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Florence and Vatican II on Other Religions: Discontinuity or Reform?

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Florence and Vatican II on Other Religions: Discontinuity or Reform?
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Abstract: The Second Vatican Council's theology of other religions is frequently cited as an example of doctrinal discontinuity in the Catholic Church, since the language of *Lumen Gentium* 16 from Vatican II seemingly contradicts that of *Cantate Domino* from the Council of Florence. At face value, the two statements appear at odds; whereas the latter condemns non-Christians to hell, the former asserts that practitioners of other religions can be saved. However, an analysis of each document's source, authoritative level, intention, assumptions, scope, reception, and accompanying theological ideas reveals that they actually express and apply the same dogmatic principles to different time periods and cultural contexts, which constitutes authentic reform, rather than discontinuity.

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Contents

Chapter One: Discontinuity: Common Ground between Unlikely Allies	1
Section One: Vatican II’s Dueling Hermeneutics.....	1
Section Two: A Brief History of No Salvation Outside the Church (NSOC)	7
Chapter Two: Authentic Doctrinal Development	10
Section One: What Can and Cannot Change?	10
Section Two: When Can Doctrinal Expression and Application Change?.....	15
Section Three: A Methodology.....	19
Chapter Three: Exploring Florence	28
Chapter Four: Exploring Vatican II	43
Chapter Five: Comparing Cantate Domino to Lumen Gentium.....	56
Chapter Six: The Implications of this Study.....	65
Section One: More than Just One Doctrine	65
Section Two: A Nuanced Approach to NSOC	72
Section Three: Concluding Remarks	75
Bibliography.....	78

Chapter One: Discontinuity: Common Ground between Unlikely Allies

Section One: Vatican II's Dueling Hermeneutics

“Wake up, O man! For your sake God became man”¹ On December 22, 2005, Pope Benedict XVI quoted St. Augustine to begin his first Christmas address to the Roman Curia. After honoring the recently deceased Pope John Paul II, the Holy Father turned his attention to a subject of great importance to him and his predecessor: the Second Vatican Council’s legacy. Benedict, as the former Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, oversaw much of the council’s implementation since 1981. Twenty-four years later, he recognized that the Council’s realization still faced major stumbling blocks. In his speech, he portrayed the Council’s legacy as embattled, stating, “On the one hand, there is an interpretation that I would call ‘a hermeneutic of discontinuity and rupture.’”² This response to the council, according to the Holy Father, was spearheaded by theologians who characterized the council’s theology as discontinuous with that of its predecessors for the sake of promoting progressive doctrinal innovations. On the other hand, Benedict praised the “hermeneutic of reform,”³ which he described as “renewal in the continuity of the one subject-Church which the Lord has given to us.”⁴ Benedict’s choice to make this battle over the council’s legacy the subject of his first Christmas address to the curia demonstrates how the council’s interpretation and implementation, even forty years after its closure, were still relevant.

¹ St. Augustine of Hippo, *Sermon 185*, 1, quoted by Pope Benedict XVI, *Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to The Roman Curia Offering Them His Christmas Greetings*, December 22, 2005
https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2005/december/documents/hf_ben_xvi_spe_20051222_roman-curia.html

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.; in the German translation of this address, the term “subject-Church” or “der Erneuerung des einen Subjekts Kirche” can also be translated as “the one subject, the Church.”

Almost a decade after Benedict's address, the historian and theologian Gavin D'Costa categorized the progressive "hermeneutic of discontinuity" as one of four responses to Vatican II. In his *Vatican II: Catholic Doctrines on Jews and Muslims*, he labels this interpretation as "Type One: Historical Methods and Discontinuity" because it invokes historical records, from arguments on the council floor to diary entries from cardinals, to argue that many of the council fathers desired to promote progressive ideas in the Church but were inhibited by conservative minorities who forced compromises in the council's final documents. Type one theologians believe that the "spirit of the council," or the true intentions of progressive council fathers, would gradually be realized in the following decades.⁵ In his address, Benedict summarized this group's position: "In a word: it would be necessary not to follow the texts of the Council but its spirit [...] It claims that [the texts of the Council] are the result of compromises in which, to reach unanimity, it was found necessary to keep and reconfirm many old things that are now pointless."⁶ Given their approval of discontinuity, this thesis will refer to "Type One" theologians as "pro-discontinuity." D'Costa accuses these theologians of favoring historical context over the content of the approved texts, themselves, thereby replacing bishops with historians as magisterial authorities.⁷

On July 26, 1986, before becoming pope, Cardinal Ratzinger, sent a letter to Father Charles Curran, a professor of moral theology at the Catholic University of America, informing him that he could no longer teach because of his public dissent against the sexual ethics taught in Pope Paul VI's encyclical *Humanae Vitae*.⁸ Curran believed that the post-conciliar Church

⁵ Gavin D'Costa, *Catholic Doctrine on Jews and Muslims* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014) 15-16.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Gavin D'Costa, *Catholic Doctrine on Jews and Muslims*, 22.

⁸ Joseph Ratzinger, *Letter to Charles Curran*, July 25, 1986, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19860725_carlo-curran_en.html

needed to move away from its rigid sexual doctrines; he professed that the Church's doctrine could and should change, noting "All, however, must recognize that Catholic social teaching changed quite a bit over the course of the twentieth century, whereas there has been little or no change in official Catholic sexual teaching."⁹ Criticizing Benedict's general overemphasis on doctrinal continuity, Curran noted slavery, usury, the purpose of marriage, religious freedom, and the role of women in society as examples in which Church teaching fundamentally changed.¹⁰ He urged "We must continue to work for change in light of what we think is best for the church but always in the awareness that we may be wrong [...]."¹¹ Curran's focus on discontinuity in Church teaching demonstrates how many theologians were eager to embrace the hermeneutic of discontinuity for the sake of progress. For pro-discontinuity theologians like Curran, the Second Vatican Council was just the beginning of a larger process of discontinuity.

While progressive responses to Vatican II were the primary target of Pope Benedict's criticisms, such positions are not the only ones that dispute the council's continuity. D'Costa calls the second category of response to the council "Type Two: Theological Methods and Continuity." It includes traditionalists who rightfully insist that continuity is vital for the Church but claim that the council's documents violate such continuity. This group, which will be referred to as "anti-discontinuity," is divided into two subcategories. First, there are those who reduce the council's documents to mere pastoral suggestions that hold little weight and thus can be ignored. These theologians will be referred to as inconsequentialists (D'Costa labels them "Two-A"). They cite Pope John XXIII's words at the council's convocation as evidence that conciliar teachings are merely strategies that hold little doctrinal value:

⁹ Charles Curran, *Loyal Dissent: Memoir of a Catholic Theologian* (Washington DC: Georgetown Press, 2006) 199.

¹⁰ Charles Curran, *Catholic Social Teaching and Pope Benedict XVI* (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2014) 28.

¹¹ Charles Curran, *Loyal Dissent: Memoir of a Catholic Theologian*, 240.

The salient point of this Council is not, therefore, a discussion of one article or another of the fundamental doctrine of the Church which has repeatedly been taught by the Fathers and by ancient and modern theologians, and which is presumed to be well known and familiar to all. For this a council was not necessary.¹²

Inconsequentialists claim that this means the council did not authoritatively comment on any doctrines, even though John more likely meant the council would not confine itself to one doctrinal question, like how Chalcedon specifically focused on Christ's natures. Nevertheless, they corroborate their claim with a quote from Pope Paul VI speaking to a general audience in 1966: "[...] given the pastoral character of the council, it avoided pronouncing in an extraordinary way dogmas endowed with the note of infallibility."¹³ On the other hand, some theologians, which this thesis calls "consequentialists" (Two-B according to D'Costa), believe that certain documents indeed changed doctrine and, therefore, must be reversed. Many of them believe that because the Second Vatican Council erred, the papacy and college of bishops forfeited their authority, which can only be restored by a rejection of the council's false doctrines. D'Costa associates these theologians with *Sedevacantism*. In summary, anti-discontinuity theologians hold that either the council never intended on defining new doctrines, so its teachings can be ignored, or it did define new, unwarranted doctrines, so its teachings must be reversed.

D'Costa uses Bishop Marcel Lefebvre as an example of someone who not only embraced an anti-discontinuity response to the council but fluctuated between consequentialism and inconsequentialism positions throughout his career. Lefebvre initially adopted an inconsequentialist position, that the council's teachings were merely pastoral and thus not

¹² Pope John XXIII, *Opening Speech to the Council*, in Walter Abbott, *The Documents of Vatican II* (El Monte: New Win Publishing, 1966) 715.

¹³ Pope Paul VI, *Udienza Generale*, January 12, 1966, https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/it/audiences/1966/documents/hf_p-vi_aud_19660112.html trans. Will Deatherage.

doctrinally binding.¹⁴ Teachings on ecumenism and interreligious dialogue, for example, were inconsequential precisely because they were not infallible. Once it became clear that the Church had no intention of abandoning such positions, Lefebvre changed his approach. He denied the validity of the council altogether, embracing a consequentialist mentality. In his “Profession of Faith,” Lefebvre writes “[...] we refuse and have always refused to follow the Rome of neo-modernist and neo-Protestant tendencies which clearly manifested themselves in the Second Vatican Council and after the council in all the reforms which issued from it.”¹⁵ His *I Accuse the Council* gained notoriety for its rejection of the post-conciliar papacy altogether, as he suggests “It is only since the council that the Church, or at least churchmen in possession of key posts, has taken a direction definitely opposed to tradition and to the official Magisterium of the Church.”¹⁶ Lefebvre, like Curran, also faced consequences for embracing the hermeneutic of discontinuity when he was excommunicated for invalidly ordaining bishops.¹⁷

It is worth mentioning the final two types of response to Vatican II identified by D’Costa. “Type Three” theologians accept the council as continuous. This thesis will refer to “Type Three” as pro-continuity, which is the alternative to a discontinuous council. Other theologians, “Type Four,” claim that the council was too late in addressing a world that had shifted from modernism to postmodernism.¹⁸ Because of its lateness, the council was altogether irrelevant. D’Costa associates this group with some liberation and feminist theologians.¹⁹ Since Type Four involves many of the same themes embraced by pro-discontinuity theologians, it will not be explored further in this thesis.

¹⁴ Gavin D’Costa, *Catholic Doctrine on Jews and Muslims*, 39.

¹⁵ Marcel Lefebvre, “Profession of Faith,” November 21, 1974, <https://fsspx.news/en/content/23598>

¹⁶ Marcel Lefebvre, *I Accuse the Council* (Dickinson, Texas: Angelus Press, 1982) xi.

¹⁷ See Pope John Paul II, *Ecclesia Dei*, July 2, 1988.

¹⁸ Gavin D’Costa, *Catholic Doctrine on Jews and Muslims*, 15-16.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 15-16.

Theologian Richard John Neuhaus observes, “The irony is in the agreement between Lefebvre and the liberal party of discontinuity.”²⁰ Additionally, the consequences of either side being correct are similar. If even one conciliar principle is demonstrably discontinuous, it could throw into question several other conciliar statements, as well as the Church’s claim to infallibility altogether. In fact, Curran blames the Church’s reluctance in changing its stance on certain issues on its fear that an admission of discontinuity would undermine its teaching authority. He theorizes, “Likewise, papal sexual teachings, like social teachings, would not be able to claim absolute certitude on complex and specific issues.”²¹ Thus, while progressive and traditionalist conciliar critics may differ in their approval of discontinuity, the confirmation of their shared belief in the council’s discontinuity could seriously damage the Church’s credibility.

Backtracking to D’Costa’s third category, pro-continuity theologians like Ratzinger defend the council’s continuity of principles while acknowledging that its expressions and applications of Christ’s eternal laws did, indeed, change. In his Christmas curia address, Benedict claims “It is precisely in this combination of continuity and discontinuity at different levels that the very nature of true reform consists.”²² Precisely how there can be discontinuity at different levels will be explored later in this thesis. Later in his address, Benedict mentions a few theological issues that sparked these debates regarding continuity, such as the Church’s initial rejection but later acceptance of historical-critical scriptural methods, the separation of Church and state, and religious tolerance. Another prime example of alleged discontinuity is the Church’s seemingly changed stance on the doctrine of *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* or “no

²⁰ Richard John Neuhaus, “What Really Happened at Vatican II,” *First Things*, October 2008, as quoted in D’Costa, *Catholic Doctrine on Jews and Muslims*, 38.

²¹ Charles Curran, “A Catholic Call for Dissent,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 21, 2005, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2005-apr-21-oe-curran21-story.html>

²² Pope Benedict XVI, “Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI To The Roman Curia Offering Them His Christmas Greetings.”

salvation outside the Church” (hereafter abbreviated as NSOC). The following section will give an overview of this contested doctrine’s history and introduce two of its most seemingly discontinuous expressions.

Section Two: A Brief History of No Salvation Outside the Church (NSOC)

The earliest mentions of NSOC come from the second century, as the apologist Justin Martyr writes “So, let no one persuade oneself, let no one deceive oneself: outside this house, that is, outside the Church no one is saved.”²³ Ignatius of Antioch affirms this, warning “Be not deceived, my brethren: if anyone follows a maker of schism, he does not inherit the Kingdom of God.”²⁴ That said, several Church Fathers considered the Hebrew prophets of the Old Testament and pagan philosophers like Socrates to be within the confines of the Church,²⁵ since Christ was partially revealed to them as universal wisdom, or *logos*. However, once a Jew or pagan had heard the Gospel, their conversion was required for their salvation. Christianity’s legalization accelerated this idea, as evidenced by the notably harsher tone of Fulgentius of Ruspe, a disciple of St. Augustine’s:

Not only all pagans, but also all Jews and all heretics and schismatics, who finish their lives outside the Catholic Church, will go into eternal fire [...] No one, howsoever much he may have given alms, even if he sheds his blood for the name of Christ, can be saved, unless he remains in the bosom and unity of the Catholic Church.²⁶

²³ Justin Martyr, *Homilies on Joshua* 3, 5; translated in *Patrologia Graeca* (Paris: J. P. Migne's Imprimerie Catholique, 1866) 12:841-42.

²⁴ Ignatius of Antioch, *Letter to the Philadelphians* 3, 3; the *Apostolic Fathers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965) 2:242-43.

²⁵ See Justin Martyr, *I Apology* XLVI, 1-4; trans. by Jean Danielou, *Gospel Message and Hellenistic Culture* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1973) 40-41.

²⁶ Fulgentius of Ruspe, *De fide ad Petrum*, 38. 81. *Corpus Christianorum* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1968) 91A, p. 757.

Pope Boniface VIII's *Unam Sanctam*, written in 1302, similarly expresses “and we firmly believe in her [the Church] and sincerely confess her outside of whom there is neither salvation nor remission of sins.”²⁷ but NSOC's clearest manifestation would not come until a century later.

The Council of Florence was convened from 1431 to 1449. A passage from one of its conciliar bulls, *Cantate Domino*, reads similar to Fulgentius's NSOC statement. It declares:

[The Holy Roman Church] firmly believes, professes, and preaches that ‘none of those who are outside of the Catholic Church, not only pagans,’²⁸ but also Jews, heretics, and schismatics, can become sharers of eternal life, but they will go into the eternal fire ‘that was prepared for the devil and his angels’ [Mt 25:41] unless, before the end of their life, they are joined to her. And the unity of the Church's body is of such great importance that the Church's sacraments are beneficial toward salvation only for those who remain within her, and [only for them] do fasts, almsgiving, and other acts of piety and exercises of Christian discipline bring forth eternal rewards. ‘No one can be saved, no matter how many alms he has given, and even if he sheds his blood for the name of Christ, unless he remains in the bosom and unity of the Catholic Church.’^{29,30}

This statement not only affirms the traditional doctrine of NSOC, but it also condemns specific religions and eliminates the possibility of virtuous non-Christians, even those who die for Christ, being saved. By extension, even infants and catechumens seem to meet a similar fate. Given its harshness, Florence lends itself as an excellent representative for the strongest magisterial expression of NSOC.

Vatican II mentions non-Christians in several of its documents, particularly in *Lumen Gentium*, *Nostra Aetate*, *Dignitatis Humanae*, and *Ad Gentes*. While the latter two primarily concern religious liberty and missionary activity, respectively, *Nostra Aetate* directly comments on the value of other religions. It states:

²⁷ Pope Boniface VIII, *Unam Sanctam*, November 18, 1302, in Heinrich Denzinger, *Compendium of Creeds, Definitions, and Declarations on Matters of Faith and Morals: Latin – English*, 43d edition, edited by Peter Hünermann (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2012) [hereafter abbreviated DH] 870.

²⁸ *Cantate Domino* cites Fulgentius of Ruspe, *De fide seu de regula fidei ad Petrum* 42, no. 85.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 38, no. 81.

³⁰ Council of Florence, *Cantate Domino*, in DH 1351.

The Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions. She regards with sincere reverence those ways of conduct and of life, those precepts and teachings which, though differing in many aspects from the ones she holds and sets forth, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men.³¹

The document then praises some of the very non-Christian religions that Florence condemns.

While such praise does not explicitly contradict *Cantate Domino*, *Lumen Gentium* 16 appears more problematic:

Those who, through no fault of their own, do not know the Gospel of Christ or his Church, but who nevertheless seek God with a sincere heart, and, moved by grace, try in their actions to do his will as they know it through the dictates of their conscience – those too [may] achieve eternal salvation.³²

The notion that non-Christians can attain salvation seems to contradict Florence's claim that all non-Christians, even those who die in Christ's name, are bound for hell. The Second Vatican Council's theology of other religions, therefore, seemingly contradicts that of the council of Florence.

The apparent contradiction between *Cantate Domino* and *Lumen Gentium* lends itself as an excellent case study for evaluating the Second Vatican Council's doctrinal continuity. If the hypothesis of the council's opponents, that the council's theology of other religions is incompatible with that of Florence, is correct, then it will validate their overarching hypothesis that Vatican II, itself, is indeed discontinuous with its predecessors. On the other hand, proving that Vatican II's theology of other religions is not discontinuous cannot validate all of its doctrines, but doing so would at least show that one of its most disputed teachings can be justified, while also providing theologians with a framework to evaluate other allegedly discontinuous doctrines.

³¹ Second Vatican Council, *Nostra Aetate*, 2, in Austin Flannery, *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post-Conciliar Documents* (Boston: St. Paul Editions, 1975) 739.

³² Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium* 16, in Flannery, *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post-Conciliar Documents*, 367-368.

Chapter Two: Authentic Doctrinal Development

Section One: What Can and Cannot Change?

Before evaluating the continuity between Florence and Vatican II, it is necessary to know how doctrines function and how they can develop. St. Thomas Aquinas holds that God can only be spoken of through analogy, since He is inexhaustibly beyond human comprehension, yet His likeness is imbued into creation.¹ Essentially, though the Church can never arrive at a perfect understanding of God, Christ sent the Holy Spirit upon His Apostles and endowed the latter with the authority to bind their followers to beliefs and behaviors that they considered befitting of the Christian life.² This is the basis for the Church's ability to express and apply Christ's eternal teachings to a changing world. Thus, whereas Christ's principles and laws remains the same, the expression and application of such laws may change.

Regarding doctrinal expression, St. John Henry Newman writes "The idea which represents an object or supposed object is commensurate with the sum total of its possible aspects [...] and in proportion to the variety of aspects under which it presents itself to various minds is its force and depth, and the argument for its reality."³ Essentially, the more a thing is experienced and reflected on, the more its accompanying idea grows. Newman continues, "The development then of an idea is not like an investigation worked out on paper, in which each successive advance is a pure evolution from a foregoing, but it is carried on through and by means of communities of men and their leaders and guides."⁴ For Newman, the Church is the

¹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Second and Revised Edition, trans. by Fathers of the English Dominican Province, *New Advent*, bk. I, q. 13, a. 10.

² Matthew 16:17-19.

³ John Henry Newman, *The Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (South Bend: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989) I.1.1.20.

⁴ *Ibid.*, I.1.1.5.

community that investigates theological ideas and the successors to the Apostles are its leaders. That does not, however, mean that the Church is blessed with a perfect knowledge of God. Given the world's vastness and humankind's cognitive limitations, no expression can fully exhaust a concept. This is why Newman writes:

There is no one aspect deep enough to exhaust the contents of a real idea, no one term or proposition which will serve to define it [...] Thus, with all our intimate knowledge of animal life and of the structure of particular animals, we have not arrived at a true definition of any one of them, but are forced to enumerate properties and accidents by way of description.⁵

When applied to the context of the Church's infallible teaching authority, ecclesiologist Francis Sullivan writes "Infallibility guarantees the truth of the proposition. It does not guarantee that the statement in which the proposition was enunciated was a fully adequate expression of the divine reality which it was intended to express."⁶ This rule applies to Church councils as well, as Sullivan continues "When we speak of a council 'defining' a doctrine, the word 'define' does not mean to give the exact meaning of a term [...] but rather to give a definitive judgment on a question."⁷ Therefore, while Christ's divine teaching stays the same, the Church's language must change to accommodate the development of its understanding of that teaching throughout history.

Christianity, as a religion of praxis, asserts that knowledge of God is useless without its application. Theologian Louis Bouyer writes "Nonetheless, revealed truths have been given [to] us by God primarily to make us live the life that God has destined for us, not primarily to equip us for the acquisition of speculative knowledge."⁸ A constantly changing world, therefore,

⁵ Ibid., I.1.1.3.

⁶ Francis J. Sullivan, SJ, *Magisterium: Teaching Authority in the Catholic Church* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2002) originally published in 1983 with identical pagination, 80.

⁷ Ibid., 60.

⁸ Louis Bouyer, *Introduction to the Spiritual Life* (Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 2013) originally published in 1961, 44.

requires that the Church not only adjust how it expresses its doctrine but also how it applies its doctrinal principles to situations. Newman affirms this, writing “Principles require a very various application according as persons and circumstances vary and must be thrown into new shapes according to the form of society which they are to influence.”⁹ Furthermore, the challenges faced by different cultures and time periods can help guide an institution towards a more perfect expression and application of its principles. For example, the fifth century Church could not have condemned in vitro fertilization (IVF), since the technology did not exist yet. When Pope John Paul II addressed IVF, he reinforced the pre-existing doctrine that procreation is inseparable from the sexual act. Thus, the application of old principles to new situations can strengthen, develop, and clarify doctrine. As Bouyer writes, “[God] makes use of experiences which are analogous, but always increasingly profound, increasingly engaging, not only our minds but our whole being, so as to have us penetrate little by little into the central truth which he has held in his heart from the beginning.”¹⁰

Crucially, the Church does not express or apply doctrines arbitrarily. Sullivan emphasizes how all infallibly proclaimed doctrines must be connected to revelation in some form: “Only what is in itself revealed can be proposed to be believed with such faith.”¹¹ Furthermore, since Christ’s teachings are primarily concerned with fostering a person’s love for God and neighbor, doctrines, as the First Vatican Council makes clear, can only pertain to matters of faith and morals.¹² Jesuit systematic theologian Piet Fransen affirms this: “the authority of the councils is only one particular application of the general authority of the Church in matters of faith and

⁹ John Henry Newman, *The Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, I.2.1.3.

¹⁰ Louis Bouyer, *Introduction to the Spiritual Life*, 51.

¹¹ Francis J. Sullivan, SJ, *Magisterium: Teaching Authority in the Catholic Church*, 131.

¹² First Vatican Council, *Dei Filius* 2.

morals and in those that concern the Christian life.”¹³ For example, the Church could not infallibly teach the Second Law of Thermodynamics or declare that William Shakespeare never existed. In fact, the Jesuit theologian Robert Bellarmine, whom Newman cites, acknowledges how “[...] it is possible for the Pope, even as pope, and with his own assembly of councillors, or with General Council, to err in particular controversies of fact, which chiefly depend on human information and testimony,”¹⁴ precisely because the primary purpose of doctrinal pronouncements is to comment on matters of faith and moral action. For example, the council of Trent declares:

If anyone denies that sacramental confession was instituted and is necessary for salvation by divine law; or says that the matter of confessing secretly to a priest alone, which the Catholic Church has always observed from the beginning and still observes, is at variance with the institution and command of Christ and is a human invention, let him be anathema.¹⁵

Trent’s claim that private Confession to individual priests existed in the early Church is inaccurate; public Confession led by bishops, not priests, was the earliest form of the Sacrament.¹⁶ However, when this anathema is read in the context of illuminating faith and morals, it becomes clear that the council was more concerned with justifying the validity of private Confession to priests than it was with painting an accurate historical picture. Therefore, the Church’s expressions and applications of doctrine must be consistent with Christ’s immutable teachings, and the Church can only claim to teach infallibly in matters of faith and morals.

¹³ Piet Fransen. "The Authority of the Councils," *CrossCurrents* 11, no. 4 (1961) accessed April 22, 2020. www.jstor.org/stable/24456974. 357.

¹⁴ Robert Bellarmine, cited in John Henry Newman, *The Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, I.2.2.11.

¹⁵ Council of Trent, Session 14, Chapter 1, Canon 6, DH 1706.

¹⁶ Herbert Vorgrimler, *Sacramental Theology* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1992) 217.

Moreover, there is a key difference between teaching something infallibly and teaching it definitively. As Sullivan writes, “[...] it is one thing to teach that something involves a serious moral obligation; it is quite another to claim that this teaching is now absolutely definitive, and demands irrevocable assent.”¹⁷ Since the Church often must react quickly to make moral judgments, it can bind its members to certain beliefs and practices temporarily, so long as said bindings are in accordance with revelation. For example, when Protestantism and Enlightenment philosophy threatened Christendom, the Church banned certain books, only to later retract its censorship once the age of pluralism demonstrated how different ideologies could coexist. As Fransen writes “The Word of the Father became incarnate in the Son, God’s Word, and continues to become incarnate in the Church. ‘To become incarnate’ means to adopt the human condition in all its fullness, and while doing so, to recreate it from within according to the rhythm of the Trinitarian life.”¹⁸ Therefore, to preserve the Trinitarian life, the Church must use its infallibility to make judgments on moral situations, even when such decisions are not definitive. This distinction will be crucial in this thesis’s analyses of both Florence and Vatican II.

In summary, all language about God, even from conciliar and papal sources, is analogous because God is infinitely beyond comprehension. It is this chasm between perfect concept and imperfect humankind that necessitates the Church re-express and re-apply God’s unchanging truths as her understanding of them evolves and encounters new ethical quandaries. When this occurs, her doctrine develops. At the same time, the guidance of the Holy Spirit ensures that the Church’s doctrinal development is authentic. Now, the question arises about when it is

¹⁷ Francis J. Sullivan, SJ, *Magisterium: Teaching Authority in the Catholic Church*, 147.

¹⁸ Piet Fransen. "The Authority of the Councils," 359.

appropriate for these expressions and applications to change and precisely how such changes occur.

Section Two: When Can Doctrinal Expression and Application Change?

According to Newman, doctrinal development occurs for logical (Y is known from X because X implies Y), historical (Y is known because of discovery X), moral (Y is known because of the implications X has on the Christian life), and metaphysical (Y is known because of X that comes from contemplation of God) reasons.¹⁹ Given the immense historical gap between Florence and Vatican II, this section will explore the following ways in which historical changes may necessitate a change in doctrinal expression or application: 1) if the language used in expressing the doctrine has significantly changed in meaning, 2) if the historical circumstances that justified a doctrinal application have changed, and 3) if a historical reflection causes the Church's understanding of concepts associated with a doctrine to change. All these instances are contingent on a changing world, rather than changing theological foundations.

1) The language used to express the doctrine has significantly changed in meaning

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* contains what has become a controversial passage: “Basing itself on Sacred Scripture, which presents homosexual acts as acts of grave depravity, tradition has always declared that ‘homosexual acts are intrinsically disordered.’”²⁰ The phrase “intrinsically disordered” is an Aristotelian term which refers to activities that are not in accord with a thing's nature. Since it is in a person's nature, according to the Church, to have sex for the sake of procreation and homosexual couples cannot procreate, their sexual desire is “disordered.”

¹⁹ See Gavin D'Costa, *Catholic Doctrine on Jews and Muslims*, 29.

²⁰ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Citta del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1993) n. 2357.

Modern psychology, however, has a very different definition of the term. The *American Psychological Association* defines a “disorder” as “a group of symptoms involving abnormal behaviors or physiological conditions, persistent or intense distress, or a disruption of physiological functioning. See also mental disorder.”²¹ By keeping its Aristotelian language or failing to clarify it, the Church risks unintentionally misleading readers to think that the Church sees homosexual acts as driven by a psychological disease that could be treated with drugs or therapies. This hardly captures the Church’s intention of commenting on the nature of human sexual actions and in fact could contradict the Church’s commitment to human dignity. While the *Catechism’s* language has not changed, the case could be made that in changing it, the Church could clarify a teaching that otherwise has become widely misunderstood.

2. The historical circumstances that justified a doctrinal application have changed

In 2018, Pope Francis amended a section of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* concerning the death penalty. Whereas before it read, “Assuming that the guilty party's identity and responsibility have been fully determined, the traditional teaching of the Church does not exclude recourse to the death penalty,”²² it now reads “Consequently, the Church teaches [...] that the death penalty is inadmissible because it is an attack on the inviolability and dignity of the person, and she works with determination for its abolition worldwide.”²³ Many of Francis’s critics accused him of doctrinal discontinuity, but the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) defended the Holy Father, claiming that this updated doctrinal expression reflected authentic development that stemmed from the Church’s unwavering commitment to human dignity. Luis Ladaria, prefect of the CDF, quoted John Paul II’s encyclical *Evangelium Vitae*:

²¹ “Disorder,” *American Psychological Association*, <https://dictionary.apa.org/disorder>

²² *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2267.

²³ *Ibid.*

“Modern society in fact has the means of effectively suppressing crime by rendering criminals harmless without definitively denying them the chance to reform.”²⁴ Essentially, whereas pre-twenty-first century governments lacked the capacity to safely incarcerate threats to public safety for extended periods of time, modern governments can accomplish this previously implausible task. Additionally, criminals today are offered rehabilitation, an opportunity to repent and know Jesus, on a scale unseen before in human history. Thus, the Church’s continued endorsement of the death penalty would contradict its commitment to the preservation of human dignity. The 2018 change demonstrates how the mitigation of certain historical circumstances, such as the inherent danger of keeping criminals alive, necessitates that the Church must reapply its principles to different cultural paradigms to remain consistent.

3. A historical reflection causes the Church’s understanding of concepts associated with a doctrine to change

In 1864, Pope Pius IX published his *Syllabus of Errors*, which condemned religious tolerance and the separation of Church and state.²⁵ The French Revolution and Italian Unification, both touting such Enlightenment beliefs, involved brutal attempts to purge the Church’s influence from society. These bloody secularist conflicts heavily skewed Pius’s perception of tolerance and separationism, which led to his condemnation of the two ideas in his *Syllabus*. However, other nations, such as the United States, incorporated tolerance and separationism into society without compromising Christianity’s role in daily life. In fact, some American bishops were so confident in their nation’s brand of liberalism that one of them declared at Vatican I that a day would soon come in which Catholics in the United States would

²⁴ John Paul II, “Evangelium Vitae,” 27, as quoted in Luis Ladaria, “Letter to the Bishops regarding the new revision of number 2267 of the Catechism of the Catholic Church on the death penalty,” August 1, 2018, <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2018/08/02/180802b.html> 3.

²⁵ Pope Pius IX, *The Syllabus of Errors*, 1864, nn. 15 and 55, respectively.

outnumber those in Italy, a comment met with jeers and laughter.²⁶ As secular European powers became less hostile to the Church and American theologians like John Courtney Murray rose to prominence, the Church realized the benefits of the two Enlightenment ideas. The Church learned how dialogue, rather than force, was a more successful evangelization strategy in the modern world. Likewise, the Gallican controversy of the 1800s, in which European bishops were controlled by their patron politicians, demonstrated how separationism could shield the Church from corruption that came from integralism.²⁷ The Church's continued opposition to tolerance and separationism would have contradicted the Church's fundamental call to effectively evangelize and purge evil from its ranks. Tolerance and separationism were praised in the Second Vatican Council, particularly in *Dignitatis Humanae*. Thus, the Church rightfully adjusted its application of its unchanging principles upon gaining a refined understanding of two historical concepts.

Conclusion

Pope Benedict stated in his Christmas address, "Basic decisions, therefore, continue to be well-grounded, whereas the way they are applied to new contexts can change."²⁸ This section has highlighted a handful of conditions in which the expression or application of doctrines can validly change. It has shown how changes in theological expression or application are not necessarily caused by fluctuations in principles, but rather by changes in historical circumstances. In fact, this chapter has demonstrated that the Church is not only obligated to restate or reapply its fundamental principles to changing situations but that failing to do so would

²⁶ Joseph F. Kelly, *The Ecumenical Councils of the Catholic Church: A History* (Collegeville: Order of Saint Benedict, 2009) 3.

²⁷ See Klaus Schatz, *Papal Primacy: From Its Origins to the Present* (Collegeville: The Order of St. Benedict, Inc., 1996) originally published in 1990, 128-147.

²⁸ Pope Benedict XVI, "Address Of His Holiness Benedict XVI To The Roman Curia Offering Them His Christmas Greetings."

ironically yield discontinuity. This is why the theologian Henri Bouillard writes, “a theology which is not up to date is a false theology.”²⁹ Like a prism, more angles of the eternal Word of God are continuously revealed by the light of history, and when new parts are brought to light, Christianity, being a religion of praxis, must adjust its expressions of teaching. So far, it has been discussed how the Church’s doctrine develops and when such developments must occur. A precise methodology for evaluating the continuity of specific doctrines will be the focus of the next section.

Section Three: A Methodology

Now that foundations of doctrinal development have been explored, this thesis will propose some criteria by which the doctrinal continuity between Florence and Vatican II can be evaluated by. These seven criteria primarily draw from Newman, D’Costa, Fransen, and Sullivan. They include the source of the magisterial statement, the type of the statement, the intention of statement, the assumptions in the statement, the scope of the statement, the reception of the statement, and the relation to contemporary statements.

Source of statement: Who is issuing this statement?

In the United States, the authority of a law depends on the level and branch of government from which it originates. A municipal law, for example, is usually superseded by a state or federal law. Even within similar levels of authority, there are nuances; although Congress and the Supreme Court operate on the federal level, each branch has different powers. Likewise, the Church also operates via different levels of authority, from parish priests to individual

²⁹ Henri Bouillard, “Conversion and Grace in Thomas Aquinas,” in ed. Patricia Kelly, *Ressourcement Theology: A Sourcebook* (London: T&T Clark, 2020) 38.

bishops, to councils of bishops, to the bishop of Rome. The highest levels of authority in the Church are the college of bishops when they teach in unison with each other and the pope, the bishops in ecumenical councils, and the pope when he teaches infallibly (*ex cathedra*).³⁰ Though they are not as powerful as *ex cathedra* statements, popes can also teach in bulls and encyclicals; the Roman curia, especially the CDF, is also invested with a high level of authority. These mechanisms give bishops and popes a proper setting to teach infallibly, so that their opinions expressed in casual conversations or interviews are not interpreted as such. Thus, the source of the statement not only depends on who says it but also on the context in which it is said.

2. Type of statement: What degree of certainty does this statement hold?

As emphasized in the previous section, the Church is often tasked with proposing both definitive and non-definitive truths in magisterial documents. Thus, it is not correct to say that every conciliar statement or papal encyclical carries the same level of authority, as Cardinal Newman writes, “There are what may be called minor points, which we may hold to be true without imposing them as necessary [...] there are greater truths and lesser truths, points which it is necessary, and points which it is pious to believe.”³¹ To distinguish these varying levels of authority that are at play in magisterial documents, D’Costa outlines five categories of doctrinal infallibility, each of which involves a different degree of certainty based on a doctrine’s proximity to revelation. The highest level is called *De Fide*; it includes teachings from popes and councils that relate directly to teachings revealed by Jesus Christ.³² The entire Christian tradition hinges on *De Fide* doctrines. People who deny one of these teachings, such as the divinity of Christ, could hardly call themselves Christians. Sullivan reminds his readers how “Only what is

³⁰ Francis J. Sullivan, SJ, *Magisterium: Teaching Authority in the Catholic Church*, 119.

³¹ John Henry Newman, *The Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, I.2.2.2.

³² Gavin D’Costa, *Catholic Doctrine on Jews and Muslims*, 14-15.

in itself revealed can be proposed to be believed with such faith.”³³ The next level is called *Fides Ecclesiastica*. These are doctrines that, while not explicitly revealed, are inseparable from revelation and are therefore also certainly true. For example, just as saying “Jason is a human who is alive” implies “Jason’s heart is beating,” saying “Jesus is God,” a fact gained from revelation, can imply several things about His natures and wills. Christians must also believe these teachings, since they are so closely connected to revelation. *Sententia fidei proxima* is the next level of certainty, and it refers to doctrines that are taught authoritatively but not explicitly at a council or *ex cathedra*. For example, a council has never made the fact that God resurrected Christ from the dead the object of a formal definition (see the section on intention), yet Christians are obligated to believe this.³⁴ This level is often referred to as the universal ordinary magisterium. While these teachings could technically err (such as when most bishops believed in the historicity of the Genesis accounts), it is not the prerogative of the laity to question them.³⁵ Of course, these teachings, too, must be closely connected to revelation, as a universally held opinion such as “bacon is the greatest food ever created” would not hold any magisterial weight.

Whereas the levels of certainty in the preceding paragraph all demand total assent from the faithful, the remaining two levels do not. *Sententia ad fidem pertinens* are theological ideas that, though they are deduced from higher levels, are not taught infallibly but merely with a high degree of certainty. These doctrines are most likely true, but any dissent requires a very well-formed intellect and conscience. Other commonly held doctrines, though, can be debated more freely because they are far less certainly true. These are called, *sententia probabilis*, or teachings that are likely but not certainly true. For example, the opinion that original sin is a biologically

³³ Francis J. Sullivan, SJ, *Magisterium: Teaching Authority in the Catholic Church*, 131.

³⁴ Francis J. Sullivan, SJ, *Magisterium: Teaching Authority in the Catholic Church*, 56.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 57.

hereditary feature, which was widely believed by certain theologians at some points in history, but the matter has never been formally settled, could be categorized as a *sententia probabilis* doctrine.³⁶ Again, it must be emphasized how even within magisterial statements, levels of authority can vary depending on their proximity to revelation, so one must carefully analyze each proposition before making conclusions about its infallibility. Just because one sentence is phrased with language indicating infallibility, such as anathemas,³⁷ it does not mean that other sentences in the document are of the same level of authority. As the Code of Canon Law warns “No doctrine is understood to be infallibly defined unless this is manifestly demonstrated.”³⁸

3. Intention of statement: What is this statement trying to accomplish?

Piet Fransen writes “only the central assertion in a decree or a canon is defined.”³⁹ Francis Sullivan concurs, writing, “And it is a basic principle of conciliar exegesis that a council should be understood to have defined only what it clearly intended to define.”⁴⁰ According to Sullivan, an excellent example of this is the council of Constantinople’s characterization of the Church as “one, holy, catholic, and apostolic.” While the council indeed mentions that the Church has all of these qualities, it only does so in its credal statement before any of its canons. Its mention in Canon 7, “these we receive when they hand in statements and anathematise every heresy which is not of the same mind as the holy, catholic and apostolic church of God”⁴¹ is merely a descriptor of the Church, not an intended object of anathematic definition.⁴² Elevating

³⁶ Joseph F. Kelly, *The Ecumenical Councils of the Catholic Church: A History*, 3.

³⁷ As mentioned on page 11 of this thesis, human language is inherently insufficient to describe God, meaning it is easier to describe what God is not than to describe what He is; this is why the language of anathemas, or condemnations of certain theological expressions, is the preferred language used in infallible statements.

³⁸ *Code of Canon Law*, 1983, 749,3.

³⁹ Piet Fransen. "The Authority of the Councils," 370.

⁴⁰ Francis Sullivan, *The Church We Believe In: One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic* (Minneapolis: Paulist, 1988) 212.

⁴¹ First Council of Constantinople, Canon 7, from Norman P. Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, <https://www.ewtn.com/catholicism/library/council-of-constantinople--st-damasus-i-constantinople-1455>

⁴² Francis Sullivan, *The Church We Believe In: One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic*, 212.

this descriptor to a higher level of infallibility would be akin to interpreting the sentence “The most illustrious king declares that all stores are closed on Sundays” as infallibly declaring that the king is, indeed, illustrious. The intention of conciliar documents will be crucial in this thesis’s treatment of Florence and Vatican II.

4. Assumptions in statement: What changeable and unchangeable assumptions are made in the statement?

A proper evaluation of doctrinal development requires recognizing epistemological and historical assumptions from the time that could have impacted how the doctrine was expressed or applied. For example, Platonic philosophy, which was dominant throughout the first thousand years of Christianity, asserted the dominance of the spiritual over the material. Thus, it was not uncommon for theologians to recognize the Eucharist is a spiritual reality, rather than as a physical one.⁴³ With the introduction of Aristotelian metaphysics, which put a stronger emphasis on the unity of the spiritual and material, the Church began speaking about the Eucharist in terms of both a spiritual and a physical transformation, known as transubstantiation.⁴⁴ Since both Platonic and Aristotelian theologians sought to express the same reality, the divinity of the Eucharist, using different metaphysical terminology, the doctrine was re-expressed but not redefined.

Not only can epistemological assumptions change, but so can historical ones. For example, if a medieval Christian empire was threatened by a warmongering people who embraced “Religion X,” the Church, as a religious and temporal defender of its empire, might feel obligated to formally condemn this religion on the grounds of its violent and fanatic nature. However, if future generations of Religion X became peaceful and tolerant, the Church’s

⁴³ Joseph F. Kelly, *The Ecumenical Councils of the Catholic Church: A History*, 3.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

condemnation of it would no longer be adequate, since the grounds that justified this condemnation would have been nullified. Thus, every magisterial statement must be read not according to how its intended objects are understood today, rather according to how the Church understood its objects at the time.

5. Scope of Statement: To who is this statement addressed to?

Not all magisterial statements apply to the same group of people. Beyond the universal Church, they can address specific regions, demographics, orders, and even individuals.

According to St. Augustine, this diversity in doctrinal scope has scriptural roots. He writes,

Accordingly, another of our rules for understanding the Scriptures will be as follows — to recognize that some commands are given to all in common, others to particular classes of persons, that the medicine may act not only upon the state of health as a whole, but also upon the special weakness of each member.⁴⁵

Documents concerned with Christian unity, for example, often address the denomination with whom Rome seeks to restore relations with. Conversely, some magisterial statements claim to address the broader world beyond the Church. Vatican II's *Gaudium et Spes* declares "Hence this Second Vatican Council, having probed more profoundly into the mystery of the Church, now addresses itself without hesitation, not only to the sons [and daughters] of the Church and to all who invoke the name of Christ, but to the whole of humanity."⁴⁶ While, *Gaudium et Spes* was addressed to the world, *Optatam Totus*, a decree from the same council, was addressed to seminarian rectors. Applying the decree's emphasis on scriptural study to public schools would

⁴⁵ Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana*, Translated by James Shaw from *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series, Vol. 7*, Edited by Philip Schaff (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1888) Revised and Edited for *New Advent* by Kevin Knight, III.17.

⁴⁶ Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, 2, in Flannery, *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post-Conciliar Documents*, 904.

be a misapplication, since this teaching was never intended to apply to secular educational institutions. Thus, not every magisterial statement is addressed to the same audience, so they should not necessary be applied to every person.

6. Reception of statement: How did other authorities immediately react to this statement?

Cardinal Newman observes that an important part of identifying properly developed Church teaching is its “staying power,”⁴⁷ which theologians like Yves Congar describe as “reception.” For example, Pope Honorius’s acceptance of monophysitism in the seventh century was almost immediately condemned after his death.⁴⁸ A more complex example of reception is the Church’s stance on usury, which John T. Noonan extensively treats in his chapter in *Change in Official Catholic Moral Teachings*.⁴⁹ Noonan describes how Pope Pius V’s *Cum Onus* and *In Eam*, as well as Sixtus V’s *Destabilis Avaritia*, condemned the practice of usury. However, as Europe’s economy started failing because of said decretals, several cardinals and theologians circumvented the document by declaring parts of the decrees as coming from opinionated rather than revelatory origin. They also appealed to the Thomistic application of the concept of *epikeia*, the notion that a law can be broken to preserve the common good, to nullify it.⁵⁰ While the three documents that condemned usury were never explicitly repealed, their effectiveness was nullified. However, it is notable how these doctrinal amendments were fostered by ecclesial authorities, not by the faithful themselves. This demonstrates how, although the faithful can encourage ecclesial authorities to investigate theological issues (as several bankers did with

⁴⁷ John Henry Newman, *The Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, I.1.1.7.

⁴⁸ Gerald O’Collins, *Christology: A Biblical, Historical, and Systematic Study of Jesus* (2nd ed. Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2009) 200.

⁴⁹ John T. Noonan, “Usury: The Amendment of Papal Teaching by Theologians,” in *Change in Official Catholic Moral Teachings*, ed. Charles E. Curran (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 2003) 80.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 102.

usury) reception is not contingent on the laity's democratic acceptance of a doctrine, rather it depends on how ecclesial authorities respond to it, especially in the short-term.⁵¹

7. Relation to other statements: What preceding statements could qualify, modify, or nuance the statement?

Finally, a magisterial statement should not be read in isolation, rather it should be read in the context of statements that preceded it since it fits into a nexus of other ideas; it should never be interpreted in a vacuum. Similar to secular laws, theological laws often modify each other.

Conclusion

Analyzing the source, type, intention, assumption, scope, reception, and interrelation of magisterial statements can help to distinguish their abiding principles from their changeable expressions and applications. These criteria can also be used to evaluate whether two seemingly incompatible magisterial statements are discontinuous with each other, which is precisely what the following chapters will attempt to do with *Cantate Domino* from the Council of Florence and *Lumen Gentium* from the Second Vatican Council. If at least one of the documents comes from a non-authoritative source, then there is no discontinuity, since a non-authoritative authority cannot issue infallible statements. If at least one of the documents is at or below the level of *sententia ad fidem pertinens* (universal ordinary magisterium), then there is no discontinuity, since theological opinions are allowed to change over time. If the documents do not intend to comment on the same issue, there is no discontinuity, since magisterial documents can only speak authoritatively on matters they intend to address. If the documents do not share the same epistemological and historical assumptions, there is no discontinuity, since doctrinal expressions and applications can change to accommodate a changing world. If their scopes are different,

⁵¹ While this thesis acknowledges that while there is much debate surrounding the precise role of the faithful in the *sensus fidelium*, this thesis cannot allocate further time to the complex matter.

there is no discontinuity, since they address two different groups of people. If at least one of the documents was not received by the Church, then there is no discontinuity since a lack of reception severely modifies a document's authority. Finally, if the latter statement does not contradict doctrines related to the former, then this further supports the notion of no discontinuity. In summary, magisterial statements can only be considered discontinuous with each other if the two doctrines come from the same source of authority, are both at or above the level of *sententia ad fidem pertinens*, share intentions, share epistemological and historical assumptions, address the same audience, were both received into the Church, and the later one rejects the former's contemporarily accepted doctrines. Even though just one of these criteria can dispel the accusation of discontinuity, this thesis will assess *Cantate Domino* and *Lumen Gentium* based on all seven of them to build a more robust case for or against the latter's discontinuity. The following chart provides a visualization of how the two councils will be compared:

Criterion	<i>Cantate Domino</i>	<i>Lumen Gentium</i>	Comparison question	Answer
Source			Do they both come from a council or pope?	
Type			Are they both at or above <i>sententia ad fidem perdinens</i> ?	
Intention			Do they both intend on commenting on similar matters?	
Assumption			Do they share similar epistemological or historical assumptions?	
Scope			Do they both address the same audiences?	
Reception			Were they both received by the Magisterium?	
Pre-existing doctrines			Do they both accept similar pre-existing doctrines?	

Chapter Three: Exploring Florence

In 1431, Pope Martin V called a council in Basel to satisfy *Frequens*, the requirement from the council of Constance that a pope must regularly convene councils.¹ Martin, a staunch opponent of conciliarism, the movement to give the a council of bishops more authority than the pope, often intentionally sabotaged his own councils. His death that same year, however, left his successor, Eugene IV, who also opposed conciliarism but lacked diplomatic prowess, in charge of the Council of Basel. For years, the council was concerned with regulating the papacy, especially in its temporal affairs, which proved a thorn in Eugene's side. At the height of these tensions, the cardinals in Basel redirected papal income to their bank accounts, bankrupting the papacy in the process. The Holy Father's fortunes soon turned, though, as Constantinople's desperate plea for military defense against the Ottoman Empire gave him the leverage to potentially end the great schism with Orthodoxy that had divided the Church for centuries. Because the port city of Ferrara was far more accessible than Basel to Eastern travelers, Eugene transferred the council there in 1437.² Most of the bishops in Basel opposed this idea and commanded Eugene to change his plans; he refused, which led to his deposition and the election of the anti-pope Felix V. For several years, the councils coexisted until conflicts of interest and Felix's poor leadership eroded Basel's authority, and the bishops gradually transitioned to Ferrara.

Once in Ferrara, Eugene's ambassadors demanded that Eastern representatives humiliatingly take responsibility for the schism and apologize on behalf of their ancestors.

¹ Unless noted, all historical background influence on the Council of Florence is from Joseph F. Kelly, *The Ecumenical Councils of the Catholic Church: A History*, 114-120.

² Léon Van der Essen, "The Council of Florence," *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 6 (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1909) <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06111a.htm>

Conditions at the council for many Easterners were brutal and miserable.³ Eventually, a disease broke out in the city, which convinced Eugene to transfer the council to the nearby city of Florence in 1439.⁴ By the end of the council, Constantinopolitan representatives agreed that the *filioque* was not incompatible with their theology and that the pope indeed retained supremacy over all Christians. However, the pope still had to negotiate unity with other Eastern churches, such as the Armenian and Coptic Christians, which was achieved in late 1439 and 1442, respectively. Finally, the council was transferred to Rome in 1443, where negotiations with Chaldeans and Maronites continued as late as 1445. Given these ongoing negotiations, the precise date of the council's closure is disputed.

In 1442, the council approved *Cantate Domino*, Eugene's bull of unity with the Coptic Christians. This is the Florentine text that mentions NSOC (no salvation outside the Church):

[The Holy Roman Church] firmly believes, professes, and preaches that 'none of those who are outside of the Catholic Church, not only pagans,'⁵ but also Jews, heretics, and schismatics, can become sharers of eternal life, but they will go into the eternal fire 'that was prepared for the devil and his angels' [Mt 25:41] unless, before the end of their life, they are joined to her. And the unity of the Church's body is of such great importance that the Church's sacraments are beneficial toward salvation only for those who remain within her, and [only for them] do fasts, almsgiving, and other acts of piety and exercises of Christian discipline bring forth eternal rewards. 'No one can be saved, no matter how many alms he has given, and even if he sheds his blood for the name of Christ, unless he remains in the bosom and unity of the Catholic Church.'"⁶

This statement will be examined according to the criteria proposed in chapter two.

1. Source of statement? Who is issuing this statement?

Declarations of unity at the council of Florence, including *Cantate Domino*, were expressed in the form of papal bulls. Sullivan finds this significant because although the council

³ Joseph Gill, SJ, *The Council of Florence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959) 170.

⁴ Léon Van der Essen, "The Council of Florence."

⁵ *Cantate Domino* cites Fulgentius of Ruspe, *De fide seu de regula fidei ad Petrum* 42, no. 85.

⁶ Council of Florence, *Cantate Domino*, in DH 1351.

approved the document, it did not draft it. He notes how in the past, non-conciliar statements that were approved but not drafted by council fathers, such as Cyril of Alexandria's anathemas at Ephesus and Michael Paleologus's profession of faith at Lyons II, had not been recognized as holding the same authority as documents actually written by council fathers.⁷ Furthermore, Lawrence Jerome King, whose dissertation analyzed the subject of non-definitive magisterial statements, finds it notable that after union with Constantinople was achieved, which preceded negotiations with the Copts, a significant number of theologians and bishops left the council. By the time the Coptic representatives had arrived, the council's composition and procedure had significantly changed. King summarizes:

Instead of having the full council address the theological and disciplinary disagreements behind this division (as had been done in the case of the Greeks), a shortcut method was used: a handful of scholars drew up a document that purportedly summarized "Roman" theology, the Armenian envoys signed it, and Pope Eugene then presented a copy of the document to the council. Two years later, an Egyptian monk representing the Coptic Orthodox Church arrived. The same procedure was followed: a document was drawn up by a few theologians, the monk Andrew signed it, and the pope presented a copy to the council.⁸

Thus, not only could it be argued that *Cantate Domino*, as a bull that was presented at but not drafted by a council, holds lesser weight than statements drafted by council fathers, but its composition via this "shortcut method" may also lessen its weight, even as a papal bull. Nevertheless, even if the circumstances in which it was composed were less than ideal, its acceptance into the conciliar canon shows that it at least holds some noteworthy weight.

⁷ Francis A. Sullivan, *Creative Fidelity: Weighing and Interpreting Documents of the Magisterium* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 1996) 45, 60, 69-70, 77-78.

⁸ Lawrence Jerome King, *The Authoritative Weight of Non-Definitive Magisterial Teaching* (Washington DC: The Catholic University of America, 2016) 428.

2. Type of statement: What degree of certainty does this statement hold?

Given how *Cantate Domino* was arguably not of conciliar origin but instead relied on a group of theologians tasked with quickly summarizing Roman beliefs, it could be argued that its contents hold theological opinions, rather than infallible theological facts. This would make the document a statement of *sententia ad fidem pertinens*, or a theological opinion that is held almost universally. Accepting the document as anything higher would prove problematic, as King argues “[...] if someone maintains that the statement about salvation has been infallibly taught, it follows that the other tenets in these two documents [on Armenians and Copts] have been infallibly taught as well.”⁹ For example, just a few paragraphs before its NSOC declaration, *Canate Domino* states: “Therefore, it commands all who glory in the Christian name, at whatever time, before or after baptism, to cease from circumcision, since whether or not they place their hope in it, it cannot be observed at all without the destruction of their eternal salvation.”¹⁰ Likewise, in the decree to the Armenians, the authors mention “thus the priesthood is conferred by handing over the chalice with wine and the paten with the bread.”¹¹ Interpreting *Cantate Domino*’s mention of NSOC as infallibly binding would mean that these other statements must be treated similarly, which is problematic given the popular practice of circumcision since Florence, as well as Pius XII’s declaration that the matter of Holy Orders is the imposition of hands.¹² Thus, the evidence suggests that *Cantate Domino* has the weight of *sententia ad fidem pertinens*, a commonly held theological opinion.

3. Intention of statement: What is this statement trying to accomplish?

⁹ Ibid., 428-429.

¹⁰ Pope Eugene IV, *Cantate Domino*.

¹¹ Pope Eugene IV, *Exultate Deo*, November 22, 1439, in DH 1325.

¹² See Pope Pius XII, *Sacramentum Ordinis*, November 30, 1947.

As mentioned in chapter two,¹³ Sullivan emphasizes that the intention of a council impacts the degree of infallibility its statements hold. Again, if the council of Constantinople merely mentions the Church being “one, holy, catholic, and apostolic” but does not intend to define it as such, then such qualities are not the object of infallible definitions.¹⁴ As mentioned in chapter one,¹⁵ *Cantate Domino* paraphrases Fulgentius of Rome:

Fulgentius	<i>Cantate Domino</i>
<p>“Not only all pagans, but also all Jews and all heretics and schismatics, who finish their lives outside the Catholic Church, will go into eternal fire [...] No one, howsoever much he may have given alms, even if he sheds his blood for the name of Christ, can be saved, unless he remains in the bosom and unity of the Catholic Church.”¹⁶</p>	<p>““none of those who are outside of the Catholic Church, not only pagans,¹⁷ but also Jews, heretics, and schismatics, can become sharers of eternal life, but they will go into the eternal fire ‘that was prepared for the devil and his angels’ [...] ‘No one can be saved, no matter how many alms he has given, and even If he sheds his blood for the name of Christ, unless he remains in the bosom and unity of the Catholic Church.’”¹⁸</p>

However, the council clearly had different intentions than the Church Father. Fulgentius was a follower of St. Augustine whose primary concern was combatting Pelagianism, which taught

¹³ See page 22.

¹⁴ Francis Sullivan, *The Church We Believe In: One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic*, 212.

¹⁵ See page 8.

¹⁶ Fulgentius of Ruspe, *De fide ad Petrum*, 38. 81. *Corpus Christianorum* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1968) 91A, p. 757.

¹⁷ *Cantate Domino* cites Fulgentius of Ruspe, *De fide seu de regula fidei ad Petrum* 42, no. 85.

¹⁸ Council of Florence, *Cantate Domino*, in DH 1351.

justification on merit, rather than faith.¹⁹ Thus, it made sense for him to repudiate those of other religions who thought they could achieve salvation without Christ's grace. It should be noted that other Augustinian Church Fathers, such as Prosper of Aquitaine, disagreed with Fulgentius's harsh expression, which demonstrates a lack of consensus of early theologians on this issue.²⁰ Florence, on the other hand, was not concerned with justification; its purpose was not to condemn Pelagians or define doctrines on soteriology or eschatology, but rather to re-establish unity with the East and end certain practices, such as circumcision. Because of this, its bulls invoked credal language, rather than that of canons and anathemas, which are common indicators of infallible statements in conciliar documents. In fact, none of *Cantate Domino*'s anathemas mention the issue of NSOC. This is because Church did not seek to formally comment on NSOC, therefore it did not define anything on the matter.

4. Assumptions in statement: what changeable and unchangeable assumptions are made in the statement?

Sullivan parses *Cantate Domino*'s NSOC statement into a logical syllogism that many medieval theologians might have believed:

Premise 1: Any person who is guilty of infidelity will not be saved

Premise 2: Jews, pagans, heretics, and schismatics are all infidels

Conclusion: Therefore, all Jews, pagans, heretics, and schismatics are condemned²¹

Since it involves the salvation of non-Christians, Sullivan's syllogism pertains more to Fulgentius's intention than it does to Florence's. Nevertheless, this syllogism is worth exploring.

¹⁹ See Jacques Dupuis, SJ, *Towards a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2001, originally published in 1997) 92.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Francis A. Sullivan, *Salvation Outside the Church? Tracing the History of the Catholic Response* (Mahway, NJ: Paulist, 1992) 66-69.

Premise 1 is an undeniable fact; it is a *De Fide* doctrine that Christ will condemn those who deny Him.²² Premise 2, however, is not a fact. Chapter one explored the general consensus among Church Fathers,²³ that those who had never been exposed to the Gospel were capable of attaining salvation through the natural *logos* of wisdom, but once the Gospel had been preached to them, there was no excuse for them not to convert.

By the height of Christendom, it was assumed that the Gospel had indeed been preached to the ends of the Earth, as Sullivan describes “We have good reason to understand this decree in the light of what was then the common belief that all pagans, Jews, heretics and schismatics were guilty of the sin of infidelity, on the ground that they had culpably refused either to accept the true faith or to remain in it.”²⁴ In fact, one of Thomas Aquinas’s categories of infidelity involves “unbelief [...] by way of opposition to the faith; in which sense a man refuses to hear the faith, or despises it, according to Isaiah 53:1.”²⁵ While the Angelic Doctor indeed believed in invincible ignorance as a path of salvation for those who had never heard the Gospel, even he was convinced that the entire globe had been evangelized to sufficiently to demand conversion.²⁶ The “discovery” of the New World proved this assumption false, and the splintering of Western Christianity after the Reformation shattered the Church’s monopoly on interpreting the Gospel message that it had enjoyed for centuries. This will be more thoroughly explored in a later section.

Further complicating matters is the way the Church perceived other religions. For example, as Jacques Dupuis writes,

²² See Matthew 5.

²³ See page 7.

²⁴ Francis Sullivan, *Salvation Outside the Church? Tracing the History of the Catholic Response*, 67.

²⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Second and Revised Edition, trans. by Fathers of the English Dominican Province, *New Advent*, bk. II-II, q. 10, a. 1.

²⁶ Gavin D’Costa, *Catholic Doctrine on Jews and Muslims* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014) 95.

Islam presented itself as a new faith whose ardor – and fanaticism – sent it to conquer the whole world. While having its roots in the faith of Abraham, to Christian eyes it also presented itself as a Christian heresy for, while Jesus Christ was recognized in the Qur'an as a prophet of God greater than Moses, he was second to Muhammad [...] Historical events did the rest. Islam began to invade and dominate eastern Christianity, and from that base threatened the rest of Christendom.²⁷

The first major encounters between Christianity and Islam were not ones of dialogue, but of war and existential threats. Thus, when documents like *Cantate Domino* condemn other religions, they do not do so with an impartial or objective understanding of said religions. To be pagan not only meant rejecting the Christian God, but it meant embracing the destructive, warmongering, vile behaviors that the Church associated with those religions. Centuries later, once interreligious dialogue emerged from pluralistic societies and showed a far greater intersection between Christian values and those of their counterparts than had been considered before, these assumptions about other religions were also proven false. As the next section will argue, though, this statement of NSOC was likely not even directed at Jews, pagans, schismatics, and heretics.

5. Scope of statement: to who is the statement addressed?

As explained in addressing the third criterion, *Cantate Domino*'s aims included affirming doctrinal unity between the Roman Church and its Coptic counterpart and condemning certain Eastern cultural behaviors as incompatible with the Christian faith. The audience whom this document seeks to influence, therefore, is likely not the entire Roman Catholic Church but the Coptic Church. Even if this can be proven otherwise, a key word prevents *Cantate Domino* from commenting on the status of other religions. The second half of the passage says "No one can be saved, no matter how many alms he has given, and even if he sheds his blood for the name of Christ, unless he remains [*permanserit* in Latin] in the bosom and unity of the Catholic

²⁷ Jacques Dupuis, SJ, *Towards a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 98-99.

Church.”²⁸ The word “perseveres” is significant because to persevere in union with the Church would imply a pre-existing unity. Obviously, many Jews and pagans were never in perfect union with the visible Church, implying that perhaps this passage was not directed at those groups of people, rather it was directed at Christians (especially the Copts) who dared consider defying the Roman bishop’s authority. Since the scope of the document seems to be Christians who were commanded to come into union with Rome, it would be unwise to apply this document’s expression of NSOC to those who never belonged to the visible Church in the first place.

6. Reception of statement: How did other authorities react to this statement?

Evidently, the unity between East and West established by the Florentine bulls did not last, leading Yves Congar to categorize them as non-received.²⁹ It could be argued that the political and military pressure that Eastern patriarchs felt nullifies the weight these documents might hold in matters of ecumenism. A similar logic has been used to invalidate Pope Vigilius’s condemnation of Chalcedonian theologians in 547 when he was placed under extreme duress by the emperor Justinian.³⁰ While this may invalidate the council’s ecumenical aims, it does not necessarily invalidate all of its doctrinal expressions, such as NSOC. However, another global event may have done so. Not even half a century after *Cantate Domino*’s publication, the “discovery” of the New World threw the assumption that the Gospel had been sufficiently preached throughout the entire world into serious question.³¹ Almost immediately, theologians not only began arguing that these native peoples, who were deprived of the Gospel message for millennia, could have attained salvation in a similar way the pagans and Jews before Christ had,

²⁸ Council of Florence, *Cantate Domino*, in DH 1351.

²⁹ Yves M.-J. Congar, “Reception as an Ecclesiological Reality,” trans. John Griffiths, in *Election and Consensus in the Church*, ed. Giuseppe Alberigo and Anton Weiler, *Concilium* 77 (no. 8, vol. 7) (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972) 57-58.

³⁰ For an extensive treatment of this controversy, see Schatz, *Papal Primacy: From Its Origins to the Present*, 52-54.

³¹ See Francis A. Sullivan, *Salvation Outside the Church? Tracing the History of the Catholic Response*, 97-98.

but some even argued that if the Gospel had been presented to them in an unfitting manner, they could reject it and still be saved. In 1539, Francisco de Vitoria, citing a prominent cardinal, wrote, “it is rash and imprudent of anyone to believe something (especially in matters such as these, concerning salvation) unless one knows it to be from a trustworthy source.”³² The Church was well-aware of some of the brutal tactics employed by colonists, Bartolome de Las Cases describing them as “bearded messengers armed to the teeth with terrible weapons.”³³ Thus, not even one century after *Cantate Domino*’s publication, well-respected theologians and church officials publicly defied the Florentine description of NSOC.

In the following centuries, more theologians distanced themselves from Florence’s interpretation of NSOC. In 1646, the Spanish cardinal John De Lugo wrote “A Jew or other non-Christian could be saved; for he could have supernatural faith in the one God and be invincibly ignorant about Christ.”³⁴ For Sullivan, this statement is especially important. He writes,

And yet here we have a Catholic theologian, teaching in Rome, who dared to suggest not only that people who had never heard of Christ might be saved, but that some Jews, Moslems, and heretics might not be guilty of the sin of unbelief and, in that case, might find salvation through their sincere faith in God and contrition for their sins.³⁵

Magisterially, the Florentine understanding of NSOC was opposed by Pope Pius V’s 1567 bull *Omnibus Afflictionibus*, which formally condemns the propositions “All the works of the unbelievers are sins, and the virtues of the philosophers are vices,”³⁶ and “Purely negative infidelity in those among whom Christ has been preached is a sin.”³⁷ The Florentine expression

³² Francisco de Vitoria *De Indis*, q. 2, a. 4 in *De Indis recenter inventis, et De jure belli Hispanorum in barbaros*, ed. Walter Schotzel (1539; Tübingen: Mohr, 1952) 76.

³³ Bartolome de Las Casas, *History of the Indies*, ed. And trans. Andree M. Collard (New York: Harper, 1971 [1552]) 194.

³⁴ John De Lugo, *De virtute fidei divinae*, disp. 12, n. 104, Lyon, 1646, vol. 3, p. 300; ed. Vives, Paris, 1868, vol. 1, 425, quoted in Dupuis, *Towards a Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 119.

³⁵ Francis A. Sullivan, *Salvation Outside the Church? Tracing the History of the Catholic Response*, 97-98.

³⁶ Pope Pius V, “Ex Omnibus Afflictionibus,” 25, in DH 1925.

³⁷ *Ibid.* 68, DH 1968.

of NSOC faced its most significant setback yet in 1690 when Pope Alexander VIII condemned the Jansenist propositions that “Pagans, Jews, heretics, and others of this kind do not receive in any way influence from Jesus Christ, and so you will rightly infer from this that in them there is a bare and weak will without any sufficient grace,”³⁸ and “The infidel necessarily sins in every action.”³⁹

Centuries later, Pope Pius IX, often cited as a bastion of traditionalism, proclaimed in a speech to the curia, “Yet, on the other hand, it must likewise be held as certain that those who are in ignorance of the true religion, if this ignorance is invincible, are not subject to any guilt in this matter before the eyes of the Lord.”⁴⁰ Finally, in 1949, the CDF issued a formal judgment on the Florentine interpretation of NSOC when the priest Leonard Feeney said “Therefore, no one will be saved who, knowing the Church to have been divinely established by Christ, nevertheless refuses to submit to the Church or withholds obedience from the Roman Pontiff, the Vicar of Christ on earth.”⁴¹ In response, the CDF wrote:

However, this dogma [NSOC] must be understood in that sense in which the Church herself understands it. [...] Therefore, that one may obtain eternal salvation, it is not always required that he be incorporated into the Church actually as a member, but it is necessary that at least he be united to her by desire and longing. However, this desire need not always be explicit, as it is in catechumens⁴²

The astonishing ease with which theologians and cardinals publicly contradicted the Florentine understanding of NSOC within one century of the council’s closure, as well as the later magisterial condemnations of the Florentine interpretation, demonstrates how Florence’s expression of NSOC was hardly ever received into the Church.

³⁸ Pope Alexander VIII, *Errors of the Jansenists*, 5, DH 2305.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 8, DH 2308.

⁴⁰ “Singulari Quadam” Pope Pius IX (1854) in Josef Neuner and Jacques Dupuis, eds., *The Christian Faith in the Doctrinal Documents of the Catholic Church* (Staten Island: Alba House, 1996) 1009-11.

⁴¹ “Letter of the Holy Office to the Archbishop of Boston (August 8, 1949)” trans. By EWTN translation, <https://www.ewtn.com/catholicism/library/letter-to-the-archbishop-of-boston-2076>

⁴² *Ibid.*

7. Relation to other statements: What preceding statements could qualify, modify, or nuance the statement?

There are at least four doctrines that greatly modify Florence's expression of NSOC. First, as Sullivan states, "The bishops of the council of Florence certainly believed that God is good, that being good he is just and that a just God does not condemn innocent people to the fires of hell."⁴³ Thus, while the predominant theological opinion of the time might have been that Jews, pagans, heretics, and schismatics were guilty of infidelity, the prevailing theological fact was that God does not unjustly condemn anyone to hell.

Several Thomistic doctrines also modify the Florentine understanding of NSOC. The Angelic Doctor believes that the gravity of mortal sins can be lessened by a person's lack of awareness of their gravity. He writes, "the lack of years hinders the use of reason and excuses him from mortal sin, wherefore, much more does it excuse him from venial sin, [...] But when he begins to have the use of reason, he is not entirely excused from the guilt of venial or mortal sin."⁴⁴ While this logic is often applied to minors who are incapable of maturely reasoning, it can also be applied to non-Christians who are unaware of the gravity of contradicting Christian doctrine. They are spiritually immature, from the point of view of the Christian Faith, so the gravity of the mortal sin of infidelity is lessened. This theory is popularly known as "invincible ignorance." Jacques Dupuis even suggests that death may present people with a moment of immediate spiritual maturity, a "moment of death which [...] would make such a moment of decision possible not only for individuals when reaching the age of reason but before as well [...] since death by its nature and in all cases involves a 'moment of truth' or of final decision."⁴⁵

⁴³ Francis Sullivan, *Salvation Outside the Church? Tracing the History of the Catholic Response*, 67-68.

⁴⁴ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, bk. I-II, q. 89, a. 6.

⁴⁵ Jacques Dupuis, SJ, *Towards a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 117.

Since God's sanctifying grace is not confined to His visible sacraments, it is possible for those who are invincibly ignorant to attain salvation out of their desire for the Gospel. In

Aquinas's words:

Secondly, the sacrament of Baptism may be wanting to anyone in reality but not in desire: for instance, when a man wishes to be baptized, but by some ill-chance he is forestalled by death before receiving Baptism. And such a man can obtain salvation without being actually baptized, on account of his desire for Baptism, which desire is the outcome of "faith that worketh by charity," whereby God, Whose power is not tied to visible sacraments, sanctifies man inwardly.⁴⁶

While Aquinas uses unbaptized catechumens as the prime example of this circumstance, he opens the possibility for the salvation of non-catechumens as well by stating that God could always save people by giving them the gift of private revelation.⁴⁷ Of course, given Aquinas's assumption that everyone in the world was sufficiently aware of the Gospel, he could only think of a person who was raised in the wilderness as an example of this extraordinary form of salvation.⁴⁸ In his commentary on Peter Lombard's *Sentences*, he writes, "If anyone born among barbarian nations were doing *quod in se est*, God would reveal to him what is necessary for salvation either by a God-given inspiration or through a teacher he would send to him."⁴⁹

It would be uncharitable to assume that the Florentine council fathers were unaware of these passages; instead, it is more likely that, as mentioned in the section on intent,⁵⁰ the council had no desire to authoritatively speak on the matter.

Conclusion

⁴⁶ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, bk. III, q. 68, a. 2.

⁴⁷ Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones disputatae De Veritate*, q. XIV, a.11., ad. 1um, translation in Jacques Dupuis, SJ, *Towards a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 115.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ Thomas Aquinas, II Sent., dist. XXVIII, q. 1, a. 4, ad 4um, translation in Jacques Dupuis, SJ, *Towards a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 115.

⁵⁰ See page 32.

This chapter has demonstrated that it would be problematic to categorize *Cantate Domino*'s expression of NSOC as an infallible statement. Though it was endorsed by a council and pope, neither the council fathers nor the pope actually drafted it. It seems to present a widespread theological opinion, or a *sententia ad fidem pertinens*, rather than a de fide doctrine, does not seek to define any soteriological or eschatological doctrines, makes changeable assumptions about other religions, and it is aimed at a very small portion of the Christian population. Finally, several doctrines that argued in favor of salvation for non-Christians had already been accepted before the council, and within a century of its conclusion, well-respected theologians and authorities already rejected its expression. In summary:

Criterion	<i>Cantate Domino</i>	<i>Lumen Gentium</i> 16	Comparison question	Answer
Source	Rushed theologians, approved by an ecumenical council		Do they both come from a council or pope?	
Type	Most likely <i>sententia ad fidem pertinens</i> (popular theological opinion)		Are they both at or above <i>sententia ad fidem perdinens</i> ?	
Intention	Unity with Coptic Christians.		Do they both intend on commenting on similar matters?	
Assumptions	Christianity had been sufficiently preached, non-Christians willingly rejected Christ		Do they share similar epistemological or historical assumptions?	
Scope	Coptic Christians		Do they both address the same audiences?	
Reception	Almost immediately rejected by magisterial authorities		Were they both received by the Magisterium?	
Pre-existing doctrines	God's transcendence of the visible sacraments, baptism by desire, invincible ignorance		Do they both accept similar pre-existing doctrines?	

At first glance, *Cantate Domino*'s expression of NSOC seems rather weak, though its conciliar approval still gives it considerable weight. The next chapter will subject the Second Vatican Council's *Lumen Gentium* to the same set of criteria.

Chapter Four: Exploring Vatican II

This chapter will analyze *Lumen Gentium* with the same set of criteria the last one did with *Cantate Domino*. It will then compare documents to determine whether or not its theology of other religions is discontinuous with that of Florence.

In 1959, just three months into his papacy, Pope John XXIII announced that he would convene a council, Vatican II, whose purpose would be to engage the Church with the modern world and modern ways of thinking.¹ As the council's constitution *Gaudium et Spes* mentions, "At all times the Church carries the responsibility of reading the signs of the time and of interpreting them in the light of Gospel, if it is to carry out its task."² The council was quite diverse; at its start it consisted of 1,041 European bishops, 956 American bishops, 379 African bishops, and 300 Asian bishops, making it by far the most globally diverse council in history. John XXIII also invited expert lay theologians, known as *periti*, to serve on the council's committees. These *periti* included many controversial theologians, such as Karl Rahner and John Courtney Murray, whose integration of modern philosophy into theology had been criticized by neo-Thomists. Thus, Vatican II was demographically and intellectually diverse on a scale not seen in prior councils. This had not always been the plan, though.

According to ecclesiologist Richard Gaillardetz, the council's ante-preparatory and preparatory commissions, which consisted mostly of bishops of the Roman curia, was offended by John XXIII's request that they consult the global bishops before drafting plans for the

¹ For a concise overview of Vatican II, see Joseph F. Kelly, *The Ecumenical Councils of the Catholic Church: A History*, 174-203.

² Second Vatican Council, "Gaudium et Spes," 4.

council.³ Conversely, many bishops from across the globe were concerned about the committee's Roman-heavy composition. In fact, the response to the preparatory commission's proposed conciliar schema (which, for example, planned for the entire council be conducted in Latin) from bishops and theologians across the globe was overwhelmingly negative.⁴ Yves Congar, Karl Rahner, and Edward Schillebeeckx were among these critics, with the latter requesting that four of the seven schemata be revised.⁵ This tension between bishops of the curia, who tended to be more conservative, and international participants carried into the council. Once the council began, its first order of business was the election of conciliar commissions. The curialists from the ante-preparatory and preparatory commissions were expected to sweep these elections, having conveniently distributed a list of those who had served on those commissions to participants. Cardinal Lienart of Lille, France objected to this vote, asking if bishops could caucus and propose their own lists of candidates.⁶ This suggestion was met with overwhelming applause and likely changed the course of the council.

The council's first session focused on producing documents about the liturgy and divine revelation.⁷ The latter's development is representative of the divisions between the curia and international bishops, as its schema was lauded by conservative bishops like Cardinal Alfredo Ottaviani but criticized by a majority of the bishops for promoting two sources of revelation (as opposed to one), ignoring Jewish scriptural interpretations, insisting on the historicity of the Gospels (including Christ's literal words), and exalting the Latin Vulgate.⁸ The Holy Father ultimately demanded that the schema be revised by a commission that included both

³ Richard Gaillardetz, "Why Vatican II Didn't Fail," lecture given April 2014, https://richardgaillardetz.files.wordpress.com/2014/04/what_we_can_learn_from_vatican_ii.pdf 4.

⁴ Ibid., 7.

⁵ Ibid., 8.

⁶ Ibid., 12.

⁷ Joseph F. Kelly, *The Ecumenical Councils of the Catholic Church: A History*, 188.

⁸ Ibid.

conservative and progressive bishops. This final document would eventually be called *Dei Verbum*.

The final document discussed during the first session was titled *De Ecclesia*, whose topic was ecclesiology. It came from the same commission that drew up the early *Dei Verbum* and was also highly criticized for promoting triumphalism, clericalism, and juridicism.⁹ Thus, it was determined that this document, too, would be extensively reworked. In mid-1963, John XXIII wrote *Pacem in Terris*, which is notably the first encyclical addressed to “all men of good will,” rather than to the Church. Shortly after the encyclical’s publication, the Holy Father died. Pope Paul VI succeeded him and inaugurated the second session of the council in 1963, which dedicated more time to the ecclesiology document, which eventually became *Lumen Gentium*. Much of this constitution’s development was chronicled by the theologian Yves Congar, a member of the council’s theological commission, in his diaries. Like many of the council’s early critics Congar was initially disdained by the council’s curia-dominated preparatory commissions.¹⁰ In fact, at a certain point, he even considered resigning.¹¹ However, Congar accredits the postponement of the conciliar commission vote as the council’s saving grace.

Section sixteen of the final document, *Lumen Gentium*, contains a passage pertaining to NSOC:

Those also can attain to salvation who through no fault of their own do not know the Gospel of Christ or His Church, yet sincerely seek God and moved by grace strive by their deeds to do His will as it is known to them through the dictates of conscience. Nor does Divine Providence deny the helps necessary for salvation to those who, without blame on their part, have not yet arrived at an explicit knowledge of God and with His grace strive to live a good life.¹²

⁹ Ibid., 189.

¹⁰ William Henn, “Yves Congar and ‘Lumen Gentium,’” *Gregorianum* 86, no. 3 (2005): <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23582406> 565.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium* 16.

The passage seemingly contradicts *Cantate Domino*'s claim that all non-baptized, regardless of their deeds, will burn in the eternal fires of hell. It will be evaluated by the same seven criteria as its predecessor.

1. Source of Statement: Who is issuing this statement?

Each document from the Second Vatican Council was composed by commissions that included a diverse mixture of bishops and theologians. A document's final approval required a two-thirds majority vote from the bishops (though the closest a vote ever got was 93-7%), as well as the Holy Father's approval. *Lumen Gentium* was approved by a vote of 2,151 to 5 (an astonishing 99.7-0.3% vote!); it was, of course, approved by Pope Paul VI. As mentioned in this chapter's introduction, the council's geographical representation was unprecedented. Given the difficult requirements for approval of this document, as well as the council's composition, it is clear that the source of *Lumen Gentium* is the college of bishops in union with the pope.

2. Type of statement: What degree of certainty does this statement hold?

Joseph Kelly notes how Vatican II was the first ecumenical council not to use any canons or anathemas when issuing doctrinal statements.¹³ This reflected John XXIII's desire to focus on using the language of mercy, rather than a harsh, condemnatory tone.¹⁴ Years later in an address to a general audience, Paul VI reflected: "given the pastoral character of the council, it avoided pronouncing in an extraordinary way dogmas endowed with the note of infallibility."¹⁵ This is why Sullivan writes, "Since [Vatican II] chose not to define any new dogmas, it would not be heretical to deny any of its teachings unless the matter were already a dogma of catholic faith."¹⁶ This corresponds to a passage from *Lumen Gentium*'s appendix, which was written in a response

¹³ Joseph F. Kelly, "The Ecumenical Councils of the Catholic Church: A History," 184.

¹⁴ See Pope John XXIII, *Opening Speech to the Council*, in Abbott, *The Documents of Vatican II*, 715.

¹⁵ Pope Paul VI, *Udienza Generale*.

¹⁶ Francis J. Sullivan, SJ, *Magisterium: Teaching Authority in the Catholic Church*, 62.

to inquiries about the constitution's magisterial weight and published alongside *Lumen Gentium* in the *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*: "Taking into account conciliar practice and the pastoral purpose of the present council, the sacred synod defined as binding on the Church only those matters of faith and morals which it has expressly put forward as such."¹⁷

Since *Lumen Gentium* does not invoke the language of anathemas and canons that are traditionally associated with binding doctrines, it might appear that its theology merely represents general theological opinion, or *sententia ad fidem pertinens*. However, its documents required the near consensus of a virtually universal group of bishops, so perhaps it would be more appropriate to categorize them as coming from the universal ordinary magisterium, or the *sententia fidei proxima* level. This would allow for the council to avoid making definitive pronouncements that are associated with canons and anathemas while still binding the faithful to obey them. In other words, *Lumen Gentium* may have issued authoritative but non-definitive statements.¹⁸ Furthermore, according to the 1985 Extraordinary Session of the Synod of Bishops, which clarified the interpretation of Vatican II's documents, its status as a dogmatic constitution means its ideas and themes are essential in interpreting the entire council.¹⁹ A rejection of *Lumen Gentium* inevitably jeopardizes the rest of the council's teachings. Therefore, given the universal agreement among bishops at the council, as well as the 1985 synod's emphasis on its status as a dogmatic constitution, this thesis categorizes *Lumen Gentium* as containing *sententia fidei proxima* teaching.

3. Intention of statement: What is this statement trying to accomplish?

¹⁷ Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*, explanatory note, in Austin Flannery, *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, 423.

¹⁸ Francis J. Sullivan, SJ, *Magisterium: Teaching Authority in the Catholic Church*, 61.

¹⁹ Synod of Bishops, *The Final Report of the 1985 Extraordinary Synod*, December 8, 1985, <https://www.ewtn.com/catholicism/library/final-report-of-the-1985-extraordinary-synod-2561>

Lumen Gentium is primarily concerned with ecclesiology. It answers the question “who is the people of God?” by describing how different groups of people are related to the Church. First, it affirms that the Church of Christ “subsists,” or most fully exists,²⁰ in the Roman Catholic Church.²¹ Then it describes how other Christian churches are in partial unity with the Church through their sacraments. Finally, section 16 explores the role other religions play in relation to the Church. According to Congar, the chapter containing it (chapter two) involved an immense amount of care and attention.²² He writes “We believe [...] that chapter 2 on the People of God, as it was finally drawn up and voted by the assembly (September 17, 1964), has the greatest promise for the theological, pastoral and ecumenical future of ecclesiology.”²³ Joseph Kelly acknowledges how the subject of other religions was pervasive throughout the entirety of the council, making the passage crucial to the council’s desire to directly comment on other religions. It affirms that people who have “not yet received the Gospel”²⁴ are ordered towards God’s people and that those with invincible ignorance can be saved. Furthermore, other religions can prepare their followers to receive the Gospel, though they must still be preached to.²⁵ *Lumen Gentium* 16’s intention, therefore, is to address the relationship between Catholicism and non-Christian religions and comment on their members’ potency for salvation.

4. Assumptions in statement: what changeable and unchangeable assumptions are made in the statement?

²⁰ Francis Sullivan, *The Church We Believe In: One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic*, 28.

²¹ Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*, 8.

²² William Henn, “Yves Congar and ‘Lumen Gentium,’” 582.

²³ Yves Congar, “D’une Ecclésiologie, de communion dans l’œuvre de Yves Congar,” 129 in *ibid.*, 585.

²⁴ Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium* 16.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

As mentioned in chapter three's analysis of Florence's reception, the Church's understanding of other religions vastly changed between the Middle Ages and the 1960s.

D'Costa writes:

The earlier negative categorization of Jews and Muslims as heretics in the tradition is ironically now the basis for the positive view of them at Vatican II. Jewish and Muslim monotheism, the presupposition of their heresy, could shine through now, unclouded by their alleged rejection or/and perversion of Christ [...] A historical change of perception of these religions, not a change of doctrine about them as such, was a key factor affecting the council documents.²⁶

According to D'Costa, "The [historically] earlier words 'Jews' and 'Muslims' involved explicit heresy and perversion. The later use of the words 'Jews' and 'Muslims' does not,"²⁷ thus supporting the idea that the concept of a "Jew" and a "pagan" that were condemned by Florence are fundamentally different from the modern Church's concept of a "Jew" and a "pagan."

Perhaps most emblematic of this shift was John XXIII's experience as the apostolic delegate to Turkey and Greece, which Kelly describes: "His experiences in this diplomatic post led him to see Jews, Muslims, and Orthodox Christians not as infidels and schismatics but as good, often pious, people, loved by God and hopeful of salvation."²⁸

However, what historical events changed these concepts? As Dupuis writes, "Barriers had begun to crumble, and communication was gradually developing, which brought home a new awareness of what other traditions proposed to their adherents by way of salvation and liberation."²⁹ Additionally, the Second World War's display of cruelty to other religions, especially by Nazi Germany to the Jews, not only demonstrated the horrific effects of religious persecution, but it encouraged the Church to seek solidarity with other religious groups who

²⁶ Gavin D'Costa, *Catholic Doctrine on Jews and Muslims*, 73.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Joseph F. Kelly, "The Ecumenical Councils of the Catholic Church: A History," 181-182.

²⁹ Jacques Dupuis, SJ, *Towards a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 131-132.

sought to combat the rise of atheist empires like the Soviet Union, and Maoist China.³⁰

Furthermore, the United States demonstrated that not only was religious diversity possible in society, but that the Catholic faith could thrive in such an environment. Another significant change was the average Western citizen's level of education. By the mid-20th Century, the median education level of the laity was far higher than that of their medieval counterparts.³¹

Finally, while technology made it far easier for people to learn about Christianity, its splintering into many denominations and declining influence in academia made it far more difficult to know about Catholicism. As mentioned in chapter three, Francisco de Vitoria wrote in 1539 "it is rash and imprudent of anyone to believe something (especially in matters such as these, concerning salvation) unless one knows it to be from a trustworthy source."³² Applying Florentine expectations to 20th century Catholics seems wildly inappropriate. Thus, between political, social, and educational shifts, the Church's historical experience with other religions had vastly changed, necessitating a refined expression and application of its theology of other religions.

5. Scope: To who is the statement addressed?

The Second Vatican Council was not only directed at the entire Church, but some of its documents, such as *Gaudium et Spes*, were directed at the entire world. It has already been argued that this council, perhaps more than any other in the past, embodied the universality of the catholic faith in consensus of its approved documents.

6. Reception of statement: how did other authorities immediately react to this statement?

³⁰ Joseph F. Kelly, "The Ecumenical Councils of the Catholic Church: A History," (Collegeville: Order of Saint Benedict, 2009) 193.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 180.

³² Francisco de Vitoria: *De Indis recenter inventis, et De jure belli Hispanorum in barbarous*, q.2, a.4.

Given its recent status, *Lumen Gentium*'s reception is still ongoing, though hardly any high-level ecclesial authorities have doubted its validity. The few who have were harshly rebuked by the magisterium, such as Pope John Paul II's excommunication of Marcel Lefebvre. In response to Lefebvre's invalid ordination of bishops, the Holy Father writes,

The root of this schismatic act can be discerned in an incomplete and contradictory notion of Tradition. Incomplete, because it does not take sufficiently into account the living character of Tradition, which, as the Second Vatican Council clearly taught, 'comes from the apostles and progresses in the Church with the help of the Holy Spirit. There is a growth in insight into the realities and words that are being passed on.'³³

Conversely, as mentioned in chapter one,³⁴ some theologians interpret Vatican II as the beginning of a dynamic movement, rather than as an event that issued authoritative documents, claiming that the council was not progressive enough in its statements on other religions and that the "spirit of the council" demanded the Church go beyond the constraints on it placed by traditionalists.³⁵ Benedict rebukes these critics in his Christmas address, stating, "In this way, obviously, a vast margin was left open for the question on how this spirit should subsequently be defined and room was consequently made for every whim."³⁶ In 2021, Pope Francis stated "[Vatican II] is magisterium [...] Either you are with the church and therefore you follow the council, or if you do not follow the council or you interpret it in your own way, as you wish, you are not with the church."³⁷ It has hardly been fifty years since the council's closure, though it is notable how the post-conciliar popes since then have defended it from both traditionalist and progressivist attacks.

³³ Pope John Paul II, *Ecclesia Dei* 4, quote from Vatican Council II. *Dei Verbum*, 8.

³⁴ See page 2.

³⁵ Gavin D'Costa, *Catholic Doctrine on Jews and Muslims*, 15-16.

³⁶ Pope Benedict XVI, "Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI To The Roman Curia Offering Them His Christmas Greetings."

³⁷ Cindy Wooden, "Pope Francis: Vatican II must be taught as part of church teaching, or 'you are not with the church'" *America Magazine*, February 1, 2021, <https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2021/02/01/pope-francis-vatican-ii-council-second-church-teaching-239892> Accessed March 17, 2022.

7. Relation to other statements: what preceding statements could qualify, modify, or nuance the statement?

Lumen Gentium, like all Vatican II documents, contains an abundance of citations, precisely 304 of them. The document is largely built on Aquinas's soteriology, reaffirming the necessity of the Church for salvation while leaving room for invincible ignorance. The council generally portrays other religions in a more positive light, invoking the Thomistic idea of *ordinantur* to describe their beliefs as intrinsically ordered to God.³⁸ As Wilhelmus Valkenberg notes, "this 'ordering towards' the Church is not only a preparation for the Gospel, as is often suggested, but that there is already a potential relationship thanks to the power of the grace of Christ. So Christ is somehow potentially present in these relationships."³⁹ Valkenberg mentions the Thomistic concept of potentiality, in which non-Christians are related to the Church through their potential to be members of it.⁴⁰ Aquinas writes "Those who are unbaptized, though not actually in the Church, are in the Church potentially. And this potentiality is rooted in two things—first and principally, in the power of Christ, which is sufficient for the salvation of the whole human race; secondly, in free-will."⁴¹ Aquinas describes the varying degrees of unity with Christ: There is actual union by glory, actual union by love, actual union by faith, potential union that will come, and potential union that will not come.⁴² The constitution's teaching on other religions is also largely influenced by colonial era theologians whose horizons were expanded by the "discovery" of the New World. Furthermore, the council's newfound appreciation of modern philosophy led to new insights from theologians like Yves Congar. Between Thomas Aquinas,

³⁸ Gavin D'Costa, *Catholic Doctrine on Jews and Muslims*, 61.

³⁹ Wilhelmus Valkenberg, "How Others Bear Witness to Our Faith: Aquinas and *Lumen Gentium*," *Jaarboek Thomas Instituut te Utrecht* (2013) 61.

⁴⁰ Gavin D'Costa, *Catholic Doctrine on Jews and Muslims*, 89.

⁴¹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, bk. III, q. 8, a. 3, ad. 1.

⁴² Gavin D'Costa, *Catholic Doctrine on Jews and Muslims*, 94.

colonial-era theologians, and modern theologians, *Lumen Gentium* 16 is largely rooted in and supported by previous theological ideas.

Lumen Gentium not only relies on the more than 300 citations; its theology of other religions is also supported by several other documents from the Second Vatican Council. In total, Vatican II produced four constitutions, nine decrees, and three declarations, all of which carry different magisterial weight. The 1985 synodal session on the council's reception outlined six rules for interpreting its documents: 1) the interpreter must consider all of the documents in summation and interrelation 2) with a special attention paid to the four constitutions, 3) no separation between doctrinal and pastoral matters, 4) no separation between the spirit and letter of the law, 5) a requirement of reading them in continuity, and 6) a relevance to today's times.⁴³ The first of these rules is crucial for the present analysis, since the conciliar documents are inherently interconnected. Beyond *Lumen Gentium*, the decree on missionary activity, *Ad Gentes*, the declaration on other religions, *Nostra Aetate*, and the declaration on religious freedom, *Dignitatis Humanae*, also comment on the subject of other religions. Their teachings, therefore, are worth analyzing regarding how they might modify *Lumen Gentium*.

According to D'Costa, Vatican II's theology of other religions can be summarized in five core teachings.⁴⁴ 1) Catholicism is the means to salvation, though God may save those who are invincibly ignorant. While this chapter highlighted how *Lumen Gentium* 16 directly states this, *Ad Gentes* affirms it: "So, although in ways known to himself God can lead those who, through no fault of their own, are ignorant of the Gospel to the faith without which it is impossible to please him [...]"⁴⁵ 2) At the same time, missionary activity is regarded as necessary. *Ad Gentes*

⁴³ Synod of Bishops, "The Final Report of the 1985 Extraordinary Synod."

⁴⁴ Gavin D'Costa, *Catholic Doctrine on Jews and Muslims*, 59.

⁴⁵ Second Vatican Council, *Ad Gentes*, December 7, 1965, 7, in Austin Flannery, *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, 821.

continues, “[...] the Church, nevertheless, still has the obligation and also the sacred right to evangelize.”⁴⁶ 3) The council sees other religions as ordered towards God, as *Nostra Aetate* states “From ancient times down to the present, there is found among various peoples a certain perception of that hidden power which hovers over the course of things and over the events of human history.”⁴⁷ The declaration then praises certain qualities of various religions, such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, and Islam. 4) Non-Christian religions can serve as steps in the path to holiness, as *Ad Gentes* mentions: “For these attempts need to be enlightened and healed; even though, through the kindly workings of Divine Providence, they may sometimes serve as leading strings toward God, or as a preparation for the Gospel.” 5) Finally, the council emphasizes how people of all religions are impacted by the effects of original sin. *Ad Gentes* writes, “Now, what [Christ] took up was our entire human nature such as it is found among us poor wretches, save only sin.”⁴⁸ Thus, not only are Vatican II’s teachings on non-Christian religions supported by an impressive set of sources, but its ideas are expanded upon by its accompanying conciliar documents.

Conclusion

Lumen Gentium 16 holds considerable magisterial weight in its theology of other religions. It was carefully crafted by a commission of bishops and theologians, approved by a consensus of bishops from across the world and in union with the pope, contains *sententia fidei proxima* teachings, intends to comment directly on the relationship between Catholicism and other religions, operates with a historically refined concept of other religions, teaches to the

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Pope Paul VI, *Nostra Aetate*, 2, in Austin Flannery, *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, 739.

⁴⁸ Pope Paul VI, *Ad Gentes*, 7.

universal Church, has been persistently defended by subsequent popes, and relies on an impressive library of references to justify its teachings. In summary:

Criterion	<i>Cantate Domino</i>	<i>Lumen Gentium</i> 16	Comparison question	Answer
Source	Rushed theologians, approved by an ecumenical council	Ecumenical council	Do they both come from a council or pope?	
Type	Most likely <i>sententia ad fidem pertinens</i> (popular theological opinion)	Most likely <i>sententia fidei proxima</i> (universal ordinary magisterium)	Are they both at or above <i>sententia ad fidem perdinens</i> ?	
Intention	Unity with Coptic Christians.	Build an ecclesiology that involves other religions	Do they both intend on commenting on similar matters?	
Assumptions	Christianity had been sufficiently preached, non-Christians willingly rejected Christ and posed an existential threat to Christianity	Christianity was no longer sufficiently preached and was fractured, non-Christians shared beliefs with Christians and could peacefully coexist with them	Do they share similar epistemological or historical assumptions?	
Scope	Coptic Christians	All Christians and non-Christians	Do they both address the same audiences?	
Reception	Rejected by magisterial authorities	Received by all post-conciliar popes	Were they both received by the Magisterium?	
Pre-existing doctrines	God's transcendence of the visible sacraments, baptism by desire, invincible ignorance	Similar to Florence, <i>ordinatur</i> (all religions are ordered to God), <i>potens</i> (non-Christians belong to Christ in potency), over 300 sources	Do they both accept similar pre-existing doctrines?	

For *Lumen Gentium* to be discontinuous with Florence, it would have to correspond with the latter in all of these categories, which will be investigated in the next chapter.

Chapter Five: Comparing Cantate Domino to Lumen Gentium

Now that both *Cantate Domino* and *Lumen Gentium* have been examined according to the criteria outlined in chapter two, this chapter will test them for discontinuity by comparing them. As chapter two proposed, the latter can be considered discontinuous only if it meets all of the following criteria: both come from a source capable of rendering infallible statements (a council or a pope), are infallible statements (*sententia fidei proxima* or higher), have the same intentions, rely on similar epistemological and historical assumptions, have the same scope, were received into the Church, and respected similar preceding doctrines. Although chapter two proposed that discrepancies in just one of these criteria can disprove discontinuity, analyzing each criterion can yield a more accurate conclusion, since some of them are more conclusive than others.

1. Source: Do they both come from a council or pope?

At face value, both documents, having been approved of and promulgated by councils, appear to have identical sources. However, the historical reviews from chapters three and four reveal that within the broader genre of conciliar documents, the two statements have very different origins. Given Florence's disjointed nature, which was impacted by constantly changing locations and cycling through delegations over the course of eighteen years, many of its documents were written by a revolving door of theologians with varying degrees of authority. As Lawrence King emphasized, *Cantate Domino*, though approved by the council, was not itself drafted by council fathers, rather it came from a group of theologians who were asked to hastily (and as a result rather sloppily) summarize Western theology.¹ *Lumen Gentium*, on the other

¹ King, *The Authoritative Weight of Non-Definitive Magisterial Teaching*, 428.

hand, was the product of years of planning, research, and debate between a stable group of conciliar authorities who were constantly involved in the drafting and approval of each document. The council was also quite diverse in representation; it involved both ecclesial authorities and lay theologians, though only the former could vote on the approval of final documents. Furthermore, *Lumen Gentium*'s composition and approval was not restricted to a handful of bishops from a certain region, rather it involved thousands of bishops representing as close to a consensus as the Church had ever seen before. While strictly speaking both documents were conciliar, the stark differences in who composed them and how they were written suggest a difference in source. Of course, Joseph Kelly notes how the composition of conciliar documents has changed throughout history,² but the different role authority figures played in their respective documents seems too significant to overlook. Thus, according to the criterion of source, discontinuity seems unlikely, though this could be disputed.

2. Type: Are they both at or above *sententia ad fidem pertinens*?

Both *Cantate Domino* and *Lumen Gentium* seem to exhibit features of *sententia ad fidem pertinens*, or a widespread theological opinion, albeit for different reasons. Whereas the authorship of the former, which consisted of theologians rather than council fathers, suggests that its teachings represent non-infallible popular opinions, the latter's explicit refusal to issue new doctrinal pronouncement seems to imply a similar status. However, Vatican II's theological opinions were not those of mere theologians; its documents were almost unanimously approved by council fathers. The theological opinions expressed in *Lumen Gentium* were so widely shared by bishops from across the entire globe that they may constitute the closest expression of *sententia fidei proxima*, or universal ordinary magisterium, that the Church has ever seen in a

² Kelly, *The Ecumenical Councils of the Catholic Church: A History*, 1.

council. Furthermore, *Lumen Gentium*'s status as a dogmatic constitution, coupled with the Magisterium's refusal to draw a sharp distinction between the council's pastoral and doctrinal aims, gives it a weight that transcends mere theological opinion. Finally, it has also been demonstrated that taking *Cantate Domino*'s formulation of NSOC as infallible proves problematic, since it would mean the infallibility of its other pronouncements, such as its condemnation of the circumcised and the matter of Holy Orders being the handing of the paten and chalice. Therefore, while both councils may technically represent theological opinions, the origin of those theological opinions impacts their level of authority. Even if it can be demonstrated that both documents are theological opinions, there is no discontinuity, since theological opinions are allowed to change over time. Therefore, it is highly unlikely that there is discontinuity.

3. Intention: Do they both intend on commenting on similar matters?

This is arguably where the councils start to more clearly diverge. As detailed in chapter three's historical overview, *Cantate Domino* was concerned with establishing unity between the Western and Coptic Christian communities. Its method for doing this was in hastily written papal bulls whose authors did not intend on constructing a thorough theology of other religions; nor did its council fathers intend on making any solemn pronouncements on the matter. As Francis Sullivan and Piet Fransen emphasize, a council can only define what it intends to define.³ Vatican II, on the other hand, clearly intended to develop a robust theology of other religions, specifically regarding their relationship to the Catholic Church. This is evident not only in *Lumen Gentium*'s text, but also in the recollections of conciliar participants, such as Yves Congar. *Lumen Gentium*'s intention is supported by Vatican II's declarations and decrees on

³ Piet Fransen. "The Authority of the Councils," 370; Francis Sullivan, *The Church We Believe In: One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic*, 212.

other religions, such as *Nostra Aetate* and *Ad Gentes*. Given their different intentions, there is no contradiction between *Cantate Domino*'s and *Lumen Gentium*'s theology of other religions. If anything, the former hardly addresses the matter of other religions, whereas the latter represents the Church's most thorough attempt to address the topic and should, therefore, be more highly respected.

4. Assumptions: Do they share similar epistemological or historical assumptions?

The change in assumptions between the councils can be explained by the theology of other religions of the Church Fathers. Early theologians like Justin Martyr believed in salvation beyond the visible Church through Christ as *logos*, or universal wisdom, for people who had never heard the Gospel.⁴ However, upon exposure to the Gospel, they needed to convert, lest they commit what Aquinas would later consider to be the sin of infidelity. By the Middle-Ages, even the most learned theologians, such as Aquinas, believed that the Gospel had, indeed, been preached throughout the world, meaning those who did not accept the Gospel had committed the sin of infidelity.⁵ The colonial era, however, not only proved this assumption false, but it demonstrated how preaching the Gospel poorly or uncharitably could repel people from the Faith.

By the time of the Second Vatican Council, given advances in interreligious dialogue and the horrors of intolerance displayed by Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia, the Church rediscovered how other religions participated in Christ as universal *logos* and thus, like the pagan contemporaries of the Church Fathers, could lead their practitioners towards Him.

Protestantism's loosening of Catholicism's grip over evangelization further complicated the

⁴ See Justin Martyr, *I Apology* XLVI, 1-4; trans. by Jean Danielou *Gospel Message and Hellenistic Culture* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1973) 40-41.

⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, bk. II-II, q. 10, a. 1.

clarity of evangelization, since today different denominations and sects can spread different sounding Gospel messages. This difference in historical assumptions between Florence and Vatican II so greatly impacts their commentary on other religions that it significantly alleviates the accusation of discontinuity between them.

5. Scope: Do they both address the same audiences?

Cantate Domino was directed at Coptic Christians; its teaching specifically concerns their beliefs and practices, such as circumcision. Vatican II, conversely, was not only directed toward the entire Church, but many of its documents were addressed at the entire world. It is not concerned with one historical event or culture, like the council of Florence was, rather it was an attempt to synthesize a significant amount of Roman Catholic theology for the sake of shepherding its flock. Even if it could be argued that *Cantate Domino* was meant to provide Roman Catholics with some catechesis, the word “*permanserit*,” or “perceive” in its NSOC passage implies that it addresses only Easterners who sought to deny Roman authority, rather than people born into the Jewish or pagan religions.⁶ Meanwhile, *Lumen Gentium* speaks about those who are born into other religions, rather than simply those who leave the Church. Thus, Florence’s scope is arguably limited to the Eastern churches it addresses and perhaps Christians considering separation from the Church, whereas *Lumen Gentium* and its contemporary documents were clearly directed to the entire Church and non-Christians. This difference in scope also refutes accusations of discontinuity.

6. Reception of statement: Were they both received by the Magisterium?

The reception of each statement exposes a glaring discrepancy between them. Not only was Florence as a whole rejected by Eastern Christianity, but its expression of NSOC was

⁶ See page 35 of this thesis.

soundly contradicted by Western theologians in the age of colonization barely a century after the council. It is telling that rejections of its expression of NSOC were not limited to a fringe group (during a time in which magisterial dissent was far less tolerated than it is now, no less) but were publicly stated by well-respected theologians. In the following centuries, magisterial authorities themselves, from Pope Alexander VIII's condemnations of Jansenism to the 1949 CDF's refutation of Leonard Feeney, rebuked an exclusivist interpretation of NSOC. Vatican II's theology of other religions, on the other hand, has not only been defended by subsequent popes of very different theological backgrounds, from the scholarly Benedict to the pastoral Francis, but attempts to circumvent such ideas have been rejected by formal magisterial authorities. The non-reception of Florence's NSOC expression deals a great blow to *Lumen Gentium's* alleged discontinuity.

7. Relation to other statements: Does the latter (*Lumen Gentium*) reject teachings the former (*Cantate Domino*) was dependent on?

Finally, the Florentine expression of NSOC was heavily modified by the pre-existing theological ideas of baptism by desire, invincible ignorance, God's authority beyond the visible sacraments, and a difference in moral weight between those who have not reached an age of reason. Since Florence does not operate in a theological vacuum, it must be read in tandem with these already established and respected doctrines, even if it did not express them. For example, no good Florentine theologian would have denied God's ability to dispense grace beyond His visible sacraments. Ironically, Vatican II, by appealing to St. Thomas Aquinas, articulates the medieval theology of Florence's time more comprehensibly than Florence itself did. Thus, when Florence is taken into account in tandem with its contemporary theology, the alleged contradictions between it and the Second Vatican Council seem to dissipate.

Conclusion

This chapter has compared the 1) source, 2) type, 3) intention, 4) assumptions, 5) scope, 6) reception, and 7) contemporary doctrines of *Cantate Domino* and *Lumen Gentium*. Chapter two's methodology proposed that for the Second Vatican Council to be considered as discontinuous, all of its criteria must match those of Florence. However, 1) though they both were approved by councils, only the latter was written by council fathers; only one of the documents is conciliar in the fullest sense of the term, so there is arguably no discontinuity in that respect. 2) Though both involve theological opinions, the latter's opinion was held universally by the bishops, suggesting the infallible authority of universal ordinary magisterium; there is arguably no discontinuity here either.

Whereas the preceding conclusions may be debatable, the following shed more certainty on the matter. 3) Each conciliar document has a fundamentally different intention, the former focusing on Christian unity with the East, not formally commenting on the subject of other religions, and the latter systematically and thoroughly commenting on that matter; given their different intentions, there is clearly no contradiction here. 4) The assumptions each council makes are also starkly different. The former assumes that its audience has no excuse to leave the visible Church because the Gospel has been thoroughly embedded into society. The latter, on the other hand, addresses a post-Christendom world and recognizes the value other religions can serve as preparation for Christ. There is no discontinuity here, either. 5) Florence's scope is confined to Coptic Christian audiences, and its expression of NSOC is arguably directed at Christians who are considering leaving the Church. *Lumen Gentium* is addressed to the universal Church, as well as non-Christians. Thus, the differences in scope also signify no discontinuity. 6) Florence's expression of NSOC was soundly rejected by both theological and magisterial

authorities, whereas Vatican II's has (so far) been staunchly defended; there is no discontinuity here. 7) Finally, the theological beliefs like invincible ignorance that the Florentine Fathers believed in, even if *Cantate Domino* did not acknowledge them, are invoked by *Lumen Gentium*, which demonstrates continuity between their theologies. In summary:

Criterion	<i>Cantate Domino</i>	<i>Lumen Gentium</i> 16	Comparison question	Answer
Source	Rushed theologians, approved by an ecumenical council	Ecumenical council	Do they both come from a council or pope?	Arguably not
Type	Most likely <i>sententia ad fidem pertinens</i> (popular theological opinion)	Most likely <i>sententia fidei proxima</i> (universal ordinary magisterium)	Are they both at or above <i>sententia ad fidem perdinens</i> ?	Very likely not
Intention	Unity with Coptic Christians.	Build an ecclesiology that involves other religions	Do they both intend on commenting on similar matters?	Clearly not
Assumptions	Christianity had been sufficiently preached, non-Christians willingly rejected Christ and posed an existential threat to Christianity	Christianity was no longer sufficiently preached and was fractured, non-Christians shared beliefs with Christians and could peacefully coexist with them	Do they share similar epistemological or historical assumptions?	Clearly no
Scope	Coptic Christians	All Christians and non-Christians	Do they both address the same audiences?	Clearly no
Reception	Rejected by magisterial authorities	Received by all post-conciliar popes	Were they both received by the Magisterium?	Clearly no
Pre-existing doctrines	God's transcendence of the visible sacraments, baptism by desire, invincible ignorance	Similar to Florence, <i>ordinatur</i> (all religions are ordered to God), <i>potens</i> (non-Christians belong to Christ in potency), over 300 sources	Does the latter reject teachings the former was dependent on?	Clearly no

Six out of eight criteria were clearly rejected, while the other two were likely and arguably rejected. Therefore, not just one but all of these criteria undermine claims of discontinuity between the two councils.

Chapter Six: The Implications of this Study

So far, this thesis has demonstrated how Vatican II's theology of other religions is not discontinuous with that of Florence. This chapter will explore this conclusion's implications for the more recent council's legacy and the modern understanding of NSOC in general.

Section One: More than Just One Doctrine

Lumen Gentium 16 is tethered to the council's broader mission. By extension, the prospect of discontinuity would not only call its theology of other religions into question, but it would threaten to undermine many of its other theological ideas. Since the council's conclusion, several theologians and magisterial authorities have noticed opposition to its realization. Gian Franco Svidercoschi, a biographer of Pope John Paul II, writes, "Resistance, slowness to act and shortcomings have prevented the Vatican teaching from having a profound influence in the life of a large part of the Christian people."¹ As noted in chapter one, part of this resistance comes from a desire to go beyond the intentions of the council fathers by following its "spirit."² Conversely, there is another tendency to reject the council's teachings as mistakes at different scales, with inconsequentialists being unphased by them and consequentialists seeking their formal reversal.

The Legitimacy of the council

¹ Gian Franco Svidercoschi, "In the New Millennium on the Path Indicated by the Council," 45, in *Jubilee 2000 Magazine*, N.2/ May 1997, 49.

² Pope Benedict XVI, "Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI To The Roman Curia Offering Them His Christmas Greetings."

Skepticism of a council's doctrines can often lead to skepticism of its entire legitimacy, which is exemplified in Marcel Lefebvre's story. The former bishop initially denied the validity of certain doctrines until he eventually rejected the council altogether.³ Such actions have been vehemently opposed by the post-conciliar popes, who insist on keeping the council at the center of the Christian life. In a 1986 address, Pope John Paul II proclaimed, "[Vatican II] remains the fundamental event of the life of the contemporary Church; fundamental for the deepening of the richness given to them by Christ; fundamental for the fecundal contact with the contemporary world in a prospective of evangelization [...]"⁴ Decades later, as described in chapter one, Pope Benedict XVI made the council's continuity a major topic in his first Christmas address.⁵

Pope Francis reaffirmed his predecessor's call for a hermeneutic of reform when writing to Cardinal Walter Brandmuller, "In fact, the 'hermeneutic of renewal' which our predecessor Benedict XVI explained in 2005 openly before the Roman Curia by no means refers less to the council of Trent than to the [Second] Vatican Council."⁶ One of Francis's most fervent defenses of the council's legitimacy was captured in his address to the National Catechetical Office of the Italian Episcopal Conference: "This is magisterium: the council is the magisterium of the Church. Either you are with the Church and therefore you follow the council, and if you do not follow the council or you interpret it in your own way, as you wish, you are not with the

³ Marcel Lefebvre, "Profession of Faith."

⁴ Pope John Paul II, *Speech of 30-5-1986 to the participants at the conference organized by the French School in Rome about Vatican II*, in *Teachings of John Paul II*, vol. IX, 1, 1986, p. 1724.

⁵ Pope Benedict XVI, "Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to The Roman Curia Offering Them His Christmas Greetings."

⁶ Pope Francis, "Epistula Data Valthero S.R.E. Cardinali Brandmüller Nominato Misso Extraordinario Ad Celebrationes Quadringentesimi Et Quinquagesimi Anniversarii Diei Ex Quo Patres Conciliares Opera Tridentini Concilii Terminarunt," November 29, 2013, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/la/letters/2013/documents/papa-francesco_20131119_brandmuller-450-chiusura-concilio-trento.pdf trans. By Will Deatherage.

Church.”⁷ All three post-conciliar popes have expressed the necessity of the council’s continuity, and while this thesis has demonstrated how simply one of its teachings is continuous, the rest of this chapter will explore how integral that doctrine is to the entire council’s coherence.

Ecclesiology

Msgr. Vincenzo Carbone writes “The central theme [of the council] is the Church. From this, the council explored the mystery, outlined the divine design of the constitution, deepened the nature, illustrated the mission, re-evaluated the vocation of the laity and their part in the mission of the People of God.”⁸ As noted in chapter four, *Lumen Gentium* intentionally places its analysis of non-Christian religions in its summary of the relationship between all of humanity to the Church. This is because the council, supported by Aquinas, considers non-Christians to still be in relation with the body of Christ as potential Christians.⁹ A significant aspect of this concept hinges on a model of NSOC that recognizes the goodness in which other religions can participate; it is difficult to regard non-Christians in relation to the Church if their members are automatically hell-bound. A rejection of *Lumen Gentium*’s theology of other religions, therefore, throws not only the status of non-Christians into question but it severely disrupts the constitution’s ecclesiology.

Pastoral Theology

Many conciliar critics believe that Vatican II’s “doctrinal” statements not only can be divorced from its “pastoral” ones but that the latter hold little magisterial weight and are completely reversible. Carbone clarifies, “The word ‘pastoral,’ in the mind of the Pope, did not

⁷ Pope Francis, “Address of his Holiness Pope Francis to Participants in the Meeting Promoted by the National Catechetical Office of the Italian Episcopal Conference,” January 30, 2021, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2021/january/documents/papa-francesco_20210130_ufficio-catechistico-cei.html Accessed April 24, 2022.

⁸ Vincenzo Carbone, “Vatican Council II: Light For The Church And For The Modern World,” *Jubilee 2000 Magazine*, N.2/ May 1997, 21.

⁹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, bk. III, q. 8, a. 3.

restrict itself to something practical, separated from doctrine: it is inconceivable to have [the] pastoral without doctrine, which is the first foundation.”¹⁰ Basically, pastoral activity is necessarily intertwined with doctrine. As demonstrated in chapter two, doctrine is developed by its expressions and applications in pastoral settings. In fact, Pope Francis cites the council’s pastoral approach as a building block for his own theology:

In the history of Latin America in which I was immersed, first as a young Jesuit student and then in the exercise of my ministry, we breathed an ecclesial climate that enthusiastically absorbed and made its own the theological, ecclesial and spiritual intuitions of the council and inculturated and implemented them¹¹

A reduction of Vatican II’s theology of other religions to reversible “pastoral” suggestions rather than “doctrinal,” teachings only perpetuates the misconception that there is a separation between the two categories.

Engaging the World

Vatican II’s understanding of NSOC is closely linked to its broader mission of engaging with, rather than recoiling from, the world. Carbone writes “The Council laid down the premises of the new walk of the Church in contemporary society. Even being the same as yesterday, the Church lives and realizes in Christ its ‘today,’ which took flight especially from Vatican II.”¹² This mission of the council hinges on its more positive perspective of other philosophies and religions, particularly in their ability to lead people to Christ. Again, *Cantate Domino*’s NSOC did not adequately express Aquinas’s recognition of the merits of other religions, an appreciation which was greatly accelerated in the modern world. Pope John Paul II writes:

¹⁰ Carbone, “Vatican Council II: Light For The Church And For The Modern World,” 21.

¹¹ Pope Francis, *Fraternity: Sign of the Times*, Quoted in Cindy Wooden, “Pope says Vatican II shaped his theology, including in social teaching,” *National Catholic Reporter*, September 28, 2021, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/francis-chronicles/pope-says-vatican-ii-shaped-his-theology-including-social-teaching>

¹² Carbone, “Vatican Council II: Light For The Church And For The Modern World,” 21.

With this document the Bishops of the entire world, gathered tightly around the successor of Peter, felt the loving manifestation of solidarity of the Church towards men and women of this century, scarred by two huge conflicts and going through a profound crisis of spiritual and moral values inherited from tradition.¹³

Rejecting *Lumen Gentium* 16 would severely hinder the council's capacity to speak about other religions in a "loving manifestation of solidarity,"¹⁴ for the Church could scarcely find common ground to establish mutual love and respect with what Florence characterized as utterly irredeemable faiths and ways of life.

Morality

Vatican II's understanding and application of NSOC impacts the way non-Christians are treated in society. In fact, *Lumen Gentium*'s status as a constitution makes it a foundation for the rest of the council's doctrine of other religions, including that of *Dignitatis Humanae*, the declaration on religious liberty. The council's pastoral constitution, *Gaudium et Spes*, which was written after *Lumen Gentium*, largely builds its ethical arguments on its predecessor's ecclesiology. A religion that accepts the possibility of salvation for its non-visible members will inevitably treat such people quite differently. By rephrasing NSOC in a manner that accounts for invincible ignorance and acknowledges Christ as the universal *logos*, *Lumen Gentium* finds common ground that could lead to inter-religious collaboration in the quest for social justice.

Theologian William Henn writes:

Collaboration for justice, peace and the protection of the environment constitute another important form of ecumenical activity. Christians may not sit by as disinterested

¹³ Pope John Paul II, "Gaudium et Spes: The Council Took Place, Hope for the World," 3, in *Jubilee 2000 Magazine*, N.2/ May 1997, 28.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

observers in the face of offences against human dignity and the destruction of the precious but vulnerable patrimony of creation.¹⁵

Because of *Lumen Gentium*, the Church is better equipped not only to interact with other religions but cooperate with them in a world that is often hostile to religion altogether. An abandonment of this expression drastically disrupts the Church's attitude towards and collaboration with other religions.

Ecumenism

Lumen Gentium's description of degrees of proximity to the Church allows for healing to enter between Catholicism and other Christian denominations. Henn calls this an "ecumenical breakthrough,"¹⁶ and it is greatly aided by an ecclesiology that sees some activities of non-Catholics (and possibly non-Christians) as sacramental in nature. This springs forth from the Christian desire for unity, as Henn writes "To believe in Christ means to desire unity; to desire unity means to desire the Church; to desire the Church means to desire the communion of grace which corresponds to the Father's plan from all eternity. Such is the meaning of Christ's prayer: 'Ut unum sint.'"¹⁷

Evangelization

Lumen Gentium 16 is important in furthering the Church's quest for unity between Christians and non-Christians. The council fathers wisely recognized that a crucial part of this involved recognizing the Church's past mistakes. Henn writes "Clearly Pope John intended the council to be not only an instrument for the aggiornamento of the Catholic Church, but also a

¹⁵ William Henn, "The Reception of Vatican II's Teaching on Ecumenism into the Life of the Catholic Church," 45, in *Jubilee 2000 Magazine*, N.2/ May 1997, 28.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 45.

¹⁷ Pope John Paul II, *Ut Unum Sint*, May 25, 1995, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25051995_ut-unum-sint.html 9.

contribution toward healing the wounds which divide Christian communities.”¹⁸ This practice was embraced by post-conciliar popes, as John Paul II writes,

Hence it is appropriate that, as the Second Millennium of Christianity draws to a close, the Church should become more fully conscious of the sinfulness of her children, recalling all those times in history when they departed from the spirit of Christ and his Gospel and, instead of offering to the world the witness of a life inspired by the values of faith, indulged in ways of thinking and acting which were truly forms of counter-witness and scandal.¹⁹

John Paul’s words are exemplified by the activities of the Pontifical Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, which aimed at restoring good relations between Rome and the very people Florence assumed had committed the grave sin of infidelity. These reparations are contingent on the same historical reflection on the Church’s failures to evangelize that led to *Lumen Gentium*’s revised language regarding other religions. By recognizing the goodness and salvific potency of other religions, *Lumen Gentium* is integral towards taking these first key steps towards reconciliation.

The Second Vatican Council’s theology of other religions is often accused of eliminating the need for evangelization. This could not be further from the truth; just one chapter after assuring the possibility of salvation for non-Christians *Lumen Gentium* 17 reaffirms the Church’s commitment to evangelization: “As the Son was sent by the Father, so He too sent the Apostles [...] The obligation of spreading the faith is imposed on every disciple of Christ, according to his state.”²⁰ Furthermore, the decree *Ad Gentes* is dedicated to the Church’s mission of proclaiming the Gospel and converting souls. Pope John Paul II echoes the decree’s mission in his encyclical, *Redemptoris Missio*, that is dedicated to the same subject:

¹⁸ William Henn, “The Reception of Vatican II’s Teaching on Ecumenism into the Life of the Catholic Church,” 45.

¹⁹ Pope John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, December 7, 1990, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_07121990_redemptoris-missio.html 33.

²⁰ Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium* 17.

But what moves me even more strongly to proclaim the urgency of missionary evangelization is the fact that it is the primary service which the Church can render to every individual and to all humanity in the modern world, a world which has experienced marvelous achievements but which seems to have lost its sense of ultimate realities and of existence itself.²¹

The post-conciliar popes stress that openness to dialogue with other religions is not an end in itself, rather it serves the Gospel's proclamation. The nuance offered in *Ad Gentes* and in subsequent encyclicals allows the Church to preach in a pluralistic society without descending into an exclusivism or relativism that its progressive and traditional critics, respectively, fear. That said, all three popes have expressed their concern regarding the imbalance of religious tolerance and missionary activity, which will be addressed in the next section.

Section Two: A Nuanced Approach to NSOC

Avoiding an exclusivist interpretation of NSOC

Since the Second Vatican Council, several popes have reaffirmed *Lumen Gentium's* claim that salvation is possible for those beyond the visible Church, some even reprimanding those who taught otherwise (such as John Paul II's condemnation of Lefebvre).²² In an address to the CDF, John Paul mentions "It is true that non-Christians - as the Second Vatican Council recalled - can 'gain' eternal life 'under the influence of grace', if 'they seek God with a sincere heart' (LG 16). But in their sincere search for the truth of God, they are in fact 'related' to Christ and to his Body, the Church."²³ Having grown up in a Soviet-dominated region, perhaps John Paul II was sensitive to the reality that many good people are prevented from hearing the Gospel.

²¹ Ibid., 2.

²² Pope John Paul II, *Ecclesia Dei* 4.

²³ Pope John Paul II, *Address of The Holy Father John Paul II To The Members, Consultors And Staff Of The Congregation For The Doctrine of The Faith*, January 28, 2000, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25051995_ut-unum-sint.html 4.

He argues how, “many people do not have an opportunity to come to know or accept the gospel revelation or to enter the Church. The social and cultural conditions in which they live do not permit this [...]”²⁴ As a cardinal, Pope Benedict also endorsed *Lumen Gentium*’s theology of other religions. Under his direction, the CDF wrote, “Furthermore, the salvific action of Jesus Christ, with and through his Spirit, extends beyond the visible boundaries of the Church to all humanity.”²⁵ *Lumen Fidei*, which was co-written by Benedict and his successor, Francis, states:

Because faith is a way, it also has to do with the lives of those men and women who, though not believers, nonetheless desire to believe and continue to seek. To the extent that they are sincerely open to love and set out with whatever light they can find, they are already, even without knowing it, on the path leading to faith.²⁶

In 2013, Pope Francis made the headline-turning claim: “If we, each doing our own part, if we do good to others, if we meet there, doing good, and we go slowly, gently, little by little, we will make that culture of encounter [...] ‘But I don’t believe, Father, I am an atheist!’ But do good: we will meet one another [in Heaven],”²⁷ theorizing that even atheists could be saved. Thus, all of the post-conciliar popes embrace *Lumen Gentium*’s understanding of NSOC and oppose the rigid 15th century expression of the doctrine.

Avoiding a pluralist interpretation of NSOC

Just as John Paul II was concerned about an overly rigid interpretation of NSOC, he was also worried about a relativistic one that might lead to religious pluralism. In an address to the CDF he stated, “It is a mistake, then, to regard the Church as a way of salvation along with those

²⁴ Pope John Paul II, “Redemptoris Missio,” 10.

²⁵ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Dominus Iesus*, August 6, 2000, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20000806_dominus-iesus_en.html 12.

²⁶ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Lumen Fidei*, June 29, 2013, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20130629_enciclica-lumen-fidei.html 35.

²⁷ As quoted in Hendrik Hertzberg, “Father, The Atheists? Even the Atheists,” *The New Yorker*, June 2, 2013, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/hendrik-hertzberg/father-the-atheists-even-the-atheists>

constituted by other religions, which would be complementary to the Church, even if converging with her on the eschatological kingdom of God.”²⁸ In *Redemptoris Missio*, the Holy Father was specifically perturbed with the decrease in Christianity throughout the world. He stressed, “The number of those who do not know Christ and do not belong to the Church is constantly on the increase [...] When we consider this immense portion of humanity which is loved by the Father and for whom he sent his Son, the urgency of the Church's mission is obvious.”²⁹

Both Benedict and Francis express a similar apprehension. The former worries that an overemphasis on the possibility of salvation for non-Christians could result in a decrease in missionary activity. In *Dominus Iesus*, the CDF writes, “Above all else, it must be firmly believed that “the Church, a pilgrim now on earth, is necessary for salvation: the one Christ is the mediator and the way of salvation; he is present to us in his body which is the Church.”³⁰ Pope Francis agrees. *Placuit Deo*, which was written by the CDF, condemns a “new Pelagianism” in which “the individual, understood to be radically autonomous, presumes to save oneself, without recognizing that, at the deepest level of being, he or she derives from God and from others.”³¹ Francis continues teaching that the Church is required for salvation, as *Placuit Deo* continues, “The place where we receive the salvation brought by Jesus is the Church, the community of those who, having been incorporated into this new order of relationship begun by Christ, can receive the fullness of the Spirit of Christ (cf. Rom 8:9).”³² Therefore, the three post-conciliar popes have combatted both exclusivist and pluralist misinterpretations of NSOC.

²⁸ Pope John Paul II, *Address of The Holy Father John Paul II to The Members, Consultors And Staff Of The Congregation For The Doctrine Of The Faith*, 4.

²⁹ Pope John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 5.

³⁰ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Dominus Iesus*, 20.

³¹ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Placuit Deo*, March 1, 2018, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20180222_placuit-deo_en.html 3.

³² *Ibid.*, 12-13.

Section Three: Concluding Remarks

Implications for Christian Living

While this thesis has analyzed NSOC's application and expression in *Lumen Gentium*, it has not explored its implementation in the lives of the faithful. Since such a topic could merit its own thesis, it will only be briefly treated here. First, it is noteworthy that the age of religious tolerance has challenged the faithful to evangelize without falling into either exclusivist or pluralist categories. This means that non-Christian religions cannot be treated as totally alien, but they also cannot be treated as equal or superior to Christianity. A key part of maintaining this balance may include emphasizing Christ's activity as *logos* in other religious traditions while acknowledging how He most fully is present in His visible Church. Essentially, the Church should not see its earthly institutional form as the only means to salvation, rather the optimal one. In doing so, the Church can respect the good aspects of other religions without compromising its unique status as the institutional witness to the Incarnation.

Another aspect of embracing Vatican II's understanding of NSOC involves respecting the good and fruitful elements of other religions. In an increasingly globalized environment, many cultures are afraid of losing their identity, which means it may be prudent for the Church to find ways to acknowledge, preserve, and perhaps integrate their traditions and even rituals into the paradigm of Christian thought and life. The latter half of this last sentence is crucial, as the Church must see herself as perfecting, rather than destroying (much like grace) the naturally good elements of other faiths. As *Lumen Gentium* 17 mentions, "Through her work, whatever good is in the minds and hearts of men, whatever good lies latent in the religious practices and cultures of diverse peoples, is not only saved from destruction but is also cleansed, raised up and

perfected unto the glory of God [...].”³³ For example, the Mexican Catholic Church has successfully Christianized ancient cultic practices like the Day of the Dead by infusing Christian imagery and rituals into pre-existing Mayan ones. The future of evangelization is contingent on casting Christianity as the unifying force that can bind diverse traditions together, rather than destroy them.

Future Research and the Future of NSOC

This chapter has shown how much of the modern Church’s mission hinges on Vatican II’s continuity with prior councils. Admittedly, this thesis’s scope is confined to a single seemingly discontinuous occurrence. While a more thorough defense of the council would analyze other such expressions, like those of Fulgentius and Lateran IV, this thesis has at least proposed a methodology that could be applied to them. While some books, such as Sullivan’s *Salvation Outside the Church* have briefly explored the broader history of expressions of NSOC and their relation to Vatican II, few works have extensively analyzed the individual occurrences of NSOC with a consistent method; thus, there is further work to be done in defending the teachings of the council.

Aside from arguing for Vatican II’s continuity, it is important to consider what clarifications Vatican II’s theology of other religions will demand in the future. History shows how follow-up councils are usually needed to revisit theological ideas; rarely does a single council settle a theological topic without sparking further controversy. For example, Nicaea, which defined Christ’s relationship to God, sparked so much debate over Christ’s natures that Constantinople had to clarify that; this council, of course, yielded great divisions over its Christology, leading to Chalcedon, which also proved controversial. Just as Nicaea was the first

³³ Pope Paul VI, *Lumen Gentium*, 17.

council to address Christological questions, Vatican II seems to be the first council to intentionally focus on other religions, so it seems very likely that further councils will need to clarify its doctrines.

Conclusion

In *Redemptoris Missio*, John Paul II recommits the twenty-first century Church to the council's vision: "As the second millennium after Christ's coming draws to an end, an overall view of the human race shows that this mission is still only beginning and that we must commit ourselves wholeheartedly to its service."³⁴ The Second Vatican Council's integrity relies on its continuity, but so long as there is skepticism of the council's continuity, whether that comes from progressives or traditionalists, its realization will be greatly hindered. Thus, an attack on *Lumen Gentium*'s interpretation of NSOC should be considered an attack on the council's legacy, which is why it is crucial to protect the council's continuity with a robust method, such as the one proposed by this thesis. Given the post-conciliar popes' defenses of the council, a failure to adhere to the hermeneutic of reform is a failure to preserve the Gospel, and as John Paul II observes, "It is the Spirit who impels us to proclaim the great works of God: [...] 'Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel!'"³⁵.³⁶

³⁴ Pope John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 1.

³⁵ 1 Cor 9: 16.

³⁶ Pope John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 1.

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