

Part III – APPLICATIONS TO OUR OBEDIENCE TO THE MAGISTERIUM

[DV 5; LG 25; CCC # 891, f. and Recent Documents]

**GOD, THE HOLY SPIRIT: ACCEPTANCE IN FAITH
AND THE TRANSMISSION OF THE SACRED DEPOSIT**

[A] DV 5

Acceptance in Faith

DV 5: The Oblation of Intellect and Will

The ‘obedience of faith’ [Rm 16:26; cf. 1:5; 2 Co 10:5-6] must be given to God who reveals, an obedience by which one entrusts his/her entire self freely to God, offering ‘the full submission [obsequium] of intellect and will to God who reveals’ [D-S 3006] and freely assenting to the truth revealed by Him. If this faith is to be shown, the grace of God and the interior help of the Holy Spirit must precede and assist, moving the heart and turning it to God, opening the eyes of the mind, and giving ‘joy and ease to everyone in assenting to the truth and believing it’ [D-S 377; 3010]. To bring about an ever deeper understanding of revelation, the same Holy Spirit constantly brings faith to completion by His gifts.¹³⁸

Presentation

[1] A theology of faith might be developed from a wide variety of points of view. One would be analytical and abstract. Whether it be a question of the genesis of faith, as well as the structure of faith, a variety of elements would be studied: subjective factors [understanding, will and divine grace] – the objective data [credibility, material object, formal motive]. This was the usual point of view of theologians, up until Vatican II.

[2] A second procedure would be synthetic and concrete: there would be studied, first of all, faith in its concrete totality, while bringing out its existential structure. This is the usual point of view as presented by Sacred Scripture and the Fathers of the Church. In this perspective, it seems that faith is explained as an organic system of personal loving relationships.

¹³⁸ *Deo revelanti praestanda est ‘oboeditio fidei’* [Rm 16:26; cf. 2 Co 10:5-6], qua homo se totum libere Deo committit ‘plenum revelanti Deo intellectus et voluntatis obsequium’ praestando [D-S 3008] *et voluntarie revelationi ab Eo datae assentiendo. Quae fides ut praebetur, opus est praeviente et adiuvante gratia Dei et internis Spiritus Sancti auxiliis, qui cor moveat et in Deum convertat, mentis oculos aperiat, et det ‘omnibus suavitatem in consentiendo e credendo veritati’* [D-S 3010]. *Quo vero profundiorusque evadat revelationis intelligentia, idem Spiritus Sanctus fidem iugiter per dona sua perficit...* [DV 5].

[3] In recent years, this second point of view has found much support. Hence, when applied to the “faith”, the following matters may be considered:

- its objective principles [witness];
- its subjective response [fidelity of the believer, adherence];
- its development.

One of the great ways to present this delicate theology of the faith is to reflect on Christian personality in the light of the Mystery of the Most Blessed Trinity.



THE TRINITARIAN DIMENSION OF CHRISTIAN FAITH¹³⁹

Introduction:

[1] The response to the question: What is Faith? – would go a long way to indicate the theological position of the respondent. Each attempt to answer this extremely complex question would show that every position is generally conditioned by particular directives and one’s own history.

[a] This present “Theological Analysis” is a quest for a definition – and yet one which will include the wealth of biblical ideas on faith, and yet one which will strive to consider the contributions made through the centuries by the efforts of others’ reflections on Scripture and Tradition. It is admitted that perhaps no single definition of the Faith will include all of its aspects: each definition will indicate something of a choice.

[b] No one solution has yet been offered which would satisfy the “Cartesian ideal” of a definition: one that would be able to summarize fully the entire wealth of the material content. Were one to restrict the definition solely to Scripture and Tradition, the effort would be greatly simplified – as these sources present a somewhat united view of the faith, even though they do offer a number of particulars.

[c] The theological analysis will be an effort to present the multiple reflections of theologians and to present them in some kind of a “system. This effort is always necessary, and no one synthesis would absorb the wealth of material *obsequium*.

[2] The tract begins with the understanding the Christian and Catholic faith has of itself – and meaning basically that faith which is “alive”, as it is described as the response to the Person of Christ. The effort here will not be “apologetic”, but simply to present the usual situation of faith, one permeated with charity. It is sometimes called the “**Amen of Salvation**”, taking the root Hebrew word, and using it to indicate one’s response to the invitation offered by the Word of God.

¹³⁹ cf. J. Trutsch, in: *Mysterium Salutis*, II, Brescia: Queriniana pp. 417-497, *passim*.

[3] The definition of faith will tend toward that faith as it is lived, and not only in its intellectual content. The *fides scientifica* is a necessary corollary to faith as it is presented in the Scriptures – as the divine word is interpreted by each passing generation, until the fullness of truth be achieved. Through the centuries many elements and controversies have added to the Church’s understanding of the Faith.

[4] In the great and much discussed problems associated with ideas contained under headings such as: *fides scientifica* and the analysis of the faith, it is very difficult to avoid certain choices, and there is always the possibility of presenting a unilateral, or “conditioned” view. In all of this effort, the theologian has to exercise caution not to lose sight of the totality of the faith.

[5] There are several definitions of the Faith that are known to students of theology:

[a] **Heb 11:** this passage is often used as the basis for discussions on the faith, even though it is certain that the unknown author did not intend this line as a formal definition of the Faith: “...**Only faith can guarantee the blessings we hope for, or prove the existence of the realities that are present...**” St. Thomas considered this passage as the most complete definition of the faith [cf. De Ver., 14, 2, c]. Rightly considered, this definition does offer a variety of elements with which one could define “faith” - even though the text, as it is, does not lend itself to the precision that should be associated with any definition.

[b] **St. Thomas:** pondering this text, other biblical data, as well as much of the contribution of Tradition, St. Thomas offered this definition of the faith: “...**It is the habit of the mind, infused by God, by which eternal life is begun in us, making the intellect assent to those things which do not appear...**” [cf. II-II, q. 4, a. 1, c].

[1] With this definition, it is clearly stated that faith is formally an act of the intellect – placed between opinion and doubt on the one hand – and vision and science, on the other. There is within the faith **the intervention of the human will**, “making the intellect assent” [which separates faith from opinion and doubt, which do not give firm assent] – to those things which do not appear [hence, removing “faith” from the level of “science or “vision.”]

[2] Within the definition of St. Thomas, there is also the noted inherent dynamism of the faith toward eternal life. Faith lies along the path to salvation.

[I] Faith as Intellectual¹⁴⁰

1. **MAGISTERIUM:** In a number of interventions the Magisterium of the Church has affirmed the character of the Faith as “intellectual”:

a. Faith is not merely “a vague religious sense” [cf. D-S 3477, ff.] – it is rather **the supernatural principle of knowledge** [cf. D-S 3008, 3015, 3035], distinct from natural knowledge [cf. D-S 2829, 3032].

b. It is not “blind assent”, nor is it contrary to reason – it is transcendent on the rational plane.

c. Faith is not produced by rational arguments [cf. D-S 2574, 2845, 3033, 3341, 3425, 3884, 3542].

d. Faith is a certain, infallible, immutable assent, because of its motive: the authority of the revealing God [cf. D-S 3020, 3031, 3036, 3225, 3135].

1.] Scripture would offer this same truth – but great caution is asked by the exegetes in citing the divine word for theological arguments. Nonetheless, Scripture would offer examples of how faith does have an intellectual aspect [cf. Jn6:21; 8:46; 10:37; cf. Lk 1:20, 46].

2.] In these instances, the subjective “faith” and the verb “to believe” seem to have the meaning of an intellectual conviction. A mere “fiducial faith”, bereft of an intellectual content, would be contrary to the description offered of faith in Sacred Scripture. One could never surrender all of one’s life to a God Who is in no way intelligible, Whose nature and personality have never been propounded for the reflection of human intelligence.

2. **THOMISM:** The Thomistic system accentuates this cognoscitive character of the Faith. With Faith, we share in the very revelation which God has of Himself and His Plan, in that activity with which He says the Word, and in the Word, knows, does all things. The faith may be compared to a seal impressed on the human mind by the First Truth [cf. In Boet., De Trin., q.1, a. 1, ad 4].

a. Faith is a knowledge, because the intellect is determined by faith to adhere to a knowable object. But, this adherence is determined by a truth that is not a “vision”. Faith is based on the truthfulness of the One revealing [cf. I, q. 12, a. 13, ad 3 um].

b. This participation in God’s own knowledge elevates and ennoble the human intelligence, and is not repugnant to it. The intelligence, in its **obediential potentiality**, is open to all truth, to truth as such – and one can remain under the action of God and come to understand in some way, the Word with which God instructs humanity.

¹⁴⁰ cf. D. Mongillo, OP, *La Somma Teologica*, II - II, qq. 1-22, **La Fede**. Introduzione, ed. Solani, Vol. 14

3. **IMPERFECTIONS:** Even though the knowledge of the Faith is sublime, because of the Divinity which specifies it, faith is still imperfect, considering it from the aspect of being an operation of the human mind.

a. The reason for this is that the intellect cannot understand, comprehend, the truths it believes, that one holds as “true” in faith: in the knowledge that one has by means of the faith, the intellectual operation is most imperfect on the part of the intellect [cf. III C.G., c. 40].

b. Faith, however, is not “erroneous knowledge”, or a “doubtful” understanding, but a most certain knowledge which is tending toward the vision of eternity [cf. I, q. 12, a. 13, ad 1 um]. Faith, of its nature, tends to eternal life, toward the vision of God “as He is in Himself”. Faith not only “merits” this vision, but faith is just a “beginning” of that vision of the blessed. With God for eternity, we will know the identical realities which we now accept in the faith.

4. An ‘**OBSEQUIUM**’ [Oblation] RENDERED TO GOD: Faith is a knowledge that **renders homage to God**, in so far as a human being believes uniquely and solely because he/she **accepts God** as the Master of Truth, and on the Divine Word one adheres to that which is not “seen.” The believer allows him/herself to be guided toward goals that are not fully understood [cf. Heb 11:8-10].

a. **Faith is a Homage-Sacrifice:** because the believer does renounce the autonomy of human reasoning, and overcomes its natural and legitimate demands for rational evidence, to enter decisively into the mysterious world of what is “not seen, nor heard.”

b. **The Act of Faith is a Judgment:** it always implies a taking possession of truth and knowledge with the affirmation of the identity between the subject and the predicate of a proposition: “God is One and also Triune” – “Jesus Christ is the Son of God” . The believer says “AMEN” to the Creed, as he/she does to the Lord’s Prayer accepting integrally its truths as the Word of God.

c. **Faith is an immediate judgment:** it is a direct decision, one that does not depend, either on intellectual research, which would precede the certain knowledge of the duty to believe – nor, does it flow from the study of individual truths, or the elements of which they are comprised. The fathoming of the revealed doctrine, to which the believer comes under the action of grace, implies a more penetrating affirmation of this identity.

d. Notwithstanding some affinities, the judgment of faith differs radically from all other forms of judgment:

1.] The judgment of Faith has affinities with the knowledge of “First Principles” and with “scientific judgment” – because, like these judgments, it implies the affirmation of a truth’ however, it differs from these because the judgment of faith implies a tendency toward evidence, while these other judgments [those of “first truths” and those about “scientific truths”] are based on their evidence [cf. I, q. 12, a. 13, d

3um].

2.] The Judgment of Faith also has some affinity with doubt and with opinion, because also in these, there is a judgment that is not based on the intrinsic evidence of the truths; the judgment of faith, however, differs from the judgment of “opinion” and that of “doubt”, because the judgment of the faith implies a firm affirmation of truth that these other judgments do not have.

5. **TENDING TOWARD EVIDENCE:** The judgment of faith is indeed in this situation. If we reflect on the various forms of human knowledge, we see that faith differs decidedly from each one of them:

a. The knowledge of intuition of first principles: in such knowledge, it is sufficient to understand the terms of the judgment with which the principles are announced, in order to make a most certain judgment concerning them.

b. If it is a scientific judgment, there is needed research - if this effort does not terminate in evidence, there can be no assent, and uncertainty remains. When evidence is achieved, only then is assent given.

c. In doubt and opinion, there is a research and this does not achieve evidence – so, assent is not giving, and uncertainty remains.

6. **FIRM ASSENT:** in faith, however, there is a most firm assent:

a. This assent, however, is not achieved by research – but, rather by the testimony of God and by the human will that is moved internally by divine grace.

b. The firm assent is not motivated by evidence, and therefore, the assent of faith cannot be separated from an on-going search which will terminate in eternity – where the truths will become “evident”.

c. This on-going, life-long “quest” differs totally from that of “doubt” – which studies not the evidence of the truth, but the truth itself. St. Thomas offers this fundamental aspect of the psychology of faith: “... In the knowledge of faith, the desire of the believer remains unfulfilled [it may be thought of as a hunger and thirst]. Faith is an imperfect knowledge: truths that are not evident are believed, and, therefore, there remains in the mind of the believer the tendency to see perfectly the truth which one believes, and to know the One through Whom one can be introduced to this Truth [cf. Compend. Theol. II, c. 1].

d. The knowledge of faith does not satisfy the desire, but rather heightens it, in that each one desires to see the things which are believed [cf. III C.G., c. 40]. The believer has a profound nostalgia for heaven, there is a thirst for light, since the faith causes a desire for the truth that is believes [cf. In Jn, c. 4, lect 5].

e. Faith, therefore, does not paralyze the activity of the human will, but “capacitates” it; faith breaks through the mental horizons that habitually limit it, and

urges the mind ever onward to **fix its contemplative gaze on the very mysteries of God**. The most coherent attitude of the faithful person is not one of already having the “truth”, or feeling that full truth is impossible: the truly “faithful” is the perennial seeker – not so much of the truths of which the believer already is in possession, but rather the yearning for full light.

7. **CONCEPTUAL MEDIATION:**

a. As is true in other forms of knowledge, the believer affirms realities through conceptual mediation. During life, these mediations are the one means for knowing God. In the matter of faith, however, it has to be kept in mind that **“faith” does not terminate in the formulae**, but rather, in the mystery enunciated – but **faith is a virtue uniting the human mind to the divine reality**. The human mind needs enunciations, formulae, not only to achieve the knowledge of the realities – this is needed both for knowledge, as well as in faith [cf. II – II, q.1, a. 2, ad 2^{um}].

b. In the matter of faith, that which is affirmed is **God Himself**, known through the gift of Faith, just as He is in Himself. Infused faith brings it about that God indeed is the “term” of knowledge.

c. The formulae, as the Articles of Faith, are, from the part of the human mind, the means by which the divine reality is expressed. The concepts of the faith are formed by human intelligence, with truth that proceeds from God, expressed by Him in human knowledge, and then drawn up into *Compendia*, or “*Formulae*” [e.g., dogmas], by the infallible Magisterium of the Church, which then cares for their interpretation.

d. Because of the requirements of the human mind, it is impossible to think of a faith without expressing it in some way, in human terminology. Faith cannot be thought of as a kind of mystical knowledge reserved for the few. In reality, even mystical knowledge always is based upon conceptual knowledge of theological faith, which is a necessary condition.

e. Through intellectual concepts, the believer is illumined and directed by the Holy Spirit. Through these, the believer tends toward the divine reality and has some contact with it – so that in some way, the divine reality and truths will be “lived”. However, faith, in its most profound nature, remains always an intellectual assent, and not an intuitive encounter with God in Christ through the Spirit.

f. The object of the act of faith is directly reached, in so far as this is mediated to the intelligence by means of doctrinal affirmations. The Faith itself has as its object, the Reality presented behind the formulations.

8. **CERTAINTY:** [cf. In Jn, c. 4, l, 5]:

a. All that the faith considers is absolutely true, because faith can consider a truth in so far as this is revealed by God, guaranteed by God and His veracity. It is

not possible that an authentic act of theological faith would have for its object a false enunciation [q. 1, a. 3].

b. This does not exclude the fact that in the mind of some believers there may be mixed in with the believed truths, some human and erroneous conceptions [cf. Rahner's "Material Heresy"]. It is not, however, the "faith" as such that would have one affirm these imprecisions, but rather something that could be reduced to "error in the faith", or something along this line.

c. The Certainty of the Faith is most firm: because it comes from God – "faith has a certainty through its light, which is divinely infused" [cf. In Jn c. 4, lect. 5]. At the same time, however, it is precarious, because this is rooted imperfectly in the human intelligence. Because of its inherent darkness and the lack of proportion with the divine object of Faith, the human intellect of the believer is also aided by the Gifts of the Holy Spirit, Understanding and Knowledge – nonetheless, there still remains an imperfection. The certainty of faith, however, does not depend on acts of reason which precede the act of faith, and the grasping of the certainty of human conviction. The certainty of faith is superior to all human certainties, because it has as its foundation the divine truth itself: "it is based on the divine reason."

d. The foundation of such certainty does not consist in the possibility of verifying it on the part of the believer, but is based rather on the testimony of the revealing God. As an affirmation of truths that are not evident, faith supposes essentially a witness that affirms the existence and guarantees the truth of what is affirmed.

e. The testimony on which the faith is founded is not only that which is external, coming from the One who announces the message – but, rather [and this is its greater part] – it is that internal conviction, the result of grace, which God establishes this in the spirit of the believer. Without this inner grace, the exterior testimony would be ineffective and empty, and it is simultaneous to the affirmation of the truth on the part of the believer. The faith is an interior light leading to assent and is a gift from God – in this sense, faith is an "infused gift." [cf. In Boet, D Tin. Q. 3, a. 1, ad 4 um].

f. The One and Triune God is not only the object of the faith of the believer, but also its motive. In this sense, there is affirmed the motive of the faith that is believed together with its mysteries: the motive is "co-believed" with the mysteries. With one and the same act, the believer assents to the God Who reveals as well as to the God Who is revealed – just as with one and the same act of sight, one sees the light and the realities made clear in that light.

[III] With the Influence of the Will

1. **COGNOSCITIVE AND VOLITIVE:** Faith is at one and the same time a **cognoscitive** and a **volitive act** – it depends in its existence and for its development on the will. This is a doctrine that has been constantly affirmed by the Magisterium of the Church,

a. Among the essential elements of the act of faith, the Council of Orange speaks of the pious affect of credulity: this means **the movement of the will under the influence of the Holy Spirit**, one goes from incredulity to faith, from impiety to piety [cf. D-S 375, 377]. In its turn, Vatican I, describes the act of faith as: a full submission of the intelligence and the will to God Who reveals [cf. D-S 3008]. In faith, a human being freely obeys God, through the consent and the cooperation that is given to grace, to which one could indeed offer resistance [cf. D-S 3010]. “Let him be anathema whoever says that the assent of the Christian faith is not free, but is produced necessarily by proofs offered by the human mind” [cf. D-S 3035].

b. With its more vital, and less abstract language, Sacred Scripture affirms the influence of the will precisely where it brings out the responsibility of human beings toward the message of God. This is a statement of the Lord Himself to the Pharisees: “... ***If you do not want to believe me, then believe my words...***” [cf. Jn 8:46].

c. The free cooperation of a human being is an essential requirement for the infusing of faith. According to John, that attraction which the Father exercises [cf. 6:44] is accomplished when the human being, with open mind, accepts the fact that God is speaking to him/her [cf. 6:45]: every human being can allow him/herself to be drawn by the Lord [“...anyone who listens...” – cf. 5:24]. The unbelievers of that time are fully responsible for their incredulity: they preferred the darkness to the light, the esteem of their fellow human beings over that of God [cf. 3:19; 14:43; they did not choose to come to Jesus [5:40; cf. 8:44] – there is no real excuse for their lack of faith [cf. 15:22, 24] – Jesus considered this rejection to be a sin [16:9].

d. The non-acceptance of the faith is inexcusable, according to this biblical view. This can happen only if a decision of the will is possible, i.e., whoever believes in the Son already has eternal life [cf. 3:36; cf. 3:15; 6:40-47]. ***If you believe, you will see the glory of God*** [cf. 11:60]; ***whoever believes in me, will not remain in the darkness*** [12: 46, etc.; cf. 6:35; 11:25; 14:12; 3:18]. All of these texts seem to imply the use of free will in the exercise of a life of faith.

e. St. Thomas has expressed in rather clear formulae this same doctrine. Faith establishes itself in the intellect **only under the command of the will**. Thus, it results that this act of the will, which is accidental in relation to the intellect, is nonetheless essential for the act of faith [De Ver., q. 15, a. 1]. In the knowledge of faith, the action of the will is predominant: the intellect in fact assents through the faith, to those truths which are proposed because it chooses to assent [moved by grace], and not because it is necessitated to assent by the evidence of the truth [cf. lii C.G., c. 40].

f. The virtue of faith does not have the function of moving directly the intellect to assent to those revealed truths, but of **disposing** it to follow docilely the movement of the will. The faith, in fact, is rooted in the intelligence, considered, however, formally in so far as it is subjected to the command of the will [cf. De Ver. q. 14, a. 4]. Faith does not pass to the act directly, but only under the impulse of the will, attracted by the First Truth which is also the Supreme Good [cf. q. 1, a. 6, ad 3^{um}; De Ver. q. 14, a.2].

2. **THE WILL PREPARES ONE FOR FAITH**

a. The perception and acceptance of ethical and religious values suppose a complexity of spiritual dispositions. These are the fruit of **the commitment of the will**. These dispositions are not the cause of the affirmation of the faith, but they do condition it. They do not create the object, but they either permit, or impede one from recognizing it.

b. Moreover, faith is a duty – and the perception of the duty to believe, as all duties, demands on the part of the individual, a voluntary attitude of loyalty, fidelity, purification.

c. This rectifying action of the will does not last only up to the conversion and to the acceptance of the faith, but always. It is the will which conserves in the soul that necessary climate for the faith: a climate of right living, purity, humility, piety, generosity – thanks to which the faith becomes more deeply rooted and developed.

d. In a plan of salvation that is offered – and can be accepted, or freely rejected – it is noted that the same will can foment a climate of deceit, or self-seeking, tepidity, or pride - attitudes that may weaken the faith, or have it disappear altogether.

3. **THE WILL INTERVENES IN THE VERY ESSENCE OF THE ACT OF FAITH:**

a. The influence of the affectivity on knowledge is multiple. The **quest** for truth is always **sustained by the will**, which **concentrates** the attention on one object, rather than on another, and moves the intelligence to consider it. The **love** for truth constitutes an empowering of the connatural thrust of the intelligence toward truth. Love has the capacity for creating a particular interest in favor of the beloved object [cf. I – II, q. 28, a. 2] - and, therefore, perfects the cognoscitive faculty. There is indeed a profound influence of the affective connaturality in the cognoscitive process.

b. In the **affirmation** of moral truths, the will has to intervene not only to apply the intelligence, but also to dispose the spirit to affirm the proposed truth. The practice of good and the experimental knowledge of virtue add to the speculative judgment, in the matter of morality, a power of discernment which is both direct and spontaneous: it is knowledge “by connaturality” [cf. II – II, q. 45, a. 3].

c. In the affirmation of religious truths of a natural order, the will and the good moral dispositions have the function of permitting and facilitating the normal exercise of the intellect, to perceive the intimate value of the rational demonstrations.

d. In the affirmation of supernatural truths, the situation is completely different. The truth, object of faith, is mysterious, and has as its essential characteristic, one of which is “in evidence.” As such, the intelligence could never know it, unless a force intervenes which would move it from the outside, and would sustain its adherence for all the time that this lasts. The will, in the case of the act of faith, intervenes in a diverse manner, from all the preceding cases; it enters directly into the constitution of the act, in so far as it determines it.

1.] In fact, the intellect knows and assents to what is revealed; however, the will determines it causally to assent. The influence of the will is required to have the act of faith subsist, not only in so far as it is a human act, but also in so far as it is an intellectual act. The theologians, therefore, say that the faith is formally in the intellect, but “causally” in the will.

2.] The ultimate reason of this essential intervention of the will is not the evidence of what has been revealed: the intellect assents not because it “sees”, but because it is constrained, moved by the will to assent.

3.] In the case of living faith, informed by charity, the will is induced to command the assent by the attraction that the desire of reaching perfection and the happiness in the possession of God, exercise on it. God is at the same time, the Supreme Truth, and the Supreme Good. The object of the faith is not, on the one hand, simply a truth – and then, on the other, a beatitude: but the One and Triune God who is at the same time, Truth and Beatitude. The proper object of faith is God Who renders a human being “blessed” [cf. q. 2, a. 5; q. 4, a. 2].

Conclusion of the Thomistic Position

[1] The fundamental theses of the coming of the faith to a human mind can thus be simple: a supernatural illumination of the object of the faith, proposed through statements about the message. There is not yet adherence, but the simple apprehension of the truth that has been proposed. **The object of the faith is known by the intelligence elevated by an actual grace**, but this is only proposed for acceptance. In the light of this presentation of the truth, **a motion of grace inspires the will**, and has it **seek** the goodness and the convenience of this truth, which postulates the affirmation of the intelligence, demands faith. Grace **arouses** [if the free human will does not reject it] the supernatural attraction of desire, the “pious affection of credulity” the will to believe.

[2] Under the influence of this first love, the will determines the intelligence to assent, to the act of faith properly so-called, which is then emitted when God infuses into the soul, the habit of theological, Trinitarian faith.

[3] The supernatural affection in question here is not necessarily an act of the virtue of charity: in fact, it subsists also in “informed” faith, which is that faith of one in the state of mortal sin – but in one who still retains a certain yearning for the goods that have been promised [cf. De Ver., q. 14, a. 2, ad 10]. Charity perfects faith, but

does not really constitute it.¹⁴¹

[4] ‘Inform’ faith, however, which subsists without grace and charity is not the gift of God in its fullness, and does not help to merit eternal life. The true, integral faith in God is that of those who enjoy His **friendship, filiation**. St. Augustine states that by believing, **we tend towards Him**, to be incorporated within His members. This is the faith that God wants from us: not just any kind of faith, but one that works in charity [cf. In Jn Ev., tr. 29, 6].

[5] This working through charity evidently cannot exclude external acts. This is particularly valid for the faith, but also that of giving witness of the committed adherence of believers to the loving service before God. Therefore, from the faith flows necessarily the external profession of the believed truths. “To believe” and “to profess” the faith are acts of one and the same virtue: they have the same object, the same end. A faith which is not professed would be, by that very fact, non authentic: it would not embrace the human being in all the dimensions of one’s being.

[6] The profession of the faith is much more than the enunciation of formulae: in fact, it is manifested in a comportment that is coherent, consistent with the revealed truths. Faith becomes concrete in an attitude of coherence which is manifested in all other acts of life.

[7] The faith is a gift from God – but, it is one that is meant to transform the entire conduct of the believer, to be inserted, directly or indirectly, in all the manifestations of its existence. It is a gift which demands to be communicated and transmitted, coming thus to constitute the primordial element of unity, to which the People is called. **On this demand of the handing on of the faith, is based the duty of evangelization in the apostolic mission.**

[8] Faith in the presentation of a theology of salvation history: while this does not necessarily deny the Thomistic presentation, does not pretend to be a mere appendage to it – but, should be integrated within it. Salvation History-Theology will speak perhaps more clearly and with greater emphasis than even St. Thomas did, with this historical conditioning of his own time, of the Event of Salvation in Jesus Christ. Thomas’ theology surely has the Christ-Event as the core of the message – but, in the theology of faith from the aspect of Salvation History, there would be an even greater emphasis on the following, imitation of Jesus Christ.

[9] Rudolf Bultmann sees “faith” as “the acceptance of the Kerygma” - he sees it as faith in the salvation achieved in Jesus Christ. This “salvific work” is a good presentation with which to begin a reflection of faith – but effort should be made also here not to make it merely an intellectualist approach.

¹⁴¹ cf. M. Labourdette, La vie theologale selon St. Thomas l’affection dans la foi, in: *Revue Thomiste*, 1960, pp.364-380.

[10] After analyzing these and possibly other classical definitions of the faith, it cannot be considered merely as something which is intellectualist only. It must be thought of as something which is correlative to the salvific offering of God, to His revelation in events and in words, no matter how this may be worded:

- to the preached “kerygma” [as Bultmann saw it];
- to “those things which do not appear” [as Hebrews sees it];
- to the eternal fulfillment and to its embryonic beginning in us, i.e., to the salvation offered and revealed, as St. Thomas saw it.

[11] In all of this, there becomes gradually clearer the fundamental **APORIA** in all of divine Revelation: there is built into it an insoluble difficulty. It has been described in these terms: in the revelation of the word, one of the following takes place:

- God speaks in an infinite manner, and we understand in an infinite manner [but, this would mean there is no real comprehension possible here, for the human mind cannot grasp the “infinite”];
- or, God speaks in an infinite manner, and humanity understands in a finite manner [once again, there would be no proportion between what is said and what is understood];
- or, finally, God speaks in a finite manner and humanity understands in a finite manner [but, in this instance, how could God truly reveal Himself and his Plan?

[a] Hence, there is in faith something **like the Mystery of the Incarnation of the Infinite God in a finite creature – the Indwelling of the Trinity in the human soul**. If the Revelation of God cannot be anything else than a supernatural Revelation, then the faith aroused by such revelation is indeed “salvific” faith [and not only a speculative faith], and this faith can live only in the atmosphere of a vital divine exchange. In other words, salvific faith can survive only in divine grace, under the “spiration” of the Holy Spirit. A basic difficulty lies in the transmission of the truths of faith on the part of God – and the reception of these truths on the part of humanity.

[b] This action of the Spirit does not supplant human activity; the action of the Spirit does not lead to an absorption in God, which would annihilate the personality of the believer. Rather, this action of the Holy Spirit inspires a confession that Christ has indeed come in the flesh.

Therefore, the □faith of the believer is measured, appropriated to each one’s personality and natural traits. The response of the believer leads one to the community of the **EK-KLESIA**. The response in faith really can only be given in the community of the Church, in the community of those who love the coming of the Lord [cf. 2 Tm 4:8]. This response, like that of the intended spouse awaits the eschatological fulfillment.

[c] Faith, therefore, places one before the Father, Who is in all things, Whose immediacy has been opened by the Mediator – Jesus is the Mediator to the loving God. This is achieved by the believer through the faith, a genuinely “theological” virtue.

[III] Toward the Personal God: Sources of Faith

1. *Crede Deum*: God: The Object and End of Faith

a. Classical theology, perhaps from St. Augustine on, offered these formulae:

- *crede Deum*: God is the object of faith;
- *crede in Deum*: God is the ultimate end of faith;
- *crede Deo* : God is the Witness, the ultimate motive for faith.

These would be the principal objectives of the faith in the personal order.

b. **The Primary and essential Object of the faith** is not some abstract truth, but rather a personal Being, God Himself. God as Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier – God the Father, His Son, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. “To have faith” means to accept this One and Tri-personal God in a very loving manner:

... Now it is impossible to please God without faith, since anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and rewards those who try to find him... [cf. Heb 11:6]

c. **The Essence of the Faith**: may be expressed this way: in the divine Being, there are included all the eternal riches which constitute our ultimate happiness; and in His Providence, are included all of the temporal organization of salvation [as Church], all the means [as Sacraments] leading to it – and, above all, the very Person of Jesus Christ. All this opens the way for the believer to achieve his/her final end. Should faith be defined in relation to the beatific vision, as a power which tends toward that end and prepares for it [*inchoatio vitae aeternae*: **the beginning of eternal life**] – then faith demands necessarily to be specified by this same Object common to both faith and the Beatific Vision. This Object which is ‘believed’, even before being ‘known’ in the Vision, is the One and Tri-personal God:

... and eternal life is this: to know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent... [cf. Jn 17:3].

d. These reflections might shed some light on the classical formula: the object of Faith is the First Truth. This precise formulation has given rise to rather abstract interpretations. The word ‘Truth’ is abstract perhaps in philosophy, but has much more ‘life’ in Scripture. The word “First” places this Truth in the highest rank, on the absolute plane. The understanding of the intellect and the divine ‘Intelligible’ are united through the gift of faith.

e. Earlier theology often may have insisted on the abstractions present in the formulation. Some might make of it a purely mental object among others – even though admitting of a privileged situation for the “**First Truth**”. This made of those reflections more of a mental exercise, a study of logic, or metaphysics; at least, the danger was always there. However, classical theology also made it very clear that this First Truth is ‘subsistent’, is Someone. So it can still be stated: “**God, in so far as He is ‘First Truth’, is the Object of our Faith.**”

f. In faith, more than in any other knowledge, it happens that the intelligible world – images, concepts, articles of the Creed – in the strict sense of the word – is not the prime object of Christian Faith: the act of the believer is not terminated in what is enunciated, or in the statements – but much more in the One Who is expressed by all these. All the material surrounding the expression of faith is merely the ‘means’ to achieve the luminous Object, hidden to our sight, because of the excesses of divine light, that totally surpasses the human ability to grasp It. For this reason, because of human limitation, the divine truth is ‘fragmented’ in statements that shed some light on the divine object.

g. It might not be out of place to recall here the story of St. Augustine and the lad on the beach of Ostia trying to put the ocean into the hole in the beach: a distant example of trying to place divine truth in the human mind. Therefore, divine truth will never be ‘**comprehended**’ by the human intellect, as **It totally surpasses all created capacities, even the mind elevated by grace and faith.** Nonetheless, through the faith, and its eschatological tension, the human spirit tends toward the ever fuller possession of the truth. The perception of the faith is, therefore, a dynamic perception [as ‘**tending**’]. This **striving forward** is that which defines the spiritual activity of the believer. Not being able to ‘see’ the First Truth, the human intellect, aided by the Gift of Faith, forms a judgment, and binds itself to this Truth. By means of this intelligible affirmation, the believer tends toward the First Truth.

2. **CREDERE IN DEUM** [to believe in God, is to **tend toward Him**]:

a. This First Truth is also the Last End of the Believer, of all of creation. God is the supreme intelligible, and **the most desirable Being**: faith is, therefore, a striving forward toward God. God, as the First Truth, is the object of the faith – and as **Supreme Good**, He is its end. While the words “First Truth” indicate being infallible and an adorable Person, it is necessary to say at the same time that the First Truth is the proper end of the human will. These aspects are not separable – and all the more is this true when they are affirmed in connection deep within by the indissoluble unity of a single act: considering God as the First Truth, one tends toward Him as the source of happiness. St. John refers to Him as “the One true God” – and St. Paul calls Him “the God of all blessing”: these are one and the same divine Person.

b. All the truths of the faith remain **in relationship to the Trinity** – as First Truth, but perhaps even more so, **as God as the ultimate Happiness** possible for humanity. An article of faith is the ‘more essential’ the more it is identified with God Himself. A truth is, therefore, the more essential – the more it is associated with human Happiness, **the Last End**. St. Thomas had stated that those truths which order, direct the believer directly to eternal life pertain to the Faith. These are the truths the vision of which will render human beings ‘happy’¹⁴². More exactly, the object of faith is the Personal Being who is both Truth and Happiness. Therefore, the act of faith is an affirmation and a love which seeks a person and which affirms Him, in order to share in His life forever.

¹⁴² cf. 2-2,q. 3, a. 5, c; q. 1, a. 6, ad 1 um; a. 8 c

3. *CREDERE DEO*: this means: Faith because of God’s Witness, Testimony, His Word:

a. God is not only the Object and the End of Faith, but He is also its Witness. The act of faith is always a believing because of God: one believes simply because God has spoken. One believes because God has given witness concerning Himself and His Plan of salvation: no one can come to Him unless the Father draws him/her – the Father, “the One who has sent Jesus.”

b. First of all, there is an interior vocation to the faith: a call which is characteristic and essential aspect of the divine witness: between God and each human being there is a personal relationship, a vocation. Only God knows the eternal name of each individual – this grace which establishes one’s deepest reality. When God calls an individual in a special manner, He makes this name heard: God directs an individual from deep within.

c. It is rightly said that “grace” is what “illuminates and attracts”. However, the deeper meaning of this is: it is God Himself Who calls – in His personal reality, He illuminates and attracts us, through His grace. So, God does not remain aloof in the excessive brilliance of His light and love – but, as it is a property of light to shine – and a property of goodness to share, it is God Himself who takes the initiative. It is God Himself Who causes the faith in the believer, inclining one’s will and illuminating one’s mind¹⁴³.

d. It is here that theology seeks to come to grips with the “leap” to the world above, which is faith. The believer does not make this “jump” on his/her own, nor is the move an irrational one. The human being who comes to the faith transcends his/her own reasoning by finding support in the divine Guide. With trust [already the result of grace], the believer does not go out toward a vacuum, but is confident in the “arms” which await. And since each human being is a sinner, this call to the soul on its journey is at one and the same time an invitation to renunciation and to the gift of oneself. This call is never precisely the same for two individuals. The grace that is given by the Lord is above all a grace that is **personal** and **‘personalizing’**:

- it is “personal”, because grace is directed toward this particular individual, person, in his/her particular differentiation;

- it is “personalizing”, because grace that is bestowed is destined to make one realize his/her unique vocation. Grace is but the means, and only God is the Agent.

4. The Word of God and the Human Word:

a. This particular aspect of the faith is one in which the believer at times is called to struggle. **The truths of the faith are communicated by God Himself by means of human lips.** The Prime Witness is God made man. And the necessary second witness – that which prolongs and represents Him in the midst of humanity and

¹⁴³ cf. St. Thomas, De Ver. , 27,12

history, is the Church. Through the “Mystical Christ” God speaks to all human beings, and will until the end of time. While this human word may not be looked upon as the Word of God, yet, the Church is the representative of Christ. Normally, allowing room for extraordinary divine interventions – the Word of God is God Who speaks through other human beings. And this special “word” has been called a “grace” - in the words of St. Thomas, a grace of locution¹⁴⁴.

b. The “seed planted” by Jesus and His Apostles is transmitted to the **Church**, its **Magisterium** – the **Pope** and the **Bishops** in union with him. The voice of the **Liturgy** brings the Word of Christ to those who are attentive to it, hungering for it. The authentic “Christian” becomes a channel of God’s grace, His Word. Thus, the “Word of God” is shared even when His whisperings are not heard in one’s heart. [The Church is sometimes called a “condition without which the Word would not be handed on “in its integrity”].

c. The “formal motive” of the faith, in the most rigorous sense of the term, is the Witness of God Himself. The First Truth, Who speaks to the believer through human lips: those of Jesus Himself, His Apostles – and then, through the Church – remains alive, and in constant dialogue with the People of God. Jesus, a Divine Person, says that which He knows and attests to that which He has seen [cf. Jn 3:12]. The Apostles – and some ‘apostolic contemporaries’ – who were privileged witnesses of Jesus Christ – transmit their inspired experiences of the Incarnate Word [cf. I Jn1: 1ff.] and God manifests in them His own Word [cf. Tt 1:3]. The Church, then, continues their witness, preserving and guarding it – the Church is thus a permanent witness. Since the Word of God is alive and personal, He has sought out human intermediaries – apostles and others – in that salvation is modeled on the great Mystery of the Incarnation. These weak human witnesses present the truths of the Faith through their contemplation, study, heeding the Magisterium and their own spiritual experience [cf. DV 8].

d. Something similar might be said concerning the signs which God employs to communicate His message. In their essence, these signs are not technically “proofs”, or abstract material intending to bring about conviction, as principles of demonstration. His “signs” could be this, but this does not seem to be their main intent. The “signs” are interventions of God that are directed toward a human being, or a group. The “sign of signs” perhaps would be the resurrection – but, the signs themselves also require a conversion and a faith.

e. Those “signs” from the outset establish with the body of teaching certain unity for witnessing. They are not elements added to the teaching as some kind of an after-thought – and much less, simply a manifestation of wondrous power. The signs are the manifestations of that which the personal God already is in Himself – these signs do indicate that the Word has its ultimate root in Him.

¹⁴⁴ cf. CG III, 154

f. The believer is called to come to understand those signs – since they are not principles upon which one may then logically establish faith: “... **blessed are they who have not seen, and yet believe...**” [cf. Jn 20:29] However, the “signs” are always deeds that have their meaning. Further, these “signs” form a unity with the witness. In Jesus, the signs refer both to His Person, as well as to His Doctrine, and His deeds – all unfolding the Father’s Plan. In the last analysis, they are all manifestations of His Person – and this Divine Person is at one and the same time, the Witness and the Object of the response in faith. The “signs” or the “marks” of the Church [One, Holy Catholic, and Apostolic] are certain indications of the Mysterious Divine Person Who established the Church, and who has recapitulated all of creation in Himself, and is the Head, the Spouse of this Church. Through the various members of the Church, each called to “witness”, the Lord has entrusted Himself and rendered Himself “knowable” to them

g. Along with being “personal” in their very origin, the “signs” are always directed to persons. God does not act, nor speak, in general, but always on the level of personal intimacy. Therefore, a “miracle” performed in public, is not intended merely for the masses, but has a message for each individual who sees it, reflects upon it in prayer. The Word of God is directed to the human ear, and grace brings this to the human heart: the union of these two [the exterior sign – and the interior grace] – achieve the act of faith. These two elements of one and the same divine action are two manners of elevating the human being and of leading each person to faith.

h. From this point of view, there may be explained the character of many real motives for conversion. The motives of credibility are signs directed by God to a human person. One must come to appreciate their worth, their ultimate meaning – simply as a means chosen by God to show that the divine message is ‘credible.’ The manner of sign really matters little in the long run: they are simply elements, at times rather tenuous, at least in the eyes of critical rationalism, which have their meaning. From the moment that God gives them a meaning, they are at least valid as motives of credibility – faith itself always remains a gift of God. Faith cannot be “proven.”

i. The enunciation of truth within the Church must assume a social character [cf. **Redemptor Hominis**]; it will always be incumbent on the Church to offer a clear witness in this regard. Nonetheless, since the access to the truth always has a very personal and unique history, there are, and there always will be, signs that spring almost exclusively from one’s personal nature. [Hence, there are criteria interior to the faith itself, as the sublimity of the teaching – and others that are more exterior, as being converted by a Liturgy, or music accompanying the prayer of the Church]. All this gives some insight into the “marvelous condescension” of God in bringing the gift of faith.

j. In the matter of faith, there will always be need of **renunciation and conversion**. An attentive study of apologetics might enumerate a good number of ways in which one is moved by divine revelation. But, all signs are directed to lead to the manifestation of a Unique Presence: God must become the reason of their human existence.

5. Faith as Personal Relationship to Jesus Christ:

a. The faith of the Church is defined in its entirety by relationship to Jesus Christ: “... *I am the Way, the Truth and the Life...*”. Christ indeed is the pathway, but He is always the “object” and the “end”, the purpose of all faith. To know Him, is to know the Father – to see, to love Him, is to see and love the Heavenly Father. The “possession” of Him is through the Resurrected Christ and the Holy Spirit, the mutual love between the Father and the Son. Hence, Christian faith is of its very nature, Trinitarian.

b. **“Christian” faith is totally specified by Jesus Christ.** It is a participation in the very life of a Person, in the mystery of His death and resurrection. It is in all this, that the believer comes to grasp in some way, the Most Blessed Trinity. The Father and the Spirit act through the grace of Jesus Christ. The entire human existence of Jesus is the “ex-pression” of the life of the Trinity, the “Self-giving” on the part of God. The call of the Triune God to a human person, by means of Jesus Christ, is the faith in its objective principles.

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[IV] THE “HEART” OF FAITH: A FREE HUMAN RESPONSE

1. Christian Faith is “personal/personalizing”: it is often said that Christian faith is not only “personal”, but that it “personalizes” – establishes the personality of the Christian. At times, it might seem that to insist on the personal character of faith is to forget its intellectual character of adherence to a truth, which would open the way to objections from a rationalist perspective against the faith. Faith travels the rarified atmosphere between both “rationalism” on the one hand, and “irrationalism” on the other. Faith responds to the requirements of the human mind, as well as to the human will, seeking the supreme good. The ultimate purpose of a human being is to be sought in the requirements of each person.

2. **Human Reason is elevated by Christian Faith:** basically, each person tends toward a totally satisfying truth and goodness. Every individual is called to communion – and the lasting communion which is God is the ultimate reason for human beings.

a. The rational aspect of each human being is elevated through faith to the First Truth. The human mind is offered endless vistas in its contemplation of the Triune God, Who has given of Himself, and offers Himself for all eternity.

b. The appetitive aspect of each person finds its ultimate response in the First Good, which is God. All the lesser goods and blessings of God are but a stone on the highway to the God of all blessings.

3. **Faith is never “irrational”:** therefore, the act of faith is both “personal” and “personalizing”. Faith could never be an irrational complex rooted in the basic instincts of humanity. Faith finds a profoundly responsive chord in the spiritual, transparent, liberated yearnings of each person – and faith also complements, totally satisfies the human person, by liberating each one through eternal union with God. The giant step from incredulity to faith demands the hard road of renunciation – it requires the sacrifice of our closed autonomy. And even when faith is granted, it demands the daily dying to self – the awesome spiritual purification to keep it. The most admired human values, such as lucidity, courage, loyalty, faithfulness – are immanent to the act of faith, and therefore, “personalization”, truly Christian character-building, demands the on-going struggle to live the faith in the routine of each day.

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[V] THREE APPROACHES TO FAITH

Since faith is indeed essentially a very personal response, the normal questions concerning it might be presented from at least three separate positions: the non-believer; the mystic; and the simple believer

1. The non-believer and the way to Faith:

a. This approach to the faith begins at the lowest possible level, the total absence of faith, and the arduous “accompaniment” [by the “**EMMANUEL**”], a **journey toward God**. Beginning with the non-believer who has never even heard the Gospel proclaimed – the Church has worked out an absolute “minimum”: to believe that God exists and that He rewards anyone who seeks Him. This minimum is sufficient because it presents the essential core of the truths that should be believed. The eternal riches of the Divine Being and the temporal economy of salvation are protected by the statement that “God does exist and that He responds to the good that human beings perform.”

b. Every judgment is a synthesis of affirmation and representation. Each judgment presupposes a representative element which is then placed in relationship with the First Truth. In the act of faith, there is elicited the profound yearning for truth and love. This spiritual plenitude, which cannot really be translated into words, concepts or rational judgments, goes beyond all formulae, even though [since faith is a “human” act] it needs some expression, “incarnation.” Faith leads one to the ultimate reality.

c. The concepts and the formulae which translate into explicit affirmations this spiritual commitment can be extremely limited and maybe even limiting. However, the profound affirmation of Christian faith and that which represents it in human language can be quite incomplete, and far from ever being adequate one to the other. At times, it might even be that the formula, the representation of the faith, may not really translate except in a rather distant, inadequate sort of way, the Absolute in Whom the believer expresses profound faith. Because of the infinite distance of the Object of faith – and coupled now with the wound of original sin on the faculties of a human being, there is pressing need for some kind of expression of one’s faith, no matter how incomplete the formulation might be.

d. The human being expresses him/herself in the best way possible – even on the natural level, one’s thought is hardly ever fully rendered by one’s words. And when it is a matter of a non-believer being elevated to the level of divine revelation, through the medium of images, concepts and human deeds, it can easily be seen the infinite disproportion between the conceptual material employed to express faith, and one’s own spiritual capacity. On the other hand, there is deep within each person, **a perennial restlessness, dissatisfaction, a seeking, a searching, a yearning**. Furthermore, the merciful God never asks the impossible - He looks at the human heart and fans the spiritual hunger and thirst for the Absolute. He takes the initiative always, and through a marvelous balance of interior inspirations and exterior contact,

the gift of faith takes root. For this reason, too, the salvific impulses experienced deep within, expressions of the activity of grace, seek some human verbalization: even though the formulae may be incomplete, they do respond to the need to understand.

2. The Mystic and the Culmination of Faith: this is the vocation of all the Baptized¹⁴⁵:

a. At the other end of the spectrum, mystical knowledge is presented as a “faith knowledge”, and one that has become more “personal” and “personalizing.” When mystical knowledge is examined from the exclusive theological point of view, it would be said that such knowledge is verified under the influence that is ever more and more profound, of the Holy Spirit. The role of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Christian is that of bringing to completion the divine interventions of creation and redemption through sanctification. It is the Holy Spirit Who crowns the development of a truly loving personality. And if it is generally accepted that a personality develops through self-knowledge, self-possession, and self-oblation, it is through the Holy Spirit that all this is achieved.

b. It is through the Holy Spirit that the Christian becomes aware of the great benefit of divine grace and what Christian personality really is [cf. I Co 2:10-16]. It is through the Spirit that one comes to understand the more the power of the flesh and the Spirit assists one to be more self-possessing, self-giving and liberated [cf. Rm 7:8]. Since the Holy Spirit is Love Itself, He leads us to God through charity [cf. Rm 5:5].

1.] Consequently one’s spiritual personality is formed in humble but strong docility to the Spirit, and the entire passive aspect of faith [its “**obedience**”] finds here its essential explanation. It is through the Holy Spirit that Christians are constituted as authentic “persons”, true images of Jesus Christ.

2.] One of the essential areas where the Spirit is particularly active is that of faith. If faith indeed is the encounter between two persons, the role of the Holy Spirit will be that of deepening the encounter and of making this union more intimate. It is through the Holy Spirit that faith more and more dominates a human life, and leads one to the ever more profound possession of God. It is the Spirit Who gradually changes faith to vision, to contact – and it all is accomplished through the mediation of grace, the human intellect and will. The very scope of the Holy Spirit is to convert the Christian more and more into other Christ’s, thus it might be understood how, under the Holy Spirit, mystical knowledge is ever more “personal” and “personalizing.”

c. This reality has been attested to through the centuries by many mystics, such as St. John of the Cross, It is always most important that mystical knowledge should not become lost in the undetermined – remembering the old adage that so many heresies have come to the Church through “false personal choices”: these often

¹⁴⁵ cf. K. Wojtyla, *Faith according to St. John of the Cross*. S. Francisco: Ignatius : 1981 - tr. by Jordan Aumann, OP

began in the “*mists*”, ended in “*schism*” because of **the BIG “I” in the middle!**¹⁴⁶ Mystical faith does submerge one in the infinite mystery of the Divine Persons, always for the benefit of the Church¹⁴⁷.

d. Mystical knowledge is one which from the very beginning is situated on an extremely personal level. It is elevated to the Triune God precisely as Father, Son and Holy Spirit are revealed. Jesus Christ is very clearly the Center, the Mediator of the entire spiritual life. Mysticism can never transcend Jesus Christ, nor His humanity, By means of His sacred humanity, the Word in Whom the Father and the Holy Spirit are not, contains all the divine secrets. This is the Mystery of God for humanity, the unique Word in which God gives His all, once and for all, in this only-begotten Word – after Jesus, there is no more to say – other than penetrating, pondering, treasuring this mystery in one’s heart, and life.

e. The whole effort of transformation is the personal intervention of God Himself, the “supernatural artificer”. It is God Himself Who continually intervenes with the purification in the depths of one’s being, leading to progressive union, mystical espousals”. The activity of the individual is that of following this divine guide. The various stages of this “ascent” correspond to an ever deepening personalization. Intellect and will are equally elevated and gradually purified by God. The will and the intellect proceed in harmony and conjointly in this spiritual journey. The Spirit does not purify intellect or will alone, separately – it is the whole person.

f. The whole *Ascent of Mount Carmel* describes in poetic and theological terms, the silent and hidden entrance into sublime contemplation, the life-long quest gradually lead the believer to overcome some of the concepts that pertain to initial faith, but never sacrificing faith itself. The true mystic, therefore, will always be most loyal to the Church, while he/she might go beyond some of her formulations – but, will never be in opposition to them.

g. The essential aspect of faith is not so much the formulations in which the faith is expressed [as these at best can only be ‘part’ of the First Truth, and no description can ever say it ‘all’] – but, much more **the Person toward Whom faith tends**. It is true that faith might be ‘installed’, ‘incarnate’, expressed in words, formulae – but, the Church has always realized the radical insufficiency of any single expression. Through the centuries, the Church remains in constant dialogue with the Holy Spirit, for the deepening, the perfecting of faith. There is involved here an enormous progress, a most painful ‘passover’ at times, from human thought and expression, for an ever deeper contact with ‘the mind of Jesus Christ’ [cf. Ph 2:5,ff.].

h. At the same time, there is in all of this the enormous danger of a ‘false mysticism’, to come to the conclusion that one is in a ‘privileged’ position of no longer

¹⁴⁶ Comment of Fr. Paul Murray, OP

¹⁴⁷ cf. Letter of the Congregation of the Faith, *Christian Meditation, to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on Some Aspects of Christian Meditation*. October 15, 1989.

needing sacraments, magisterial structures. Human ideas do not ‘re-present’ God comprehensively, nor will the human mind ever totally ‘grasp’ Him, or the human will ever totally ‘possess’ Him: at best, these are analogies to offer some distant description of union with God. Formulae can also be something of an obstacle – if one ever deduces from any one of them that he/she truly ‘understands’ the mystery [e.g. St. Augustine’s brilliant analogy of the mind, word and will for the Trinity], or has already ‘achieved’ God: perhaps, as mystical progress increases, it becomes more and more true that one not know so much what God is, but more rather what God is not!

i. Yet, mystical faith can never be a leap into an impersonal vacuum – the most sublime faith, if it is to remain truly ‘Christian’, will always be a loving encounter with ‘Someone’, on behalf of the whole Church. One of the surest signs of genuine contemplation is precisely the loving knowledge and attention given to God and those He loves. The ultimate purpose of all mystical gifts is perfect union with God, for the eternal benefit of the individual and the Church, and the elevating of this communion still further. Mystical gifts lead to a living relationship, that is ever more vital, vibrant and alive. The human personality is perfected by one’s communion with the Divine Persons through faith.

3. The Every-day Example, Witness and the “Irradiation” of the Faith:

a. The transmission of the faith is verified through “witness”, example. Faith is based on “testimony”, more of life than of words, There is also a precise incarnation of this witness: the message, the signs, grace, doctrine.

b. The Christian gives “witness” in the manner that he/ she is committed totally to God and to His work: the Truth, the Reign of God, the Good News. One’s testimony implies radically a personal self-giving to the Word of God, and the Incarnation of this Word in one’s daily living. The Incarnation of the Lord, His life on earth, His death, His judgments – translated in clear human terms, understandable to all, of the Mind of God. Jesus is the “Great Witness”, Who has given good, truthful, faithful testimony – in fact his entire earthly existence and His activity on earth irradiated the fact that He was one intimately united to the Father, and totally given over to humanity. In the words of Paul, Jesus is ‘consecrated’, “separated” for the service of the Gospel – and the Apostle is called to be the “slave”, the “ambassador” of Jesus Christ.

c. In this manner, the faith is transmitted: through the testimony of human beings, in whom the witness of God Himself is resplendent, transparent. From this ‘subjective’ point of view, the essential factor is the dedication of the individual. God could intervene directly, without human mediation – however, a central mystery of this faith is the Incarnation: God has chosen to work through the instrumentality of weak human beings. God could intervene without the mediation of the “permanent witness”, the Church - but, through the institution of Jesus Christ Himself, the Church is the universal Sacrament of Salvation.

d. Each believer is offered in total sufficiency, the strength, the life and the joy that comes through faith. In the ideal, faith is meant to permeate one's inner life, and irradiate this life to others. This is a spiritual impulse which 'totalizes' one's earthly existence – it elevates one's human nature, in-forms it, models it, orientates it, unifies it. It is faith that imparts to every human existence a meaning. It serves as the basis for one's thoughts, and responses – for charity and fidelity, and animates one totally for God. Through one's life, the action and presence of God are 'revealed'. Since each human being is in 'tension' because of basic incompleteness, each person is tending forward toward fulfillment. The ultimate role of witness is to realize a Presence, and to transmit a divine call.

e. The function of "witness" is so necessary to the Church that it defines the Christian state¹⁴⁸. It is a serious responsibility for every believer. The believer receives a particular spiritual capacity for this through the Sacrament of Confirmation, as noted in Pope Paul's *Divinae Naturae Consors*, and renewal of the Ritual of Confirmation. This is the "**sharer in the divine nature**" [cf. 2 P 1:4]. Confirmation is the Sacrament of Witness, of Christian maturity, and personality. To enable one to engage in the demanding roles of witness, the Holy Spirit is bestowed. The Holy Spirit here initiates, and in some way, completes this aspect of Christian existence. Faith demands the constant conversion to becoming authentic witnesses. Faith is an essential force in the process of personalization – it is the basic root for witness. Hence, the Holy Spirit makes of the Christian a "person", by perfecting grace, faith, hope and charity.

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¹⁴⁸ cf. A.A. Trites, *The NT Concept of Witness* Cambridge University Press 1977

SUMMARY

[1] The Ecclesial Character of the Faith:

[a] Faith is based on the Word of God and is transmitted through the Church. The Word of God has been given over by Christ – His words were ‘repeated’ by the Apostles and registered in the NT writings. However, this ‘word’ expressed in human terms will remain always a divine word – it comes from God and is a gift of the Father. The divine word revealed God Himself and His plan - it has come to us from God made man, the very Word of God Incarnate. This Mystery of the Word, Who is eternal, ‘substantial’, ‘subsistent’, ‘personal’ – is, at the same time, expressed in human affirmations.

[b] This mystery is in some way ‘prolonged’ in the Church. The Apostles preached this word so that it might lead to salvation. They enjoyed a fullness of experience that was really incommunicable – because they saw, heard and touched with their own hands, the Word of Life. However, this experience of theirs nourished in them a permanent, necessary, indestructible function: they were called to transmit in absolute fidelity, and with full authority, the Word of God. This function is now prolonged by the successors of the Apostles, and will continue with the assistance of the Holy Spirit.

[c] Consequently, the Church is at the service of the Word, and can only authentically preach this word that has been spoken: the Church has been formed to propose, guard, explain, and defend this precious gift. This preaching must be contemplated and studied, experienced and translated into action [DV 8] – and for this:

- the charism is kept alive in the Magisterium, gifted as it is, with the divine truth. Vibrant faith and contemplation are always alive in the Church: in the Shepherds who are called to be a believing, learning, and teaching Church;
- the truth is kept alive in the long succession of the saints, in whom the light and love develop, spread and permeate the Church in every age;
- the Word is kept particularly alive in the Sacraments, most specially in the Eucharist: during the entire period of pilgrimage, the death and resurrection of the Lord will be proclaimed and communicated – until He comes again. The eternal and subsistent Word will be shared under the veil of symbols until the end of time;
- therefore, in the very bosom of the Church, the Incarnate Word is continued, as the principle and the root of all Catholic unity: the mystery of the Body presents the mystery of the Word: this is the one and the same Divine Mystery, under different signs and in different states.

[d] In this sense, the most personal faith of the believer is placed on the Word of God, as this is transmitted through the Church: faith hears the Word of God in the spirit of religious obedience. Faith is communicated through the hearing of the Word of God – even more than it is through the communication of the Church. Nonetheless, by divine institution, the Church becomes the usual means [or the ‘extraordinary’ means, when one considers the small number actually enrolled in the ‘Church’].

[e] Faith is ‘ecclesial’ in the strict sense because it is realized by one’s entrance and remaining with the Church. Entrance into the Church is achieved through Baptism. Baptism is that act of Jesus Christ in His Church, which associates one intimately with the mystery of His Death and Resurrection: death to sin, and resurrection to new life with Jesus. “To keep the faith” is to believe not so much in some distant and purely invisible power of the Resurrection and in some sense of ‘life’ in the Church - rather, it is to believe in this awesome power, expressed in the ‘humility’ of the Sacraments, in which Christ and the recipient meet. Salvation through the faith is fully identified with salvation through Baptism and salvation through the Church. Salvation begins through adherence to the Word of God as this is proposed by the Church. Fidelity to the teaching that has been received is faithfulness toward what has been taught from the beginning, a conformity to the Word of God with all of its moral, spiritual and social demands. The ‘obedience of faith’ includes fidelity to the Magisterium, the Church, as established by Jesus Himself.

[f] Faith is also ‘ecclesial’ because it leads to community: faith is not meant to be closed up in on an individual, but it opens one up, it communicates to the whole reality of Jesus, and the Mystical Body, the Sacrament of Salvation. Faith of its nature is orientated toward a common object and hope, based on the divine word, which is hierarchical and mystical – and is achieved in the ‘assembly’, in the ‘membership’. The act of faith asks for union with the others similarly called, and it is a share in the knowledge of the whole mystical body. Faith culminates, with the assistance of hope, in the ever deepening rooting in charity, leading to ‘union with all the saints’ [cf. Ep 3:18]. All are assisting and being assisted in one and the same salvific event.

[g] Faith that is expressed in communication with others is the activity which constitutes the Mystical Body. Through visible testimony, through direct influence, as well as in its mysterious communication, faith is the activity which constitutes the Body, and increases its membership. All become united in one and the same tension, impulse, toward the same term, which is the entrance of all into the mystery of Jesus Christ. Through Faith, there is achieved the insertion into the one Body of Christ, the incorporation of all in the one being of Jesus.

[2] Faith and the “Experience” of God:

[a] In all of this, there is implied that the treatise speaks of ‘living faith’ – and this theological gift remains even in those who lack charity and grace, but not in the living manner that leads to eternal life. If one understands the word ‘experience’ in the current and empirical sense, as the designation of a vivid contact, a ‘felt’ presence, an ‘emotion’, or a direct impression- then perhaps faith is better not called an ‘experience’ of God. It is true that in some truly ‘gifted’ individuals, faith may assume manifestations that far surpass the ordinary faith of most people – which faith is what leads to sanctification. There is no necessity ever for the ‘extraordinary.’ Faith is simply the fruit of a divine grace, which moves one from within to desire and affirm, to know and to love God as Savior. However, most often this grace of faith is not revealed, or discovered – it is most often not perceived, but simply takes over one’s life, gives it its precepts. Faith gives new understanding, new appreciation – it does

not reveal itself in itself, nor in its mystery – but only in its fruits, in what it produces and in what it leads to - through the efficacy of its activity. Faith is the adherence in obscurity of a person seeking the radical response for human existence – it roots one in the First Truth and Ultimate Goodness.

[b] Nonetheless, faith does communicate a unique experience of God. The reason is that faith transforms, tends toward union forever with God, from the very instant that it is implanted in one's mind. The subsequent contemplative and mystical life find their root in the faith. The 'experience' of God in the faith will not be something empirical in every instant, something that would be perceptible on the level of ordinary 'experiences.' Rather, faith is a spiritual reality, a kind of profound impulse, in which the spiritual instincts occupy the first place.

[c] Consequently, there is no authentic 'experience of the Spirit' in the Church that would close one in on him/herself, to separate one definitively from the 'institutional' Church, established by Christ. Authentic dialogue with the "beloved" in the mystical life is only assured in its full truth, its integral power and profound joy – through an absolute fidelity to the teaching of the Church, to her dogmatic decisions and moral requirements¹⁴⁹.

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¹⁴⁹ cf. J. Mouroux, "*Caracter personal del la fe*", in: *Comentarios a la constitucion 'Dei Verbum'*. Madrid: BAC 1969, pp. 194-217, *passim*.

[B] LG 25

...Bishops who teach in communion with the Roman Pontiff are to be revered by all as witnesses of divine and Catholic truth; the faithful, for their part, are obliged to submit to their bishops' decision, made in the name of Christ, in matters of faith and morals, and to adhere to it with a ready and respectful allegiance of mind. This loyal submission of will and intellect must be given in a special way, to the authentic teaching authority of the Roman Pontiff, even when he does not speak *ex cathedra* in such wise, indeed, that his supreme teaching authority be acknowledged with respect, and sincere assent be given to decisions made by him, conformably with his manifest mind and intention, which is made known principally either by the character of the documents in question, or by the frequency with which a certain doctrine is proposed, or by the manner in which the doctrine is formulated ...¹⁵⁰

Presentation: the appeal of Pope Paul VI, in: *Humanae Vitae* [nn. 28, f.]:

28: Beloved priest sons, by vocation you are the counselors and spiritual guides of individual persons and of families. We now turn to you with confidence. Your first task – especially in the case of those who teach moral theology – is to expound the Church's teaching on marriage without ambiguity. Be the first to give, in the exercise of your ministry, the example of loyal internal and external obedience to the teaching authority of the Church. That obedience, as you know well, obliges not only because of the reasons adduced, but rather because of the light of the Holy Spirit, which is given in a particular way to the pastors of the Church in order that they may illustrate the truth [cf. LG 25]. You know, too, that it is of the utmost importance, for peace of consciences and for the unity of the Christian people, that in the field of morals as well as in that of dogma, all should attend to the magisterium of the Church and all should speak the same language. Hence, with all our heart we renew to you the heartfelt plea of the great Apostle Paul: *I appeal to you, brethren, in the name of Our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree and that there be no dissensions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment* [cf. 1 Co 1:10].

29: to diminish in no way the saving teaching of Christ constitutes an eminent form of charity for souls. But this must ever be accompanied by patience and goodness, such as the Lord Himself gave example of in dealing with men. Having

¹⁵⁰ ... *Episcopi in communione cum Romano Pontifice docentes ab omnibus tamquam divinae et catholicae veritatis testes venerandi sunt; fideles autem in sui Episcopi sententiam de fide et moribus nomine Christi prolatum concurrere, eique religioso animi obsequio adhaerere debent. Hac vero religiosum voluntatis et intellectus obsequium singulari ratione praestandum est Romani Pontificis authentico magisterio etiam cum non ex cathedra laquitur; ita nempe ut magisterium eius supremum reverenter agnoscat, et sententiis ab eo prolati sincere adhaereatur, iuxta mentem et voluntatem manifestata ipsius, quae se prodit praecipue sive indole documentorum, sive ex frequenti propositione eiusdem doctrinae sive ex dicendi ratione ...*

come not to condemn but to save [cf. Jn 3:17], He was intransigent with evil, but merciful toward individuals.

In their difficulties, may married couples always find, in the words and in the heart of the priest, the echo of the voice and the love of the Redeemer.

And then speak with confidence, beloved sons, fully convinced that the spirit of God, while He assists the magisterium in proposing doctrine, illumines internally the hearts of the faithful inviting them to give their assent. Teach married couples the indispensable way of prayer; prepare them to have recourse often with faith to the sacraments of the Eucharist and of Penance, without ever allowing themselves to be discouraged by their own weakness...¹⁵¹

¹⁵¹ cf. Ermenegildo Lio, *'Humanae Vitae' e infallibilita'. Il Concilio, Paolo VI e Giovanni Paolo II. Vaticana 1986*; Bernadito Cleopas Auza, *The Non-infallible Magisterium and Theological Dissent*. Roma: ANGELICUM 1990.

[C] CCC ## 331, ff.; 375, ff.

331: The Bishop of the Church of Rome, in whom resides the office given in a special way by the Lord to Peter, first of the Apostles, and to be transmitted to his successors, is head of the College of Bishops, the Vicar of Christ, and Pastor of the universal Church on earth; therefore, in virtue of his office he enjoys supreme, full, immediate and universal ordinary power in the Church, which he can always freely exercise.

375 § 1: Through the Holy Spirit who has been given to them, bishops are the successors of the Apostles by Divine Institution; they are constituted pastors within the Church so that they are teachers of doctrine, priests of sacred worship and ministers of governance.

§ 2: By the fact of their Episcopal consecration bishops receive along with the function of sanctifying, also the functions of teaching and of ruling, which by their very nature, however, can be exercised only when they are in hierarchical communion with the head of the college and its members.

[D] Recent Pontifical Documents

- [1] *Mysterium Ecclesiae* [1973]
- [2] International Theological Commission [June 1976]
- [3] *Donum Veritatis* [May 24, 1990]
- [4] *Ad Tuendam Fidem* [May 1998]
- [5] Doctrinal Note [1998]

§§§§§

CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH

[1] *Mysterium Ecclesiae*

Declaration in Defense of the Catholic Doctrine on the Church Against Certain Errors
of the Present Day

Issued by the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith

June 24 1973

The mystery of the Church, upon which the Second Vatican Council shed fresh light, has been repeatedly dealt with in numerous writings of theologians. While not a few of these studies have served to make this mystery more understandable, others, through the use of ambiguous or even erroneous language, have obscured Catholic doctrine, and at times have gone so far as to be opposed to Catholic faith even in fundamental matters.

To meet this situation, the bishops of several nations, conscious both of their duty of “keeping pure and intact the deposit of faith” and of their task of “proclaiming the Gospel unceasingly,”⁽¹⁾ have, through concurring declarations, sought to protect the faithful entrusted to their care from the danger of error. In addition, the second General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, in dealing with the ministerial priesthood, expounded a number of important points of doctrine regarding the constitution of the Church.

Likewise, the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, whose task it is to “preserve the doctrine of faith and morals in the whole Catholic world”, ⁽²⁾ intends to gather together and explain a number of truths concerning the mystery of the Church which at the present time are being either denied or endangered. In this it will follow above all the lines laid down by the two Vatican Councils.

1. The Oneness of Christ’s Church

One is the Church, which after His Resurrection our Savior handed over to Peter as Shepherd (cf. Jn. 21:17), commissioning him and the other apostles to propagate and govern her (cf. Mt. 18:18ff.) (and which) He erected for all ages as “the pillar and mainstay of the truth” (cf. 1 Tm. 3:15). And this Church of Christ, “constituted and organized in this world as a society, subsists in the Catholic Church, which is

governed by the Successor of Peter and the bishops in union with that Successor.”(3) This declaration of the Second Vatican Council is illustrated by the same Council’s statement that “it is through Christ’s Catholic Church alone, which is the general means of salvation, that the fullness of the means of salvation can be obtained,” (4) and that same Catholic Church “has been endowed with all divinely revealed truth and with all the means of grace” (5) with which Christ wished to enhance His messianic community.

This is no obstacle to the fact that during her early pilgrimage the Church, “embracing sinners in her bosom, is at the same time holy and always in need of being purified,”(6) nor to the fact that “outside her visible structure,” namely in Churches and ecclesial communities which are joined to the Catholic Church by an imperfect communion, there are to be found “many elements of sanctification and truth (which), as gifts properly belonging to the Church of Christ, possess an inner dynamism towards Catholic unity.”(7)

For these reasons, “Catholics must joyfully acknowledge and esteem truly Christian endowments derived from our common heritage, which are to be found among our separated brethren,”(8) and they must strive for the re-establishment of unity among all Christians, by making a common effort of purification and renewal,(9) so that the will of Christ may be fulfilled and the division of Christians may cease to be an obstacle to the proclamation of the Gospel throughout the world.(10) But at the same time Catholics are bound to profess that through the gift of God’s mercy they belong to that Church which Christ founded and which is governed by the successors of Peter and the other Apostles, who are the depositories of the original Apostolic tradition, living and intact, which is the permanent heritage of doctrine and holiness of that same Church.(11)

The followers of Christ are therefore not permitted to imagine that Christ’s Church is nothing more than a collection (divided, but still possessing a certain unity) of Churches and ecclesial communities. Nor are they free to hold that Christ’s Church nowhere really exists today and that it is to be considered only as an end which all Churches and ecclesial communities must strive to reach.

2. The Infallibility of the Universal Church

In His gracious goodness, God has seen to it that what He had revealed for the salvation of all nations would abide perpetually in its full integrity. (12) For this reason He entrusted to the Church the treasury of God’s Word, so that the pastors and the holy people might strive together to preserve it, study it and apply it to life. (13)

God, who is absolutely infallible, thus deigned to bestow upon His new people, which is the Church, a certain shared infallibility, which is restricted to matters of faith and morals, which is present when the whole People of God unhesitatingly holds a point of doctrine pertaining to these matters, and finally which always depends upon the wise providence and anointing of the grace of the Holy Spirit, who leads the Church into all truth until the glorious coming of her Lord.(14) Concerning this infallibility of the People of God the Second Vatican Council speaks as follows: “The body of the faithful as a whole, anointed as they are by the Holy One (cf. 1 Jn. 2:20,

27), cannot err in matters of belief. Thanks to a supernatural instinct of faith which characterizes the people as a whole, it manifests this unerring quality when, ‘from the bishops down to the last member of the laity’ (St. Augustine, *De Praed. Sanct.*, 14, 27), it shows universal agreement in matters of faith and morals.”(15)

The Holy Spirit enlightens and assists the People of God inasmuch as it is the Body of Christ united in a hierarchical communion. The Second Vatican Council indicates this fact by adding to the words quoted above: “For, by this instinct of faith which is aroused and sustained by the Spirit of truth, God’s People accepts not the word of men but the very Word of God (cf. 1 Thes. 2:13). It clings without fail to the faith once delivered to the saints (cf. Jude 3), penetrates it more deeply by accurate insights, and applies it more thoroughly to life. All this it does under the lead of a sacred teaching authority to which it loyally defers.”(16)

Without doubt the faithful, who in their own manner share in Christ’s prophetic office (17), in many ways contribute towards increasing the understanding of faith in the Church. “For,” as the Second Vatican Council says, “there is a growth in the understanding of the realities and the words which have been handed down. This happens through the contemplation and study made by believers, who treasure these things in their hearts (cf. Lk. 2:19, 51), through the intimate understanding of spiritual things they experience, and through the preaching of those who have received through apostolic succession the sure charism of truth.”(18) And the Supreme Pontiff Paul VI observes that the witness the pastors of the Church offers is “rooted in Sacred Tradition and Holy Scripture and nourished by the ecclesial life of the whole People of God.”(19)

But by divine institution it is the exclusive task of these pastors alone, the successors of Peter and the other Apostles, to teach the faithful authentically, that is with the authority of Christ shared in different ways; so that the faithful, who may not simply listen to them as experts in Catholic doctrine, must accept their teaching given in Christ’s name, with an assent that is proportionate to the authority that they possess and that they mean to exercise. (20)

For this reason the Second Vatican Council, in harmony with the first Vatican Council, teaches that Christ made Peter “a perpetual and visible principle and foundation of the unity of the faith and of communion” (21); and the Supreme Pontiff Paul VI has declared: “The teaching office of the bishops is for the believer the sign and channel which enable him to receive and recognize the Word of God.”(22) Thus, however much the Sacred Magisterium avails itself of the contemplation, life and study of the faithful, its office is not reduced merely to ratifying the assent already expressed by the latter; indeed, in the interpretation and explanation of the written or transmitted Word of God, the Magisterium can anticipate or demand their assent. (23)

The People of God has particular need of the intervention and assistance of the Magisterium when internal disagreements arise and spread concerning a doctrine that must be believed or held, lest it lose the communion of the one faith in the one Body of the Lord (cf. Eph. 4:4, 5).

3. The Infallibility of the Church's Magisterium

Jesus Christ, from whom derives the task proper to the pastors of teaching the Gospel to His people and to the entire human family, wished to endow the pastors' Magisterium with a fitting charism of infallibility in matters regarding faith and morals. Since this charism does not come from new revelations enjoyed by the Successor of Peter and the College of Bishops,(24) it does not dispense them from studying with appropriate means the treasure of divine Revelation contained both in Sacred Scripture which teaches us intact the truth that God willed to be written down for our salvation(25) and in the living Tradition that comes from the Apostles.(26) In carrying out their task, the pastors of the Church enjoy the assistance of the Holy Spirit; this assistance reaches its highest point when they teach the People of God in such a manner that, through the promises of Christ made to Peter and the other Apostles, the doctrine they propose is necessarily immune from error.

This occurs when the bishops scattered throughout the world but teaching in communion with the Successor of Peter present a doctrine to be held irrevocably.(27) It occurs even more clearly both when the bishops by a collegial act (as in Ecumenical Councils), together with their visible Head, define a doctrine to be held,(28) and when the Roman Pontiff "speaks *ex cathedra*, that is, when, exercising the office of Pastor and Teacher of all Christians, through his supreme apostolic authority he defines a doctrine concerning faith or morals to be held by the universal Church."(29)

According to Catholic doctrine, the infallibility of the Church's Magisterium extends not only to the deposit of faith but also to those matters without which that deposit cannot be rightly preserved and expounded. (30) The extension however of this infallibility to the deposit of faith itself is a truth that the Church has from the beginning held as having been certainly revealed in Christ's promises.

The First Vatican Council, basing itself upon this truth, defined as follows the matter of Catholic faith: "All those things are to be believed by divine and Catholic faith which are contained in the written or transmitted Word of God and which are proposed by the Church, either by a solemn judgment or by the ordinary and universal Magisterium, to be believed as having been divinely revealed."(31) Therefore the objects of Catholic faith—which are called dogmas—necessarily are and always have been the unalterable norm both for faith and theological science.

4. The Church's Gift of Infallibility Not To Be Diminished

From what has been said about the extent of and conditions governing the infallibility of the People of God and of the Church's Magisterium, it follows that the faithful are in no way permitted to see in the Church merely a fundamental permanence in truth which, as some assert, could be reconciled with errors contained here and there in the propositions that the Church's Magisterium teaches to be held irrevocably, as also in the unhesitating assent of the People of God concerning matters of faith and morals.

It is of course true that through the faith that leads to salvation men are converted to God,(32) who reveals Himself in His Son Jesus Christ; but it would be

wrong to deduce from this that the Church's dogmas can be belittled or even denied. Indeed the conversion to God which we should realize through faith is a form of obedience (cf. Rom. 16:26), which should correspond to the nature of divine Revelation and its demands.

Now this Revelation, in the whole plan of salvation, reveals the mystery of God who sent His Son into the world (cf. 1 Jn.4:14) and teaches its application to Christian conduct. Moreover it demands that, in full obedience of the intellect and will to God who reveals (33), we accept the proclamation of the good news of salvation as it is infallibly taught by the pastors of the Church. The faithful, therefore, through faith are converted as they should to God, who reveals Himself in Christ, when they adhere to Him in the integral doctrine of the Catholic faith.

It is true that there exists an order as it were a hierarchy of the Church's dogmas, as a result of their varying relationship to the foundation of the faith.(34) This hierarchy means that some dogmas are founded on other dogmas which are the principal ones, and are illuminated by these latter. But all dogmas, since they are revealed, must be believed with the same divine faith. (35)

5. The Notion of the Church's Infallibility Not To Be Falsified

The transmission of divine Revelation by the Church encounters difficulties of various kinds. These arise from the fact that the hidden mysteries of God "by their nature so far transcend the human intellect that even if they are revealed to us and accepted by faith, they remain concealed by the veil of faith itself and are as it were wrapped in darkness."(36) Difficulties arise also from the historical condition that affects the expression of Revelation.

With regard to this historical condition, it must first be observed that the meaning of the pronouncements of faith depends partly upon the expressive power of the language used at a certain point in time and in particular circumstances. Moreover, it sometimes happens that some dogmatic truth is first expressed incompletely (but not falsely), and at a later date, when considered in a broader context of faith or human knowledge, it receives a fuller and more perfect expression. In addition, when the Church makes new pronouncements she intends to confirm or clarify what is in some way contained in Sacred Scripture or in previous expressions of Tradition; but at the same time she usually has the intention of solving certain questions or removing certain errors.

All these things have to be taken into account in order that these pronouncements may be properly interpreted. Finally, 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.

In view of the above, it must be stated that the dogmatic formulas of the Church's Magisterium were from the beginning suitable for communicating revealed truth, and that as they are they remain forever suitable for communicating this truth to

those who interpret them correctly. (37) It does not however follow that every one of these formulas has always been or will always be so to the same extent. For this reason theologians seek to define exactly the intention of teaching proper to the various formulas, and in carrying out this work they are of considerable assistance to the living Magisterium of the Church, to which they remain subordinated.

For this reason also it often happens that ancient dogmatic formulas and others closely connected with them remain living and fruitful in the habitual usage of the Church, but with suitable expository and explanatory additions that maintain and clarify their original meaning. In addition, it has sometimes happened that in this habitual usage of the Church certain of these formulas gave way to new expressions which, proposed and approved by the Sacred Magisterium, presented more clearly or more completely the same meaning.

As for the meaning of dogmatic formulas, this remains ever true and constant in the Church, even when it is expressed with greater clarity or more developed. The faithful therefore must shun the opinion, first, that dogmatic formulas (or some category of them) cannot signify truth in a determinate way, but can only offer changeable approximations to it, which to a certain extent distort or alter it; secondly, that these formulas signify the truth only in an indeterminate way, this truth being like a goal that is constantly being sought by means of such approximations. Those who hold such an opinion do not avoid dogmatic relativism and they corrupt the concept of the Church's infallibility relative to the truth to be taught or held in a determinate way.

Such an opinion clearly is in disagreement with the declarations of the First Vatican Council, which, while fully aware of the progress of the Church in her knowledge of revealed truth (38), nevertheless taught as follows: "That meaning of sacred dogmas...must always be maintained which Holy Mother Church declared once and for all, nor should one ever depart from that meaning under the guise of or in the name of a more advanced understanding."(39) The Council moreover condemned the opinion that "dogmas once proposed by the Church must, with the progress of science, be given a meaning other than that which was understood by the Church, or which she understands."(40) There is no doubt that, according to these texts of the Council, the meaning of dogmas which is declared by the Church is determinate and unalterable.

Such an opinion is likewise in contrast with Pope John's assertion regarding Christian doctrine at the opening of the Second Vatican Council: "This certain and unchangeable doctrine, to which faithful obedience is due, has to be explored and presented in a way that is demanded by our times. One thing is the deposit of faith, which consists of the truths contained in sacred doctrine; another thing is the manner of presentation, always however with the same meaning and signification."(41)

Since the Successor of Peter is here speaking about certain and unchangeable Christian doctrine, about the deposit of faith which is the same as the truths contained in that doctrine and about the truths which have to be preserved with the same meaning, it is clear that he admits that we can know the true and unchanging meaning of dogmas. What is new and what he recommends in view of the needs of the times

pertains only to the modes of studying, expounding and presenting that doctrine while keeping its permanent meaning.

In a similar way the Supreme Pontiff Paul VI exhorted the pastors of the Church in the following words: “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.”(42)

6. The Church Associated with the Priesthood of Christ

Christ the Lord, the High Priest of the new and everlasting covenant, wished to associate with His perfect priesthood and to form in its likeness the people He had bought with His own blood (cf. Heb. 7:20-22, 26-28; 10:14, 21). He therefore granted His Church a share in His priesthood, which consists of the common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial or hierarchical priesthood. These differ from each other not only in degree but also in essence; yet they are mutually complementary within the communion of the Church. (43)

The common priesthood of the laity, which is also rightly called a royal priesthood (cf. 1 Pt. 2:9; Rev. 1:6; 5:9ff.) since through it the faithful are united as members of the messianic people with their heavenly King, is conferred by the sacrament of Baptism. By this sacrament “the faithful are incorporated into the Church and are empowered to take part in the worship of the Christian religion” in virtue of a permanent sign known as a character; “reborn as children of God they are obliged to profess before men the faith which they have received from God through the Church.”(44) Thus those who are reborn in Baptism “join in the offering of the Eucharist by virtue of their royal priesthood. They likewise exercise that priesthood by receiving the sacraments, by prayer and thanksgiving, by the witness of a holy life, and by self-denial and active charity.”(45)

Moreover, Christ, the Head of the Church, which is His Mystical Body, appointed as ministers of His priesthood His Apostles and through them their successors the bishops, that they might act in His person within the Church,(46) and also in turn legitimately hand over to priests in a subordinate degree the sacred ministry which they had received.(47) Thus there arose in the Church the apostolic succession of the ministerial priesthood for the glory of God and for the service of His people and of the entire human family, which must be converted to God.

By means of this priesthood bishops and priests are “indeed set apart in a certain sense in the midst of God’s people. But this is so, not that they may be separated from this people or from any man, but that they may be totally dedicated to the work for which the Lord has raised them up”(48) namely, the work of sanctifying, teaching and ruling, the actual execution of which is more precisely specified by the hierarchical communion.(49) This many-sided work has as its basis and foundation the continuous preaching of the Gospel,(50) and as a summit and source of the entire Christian life the Eucharistic Sacrifice.(51)

Priests, acting in the person of Christ the Head, offer this Sacrifice in the Holy Spirit to God the Father in the name of Christ and in the name of the members of His Mystical Body. (52) This sacrifice is completed in the holy supper by which the faithful, partaking of the one body of Christ, are all made into one body (cf. 1 Cor. 10:16ff.).

The Church has ever more closely examined the nature of the ministerial priesthood, which can be shown to have been invariably conferred from apostolic times by a sacred rite (cf. 1 Tm. 4:15; 2 Tm. 1:6). By the assistance of the Holy Spirit, she recognized more clearly as time went on that God wished her to understand that this rite conferred upon priests not only an increase of grace for carrying out ecclesiastical duties in a holy way, but also a permanent designation by Christ, or character, by virtue of which they are equipped for their work and endowed with the necessary power that is derived from the supreme power of Christ. The permanent existence of this character, the nature of which is explained in different ways by theologians, is taught by the Council of Florence (53) and reaffirmed by two decrees of the Council of Trent. (54)

In recent times the Second Vatican Council, more than once mentioned it (55), and the second General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops rightly considered the enduring nature of the priestly character throughout life as pertaining to the teaching of the faith. (56) This stable existence of a priestly character must be recognized by the faithful and has to be taken into account in order to judge properly about the nature of the priestly ministry and the appropriate ways of exercising it.

Faithful to Sacred Tradition and to many documents of the magisterium, the Second Vatican Council taught the following concerning the belonging to the ministerial priesthood: “Though everyone can baptize the faithful, the priest alone can complete the building up of the Body in the Eucharistic Sacrifice.”(57) And again: “The same Lord, in order that the faithful might form one body in which ‘all the members have not the same function’ (Rom. 12:4), appointed some ministers within the society of believers who by the power of Orders would be capable of offering the Sacrifice and of forgiving sins.”(58)

In the same way the second General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops rightly affirmed that only the priest can act in the person of Christ and preside over and perform the sacrificial banquet in which the People of God are united with the oblation of Christ (59). Passing over at this point questions regarding the ministers of various sacraments, the evidence of Sacred Tradition and of the sacred magisterium make it clear that the faithful who have not received priestly ordination and who take upon themselves the office of performing the Eucharist attempt to do so not only in a completely illicit way but also invalidly. Such an abuse, wherever it may occur, must clearly be eliminated by the pastors of the Church.

Conclusion

It was not the intention of this Declaration, nor was it within its scope, to prove by way of a study of the foundations of our faith that divine revelation was entrusted to the Church so that she might thereafter preserve it unaltered in the world. But this dogma, from which the Catholic Faith takes its beginning, has been recalled, together

with other truths related to the mystery of the Church, so that in the uncertainty of the present day the faith and doctrine the faithful must hold might clearly emerge.

The Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith rejoices that theologians are by intense study exploring more and more the mystery of the Church. It recognizes also that in their work they touch on many questions which can only be clarified by complementary studies and by various efforts and conjectures. However, the due freedom of theologians must always be limited by the Word of God as it is faithfully preserved and expounded in the Church and taught and explained by the living magisterium of the pastors and especially of the Pastor of the entire People of God (60).

The Sacred Congregation entrusts this Declaration to the diligent attention of the bishops and of all those who in any way share the task of guarding the patrimony of truth which Christ and His Apostles committed to the Church. It also confidently addresses the Declaration to the faithful and particularly, in view of the important office which they hold in the Church, to priests and theologians, so that all may be of one mind in the faith and may be in sincere harmony with the Church.

Pope Paul VI, by divine providence Supreme Pontiff, in the audience granted to the undersigned Prefect of the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith on May 11, 1973, has ratified and confirmed this Declaration in defense of Catholic doctrine on the Church against certain errors of the present day and has ordered its publication.

Given in Rome, at the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, on June 24, 1973, the feast of St. John the Baptist.

Franjo Cardinal Seper Prefect

Abp. Jerome Hamer Secretary

Footnotes

1. Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Quinque iam anni*, AAS 63 (1971), p. 99.
2. Paul VI, Apostolic Constitution, *Regiminis Ecclesiae Universae*, AAS 59 (1967), p. 897.
3. Vatican Council II: Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, 8; *Constitutiones Decreta Declarationes*, editio Secretariae Generalis, Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1966, p. 104ff.
4. Vatican Council II: Decree on Ecumenism, *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 4; Const. Decr. Decl., p. 250.
5. *Ibid.*, 4; Const. Decr. Decl., p. 252.

6. Vatican Council II: Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *_Lumen Gentium_*, 8; Const. Decr. Decl., p.106.
7. *Ibid.*, Const. Decr. Decl., p. 105.
8. Vatican Council II: Decree on Ecumenism, *_Unitatis Redintegratio_*, 4; Const. Decr. Decl., p. 253.
9. Cf. *ibid.*, 1; Const. Decr. Decl., pp. 255-258.
10. Cf. *ibid.*, 1; Const. Decr. Decl., p. 243.
11. Cf. Paul VI, Encyclical Letter, *_Ecclesiam Suam_*, AAS 56 (1964), p. 629.
12. Vatican Council II: Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *_Dei Verbum_*, 7; Const. Decr. Decl., p. 428.
13. Cf. *Ibid.*, 10; Const. Decr. Decl., p. 431.
14. Cf. *Ibid.*, 8; Const. Decr. Decl., p. 430.
15. Vatican Council II: Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *_Lumen Gentium_*, 12; Const. Decr. Decl., p. 113ff.
16. *Ibid.*, Const. Decr. Decl., p. 114.
17. Cf. *Ibid.*, 35; Const. Decr. Decl., p. 157.
18. Vatican Council II: Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *_Dei Verbum_*, 8; Const. Decr. Decl., p. 430.
19. Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation, *_Quinque iam anni_*, AAS 63 (1971), p. 99.
20. Cf. Vatican Council II: Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *_Lumen Gentium_*, 5; Const. Decr. Decl., p. 138ff.
21. Vatican Council II: *Ibid.*, 18; Const. Decr. Decl., p. 124ff. Cf. Vatican Council I: Dogmatic Constitution, *_Pastor aeternus_*, Prologue; *_Conciliorum Ecumenicorum Decreta_* 3, ed. Institute per la Scienze Religiose di Bologna. Herder, 1973, p.8. (DS 3051).
22. Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation, *_Quinque iam anni_*, AAS 63 (1971), p. 100.
23. Decree of the Holy Office *_Lamentabili_*, 6, AAS 40 (1907), p.471 (DS 3406). Cf. Vatican Council I: Dogmatic Constitution, *_Pastor aeternus_*, ch. 4 ;Conc. Oec. Dec. (3), p. 815ff. (DS 3069, 3074).
24. Vatican Council I: Dogmatic Constitution, *_Pastor aeternus_*, ch. 4; Conc. Oec. Decr. (3), p 816 (DS 3070). Cf. Vatican Council II: Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *_Lumen Gentium_*, 25, and Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *_Dei Verbum_*, 4; Const. Decr. Decl., p. 141 and 426.

25. Cf. Vatican Council II: Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum*, 11; Const. Decr. Decl., p. 434.
26. Cf. *ibid.*, 9ff.; Const. Decr. Decl., pp. 430-432.
27. Cf. Vatican Council II: Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, 25; Const. Decr. Decl., p. 139.
28. Cf. *ibid.*, 25 and 22; Const. Decr. Decl., pp. 139 and 133.
29. Vatican Council I: Dogmatic Constitution *Pastor aeternus*, ch. 4; Conc. Oec. Decr. (3), p. 816 (DS 3074). Cf. Vatican Council II: *ibid.*, 25 Conc. Oec. Decr. (3), pp. 131-141.
30. Cf. Vatican Council II: Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, 25; Const. Decr. Decl., p. 139
31. Vatican Council I: Dogmatic Constitution, *Dei Filius*, ch. 3; Conc. Oec. Decr. (3), p. 807 (DS 3011). Cf. C.I.C., can. 1323, Sect. 1 and can. 1325, Sect. 2.
32. Cf. Council of Trent. Sess. 6: Decree on Justification, ch. 6; Conc. Oec. Decr. (3), p. 807 (DS 3008); cf. also Vatican Council II: Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum*, 5; Const. Decr. Decl., p. 426.
33. Cf. Vatican Council I: Constitution on the Catholic Faith, *Dei Filius*, ch. 3; Conc. Oec. Decr. (3), p. 807 (DS 3008); cf. also Vatican Council II: Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum*, 5; Const. Decr. Decl., p. 426.
34. Cf. Vatican Council II: Decree on Ecumenism, *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 11; Const. Decr. Decl., p. 260.
35. Reflections and Suggestions Concerning Ecumenical Dialogue, IV 4 b, in the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity: Information Service, n. 12 (December 1970, IV), p. 8.
36. Vatican Council I: Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Filius*, ch. 4; Conc. Oec. Decr. (3), p. 808 (DS 3016).
37. Cf. Pius IX, Brief “*Eximiam Tuam*,” AAS 8 (1874-75), p. 447 (DS 2831); Paul VI, Encyclical Letter, *Mysterium Fidei*, AAS 57 (1965), p. 757ff. and *L’Oriente cristiano nella luce di immortali Concilii*, in *Insegnamenti di Paolo VI*, vol. 5, Vatican Polygot Press, p. 412ff.
38. Cf. Vatican Council I: Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Filius*, ch. 4; Conc. Oec. Decr. (3), p. 809 (DS 3020).
39. *Ibid.*
40. *Ibid.*, can 3; Conc. Oec. Decr. (3), p. 811 (DS 3043).

41. John XXIII, “Alloc. In Concilii Vaticani inauguratione,” AAS 84 (1962), p. 792. Cf. Vatican Council II: Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *“Gaudium et spes,”* 62; Const. Decr. Decl., p. 780.
42. Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *“Quinque iam anni,”* AAS 63 (1971), p. 100ff.
43. Cf. Vatican Council II: Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *“Lumen Gentium,”* 10; Const. Decr. Decl., p. 110.
44. Ibid., 11; Const. Decr. Decl., p. 111.
45. Ibid., 10; Const. Decr. Decl., p. 111.
46. Cf. Pius XI, Encyclical Letter, *“Ad Catholici sacerdotii,”* AAS 28 (1936), p. 10 (DS 3735). Cf. Vatican Council II: Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *“Lumen Gentium,”* 10, and Decree on the Priestly Life and Ministry, *“Presbyterorum ordinis,”* 2; Const. Decr. Decl., p. 110 ff., 622ff.
47. Cf. Vatican Council II: Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *“Lumen Gentium,”* 28; Const. Decr. Decl., p. 625.
48. Vatican Council II: Decree on the Priestly Life and Ministry, *“Presbyterorum ordinis,”* 3; Const. Decr. Decl., p. 625.
49. Cf. Vatican Council II: Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *“Lumen Gentium,”* 24, 27ff.; Const. Decr. Decl., p. 137, 143-149.
50. Vatican Council II: Decree on the Priestly Life and Ministry, *“Presbyterorum Ordinis,”* 4; Const. Decr. Decl., p. 627.
51. Cf. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *“Lumen Gentium,”* 11; Const. Decr. Decl., p. 111ff. Also Council of Trent, Sess. 22: *“Doctrina de Missae Sacrificio,”* ch. 1 and 2; Conc. Oec. Decr. (3) pp. 732-734 (DS 1739-1743).
52. Cf. Paul VI, *“Sollemnis Professio Fidei,”* 24, AAS 60 (1968), p. 442.
53. Council of Florence: *“Bulla unionis Armenorum,”* *Exsultate Deo,* Conc. Oec. Decr., (3) p. 546 (DS 1313).
54. Council of Trent: Decree on the Sacraments, can. 9 and Decree on the Sacrament of Order, ch. 4 and can. 4; Conc. Oec. Decr. (3) p. 685, 742, 744 (DS 1609, 1767, 1774).
55. Cf. Vatican Council II: Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *“Lumen Gentium,”* 21 and Decree on the Priestly Life and Ministry, *“Presbyterorum ordinis,”* 2; Const. Decr. Decl., pp. 133, 622ff.
56. Cf. Documents of the Synod of Bishops: I. “The Ministerial Priesthood,” part one, 5, AAS 63 (1971), p. 907.

57. Vatican Council II: Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *“Lumen Gentium”*, 17; Const. Decr. Decl., p. 123.

58. Vatican Council II: decree on the Priestly Life and Ministry, *“Presbyterorum ordinis”*, 2; Const. Decr. Decl., p. 621ff. Cf. also: 1) Innocent III, Letter *“Eius exemplo”* with *“Professio fidei Waldensis imposita”*, PL, vol 215, col. 1510 (DS 794); 2) Lateran Council IV: Constitution *“De Fide Catholica”*; Conc. Oec. Decr. (3), p. 230 (DS 802); passage quoted on the Sacrament of the Altar to be read together with the following passage on the sacrament of Baptism; 3) Council of Florence: *“Bulla uniionis Armenorum”*, *“Exsultate Deo”*; Conc. Oec. Decr. (3), p. 546 (DS 1321); passage quoted on the Minister of the Eucharist to be compared with nearby passages on the Ministers of the other sacraments; 4) Council of Trent, Sess. 23: Decree on the Sacrament of Order, ch. 4; Conc. Oec. Decr. (3), p. 742ff. (DS 1767, 4469); 5) Pius XII, Encyclical, *“Mediator Dei”*, AAS 39 (1947), pp. 552-556 (DS 3849-3852).

59. Documents of the Synod of Bishops: I. “The Ministerial Priesthood,” part one, 4, AAS 63 (1971), p. 906.

60. Cf. Synod of Bishops (1967), *“Relatio Commissionis Synodalis constitutae ad examen ulterius peragendum circa opiniones periculosas et atheismum, II, 4: De theologorum opera et responsabilitate”*, Vatican Polygot Press, 1967, p. 11 (L’Osservatore Romano, Oct. 30-31, 1967, p. 3).

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[2] International Theological Commission, # 6
[June 6, 1976]

[Texts and Documents, pp. 129-143]

THESES ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE ECCLESIASTICAL
MAGISTERIUM AND THEOLOGY

The Ecclesiastical Magisterium has the mandate to **protect divine revelation** – the task given to theologians is to **investigate and explain the doctrine of Faith**.

Two tasks: hearing the Word of God and proclaiming it by **word and life**. A special witness is expected of those equipped by official ministry, or by scientific qualifications.

It might be said that the theologians' primary task is the hearing of the Word of God, in a qualified scientific way - the primary task of the Magisterium is more than proclaiming the Word of God, it has heard with the help of theological experts.

THESIS I: Definition of Terms:

Ecclesiastical Magisterium: the **task of teaching** by Christ's institution is proper to the College of Bishops or to individual bishops linked in hierarchical communion with the Supreme Pontiff.

Theologians: those members of the Church who by their studies and life in the community of ecclesial faith are qualified to pursue, in the scientific manner proper to theology, a deeper understanding of the word of God and also to teach that Word by canonical mission.

Both have a teaching office in different ways – in earlier times the office of bishop and the exercise of theology were in one and the same person – presently it is more by way of **cooperation**.

Part I considers what is common between the two.

Part II concerns what is specific to each.

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Part One: Elements in Common

THESIS 2: in analogous and distinct ways, both Magisterium and theology are to preserve, examine more deeply, explain, teach and defend the Deposit of Revelation for the salvation of God's People. Each must safeguard the certainty of faith by a deeper understanding and scientific defense of the Faith, by proclaiming it, and defending it.

THESIS 3: there are certain obligations:

1. Both are bound by the **Word of God** – Magisterium is not above it [DV 10] – and theology relies on the written word along with Tradition.

2. Both are bound by the '***sensus fidei***', the supernatural appreciation of the faith. The word of God lives through the ages – and the whole People of God cannot err in it [LG 12]
3. Both are bound by the **documents of Tradition**.
4. Both are bound by **pastoral** and **missionary** concern for the world.

The authority of each differs – but, one that is not absolute but exercised as a **service of 'the obedience of faith'**. Both draw on 'the common sense of the faithful', the common patrimony of the Church. Neither side is undertaken for merely academic reasons – the goal is always pastoral and missionary. On the 'negative' side, care must be taken not to damage the faith of believers. Yet, 'positively' it must be made known as their work affects the life of the ecclesiastical and human community.

THESIS 4: Common, and yet different in both, is the manner both collegial and personal in which their task is carried out. Infallibility is promised to the whole body of the faithful, to the College of Bishops in communion with the Successor of Peter, and to the Pope himself – and hence, needs to be exercised corresponsibly, cooperatively and collegially.

This communion and collegiality needs to be exercised by fostering community – both sides need to pay attention to the other, and theologians need to heed their own colleagues.

Part Two: Specific Elements to Both Magisterium and Theology

THESIS 5: There are functions proper to each:

1. It is the Magisterium's task to **defend** Catholic integrity and unity of faith and morals – this includes task of **authoritative interpretation** – censuring of opinions endangering the faith and morals - proposing of truths of particular contemporary relevance. It must consider individual truths in the light of the whole, integrating what is particular into the whole.
2. The function of theology is to **mediate** between the Magisterium and the People of God - it is a midway point between the Faith of the Church and the Magisterium. Theologians lend their help to **the spreading, clarifying, confirming and defending the truth** that the Magisterium authoritatively expounds.

In the ideal, there is cooperation in the service of God's Word – theology is called to be of assistance in communicating the thought behind the proclamations of the Magisterium. The Magisterium surely needs the serious cooperation of theologians who need to be aware of this ministry.

THESIS 6: They differ in the quality of their authority:

1. The Magisterium **derives its authority from sacramental ordination** which confers the task of **sanctifying, teaching** and **ruling** [LG 21]. This 'formal authority' is

at once **charismatic** and **juridical**, founding the **right** and **duty** of the Magisterium, sharing in the authority of Christ. Both the personal authority, and that inherent in the matter being proposed, needs to be brought to bear.

2. Theologians authority derives from **their scientific qualifications** – and all needs to be carried out as a living experience and practice of Faith. This is truly “ecclesial”, not profane and not merely scientific, but one derived from the Word of God, confirmed by **canonical mission**.

The Magisterium would have no meaning outside the Church – it is exercised in the manner of a judge who discerns the truth or falsehood of proposed opinions. Faith [‘quae’] can only be investigated by those who live in the Church with a living subjective faith [‘qua’].

THESIS 7: Both work in and for the Church, with differences in their ecclesial reference:

1. The Magisterium is an official task conferred **through the sacrament of Orders** – and institutional element of the Church, and its authority has as its purpose the building up of the flock in truth and holiness.

2. Theologians do have a “canonical mission”, but need to be in living communion with the Faith of the Church. All the baptized can be theologians provided they have competence – a force derived from the Holy Spirit, communicated by the sacraments, the preaching of the Word of God and a communion of love.

Theology is not a personal research project but remains linked to the Church, and is carried out in the context of the Church’s faith.

THESIS 8: there is a difference in freedom and critical function:

1. The freedom of the Magisterium is **an enormous responsibility** – respect for the Magisterium must always be a part of Catholic theology. Contemporary democratic sentiments often oppose ‘power blocs’.

2. The scientific responsibility of theologians is **not unlimited freedom – personal and social responsibility** needs to be observed in its exercise. The critical function of theology needs to remain positive: they share the task of interpreting the documents of the past and present Magisterium, putting them in the context of the whole of revealed truth, finding a better understanding of them.

Scientific freedom of theologians can never be incompatible with Ecclesiastical authority. The Magisterium also enjoys a God-given freedom. Freedom of either is never ‘license’ – it is difficult to preserve both ‘freedoms’ – there can be a constant struggle within the Church.

THESIS 9: There will be inevitable tension never to be fully resolved on this earth – it is an aspect of life. It should not degenerate into hostility, opposition – but needs to be a vital force.

This provides a transition to the third part where there is constant effort for harmony – dialogue is a central means.

Part III: The Relationship between the Magisterium and Theologians

THESIS 10: the basis for the possibility of dialogue is that both start from the same source, is their shared community in the Faith of the Church, and service of up building. Habitual association is part of their vocations – strengthened and enlivened by its practice of mutual assistance.

Their basic “solidarity” is their **common Faith**. Dialogue arises out of their common basis – and their proper functions are not confused. There can be no exclusive claim for theology to competence in matters of faith and morals.

THESIS 11: the whole vast field of truth is unlimited by faith – this always must be sought as faith is unknown. Dialogue and truth can be endangered. Pressure may not be exerted for political ends. On the one hand, this happens when the instruments are coercion, threat and sanction – or, on the other, when public fora are employed, such as mass media.

If faith is preserved, there are no limits to dialogue – but dialogue ends where the truth of faith is harmed. Today, very often, areas of conflict draw publicity. Care needs to protect the atmosphere of dialogue.

THESIS 12: Prior to official examination of one’s writings, ordinary possibilities should include correspondence. Then, if not successful, there is a whole stock of responses: warning, sanctions. “Heresy” technically is only present where there is “proven obstinacy.”

The importance and manner of dialogue remain important – the C.D.F. has published two methods of acting in the examination of doctrines [1974; 1997].

[3] **C.D.F., *Donum Veritatis*, May 24, 1990**
[Instruction on the Ecclesial Vocation of the Theologian]

The Document [a booklet of 42 small pages in English] presents a very simple format:

Introduction [# 1]

1. The Truth, Gift of God to His People [## 2-5]
2. The Vocation of the Theologian [## 6-12]
3. The Magisterium of the Church's Pastors [## 13-20]
4. Magisterium and Theology [## 21-41]
 - a. Collaborative Relations [## 21-31]
 - b. The Problem of Dissent [## 31-41]

Conclusion [# 41].

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[I] The Text Itself

1. For the People of God:

“...Never forgetting that he is also a member of the People of God, the theologian must foster respect for them and be committed to offering them a teaching which in no way does harm to the doctrine of the faith. The freedom proper to theological research is exercised **within the Church's faith**. Thus while the theologian might often feel the urge to be daring in his work, this will not bear fruit or ‘edify’ unless it is accompanied by that patience which permits maturation to occur...” [# 11]

“...By virtue of the divine mandate given to it in the Church, the Magisterium has the mission **to set forth the Gospel's teaching, guard its integrity, and thereby protect the faith of the People of God**. In order to fulfill this duty, it can at times be led to take serious measures as, for example, when it withdraws from a theologian, who departs from the doctrine of the faith, the canonical mission or the teaching mandate it had given him, or declares that some writings do not conform to this doctrine. When it acts in such ways, the Magisterium seeks to be faithful to its mission of **defending the right of the People of God to receive the message of the Church in its purity and integrity**, and is not to be disturbed by a particular dangerous opinion...” [# 37]

2. A Quest for the Truth

“...Revelation in fact penetrates human reason, elevates it, and calls it to give an account of itself [cf. 1 P 3:15]. For this reason, from the very beginning of the Church, the ‘standard of teaching’ [cf. Rm 6:17] has been linked with baptism to entrance into the mystery of Christ. The **service of doctrine**, implying as it does **the believer's search for an understanding of the faith**, i.e., theology, is therefore something **indispensable for the Church**...” [# 1].

“...Among the vocations awakened in this way by the Spirit in the Church is that of the theologian. His role is to pursue in a particular way an ever deeper understanding of the Word of God found in the inspired Scriptures **and** handed on by

the living Tradition of the Church. He does this in communion with the Magisterium which has been charged with the responsibility of **preserving the deposit of faith**... Theological science responds to the invitation of truth as it **seeks** to understand the faith. It thereby aids the People of God in fulfilling the Apostle's command [cf. I P 3:15] to give an accounting for their open to those who ask it... [# 6].

“... The theologian's work thus responds to a dynamism found in the faith itself. Truth, by its nature, seeks to be communicated since man was created for the perception of truth and from the depths of his being desires knowledge of it so that he can discover himself in the truth and find there his salvation [cf. I Tm 2:4]. For this reason, the Lord sent forth His apostles to make 'disciples' of all nations and teach them [cf. Mt 28:19, ff.]. Theology, which **seeks** the 'reasons of faith' and offers these reasons as a response to those seeking them, thus constitutes an integral part of obedience to the command of Christ, for man cannot become disciples if the truth found in the word of faith is not presented to them [cf. Rm 10:14, ff.].

“Theology, therefore, offers its contribution so that the faith might be communicated. Appealing to the understanding of those who do not yet know Christ, it helps them to seek and find faith. Obedient to **the impulse of truth which seeks to be communicated**, theology also **arises from love and love's dynamism**. In the act of faith, man knows God's goodness and begins to love Him. Love, however, is **ever desirous of better knowledge of the beloved [St. Bonaventure]**. From this double origin of theology, inscribed on the interior life of the People of God and its missionary vocation, derives the method with which it ought to be pursued in order to satisfy the requirements of its nature...” [# 7].

“...The Church, which has for her origin in the unity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, is a mystery of communion. In accordance with the will of her founder, she is organized around a hierarchy established for the service of the Gospel and the People of God who live by it. After the pattern of the members of the first community, all the baptized with their own proper charisms are to strive with sincere hearts for a harmonious unity in doctrine, life and worship [cf. Ac 2:42]. This is a rule which flows from the very being of the Church...” [#39]

“... The Church is like a sacrament, a sign and instrument, i.e., of communion with God and unity among men [LG 1]. Consequently, to **pursue** concord and communion is to enhance the force of her witness and credibility. To succumb to the temptation of dissent, on the other hand, is to allow the leaven of infidelity to the Holy Spirit to start to work.

3. “Sensus Fidei”

“...Dissent sometimes also appeals to a kind of sociological argumentation which holds that the opinion of a large number of Christians would be a direct and adequate expression of the 'supernatural sense of the faith.'”

“Actually, the opinions of the faithful cannot be purely and simply identified with the ‘**sensus fidei**’. The sense of the faith is a **property of theological faith**; and as **God’s gift** which enables one to adhere personally to the Truth, it cannot err. This personal faith is also the faith of the Church since God has given guardianship of the Word to the Church. Consequently, what the believer believes is what the Church believes the ‘**sensus fidei**’ implies then by its nature, a profound agreement of spirit and heart with the Church, ‘**sentire cum Ecclesia**’

“Although theological faith as such, then, cannot err, the believer can still have erroneous opinions since all his thoughts do not spring from faith. Not all the ideas which circulate among the People of God are compatible with the faith. This is all the more so, given that people can be swayed by public opinion, influenced by modern communication media. Not without reason did the Second Vatican Council emphasize **the indissoluble bond between the ‘sensus fidei’ and the guidance of God’s People by the Magisterium of the Pastors.** These two realities cannot be separated [LG 12]. Magisterial interventions seek to **guarantee the Church’s unity in the truth of the Lord.** They aid her to ‘abide in truth’ in face of the arbitrary character of changeable opinions and are an expression of obedience to the Word of God. [DV 10]. Even when it might seem that they limit the freedom of theologians, these actions, by their fidelity to the faith which has been handed on, establish a deeper freedom which can only come from unity in truth...” [# 35].

4. Prayer and Sacrifice

“...The People of God respond to this calling [of **bearing witness to the truth of Christ which sets us free**], ‘above all by means of the life of faith and charity, and by **offering to God ‘a sacrifice of praise’.** More specifically, as far as the life of faith is concerned, the Second Vatican Council makes it clear that ‘the whole body of the faithful who have an anointing which comes from the holy one [cf. I Jn 2:20, 27] cannot err in matters of belief.’ And ‘this characteristic is shown in the supernatural sense of the faith of the whole people, when ‘from the bishops to the last of the faithful’, they manifest **a universal consent in matters of faith and morals.**’ [LG 12] [# 4].

“... In order to exercise the prophetic function in the world, the People of God must continually reawaken or ‘rekindle’ its own life of faith [cf. 2 Tm 1:6]. It does this particularly by contemplating ever more deeply, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the contents of the faith itself and by dutifully presenting the reasonableness of the faith to those who ask for an account of it [cf. I P 3:15]. For the sake of this mission, the **Spirit of truth** distributes among the faithful of every rank **special graces ‘for the common good.’** [I Co 12:7-11] [# 5].

“... Since **the object of theology is the Truth which is the living God and His plan for salvation revealed in Jesus Christ**, the theologian is called to deepen his own life of faith and continuously unite his scientific research with prayer. In this way, he will become **more open** to the ‘supernatural sense of faith’ upon which he depends, and it will appear to him as a sure rule for guiding his reflections and helping him assess the correctness of his conclusions.” [# 8]

“Through the course of the centuries, theology has progressively developed into a true and proper science. The theologian must therefore be attentive to the epistemological requirements of his discipline, to the demands of rigorous critical standards, and thus to a rational verification of each stage of his research. The obligation to be critical, however, should not be identified with the critical spirit which is born of feeling or prejudice. The theologian must discern in himself the origin of and motivation for his critical attitude and allow his gaze to be purified by faith. This commitment to theology requires a spiritual effort to grow in virtue and holiness...” [# 9]

[II] A Few Comments

1. **Service to the Church**: Service to doctrine always implies the believing research into the understanding of the faith, a need that the Church can never surrender. Theology responds to a dynamism that is within faith itself, as this tends toward intelligence and there is thus satisfied the yearning for truth inscribed in the human spirit. Theology pertains to the evangelizing mission of the Church. The People of God require the utmost respect in this enterprise. Boldness of research requires patience of maturation. [Georges COTTIER, OP].

2. **The Truth is Jesus Christ, Who sets us free [cf. Jn 8:32]**: “truth” means that revelation of the salvific plan of God. – synonyms would be: mystery, what is hidden, unveil, reveal. This truth is not to be sold – it is wisdom, discipline and intelligence [Pr 23:23]. There is a Christological concentration of truth centered on His Person, His Mission. [I. DelaPOTTERIE, SJ.]

3, **Central Characteristics**: Christ did not draw His origins from Himself – the truth is not “His.” The Father generated Him, not out of necessity – but freely, to share Him with us. The Holy Spirit comes to remind us of His Truth. The fullness of Revelation pours forth from the open side of Jesus Christ [cf. Jn 14:17; 19:34. [Raul TREMBLAY, C SSR].

4. **Theology as Dialogue: with God, with the Magisterium, with the People of God**: the truth is Divine – faith is obedience for all, who are the service of God’s word. The vocation of the Magisterium is rooted in Holy Orders – that of the theologian is rooted in Baptism, Confirmation. All are joined in and through the Eucharist, the Bread of Wisdom. There are no others more called to dialogue than the Magisterium and the theologian: first of all with God – the signs of the times – with one another. Theology cannot be closed in as archeology, philology, or any ideology. Its full realization will require fidelity to God’s Word – written and in the living Tradition of the Church. [M. OUELLET].

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[4] “**Ad Tuendam Fidem**”
 [John Paul II, Apostolic Letter, May 18, 1998]

A Doctrinal Note illustrating the Concluding Formula of the *Professio Fidei*
 [A Few Reflections]

Introduction: the matter of the relationship between the Magisterium of the Church and her theologians needs to be seen in the light of Vatican II – particularly, the two Dogmatic Constitutions – and a brief bibliography that flows from these Conciliar statements:

[1] **Lumen Gentium:**

[a] **# 12 a**

... The holy People of God shares also in Christ’s prophetic office: it spreads abroad a living witness to him, especially by a life of faith and love and **by offering to God a sacrifice of praise**, the fruit of lips praising his name [cf. Heb 13:15]. **The whole body of the faithful** who have an anointing that comes from the holy one [cf. I Jn 2:20 & 27] **cannot err in matters of belief**. This characteristic is shown in the supernatural appreciation of the faith [*sensus fidei*] of the whole people, when “from the bishops to the last of the faithful”, they manifest **a universal consent** in matters of faith and morals. By this appreciation of the faith, aroused and sustained by the Spirit of truth, the People of God, guided by the sacred teaching authority [*magisterium*] and obeying it, receives not the mere word of man, but truly the word of God [cf. I Th 2:13], the faith once for all delivered to the saints [Jude 3]. The People unfailingly **adheres** to this faith, **penetrates** it more deeply with right judgment, and **applies** it more fully in daily life...

[b] **# 25 a- d [*in toto*]:**

... Among the more important duties of bishops that of **preaching** the Gospel has pride of place. For the bishops are **heralds** of the faith, who draw new disciples to Christ; they are authentic teachers, i.e., teachers endowed with the authority of Christ, who preach the faith to the people assigned to them, the faith which is destined to **inform** their thinking and **direct** their conduct; and under the light of the Holy Spirit they make that faith shine forth, drawing from the storehouse of revelation new things and old [cf. Mt 13:52]; they make it bear fruit and with watchfulness they **ward off** whatever errors threaten their flock [cf. 2 Tm 4;14]. **Bishops who teach in communion with the Roman Pontiff** are to be revered by all as witnesses of divine and Catholic truth; the faithful, for their part, are obliged to submit to their bishops’ decision, made in the name of Christ, in matters of faith and morals, and to **adhere to it with a ready and respectful allegiance of mind**. This loyal submission of the will and intellect must be given, in a special way, to the authentic teaching authority of the Roman Pontiff, even when he does not speak *ex cathedra* in such wise, indeed, that his supreme teaching authority be acknowledged with respect, and that one sincerely adhere to decisions made by him, **conformably with his manifest mind and intention**, which is made known principally either by the character of the documents in question, or by the frequency with which a certain doctrine is proposed, or by the manner in which the doctrine is formulated.

Although the bishops, taken individually, do not enjoy the privilege of infallibility, they, do, however, **proclaim** infallibly the doctrine of Christ on the following conditions:

- when, even though dispersed throughout the world, but preserving for all that amongst themselves and **with Peter's successor the bond of communion**, in their authoritative **teaching** concerning matters of faith and morals, they are in agreement that a particular teaching is to be held definitively and absolutely.

- this is still more clearly the case when, **assembled in an ecumenical council**, they are, for the universal Church, teachers of and judges in matters of faith and morals, whose decisions must be adhered to with the loyal and obedient assent of faith.

This infallibility, however, with which the divine Redeemer wished to endow his Church in defining doctrine pertaining to faith and morals, is **co-extensive with the deposit of revelation**, which must be **religiously guarded and loyally and courageously expanded**. **The Roman Pontiff, head of the College of Bishops, enjoys this infallibility in virtue of his office**, as Supreme Pastor and Teacher of all the Faithful – who **confirms his brethren in the faith [cf. Lk 22:32]** – he proclaims in an absolute decision a doctrine pertaining to faith or morals. For that reason his definitions are not to be reformed by their very nature and **not by reason of the assent of the Church**, in as much as they were made with the assurance of the Holy Spirit promised to him in the person of blessed Peter himself; and as a consequence **they are in no way in need of the approval of others, and do not admit of appeal to any other tribunal**. For in such a case, the Roman Pontiff does not utter a pronouncement as a private person, but rather does he expound and defend the teaching of the Catholic faith **as the supreme teacher** of the universal Church, **in whom the Church's charism of infallibility is present in a singular way**. The infallibility promised to the Church is also present in the body of bishops when, **together with Peter's successor**, they exercise the supreme teaching office. Now, the assent of the Church can never be lacking to such definitions on account of the same Holy Spirit's influence, through which Christ's whole flock is maintained in the unity of the faith and makes progress in it.

Furthermore, when the Roman Pontiff, or the body of Bishops together with him, define a doctrine, they make the definition **in conformity with revelation itself**, to which all are bound to adhere and to which they are obliged to submit and this revelation is transmitted integrally **either in written form or in oral tradition** through the legitimate succession of bishops and above all through the watchful concern of the Roman Pontiff himself; and through the light of the Spirit of truth it is scrupulously preserved in the Church an unerringly explained. The Roman Pontiff and the Bishops, by reason of their office and the seriousness of the matter, apply themselves **with zeal to the work of inquiring by every suitable means** into this revelation and of **giving apt expression to its contents**; **they do not, however, admit any new public revelation as pertaining to the deposit of faith...**

[2] **Dei Verbum**

[a] **# 5:**

The '**obedience of faith**' [Rm 16:26; cf. Rm 1:5; 2 Co 10:5-6] must be given to God as he reveals himself. By faith man **freely commits his entire self to God, making 'the full submission of his intellect and will to God who reveals'**, and **willingly assenting to the Revelation given by him**. Before this faith can be exercised, many must have **the grace of God** to **move** and **assist** him; he must have **the interior helps of the Holy Spirit** who **moves the heart and converts it to God**, who **opens the eyes of the mind** and 'makes it easy for all to accept and believe the truth'. The same Holy Spirit **constantly**

perfects the faith by his gifts so that Revelation may be more and more profoundly understood...

[b] **# 8 b:**

... The Tradition that comes from the apostles makes **progress** in the Church, with the help of the Holy Spirit. There is **a growth in insight** into the realities and words that are being passed on. This comes about in various ways. It comes through the **contemplation** and **study** of believers who ponder these things in their hearts [cf. Lk 2:19 & 51]. It comes from the intimate sense of spiritual realities which they **experience**. And it comes from the preaching of those who have received, along with their right of succession in the episcopate, **the sure charism of truth**. Thus, as the centuries go by, the Church is always advancing towards the plenitude of divine truth, until eventually the words of God are fulfilled in her...

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The Ample Documentation of the Magisterium since Vatican II: In General¹⁵²

1 THE FUNCTION OF THE MAGISTERIUM IN GENERAL

a. The Magisterium **teaches authentically** the revealed truths. It also has the function of **keeping distant** those errors which threaten the faith. **The Magisterium guides the “sense of the faith” of the Christian People**. The formal definitions of the Magisterium are in accord with divine revelation, but they do not imply a new public revelation.

b. The Magisterium is assisted by the Holy Spirit. Biblical exegesis develops under the vigilance of the Magisterium and supplies precise data for its guidance. The theological realities upon which human life depends cannot be understood without referring to the ecclesiastical Magisterium. The object of the Magisterium are the problems of our time considered in the light of the Word of Christ.

c. The freedom of the Magisterium of the Church is capable of determining the authenticity of doctrine and the Catholic tradition. There is needed a spirit of love and reverence for the Magisterium of the Church. The Council asked for a loyal deference, both internal and external, for the Magisterium of the Church. The Magisterium is a sign of the love of Christ for His Church. The Church conserves, transmits and interprets the positive law revealed and the natural principles, affirming the absolute and unchangeable value of some of these. Theology is also bound to the Magisterium.

d. The Church is not subject to statistics, but seeks always the truth. In a mentality that is against life, the Church stands for life. The Word of God is entrusted

¹⁵² cf. Index of EV, S 2, pp. 862-868

to the Church. Catechesis expresses the faith of the Church. The “sense of the faith” is developed in the entire Church. The Magisterium of the Church is not the teaching of doctors, nor an authoritarian power, but needs always to be bound to the Word of God. The Magisterium is an authority in the Church but one that is at the service of the Word of God.

e. The Magisterium **guards** and **authentically interprets** the deposit of the Faith. The Magisterium is assisted by the discernment of the signs of the times. There is a union between the Magisterium and the tradition of the Church. The Magisterium fixes and determines the permanent needs of the Church. The Magisterium of the Church is that task of teaching as in the College of Bishops, and of the single bishops in union with the Supreme Pontiff. The Magisterium of the Church is necessary for her catechesis.

2. THE EXERCISE OF THE MAGISTERIUM

a. The hierarchy teaches in the name and with the authority of Jesus Christ. While the teaching of the Roman Pontiff is not always infallible, it is always authentic, and extends over the entire revealed deposit of faith. The Episcopal order succeeds the apostolic college in the Magisterium. The entire priestly body has the mandate of Jesus Christ to announce the Gospel. The office of teaching is conferred with priestly ordination.

b. The definitive teaching of the authoritative Church body is infallible. The authentic Magisterium is exercised both singly as well as collegially. In the exercise of the Magisterium, the pastoral aspect must be evident. Believers are challenged to accept the Magisterium of the Pope out of obedience. The Magisterium is one of the fonts of conscience, that may not be considered as of one’s free choice.

Our separated brethren think differently than we do concerning the place of the Magisterium in their lives. One may not use the texts of the Magisterium to support some social model or other.

3. THE MAGISTERIUM AND THEOLOGAINS

a. There is a mutual relationship between the Magisterium of the Church and theology. Among the duties and challenge of theologians is to act in union with the Magisterium of the Church. There has to be a bond between the ecclesiastical faculties with the Magisterium of the Church.

b. The teachers of the materials concerning faith and moral are to be in communion with the Magisterium. All the freedom in research enjoyed by theologians is within the ambit of the revealed Word of God at the service of which the Magisterium teaches.

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John Paul II, Apostolic Letter, ***Ad Tuendam Fidem***, May 18, 1998 [Oss. Rom., English edition – booklet to be published in September].

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[5] **Doctrinal Note of Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith**
[June 29, 1998]

The Doctrinal Note explains a bit more in detail the three “Propositions” of truths of concern here:

[1] **Divinely Revealed**: **believe everything in the Word of God**, either written or handed down in Tradition. These are the divinely and formally revealed truths – these doctrines require **assent of theological faith**. Refusal to do so could lead to the censure of **Heresy**. The assent here is based directly on the Faith. [cf. **Canon 750, ¶ 1**].

Examples would be: the Creed; Christology; Mariology; Sacraments; Eucharistic Presence; Sacrifice of the Mass; Church; Roman Pontiff; Original Sin; Immortality; Murder.

[2] **To be held definitively**: these are truths that are also infallibly taught, and must be accepted and held as definitively proposed by the Church. This would include all that is necessary for keeping, expounding the Deposit of Faith. Such truths can be defined and they are to be ***definitive tenenda* [definitively to be held in faith]**. Rejection would mean one is no longer in communion with the Catholic Church. These are truths necessarily connected historically, logically with the Deposit of Faith. There can be **no difference in the full and irrevocable character of the assent required of the Faithful**. The assent here is **based on the Faith in the Holy Spirit’s Assistance to the Magisterium**.

Examples: Papal Infallibility; Primacy; His Election; Reservation of Valid Subject for Sacrament of Holy Orders; Illicitness of Euthanasia [not in Scripture, but natural law]; Illicitness of Prostitution, Fornication; Canonization of Saints; Invalidity of Anglican Orders.

[3] **Religious Submission of Will and Intellect**: all those teachings presented as true, or sure – even if not defined. These are authentic teachings of the Ordinary Magisterium. They are set for three reasons:

- to arrive at a deeper understanding of the Deposit of Faith;
- to recall conformity with the teachings of faith;
- to warn against ideas incompatible with Deposit of Faith.

Rejection: would qualify one’s opinions as **Erroneous, Rash, Dangerous**.

Examples: the requirement of degrees of adherence differentiated:

- according to the mind and will manifested;
- the nature of the documents;

- the frequent repetition of the same doctrine;
- the tenor of the verbal expression.

†††

CONCLUSIONS

[1] The specific role of the Magisterium is described by two sets of verbs:

A. **DEFEND** [“Negative”?]

bind
conserve
keep
preserve
reject
ward off
watch over

censure
judge
maintain
protect
retain

B. **DEFINE** [“Positive”]

apply
clarify
direct
explain
guide
inform
penetrate
serve

authenticate
decide
expand
expound
herald
interpret
preach

guard
proclaim

[2] There is an interesting “Curial Style” in the order between Intellect and Will – Will and Intellect – which comes first:

A. **INTELLECT AND WILL**

DV 5; Canon 752

B. **WILL AND INTELLECT**

LG 25; Donum Veritatis 23; C.D.F. # 10

The quote in DV 5¹⁵³ is based on Vatican I [D-S 1789 [3008] which places the “intellect” first. This may be due to St. Thomas Aquinas, who taught that the subject of faith is the intellect – as nothing can be loved unless first known. As the Theological Commission for LG 25 discussed the matter, what had been this original order: “the religious assent of the intellect and will” found this order reversed to “will and intellect” - In mid-July 1963, the work of revision was complete. The comments made by the central commission were communicated to the doctrinal commission. The theological commission made its response to the observations, and this was drawn by Fr. Sebastian Tromp, SJ. The re-written text was presented as based on the comments [cf. U. Betti, *L’ossequio al magistero pontificio non ‘ex cathedra’*, pp. 431m f.]. The emended text read:

“... A religious assent [**obsequium**] of the **will and intellect** is to be supplied to the authentic Magisterium of the Roman Pontiff, also when he does not speak *ex cathedra*, by which namely his supreme magisterium is acknowledged with reverence, and the decision made by him is sincerely adhered to, and this according to his **mind**

¹⁵³ cf. Rev. Bernardito Cleopas AUZA, *The Non-Infallible Magisterium and Theological Dissent*. Angelicum Doctoral Thesis 1990, pp. 608, ff.

and will, which is revealed either from the character of the documents, from his frequent repetition of the same doctrine, or from his manner of speaking...”

There are significant changes made between the provisory text discussed by the central commission and the text as noted above. The first is the inversion of the order of the two faculties involved in the due assent. The priority of the “will” over the “intellect” was given to indicate that the assent is dictated by motivations of faith rather than commanded by the personal understanding of the doctrine taught. [cf. U. Betti, p. 432.]. It was now made clear that the motive of such an assent is not really the convincing power of the arguments forwarded but rather the recognition that this magisterium teaches in the name of Christ.

There are some differences of translation in the Abbot edition as compared with the Flannery rendition:

ABBOT: [LG 25 b]: “...This religious submission of **will and of mind** must be shown in a special way to the authentic teaching authority of the Roman Pontiff even when he is not speaking ex cathedra. That is, it must be shown in such a way that his supreme magisterium is acknowledged with reverence, the judgments made by him are sincerely adhered to, according to his manifest **mind and will**. His **mind and will** in the matter may be known chiefly either from the character of the documents, from his frequent repetition of the same doctrine, or from his manner of speaking.”

FLANNERY [LG 25 b]: “...This loyal submission of the **will and intellect** must be given, in a special way, to the authentic teaching authority of the Roman Pontiff, even when he does not speak ex cathedra in such wise indeed that his supreme teaching authority be acknowledged with respect, and that one sincerely adhere to decisions made by him, conformably with his manifest **mind and intention**, which is made known principally either by the character of the documents in question, or by the frequency with which a certain doctrine is proposed, or by the manner in which the doctrine is formulated.”

[3] A major word in this discussion is the Latin **obsequium** - found in the Latin Vulgate for Rm 12:1, ff.: Think of God’s mercy, my brothers, and worship him, I beg you, in a way that is worthy of thinking beings, by **offering your living bodies [lives] as a holy sacrifice**, truly pleasing to God....”

a. Just looking at the various translations of this term would indicate the wide divergence of interpretation: some Romance languages leave it is **ossequio**, which does not help the English translation. Both Abbot and Flannery editions have translated this as either “religious”, or “loyal” submission – which is the French rendition.

- b. English speaking theologians express wide views
- Orsy, SJ, maintained that the Council chose this word specifically to leave the matter vague – awaiting later clarification;
 - C. Butler stated it means only ‘due respect’;
 - F. Sullivan, SJ interprets it much more strongly, as “to follow, to yield to, to comply, to obey”.

- Msgr. Colombo translates it as “to obey, to submit. To assent.” [cf. AUZA, *The Non-Infallible Magisterium and Theological Dissent*. Pp. 92-106].

c. Some light [or maybe just more smoke!] might be cast on the issue by pondering the way St. Thomas Aquinas uses the expression **obsequium** – [humbly noted (?!?!?): J. Henchey, *La Formula ‘In Obsequium’ nel linguaggio di S. Tommaso*. In: ANGELICUM LXIX (1992) pp. 453-470] – the term is used to describe Christ’s relationship to His Father: the Blood of Christ is offered for the spiritual **obsequium** offered to God [cf. In Heb., c. 9, l. 3]. In the Summa, St. Thomas notes that the Passion of Christ is the cause of our reconciliation in two ways: first, it distances sin by which humanity has become the enemy of God; and secondly, Christ’s Passion becomes the most highly acceptable **obsequium** to the Father. [cf. III, q. 49, a. 4, c]. The believer imitates Christ most intimately by living the “obedience” of faith [cf. DV 5], and by this suggestion: “the People of God respond to this calling ‘above all by means of the life of faith and charity, and by offering to God a **sacrifice of praise**.’” [cf. Donum Veritatis, n. 4]. This might offer some insight for the ultimate motive for the assent of will and intellect – and the **oblation** of intellect and will to God and to the Magisterium.

[4] The three propositions of the recent documents of the Holy See might be of some help here:

- 1st Proposition: those doctrines contained in the Word of God, written or handed down, and defined with a solemn judgment as divinely revealed truths – all these doctrines require **the assent of theological faith** by all the members of the faithful [cf. Commentary, # 5]. A contrary view is “heretical.” [cf. **Can. 750, ¶ 1; 1371, ¶ 1**]

- 2nd Proposition: those teachings belonging to the dogmatic or moral areas, which are necessary for faithfully keeping and expounding the deposit of faith even if they have not been proposed by the Magisterium of the Church as formally revealed. Every believer is required to give **firm and definitive assent to these truths, based on the faith in the Holy Spirit’s assistance** to the Church’s Magisterium [cf. Commentary # 6]. A contrary view is no longer in full communion with the Catholic Church [cf. **Can. 750, ¶ 2 (the “recent addition to the Code”)**].

- 3rd Proposition: all those teachings on faith and morals presented as true, or at least as sure, even if they have not been defined with a solemn judgment proposed as definitive by the ordinary and universal magisterium. Such teachings are an authentic expression of the ordinary Magisterium of the Roman Pontiff, or of the College of Bishops and therefore require **a religious submission of will and intellect** [cf. Commentary # 10]. [cf. **Can. 1371, ¶ 2**].

[2] Brief Bibliography of Recent Documents

- **Letter sent to all Bishops and other Ordinaries and hierarchs of the Catholic Church regarding the more serious offenses («*graviora delicta*») reserved to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (*Epistula ad totius Catholicae Ecclesiae Episcopos aliosque Ordinarios et Hierarchas interesse habentes de delictis gravioribus eidem Congregationi pro Doctrina Fidei reservatis*), May 18, 2001
AAS 93 (2001) 785-788**
- **Apostolic Letter «*Sacramentorum sanctitatis tutela*», given *motu proprio*, promulgating the norms on the more serious offenses reserved to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (April 30, 2001)
AAS 93 (2001) 737-739**
- **Dichiarazione sulla «Chiesa *oving*» nella Repubblica Ceca, February 11, 2000
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- **Regulations for doctrinal examination – *Ratio Agendi* (*Agendi ratio in doctrinarum esame*), May 30, 1997
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