

MAGISTERIUM: ESSENTIAL AND CONSTITUTIVE ELEMENT OF THE CHURCH'S LIFE AND MISSION IN THE LIGHT OF THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL

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ABSTRACT

The Catholic Church, in the Second Vatican Council *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, Dei Verbum* stresses emphatically that “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 and be handed on to all generations” (DV 7). In fact, the Church believes and teaches that the task of “authentically interpreting the Word of God, whether written or handed on, has been entrusted exclusively to her living teaching office namely the Magisterium, which is the official teaching authority of the Bishop. And this is an essential constitutive element for the accomplishment of the life and mission of the church on earth. The Church believes that Jesus will not permit the truth to which he came to bear witness to the point of shedding his blood to be forgotten, twisted, misinterpreted, adulterated or badly explained. Jesus did make adequate provisions for the preservation and prolongation of his revelation to all succeeding ages through the Teaching Office of the Church. The teaching authority or office of the Catholic Church was thus instituted or established by the Church to perform certain functions that pertain to the revelation by God. This paper contributes to the discussion on the Church's Magisterium, its concept, its content and analyses the different levels or modes of the teaching authority of the Catholic Church.

Key Words: *Magisterium, Ordinary Universal Magisterium; Extraordinary Magisterium; Authentic Magisterium; infallible magisterium; Ordinary non-universal magisterium. Roman Pontiff, Episcopal Conference, Individual Bishops, Bishop of Rome.*

INTRODUCTION

The expression *magisterium* etymologically derives from the Latin word *magister* rendered in English as *master* and therefore connotes authority, that is, the authority of the master, not only in the sense of *teacher* but also in the broader sense of someone possessing authority or masterly in a particular field or discipline. The term has evolved significantly in the course of history. According Francis Sullivan, the term in classical Latin meant the role, dignity and authority of the master or the teacher, whereas in the early Church, it was employed to define the authority pertaining to the teaching and other forms of pastoral ministry. In the middle ages, the term designated the office and authority of teachers, both bishops and scholars, and the *chair* became the symbol of teaching; that of the bishop in the cathedral and that of the scholar in the university². Hence, in the view of Sullivan and following the thoughts of St. Thomas Aquinas we could speak of two kinds of magisterium: “magisterium cathedrae pastoralis³” of the bishop, and magisterium cathedrae magistralis⁴” of the theologian⁵

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² F.A. Sullivan, *Magisterium: Teaching Authority in the Catholic Church*, (New York, Paulist Press, 1983), p. 24-25

³ The expression means: *The Pastoral Chair or pastoral authority of the bishop.*

⁴ The expression means: *The master's Chair or authority*

⁵ F.A. Sullivan, *Magisterium*: p. 24-25.

Magisterium, Official Teaching office of the Church

As a modern ecclesiastical expression, magisterium primarily refers to the teaching office or authority of bishops, with the Supreme Pontiff inclusive. It refers not only to the teaching office of the hierarchy but also to the hierarchy itself as the bearer of this office⁶. The bishops are the authoritative teachers by virtue of their Episcopal consecration and apostolic succession. The Second Vatican Council emphasizes that, Jesus gave a permanent role to Peter, the first among the apostles, and that role was meant to be transmitted to his successors. In the same way, the apostles' office of nurturing the church is permanent and is meant to be exercised without interruption by the sacred order of bishops. Hence the Council teaches that by divine institution bishops have succeeded to the place of the apostles as shepherds of the church, and that he who hears them hears Christ, while he who rejects them rejects Christ and him who sent Christ⁷.

Generally, and in a loose sense, all the baptized participate in the teaching office of the Church. Some fulfill this responsibility in a more formal way as Catechists, Pastoral Ministers and Preachers, while others too in a less formal way. For example, Vatican II acknowledges the Christian family as the domestic Church in which parents must be for their children by word and example, the first preachers of faith⁸. Some scholars, consequently argue that the Magisterium consists not only of the Magisterium proper, exercised by the Pope and the Bishops, but also of the Magisterium general, exercised by all the faithful through the gift of universal or common priesthood of all believers⁹.

The Magisterium proper teaches the Faith with authority and certitude; the degree of authority and of certitude depends upon whether the teaching is infallible or non-infallible. In the view of J.A. Coriden, however, the Magisterium general does not teach with authority or certitude, but rather provides a search for new insights into the truths of the Faith, which keeps the Magisterium proper from becoming stagnant, and which corrects the occasional limited errors found within the teachings of the Ordinary Magisterium. He stressed that the Magisterium general has the charism of the Holy Spirit so that its search for truth within Divine Revelation cannot fail to bear fruit that will last. He could therefore conclude that indeed the entire Church, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit dynamically engages God's revealed truth, safeguarding it, searching for more profound grasp of it, faithfully announcing and explaining it¹⁰.

Some scholars, from the thomistic standpoint, argue in favour of a twofold magisterium, i.e., of the bishops and of theologians/exegetes¹¹. In the opinion of Avery Dulles, the church needs two kinds of teachers: the official teacher (Hierarchical Magisterium) whose responsibility is to establish the official doctrine of the Church, and the theologian (Theological Magisterium) whose function is to investigate questions about faith with the tools of critical scholarship¹². However, Sullivan holds the view of a single magisterium, i.e., of the bishops. For him, since the term magisterium has come to be associated exclusively with pastoral teaching authority, to speak of a second magisterium of theologians and exegetes would imply a rival pastoral authority. The fact that bishops share in divine authority, communicated to them by Jesus (Cf. Mt 28:18-20), but not their scholarly competence and expertise or administrative power, qualifies them for their magisterial function¹³.

The teaching of the magisterium is said to be authentic and authoritative, both expressions meaning essentially the same thing. The expression *Authentic* in this context does not simply mean "genuine". Sullivan maintains that, the Latin *authenticum* and *authentice* mean "*authoritative*" and *authoritatively* respectively¹⁴. The teaching of the bishops is authoritative inasmuch as Christ is the source of their

⁶ A. Dulles, *A Church to believe In. Discipleship and the Dynamics of Freedom*, (New York, Crossroad Publishing Company, 1983), p. 109-110

⁷ LG 20

⁸ LG 11

⁹ Cf. W.M., "The basic Catholic Catechism", available at <https://www.catholicplanet.com/TSM/general>, (assessed (17-12-2018),

¹⁰ Cf. James A. Coriden, "Book III, The Teaching function of the Church, (cc. 747-833)", in John Beal et al. *The New Commentary on the Code of the Canon Law*, (Bangalore publications, Bangalore, 2013), p. 912

¹¹ Cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of faith, "An Instruction on the Ecclesial Vocation of the Theologian", in *Origins*, 20, (July 1990), pp. 117-126

¹² A. Dulles, "*The Two Magisteria: An Interim Reflection Proceedings*", *CTSA* 35, (1980), p. 155-169

¹³ F.A. Sullivan, *Magisterium*, p.29

¹⁴ F.A. Sullivan, *Magisterium*, p.26.

authority. The bishops, *doctores authentici* (*authoritative teachers*) according to the Second Vatican Council are “teachers endowed with the authority of Christ”¹⁵. In simple terms, authentic magisterium refers to the teaching office of the Church with the authority to speak, by virtue of Episcopal consecration and Apostolic succession, in the name of Jesus Christ.

Brief biblical basis for the Teaching Authority of Bishops

The Catholic Church holds fast to the teaching that the Bishops are the successors of the Apostles. According to *Lumen Gentium* 22 the Apostolic Succession of bishops does not depend on direct and exclusive succession. We read from the New Testament that the apostles made decisions about the structures of the Church as the need arose, and that, they felt guided by the Holy Spirit in taking such incisive decisions. For instance, in the Acts of the Apostles chapter 6,1-7, we read about the appointment of “the seven” in Jerusalem. Moreover, the New Testament Church itself saw the pastoral ministry of the apostles as something that needed to continue, and which meant that others had to succeed them in that respect. The letters to Titus and Timothy are clear witnesses to the beginning of the development of the original founding apostles to the local bishops.

However, some scholars or theologians question the biblical basis of this teaching office. Among them is Hans Kung¹⁶ who insisted that the teaching authority that is attached to the office of the bishops is neither historical nor biblical. For Kung, bishops succeed the apostles only in pastoral role but not in teaching, since the New Testament distinguishes between apostles and teachers (1 Cor. 12:28), and the successors of the New Testament teachers are not the bishops but the theologians¹⁷. For Sullivan¹⁸, this theory seems not to square with the New Testament evidence at all. In perusing the Pauline corpus, he affirms that an apostle could be a teacher and a Church leader at the same time. He maintains that St. Paul was referred to in many instances as a teacher and his ministry as teaching. He himself spoke of his ministry as a teacher.¹⁹ On the part of the other apostles, there is also reference to a teaching ministry (Cf. Acts 2:42; 4:2; 5:21, 42). In the New Testament, the combination of the teaching ministry and pastoral leadership was normal. For example, the warning Paul gives to the elders of the church of Ephesus suggests that they should be concerned with pure doctrine and guard against false teaching and speak with authority if the need arises (Acts 20:28-31). Moreover, Timothy and Titus, though pastoral leaders, were commanded to teach (1 Tim 4:11, 13, 16; 2 Tim 4:2; Tit 2:1). Furthermore, among the qualifications that a candidate for the episcopate should possess is that he should be an “apt teacher”²⁰ With this succinct exploration, we can conclude that there is enough evidence from Acts, the Pauline and Pastoral letters, of a close relationship between the ministry of pastoral leadership and the ministry of teaching in the New Testament church, to justify the conclusion that the union of these two ministries in the same person is not contradictory to the New Testament message and practice. In this view, therefore, one should not be surprised to find bishops being recognized as successors of the apostles in leadership positions as well as in teaching ministry.

The content of the Magisterium

For the Catholic Church and many Catholic theologians, the content of the magisterium is the divinely revealed Word of God as preserved in Scripture and Tradition, entrusted to the guardianship of the Magisterium, who teaches it dogmatically and officially by one of the following three ways: First by the solemn definition from the pope when he teaches *ex cathedra* or from the chair of Peter; second, by the solemn definition of an ecumenical council and lastly, by the teaching of the college of bishops when, while

¹⁵ Cf. *LG* 25; *DV* 10

¹⁶ Cf. H. Kung, *Infallible? An inquiry*, tr. By E. Quinn, Garden City, 1971, p. 86 & 84; read also pp. 237-238

¹⁷ Cf. H. Kung, *Infallible?*, p 237-238.

¹⁸ Cf. F.A. Sullivan, *Magisterium*, p 35-37.

¹⁹ Cf. 1 Cor 4:17; Rom 6:17; 2 Thess. 2:15.

²⁰ Cf. 1 Tim 3:3; 2 Tim 2:2; Tit 1:9.

dispersed throughout the world, they are in agreement that a teaching be held as definitive.²¹

The *Word of God* refers to God's Self-revealing activity; the communication in human history of what is hidden in God and is ultimately, the communication of the very person of God. *Dei Verbum* describes the task of the Church as: "Hearing the Word of God with reverence, and proclaiming it with faith"²². The Church receives the Word of God as a servant and faithfully transmits it through the magisterium.

The *Word of God* is the proper object of the Magisterium. The Second Vatican Council's Dogmatic Constitution on the divine Word, *Dei Verbum* reveals that the force and power in the Word of God is so great that it remains the support and energy of the Church, the strength of faith for her sons and daughters, the food of the Church, the food of the soul, and the pure and perennial source of spiritual life²³. This Word of God establishes the Church and is the basic source of unity and oneness of the Church. In this perspective, the Second Vatican Council though considers bishops as *judges of faith* but they are not superior to the Word of God: "*The magisterium is not above the Word of God, but serves it, teaching only what has been handed on, listening to it devoutly, guarding it conscientiously, and explaining it faithfully, by divine commission and with the help of the Holy Spirit. From this one deposit of faith it draws everything which it presents for belief as divinely revealed*"²⁴.

Interpreting the above passage, Sullivan²⁵ makes certain incisive and judicious comments insisting that the phrase *not above the Word of God but serves it* implies that the authority of the magisterium is not an authority over the Word of God but over the human interpretations of it; an authority within the community of faith, a ministry to the Word, and to the people who have accepted this Word; a service to the unity of the Church in the profession of the true faith. The bishops teach *only what has been handed on*, the whole sacred deposit of the Word of God, that is Scripture and Tradition, which is committed to the church. The bishops are to listen to *it devoutly* as it is handed on in the teaching, life and worship of the church; for, to be preachers of the Word they must first be hearers of the Word. They have to belong to the learning Church (*ecclesia discens*) in order to belong to the teaching Church (*ecclesia docens*)²⁶. In other words, the Church before being a teacher is a disciple. She teaches a sound doctrine, but she teaches a doctrine that she herself first of all, had to learn. The authority of the Church's teaching does not come from her own wisdom, but from a fact that she announces a Word which comes from the transcendence thought of God²⁷. Magisterium therefore possesses as object of his teaching the deposit of faith, God's self-revelation to humankind which is definitive in the Christ event, and this definitive Word of God is a treasure entrusted to the Church, to which nothing further is added²⁸.

In many respects, the ministry of Christ's Apostles was a unique and unrepeatable event in the life of the Church. The apostles laid the foundation of the Church's faith and life once and for all. The function of their successors would therefore be to guard and build upon this foundation. Consequently, the Magisterium guards and protects the deposit of revelation without providing any new and subsequent revelations.

Remarkably though, the magisterium, as guardian and protector teaches only what Christ taught, yet this does not mean that there could be no growth or progress in the explanation and the interpretation of the revealed word of God. The teaching of the Magisterium becomes the norm or rule of faith for the Church's faithful. In other words, it is all those revealed truths, whose knowledge is essential or useful for preserving the integrity of dogma or the salvation of souls that the magisterium guards and protects. This includes anything that might endanger the integrity or violate the purity of the faith. Guarding the deposit of faith thus becomes the primary function of the Magisterium. It is to safeguard the priceless treasure of

²¹ R.R. Gaillardetz, *Teaching with Authority: A theology of the Magisterium in the Catholic Church*, (Minnesota, The liturgical Press, 1972), p. 103.

²² DV 1.

²³ DV 21

²⁴ DV 10

²⁵ F.A. Sullivan, *Magisterium*, p. 31

²⁶ F.A. Sullivan, *Magisterium*, p.31

²⁷ R.R. Gaillardetz, *Teaching with Authority*, p.132-134

²⁸ F.A. Sullivan, *Magisterium*, p.32

the Word of God and to defend the purity of the faith of the Christian community. Brief, its primary concern is fidelity to the original deposit of Faith as they teach and interpret the Word faithfully.

Different levels of the Teaching Authority

The Catholic Church is basically endowed with two main levels of official teaching authority: the Extraordinary and Ordinary Magisterium²⁹. The Extraordinary Magisterium involves a solemn and infallible act of defining a matter of faith on the part of either the whole college of bishops, usually in ecumenical council, or the pope as head of that college when he teaches *ex-cathedra*. The Ordinary Magisterium designates all other exercises of bishops' teaching authority and is categorized into ordinary non-universal magisterium and ordinary universal magisterium.

Ordinary Non- Universal Magisterium

The Ordinary (Non-universal) Magisterium of the Church is the day-to-day normal teaching of the Pope and the bishops united with the Pope. This does not involve the teaching of the whole college but involves the teaching of individual bishops, the teaching of groups of bishops and the teaching of the bishop of Rome³⁰.

1. Ordinary Teaching of individual Bishops

According to the Second Vatican Council, every bishop, by ordination receives the ecclesiastical teaching power (*munus docendi*). The Bishop then becomes the authentic teacher of faith and morals in his diocese³¹. He teaches with authority derived from his office, though not infallibly, and always dependently on the supreme magisterium of the Church, that is the Pope. The primary aspect of the bishop's teaching ministry is kerygmatic or catechetical, oriented towards the proclamation of God's saving word. The bishop as the chief evangelist and chief catechist in the local church performs this teaching ministry in his own preaching and catechesis and in publication of pastoral letters and other ecclesiastical directives. The second aspect of his teaching office is pastoral, which is directly concerned with reflective application of church doctrine to the changing conditions and circumstances in the lives of believers³².

2. The Ordinary Teaching of Groups of Bishops

There are two types of ordinary magisterium namely: The Teaching Office of Episcopal Conferences (for example, Synod of Bishops for Africa) and the Teaching of the World Synod of Bishops. The Second Vatican document, *Christus Dominus* defines Episcopal conferences as the Assemblies of bishops of a given nation or territory that collaboratively exercise the pastoral office³³. *Episcopal Conferences* as a product of ecclesiastical laws, the individual bishop expresses collegiality precisely as a bishop of a local church and the whole episcopate expresses collegiality as a college³⁴. *The World Synod of Bishops* is convocation of bishops to consider issues of considerable import for the life of the church. Pope Paul VI established the world synod of bishops in his encyclical *motu proprio Apostolica sollicitudo*. This synod was to be a consultative body though it was possible that the Holy See might confer upon it a deliberative power³⁵.

3. Ordinary Teaching of the Bishop of Rome

We would like just to mention some salient points at this stage since this topic covers a whole range of issues which cannot be treated here. The three components of the teachings of individual bishops discussed above are also applicable to the papal teaching. In addition to being the local ordinary of the Church in

²⁹ R.R. Gaillardetz, *Teaching with Authority*, p. 159

³⁰ R.R. Gaillardetz, *Teaching with Authority*, p. 163-166

³¹ *L.G.*, 24

³² Cf. *Christus Dominus*, 11-14

³³ *Christus Dominus*, 38

³⁴ *CIC*, Canon 753

³⁵ Paul VI, Apostolic letter *Moto Proprio, Apostolica Sollicitudo, Establishing the Synod of Bishops for the Universal Church*, 5/9/1962

Rome he also assumes the responsibility as a universal teacher when he is teaching as pastor to all Christians. Gaillardetz emphasizes that “the pope’s exercise of supreme authority occurs whenever he explicitly teaches as universal pastor, as with the issuance of papal encyclical”³⁶. Indeed, the various teaching authority which are related to the diverse titles he assumes demonstrate the multifaceted task of the Pope. For instance he teaches as the Pope, Patriarch, primate and Bishop³⁷. Gaillardetz rightly observed that presently ‘these distinctions reflected in papal titles are not observed in practice. Yet the discovery of the titles held by the Bishop of Rome might do much to overcome the often monolithic conception of papal authority held by many within and without Roman Catholicism’³⁸.

The Ordinary Universal Magisterium

The teaching of the ordinary Universal Magisterium is of twofold. On one hand, bishops dispersed in their daily teachings could propose a teaching to be held as definitive and so would have recourse to the charism of infallibility. On the other hand, the whole college of bishops might teach authoritatively without either solemnly defining a teaching or proposing a teaching as something to be held as definitive. This exercise would not have recourse to the charism of infallibility.

Gaillardetz explains further that when teaching definitively, the college of bishops exercise their ordinary universal Magisterium infallibly when they propose in their daily teaching those truths of the faith that have never been solemnly defined by the Pope or council only because they have never been seriously challenged. On the other hand, the college of bishops may exercise its supreme teaching authority in an ecumenical council even when the members are not promulgating a solemn definition and are not proposing a teaching as something to be definitive. It is also possible that bishops who are dispersed throughout the world can agree on a particular matter but not proposing it as a matter to be held as definitive³⁹.

The Extraordinary Magisterium

In addition to the ordinary magisterium discussed above, the Church equally disposes other solemn means of teaching her faith, which is the Extraordinary Magisterium. The exercise of this teaching office involves a solemn and infallible act of defining a matter of faith either from, first the whole college of bishops, usually in an Ecumenical Council or second from the Pope as head of the College of Bishops, when he teaches *ex cathedra*, that is, when he speaks from the Chair of St. Peter. The Second Vatican Council referred to the teaching of the First Vatican council to confirm that when the Pope discharges his office as pastor and teacher of all Christians, and, in virtue of his supreme apostolic authority, defines a doctrine concerning faith or morals that is to be held by the universal Church, through the divine assistance promised him in St. Peter, he exercises that infallibility with which the divine Redeemer willed to endow his Church.⁴⁰

4. Teaching of the College of bishops in Ecumenical Council

The gathering of bishops in regional synods has always sought to address important pastoral and doctrinal matters. The ecumenicity that was ultimately conferred on these councils was derived not from some juridical feature of the councils themselves, but from both the weighty doctrinal problems addressed by the councils and the fact that the solutions these councils provided were ultimately accepted and received by the whole Church. These gatherings of bishops have their theological foundation in the ancient notion of communion⁴¹.

Indeed, the Second Vatican Council reaffirmed the common conviction since the tenth century that

³⁶ Gaillardetz, *Teaching with Authority*, p. 179

³⁷ F. Sullivan, *Magisterium*, p. 62-64

³⁸ R.R. Gaillardetz, *Teaching with Authority*, p. 179

³⁹ R.R. Gaillardetz, *Teaching with Authority*, p. 167.

⁴⁰ Cf. *DS* 3074: The Latin phrase *ex cathedra* means “from the chair (of office)” and is intended to mean that the pope is speaking in a deliberately formal, official way, exercising his power as the Vicar of Christ, seated on the chair of Peter, the first Pope. It is, of course, a metaphor, stressing a fact that when the Pope intentionally speaks in a definitive way on a dogmatic issue, he is being guided by the Holy Spirit and thus he cannot err.

⁴¹ The Bishops see themselves as following the tradition of the Acts 15 and the Council of Jerusalem.

in an ecumenical council, the college of bishops may teach with the charism of infallibility. In *Lumen Gentium* 25, the council believes that the exercise of an infallible teaching or judgement by the college of bishops “takes place even more clearly when they are gathered together in an ecumenical council and are the teachers and judges of faith and morals for the whole Church. Their definitions must be adhered to with the obedience of faith”⁴². The council suggests that it is the college of bishops that is central, but not a given ecclesiastical institution (an ecumenical council) in and through which the council exercises its authority. At the same time, the council situates the pope within the college of bishops as member and head. According to the Second Vatican Council⁴³ in the dogmatic constitution of the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, the authority of an ecumenical council is derived from the authority of the pope and the authority of the whole college of bishops under the leadership of the pope. This is in consonance with the Second Vatican Council ecclesiology which resists separation, and fosters communion or unity among the members of the college of Bishops with the Pope as the head.

5. The Extraordinary Magisterium of the Bishop of Rome, Head of the College of Bishops

Let’s first call to mind that the Second Vatican Council built upon the understanding of the papal teaching especially concerning the infallibility as defined by Vatican I⁴⁴, that is, in terms of college of bishops and the *sensus fidelium* (Sense of the Faithful). However, juxtaposed to this affirmation is the Second Vatican Council’s own view on papal primacy as follows:

the order of bishops, which succeeds the college of apostles in teaching authority and pastoral government, and indeed in which the apostolic body continues to exist without interruption, is also the subject of supreme and full power over the universal Church, provided it remains united with its head, the Roman pontiff, and never without its head; and this power can be exercised only with the consent of the Roman Pontiff⁴⁵.

In reading and analyzing further the conciliar document we realize that Second Vatican Council reaffirms the First Vatican Council’s teaching on papal infallibility, but with some significant additions. “By virtue of his office, the Roman Pontiff, head of the college of bishops, enjoys this infallibility when, as supreme shepherd and teacher of all Christ’s faithful, he proclaims in a definitive act a doctrine on faith and morals”⁴⁶. Therefore, his definitions are rightly said to be irreformable in themselves, and not from the consent of the Church, for they are delivered with the assistance of the Holy Spirit which was promised to him in Peter. For, the Roman pontiff is the supreme teacher of the universal Church, in whom the Church’s own charism of infallibility individually exists; he defends a doctrine of the Catholic faith. The infallibility promised to the Church also exists in the body of bishops when, along with the successor of Peter, it exercises the supreme teaching office. The Church assents to this on account of the activity of the same Holy Spirit, by which the whole flock of Christ is preserved in the unity of faith. The Second Vatican Council teaches emphatically:

When the Roman Pontiff or the body of bishops together with him define a decision, they do so in accordance with revelation itself, by which all are obliged to abide and conform. This revelation, whether written or handed down in tradition, is transmitted in its entirety through succession of bishops and in the first place through the care of the Roman Pontiff himself. In the light of the spirit of truth, this revelation is sacredly preserved and faithfully transmitted in the Church. The Roman Pontiff and the bishops work to investigate this revelation and give it a suitable expression, without accepting any new public revelation as belonging to the divine deposit of faith⁴⁷.

Thus, the Second Vatican Council claimed that in the proper exercise of the extraordinary magisterium, the consent of the whole Church can never be lacking; that, the pope and the college can be distinguished but

⁴² LG 25

⁴³ LG 22

⁴⁴ The main Roman Catholic teaching on infallibility has been given by Vatican I (1870) precisely in In chapter four of *Pastor Aeternus*, and in *Lumen Gentium*, *Christus Dominus*, and *Dei Verbum* of the Second Vatican Council, (1962-1965).

⁴⁵ *Christus Dominus*, 4

⁴⁶ LG 25

⁴⁷ LG 25; Cf. LG 12

not separated since papal exercise of the extraordinary magisterium in some way involves the whole college. Sullivan equally stipulates that the Council also creates a link between the infallibility of the extraordinary magisterium with the infallibility of the whole people of God. He remarks that *LG 12* emphasizes on the supernatural sense of faith⁴⁸ and maintains that it is aroused and sustained by the Spirit of Truth. Secondly it characterizes the people of God as whole⁴⁹ and thirdly, the text describes the effects of this gifts: that is by this sense God's people accepts not the word of men but the every Word of God; it clings without fail to the faith once delivered to the saints; it penetrates it more deeply by accurate insights and applies it more thoroughly to life⁵⁰.

Likewise, since the pope always acts as head of the college, papal infallibility is only intelligible in the light of the infallibility of the whole college of bishops. Since the college of bishops is linked with the communion of Churches, the infallibility of the college of bishops, in turn, depends on the infallibility of the people of God. These three elements are intrinsically linked together in the definition of the infallibility of the universal agreement on a matter of faith and morals. For Sullivan this implies firstly, the body of the catholic faithful as a whole, *secondly*, the Catholic people as a whole and *thirdly*, the Universal agreement among catholic Bishops and laity.⁵¹

We can consequently stipulates that when an ecumenical council or the Pope definitively proclaims something to be divinely revealed, the Holy Spirit assists the Magisterium in such a way as to guarantee that what is defined is true. Infallibility means that the Holy Spirit sees to it that the Magisterium does not solemnly oblige the faithful to believe in something as revealed which is not contained in the Word of God. For the Church, this dogma gives the assurance that a proposition in which the Magisterium makes some aspects of revelation for belief, though it remains a human composition, with the limitations inherent in any human attempt to express divine truth, will be a true proposition. That is, the dogma of infallibility does not exempt any limitation which is compatible with its being true.

Catholics believe that the Church relying on the assistance of the Holy Spirit, will never depart fundamentally from the gospel (*indefectibility*). The church is not merely a social organization but a spiritual reality, the temple of the Holy Spirit. She possesses both divine and human realities and can therefore teach authoritatively⁵². It is clear from the ongoing discussion that the Roman Catholic belief in the infallibility of the Magisterium is based on their belief in the assistance of the Holy Spirit who arouses and maintains the supernatural sense of faith of the whole people of God and confers on those called to ministry in the church, the charism necessary for the effective carrying out of their office. Catholics believe that the *Petrine Ministry* includes a teaching office with authority to guide the faith of the whole church and that the church's charism of infallibility is present in a special way in the Roman Pontiff when he makes definitive statement of faith. In all other cases, infallibility should be understood to refer to a divine gift that works only under certain limited conditions. When used of the Church, infallibility means that by virtue of the abiding presence of Christ and of the assistance of the Holy Spirit, the Church is "the pillar and foundation of truth" (1 Tim 3:15). As a consequence, it is preserved from definitively falling away from the truth of Jesus Christ.

In these there are three conditions required for an infallible definition, namely, those that concern the *Subject* (definer); the *object* (matter defined); and The *act* of defining. Concerning the subject it is only the bearer of supreme and universal teaching authority in the church who can solemnly define a dogma of faith. Conditions concerning the object have to be a truth capable of being defined. The truth has been revealed to us by God for our salvation⁵³ and can be defined as dogma of faith. It should be contained in the deposit of revelation. Conditions concerning the act of defining refer to a definitive judgment which puts an end to all freedom of opinions and decisively establishes some truth as an element of normative

⁴⁸ F. Sullivan, *Magisterium*, p. 21

⁴⁹ F Sullivan, *Magisterium*, p.32

⁵⁰ Cf. *Thess.* 2:13

⁵¹ F. Sullivan, *Magisterium*, p.19

⁵² Cf. R. R. Gaillardetz, *Teaching with Authority*, p.142

⁵³ Cf. *DV* 11

faith of the community. Such a judgment can be expressed negatively as a solemn condemnation of a heresy such that the contrary becomes a dogma of faith.

CONCLUSION

The task of guarding, preserving the deposit of faith and faithfully witnessing to and transmitting it to every generation implies and demands the magisterial function of infallibly interpreting and defining the faith. The magisterium's task therefore is to "preserve the sacred deposit of revelation, to examine it more deeply. To explain, teach and defend it" for the service of the people of God and for the whole world's salvation. In the above discussion, we have systematically underlined how the magisterium is an essential constitutive element in the Catholic Church, emphasizing on the teaching role exercised by the pope in communion with the bishops who at the same time constitute the magisterium. As a divine institution, the magisterium has the divinely revealed Word of God, which it serves and guards in fidelity, as its primary object. With Christ as its source and with the assistance of the Holy Spirit, the magisterium is said to be infallible, for it cannot err in matters of faith and morals. It preserves God's people from deviation and defections and to guarantee them the objective possibility of professing the true faith without error⁵⁴. As judge, the magisterium proclaims publicly what is vital for the life and witness of the Christian community. The magisterium is charged with the defense of orthodoxy against erroneous doctrines and dangerous opinions in matters of faith, morals and all religious practices. We want to emphasize, before concluding that the Second Vatican Council did *not teach that the pope is infallible*, but stated that the pope "exercises that infallibility with which the divine Redeemer willed to endow his church", without explaining the nature of infallibility and without limiting the exercise of infallibility to the pope. In addition, the Council did not speak of *papal infallibility*, but of the *infallible magisterium of the Roman Pontiff*. This was probably to show that infallibility is not a permanent personal quality of the pope, but a temporary assistance given him by God in his capacity as universal pastor and authoritative teacher of the faith of the Church.

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⁵⁴ Code of the Canon Law, (1983) can. 890