THE MAGISTERIUM, THE POPE, AND INFALLIBILITY

Taken from the Acts of the Apostles:

And as they were speaking to the people, the priests, and the officer of the temple, and the Sadducees, came upon them, being grieved that they taught the people, and preached in Jesus the resurrection from the dead: And they laid hands upon them, and put them in hold till the next day; for it was now evening. But many of them who had heard the word, believed; and the number of the men was made five thousand. And it came to pass on the morrow, that their princes, and ancients, and scribes, were gathered together in Jerusalem; and Annas the high priest, and Caiphas, and John, and Alexander, and as many as were of the kindred of the high priest. And setting them in the midst, they asked: By what power, or by what name, have you done this? Then Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost, said to them: Ye princes of the people, and ancients, hear: If we this day are examined concerning the good deed done to the infirm man, by what means he hath been made whole: Be it known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ of Nazareth, Whom you crucified, Whom God hath raised from the dead, even by Him this man standeth here before you whole. This is the stone which was rejected by you the builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other. For there is no other Name under heaven given to men, whereby we must be saved…

And the high priest asked them, Saying: Commanding we commanded you, that you should not teach in this name; and behold, you have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and you have a mind to bring the blood of this man upon us. But Peter and the apostles answering, said: We ought to obey God, rather than men. The God of our fathers hath raised up Jesus, Whom you put to death, hanging Him upon a tree. Him hath God exalted with His right hand, to be Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel, and remission of sins. And we are witnesses of these things and the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to all that obey Him. When they had heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they thought to put them to death … And calling in the Apostles, after they had scourged them, they charged them that they should not speak at all in the Name of Jesus; and they dismissed them. And they indeed went from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were accounted worthy to suffer reproach for the Name of Jesus. And every day they ceased not in the temple, and from house to house, to teach and preach Christ Jesus.

Acts 4:1-12; 5:27-33; 40-42
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PAPAL INFALLIBILITY

➢ Read *Pastor Aeternus* (Vat I, 1870) – the document in which papal infallibility was clearly defined.

**When is the Pope Infallible?**

➢ The pope speaks *ex cathedra* when...
  - In the office of shepherd and teacher of all Christians
  - He defines
  - By virtue of his supreme apostolic authority
  - Doctrine concerning faith or morals
  - To be held by the universal Church

**Characteristics of this Infallibility**

➢ His intention to bind all Catholics in conscience, i.e. this is infallible, must be made clear.
➢ This power comes to the Pope from God directly (not from the Church).
➢ Such definitions are irreformable of themselves (one must understand the definition correctly).
➢ A definition marks the boundaries of the true Faith. A Catholic may not step beyond the limits; he may remain anywhere within the limits. (This is why they are crafted very carefully & intentionally.)
➢ Anyone who presumes to contradict such a definition let him be anathema.

THE DEPOSIT OF FAITH

➢ Remember: (I) The Deposit of Faith comes to us from Christ and the Apostles and (II) the authority to infallibly proclaim this dogma is given to (1) The Ordinary and Universal Magisterium, and (2) The Pope speaking *ex cathedra*, and (3) the General Ecumenical Council defining doctrines of faith and morals.

**No New Dogmas**

➢ Like Christ, the Deposit of Faith must remain the same yesterday, today and forever (cf. Heb 13:8)
  - No new teachings can be added to the Deposit of Faith.
  - No original teachings can ever be contradicted.
  - No original teaching can become ‘outmoded’ or ‘revised’ so as to mean something different.

“For the Holy Ghost was not promised to the successors of Peter, that by His revelation they might make known new doctrine, but that by His assistance they might inviolably keep and faithfully expound the revelation or deposit of faith delivered through the Apostles.” (*Pastor Aeternus*, Vatican I, Denzinger 1836)

➢ An infallible definition may be made at any point in time, but the dogma itself may not be new. Rather it must have always been part of the Deposit of Faith. Many detractors of the Church make the mistake of accusing a doctrine to have first been ‘invented’ when it was proclaimed infallibly.

FALSE TEACHINGS

**Today there are many “pseudo-doctrines”**

➢ Pseudo-doctrine: False teaching (error) that has the appearance of being approved and proposed by the Church because many churchmen advance it. *How can we tell it apart from real doctrine?*
  - Does it meet the criteria of infallibility?
  - Has it always been taught by the Church?
  - Does it contradict (oppose, revise, attack) any dogma of the Church?
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- What is its fruit? (Albeit this is a tenuous mark, but often helps us on account of our ‘common sense’ of the Faith.) Does it bring about more vocations? More conversions to the Catholic Church? Strengthening of Catholic life? Increase detachment from the world? Help us resist human respect? Call us to increased prayer and penance? Increase focus on Last Things?

∴ At times today, pseudo-doctrines are also being promulgated by a “para-magisterium”.¹
- Pseudo-doctrines are disseminated by those without the proper authority (e.g. the International Theological Commission engaging in speculative theology regarding Limbo).
- They are promulgated in unorthodox and inappropriate mediums (e.g. media, interviews, etc.).
- They are expressed ambiguously and open to a multiplicity of interpretations.²

∴ If we know it to be a false doctrine, we have the obligation to reject it! We may never follow error.
- It does not matter WHO teaches this error.
- It does not matter HOW MANY people embrace this error.
- No amount of PERSECUTION should ever induce us to accept the error.

A “Living” Magisterium?∗
∴ “Magisterium” – The authoritative teaching office of the Church; especially as it is exercised by the pope and bishops.
- The magisterium is ‘living’ in the sense that the Holy Ghost guides it.
- The magisterium is ultimately founded upon Christ and the Twelve Apostles. We could say it is ‘living’ in the sense that the Apostles (Fathers, Doctors of the Church, etc) are in heaven and ultimately more ‘alive’ than those Church Suffering / Militant members of the magisterium.
- The magisterium is ‘living’ in the sense that the Church’s authoritative teaching can always apply itself to the particular and unique needs of each passing age.

∴ A necessary clarity:
(1) Excepting Christ, no one single individual can be considered the Magisterium.
(2) Every member of the Magisterium has the solemn obligation to remain in union with the previous members of the Magisterium, all the way back to St. Peter (and of course, Christ).
(3) This perfect continuity is an essential distinguishing mark of the authentic living magisterium.³

∴ An error to avoid: The magisterium is by nature “living”; this means the pope and those bishops that are currently members of the Church Militant make up the [living] magisterium.
- An erroneous consequence of this fallacy is that “magisterial teaching” is whatever happens to be the latest word from Vatican officials.

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¹ I read this phrase “paramagisterium” coined in an article at www.catholicism.org. It brings to mind the term “paramilitary” which refers to a militarized, or semi-militarized, force whose organizational structure, training, subculture and (often) function are similar to those of a professional military, and yet is not included as part of a state’s formal armed forces.

² “One undeniable hallmark of Catholic dogma has always been its clarity. The Church, as a good teacher, does not guide her children in halting speech. She is not vague or ambiguous. Indeed, to teach infallibly and thus bind the faithful under pain of grievous sin would absolutely require clarity. Since it is manifestly contrary to reason for a teacher to demands assent of the intellect to something ambiguous or vague, how can Christ’s faithful be bound in conscience to believe something ephemeral or given to a multiplicity of contrary interpretations?” (Brother Andre Marie, “The Paramagisterium,” www.catholicism.org/ad-rem-no-238.html).

³ “If anyone rejects any written or unwritten tradition of the Church, let him be anathema.” – Canon from the Second Council of Nicea (787 AD). “Therefore all those who dare to think or teach anything different, or who follow the accursed heretics in rejecting ecclesiastical traditions, or who devise innovations, or who spurn anything entrusted to the Church, or who fabricate perverted and evil prejudices against cherishing any of the lawful traditions of the Catholic Church, or who secularize the sacred objects and saintly monasteries, we order that they be suspended if they are bishops or clerics, and excommunicated if they are monks or lay people.” (See www.papalencyclals.net)
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Basically, this means today’s magisterium may contradict yesterday’s; but then continuity is lost. Infallibility, teaching authority, and the Church’s foundation upon Christ would be meaningless.

Such a changeable magisterium would be more akin to a dead magisterium than a living one. Pope Pius XII warned in his encyclical, Humani Generis (1950), that such a subjectivist philosophy (which is typical of Protestantism and Modernism) would ruin Catholic theology.

The correct understanding of the [living] magisterium is the essential differentiation between a Neo-Catholic and a [Traditional] Catholic.

In the Latin Mass Magazine, Fr. Chad Ripperger writes:

The only standard by which [neo-Catholics] judge orthodoxy is whether or not one follows the current Magisterium… Traditionalists tend to take not just the current Magisterium as their norm but also Scripture, intrinsic tradition, extrinsic tradition and the current Magisterium as the principles of judgment of correct Catholic thinking… Inevitably, this magisterialism has led to a form of positivism. Since there are no principles of judgment other than the current Magisterium, whatever the current Magisterium says is always what is “orthodox.”

DEVELOPMENT OF DOCTRINE

Holy Mother Church is always working to guide and protect souls of each passing age in regard to the errors of their time.

Never forget, that the Magisterium’s duty (office) of condemning error is perhaps the most merciful and pastoral of its roles. {As loving parents, how can one fail to understand this?}

Magisterial teachings always move (“develop”) in the direction of:

1. A fuller explanation of the same truth already expressed,
2. Supplying an increase in precision of the Church’s explicit and clear teaching,
3. While never altering or giving a new sense to the teaching.

It is not true development but false so-called ‘development’ if:

1. The teaching is weakened, diluted or mitigated;
2. Or the teaching is made more vague, ambiguous or imprecise;
3. Or the teaching is altered, or given a new sense different from the previous clear truth.

“Let the understanding, then, the knowledge and the wisdom, as well of individuals as of all, as well of one man as of the whole Church, throughout the course of ages and centuries increase and make much and vigorous progress; but yet only in its own kind; that is to say, in the same doctrine, in the same sense, and in the same meaning.”

— St. Vincent of Lerins (+445 AD), Commonitorium, xxiii.

4 The poisonous notions of a “living Tradition” and a “living Magisterium” – not in continuity – came into the vocabulary of Catholics through the modernist theologian, Fr. Henri de Lubac, SJ, a ‘father’ of the ‘new theology’ and avid disciple of Maurice Blondel. (Crucial Truths, p.47).

5 “The neo-Catholic is doctrinally conservative while nonetheless progressive in embracing or defending changes in Catholic practice, attitudes, and theological speculations arising during the post-cenciliar period, none of which have been imposed as doctrinally binding but rather represent predilections of the neo-Catholic current.” (From an article entitled “Neo-Catholicism: A Comprehensive Definition on Wikipedia” at www.remnantnewspaper.com)

6 Fr. Chad Ripperger, “Conservative vs. Traditional Catholicism.” Latin Mass Magazine, Spring 2001. (It can be found online.)

7 “The setting up of the principal of mercy as opposed to severity ignores the fact that in the mind of the Church, the condemnation of error is itself a work of mercy, since by pinning down error those laboring under it are corrected and other are preserved from falling into it.” Romano Amerio, Iota Unum (Sarto House, 1996, p. 80)

8 Many often refer to this as the “evolution” of dogma or more subtly to the ‘organic’ growth/development of dogma.

9 “Human wisdom is always set up against in opposition to the Divine wisdom, when men consider human learning to be paramount in importance, and when they endeavor to make the truths of faith subservient to the teaching of human sciences. This error is the origin of all heresies.” – St. Thomas Aquinas, Apology for Religious Orders, chapter XII.
REGARDING THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL

- Vatican Two remained just a “pastoral council.”
- By the popes’ own decision (John XXIII and Paul VI), V2 purposefully refrained from declaring infallible dogma. Numerous attending bishops affirmed this, as have many theologians since then.
- Infallible teachings and definitions are the “measuring rod” by which we evaluate the orthodoxy of all non-infallible expressions. This would apply to Vatican II as well.
- Yet one of the most bizarre phenomena within Catholicism today, is that many take V2 to be a kind of “super council” by which the Church’s entire heritage is judged. 10
- Vatican Two promulgated ambiguous documents.
  - Yet the role of the Magisterium, & the purpose of an Ecumenical Council, is to clarify the Catholic Faith (from heresy) so that all Catholics will be united and understand the dogmas of the Faith in the same sense.
  - To this day, the ambiguities remain UNRESOLVED!
  - Only the Church’s supreme authority will be able to clarify these ambiguities...
- Can we consider Vatican Two an “evil” council?
  - Definition of “evil”: The privation (non-existence) of a good that ought to be there. 11
  - Purpose of an Ecumenical Council: (1) To teach truth with clarity so as to unite all Catholics in the one same [sense of] dogma. (2) To condemn heresy (a work of mercy!). (3) To restore and strengthen ecclesiastic disciplines that have grown lax. 12
  - It is inarguable that Vatican II has failed in these three purposes. The good proper to an Ecumenical Council is lacking in Vatican II, and in this sense that I think we may understand it as ‘evil’.
  - It is also manifestly obvious that the fruits of this Council have also been disastrous for the Church, the propagation and defense of the Faith, and the salvation of souls.
  - There is precedent for this: 2nd Council of Constantinople (553 AD), the Synod of Pistoia (1786 AD), and others...

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*By their fruits you shall know them. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit, and the evil tree bringeth forth evil fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit, shall be cut down, and shall be cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits you shall know them. (Mt 7:16-20, Sermon on the Mount)*

FAITHFUL CATHOLICS HAVE A DUTY TO RESIST ERROR

- St. Paul had to resist St. Peter when his actions were giving scandal (cf. Gal 2:11-14).
- Pope St. Felix taught: “Not to oppose error is to approve it; and not to defend truth is to suppress it.”
- St. Robert Bellarmine clearly explained the Pope’s authority is by no means unlimited or arbitrary.
- Francisco Suarez, the exceptional and pious doctor, taught it is lawful to resist authority, even a pope, when the command is immoral, or opposed to justice, or against the common good.
- Cardinal Torquemada and St. Thomas Aquinas echo these same teachings as well. [54-57]

“We not only have the right, but at times we may have the duty, to voice our loyal obedience to God and our opposition to the errors of doctrine or practice advanced by our lawful superiors who are going beyond their legitimate authority.” [Crucial Truths, p. 56] Such opposition must always be done respectfully, in charity, and within our sphere of authority under God’s created order, lest we become revolutionary.

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10 Cardinal Ratzinger admitted the insanity of this situation: “The 2nd Vatican Council has not been treated as a part of the entire living Tradition of the Church, but as an end of Tradition, a new start from zero. The truth is that this particular Council defined no dogma at all, and deliberately chose to remain on a modest level, as a merely pastoral council; and yet many treat it as though it has made itself into a sort of superdogma which takes away the importance of all the rest.” Address to the Bishops of Chile, 13 July 1988, as quoted in Crucial Truths, p. 53.

11 This definition of evil has been put forward by St. Augustine and affirmed by St. Thomas Aquinas.

12 These ‘criteria’ are given to us by the Church in the opening paragraphs of Dei Dei.