JOHN PAUL II AND FORMAL HERESY

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John Paul II has occupied the Chair of Peter for well over eight years now. During that period his words and deeds on various occasions have brought on the charge of heresy against him from some traditional Catholics. Nor is this a farfetched charge by any means. On the contrary, it is a well-founded one. Certainly his support and promotion of the false and non-Catholic Declaration on Religious Liberty of Vatican Council II (a position condemned by Pope Pius IX) in itself provide reasonable justification for the accusation of heresy. There are other examples. And now we have the latest abomination: the false ecumenism and heretical religious indifferentism openly espoused by John Paul II at Assissi, Italy, on October 27, 1986, when he permitted the once-Catholic churches of Assisi to be used for pagan and other non-Catholic worship services, and even encouraged such worship. What more, pray tell, is needed to make John Paul II open to the legitimate accusation of heresy?

Some few months back an article appeared in a conservative, quasi-traditional publication of the Conciliar Church which voiced the opinion that John Paul II might be a material heretic. (To see even that admission in the publication in question was a bit of a surprise.) Now a material heretic may be described as one who, though objectively involved or engaged in heresy, is not guilty of the *sin* of heresy because of his lack of knowledge or because, we may say, he is "in good faith." A formal heretic, on the other hand, is a person who consciously and willingly and obstinately maintains a position which he knows to be heretical according to the mind of the Church. A Roman Catholic who is guilty of formal heresy thereby ceases to be a Roman Catholic.

Canon 2316 of the Code of Canon Law (1917) reads in part: "One who spontaneously and with full knowledge helps in any way in the propagation of heresy...is suspect of heresy." Can there be any question but that this is applicable to John Paul II? Canon 2315 gives the procedure to be followed regarding a person suspected of heresy and states that, if the cause of suspicion is not removed within a specified period of time, that person "shall be considered a heretic and be subject to the penalties for heresy." The procedure indicated would, in normal times, be carried out by the proper Church authorities. Since, however, the Conciliar Church is not Catholic, no binding action can be expected from that source. Nor, in any case, has such action, to my knowledge, ever been attempted by that Church.

To contend that John Paul II is, or may be, a material heretic but not a formal heretic is ridiculous for this is equivalent to saying that, although he has said and done things which are manifestly heretical, he is not guilty of heresy because he has not consciously and willingly and obstinately (pertinaciously) maintained a heretical position. In other words, he really means well and just doesn't know any better. Is not this utterly preposterous? The man who is supposed to be the head of the Church, the Vicar of Christ, is not a formal heretic because of his ignorance of the teaching of the Church and what constitutes heresy? Incredible! If John Paul II is a material heretic, as he assuredly is, then he is likewise a formal heretic because he most certainly knows what he is doing! But a formal heretic is not a Catholic. Hence, John Paul II, since he is not a Catholic, is not a valid pope. He is the head of the Conciliar Church—the non-Catholic "pope" of a non-Catholic Church.

But what is to be said in answer to those who contend that, even though a person may be firmly convinced (as I most certainly am) that John Paul II is a non-pope because of heresy, that person must keep his conviction to himself and may not publicly make such a statement? An individual who openly declares his conviction that John Paul II is not a valid pontiff is (so the objection goes) assuming to depose the pope—and that is a judgment which only the proper authorities in the Church can make. In other words, the deposition of a pope must await the formal and definitive action of the Church. True enough. But is a Roman Catholic, be he priest or layman, who is absolutely certain of the invalidity of John Paul II, thereby forbidden to voice his conviction and the reasons for it in order to persuade and convince others? To maintain that this *is* forbidden makes no sense to me. Such a person is not deposing the pope but merely striving to make known his blatant record of heresy, a record which itself invalidates John Paul II. The following quotation is very much to the point:

> A pope can only be deposed for heresy, expressed or implied, and then only by a general council. It is not strictly deposition, but a declaration of fact, since by his heresy he has already ceased to be head of the Church... (Donald Attwater, ed., *A Catholic Dictionary*, Imprimatur: Patrick Cardinal Hayes, Macmillan, 1942, p. 412, "Deposition of a Pope")

So, only a General Council of the Church can formally depose a pope. Assuredly, then, those who hold that the Chair of Peter is currently vacant (the "sedevacantists") cannot depose John Paul II. But that does not mean, nor can it mean, that we must remain silent and ignore the glaring fact that, by his heresy, John Paul II "has already ceased to be head of the Church." Such is the stark and utterly woeful reality. The heretical record of John Paul II speaks for itself—and that record loudly and clearly declares that he is no more a valid pontiff than I am. Were I to remain silent on the matter, I am absolutely convinced that I would be seriously remiss in the fulfillment of my duty as a Roman Catholic priest and would be doing a grave disservice to the Roman Catholic Church. John Paul II is a formal heretic and, as such, he cannot be a valid pope. I await his formal deposition by a General Council of the true Church in the future but do not expect to see this happen very soon. †

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