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MAGISTERIUM



Teacher and Guardian of the Faith

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of Ave Maria University

- EV** John Paul II, Encyclical *Evangelium vitae* (The Gospel of Life), 1995.
- GS** Vatican II, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et spes*.
- LG** Vatican II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen gentium*.
- Mansi** *Sacrorum Conciliorum nova collectio*, ed. J. D. Mansi, continued by L. Petit and J. Martin, 1759ff.
- PG** J. P. Migne, ed., *Patrologiae cursus completus, series graeca*. Paris, 1857ff.
- PL** J. P. Migne, ed., *Patrologiae cursus completus, series latina*. Paris, 1844ff.
- UR** Vatican II, Decree on Ecumenism, *Unitatis redintegratio*.
- UUS** John Paul II, Encyclical on Christian Unity, *Ut unum sint*, 1995.
- VS** John Paul II, Encyclical on Certain Fundamental Questions of the Church's Moral Teaching, *Veritatis splendor*, 1993.

CHAPTER ONE



The Nature and Function of the Magisterium

THE THREEFOLD OFFICE

ACCORDING TO the Bible and the ancient tradition of the Church, Jesus Christ fulfilled and united in himself the three offices of prophet, priest, and king. As prophet, he succeeded and brought to fulfillment the work of a whole series of prophets from Moses to Elijah, from Jonah to Malachi. As priest, he fulfilled what had been given in type through Melchizedek, Aaron, and the Levites. As king, he was Son of David, the royal Messiah.

Before his Ascension Jesus conferred a share of all these functions on the Church and its leaders. According to the final verses of Matthew's Gospel he commissioned the Eleven to teach, to baptize, and to issue commands. The Apostles and their successors have the power to teach all nations the way of Christ, to sanctify the faithful through sacraments and other forms of worship, and to exercise pastoral government over the community of Christian believers. The Second Vatican Council (1962–65) adopted the threefold division of functions in its Constitution on the Church and in several other key documents.¹

¹ Joseph Lécuyer, "La triple charge de l'évêque," in *L'Église de Vatican II*, ed. Guilherme Baraúna, Unam Sanctam 51c, vol. 3 (Paris: Éd. du Cerf, 1966), 891–914.

The priorities among the three tasks of the hierarchy are mutual. The sanctifying office has priority in the order of final causality, since it is the goal of the others. Governance is primary in the sense that it is a condition of possibility for the exercise of all ecclesial activities. But the prophetic or teaching office holds primacy in the sense that it gives meaning to the other two. As Monsignor Robert Sokolowski has said,

Teaching is related to sanctifying and governing in a way analogous to the way the theological virtue of faith is related to hope and charity. Faith opens up the whole domain of Christian life; it opens the space in which hope and charity can occur. Likewise, apostolic teaching opens the possibility for Christian life and for the Church. It establishes the space in which sanctification and governance can take their place, and it makes clear what the sanctification and governance really are.²

The passing on of revelation pertains specifically to the prophetic office. The Church as a divine oracle is commissioned to bear authoritative witness to God's revelation in Christ. The Greek term *prophētēs*, from which our word "prophet" is derived, means one who speaks for another. In their prophetic role, authorities in the Church speak not in their own name but on behalf of God, whose word they transmit with whatever explanations may be necessary.

The term "Magisterium," the subject of this book, designates the Church's function of teaching.³ More precisely, it means the

authoritative teaching of those who are commissioned to speak to the community in the name of Christ, clarifying the faith that the community professes. The term "Magisterium" designates not only the function of official teaching but also the body of persons who carry on this function, the official teachers. To distinguish it from the less authoritative teaching of individuals in the Church, the word "Magisterium" is sometimes qualified by adjectives such as "hierarchical" or "pastoral."

The offices of teaching, sanctifying, and ruling are closely interrelated in the Church, since all of them are exercised by the same persons with a view to the same end—the salvation of souls. The Magisterium preaches and teaches "holy doctrine" with a view to eliciting the salvific response of faith. Its authoritative teaching imposes a certain obligation on members of the Church to believe. Unlike civil societies, the Church is a society of faith. Its members are united by professing the same body of revealed truth, expressed in creeds and dogmas. To reject the faith of the community is to exclude oneself from the Church as a society. The teaching of the Magisterium therefore has an obligatory force resembling that of a law or precept. But the two are not the same. The ruling power calls for external obedience; the Magisterium calls for free, internal assent. The ruling power speaks first of all to the will; the Magisterium, to the intellect.

In the atmosphere of contemporary liberal democratic societies, the very idea of an authoritative Magisterium provokes misgivings. People tend to think that they have both the right and the duty to make up their own minds about what to believe in matters of religion. They may be willing to take advice from theologians and biblical scholars who have professional qualifications, but they balk at the idea that some body of pastors without specialized academic training should presume to tell them what

² Robert Sokolowski, *Christian Faith & Human Understanding* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2006), 117. Chapter 8 of this book is a paper on "The Identity of the Bishop" presented at a theological conference in 2003.

³ The standard book in English remains Francis A. Sullivan, *Magisterium: Teaching Authority in the Catholic Church* (New York: Paulist, 1983). The present work grows out of many years of teaching and writing. Its nucleus is Avery Dulles, "Lehramt und Unfehlbarkeit," in the *Handbuch der Fundamentaltheologie*, edited by Walter Kern, Hermann J. Pottmeyer, and Max

Seckler, 1st ed., vol. 4 (Freiburg: Herder, 1988), 153–78; revised for the 2nd ed., vol. 4 (Tübingen: A. Francke, 2000), 109–30.

they must believe. How, they ask, can it be morally justifiable to surrender one's personal responsibility and turn over to others the power of decision in matters of such moment?

THE RATIONALE FOR THE MAGISTERIUM

The Catholic Church believes and teaches that Christ delivered his revelation to the Church as a corporate body. Having received the word of God, the Church has an inalienable responsibility to hand it on, explain it, and defend it against errors. In order to perform this function the Church needs persons and offices with the competence to speak in the name of God. Anyone who wants to ascertain the word of God must obtain it directly or indirectly from the persons to whom it was entrusted. Jesus selected and trained the Twelve for this function. The Bible itself is the work of qualified witnesses who wrote with a special divine assistance known as inspiration. The inspiration of the Old Testament is affirmed in several key passages from the New Testament, most explicitly 2 Timothy 3:14–17 and 2 Peter 1:20–21.

In establishing the Magisterium, Christ responded to a real human need. People cannot discover the contents of revelation by their unaided powers of reason and observation. They have to be told by people who have received it from on high. Even the most qualified scholars who have access to the Bible and the ancient historical sources fall into serious disagreements about matters of belief. Puzzled by the words of Scripture, they feel like the Ethiopian eunuch. When asked by the deacon Philip, "Do you understand what you are reading?" he replied, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" (Acts 8:30–31).

It is logical to suppose that if God deems it important to give a revelation, he will make provision to assure its conservation.⁴ If he did not set up reliable organs of transmission, the revelation would

⁴ John Henry Newman presents the argument under the caption, "An Infallible Developing Authority to Be Expected," chapter 2, section 2, of his

in a few generations be partly forgotten and inextricably commingled with human speculations, as happened, for instance, in Gnosticism. The New Testament and the early Fathers attest that Jesus conferred upon his Apostles and their successors the authority to teach doctrine in his name. As we shall see in chapter II, he promised to remain present with the apostolic leadership to the end of time, and he conferred the Holy Spirit to assist the leadership in remaining faithful. Just as the Christians of the first generation had to rely on the word of the Apostles and their fellow-workers, so the Christians of later generations must continue to rely on the living authority of those who succeed to the place of the Apostles.

THE MAGISTERIUM AND FAITH

The authority of the Magisterium is closely linked with the structure of Christian faith as personal self-surrender to the word of God.⁵ Faith is never the mere self-assertion of believers but an acceptance by them of something received from others—in the last analysis, from God. The faithful submit to the word of God as something higher and more reliable than their own personal insights. The word comes through revelation given in history. God's word, moreover, has a content to which the believer must assent. Christianity from its beginnings has been a faith with a definite set of beliefs, expressed in confessional or credal statements.

The propositions of faith are revealed truths; they are not the personal views of a particular theologian or school of theology. Academic theology is not, and does not claim to be, the word of God. Its theses do not merit the absolute assent of faith. Richly blessed though she is by her theologians, the Church needs in

Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), 75–92.

⁵ On the doctrine of faith here presupposed, see Avery Dulles, *The Assurance of Things Hoped For: A Theology of Christian Faith* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

addition an office or organ capable of certifying revealed truth with divine authority. Otherwise she could not serve as “the pillar and bulwark of the truth” (1 Tim 3:15). The Magisterium is an essential resource for theology itself, for without it theology would lack a secure foundation on which to base its speculations. Theology seeks to understand as far as possible the truths that Christians believe as matters of faith.

The acceptance of a faith proclaimed by a divinely commissioned witness is not, as some imagine, an abdication of personal responsibility. It is, on the contrary, a preeminently free and personal act. Freedom is given to us so that we may personally seek and embrace the truth, committing ourselves to live according to it. Since the truth that matters for salvation is offered to us by way of revelation, and since revelation is handed down by competent witnesses, our acceptance of these witnesses is inseparable from the act of faith itself. To withhold assent from the testimony of properly authenticated witnesses to revelation would be a misuse of freedom.

The task of showing that it is reasonable and prudent to submit to the word of God as taught by the Magisterium pertains to apologetics. The present book is primarily doctrinal, not apologetical, in purpose. It is written for believers who adhere to the Christian faith and wish to know more about its authoritative transmission. Principally, this book is for the instruction of Catholics, who have in their Church an active, living Magisterium. One of the tasks of doctrinal theology is to expound in the light of faith the nature and functions of the Magisterium.

CHAPTER SIX



The Scope of the Magisterium: Infallibility

THE TEACHING MISSION of the Magisterium does not extend to everything knowable. The Church does not herself teach mathematics, medicine, or economics, though she might have things to say about some of these subjects from her own perspective. Vatican II summarizes in one compact sentence the functions of the official Magisterium. It states that the bishops “preach to the people committed to them the faith they must believe and put into practice. By the light of the Holy Spirit, they make that faith clear, bringing forth from the treasury of revelation new things and old (cf. Mt 13:52), making faith bear fruit and vigilantly warding off any errors that threaten their flock (cf. 2 Tim 4:14)” (*LG* 25).

THE TREASURY OF REVELATION

The Magisterium as here described draws its teaching from revelation. The “treasury of revelation” may be taken as a synonym for the more common term “deposit of faith,” which occurs in the Pastoral Letters (1 Tim 6:20; 2 Tim 1:12, 14). The terms “treasury” and “deposit” are metaphors for the gospel, that is, the divine revelation that culminated in the Christ-event. As many theologians

have observed, one should avoid objectifying the "deposit" as though it consisted simply of divinely given propositions rather than the concrete, living reality to which the Apostles bore witness (cf. 1 Jn 1:12).¹

Vatican II's Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation teaches that the fullness of revelation was given in the incarnate life, death, and glorification of the Son of God and in the sending of the Spirit of Truth. "No further public revelation is to be awaited (*expectanda est*) before the glorious manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ" (DV 4). It is no doubt possible to identify revelation with God's continual self-communication as this occurs through nature, through historical events, and through the proclamation of the gospel. Even so, however, it must be granted that nothing is revealed that is not in some way contained in Jesus Christ, who is the "mediator and at the same time the fullness of all revelation" and who was revealed once and for all to the Apostles (DV 2; 7-8).

Christians of every century share one and the same faith, that "which was once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3). They do so, however, as people of their own time, accepting the faith as interpreted by the living Church to which they belong.

FUNCTIONS OF THE MAGISTERIUM

The first function of the Magisterium is that of heralding the apostolic faith. In order to preach the gospel effectively it is not enough to repeat verbally what is stated in Scripture and in the documents of Tradition. It is necessary to gather up the joint meaning to be found in testimonies of Scripture and Tradition, to interpret them in a new historical situation, and to "translate" their message into the idiom and conceptuality of a new age, so that its content, relevance, and credibility shine forth. Pope John

¹ The non-existence of any post-apostolic public revelation, already taught at Vatican I (DS 3020, 3070), was reiterated in the anti-Modernist decree *Lamentabili* (1907, DS 3421).

XXIII, in his opening allocution at Vatican II, stressed the pastoral importance of presenting the faith in a way demanded by our own times.² Paul VI likewise asserted: "Nowadays a serious effort is required of us to ensure that the teaching of the faith should keep the fullness of its meaning and force, while expressing itself in a form which allows it to reach the spirit and heart of the people to whom it is addressed."³

These exhortations, however, do not mean that the terminology of councils should be casually abandoned. Pius XII in *Humani generis* (1950) taught that although the Church had not always used the same terms in the same way, the language of the Church's dogma and the common terminology of the schools, hammered out over the course of centuries, was grounded in the reality itself (DS 3883). Paul VI, in his encyclical *Mysterium Fidei* (1965), made a similar statement:

Who indeed would ever tolerate that the dogmatic formulas used by the ecumenical councils for the mysteries of the Most Blessed Trinity and the Incarnation be judged as no longer appropriate for men of our times and therefore permit others to be rashly substituted for them? Likewise, it cannot be tolerated that any individual should on his own authority modify the formulas used by the Council of Trent to express belief in eucharistic mystery. These formulas, like the others which the Church uses to propose the

² The Abbott edition of *The Documents of Vatican II*, following the Latin text released by the Vatican Press Office, quotes John XXIII as saying on October 11, 1962: "The substance of the doctrine of the deposit of faith is one thing, and the way in which it is presented is another" (New York: America Press, 1966), 715. The official version subsequently published adds to the sentence: "keeping the same sense and the same meaning" (*eodem tamen sensu eademque sententia*). See Sacrosanctum Oecumenicum Concilium Vaticanum II, *Constitutiones, Decreta, Declarationes* (Vatican City: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1966), 854-72, at 865; also AAS (1962): 786-96, at 792.

³ Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation, "Quinque iam anni," AAS 63 (1971): 100-1.

dogmas of faith, express concepts that are not tied to a certain form of human culture, or to a specific phase of scientific progress, or one or other theological school. No, these formulas present that part of reality which necessary and universal experience permits the human mind to grasp and to manifest with exact terms taken from either common or polished language. For this reason, these formulas are adapted to men of all times and all places. (§24)

There is no need to deny that the Magisterium sometimes uses mutable human concepts to convey transcendent truth. The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith stated in 1973: "Even though the truths which the Church intends to teach through her dogmatic formulas are distinct from the changeable conceptions of a given epoch and can be expressed without them, nevertheless it can sometimes happen that these truths may be enunciated by the sacred Magisterium in terms that bear traces of such conceptions."⁴ With the passage of years and the shifts in human culture, it may become necessary to explain the terms or even, in some cases, to replace them. But efforts should be made to retain continuity so that the ancient documents may still be intelligible.

The second function of the Magisterium is the negative one whereby the hierarchical authorities, as judges, defend the faith against opposed errors. Until relatively recent times, the doctrinal decrees of the Magisterium were predominantly concerned with warding off heresy, sometimes under pain of a solemn excommunication, called an "anathema."⁵ In condemning misinterpretations of the faith, the Magisterium inevitably gives a more precise

⁴ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Mysterium Ecclesiae*, AAS 65 (1973): 396–408, at 403. English translation, "Declaration in Defense of the Catholic Doctrine of the Church Against Certain Errors of the Present Day," *Origins* 3 (1973): 97, 99–100, 110–12, at 110–11.

⁵ The term "anathema" in the Hebrew Scriptures often refers to a curse, setting a person or thing apart for destruction. In 1 Corinthians 16:22 and Galatians 1:8–9, St. Paul used the word to denote separation from the Christian community or excommunication. In the early councils the term was regularly used in condemnations of heresy, a practice that still

interpretation to what has been handed down in the doctrinal tradition, and thus "develops" the doctrine.

The Magisterium consequently has a third function: to clarify the faith by bringing forth from the treasury "things new and old." In answering new questions, as in refuting new errors, the Magisterium sometimes brings out hitherto unnoticed implications of the faith. The idea of dogmatic development will be considered later in this chapter.

APPLYING THE FAITH TO LIFE

Vatican II, as we have seen, teaches that the Magisterium must proclaim what is to be believed in faith and applied in practice (*fidem credendam et moribus applicandam*). This language echoes the coupling of faith and morals in many magisterial documents (*res fidei et morum*). The term *mores*—here translated "morals"—takes on different nuances in different documents. It often means something like "patterns of behavior commended by the gospel."⁶

Since ancient times the Magisterium has been accustomed to lay down rules of conduct for individuals seeking to be faithful to the law of God and to the gospel of Christ. These rules are not arbitrary decisions of the Church but applications of what Paul would call "the law of Christ" (1 Cor 9:21; Gal 6:2).

In her social teaching the Church goes beyond individual morality and speaks out on public affairs, seeking to promote the dignity of the human person and the common good. Since Pope Leo XIII published his encyclical *Rerum novarum* in 1891, a series

continued as late as Vatican I. The 1917 Code of Canon Law treats anathematization as a solemn excommunication (c. 2257 §2). The Code of 1983, however, makes no reference to anathemas.

⁶ Sullivan, profiting from the research of Maurice Bévenot, points out that the term *mores*, particularly in the decrees of Trent, includes more than what we mean by morality. He would prefer to translate it by "matters of Christian practice" based on the gospel. See Sullivan, *Magisterium*, 128–29.

of popes and the Second Vatican Council have built up a coherent body of Christian social teaching and have occasionally made specific applications to current affairs. The *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (2005) indicates that such social teaching has true authority:

Insofar as it is part of the Church's moral teaching, the Church's social doctrine has the same dignity and authority as her moral teaching. It is authentic Magisterium, which obligates the faithful to adhere to it. The doctrinal weight of the different teachings and the assent required are determined by the nature of the particular teachings, by their level of independence from contingent and variable elements, and by the frequency with which they are invoked. (§80)

In the sociopolitical area the Church's mission is not to make pronouncements on the technical aspects of politics, economics, and the social sciences, but to illuminate the moral and religious dimensions of social questions so that the faithful may better form their consciences.⁷ The value of applications to concrete situations depends in part on the availability of sufficient factual information, on technically correct analysis, and on the human prudence of those making the applications. The applications, therefore, may be less certain than the principles.

INFALLIBILITY OF THE CHURCH AS A WHOLE

The Church, according to Christian belief, is divinely assisted by the Lord, who preserves her in the truth by his Spirit (Jn 14:26, 16:13) and promises to remain with her apostolic leaders until "the close of the age" (Mt 28:20), preventing the powers of death from prevailing against her (Mt 16:18). Convinced that she stands

⁷ See the essays of Johannes Baptist Metz, Edward Schillebeeckx, and others in *Concilium*, vol. 36, *Faith and the World of Politics* (New York: Paulist, 1968); also Francis S. Fiorenza, "The Church's Religious Identity and Its Social and Political Mission," *Theological Studies* 43 (1982): 197–225.

in full institutional continuity with the apostolic Church, the Catholic Church is confident that she will never cease to bear authentic witness to Christ. If the Church as a body were to fall away from the gospel, Christ's promises would be made void, and God would be proved unfaithful.

Together with the promise of perpetuity, Christ has given to the Church means whereby she can assuredly remain "the pillar and the bulwark of the truth" (1 Tim 3:15; cf. 2 Tim 2:19). These means include the canonical Scriptures, as an inspired record of the developing faith of the People of God in its constitutive phase; sacred Tradition, whereby the Church preserves her deposit of faith as a living memory; the sacraments, whereby she encounters the living Lord in faith; prayer, whereby she invokes the Spirit of Truth; and the ecclesiastical office, which continues to shepherd God's People as the needs of the time require.

The perpetuity or indefectibility of the Church as a community of faith involves her preservation from errors that would contradict the gospel. Thanks to the promised assistance of the Holy Spirit and the created means of grace, the Church as a whole has what Vatican II speaks of as a "charism of infallibility" (LG 25). Putting this idea in a positive form, one may say that the Church is gifted with what Vatican I calls a "charism of unfailing truth and faith" (DS 3071). This does not mean that the faithful or their pastors cannot be mistaken in some of their opinions, but that, to the extent that they are in full communion in the Church, their faith will be unsullied. Thanks especially to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, the firm and universal agreement of the pastors and the whole body of the faithful about matters of faith and morals cannot be in error (LG 12).

INFALLIBILITY OF THE MAGISTERIUM: SUBJECT AND EXERCISE

The Magisterium is one of the means whereby God preserves the Church in the truth of the gospel. In order for the Church to be

indefectible it is necessary that those preaching and teaching the faith on the highest authoritative level be not mistaken about what pertains essentially to revelation. According to Catholic belief, as defined at Vatican I and reaffirmed at Vatican II, the supreme Magisterium, in its definitive teaching about matters of faith and morals, is divinely protected against error.

Strictly speaking, infallibility is a property of the Magisterium in its activity of teaching, not a property of magisterial statements. The statements protected by infallibility are said to be "irreformable" (DS 3074). In the documents of Vatican I, "irreformable" meant that the statements are not subject to rejection or correction by any other authorities in the Church, as had been held by the Gallicans, who contended that papal definitions were always subject to the judgment of the Church (DS 2284). Irreformable statements may, however, require completion, refinement, reinterpretation, and restatement in accordance with new conditions, which raise new questions and provide new information, new conceptual categories, new methods, and new vocabulary. The "irreformability" of a definition, though it rules out subsequent reversals, leaves room for considerable "reformulation."⁸ Since Vatican Council II, papal documents often use the term "definitive" in the places where, earlier, one would have expected the term "irreformable." This is notably the case in the Profession of Faith of 1989, in the Code of Canon Law (c. 249), and in the supplement to canon 750 inserted by the Apostolic Letter *Ad tuendam fidem* of May 18, 1998, texts that we shall examine in the next chapter. This change of terminology is attributable to Vatican II, which speaks of "definitive" acts of teaching and of doctrine to which "definitive" assent is to be given (LG 25).

The episcopal and papal forms of magisterial infallibility may be separately considered.

⁸ The problem of the permanence of dogma and the historical relativity of the concepts and language is briefly but carefully treated in *Mysterium Ecclesiae*, sec. 5, AAS 65: 402-4; English translation, 110-11.

THE UNIVERSAL MAGISTERIUM OF THE BISHOPS

The universal Magisterium of the bishops can be exercised in either of two forms, called ordinary and extraordinary (DS 3011; LG 25). The *ordinary* universal Magisterium is engaged when the whole body of bishops, in hierarchical communion with the successor of Peter, is morally unanimous in teaching a certain doctrine as a matter of divine and Catholic faith, to be accepted by all as pertaining to the faith of the Church. The unanimity of the episcopal body is sometimes difficult to verify, but in many cases it is apparent from what the bishops regularly do or knowingly permit in preaching, liturgical prayer, catechesis, confessional practice, and the like.

Several examples may be instanced. The communion of saints is confessed as a matter of faith in the Apostles' Creed but has never been defined as a dogma. But all bishops, at least in the West, recite and encourage others to recite the Apostles' Creed. In the *Confiteor* of the Roman Mass the faithful invoke "Blessed Mary ever virgin," though the perpetual virginity of Mary has not yet been solemnly defined. Some doctrines were in peaceful possession for a long time and were later solemnly defined by popes or councils. The Immaculate Conception and Assumption of the Blessed Virgin were affirmed in approved prayers and liturgical feasts for many centuries before being defined as papal dogmas in 1854 and 1950, respectively. In a number of cases the pope or the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith has authoritatively declared that a given doctrine is contained in the word of God and has been constantly taught by the ordinary universal Magisterium. The ordinary and universal Magisterium, therefore, is by no means an empty category.

The *extraordinary* Magisterium of the bishops comes into play when bishops representing the universal Church, by a united act, solemnly define a matter of faith or morals, with the approval of

the pope. The dogmatic definitions of the early councils regarding the Trinity and Christology, and the decrees of Vatican I regarding papal primacy and infallibility, may serve as examples. The ecumenicity of certain early councils (notably the four from Nicaea to Chalcedon, but also the next three, ending with Nicaea II, 787) is generally admitted by Catholics, Orthodox, and Protestants. There is, however, no canonical list of all the ecumenical councils. Following a list that was drawn up by Robert Bellarmine in the seventeenth century, Catholics commonly include the general councils convened by popes in the Middle Ages and accordingly reckon Vatican II as the twenty-first ecumenical council. Western councils such as Trent, Vatican I, and Vatican II clearly claimed to be ecumenical and are accepted as such by the popes. Their solemn teachings, therefore, are for Catholics beyond challenge.

Statements emanating from ecumenical councils are definitive only when the council so indicates. Often the council will indicate its intention to define by using solemn language such as: "This Holy Council believes and confesses . . .," or by pronouncing an anathema: "If anyone does not confess . . ., let him be anathema." Councils such as Trent and Vatican I often divided their decrees into chapters and canons in such a way that the chapters stated positively the contradictory of what the anathema denied. The teaching of the chapter is definitive at least to the extent that it contradicts the anathema in the canon. But, besides containing defined doctrine, the chapters often contain additional explanatory matter that is not infallibly taught.⁹

Regarding the teachings of Vatican II, the Doctrinal Commission declared:

In view of conciliar practice and the pastoral purposes of the present Council, this sacred Synod defines matters of faith or morals

⁹ On the authority of the chapters and canons at the Councils of Trent and Vatican I, see Ioachim Salaverri, *De Ecclesia Christi in Sacrae Theologiae Summa*, vol. 1: *Theologiae Fundamental*, Part III, nos. 906–13, 811–16.

as binding on the Church only when the Synod itself openly declares so.

Other matters which the sacred Synod proposes as the doctrine of the supreme teaching authority of the Church, each and every member of the faithful is obliged to accept and embrace according to the mind of the sacred Synod itself, which becomes known either from the subject matter or from the language employed, according to the norms of theological interpretation.¹⁰

Vatican II, as instructed by Pope John XXIII, refrained from defining any new doctrines to be held under pain of heresy. But it did deliberately go beyond previous magisterial statements in affirming that ordination to the episcopate is a sacrament and that the bishops in communion with the successor of Peter constitute a college. The sacramentality of episcopal ordination is, moreover, stated with great emphasis:

This sacred Synod teaches that by episcopal consecration is conferred the fullness of the sacrament of orders, that fullness which in the Church's liturgical practice and in the language of the holy Fathers of the Church is undoubtedly called the high priesthood, the apex of the sacred ministry. (LG 21)

Commentators generally agree that while this is not a dogmatic definition in the strict sense, it ranks as a "definitive judgment"¹¹ and calls for "obligatory adherence."¹² The unanimity of the Fathers

¹⁰ Declaration of the Theological Commission of March 6, 1964, quoted with approval by the Secretary General of the Council, November 16, 1964; text in *Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Walter M. Abbott (New York: America Press, 1966), 98. The Theological Commission is called in other translations "Doctrinal Commission," a term more closely corresponding to the Latin, *Commissio de Doctrina Fidei et Morum*.

¹¹ Yves Congar, "En guise de conclusion," in Baraúna, *L'Église de Vatican II*, 1365–73, at 1367.

¹² Joseph Ratzinger, "La collégialité épiscopale, développement théologique," in Baraúna, *L'Église de Vatican II*, 763–90, at 789.

voting for chapter III of *Lumen gentium* would seem sufficient for the affirmation here quoted to be considered at least as an utterance of the ordinary universal Magisterium, confirmed by the pope.

PAPAL MAGISTERIUM: ORDINARY AND EXTRAORDINARY

Like the bishops, the pope has an ordinary and an extraordinary Magisterium.¹³ He exercises his *ordinary* Magisterium in his day-to-day preaching and in written statements that do not claim to enjoy the guarantee of infallibility. Encyclical letters are normally addressed by the pope to the entire episcopate or the entire world. Encyclicals have rarely if ever been used to define new dogmas, though they frequently reaffirm doctrines that are already matters of faith. An encyclical, therefore, is an expression of the pope's ordinary teaching authority, which, according to the common teaching, is not infallible. The same may be said of apostolic exhortations, letters to priests, allocutions, messages, homilies, and the like.

The pope makes use of his *extraordinary* Magisterium when he issues an *ex cathedra* pronouncement, as occurred when Pius IX defined the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary in 1854 (*DS* 2803) and when Pius XII defined the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin in 1950 (*DS* 3903). In explaining the infallibility of such definitions, Vatican I laid down several conditions or limitations. The pope's teaching is infallible only when he speaks (a) "in the chair of Peter," using his full apostolic authority, (b) concerning a doctrine of faith or morals (*doctrina de fide vel moribus*), and (c) defining what must be held as a matter of faith by all members of the Church. The infallibility of such definitions is attributed to the divine assistance promised to the pope in the

¹³ For an overview of various types of papal pronouncement, see Francis G. Morrissey, *Papal and Curial Pronouncements: Their Canonical Significance in Light of the Code of Canon Law*, 2d ed. (Ottawa: St. Paul University, Faculty of Canon Law, 2001), 9–20.

person of Peter (*DS* 3074). When the pope defines a dogma or performs a particularly solemn act he normally uses an Apostolic Constitution, in the form of a bull.

Except for the definition of the Immaculate Conception, there is little clarity about which papal statements prior to Vatican I are irreformable. Most authors would agree on about half a dozen statements. Among the clearest examples are the statement of Pope Benedict XII on the nature of the beatific vision (1336; *DS* 1000–2) and the condemnation of five Jansenist propositions by Innocent X (1653; *DS* 2001–7).¹⁴

The bare text of the Vatican I definition, taken without regard to the Council's accompanying explanation, could be misunderstood as giving absolute powers to the pope to define whatever he chooses. But when the definition is read in continuity with the preceding paragraphs, and especially in the light of the *relatio* given to the council fathers by Bishop Gasser on behalf of the Deputation on Faith,¹⁵ it is apparent that the pope cannot define except under certain specified conditions. He must be expressing, defending, or explaining the word of God as contained in Scripture or apostolic Tradition and held by the Church throughout the centuries. In their reply to Bismarck, already mentioned in chapter 3, the German bishops pointed out that papal infallibility is limited insofar as he cannot contradict the teaching of Scripture and Tradition and the previous definitions of the Magisterium.¹⁶

¹⁴ For discussion of doctrinal definitions in papal documents, see Francis A. Sullivan, *Creative Fidelity: Weighing and Interpreting Documents of the Magisterium* (New York: Paulist, 1996), 80–92.

¹⁵ As mentioned in chapter 5, Gasser's *Relatio* is printed in Mansi 52:1204–32; translation and commentary in James T. O'Connor, *The Gift of Infallibility* (Boston: St. Paul Editions, 1986). For further discussion, see Küng, *Structures of the Church*, 366–77; Gustave Thils, *L'Infaillibilité pontificale* (Gembloux: Duculot, 1969), 186–221; Avery Dulles, "Moderate Infallibilism: An Ecumenical Approach," in *A Church to Believe In* (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 133–48.

¹⁶ Collective Declaration of the German Bishops, 1875 (*DS* 3116). Similar statements were made at Vatican II, notably by the Doctrinal Commission;

Picking up on these themes, Vatican II declared that the Magisterium is not above the word of God but serves that word (*DV* 10). The pope in defining doctrine is manifestly bound to the faith of the whole Church, both as taught by his fellow bishops and as lived by the faithful as a body (*LG* 12, 25). Although not juridically dependent on any other agency in the Church, the pope is obliged in the nature of the case to take the necessary means to ascertain the faith of the Church. If the pope did not fulfill these necessary conditions, or if he were heretical, schismatic, demented, or coerced, he could not exercise his teaching authority.¹⁷ Catholics may rest assured that the pope does not issue dogmatic definitions without taking the necessary means to inform himself.

Without appealing to his personal infallibility, the pope can by his ordinary teaching authority "confirm" or "declare" doctrines that were already taught by the ordinary and universal Magisterium on the basis of Scripture and the constant Tradition of the Church. Pope John Paul II did this on several occasions. In his encyclical *Evangelium vitae* (1995) he emphatically taught the grave sinfulness of taking innocent human life (*EV* 57), committing or procuring abortion (*EV* 62), and engaging in euthanasia (*EV* 65). In the same encyclical he explained that he was speaking with the unanimous support of the cardinals and bishops (*EV* 5).

Similarly, in his Apostolic Letter *Ordinatio sacerdotalis* (1994), Pope John Paul II taught that the Church has no authority whatsoever to confer priestly ordination on women, and that this judgment is to be held definitively by all the faithful. The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith declared, in a "response" of October 28, 1995, that Pope John Paul II's determination on this point confirmed a teaching that pertained to the deposit of faith and one that had already been taught infallibly by the ordinary and universal

see Karl Rahner in Herbert Vorgrimler, ed., *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, vol. 1: Constitution on the Church, chap. 3, 202–3.

¹⁷ See Sullivan, *Magisterium*, 101–2.

Magisterium.¹⁸ Although the response of the CDF is not itself protected by the charism of infallibility, it embodies the considered judgment of the highest doctrinal organ of the Church, confirmed by the pope. In view of the strong evidence from Scripture and Tradition for the reservation of ordination to men, the papal decision is solidly grounded in the deposit of faith.¹⁹

PRIMARY AND SECONDARY OBJECTS OF INFALLIBILITY

There has been much discussion regarding the object of the infallible Magisterium. Vatican I stated that the purpose of papal infallibility was to enable the popes "religiously to guard and faithfully to expound the revelation or deposit of faith that was handed down through the Apostles" (*DS* 3070). It also stated that papal definitions were infallible only when they dealt with "doctrine of faith and morals" (*doctrina fidei et morum*, *DS* 3074).

Vatican II likewise stated that the infallibility of the Church in defining doctrine "extends as far as does the deposit of divine revelation, which must be religiously guarded and faithfully expounded" (*LG* 25). To clarify this concise statement the Doctrinal Commission at Vatican II provided an explanation: "The object of infallibility extends to all those things, and only to those, which either directly pertain to the deposit itself or are required in order that the same deposit may be religiously safeguarded and faithfully expounded."²⁰ The Congregation for the

¹⁸ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, "Response to *Dubium*," *Origins* 25 (November 30, 1995): 401–5; *AAS* 87 (1995): 1114.

¹⁹ The arguments from Scripture and Tradition, as well as from theological reasoning, are spelled out in the Declaration of the Congregation for the Faith, "*Inter insigniores*" of October 15, 1976; *Origins* 6 (February 3, 1977): 517, 519–24.

²⁰ "Objectum infallibilitatis . . . extenditur ad ea omnia, et ad ea tantum, quae vel directe ad ipsum depositum revelatum spectant, vel quae ad idem depositum sancte custodiendum et fideliter exponendum requiruntur, ut

Doctrine of the Faith, in its 1973 Declaration, *Mysterium Ecclesiae*, used similar terms:

According to Catholic doctrine the infallibility of the magisterium of the Church extends not only to the deposit of faith but also to those things without which this deposit cannot be properly safeguarded and explained. However, the extension of this infallibility to the deposit of faith itself is a truth that the Church has from the beginning held as being certainly revealed in the promises of Christ. (§3)

Theologians accordingly distinguish between the primary object of infallibility, the deposit of revelation itself, and the secondary object, whatever is required to defend and expound the deposit. The extension of infallibility to the primary object is a matter of faith; its extension to the secondary object is theologically certain Catholic teaching.

The line of demarcation between the primary and secondary objects is not always easy to draw, because the primary object has a capacity for expansion as new implications come to be recognized in the original deposit. When the Magisterium, in calling for definitive assent to a certain doctrine, does not clearly indicate whether it is teaching a revealed truth, theologians may have different views about whether the teaching was always contained in the deposit of faith or whether it is being taught as an additional truth inseparably connected with revelation.

DEVELOPMENT OF DOCTRINE

As stated above, the faith contained in the deposit must sometimes be proclaimed in new formulations in order to obviate misunderstandings or make the message intelligible and credible in

habetur in Conc. Vat I: DS 3070 (1836), ubi de infallibilitate Romani Pontificis," *Acta Synodalia* III/8 (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1970), 89.

new cultures. New dogmas, if they state no more than was formally implied in the original revelation, fall within the primary object of magisterial infallibility. The Council of Nicaea, for example, used the term *homoousion* ("consubstantial") to express a revealed truth that some theologians had overlooked: the full divinity of the Son and his unity with the Father in the same identical divine nature. This process of reformulation results in the development of dogma.

In the early twentieth century there was an inconclusive debate about whether the Church can dogmatically define what is only "virtually" rather than "formally" revealed. By the "virtually revealed" was meant something that can indeed be deduced from revelation, but only with the help of truths naturally known. An example of such a deduction is given by Matthias J. Scheeben: "God the Father and the Son have the same nature in common [revealed]; but nature is the proximate principle of activity [naturally known]; hence they have a common activity *ad extra*."²¹ Can such a conclusion be proclaimed as a revealed truth?

If revelation is understood propositionally, as it was by most parties to the dispute, it would seem that the conclusion could not be imposed in the name of revelation, for, according to an established axiom of logic, the conclusion can have no greater certainty than the weaker premise. But if revelation is understood in terms of a broader theory of communication, which admits that a speaker may in the act of speaking communicate more than is propositionally contained in the meaning of the words used, a conclusion achieved with the help of premises not themselves revealed may say no more than was really (though non-propositionally) communicated in the original event of revelation. As Karl Rahner points out, statements of revelation, as salvific events, communicate (*mitteilen*) more than they formally state. Hence the Magisterium,

²¹ Matthias J. Scheeben, *Handbuch der katholische Dogmatik*, vol. 1 (Freiburg: Herder, 1873), 30.

when it explicates revelation, may infallibly teach doctrines that, in terms of formal logic, were only virtually implicit in the deposit.²² This does not mean, however, that all theological conclusions are definable.

In ancient times, the Magisterium did not seek to define the implications of revelation except to the degree that was considered necessary to defend the faith against heretical distortions. Only with great reluctance did the Fathers at Nicaea, for example, insert the non-biblical term *homoousion* ("consubstantial") into the creed. But in recent times, especially in the period between 1850 and 1950, the Roman Magisterium deliberately engaged in the process of dogmatic development. Dogmas such as the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin (defined respectively Pius IX and Pius XII) were intended to enrich the faith and piety of Catholics in a positive way, and to redound to the honor and glory of God, rather than to avert specific threats to the faith. This period of the "extensive" development of dogma seems to have peaked and subsided, at least for the time being, though some Catholics are still asking for dogmatic definitions of new Marian titles and privileges. Vatican II, following the instructions of Pope John XXIII, abstained from invoking its own infallibility. It neither defined new dogmas nor anathematized new errors. No pope since Vatican II has as yet made an *ex cathedra* definition, but Pope John Paul II affirmed that the pope has the power to do so under the conditions laid down by Vatican I (*UUS* 94).

SECONDARY OBJECTS OF INFALLIBILITY

The extent of the secondary object of magisterial infallibility is thoroughly discussed in the standard theological manuals.²³

²² Karl Rahner, "The Development of Dogma," *Theological Investigations*, vol. 1 (Baltimore: Helicon, 1961), 39–78, esp. 68–75.

²³ Salaverri, *De Ecclesia Christi* §§698–737, 729–47; Sullivan, *Magisterium*, 131–52.

Where competent authorities disagree about whether a given doctrine is infallibly taught, the burden of proof rests juridically on those who contend for infallibility. For, according to the principles of canon law, a doubtfully infallible definition is in practice to be treated as though it were non-infallible (CIC, c. 749, #3).

All agree that the secondary object includes whatever must be believed as a necessary condition or necessary consequence of the assent to revelation itself. Very often the crucial question is whether the doctrine in question is not merely useful but truly indispensable for the exposition and defense of the apostolic revelation, as Vatican II and the CDF Declaration *Mysterium Ecclesiae* seem to require.

It is generally agreed that the Magisterium can infallibly declare the "preambles of faith," that is, naturally knowable truths implied in the credibility of the Christian message, such as the capacity of the human mind to grasp truth about invisible realities, to know the existence of God by reasoning from the created world (*DS* 3004, 3026, 3538), and to grasp the possibility of revelation (*DS* 3027) and miracles (*DS* 3033–34).

A strong case for infallibility can be made in the case of certain facts closely connected with the truth of revelation (called "dogmatic facts") such as the ecumenical authority of a given council or the validity of the election of a given pope, since this information might be essential to establish the validity of a dogmatic definition. Unless the Church could identify her popes and ecumenical councils with full authority, her dogmatic teaching would be clouded by doubt.

About other secondary objects there are differences of opinion. The extension of infallibility to "dogmatic facts" became a burning issue when Cornelius Jansen was condemned for having taught five propositions that according to his followers were incorrectly ascribed to him (*DS* 2001–7). The Holy See insisted that Jansen himself taught the propositions in the sense that it

had rejected (*DS* 2010–12; 2020). But even if Jansen understood his propositions in an orthodox sense, it cannot be denied that the Magisterium had the competence to condemn the propositions according to the normal meaning of the words. What Jansen had in mind is a more complicated question.

Among other non-revealed matters that have frequently been seen as falling within the secondary object of infallibility is the solemn canonization of saints.²⁴ Some authors defend, in addition, a kind of “practical infallibility” in papal actions such as the approval of religious institutes. Although the common teaching of theologians gives some support for holding infallibility in these cases, it is difficult to see how they fit under the object of infallibility as defined by the two Vatican Councils.

Moral theologians debate about the competence of the Magisterium to speak definitively in its teaching concerning the natural law. They generally agree that, as Francis Sullivan puts it, “some of the basic principles of the natural law are also formally revealed, and as such, belong to the primary object of infallible magisterium.”²⁵ The Ten Commandments, for example, are little more

²⁴ The Catholic participants to the United States Lutheran-Catholic Dialogue, in their reflections on infallible teaching, wrote: “The theological manuals of recent generations rather commonly hold that solemn canonizations of saints, as contained in papal decretal letters, are infallible. The tradition in favor of infallibility in the matter has been traced back at least to the time of Thomas Aquinas, but there are genuine difficulties in seeing how canonizations fall within the object of papal infallibility as taught by Vatican I or Vatican II. Certainly, the virtues of particular persons of post-biblical times, and their present situation before God, can scarcely be reckoned as part of the apostolic deposit of faith. . . . The Church has the power to recognize authentic Christian holiness, yet canonization would not seem of its nature to convey infallible certitude that the holiness in question was actually present in the life of this or that historical person” (§32). References to literature on canonizations are given in the footnotes, which I have not reproduced here. See “Roman Catholic Reflections,” in *Teaching Authority and Infallibility in the Church*, ed. Empie et al., 49–50.

²⁵ Sullivan, *Magisterium*, 149.

than a restatement for Israelites of the requirements of the natural law. In *Evangelium vitae* Pope John Paul II bases his teaching on the inviolability of innocent human life on natural law “reaffirmed by Sacred Scripture,” as well as by Tradition and the Magisterium (*EV* 57).

At a conference with Cardinal Ratzinger and other representatives of the CDF and several Committees on Doctrine, Archbishop Daniel Pilarczyk, as chairman of the Committee on Doctrine of the United States Conference of Catholic bishops, remarked:

Further clarification about the Church’s ability to teach matters of natural law infallibly would be desirable. According to one opinion, the capacity to teach the natural law with full authority falls within the Church’s mission, since the observance of the natural law is required for salvation. According to another opinion, the magisterium can speak with pastoral authority on all issues of the moral law. It can also speak infallibly on basic principles of the natural law that are also formally revealed; but the Church, it is said, has no power to speak infallibly about particular applications of the natural moral law unless these can be shown to be intimately or necessarily connected with revelation.²⁶

²⁶ Daniel E. Pilarczyk, “The Role of the Theologian in a Catholic College or University in the Light of *Ad tuendam fidem* and the *Professio fidei*,” in *Proclaiming the Truth of Jesus Christ: Papers from the Vallombrosa Meeting* (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 2000), 69–82, at 80. As holding the first opinion (that all matters of natural law fall within the object of irreformable definitions), Pilarczyk quoted from Umberto Betti, commenting on the 1989 Profession of Faith in *L’Osservatore Romano* (English-language edition), 13 March 1989, 4. As a representative of the second opinion, requiring intimate connection with revelation, he cited an article by Francis A. Sullivan, “Some Observations on the New Formula for the Profession of Faith,” in *Gregorianum* 70 (1989): 552–54. In his *Magisterium*, 136–52, Sullivan takes the same position. In footnote 46, 227, Sullivan lists a considerable number of prominent moral theologians who hold that particular norms of the natural law “are not proper matter of irreformable teaching.”

The response of the CDF was carefully worded. It distinguished between negative and positive norms. "Given that the observance of all negative moral norms that concern intrinsically evil acts (*intrinsece mala*) is necessary for salvation, it follows that the Magisterium has the competence to teach infallibly and make obligatory the definitive assent of the members of the faithful with regard to the knowledge and application in life of these norms. This judgment belongs to the Catholic doctrine on the infallibility of the Magisterium."

Turning then to positive norms, the CDF stated: "With regard to the particular applications of the norms of the natural moral law that do not have a necessary connection with Revelation—for example, numerous positive moral norms that are valid *ut in pluribus*—it has not been defined nor is it binding that the Magisterium can teach infallibly in such specific matters."²⁷

Francis Sullivan interprets John Paul II's position as opposed to his own. The encyclical *Veritatis splendor* (1993), as he understands it, implies that all moral truths, including those of the natural order, are knowable from revelation. If so, says Sullivan, the entire moral law could be seen as falling within the primary object of infallibility.²⁸

The pope, we may agree, teaches in *Veritatis splendor* that the entire moral law is better understood in the light of revelation, as contained in Holy Scripture and Tradition (VS 5, 28, and so on). In *Evangelium vitae* he condemned murder, abortion, and euthanasia on the basis of the teaching of the ordinary and universal Magisterium. He stated that the teaching of the Magisterium was supported by Scripture as well as by the natural law.

²⁷ CDF Representatives, "Some Brief Responses to Questions Regarding the *Professio fidei*," *Proclaiming the Truth of Jesus Christ: Papers from the Vallombrosa Meeting*, 61–66, at 66.

²⁸ Francis A. Sullivan, "Infallible Teaching on Moral Issues? Reflections on *Veritatis splendor* and *Evangelium vitae*," in *Choosing Life: A Dialogue on Evangelium vitae*, ed. Kevin W. Wildes and Alan Mitchell (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1997), 77–89.

But it is not evident that he meant to say that all precepts of the natural moral law are revealed truths, falling within the primary object of infallibility. As we shall see in our next chapter, the CDF classifies some teachings of the moral law as belonging to the secondary object of infallibility.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Response Due
to the Magisterium

THEOLOGICAL NOTES

IN THE MANUALS published before and during Vatican II, it was customary to attach theological notes or qualifications to every proposition being taught.¹ Was it a matter of faith, to be believed by all under pain of heresy, or did it have some lesser degree of obligatory force? These theological notes depended primarily on the degree to which the Magisterium had engaged its authority. A very simplified list would include the following:

1. Doctrine of faith
 - a. defined (by pope or council)
 - b. taught by the ordinary and universal Magisterium
2. Doctrine infallibly taught as inseparably connected with revelation
3. Doctrine authoritatively but non-infallibly taught by Magisterium

¹ Ioachim Salaverri, in the treatise *De Ecclesia* of the multivolume *Sacrae Theologiae Summa*, lists fourteen theological “notes” used in the series, with the “censures” of errors opposed to each; vol. 1, §§884–905; 800–10. For a full discussion of theological notes, see Sisto Cartechini, *Dall’Opinione al Dogma: Valore delle Note teologiche* (Rome: Civiltà Cattolica, 1953).

4. Theological conclusion logically deduced from a proposition of faith
5. Probable opinion

In the decade following the council these theological notes disappeared from textbooks. There was a period of confusion as to what doctrines were binding, on what grounds, and in what measure. Some theologians acted as though it were acceptable for Catholics to contest every doctrine of the Church that had not been solemnly defined. A few authors contended that since revelation was not originally given as a set of propositions, no Christian should be required to subscribe to any propositions as matters of faith. Or alternatively, the doctrines of the Church were regarded as being so historically and culturally conditioned that none of them could be classified as revealed or irreversibly true. Individuals were at times encouraged to construct creeds and confessions of their own, thus blurring the contours of the Church as a visible, universal, and abiding community of faith.

POST-CONCILIAR CLARIFICATIONS

To remedy the growing confusion, the Holy See took a series of steps, several of which may be mentioned here. In 1968 Pope Paul VI, preoccupied by "the disquiet which at the present time agitates certain quarters with regard to the faith," promulgated a profession of faith popularly known as "the Credo of the People of God." While expressly declaring that it was not a dogmatic definition, the pope incorporated in it the substance of the creed of Nicaea, together with some teachings of later councils, notably the teaching of Trent with regard to original sin and the Eucharist, which was being questioned in some circles.²

² Paul VI, "Profession of Faith," in Jacques Dupuis, ed., *The Christian Faith in the Doctrinal Documents of the Catholic Church*, 6th ed. (Staten Island, NY: Alba House, 1996), §39, 24–31.

In 1973 the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith published the Declaration *Mysterium Ecclesiae*, dealing primarily with the infallibility of the Magisterium, in response to questions raised by Hans Küng and others. In 1983, the pope promulgated the revised Code of Canon Law, which contained a long section on the Church's Teaching Office (*Munus Docendi*) in canons 747–843.

The Extraordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops in 1985 asked Pope John Paul II to draw up a universal catechism. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* was accordingly composed and published in 1992, with a definitive Latin edition in 1997. Pope John Paul II in the Apostolic Constitution promulgating the *Catechism* declared it to be "a sure norm for teaching the faith and thus a valid and legitimate instrument for ecclesial communion."³ The various teachings in the *Catechism* have no greater authority than they had in the documents from which they are drawn.⁴

THE PROFESSION OF FAITH OF 1989

In 1989 the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith published a new Profession of Faith.⁵ It replaced the much briefer Profession of Faith of 1967, which had itself replaced the Tridentine Profession of Faith (1564) together with the addition inserted into it in 1877, based on Vatican I, as well as the Oath against Modernism of 1910. The Profession of 1989, currently in force, is designed to reflect the teaching of Vatican II, especially in *Lumen gentium* 25. After the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, which had traditionally stood at

³ John Paul II, Apostolic Constitution *Fidei Depositum*, §3, in *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2d ed. (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2000), 5.

⁴ "The individual doctrines that the Catechism affirms have no other authority than that which they already possess," wrote Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger in "The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and the Optimism of the Redeemed," *Communio: International Catholic Review* 20 (1993): 469–84, at 479.

⁵ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, "Profession of Faith," *Origins* 18 (March 16, 1989): 661, 663.

the head of professions of faith, the Profession of 1989 contains three added paragraphs, the first dealing with revealed truths, the second with doctrines definitively taught as inseparably connected with revelation, and the third with authoritative teachings that are neither revealed nor inseparably connected with revelation, which consequently are not definitive.

In May 1998 Pope John Paul II in the motu proprio *Ad tuendam fidem* amended the Code of Canon Law by two small additions to take care of the doctrines treated in the second added paragraph of the Profession of Faith, which lacked any recognition in the Code of 1983.⁶ Using the publication of *Ad tuendam* as the occasion, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, as Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, together with Archbishop Tarcisio Bertone, Secretary of the Congregation, issued a joint commentary on the three concluding paragraphs of the Profession of Faith.⁷ Relying principally on the new Profession of Faith and the two documents of 1998, we may at this point consider the proper responses to doctrinal pronouncements of different types.

The Catholic Church recognizes two creeds as having uncontested authority: the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed.⁸ The Apostles' Creed, which differs hardly at all

⁶ John Paul II, Apostolic Letter motu proprio, "*Ad tuendam fidem*," *Origins* 28 (July 16, 1998): 113, 115–16. The additions are to canons 750 and 1371 of the CIC and corresponding articles of the Code for Eastern Churches.

⁷ Joseph Ratzinger and Tarcisio Bertone, "Commentary on the Profession of Faith's Concluding Paragraphs," *Origins* 28 (July 16, 1998): 116–19. This commentary, since it does not emanate from the Congregation as such, is not an official document of the Church. Cardinal Ratzinger, however, later explained that the text was composed by the Congregation as a whole and approved by the cardinals in assembly and also by the pope. It is not therefore a merely private document. See Joseph Ratzinger, "Stellungnahme," *Stimmen der Zeit* 217 (1999): 168–71, at 171.

⁸ The Athanasian Creed (also known as the *Quicumque*) is sometimes listed as the "third ecumenical creed," but it is not recognized in the East, and even in the West does not have the same standing as the other two.

from the Roman Creed of the fourth century, remains the creed professed by candidates for baptism in the Roman rite. The Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, as its name suggests, is a reworking of the Creed of Nicaea (325) by the Council of Constantinople (381). Popularly known as the Nicene Creed, it has become the baptismal creed of the Eastern churches and is often sung at Mass in churches of the Roman rite. These two creeds are to be accepted by all Catholics as summaries of the key articles of Christian faith.

In its Western or Latin form, the Nicene Creed includes one word that was introduced in the Middle Ages: *Filioque*. This term characterizes the procession of the Holy Spirit as being not only from the Father but also from the Son. Although some theologians question whether the *Filioque* ought to have been introduced into the Creed without prior consultation with the Eastern churches, the teaching expressed by the term has an impressive patristic pedigree and enjoys strong support from the arguments of distinguished theologians. The ecumenical councils of Lyons II (DS 850) and Florence (DS 1300) solemnly taught the truth of the *Filioque*. Catholics, therefore, should have no hesitation in professing the Creed with the added term, as set forth in the Profession of Faith.

After these preliminary remarks on the Creed we may now turn to the three added paragraphs.

THE FIRST ADDED PARAGRAPH

The first added paragraph concerns doctrines contained in the word of God, handed down in Tradition, and proposed by the

It appears in the Lutheran Book of Concord and in the Anglican Book of Common Prayer. Before Vatican II Catholics regularly recited it in the Divine Office for Sundays, but it was eliminated in the revision of the Liturgy of the Hours after the council. Certainly not composed by Athanasius, it is a Western creed probably composed in Southern Gaul about the fifth century. It eloquently and emphatically sets forth the mysteries of the Holy Trinity and the Incarnation in opposition to various ancient heresies.

Church as revealed truths. This category includes both solemn teachings of popes or councils and teachings of the ordinary and universal Magisterium.

According to the Profession of Faith the proper response to such teaching in each and every case is one of "firm faith." Vatican I spoke in this connection of "divine and Catholic faith"—divine because the doctrines are contained in the word of God; Catholic because they are proposed as such by the Catholic Church. The scope of divine and Catholic faith was succinctly stated by Vatican I as including "all those truths which are contained in Scripture and Tradition and which the Church, either by solemn judgment or by her ordinary and universal magisterium, proposes for belief (*credenda*) as having been divinely revealed" (DS 3011).

Obstinate denial or obstinate doubt of any doctrine of the Catholic faith is a sin of heresy. It makes one liable to the canonical penalties specified for heresy, including excommunication (CIC, cc. 751, 1364, and so on).

As examples of revealed truths contained in the deposit of faith one could adduce any dogmas defined by ecumenical councils, such as the Real Presence or papal infallibility, or by popes speaking *ex cathedra*, such as the two Marian dogmas defined in recent centuries. As an example of a revealed truth that has not been solemnly proclaimed, the Ratzinger-Bertone Commentary mentions the doctrine that the voluntary and direct killing of innocent human beings is gravely sinful (EV 57).

THE SECOND ADDED PARAGRAPH

The second added paragraph deals with other doctrines pertaining to faith and morals that are proposed by the Church definitively (*definitive*). This category has to do with non-revealed truths that are "required for the sacred presentation and faithful explanation" of the deposit of the faith (canon 750, §2). As we have seen in chapter 6, these doctrines belong to the secondary or indirect

object of infallibility. With regard to each and every such teaching, says the Profession of Faith, the proper response is to accept and hold it with a firm and irrevocable assent. In saying "hold" rather than "believe" the Profession of Faith here follows the language of Vatican I, which distinguished between *credenda* (doctrines "to be believed" in the strict sense of the word, DS 3011) and *tenenda* (doctrines "to be held," DS 3074). Only revealed truths can be in the strict sense believed. The assent to non-revealed truths that are definitively taught must be definitive so as to correspond to the firmness of the teaching.

Many theologians speak in this connection of "ecclesiastical faith"—faith that goes out not directly to God as witness, but to the Church as divinely assisted teacher. This use of the term "ecclesiastical faith" is relatively recent, and is regarded by some as confusing or unsatisfactory.⁹ Yet it should be recognized that confidence in the judgment of the Church is involved in the acceptance of the *tenenda*.

The Ratzinger-Bertone Commentary on the new Profession of Faith distinguishes between two types of doctrine in this category: those connected with revelation by logical and by historical necessity. As examples of doctrines connected by logical necessity the Commentary lists several moral doctrines such as the illicitness of euthanasia (EV 65), which is infallibly taught though it does not seem to be mentioned in Scripture. The Commentary, therefore, does not treat the entire moral law as falling within the *primary* object of infallibility.

⁹ The majority of pre-Vatican II theological manuals admitted the concept of "ecclesiastical faith," but some very distinguished authors (including Francisco Marín-Sola, Ambroise Gardeil, and Charles Journet) opposed it. See the discussion in Salaverri, *De Ecclesia Christi*, §899, 807–8, and that of Yves Congar in his *Sainte Église* (Paris: Cerf, 1963), 357–73. Since Vatican II Henri de Lubac vigorously criticized the modern use of the term "ecclesiastical faith," holding that the term ought to mean the faith of the Church, pure and simple. See his *The Splendor of the Church* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1986), 42.

The reservation of priestly orders to men, also mentioned as logically connected with revelation, is a different type of doctrine since, unlike the examples just given, it is not a matter of natural law known by reason. It cannot be known otherwise than by faith in Holy Scripture and Catholic Tradition. In a response of 1995, the CDF officially ruled that this doctrine was infallibly taught by the Magisterium and pertained to the deposit of faith.¹⁰ The 1998 Commentary explains that although the doctrine has been "set forth infallibly by the ordinary and universal Magisterium," it may be understood not as revealed but as logically connected with revelation. But the authors add: "This does not foreclose the possibility that in the future the Church might progress to the point where this teaching could be defined as a doctrine to be believed as divinely revealed" (§11). Such a reclassification, according to the Commentary, would not be unprecedented. The universal jurisdiction and infallibility of the pope, previously understood as logical consequences of revelation, have been regarded as revealed truths since Vatican I.¹¹

As examples of truths connected with the deposit of faith by historical necessity the Ratzinger-Bertone Commentary suggests

¹⁰ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, "Response to *Dubium*," 401, 403.

¹¹ At a meeting between the chairmen of several episcopal doctrinal commissions and representatives of the CDF held in Vallombrosa, California, in 1999, Archbishop Daniel Pilarczyk asked whether the teaching of *Ordinatio sacerdotalis* on the ordination of women to the priesthood could be considered a revealed truth, belonging to the first added paragraph of the Profession of Faith. The representatives of the CDF responded that the doctrine could legitimately be regarded as a doctrine of divine and Catholic faith; "for the moment, however, the Magisterium has simply reaffirmed it as a truth of the Church's doctrine (the second paragraph), based on Scripture, attested to and applied in the uninterrupted Tradition, and taught by the ordinary and universal Magisterium, without declaring it to be a dogma that is divinely revealed." See *Proclaiming the Truth of Jesus Christ: Papers from the Vallombrosa Meeting* (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 2000), 64–65 (CDF) and 79–80 (Pilarczyk).

the validity of papal elections, the ecumenicity of councils, canonizations of saints, and the invalidity of Anglican orders, as declared by Pope Leo XIII in 1896 (*DS* 3315–19). As mentioned in chapter 6, it is not easy to see how the fact that this or that saint possessed heroic virtue is either a necessary condition or a necessary consequence of Christian faith. Since Vatican II, moreover, there have been new debates about the possibility of recognizing Anglican orders. In proposing these two examples, the Commentary presumably intends to recall what is been taught, not to settle current controversies.¹²

In *Ad tuendam fidem* Pope John Paul II states that anyone who rejects propositions falling within the second added paragraph of the Profession of Faith "is opposed to the doctrine of the Catholic Church." If such a person fails to make a retraction after having been admonished by the Apostolic See or by the ordinary, he shall be "punished with a just penalty." The Ratzinger-Bertone Commentary says of such persons that they are "no longer in full communion with the Church."¹³

THE THIRD ADDED PARAGRAPH

The third added paragraph has reference to teachings that are authoritative but are not set forth as definitive. This category is a

¹² At the Vallombrosa meeting mentioned in the preceding note, the representatives of the CDF explained that in proposing these dogmatic facts as doctrines to be definitively held, the Magisterium relies "on its faith in the Holy Spirit's assistance to the Church and on the Catholic doctrine of the infallibility of the Magisterium," *ibid.*, 63. Cardinal Ratzinger has written: "The listing of some doctrinal examples as examples does not grant them any other weight than what they had before." See Ratzinger, "Stellungnahme," 17.

¹³ Ratzinger-Bertone, "Commentary," §6, 117. In answer to the question whether this lack of full communion with the Church entailed exclusion from the sacraments (Pilarczyk, 81), the representatives of the CDF at the Vallombrosa meeting replied: "Negative," while calling attention to the power of the bishop to impose "just penalties" (*Vallombrosa Papers*, 66).

very broad one, including many types of doctrines that can lead to a better understanding of faith and morality. Pius XII in *Humani generis* discussed the kind of response that is due to non-infallible authoritative teaching of the papal Magisterium (DS 3885). He declared:

20. Nor must it be thought that what is expounded in Encyclical Letters does not of itself demand assent (*assensum*), since the Popes do not exercise in such letters the full power of their Magisterium. For these matters are taught with the ordinary Magisterium, of which it is true to say: "He who hears you, hears me" (Lk 10:16); and generally what is expounded and inculcated in encyclical letters already for other reasons pertains to Catholic doctrine. But if the supreme pontiffs in their official documents purposely pass judgment on a matter up to that time under dispute, it is obvious that the matter, according to the mind and will of these pontiffs, cannot any longer be considered a question open to free discussion (*liberae disceptationis*) among theologians.

Vatican II in its Constitution on the Church spoke somewhat more briefly to the same point:

Religious submission (*religiosum obsequium*) of will and intellect is to be given in a special way to the authentic Magisterium of the Roman pontiff even when he is not speaking *ex cathedra*; in such a way, that is, that his supreme Magisterium is respectfully acknowledged, and the judgment expressed by him is sincerely adhered to (*sincere adhaereatur*), in accordance with his manifest mind and will, which is communicated chiefly by the nature of the documents, by the frequent repetition of the same doctrine, or by the style of verbal expression. (LG 25)

Lumen gentium, probably for the sake of brevity, did not repeat the statement of Pius XII regarding the termination of free discussion, but it would seem clear from its teaching on submission to the ordinary papal magisterium that theologians could not

properly continue to urge their objections after the pope had rendered a contrary judgment.

Following the language of Vatican II, the Profession of Faith states that the Catholic must adhere to authentic but non-definitive teaching with "religious submission will and intellect." The term *obsequium religiosum*, introduced at this point, is notoriously difficult to translate into English. Terms such as "religious submission," "religious assent," "conditioned assent," "religious respect," "religious adherence," and "religious allegiance" have been proposed as translations. This response, like the *obsequium* of faith, is motivated by reverence for the sacred authority of the speaker, but it falls short of the absolute and irrevocable assent required in the first two categories because in this case the infallibility of the Church is not engaged. *Obsequium religiosum* can nevertheless be relatively firm in certain cases.

Because the instances of such teaching are so numerous and various, the 1998 Commentary refrained from giving examples. Such teachings, it declared, "require degrees of adherence differentiated according to the mind and will" of the teacher, as "shown especially by the nature of the document, by the frequent repetition of the same doctrine or by the tenor of the verbal expression" (§11). In an earlier instruction, *Donum veritatis* (1990), the CDF had stated that the response to such teachings "cannot be simply exterior or disciplinary, but must be understood within the logic of faith and under the impulse of obedience to the faith."¹⁴ Non-adherence, however, is not totally excluded, for as the Instruction says a little later: "The willingness to submit loyally to the Magisterium on matters per se not irreformable must be the rule."¹⁵ The phrasing of this sentence seems to imply that the requirements of *obsequium* can, in exceptional cases, be fulfilled by what

¹⁴ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Donum veritatis*, "Instruction on the Ecclesial Vocation of the Theologian," §23; *Origins* 20 (July 5, 1990): 117–26, at 122.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, §24, 122.

Francis Sullivan calls “an honest and sustained effort to overcome any contrary opinion I might have,” even when that effort does not eventuate in the actual assent of the intellect.¹⁶

DISCIPLINARY INTERVENTIONS

The Profession of Faith, since it is concerned only with doctrinal matters, does not deal with disciplinary interventions on the part of the Magisterium, but these are touched on in the Instruction *Donum veritatis*. Sometimes organs of the Magisterium, without pronouncing on the truth or falsity of a proposition, direct Catholic teachers and writers for pastoral reasons not to affirm it, or to affirm it only as a hypothesis until it is solidly proved. The Magisterium has exercised great caution in admitting new scientific theories that seemed contrary to Scripture and longstanding Tradition and that might be upsetting to the faithful. This was the case with regard to heliocentrism in the seventeenth century and, later, the theory of evolution. It was also true of certain responses of the Biblical Commission to theories being espoused by Modernists and critical exegetes at the beginning of the twentieth century. Disciplinary regulations of this kind are by their nature subject to change, since they reflect the state of the evidence at a particular moment of history. They require external conformity in behavior, but do not demand internal assent.

In a press conference on *Donum veritatis* Cardinal Ratzinger spoke more fully of “prudential interventions” than the text itself. He said that the anti-Modernist decisions of the Biblical Commission, even though some of them may be seen in retrospect as overrestrictive, performed a great service in saving the Church from the assaults of liberal positivism. They fulfilled a pastoral function in the situation of their day and remain valid as warnings against rash and superficial accommodations.¹⁷

¹⁶ Sullivan, *Magisterium*, 164.

¹⁷ Joseph Ratzinger, *The Nature and Mission of Theology* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1995), 106.

DISSENT

To dissent means to think or assert what is contrary to the approved teaching. It occurs when one denies the truth of what is taught, or consciously affirms something that contradicts it. Dissent is sometimes confused with other responses, such as wishing that the Magisterium could have taught otherwise, or failing to understand why the Magisterium taught as it did. Dissent, however, is not the same as disappointment or incomprehension, which are entirely compatible with assent. Nor is it the same as doubt, though doubt is likewise a failure to give full assent. Depending on the circumstances, dissent or doubt may be voluntary or involuntary, culpable or inculpable. The loyal Catholic, out of respect for the Magisterium, will try to avoid dissenting from or doubting its authoritative teaching. On each of the three levels of magisterial teaching, dissent and doubt have different consequences.

1. To dissent from, or to doubt, articles of the creed and dogmas of the faith, if done obstinately, is heresy. If such dissent is expressed, the penalty of automatic excommunication is incurred. Persons who even inculpably reject what the Church definitively teaches as her faith cease to be in communion with the Church. One may have difficulties in believing certain dogmas of the faith, but difficulties do not prevent one from assenting, nor do they exclude one from communion. Those who experience serious difficulties have an obligation to try to understand the basis for the teaching, to pray over it, and to recognize that the Church is a divinely commissioned teacher. They should remind themselves that the Church is not limited to teaching what they would believe without her intervention. We most need the Church when we would fall into error unless she corrected us.
2. To dissent from definitive non-revealed teaching, or to doubt it, is not heresy. But those who dissent from such doctrines are

opposed to the Church's definitive teaching and are objectively in error. In the absence of aggravating factors, such as contempt for the Magisterium or scandal, such dissenters are not excommunicated or excluded from the sacraments, but their communion is in some ways impaired. Theologians who dissent from doctrines in this second category frequently claim that the doctrines are not definitively taught, but properly belong in added paragraph 3. But this evasion is not acceptable in cases in which the Magisterium clearly teaches that the doctrines must be definitively held.¹⁸

3. The problem of dissent arises most frequently in connection with added paragraph 3, which deals with teachings that might in principle be erroneous. The Church recognizes that personal difficulties with such teachings can occur, even among faithful theologians. But as the CDF states in *Donum veritatis*, the presumption should always be in favor of the Magisterium, because God has given it to the Church as a

¹⁸ At the Vallombrosa meeting the representatives of the CDF stated with reference to *Ordinatio sacerdotalis*: "It would be contrary to the teaching of the Church to maintain that this doctrine belongs to the third paragraph, and as such requires only religious submission of intellect and will, and not a firm and irrevocable assent" (*Vallombrosa Papers*, 65). In an *ad limina* speech to German bishops of November 20, 1999, Pope John Paul II himself declared that "the doctrine that the priesthood is reserved to men possesses, by virtue of the Church's ordinary and universal Magisterium, that character of infallibility which *Lumen gentium* speaks of and to which I gave juridical form in the Motu Proprio *Ad tuendam fidem*."

As for the teaching of *Humanae vitae*, it is not mentioned in the Ratzinger-Bertone Commentary on the Profession of Faith. But the Pontifical Council on the Family, in its *Vademecum for Confessors concerning some Aspects of the Morality of Conjugal Life*, dated February 12, 1997, declared: "The Church has always taught the intrinsic evil of contraception, that is, of every marital act rendered unfruitful. This teaching is to be held as definitive and irreformable." If so, the sinfulness of contraception probably falls within the second added paragraph of the Profession of Faith.

guide and assists it with special graces. Even when theologians do not see the reasons for a particular teaching, they will assume that the pope and the bishops have good reasons as yet unknown to them. They will study, consult, and pray before allowing themselves to disagree.¹⁹

It is important, however, to recognize that magisterial interventions of the prudential order are not always free from contingent and conjectural elements that can be sifted out only with the passage of time. The effort to identify such non-essential features is an important task of theology, and should not be confused with dissent, provided that the substantive teaching is accepted.²⁰

If, in an exceptional case, one feels justified in dissenting, the next question is what to do about it. One option is to remain silent, so as not to trouble other believers and cause division in the Church. It can be assumed that if the Magisterium has erred, it will correct itself. Many of the older textbooks recommended a *silentium obsequiosum* (reverent silence). *Donum veritatis* speaks of situations in which the theologian will be called "to suffer for the truth, in silence and prayer, but with the certainty that if the truth is really at stake it will ultimately prevail."²¹ Today it is not uncommon to hold that dissenters who are qualified experts should make their disagreements known, with the aim of being corrected by colleagues or, alternatively, to "provide a stimulus to the Magisterium to propose the teaching of the Church in greater depth and with a clearer presentation of the arguments."²² An expressed dissent can be private, if it is shared only with a relatively small group, or public, if shared with a wide audience. According to *Donum veritatis*, theologians who have difficulty in accepting some doctrine would

¹⁹ CDF, Instruction *Donum veritatis*, §§24–31, 122–23.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, §24, 122–23.

²¹ *Ibid.*, §31, 123.

²² *Ibid.*, §30, 123.

generally do well to enter privately into communication with a few colleagues, to see how they react, and perhaps also to make their difficulties discreetly known to hierarchical teachers, for the reasons mentioned above. The development of doctrine has sometimes been assisted by expressions of dissatisfaction with previous deficient formulations. This observation of the CDF is noteworthy, since it is relatively new for theologians to receive official encouragement to express their problems with current magisterial teaching.

The other possibility is to dissent publicly, disseminating one's views through popular media of communication. Occasionally dissenting theologians have called press conferences and taken out advertisements in secular newspapers to announce that the Magisterium is misleading the Church and to promote their own position as the preferable alternative. Public opposition of this sort is a usurpation of authority, because the dissenters claim to be correcting the divinely constituted Magisterium. The CDF particularly disapproves of organized dissent, especially when it is used to put pressure on the Magisterium to change its teaching.²³ It harms the Church in the eyes of the general public; it weakens the Church by dividing Catholics against one another; and it is usually counterproductive because it prompts the hierarchical Magisterium to stiffen its stance lest it appear to be yielding to pressure.

The line between private and public dissent is not always clear. What begins as private dissent, communicated in a restricted scholarly circle, often finds its way into the press and becomes public. If this happens in an unforeseeable way, the theologian is not responsible. But reasonable efforts should be taken to prevent the confusion, bitterness, and disrespect for authority that normally accompany public opposition.

Dissent has always been a problem in the Church, but it seems to have become more widespread in recent years. People who live in a free democratic society have difficulty in understanding why they ought to submit their minds to a Magisterium. They often fail to understand the distinctiveness of the Church as a community of faith. Membership in the Church, unlike membership in secular societies, depends upon sharing the beliefs of the community. Christ equipped the Church with a hierarchical Magisterium that has the competence to articulate what the members should believe to keep them united among themselves and, most importantly, united to their divine Teacher. The Magisterium should be seen not as a burden but as a gift and a blessing.

²³ For discussion of the CDF position on dissent, see Avery Dulles, *The Craft of Theology*, 2d ed. (New York: Crossroad, 1995), 113–16.