does not simply provide reasons but imposes obligations - of fidelity of mind and belief. These are obligations to believe with the assent of faith in the case of what is taught infallibly, or to give something distinct from the assent of faith, something termed in *Lumen Gentium* and in the 1983 Code a religious submission of intellect and will (*religiosum intellectus et voluntatis obsequium*) or of mind (*religiosum animi obsequium*), in other cases.

These obligations are given canonical form, in canons 750 to 754 in the section of the 1983 Code *De ecclesiae munere docendi* – *On the teaching function of the Church*. These canons leave much open to debate. What is a religious submission of intellect and will or of mind to fallible teaching if not the assent of faith, and is it always an obligation to belief, especially since what is taught could be false? Canons 750 to 754

have antecedents in the 1917 Code in canons 1323 to 1326 from the section *De magisterio ecclesiastico – On the magisterium of the Church*. But the language of the two Codes is importantly different. For example, the 1983 Code in canon 753 requires the faithful within their care to ‘adhere with a submission of mind’ to the ‘authentic magisterium’ even of fallible individual bishops or local assemblies of bishops. But the parallel canon 1326 of the 1917 Code does not impose such a requirement on the faithful explicitly, or indeed propose any other explicit obligation on the mind, but specifies simply that individual bishops and their local assemblies are ‘true teachers’ of those within their care.

We can bypass these very important but difficult questions here, as one thing is clear. Insofar as it does impose a canonical obligation on the mind, magisterial teaching must be given by some bearer of authority, such as bishops, capable of imposing that obligation. And since it is accepted that assertions on faith and morals may be made by popes and bishops that are not magisterial, teaching that is magisterial must sufficiently manifest an intention to obligate the faithful. If canonical obligations are to be genuine obligations that really do bind morally, their imposition has to be signalled to those they seek thus to bind.

This being so, there is much theological assertion by officials of the church that is not magisterial teaching in this sense – either because it does not clearly come from popes or bishops themselves, or because even if it does, it comes without a clear intention to teach magisterially so as to bind the intellect. All this non-magisterial assertion falls within the category of official theology. Some of this assertion ought to be believed because although the assertion of it does not itself count as a magisterial act – it might be a passage in a parish homily or newsletter – it does convey what is already magisterial teaching. But the distinction between magisterial teaching and official theology matters even in such cases. For having conveyed magisterial teaching the very same document may go on to make claims that entirely lack magisterial backing, but without this being in any way clear to the ordinary faithful. The same homily or newsletter that faithfully communicates dogma about the Holy Spirit may contain assertions about what that same Holy Spirit has inspired that are not magisterial teaching at all, and that can perfectly well be false.

Just because magisterial teaching comes from an authority that is divinely provided for, and God is truth, we should expect magisterial teaching to exhibit a general level of consistency and truth. Nonetheless not all magisterial teaching is infallible; and how far consistency and truth can be relied on where the magisterial teaching is given fallibly is a deeply important question which the current state of the Church may be making the more pressing. But whatever may be true of magisterial teaching, official theology taken as a whole, as it has existed throughout the history, is certainly not at all consistent with itself, and has over time included much falsehood. Official theology can perfectly well directly contradict not just other cases of official theology, but magisterial teaching itself or (at least) support pastoral strategies impossible to reconcile with magisterial teaching. This is certainly the case with much official theology since Vatican II. The effect of official theology that contradicts the magisterium can be disastrous. For it can detach ordinary members of the Church from the Church’s own teaching – just because the ordinary faithful very naturally greatly rely for their understanding of what the Church teaches on prevailing official theology.

Moreover, the problem is not just that official theology can make positive assertions

that contradict magisterial teaching. Official theology can also suppress magisterial teaching through omission. Official theology is not limited, after all, to what is explicitly pronounced. Indeed, change in official theology can come most easily through silence. Something that has long been magisterially taught, and taught as important to salvation, is no longer even mentioned. Here the influence of defective official theology can be most pernicious, just as its distance from genuine magisterial teaching is most obvious and undeniable. For silence is especially clearly not magisterial teaching in its own right. Simply failing to mention something certainly does not impose any obligation to disbelieve it, or even remove an existing obligation to believe it. But it can radically affect the life of the Church nonetheless. It can remove important elements of the faith from the consciousness of most Catholics.

Both in its pronouncements and in its silences official theology is a part of the life of the Church that is constantly changing. Consider these issues, where there have been marked revolutions and reversals of official theology over time, often linked to important changes in ecclesial and pastoral policy. In some cases there may never have been any actual magisterial teaching on the topic. In other cases there may have been magisterial teaching – but especially since Vatican II official theology has come to ignore and pass over it in silence, or even to contradict it.

We have already mentioned the issue of whether, at least ideally or in principle, the state should form a soul-body union with the Church. There is widespread official theology that ignores Leo XIII's very clear magisterium – Cardinal Ratzinger, later pope, will shortly provide us with an example. This reminds us of a number of things. First, it is alarmingly easy, at least since Vatican II, for magisterial teaching to become invisible – something that is just no longer discussed. It is not that Leo XIII's teaching is regularly clearly identified as such, and then condemned as erroneous. Some theologians are willing to make that step.³ But more commonly, it is as if the teaching had never been given. So invisible has it become, that we even get Leo XIII feted as the alleged founder of a new form of Catholicism - 'evangelical Catholicism' - that is supposed to come to its maturity at Vatican II and that supposedly includes, as a central element, the inherent goodness of the very Church-state separation that Leo XIII so clearly condemned.⁴

The prevailing official theology on Church-state separation, that Church-state separation is inherently good, is important in another way as well. Official theology may be nothing more than an official party line. It may even contradict the magisterium. But that does not make it in any way optional in career terms. A friend arriving at a Roman university to study for a doctorate in the early 1990s was very clearly warned that any suggestion of 'integralism' on his part in political theology would be, within ecclesial academia, career death.

An especially clear example of a rather dramatic silence in modern official theology about magisterial teaching relates to Trent session 7 canon 14. This is the teaching of Trent, in a canon on baptism, that fidelity to baptismal obligations, which include the

³ See for example Martin Rhonheimer, 'Benedict XVI's 'Hermeneutic of Reform' and Religious Freedom,' *Nova et Vetera* vol. 9, pp1029-54, 2011, who openly claims that the nineteenth century papal magisterium on Church and state was in error.

⁴ For this curious interpretation, see the extensive theological journalism of George Weigel.

central obligation to faith, is legitimately enforced on the baptised through sanctions that go beyond mere exclusion from the sacraments.⁵ This was never going to be a minor matter, as this teaching supports canon law's consistent treatment to this day of heresy and apostasy in the baptised as punishable crimes, a treatment to which the early modern Church was practically committed at every level. This understanding of the canon and the dogmatic force accorded it was quite uncontroversial from the time of Trent to Vatican II. Francisco de Toledo, the first Jesuit to be made a Cardinal and teaching theology during and immediately after Trent at the new Roman College, notes that the canon was against Erasmus, and was intended to condemn as heresy his demand for toleration of infidelity in the baptised - a view of Trent that Toledo entirely shares with the Council's first great historian, the otherwise very different anti-papal Venetian Paolo Sarpi.⁶ Thereafter the canon so understood is a seminary manual platitude.⁷ We have here magisterial teaching conveyed under an agreed and uncontroverted interpretation in official theology over four centuries.

But after Vatican II official theology falls silent. Significantly, as with Leo XIII's teaching on Church and state, it is not as if the existence of the canon is openly admitted, and then frankly dismissed as involving doctrinal error on the part of a general council. Explicit denial of solemn teaching by an earlier general council is still (on the whole) avoided at the official level.⁸ It is not even as if the canon is still generally recognised but suddenly and equally generally reinterpreted.⁹ Instead the

⁵ 'If anyone says that when they grow up (*cum adoleverint*), those baptised as little children should be asked whether they wish to affirm what their godparents promised in their name when they were baptised; and that, when they reply that they have no such wish, they should be left to their own decision and not, in the meantime, be coerced by any penalty into the Christian life (*suo esse arbitrio relinquendos nec alia interim poena ad christianam vitam cogendos*), except that they be barred from the reception of the eucharist and the other sacraments, until they have a change of heart: let him be anathema' *Council of Trent*, Session 7, Decree on baptism, canon 14, 3 March 1547, in Alberigo and Tanner eds, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, volume 2, p686.

⁶ Cardinal Francisco de Toledo, *In Summam Theologiae Sancti Thomae Aquinatis Enarratio*, volume 2, question 10, article 8, *An infideles sint ad fidem impellendi* (Rome 1869). For Sarpi's account and commentary on it, see Le Courayer's edition of Sarpi, *Histoire du Concile de Trente* (Amsterdam 1751) p436.

⁷ Among notable theological discussions up to Vatican II, a sample which could be expanded with some ease:: Billuart *Summa Sancti Thomae* (Liege 1746-51), in the *Tractatus de fide*, dissertation V, article II, *Utrum infideles cogendi ad fidem?*; Giovanni Perrone, *Praelectiones Theologicae quas in Collegio Romano SJ habebat* (Milan 1845), volume 7, *Tractatus de baptismo*, pp103-11; Hurter, *Theologiae Dogmaticae Compendium* (Innsbruck 1908) volume 3, Tract IX §§315-16, pp281-2; Choupin, *Valeur des Décisions Doctrinales et Disciplinaires du Saint-Siège*, (Paris 1913) p265; 'Peines ecclésiastiques: légitimité', *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique*, vol 12 (Paris 1933) pp635-6; Ottaviani, *Institutiones Iuris Publici Ecclesiastici*, (Rome 1935) volume 1, §170; Merkelbach, *Summa Theologiae Moralis*, (Paris 1938) volume 1, §740; Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*, (Cork 1955), book 4, part 3, section 2, §6, p360.

⁸ Though one official spokesman for the Catholic Church in the UK, when I told him about the canon, without any hesitation at once responded – 'Oh, we'll have to change that.'

⁹ Though recently, having been reminded of the canon's (clearly now very unwelcome) existence, John Finnis has attempted a very novel re-interpretation of his own – see 'John

canon is simply ignored. Like a non-person in an official state photograph, it has been retouched into non-existence. Most modern Catholics have no idea that Trent passed such a dogmatic canon, or of its significance. Instead they are constantly told, as a point of official theology, the complete historical falsehood that not only does the Church now oppose any coercion of the act of faith, but that she has ‘always done so’. And this is indeed just false. Coercion of the act of faith has only ever been opposed by the magisterium in principle and without exception for the case of the unbaptised, who as unbaptised are not bound by any baptismal obligation to fidelity and who fall outside the Church’s jurisdiction.

Is spiritual death from making an unworthy communion a real danger to be carefully guarded against in pastoral and liturgical arrangements and by other forms of ecclesial policy? Once this was indeed treated as a real danger. Before the 1970 liturgical reform *Lauda Sion* was a compulsory sequence for Corpus Christi:

Sumunt boni, sumunt mali;
Sorte tamen inaequali,
Vitae vel interitus.
Mors est malis, vita bonis:
Vide paris sumptionis
Quam sit dispar exitus.¹⁰

and liturgical readings on Holy Thursday and Corpus Christi included vv27-29 from 1 Corinthians 11 warning of the judgment that falls on unworthy communions. How different the liturgy, and the official theology, of today. Outside the London Oratory I have never heard this passage from *Lauda Sion* sung at an ordinary parish Corpus Christi Mass¹¹; and vv27-29 are now entirely omitted from the reformed Roman

Finnis on Thomas Pink’ in *Reason, Morality and Law: the Philosophy of John Finnis* pp566-77 (Oxford University Press 2013). He bravely claims, against history and four centuries of theological consensus to the contrary, that the canon was intended not to condemn Erasmus but only to teach the legitimacy of the coercive enforcement on the baptised, not of Catholic faith, but only of at least some duties under natural law (such as for example some general duty of justice pp574-5).

But this reading has nothing to do with anything discussed at Trent, as the Council *Acta* make very clear. Obviously some natural law duties can be enforced – think of the duty not to kill – but the Council fathers and theologians at Trent never worried themselves over some notional heresy that denied this. The condemnable view discussed in debates about canon 14 at Trent is always Erasmus’s - that *faith* not be enforced on the baptised. And it is this view that everyone at the Council who gave an opinion condemned - as *falsus*, *haereticus* or *damnandus* - without any debate to the contrary.

I shall discuss Finnis’s highly eccentric interpretation of Trent in more detail elsewhere. In its anachronisms and misreadings of the *Acta* of Trent, it is a beautiful example of just how anxious today’s ‘conservative’ Catholicism is to ‘reconstruct’ aspects of the Church’s past that do not suit its own novel and very ‘post-conciliar’ theology.

¹⁰ The good, the guilty share therein, With sure increase of grace or sin, The ghostly life, or ghostly death: death to the guilty; to the good immortal life. See how one food man’s joy or woe accomplisheth.

¹¹ The Oratory aside, I have generally never heard *Lauda Sion* at all in the New Rite – except at one London parish where it was said, but in a specially shortened form, omitting just that passage about the fatal consequence of an unworthy communion.

liturgy. And here we see the important role of silence and oblivion within official theology. Recently I was addressing the clergy of an English diocese on the theology of ecumenism, with the ecumenical officer of the bishops' conference present. This ecumenical officer suggested that communion should be more readily available to Protestants. When asked whether any such eucharistic sharing should, for the spiritual good of the Protestants themselves, always be preceded, as allowed for in canon law, by *penitential* sharing – because most Protestants, though prone like all of us to mortal sin, will never have confessed and received absolution, so that holy communion could be spiritually very dangerous to them – the ecumenical officer reacted with utter incomprehension and surprise. We may conclude that at least within the bishops' conference of England and Wales there is a prevailing, and highly problematic, official theology that treats unworthy communions as not a real danger at all. We shall be returning to the problems caused by this relatively new official theology. It is clearly fundamental to the crisis over *Amoris Laetitia*.

This issue of unworthy communions and their spiritual danger brings us to the importance of the liturgy and liturgical reform. Omissions within official theology are very often importantly linked to and dependent on liturgical omissions. It is very much easier for official theology to change, and even come to contradict magisterial teaching, if the liturgy has ceased to represent that teaching. The *de iure* removal from the liturgy of passages of scripture warning of unworthy communions, and the disappearance in practice of *Lauda Sion* as well, have been essential to the propagation of the new official view that unworthy communions are certainly not a real and constant danger.

Can children who die unbaptised before the age of reason attain the beatific vision? Or are they capable of natural happiness at best, or are they even threatened with the pain of sense? Debate exists about magisterial teaching in this area. One thing does seem clear, however. There is certainly no magisterially taught guarantee of the beatific vision. Meanwhile there have been marked shifts in official theology, as in liturgical and pastoral policy. And this case reminds us that whatever may be true of magisterial teaching, where official theology is concerned, not only can the official theology of one time contradict that of another – but the change can go back and forth, and not consistently in one direction only. Thus the high and late middle ages saw a shift away from an uncompromising Augustinianism to theories of natural happiness or even, in thinkers such as Cajetan, to theories of possible supernatural happiness. But then, alongside the radical Augustinianism of the Reformation, Trent saw a revival of a Catholic Augustinianism. Cajetan's view narrowly escaped condemnation for heresy at Trent, and official theology returned to more uncompromising views, so that natural happiness was the most that could be hoped for.¹² By the seventeenth century Petavius, though a Jesuit and an opponent of Jansenism, could even maintain again that infants who die unbaptised will suffer the pain of sense.¹³ And then, even before Vatican II there was a revival among some theologians of the more benign pre-Tridentine views of Cajetan and others.¹⁴ Since

¹² On attitudes to Cajetan at Trent, see 'Baptême' in *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique*, vol 2 pp325-6

¹³ Dionysius Petavius, *Dogmata Theologica*, de Deo, book 9, chapter 11.

¹⁴ For brief discussion, see Ott, *Foundations of Catholic Dogma*, Book 2, section 2, §25, pp113-14

Vatican II official theology, without any direct backing from some new formal teaching of the Council – there was none - has become almost mandatorily benign, not only in optimistic preaching but in pastoral policy and related liturgical change. Friends of mine struggled at their parish with a priest who insisted, very much against their wishes, on a postponement of their child's baptism until six months after birth at the earliest – to enable their completion of a diocesan preparation course for parents. They turned to a papally instituted traditional priestly order, which baptised their child immediately.

Has the Church replaced Israel as the people of God – the community through which God now works human salvation and in which he is to be worshipped? That has certainly been historical Catholic teaching, still maintained in *Lumen Gentium*, a declaration of Vatican II that counts as a 'dogmatic constitution'. *Lumen Gentium* teaches that an old Israel according to the flesh has been succeeded 'through a new and perfect covenant' by the Church as a 'New Israel' of the spirit rather than the flesh (§9), formed by

calling together from Jews and Gentiles a people that would be bound together in unity not according to the flesh but in the Spirit. This would be the new people of God.
Lumen Gentium §9

But then the Church has a clear public mission - to call the Jewish people away from Jewish unbelief and into the Church, exactly as Gentiles are to be called away from Gentile unbelief and into the Church. This public mission to the Jewish people was pursued by the apostles in the New Testament. And the spiritual need for it, for the sake of Jewish salvation, was taught even before *Lumen Gentium* by an earlier general council, Florence.¹⁵ This is a mission that the Church recognized and pursued right up until Vatican II. Yet despite all this, the view that the Church has any such mission is now deeply controversial within official circles. Indeed, *Lumen Gentium* and the Council of Florence notwithstanding, we shall see that such a mission of the Church appears to be denied outright in current official theology. The issue here is not whether God has a continuing concern for the Jewish people, as if God could or would ever have abandoned them. Rather, the issue is how to understand that persisting concern – and whether, for the sake of their salvation, all of humanity, Jew and Gentile alike, is called on the very same terms to baptism into the one Church, something that was even within living memory very clearly taught.

Official theology is merely that. As we have already observed, though official theology may convey magisterial teaching, it may also go beyond magisterial teaching or hide its existence or even oppose it. And since just as official theology it imposes no obligation of its own on our belief as Catholics, we should not be afraid to criticise it when its content deserves criticism – and very especially when it actually contradicts magisterial teaching. For then the default assumption must be that it is the official theology that is false, as merely a current party line that places no obligation on us to believe it, and not the magisterial teaching. Indeed, where official theology contradicts magisterial teaching, we may be under a canonical obligation not to believe the official theology.

The period since Vatican II has seen an explosion of dubious official theology – in novel positive claims that contradict both the magisterial teaching and the official

¹⁵ As will be discussed below.

theology of the past, and in novel silences that serve instead most effectively to bury that past teaching and theology. Now erroneous official theology does not of itself threaten the consistency of the magisterium. But it still poses a huge problem. It is tempting for a 'conservative' Catholic to clutch *Denzinger* to themselves, and piously declaim that all is well because on this or that question 'magisterial teaching has not changed', especially when there is a single passage or footnote, no matter how obscure, within a document of Vatican II that supports the historical magisterium. But remember - the individual Catholic's immediate exposure to 'what the Church teaches' is deeply shaped by current official theology.

Denzinger is itself a partial selection of past magisterial teachings, with the selection changing significantly from edition to edition, according to official theological fashion, and by omission and not merely addition. But most ordinary Catholics do not even read *Denzinger* anyway. What most Catholics are immediately exposed to is official theology at its most humdrum - in conventional sermons or devotional literature at the diocesan or parish level - and so to magisterial teaching only as transmitted or even misrepresented and obscured at that level. So if some part of magisterial teaching does come to be omitted from official theology, that silence will mean very effective oblivion. The ordinary Catholic will have absolutely no idea that the magisterial teaching exists at all. The teaching will have no impact on their religious life. This means that a problematic body of official theology can have dire consequences for the health of the Church and the efficacy of her mission. Even if it does turn out to be true that Vatican II has led more to a crisis of official theology than to a crisis within magisterial teaching itself, that may leave the crisis no less serious for that.

The erroneous official theology of grace and baptism that has become especially prevalent since Vatican II cannot be dismissed just as a rogue 'spirit of the Council' - as nothing more than some liberal theologians on a frolic of their own. The theology may be no more than a debatable party line. But it is a party line that is common to officeholders within the Church - assumed almost without thinking by clergy 'in good odour' at every level, up to that of popes and cardinals.

3. Vatican II and revolution in the official theology of baptism

Vatican II may not have introduced any new teaching about baptism in its formal magisterium. But even so, the Council event is deeply associated with a revolution in baptism's official theology.

Aspects of this revolution were already occurring before the Council, in some cases with roots going back to the nineteenth century. The Council event still deepened or confirmed these theological changes. Other aspects of the revolution involved official liturgical changes brought about thanks to the Council. These liturgical changes were not in general directly called for by any document of the Council. But they were introduced by Paul VI in the name of applying the Council, and opposition to them is characteristically treated in official circles as opposition to the Council.

So we can with some justification talk of Vatican II as lying at the centre of a revolution in the official theology of baptism. This revolution in official theology is extensive, has had a very great impact on everyday Catholic belief and practice, and seems in almost every respect deeply problematic, as overtly inconsistent with or at

least involving a compromising silence about what has long been the clear magisterial teaching of the Church.

- the dominion of the devil

The first and most important change has to do with how the Church now presents the Fall and original sin, and what the Church is doing when through baptism she releases us from the guilt of original sin.

The Church's historical teaching is clear. The Fall has delivered the world, in so far as it is fallen, to the devil as its prince. The guilt of original sin involves, therefore, subjection to the dominion of the devil. This is vividly stated by the Council of Florence in its decree for the Copts. Faith in Christ, and baptism, in freeing us from original sin, free us from subjection to the devil:

[The Council] firmly believes, professes and preaches that never was anyone, conceived by a man and a woman, liberated from the devil's dominion except by faith in our lord Jesus Christ, the mediator between God and humanity, who was conceived without sin, was born and died.¹⁶

And

With regard to children, since the danger of death is often present and the only remedy available to them is *the sacrament of baptism by which they are snatched away from the dominion of the devil and adopted as children of God*, it admonishes that sacred baptism is not to be deferred for forty or eighty days or any other period of time in accordance with the usage of some people, but it should be conferred as soon as it conveniently can; and if there is imminent danger of death, the child should be baptised straightaway without any delay, even by a lay man or a woman in the form of the church, if there is no priest, as is contained more fully in the decree on the Armenians.¹⁷

This equation of original sin with subjection to the dominion of the devil has long been reflected and taught in the liturgy of baptism, in the rites of both Rome and Constantinople. In the traditional Roman baptismal liturgy, we find a sequence of exorcisms that directly represent baptism's role as releasing us from the devil's possession. Thus:

Go forth from him (her), unclean spirit, and give place to the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete.

And again

I exorcise thee, unclean spirit, in the name of the Father + and of the Son, + and of the Holy + Spirit, that thou goest out and depart from this servant of God, N. For He commands thee, accursed one, Who walked upon the sea, and stretched out His right hand to Peter about to sink. Therefore, accursed devil, acknowledge thy sentence, and give honour to the living and true God: give honour to Jesus Christ His Son, and to the Holy Spirit; and depart from this servant of God, N. because God and our Lord Jesus

¹⁶ Council of Florence Session 11, Bull of union with the Copts, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils* eds Tanner and Alberigo, volume 1, p575.

¹⁷ Florence p576

Christ have vouchsafed to call him (her) to His holy grace and benediction and to the font of Baptism.

And again

And this sign of the holy Cross, which we make upon his (her) forehead, do thou, accursed devil, never dare to violate.

And finally

I exorcise thee, every unclean spirit, in the name of God the Father + Almighty, in the name of Jesus + Christ, His Son, our Lord and Judge, and in the power of the Holy + Spirit, that thou depart from this creature of God N, which our Lord hath deigned to call unto His holy temple, that it may be made the temple of the living God, and that the Holy Spirit may dwell therein.

That baptism constitutes our liberation by Christ from the dominion of the devil is not generally denied outright in official documents of the post-conciliar Church. Indeed, the 1992 Catechism refers to the doctrine in at least two places. In §1237 it links the doctrine to the practice of baptismal exorcism:

Since baptism signifies liberation from sin and from its instigator the devil, one or more exorcisms are pronounced over the candidate.

And in §1250 the Catechism characterises baptism as a liberation from ‘the power of darkness’:

Born with a fallen human nature and tainted by original sin, children also have need of the new birth in baptism to be freed from the power of darkness and brought into the realm of the freedom of the children of God, to which all men are called.

Now the magisterial teaching is that baptism is not only a sign of our deliverance from the dominion of the devil, but necessary to its effecting. Until the child is actually baptised the child still remains, with fallen humanity, under the devil’s dominion. The traditional exorcisms present this exactly, calling on the devil to depart *now*, with the child’s baptism.

But there is another theology of the matter, one which treats the baptism as a sign of a deliverance from diabolic dominion that, thanks to Christ’s coming, has in effect already happened – a liberation that the child does not have to wait until actual baptism to enjoy. And this theology is left open in new rite of baptism introduced by Paul VI in 1970. Granted, the new rite still speaks of release *from original sin* as effected by baptism. But original sin is no longer liturgically presented as implying continued subjection to the devil. The former multiple and very unambiguous exorcisms are all removed, to be replaced by a single new prayer, which reads:

Almighty and ever-living God, you sent your only Son into the world to cast out the power of Satan, spirit of evil, to rescue man from the kingdom of darkness, and bring him into the splendour of your kingdom of light. We pray for this child: set him (her) free from original sin, make him (her) a temple of your glory, and send your Holy Spirit to dwell with him (her). We ask this through Christ our Lord.

The difference is obvious. The new prayer is simply a prayer that God release the child from original sin. It is no longer explicitly commanding the devil to depart the

child and abandon his dominion of it *now*. In fact the devil's departure is not commanded at all. Which is why the new rite's so-called 'exorcism' is not really a genuine formula of exorcism. The destruction of the power of the devil is associated in the prayer not with the devil's departure from the child only at the moment of its baptism, but rather with Christ's coming into the world. Any clear statement that even after the coming of Christ until actually baptised the child remains under the dominion of the devil, a devil whose departure has then to be explicitly commanded, has been removed.

This change is associated with a wider one. The traditional forms of blessing for liturgical use of natural elements such as water and oil also involve exorcism. Within a fallen world, natural elements require release from the dominion of the devil before they can be appropriated and used by the Church as holy water or holy oil. Take this exorcism that initiates the blessing of the oil of the sick in the traditional liturgy for the Chrism Mass:

I exorcise thee, thou most unclean spirit, and every incursion of Satan, and every phantasm: in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit: do thou depart from this oil, so that it may become a spiritual unguent for strengthening the temple of the living God; so that the Holy Spirit may dwell therein, by the name of God the Father almighty, and by the name of his well-beloved Son our Lord Jesus Christ, who will come to judge the living and the dead and the world by fire.

These exorcisms have similarly been quite comprehensively removed from the new Roman liturgy. The message is clear. Blessings need only give thanks to God for a world that is good. There is no need of exorcism to remove a persisting diabolic dominion over a world that though by nature good is also fallen.

The traditional Roman liturgy with its formulae of exorcism for baptism and for blessings is now seen by many modern theologians as problematic and as having required reform just because, unlike the new, its forms for baptism and blessing really do contain genuine exorcisms of the devil – commands addressed to the devil that he depart from an unbaptised child or from natural elements.¹⁸

¹⁸ For further discussion of post-conciliar theological opposition to such exorcisms see an important recent article by Michael Uwe Lang 'Theologies of blessing: origins and characteristics of *De benedictionibus* (1984)' *Antiphon* 15.1 (2011) pp27-46, especially at pp35-6. Lang is rightly critical of this opposition:

'The act of blessing [in the reformed post-conciliar liturgy] consists above all in the recognition and proclamation of the goodness of created things and of the loving care of their Creator. The apotropaic aspect of blessing, that is, to protect against the influences of evil and of the Evil One, is largely absent. Lessi-Ariosto considers this aspect of blessings a remainder of a pessimistic worldview that does not take into account the goodness of God's creation, but it could be asked whether such a position does not underestimate the consequences of original sin. The theological rationale for this claims to be biblical, but would appear to be oblivious of the fact that Christ himself, in the Gospel of John, speaks of "the prince of this world" (Jn 12:31, 14:30, 16:11)...Daniel Van Slyke has noted that "any view that discounts the influence of evil in favor of an insistence on the goodness of creation can be accused of an optimism that verges on naïveté." It would seem to be – and I suggest this here for the purpose of further exploration – that the relegation of apotropaic blessings has less to do with biblical *ressourcement* than with modern theologians such as Edward Schillebeeckx OP (1914-2009) and Karl Rahner SJ (1904-1984), who considered the whole created world already endowed with or permeated by divine grace. Their notion of "sacramentality" is extended to the whole of creation, and so the specific nature of the sacraments is lost: the sacraments and, by

Baptism is not now generally explained to Catholics as release from diabolic dominion. That idea of baptism may have been taught by the Council of Florence, and it may still lurk in those just cited Catechism paragraphs. But it plays no role in the Church's current pastoral life. That the fallen world and the unconverted within it are still subject to the devil is simply not part of the Church's current official theology. It is a conception of the world that many contemporary Catholics would find alien and even shocking – and which has been carefully removed, very consistently and very thoroughly, from the contemporary liturgy. Diabolic dominion over a fallen world is not now presented in the Church's liturgy, is not pastorally communicated in parish homiletics, and – as we are about to see – does not inform the current policy of the Church. The issue is not (yet) the reality of the devil or of original sin, none of which generally denied.¹⁹ It has instead to do with what the existence of the devil and original sin all imply for the Church's relation to an unconverted world.

If the fallen world – the world of the unconverted and unbaptised – really does lie under the dominion of the devil, then the consequence is clear. The Church cannot really live at peace with the world until it is converted. The Church can no more live at peace with the unconverted world than she can live at peace with the devil. Central to the Church's relation to the unconverted world must be a commitment to spiritual confrontation, where the only way out of the ensuing spiritual conflict is the world's conversion.

And this is Christ's own message, who presents his mission as centrally involving conflict between a converted and an unconverted world – between the world of the baptised and the world of the unbaptised – with the mission to baptise as both crystallisation of this conflict, and the only means to victory in it.

I came to cast fire upon the earth; and would that it were already kindled! I have a baptism to be baptised with; and how I am constrained until it is accomplished! Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division...*Luke* 12: 49-51

Baptism then is not a source of harmony and solidarity with the as yet unconverted world, but precisely in so far as the world is not yet converted, a source of spiritual conflict with it.

But what instead if the dominion of the devil has already, thanks to the coming of Christ, been effectively removed, so that at some eschatological level, even the unconverted world – the world of the unbaptised – is already released from the devil's power? Perhaps through the coming of Christ the world, though fallen, is already marked, even prior to baptism and incorporation within the visible Church, by a

consequence, the sacramentals are mere manifestations that make explicit what already takes place.' pp44-5.

I obviously share Lang's view.

¹⁹ The reality of the devil or of original sin may not be openly denied at least within the English church. But official theologies can be highly local. The official theology of the Flemish church is more radical. One Flemish priest, a retired academic of the Catholic University of Leuven, at a baptism in Leuven where this writer was godparent would not use even the New Rite 'exorcism', as supposedly theological erroneous and outmoded – and nor, I was assured, would other Flemish clergy.

Christianity that, to use the Rahnerian expression, is ‘anonymous’. Even the unconverted world is somehow already released from diabolic dominion and, albeit implicitly rather than explicitly, already committed to the supernatural end. Then the relation of the Church even to the unconverted world need not be one of conflict. Even prior to the world’s conversion the Church’s primary relation to the world can already be one of dialogic harmony.

The traditional liturgy of exorcism, in baptisms and in blessings, stands in contradiction to this benign conception of the situation of the unconverted world. It presents the unconverted world as still in the possession of Christ’s and humanity’s deadly enemy. Without the world’s baptism and its conversion, there can be no articles of peace – no stable dialogic harmony. But a benign conception of the unconverted world and of the Church’s relation to it is plainly now dominant in official theology, and the traditional liturgy’s unwelcome contradiction has been comprehensively suppressed. The duty to convert the world is constantly subordinated to the pursuit of harmony with it. This subordination of conversion to dialogic harmony is a central feature of post-conciliar official theology.

The issue does not of course affect only baptism but generalises from it. For though baptism initiates a life of grace that detaches us from the devil, that grace can be lost through mortal sin. To prevent such loss and then as remedy for its occurrence, we need the other sacraments, and not the eucharist alone, but that condition, once grace has been lost, of the eucharist’s worthy reception, without which communion threatens to bring with it not liberation but a confirming of spiritual death and diabolic dominion – the sacrament of penance. And the needed combination of these sacraments is largely lacking not just among the unbaptised but in many communities of the baptised. Eucharist and penance are lacking in the Protestant world. But in effect penance is also lacking among many modern Catholics, who regularly take communion without ever going to confession – something with alarming implications, according to traditional magisterial teaching, for the internal life of increasingly large parts of the Church. For communion without confession is liable to drive us further from the life of grace, and so even further under the dominion of the devil, and there are important effects of this detachment very apparent in the life of the contemporary Church, as we shall see.

- baptism, the conversion of the state, and the Church as coercive potestas

If the fallen world is under the devil’s dominion, and is in inevitable spiritual conflict with the Church until it is converted, then to remove the conflict no part of the world can be excluded from that conversion.

The Church’s magisterium has long taught that the need for conversion includes the state. Even if individuals are Christian privately, that does not guarantee the health of the political community. For we do not pursue the communal good simply as private individuals, but as members of a community, through public institutions – and spiritual sickness can arise as much in public life as in private.²⁰

²⁰ For more on the nature and role of the state, and the consequent need for the state’s conversion. see my ‘In defence of Catholic integralism’ online on *Public Discourse* here

<https://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2018/08/39362/>

Now the state is divinely established just as is the Church, though each in a different way. While the authority of the Church is based on a law of the New Covenant that is supernatural and revealed, state authority is based on natural law. But just as much as the Church the state is a form of community and authority that is divinely instituted so that humanity may flourish. This means that it is fundamental to Catholic teaching that harmony between Church and state must be possible, at least in principle. How could God not provide for harmony between two authorities each of which he has ordained and instituted?

But if the Church can only co-exist harmoniously with a nature that has been removed from the devil's dominion through baptism and conversion, that must be true in particular for communal authority in its natural form - the state. For the state too, like the rest of nature, is affected by the Fall. This allows for no political neutral space. The state too must be rescued from the dominion of the devil, and brought into the Church, so that it publicly commits itself to Christ. Otherwise, if unconverted, the state will degrade from the proper order of nature. So the Church has clearly taught, not least through the magisterium of the nineteenth century popes. These popes taught, with clarity and, we are now beginning to see, with foresight too, that the conversion of private individuals is not enough. Unless the state itself is converted, and recognizes Christ politically and publicly, thanks to the Fall natural law as it concerns the public good and public justice will cease to be clearly recognized and applied:

...where religion has been removed from civil society, and the doctrine and authority of divine revelation repudiated, the genuine notion itself of justice and human right is darkened and lost... Pius IX *Quanta Cura* §4

And

Therefore the law of Christ ought to prevail in human society and be the guide and teacher *of public as well as of private life*. Since this is so by divine decree, and no man may with impunity contravene it, it is an evil thing for any state where Christianity does not hold the place that belongs to it. When Jesus Christ is absent, *human reason fails*, being bereft of its chief protection and light, and the very end is lost sight of, for which, under God's providence, human society has been built up. This end is the obtaining by the members of society of natural good through the aid of civil unity, though always in harmony with the perfect and eternal good which is above nature. *But when men's minds are clouded*, both rulers and ruled go astray, for they have no safe line to follow nor end to aim at. Leo XIII *Tametsi Futura* §8

That degradation of the political community will guarantee not only the moral ruin of the state, but its enmity to the gospel, tied as the life of the gospel is to observance of the natural law – a law of which the devil is an unrelenting enemy.

The Church's involvement in spiritual warfare within a temporal order that is fallen is also fundamental to the nature of the Church herself, and has long determined magisterial teaching about that nature. The Church has been given by Christ himself the authority to protect the supreme good of religion. But locked as she is in a spiritual conflict within a fallen world, the Church is under attack both from without and also from within – from her own sinful and often recalcitrant members. So she

must be able to protect the good of her community from those attacks. She must be able to discourage wrongdoing by her members that threatens the spiritual good of the Christian community she serves. And she must also be able to prevent spiritually damaging intrusions into that community by opponents from without. So the Church, just as much as the state, must be a *potestas* or coercive authority. Just as the state must be able to use law to protect the political community, so the Church must be able to use law to protect the ecclesial community. The Church has been given by Christ the sovereign authority to make laws and to enforce those laws within her jurisdiction by legitimate threats of punishment that to be effective must include temporal as well as spiritual sanctions.

Subjection to the Church's jurisdiction, the magisterium teaches and as the 1983 *Code of Canon Law* continues to claim, comes with baptism. So at Trent, as we have already seen, and elsewhere, the magisterium has clearly taught that baptism subjects the baptised to a coercive jurisdiction, that of the Church, with obligations to fidelity on the baptised that may be enforced – where breach of those obligations is genuinely culpable, and where enforcement really is necessary to protect the religious good of the Church's community. Because the state itself needs to be converted, baptismal obligations can take political and public as well as private form. Officials of a state that is publicly Christian can be bound by their baptism to exercise their office so as to support the mission of the Church. In particular the officials of a publicly Christian state can be bound to assist the Church in the exercise of her jurisdiction, as canon 2198 of the 1917 *Code of Canon Law* still insisted.²¹ Baptism obligates the rulers of a Christian state to act as body to the Church's soul – to form a single Christian community where, in religious matters, the state helps as secular arm (*brachium saeculare*) to enforce the law of the Church.

This theory of the Church as *potestas* for the good of religion and of the need for a soul-body union of Church and state is a long-standing part of the Church's magisterium. At its heart is teaching that baptism has a juridical character fundamental to the nature of the Church herself. It is baptism that provides the Church as *potestas* with her coercive jurisdiction, and then obligates officials of a publicly Christian state to support that jurisdiction when called on by the Church to do so. Baptism then is the basis for the legitimacy of a soul-body union of the Church with that of the state, where in matters of religion the state may act as agent or secular arm of the Church as *potestas* for the good of religion.

Vatican II was careful not to contradict this teaching. According to the official *relationes* that interpreted *Dignitatis Humanae* to the council fathers at Vatican II, the declaration does not in any way deny the Church's status as *potestas* for religion, and addresses only the authority of the state when detached from any union with the Church, and so acting only as on its own authority as *potestas* for the civil order.²²

²¹ 'Offences against the law of the Church alone, are, of their nature, within the cognisance of the ecclesiastical authority alone, which, when it judges it necessary or opportune, can claim the help of the secular arm.' 1917 *Code of Canon Law*, canon 2198

²² See this *relatio* of September 1965, issued to the Council fathers just before the final vote:
 'For the schema rests on the traditional doctrine between a double order of human life, that is sacred and profane, civil and religious. In modern times Leo XIII has wonderfully expounded and developed this doctrine, teaching more clearly than ever before that there are two societies, and so two legal orders, and two coercive authorities (*potestates*), each divinely

The 1983 *Code of Canon Law* also still clearly presents the Church as a *potestas*. The Code clearly asserts that the Church has a jurisdiction over the baptised, with the authority to enforce that jurisdiction with threats of temporal as well as spiritual punishment.²³

Nevertheless the idea of the Church as a *potestas* is decreasingly taken seriously in official theology. In practice a model prevails of the Church as, in effect, a voluntary society, and with this comes a conception of canonical obligations as really no more than membership rules. All that culpable breach of them really merits is not some genuine form of punishment, but simple loss of membership. With this comes a view of Church-state separation not as a regrettable evil, as Leo XIII viewed it, but as a positive good.

Consider Joseph Ratzinger, who when writing as a cardinal, defended both the idea of the Church as a voluntary society whose authority is purely moral, and the desirability of Church-state separation. Not only is the entry of unbaptised adults into the Church treated by him an entirely voluntary matter – which was always taught – but continued fidelity in the baptised is treated by him as entirely voluntary too, which Trent formally denied. Moreover, the use of civil penalties by a Christian state to enforce ecclesial law is condemned by Ratzinger – despite the fact that such use was called for by General Councils such as Lateran IV and Trent:

This community in its turn, the Church, understands itself as a final moral authority which however *depends on voluntary adherence* and is entitled only to spiritual *but not to civil penalties*, precisely because it does not have the status the state has of being accepted by all as something given in advance...This is not in any way to dispute the fact that this balance has often enough been disturbed, *that in the middle ages and in the early modern period things often reached the point of Church and state in fact blending into one another in a way that falsified the faith's claim to truth and turned it into a compulsion so that it became a caricature of what was really intended*...With this the fundamental task of the Church's political stance, as I understand it, has been defined; its aim must be to maintain this balance of a dual system as the foundation of freedom. Hence the Church must make claims and demands on public law and cannot

constituted but in a different way, that is by natural law and by the positive law of Christ. *As the nature of religious liberty rests on this distinction of orders*, so the distinction provides a means to preserving it against the confusions which history has frequently produced'. Vatican II *Acta Synodalia* 4.1 p193

And at the same time, emphasizing that coercion on the authority of the Church in the order of religion to enforce her jurisdiction is not being addressed by the declaration:

'There this question of religious liberty, *since it has to do with the civil order, is to be distinguished from other questions which are of a theological order*. The first of these is of the nature and extent of that evangelical liberty by which Christ has liberated us (*Galatians* 5,1); *the other has to do with relations between freedom and authority within the Church herself*.' Vatican II, *Acta Synodalia* 4.1 p185

²³ See especially:

'The Church has the innate and proper right to coerce (*coercere*) offending members of the Christian faithful (*christifideles*) with punitive sanctions (*poenalibus sanctionibus*).'
Canon 1311 (*christifideles* being defined in canon 204 as the baptised.)

Sanctions can extend to temporal penalties:

'The law can establish other expiatory penalties which deprive a member of the Christian faithful of some spiritual or temporal good and which are consistent with the supernatural purpose of the Church.' Canon 1312

simply retreat into the private sphere. Hence it must also take care on the other hand *that Church and state remain separated and that belonging to the Church clearly retains its voluntary character.*²⁴

Contrast here the magisterial teaching of Leo XIII, who condemned ‘the fatal theory of the need of separation between Church and State’ in *Libertas* (at §18). Leo XIII clearly taught also that the church was not a voluntary society with mere membership rules, but, just as much as the state, is a *societas perfecta* – a sovereign *potestas* or coercive law-giver:

Others oppose not the existence of the Church, nor indeed could they; yet they despoil her of the nature and rights of a perfect society, and maintain that it does not belong to her to legislate, to judge, or to punish, but only to exhort, to advise, and to rule her subjects in accordance with their own consent and will. By such opinion they pervert the nature of this divine society, and attenuate and narrow its authority, its office of teacher, and its whole efficiency; and at the same time they aggrandize the power of the civil government to such extent as to subject the Church of God to the empire and sway of the State, like any voluntary association of citizens. To refute completely such teaching, the arguments often used by the defenders of Christianity, and set forth by us, especially in the encyclical letter *Immortale Dei*, (§12) [where the Church is taught to be a genuine *potestas*] are of great avail; for by those arguments it is proved that, by a divine provision, all the rights which essentially belong to a society that is legitimate, supreme, and perfect in all its parts exist in the Church. *Libertas* §40

Modern official theology assumes that the state should be religiously neutral because it also assumes that this public neutrality will be entirely consistent with harmony between Church and state. We see the general model of dialogic harmony with the unconverted world applied to an unconverted state in particular.

The idea that Church and state can live in harmony without the state’s conversion was influentially supported even before Vatican II by Jacques Maritain. It was central to the new political theology that Maritain was developing in the decades before the council, especially in *Man and the State*. On juridical questions Maritain was a more orthodox Catholic than Ratzinger. Unlike Ratzinger he did not attack as outright error the magisterium’s teaching that Church herself is a *potestas* entitled under appropriate circumstances to use the state as her coercive agent. Instead Maritain adopted a subtler view. By contrast to Ratzinger, Maritain admitted that such use by the Church of the state, far from ‘falsifying the faith’s claim to truth’ as Ratzinger supposed, had in its time – the middle ages - been fully legitimate. But then Maritain made a crucial claim. Thanks to a supposed progress of the gospel, and human spiritual advancement, it was no longer a condition of harmony between Church and state that the state should be publicly Christian. Maritain allowed that previously, under the more spiritually primitive conditions of the past, in what he termed the *sacral* age of medieval Europe, it had been necessary for the good of religion for the state to convert, and for the political community to be a community of the baptised. Harmony between Church and state did once require a soul-body union of them that was then entirely legitimate, just as Leo XIII had taught. But we now lived in what Maritain termed a *secular* age. And in this new secular age, supposedly thanks to a progress of the gospel, the Church could now live in harmony with the state without requiring the

²⁴ “Theology and the Church's Political Stance” in Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger *Church, Ecumenism and Politics: New Essays in Ecclesiology* (NY: Crossroad, 1988) pp161-63 (my emphases)

state's conversion into a Christian state. Harmony could obtain without a shared religion, simply within a shared framework of natural law. In Maritainian political theology, under conditions of modernity the political community can now somehow escape the dominion of the devil without needing to be converted.²⁵

The Church's ever-increasing conflict with secular states suggests, alas, that such escape may not be available – and that the secular age may not constitute spiritual advance at all. The issue, let me emphasize, is not whether a soul-body union of Church and state is now realisable. Clearly under modern conditions there is simply no prospect of such a union. The issue, rather, is what we must expect from a state that is no longer publicly committed to the truth of Christianity in its laws and policies. What the nineteenth century popes taught us to expect in such a case is clearly what we are now getting - not harmony with the Church, but deepening spiritual conflict, and a conflict moreover that, just as those popes predicted, is rooted in the state's denial of natural law, especially as it concerns marriage and the right to life.

- the efficacy of grace – through or apart from explicit faith and visible participation in baptism and other sacraments

Even before Vatican II the magisterium taught that salvation is possible, at least in principle, even for those who are not Catholic. Pius XII taught that non-Catholics may be related to the Church through some kind of unconscious desire, and implied that this may be a (less than certain) help to their salvation:

As you know, venerable brethren, from the very beginning of our pontificate, we have committed to the protection and guidance of heaven those who do not belong to the visible body of the Catholic Church, solemnly declaring that after the example of the Good Shepherd we desire nothing more ardently than that they may have life and have it more abundantly. Imploring the prayers of the whole Church we wish to repeat this solemn declaration in this encyclical letter in which we have proclaimed the praises of the "great and glorious Body of Christ" and from a heart overflowing with love we ask each and every one of them to correspond to the interior movements of grace, and to seek to withdraw *from that state in which they cannot be sure of their salvation*. For even though by an unconscious desire and longing they have a certain relationship with the Mystical Body of the Redeemer, *they still remain deprived of those many heavenly gifts and helps which can only be enjoyed in the Catholic Church*. §103 *Mystici Corporis*

But even if a chance of salvation is offered to all, this hope was always accompanied by equally magisterial warnings of the kind provided by Pius XII here – that detachment from the visible Church is spiritually highly dangerous, not just for the non-baptised but also for those who though baptised lack the fullness of the faith in communion with the Church and, most importantly, the further sacraments of eucharist and penance. Such detachment might not remove the very possibility of salvation. But it will still endanger salvation. Certainly, God is not bound by his own sacraments. But the magisterium has historically taken care to remind us not to presume on God's not being bound.

²⁵ For more detailed discussion of Maritain see my 'Jacques Maritain and the problem of Church and state', *The Thomist* vol 79, 2015, pp1-42.

The current official theology on this matter is now very different. This author knows through direct testimony that a Protestant cleric was quite recently discouraged at the topmost level of the Church from becoming Catholic. Ecumenical dialogue is no longer consistently treated in official circles as Vatican II's *Unitatis Redintegratio* still treats it, as a path to genuine unity under Peter within the one Church for whole ecclesial communities separated from her that is parallel to, and not in any way opposed to, the other path of individual reception. Rather ecumenical dialogue is often treated in practice as a substitute for genuine unity, as if its real purpose were merely to initiate harmonious co-existence between a plurality of 'Christian churches' that nevertheless remain separated. Just because the outcome being aimed at is a harmonious co-existence without real unity, ecumenical dialogue is even treated in some quarters as if it were somehow inconsistent with also encouraging individual receptions. For the open pursuit of individual receptions might threaten the harmony of this co-existence.

And so we arrive at a form of 'zombie' ecumenism, that effectively blocks the path to Christian unity rather than providing it. The ecumenism is a 'zombie' form, because although it appears living, it is really dead, serving not to end but to preserve the existing separateness of Christian bodies, and to do so precisely through its prioritisation of harmonious co-existence above all else. This degenerate ecumenism just provides complacent support for a status quo. In particular it blocks any public encouragement of individual receptions, just because such public encouragement would threaten that status quo. The possible spiritual loss to those denied 'those many heavenly gifts and helps which can only be enjoyed in the Catholic Church' no longer matters.

Complacent presumption on God's mercy in official theology extends beyond the other sacraments to baptism itself. In historic magisterial teaching, because all need to be rescued from the dominion of the devil, and because the New Covenant provides for but one sure means of rescue that applies to all - baptism - all are called to baptism, and the Church's mission to convert and baptise is a mission to all peoples. There is no alternative covenant or way of salvation available. The Church is indeed exactly as the magisterium in *Lumen Gentium* describes her, the New Israel replacing the Israel of old, for Jew and Gentile alike.

But that is no longer the view taken in modern official theology. One body in particular – the practitioners of Torah-based rabbinical Judaism - is treated as somehow exempt from the call to baptism and visible unity within the one Church. The issue here is not that we are now being allowed at least to hope for salvation even apart from membership of the visible Church. As we have seen, some magisterial licence for such a hope might not be new, though certainly any licence given was only for hope, not complacency. The problem is that in the case of Judaism, hope is now being replaced by complacency – a complacency that is supposedly divinely sanctioned. Where the Jewish people are concerned, a public mission to convert and baptise is now being officially excluded.

It is very important that a mission to the Jews is not being excluded just as a matter of temporary or local prudence. For example, given the appalling persecution of the Jewish people, a persecution that took a radically murderous form in modern times, and the disgraceful participation of Christians in that persecution, it could be argued that missionary work specifically and overtly directed at the Jewish people might in

our particular context be counter-productive as offensive or intimidating.²⁶ But this is not the way a mission to the Jews is being excluded. It is being excluded in principle - as supposedly dictated in some way by the very nature of the Church and her mission, and by the terms of a supposedly different mission divinely given to Judaism apart from the Church.

It is impossible to reconcile the rejection of a mission to the Jews on this supposedly principled and quite general basis with the practice of the apostles themselves – the model and origination of the Church's mission. Such a rejection is also opposed by the Council of Florence that not only teaches the universality of the call to and need for baptism, but specifically condemns any continued reliance for salvation on the ceremonies of the Old Law.²⁷ And, as we have already seen, an ecclesial mission to Jew and Gentile alike is taught by *Lumen Gentium*. The new official theology has therefore to be accompanied by much alternative history – by much silence about or outright denial of the Church's past commitment to such a mission to the Jewish people, as if right up until Vatican II whole religious communities had not been dedicated to it.

This rejection of a public mission to the Jews is accompanied by continued lip-service to the universality of Christ's saving covenant. That is, official theology tends still to deny any dual covenant theory – the clearly heretical position that the Jewish people have a saving covenant distinct from that offered by Christ through baptism into the Church to the Gentiles. But while the doctrinal content of dual covenant theology is still officially rejected, nonetheless a pastoral programme presupposing that content is being adopted. And with that pastoral programme, the content of dual covenant theology still slips in at least at the margins of theological expression, again at the very highest levels of the Church. Take Judaism's denial of Christ's identity as the saviour of all mankind. If dual covenant theology is false, this denial must be a very serious error and so an evil which God, as the author of truth and no deceiver, must permit but not directly will. Yet Joseph Ratzinger, writing when pope but as a private theologian, associates this error with a supposed distinctive mission for the Jews – as if their rejection of Christ were not opposed to God's salvific will for them, as it surely must be, but were somehow an expression of it.

In this regard, the question of *Israel's mission* has always been present in the background. We realize today with horror how many misunderstandings with grave consequences have weighed down our history. Yet a new reflection can acknowledge that the beginnings of a correct understanding have always been there, waiting to be rediscovered, however deep the shadows. Joseph Ratzinger – *Jesus of Nazareth: Holy Week* p44

What is this mission, special as Israel's 'own mission' as Ratzinger terms it (p46)? Certainly not to respond here and now through conversion and baptism to Christ's

²⁶ One might wonder whether all such evangelisation would be quite as counterproductive as is often supposed – but we need not debate this here.

²⁷ See the Council of Florence, Bull of union with the Copts, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils* eds Tanner and Alberigo, volume 1, p576; and then, citing Florence, Pius XII in *Mystici Corporis*: 'On the Cross then the Old Law died, soon to be buried and to be a bearer of death, in order to give way to the New Testament of which Christ had chosen the Apostles as qualified ministers'.

universal saving call. For Israel's 'mission' implies, on Ratzinger's understanding, that by her very nature the Church really has no public mission of her own to convert and baptise the Jewish people as she has to convert and baptise the Gentiles. What of the inconvenient truth that the apostles themselves began with and always maintained a public mission to their fellow Jews? Ratzinger equivocates, rather unconvincingly:

But it was becoming increasingly clear that the evangelization of the Gentiles was now the disciples' particular task – thanks above all to the special commission given to Paul as a duty and a grace. *ibid* p46

But this really is misleading. St Paul's own prioritisation of a mission to the Gentiles hardly excluded even in his case a public call to Jewish conversion as well; and as special to him this prioritisation had nothing whatsoever to do with what Ratzinger implies - a supposed general detachment of the apostles as a whole from a public mission to all humanity, to Jew and Gentile alike.

Romans chapter 11 is a famous proclamation of God's continuing concern for the Jewish people, and of God's determination to remain faithful to his promise of salvation for them. It predicts the persistence of Judaism as a religion rejecting of Christianity until at the end times, when the mission to the Gentiles is finally concluded. Now when St Paul writes that at that time 'so all Israel will be saved' (*Romans* 11, 26) he seems to have meant, at least, that all that is left of Judaism at that time will then be converted and saved. But that does not guarantee a route to salvation for practitioners of Judaism living now that is independent of faith in Christ and baptism as Gentile salvation is not. Nor does St Paul seem to have envisaged such a route. After all St Paul claims in that same chapter that he advertises his own ministry to the Gentiles to make his fellow Jews jealous of what the Gentiles are being offered 'and thereby save some of them'.²⁸

Ratzinger, however, does take this chapter to exclude, on scriptural grounds, any mission to the Jews here and now. Quoting a theological speculation of Hildegard Brem, Ratzinger concludes:

In the light of *Romans* 11:25, the Church must not concern herself with the conversion of the Jews, since she must wait for the time fixed for this by God, 'until the full number of the Gentiles come in' (*Rom* 11.25). *ibid*, p45

But this is effectively to admit dual covenant theology in some form. However much, or little, actual baptism may matter here and now to the salvation of an individual Gentile, it is being treated as *especially* irrelevant to the salvation of an individual Jew. Even if Christ is still supposed to be in some way saviour for Jew and Gentile alike, baptism clearly does not matter to Jewish salvation as it matters to Gentile salvation. For where the Jewish people are concerned, the Church is specifically forbidden *by the very terms of her mission* openly to encourage it. Contrary to *Lumen Gentium*, the Church is not after all in the business of calling 'together from Jews and Gentiles a people that would be bound together in unity not according to the flesh but in the Spirit' – a new and universal people of God to replace the old Israel of the flesh.

²⁸ 'Now I am speaking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry in order to make my fellow Jews jealous, and thus save some of them.' *Romans*, 11, 13-14. And the Jews are described as to be grafted back into salvation 'if they do not persist in their unbelief' (*Romans*, 11, 23).

This is part of a wider phenomenon. Even when the letter of magisterial teaching is still preserved by official theology, at least for a while, its pastoral implications are often abandoned in Church policy - where this is necessary to avoid some especially unwanted conflict with an unconverted world. And then, inevitably, official theology begins to compromise or elide that past magisterial teaching.

- summary - the sacraments as salvation theatre

We see official theology omitting or even denying magisterial teaching about baptism – and in ways that consistently underplay the implications of the Fall. The need for baptism for salvation is soft-pedalled, its role in subjecting the baptised to the jurisdiction of a *potestas* is effectively denied, as are its political implications – baptism’s clear involvement of the state. In all of this it is assumed that even prior to baptism and real conversion somehow the world is already released from the dominion of the devil and oriented towards salvation, so that, as with Maritain’s new vision of Church-state relations, harmony with the world no longer presupposes its conversion.

Of course, if this official theology is taken seriously there arises an obvious question about the point of actual membership of the Church and actual participation in her sacramental life. This threatens to become a form of salvation theatre, at best a representative sign of salvation merely, where what actually saves us is some invisible and universal supernatural orientation eschatologically linked to Christ. As one Italian priest preached in my hearing to his congregation in Verona in September 2016, participation in penance and the eucharist is simply a sign of something Christ has already achieved. For we are all *già salvati* – all already saved.

This is a transformation in the Church’s official theology of baptism, and in clear conflict with the historical magisterium. At the heart of it lies a vision of the Church’s relation to the unconverted world – be it the world of the state, of non-Catholic Christian communities, or of non-Christian religions and of Judaism in particular – as primarily directed at attaining spiritual harmony, and so as excluding spiritual conflict, and to this end as prioritising dialogic harmony over conversion, and even in some cases (the state and the Jewish people) as precluding conversion altogether. Central to this vision of harmonious coexistence with an unconverted world is the abandonment of any conception of the world as still, until its conversion, lying under diabolic dominion.

4. Church and state – and the operation of grace to heal

How far can the operation of grace really be detached from visible membership of the Church? Is receipt of the sacraments really no more than a form of salvation theatre - the representation of a communication of grace that is really effected independently? This is the fundamental issue, to which the relationship between baptism and release from diabolic dominion is key. Is baptism the means by which we are liberated from the devil’s power, or a mere sign of a liberation that occurs independently of actual baptism – that has, in effect, already happened?

While the Church allows for the possibility of salvation even of the unbaptised, the

magisterium has never treated visible membership of the Church and actual participation in her sacramental life as a matter of indifference. Hope has certainly been offered, but not the comfort of complacency. But perhaps the historical magisterium was just wrong. Perhaps modern official complacency is really warranted, and we have to draw the lesson of a New Pentecost – that for her entire history until Vatican II the Church was consistently betraying her own Gospel by trusting insufficiently in the divine mercy.

How consistent though is such a theory of the New Pentecost with the doctrine that revelation was complete with the death of the last apostle – and that the Church was equipped by Christ from the very beginning to preach that revelation without error, preserving it faithfully without adding to it? For if we are all living, only now, through a New Pentecost, it would seem that for centuries, from the very beginning until the last Council, the Church was woefully in error about her own mission, and that only now after two millennia does she understand that mission aright – a mission that, it now appears, may even leave actual membership of her and actual reception of her sacraments of symbolic significance only, and no more than elaborate salvation theatre.

At this point someone might raise an important difficulty. We are debating how grace is made present and effective in human life to save us – whether in a way that significantly depends on actual receipt of the sacraments of the Church, or in a way that is largely assured independently of them. But who can tell with precision who is saved and who is not? So whilst the theory of invisible salvation may seem presumptuous, opposing scepticism might seem equally presumptuous too.

But in fact the operation of grace is not entirely hidden from us. For the same grace that elevates us to the supernatural end also operates to heal nature, and repair the moral damage done to human nature by the Fall. Grace repairs, in particular, the damage done by sin to the human will and intellect. Here the operation of grace is far more visible – and in a way that suggests a significant dependence for its operation on membership of the visible Church and actual and worthy participation in her sacraments.

The Fall did not remove the natural law entirely from human nature. We retain an understanding of its foundations, that goodness should be pursued, evil avoided. We also remain capable of doing good and avoiding evil at the level of natural morality. But sin, original and actual, has still done real damage. As Aquinas noted, without the help of grace we cannot now avoid all serious wrongdoing. And even our understanding of the detail of the moral law may be impaired, so that at certain times and places particular groups or societies of people might cease to understand that, for example, theft is wrong, or that innocents should not be killed. Such failure to acknowledge even the content of the natural law, Aquinas notes, can affect the political order. In a fallen world, states may pass laws that conflict with, and reflect a failure to understand, important parts of natural law.²⁹

So grace operates at two levels – to raise us above nature, and to repair nature. And its operation to repair nature is by no means invisible. Where we find failure not only to apply the natural law, but even to acknowledge important parts of its content, then we can empirically determine that grace is not operating effectively. And such evidence

²⁹ See *Summa Theologiae* 1.2ae q94 a6 and q109 a2

becomes plentiful precisely when whole human societies are detached from the Church, or where groups of people remain visibly members, but collectively abandon worthy participation in her sacramental life – as where the habit of communion without confession becomes typical. We arrive at the phenomenon of widespread dissent, both outside the Church and in the post-conciliar period within the Church as well, from the natural law concerning human life and marriage

As for private individuals, so for political communities as well – as the nineteenth century popes consistently predicted. It is with the operation of grace to heal that, as we have seen, the political teaching of the nineteenth century popes was immediately concerned. Thanks to the Fall humanity in general is threatened with a degradation of their nature – and the political community is in no way exempt from this threat. The popes were quite explicit that at the political level grace would only reliably operate to heal nature through a genuine conversion of the political community, and its membership of and participation in the life of the Church at the public level. Without that conversion, as Leo XIII predicted, ‘human reason fails’ in relation to the public good. Secularisation of political life has led only to ever increasing levels of state denial and violation of those parts of the natural law that are central to issues of life and death – marriage and respect for the right to life of the innocent. The political community is returning in its public life to the dominion of the devil - an allegiance that opposes it to natural law and therefore also to the mission of the Church. There is indeed no neutral space.

What stops the Church from living in a stable harmony with an unconverted world? Ultimately, of course, for as long as the world does remain unconverted, Christ himself is the obstacle, given the unconverted world’s subjection to the devil, and his enmity with Christ. But the unconverted world is at war too with the law of its own created nature - the natural law conformity to which is basic and essential to any conformity to Christ. Without a restoration of respect for natural law, which can only come through the healing grace of Christ, there can be no harmony between Church and world. The case of the secular state shows, with particular clarity, that the Church cannot expect any such harmony without conversion.

5. The pursuit of harmony with the unconverted world

The Church’s ultimate goal is harmony with all mankind – with a world both as God’s creation and as redeemed by Christ. According to the new official theology, however, not only is this harmony to be aimed at – but it is supposed to be attainable already, even without the world’s conversion. Yet we can now clearly see, and the magisterium has historically taught, that such harmony is not possible. The Church cannot coexist in spiritual peace with the dominion of the devil.

Nevertheless, because the new official theology dictates this, the contemporary Church still persists in her pursuit of harmony without conversion. What then if, as it must, this pursuit consistently proves unsuccessful? The one lesson the new official theology will not allow to be drawn is the traditional one; that harmony with the unconverted world is impossible precisely because the world is unconverted.

Since, where attaining harmony between Church and world is concerned, the world’s non-conversion is nowadays not supposed to be a problem, the modern official theology encourages the idea that the solution must instead lie in the other way left

open – not in a transformation of the world, through its conversion, but rather in a transformation of the Church. The new pastoral programme of the Church towards the unconverted – the programme of the New Pentecost – is supposed to be one of a stable dialogic harmony, a harmony no longer dependent on conversion. When the harmony fails to arise, renewed effort must be made to find remaining obstacles to it that can safely be removed – no longer from the side of the world, through its conversion, but from the Church's side. To prevent conflict, then, the Church will increasingly attempt to adapt herself to the unconverted world, where she thinks she somehow can, and especially at the level of pastoral policy.

The first to go will be any conflict-producing prioritisation of conversion. The strict doctrinal letter behind that mission to convert may still be respected – but in cases where conflict is particularly feared, the pastoral commitment to that mission will be rapidly ended, and may even be ended on grounds of alleged principle, and not some simple temporary prudence. Lip-service continues to be paid to the universality of the Church's mission – but this universality can still be thoroughly contradicted at the pastoral level.

Thus in a 2015 statement on the fiftieth anniversary of *Nostra Aetate*,³⁰ the Church's Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews still excludes dual covenant theology at the level of doctrine:

Since God has never revoked his covenant with his people Israel, there cannot be different paths or approaches to God's salvation. The theory that there may be two different paths to salvation, the Jewish path without Christ and the path with the Christ, whom Christians believe is Jesus of Nazareth, would in fact endanger the foundations of Christian faith. Confessing the universal and therefore also exclusive mediation of salvation through Jesus Christ belongs to the core of Christian faith. §35

Now, surely, if Christ's saving covenant is universal, and the body by which Christ saves is the Church, the Church's public mission must include, at least in principle, a call to the Jewish people. Yet, the Commission urges that, as a matter of *principle*, the Church's public mission excludes any such call – simply because the Jewish people's self-identity depends on not being converted.

It is easy to understand that the so-called 'mission to the Jews' is a very delicate and sensitive matter for Jews because, in their eyes, it involves the very existence of the Jewish people. This question also proves to be awkward for Christians, because for them the universal salvific significance of Jesus Christ and consequently the universal mission of the Church are of fundamental importance. The Church is therefore obliged to view evangelisation to Jews, who believe in the one God, in a different manner from that to people of other religions and world views. In concrete terms this means that the Catholic Church neither conducts nor supports any specific institutional mission work directed towards Jews. While there is a *principled* rejection of an institutional Jewish mission, Christians are nonetheless called to bear witness to their faith in Jesus Christ also to Jews, although they should do so in a humble and sensitive manner, acknowledging that Jews are bearers of God's Word, and particularly in view of the great tragedy of the Shoah. §40

³⁰ *"The gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable" (Rom 11:29) A Reflection on Theological Questions Pertaining to Catholic–Jewish Relations on the Occasion of the 50th Anniversary of "Nostra Aetate"*, Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, 2015

The Church does not call on Jews to convert and be baptised as she might still call on Gentiles to convert and be baptised. Does this not risk the salvation of those unbaptised Jewish individuals passed by? It had better not do so. If giving even the impression that conversion to Christ was not needed in their case did risk Jewish salvation in any way, abandoning a public mission to the Jews, and doing so as a matter of principle, would be an act of profound hostility to the Jewish people. The Commission's policy – the Jewish people are not to be invited to convert and be baptised as other peoples are – makes sense only on one assumption. Jewish salvation must not depend at all on conversion and baptism.

Yet the Commission still insists that the Church's mission is universal. It maintains that for Christians

the universal salvific significance of Jesus Christ and consequently the universal mission of the Church are of fundamental importance.

But now the Commission faces a dilemma. Jewish salvation, it seems, is radically independent of baptism and conversion. If even then the Church's mission of salvation still includes the Jews under the very same covenant as the Gentiles, the covenant offered by Christ in the New Testament cannot after all depend on actual baptism and conversion. These are mere signs of Christ's mission, not means needed to effect it. The mission of the Church involves the sacraments simply as a form of salvation theatre.

Suppose on the other hand that the Church's mission does importantly depend on the sacraments as means to effecting it. Then that mission cannot after all include the Jewish people. If baptism is taken to be radically dispensable in the salvation of the Jewish people but is not so for the Gentiles, this is to concede dual covenant theology in some form. There must be a different salvific deal for the two peoples, and the Church's mission, as sacrament-dependent, is to the Gentiles alone.

Notice of course one important consequence of an official theology that does ever radically detach salvation from actual conversion to Christ, whether for the case of the Jewish people alone or more generally. The spiritual conflict required to ensure conversion centrally involves confronting error about matters vital to salvation – in particular about the identity and significance of Christ himself. But if the removal of error on this point is no longer seen as vital to salvation – if the error is no longer seen clearly as spiritually dangerous, or even a real error at all – then the spiritual conflict that attempts at conversion would inevitably lead to is increasingly seen as an unnecessary evil. The attempt to convert becomes an unnecessary and offensive intolerance – something that has to be avoided to facilitate harmonious coexistence and the better to enable those forms of cooperation that can be common property with the unconverted world. And so we see the Church Commission concluding:

One important goal of Jewish-Christian dialogue certainly consists in joint engagement throughout the world for justice, peace, conservation of creation, and reconciliation. In the past, it may have been that the different religions – *against the background of a narrowly understood claim to truth and a corresponding intolerance* – contributed to the incitement of conflict and confrontation. *But today religions should not be part of the problem, but part of the solution.* Only when religions engage in a successful dialogue with one another, and in that way contribute towards world peace, can this be realised also on the social and political levels. §46

The solution to the plight of a fallen world is no longer first and foremost the public acknowledgment by all of Christ, but cooperation towards no doubt valuable but entirely secular ends. And this especially excludes pressing the religion-dividing issue of Christ, the very issue that a public mission to the Jewish people would raise. Suddenly, in official theology it seems, the Church's mission to convert is no longer the solution, but the very problem.

If the sacramental life of the Church is increasingly understood no longer as effecting of salvation, but instead as a form of salvation theatre, then even in relation to that sacramental life other values, those acceptable to the unconverted world, may come to dominate. If the attempt to convert and invite into the Church's sacramental life causes offense and disharmony then, since we are dealing with a symbol, a sign strictly inessential or unimportant in itself to actually effecting salvation, the symbol may be sacrificed. Equally if, within the life of the Church, denial of a sacrament would be offensive and conflict-producing, then again, since unworthy receipt of the sacrament no longer threatens salvation, offence may carefully be avoided there too. The denial of communion to whole categories of people because their way of life is in public contradiction of the gospel may come to look unacceptable – especially when an unconverted world increasingly insists that the way of life is not objectionable at all, but right and liberating.

Thus the prioritisation of harmony over conversion corrupts the Church's mission not only *ad extra*, but *ad intra* too. The pursuit of harmony with the world but without the world's conversion will not only stifle the Church's mission to convert those without, but weaken the internal life of the Church. And this will happen in two ways. First, in placating that world without converting it the Church will inevitably encourage her own membership actually to conform to the unconverted world themselves. But of course, with lowering levels of worthy participation in the full sacramental life of the Church – especially through communions unaccompanied by confession - the pursuit of harmony with the unconverted will increasingly dominate the internal life of the Church herself. For the unconverted world will increasingly extend to include more and more of the Church's own members who cease to participate in her sacraments worthily, and so cease benefit from the life of grace, even in their beliefs. The unremedied consequences of sin for the human intellect – the 'clouding of human reason' - will damage the internal life of the Church herself, and lead to ever increasing levels of dissent not only with revelation but with the plain content of natural law. And so we come to the crisis in the Church's treatment of marriage – the crisis of *Amoris Laetitia*.

We now see the source of the pressure to adopt pastoral programmes that seem primarily designed to defuse conflict with the unconverted – and in doing so muffle the content of magisterial teaching that is conflict-threatening, even when the letter of that teaching is still respected.

A common thread emerges, linking the Church's official policy towards and theological understanding of her relations to those unconverted without to her treatment of those effectively unconverted within. Dual covenant theology is still formally denied, but a pastoral programme is adopted that presupposes some form of a dual covenant – a path to salvation special to practitioners of Judaism that is left mysterious but that, at least in the here and now, bypasses the Church and baptism entirely. And then we have an internal parallel to this. The indissolubility of marriage is formally taught – but to remove conflict with the unconverted within as much as

without the Church, the pastoral implications of that teaching begin to be ignored, and a pastoral programme is adopted that treats marriage as in effect dissoluble. Indeed some of the same figures can be found in both programmes of conflict-precluding pastoral adjustment. Walter Cardinal Kasper has denied the letter of dual covenant theology – but is a notable proponent of adopting its pastoral programme. He is also a notable proponent of adopting a pastoral programme that treats marriage as, in effect, dissoluble.

Inevitably in both cases the magisterial teaching itself is soon watered down. Just as official theology begins to inch towards dual covenant theology at the level of theory as it concedes to it outright in pastoral practice, so likewise concessions begin to be made in relation to marriage doctrine as well. So it is increasingly suggested, even by senior prelates, that not all sexual relations outside marriage should be classed as adultery or fornication. Some ‘conscientious’ cases of such relations, it is even suggested, may become morally equivalent to a form of ‘marriage’.

Much of ‘conservative’ Catholicism has been deeply shocked by *Amoris Laetitia*, but is prone to see the problem of official theology detaching itself from the historical magisterium as a peculiarity of the current pontificate. But now we see the deeper source of the crisis – which lies in a revolution, occurring with Vatican II, though apart from any new magisterial teaching of the council, in the official theology of the sacraments and of baptism in particular.

6. Conclusion

The revolution in the official theology of baptism is twofold. Dialogic harmony is given priority over conversion – and the sacramental life of the Church is seen as signifying of salvation, rather than something on which salvation actually depends.

There is a common root – the assumption that diabolic dominion over humanity has already been removed even in advance of baptism, and without any need for the world’s conversion. That assumption is what makes the modern Church’s pursuit of harmony with the world without its conversion appear feasible, and even a goal to be prioritised over conversion itself.

But the goal of harmony without conversion is not feasible at all. What reveals this is what also provides strong evidence that the operation of grace really does significantly depend on worthy participation in the sacramental life of the Church. This evidence lies in the very visible failure of grace to heal nature without nature’s conversion – a failure that lies at the heart of moral conflict between the Church and an unconverted world.

Central to magisterial teaching about baptism is the grim reality, so clearly taught dogmatically at Florence, that the unconverted world remains under the dominion of the devil. Consequently, as Christ himself clearly proclaimed, baptism is a source not of harmony with the unconverted world but of spiritual confrontation of it and spiritual conflict with it – a spiritual conflict that can be ended only by the world’s conversion.

The crisis of *Amoris Laetitia* is not a theological crisis of the current pontificate alone. It is not isolated, and it has parallels elsewhere that had already arisen under previous

post-conciliar popes. One especially glaring parallel to the pastoral muffling of the Church's marriage teaching, we have seen, is the equally serious compromising of the Church's mission publicly to call all humanity to Christ – the Church's flirtation at an official level, at least at the level of pastoral strategy and even to a degree beyond, with dual covenant theology. Both are parts of a more general crisis in official theology that has followed Vatican II. This crisis involves a revolution in understanding of the sacraments, and of baptism in particular – a revolution which immediately implicates the Church in pastoral programmes that prioritise harmony over conversion, and which, to protect this prioritisation at the pastoral level, inevitably compromises the Church's presentation of magisterial teaching too. Until this general crisis of official theology is generally understood for what it is, and fidelity to magisterial teaching is recovered at every level of the Church, but especially at the highest levels, the general crisis of the Vatican II period will only continue, and take new forms.