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The Truth about the title "Lord God the Pope"

Introduction to the allegation

The anti-Catholic charge usually reads as follows:

"In the "Extravagantes" of Pope John XXII (Cum. Inter, title 14, chapter 4, "Ad Callem Sexti Decretalium", Column 140, Paris, 1685), Roman Canon Law says that it is heresy to deny the power of "Our Lord God the Pope." In an Antwerp edition of the Extravagantes, the words occur in column 153."

The work in question, the "Extravagantes of Pope John XXII) was actually written by a canonist, Zenzelinus de Cassanis, in the early 14th century. But did he really write the words "Lord God the Pope"?

Who was Zenzelinus de Cassanis?

From the Traugott Bautz [Kirchenlexicon](#) we read:

Zenzelinus de Cassanis, Canonist, papal chaplain, died 1334 in Avignon. Until 1317 he held position of Professor of Canon Law in Montpellier. Of his readings we have only a few glosses. His influential works strengthened the legal foundations of the papacy against conciliar tendencies. He rose to the position of papal chaplain and "Auditor Sacri Palatii".

(Original German at the above site: "ZENZELINUS de Cassanis (Gaucelinus, Genselinus, Jesselinus u.ä. de Cassagnes), Kanonist, päpstlicher Kaplan, + 1334 in Avignon. - Z. wirkte bis 1317 als Professor des kanonischen Rechts in Montpellier. Von seinen Vorlesungen sind nur wenige Glossen erhalten. Sein einflußreiches Wirken stärkte die rechtlichen Grundlagen des Papsttums gegen konziliare Tendenzen. Z. stieg zum päpstlichen Kaplan und Auditor Sacri Palatii auf.")

What did Zenzelinus really do as a glossarist?

From the Catholic Encyclopedia: [Glosses, Glossaries, Glossarists](#) we read:

"The "Extravagantes" of John XXII were glossed as early as 1325, by Zenzelin (Zenzelinus) de Cassanis. (See also CORPUS JURIS CANONICI; DECRETALS, PAPAL.)"

Regarding glosses in general, according to the same source:

"A gloss (Gk. glossa, Lat. glossa, tongue, speech) is an interpretation or explanation of isolated words. To gloss is to interpret or explain a text by taking up its words one after another. A glossary is therefore a collection of words about which observations and notes have been gathered, and a glossarist is one who thus explains or illustrates given texts. In Canon law, glosses are short elucidations attached to the important words in the juridical texts which make up the collections of the "Corpus Juris Canonici" (q.v.). But the term gloss is also given to the ensemble of such notes in any entire collection, e. g. the Gloss of the "Decretum" of Gratian, of the "Liber Sextus", etc. The Glossarists are those canonists who lived during the classic period of Canon law, from the twelfth to the fifteenth century, though many left works other than glosses."

From the Catholic Encyclopedia: [Papal Decretals](#) we read that it "was customary to add to the manuscript copies [of canonical collections] textual explanations written between the lines (glossa interlinearis) and on the margin of the page (glossa marginalis). Explanations of the

subject-matter were also added."

So we can see that glosses were simply commentaries on canon law, and had no binding force or doctrinal infallibility behind them. The glossarists were legal commentators, not popes, and their views should not be treated as certain.

Back to the anti-Catholic charge

The particular gloss in question here is the Extravagantes of Zenzelius de Cassanis. (While there was also another gloss, called the "Extravagantes communes", this is not important to our discussion). From the [Catholic Encyclopedia: Extravagantes](#) we read

"In 1325 Zenselinus de Cassanis added a gloss to twenty constitutions of Pope John XXII, and named this collection "Viginti Extravagantes pap Joannis XXII". The others were known as "Extravagantes communes", a title given to the collection by Jean Chappuis in the Paris edition of the "Corpus Juris" (1499-1505). He adopted the systematic order of the official collections of canon law"

In 1500 Jean Chappuis, a French lawyer, collated and arranged all the collections of the last two centuries (including the Extravagantes) in the Corpus juris canonici. The publishers in Paris were Udalric Gering and Berthold Rembolt (see <http://allserv.rug.ac.be/~mvmelkeb/Page5.htm>; see also <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09056a.htm>)

The reader will note that Zenzelius had died in 1334, over 160 years before the first Parisian collection. (Also of note is the fact that it is not this edition that is charged with containing the words "Lord God the Pope" but a much later edition, from 1685).

Remember: the anti-Catholic charge is that this gloss of Zenzelinus referred to the Pope as "Lord God the Pope."

So let's look at the original "Extravagantes."

This is found, complete *without* the interpolated text, at the Vatican Library. The exact library reference is as follows:

Gencelinus de Cassanis, Glossa ordinaria in Extravagantes Iohannis XXII
Ms.: BAV, Vat. lat. 1397, ff. 133ra-171rb.
Bibl. & Mss.: Tarrant, Jesselin de Cassagnes, 57-s.

Further information on this work can be found in the following work:

Jacqueline Tarrant "The life and works of Jesselin de Cassagnes", p.37
in ""Bulletin of Medieval Canon Law NS 9" (1979)
published by the Stephan Kuttner Institute of Medieval Canon Law (<http://www.lrz-muenchen.de/~SKIMCL/publikationen-SKIMCL.htm>)

What we find here is that the words "Lord God the Pope " **do not** appear in the original housed in the Vatican Library.

So, what have we found? The statement "Lord God the Pope", allegedly occurs in a Parisian version as late as 1685 (in other words, over 350 year after the original was written in 1325). Even if the words *do* appear in this edition, we can say the following:

- i) The interpolated (possibly forged?)statement does not appear in the original, but only in copies dated many years (in the case of the Paris edition, over 350 years (1325 till 1685) after the original was written.
- ii) As glosses of their very nature deal with commentaries on canon law, they are unrelated to doctrine or doctrinal pronouncements and are not issued by the pope. Hence this inserted text could not be used (even if present in the original) as proof the pope was teaching falsehood.

- iii) The insertion of a forger of these words at a later date do not in any way affect the truth of the divine institution of the papacy, any more than insertion of words into a copy of the Bible changes the Bible's authenticity.
- iv) The statement of one Father A. Pereira (see below) is invalid for the same reason mentioned in iii)

Conclusion

A good summing-up of this issue can be found on Catholic apologist [Phil Porvaznik's site](#) :

"an examination of **the original manuscript of Zenzelinus, preserved in the Vatican Library, failed to reveal the words attributed to him**; and it has been definitely proved that the reference to God is an interpolation in later copies of his commentary." (emphasis mine)

Although there is no way of knowing if the interpolation of these words was the work of a deliberate forger or a printing error, in any case the copied document was never used as a doctrinal source, something some anti-Catholics would like to believe.

With this in mind, we can safely lay to rest the anti-Catholic charges concerning the "Extravagantes" of Pope John XXII.

Final note

Some anti-Catholic websites mention a quotation from a Father A. Pereira: "It is quite certain that Popes have never approved or rejected this title 'Lord God the Pope,' for the passage in the gloss referred to appears in the edition of the Canon Law published in Rome in 1580 by Gregory XIII."

Disregarding the fact that a) the Canon Law edition of Pope Gregory XIII was published in 1582, and not 1580, as the quote suggests, and b) that the author has been unable to find any information about the said Father Pereira, or even to verify his priestly status, what are we to make of his assertion?

It is important to point out that the *gloss itself* does not appear in this canon law edition; all the priest says is that the **passage in the gloss referred to** (in other words, the passage that is referred to in the gloss) appears in the Canon Law edition.

THE GLOSS ITSELF DOES NOT APPEAR IN THIS EDITION OF CANON LAW!

So the logic goes as follows: if someone were to write a falsehood in relation to another written work anywhere, how does that affect the truth or otherwise of the referenced written work itself?

Yet this is what we are expected to believe here. Father A. Pereira, whoever he is (I have been unable to trace him) has not spoken logically here. He has said that the passage which the gloss refers to is in the Canon Law edition, so the gloss itself (even if it were a copy with the faked addition) must be approved! Of course, the validity of one work is not dependent on references to it from a secondary source, and is not invalidated by falsehoods in such references.

Update June 2004

By way of confirmation, the following update was received recently from Mr. Marno Retief in regard to the original manuscripts of Zenzelinus de Cassanis at the Vatican Library.

Vatican Library, Reference Service. "Re: Fwd: Verifying Information." E-mail to Marno Retief. 2 June 2004.

'It is, of course, a huge mistake. With much pain and time we found the passage you are quoting in the original manuscripts (Vaticanus latinus 2583, f. 258 v; Vat. lat. 1404, f. 22 r, both from 14th century), and in both it is clearly said "Dominum nostrum Papam". The

wrong formulation, "Dominum Deum nostrum Papam", we found in an edition of the end of the 16th century, but these old editions cannot be philologically trusted. The original manuscripts have the correct version, and there is no word "Deum" in that sentence.'

Comments from Mr Marno Retief (who requested the information about the original manuscripts from Vatican Library)

'In Zenzelinus de Cassanis' original manuscripts (reference: Vaticanus latinus 2583, f. 258 v, and Vaticanus latinus 1404, f. 22 r, both from the 14th century) the word 'Deum' does NOT occur in the passage that anti-Catholics so often love to cite.'

'I am glad and thankful Vatican Library Reference Service so graciously assisted in finding out this information. The staff at the Vatican Library Reference Service was kind enough to go and look at the original 14th century manuscripts, and, as you know by now, they read 'Dominum nostrum Papam' and NOT 'Dominum Deum nostrum Papam'. Zenzelinus de Cassanis has been vindicated. For those anti-Catholics who are interested, there is an excellent article by Prof. Franz Gillman on how the erroneous phrase came to print in some of the later publications: Franz Gillmann, "Dominus Deus noster Papa"? (in: Archiv f. Kathol. Kirchenrecht 95, 1915, 266-282).'

- Comments taken from e-mail correspondence with Sean Hyland, 2 and 3 June 2004

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