

THE TEACHING ROLE OF THE MAGISTERIUM AND OF THEOLOGIANS

Before embarking on a discussion of the material suggested by the title of this dialogue, it might be useful to note the ambiguous character of the title. It implies to some extent that theologians are not part of the magisterium and that the magisterium is or should be identified with the doctrinal-pastoral charism¹ of the hierarchy. While this terminology has settled in Catholic usage, it is precisely the implications of this notion of magisterium which I shall challenge in the following remarks. On the other hand, even though the title suggests an identification of magisterium with hierarchy, it very correctly implies that the teaching function in the Church is larger than hierarchical teaching.

For purposes of clarity I shall gather my reflections under the following four titles: (1) the notion of teaching in the Church; (2) the pluridimensional character of teaching in the Church; (3) the teaching role of the hierarchical magisterium and of theologians; (4) the scope of the practical problem.

THE NOTION OF TEACHING IN THE CHURCH

The specific teaching role of the hierarchy and of theologians will be conceived according to the prevailing notion of teaching in the Church in a given era. Now this notion of teaching is affected by

¹ The use of the term "doctrinal-pastoral" charism is arbitrary. Some would prefer to use "pastoral" charism to cover the teaching competence of the hierarchy since the Council seems to have subordinated the doctrinal notion of teaching to the more biblical concept of preaching. (Cf. Karl Rahner in *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*. New York: Herder and Herder, 1967, vol. I, p. 208.) I imagine these authors would then refer to the charism of theologians as "doctrinal" (suggesting the notion of *doctor* and the scientific competence proper to the term). Others seem to refer to the teaching office as prophetic and therefore might style its proper charism "prophetic." (Cf. A. Dulles, S.J., in *The Documents of Vatican II*, ed. W. Abbott, S. J., New York: Association Press, 1966, p. 33, note 51.) Throughout merely for consistency I shall refer to the doctrinal-pastoral charism of the hierarchy and the scientific charism of theologians.

many cultural and historical factors. Some of the more important factors are the following: (1) the self-definition of the Church; (2) the influence of the mass media on learning processes and the formation of opinion; (3) the awareness of the complexity of contemporary religious and theological issues; (4) the manner of the exercise of authority in the Church; (5) the educational status of the clergy and the laity; (6) the status of relations between ecclesial groups; (7) the educational theories and styles dominant in a particular culture.

First it would be helpful to indicate how these factors have operated in the past to generate a certain concept of teaching and what the results of this notion of teaching have been. Then we can examine these same factors and their influence on contemporary notions of teaching in the Church. There is always the danger of caricature in this type of broad delineation, but hopefully the cumulative validity will suffice to compensate for any individual overstatement.

The self-definition of the Church. In the preconciliar past, a rather onesidedly juridical model of the Church prevailed.² The Church was often described along lines closely resembling civil society. Such a description highlighted a vertical or pyramidal structure. In this structure authority as well as truth was seen as descending from the summit down, from the popes and bishops to the priests, and ultimately to the laity. Indeed, the word "Church" was frequently identified with a small group in positions of authority.

The influence of the mass media. In the pre-jet and pre-television decades access to information and thought in other areas of the world was slow and even restricted, and hence less influential on the formation of opinion. Because opinions were formed with less exposure to other currents of thought, ecclesiastical directives did not always incarnate the full richness of varying traditions and were received less critically within the Church. This means that at times it was possible for them to retain a formative influence disproportionate to their inherent persuasive force.

The awareness of the complexity of issues. In the past Catholic

² Cf. *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*. vol. I, p. 262 and vol. II, p. 69.

education was not infrequently defensive and cloistered from the major currents of secular life. Similarly many seminaries were isolated from university life. This meant that Catholic attitudes (both theological tenets and language) were formed or maintained apart from the enlightenment that contemporary science could bring to them, and hence without a sufficiently full awareness of the complexity of the issues.

The manner of the exercise of authority in the Church. In the past authority in the Church was highly centralized both at the Roman and the diocesan level. Where teaching was concerned there was very limited consultation in the drafting of papal statements, and what there was, was often the product of a single theological emphasis. Furthermore, in the decades following the definition of papal infallibility, theologians were a bit overawed by the documents of the ordinary non-infallible magisterium. They tended to be almost exegetical in their approach to these teachings and it was close to unthinkable (and certainly very risky) to question the formulations of such documents. These considerations justify the conclusion of Roderick Mackenzie, S.J., that "between the two Vatican councils there has been a tendency to exaggerate, or to broaden unduly, the role of the magisterium, and that the Church has suffered on this account."³

Educational status of the clergy and laity. For centuries the clergy were the best educated people in the world. Many cultural factors—among them the broad, non-specialized character of education—explained this phenomenon.

Status of relations between ecclesial groups. In the preconciliar era the apologetic or defensive attitude was taken for granted. Our basic attitudes were simply unecumenical. Viewing other ecclesial groups as in some sense "the adversary," we hardly would turn to these groups for Christian or theological enlightenment. They were not regarded as a reliable source of religious knowledge.

The educational theories and styles dominant in a particular

³ Roderick Mackenzie, S.J., "The Function of Scholars in Forming the Judgment of the Church" in *Theology of Renewal*. ed. L. K. Shook, Montreal: Palm Publishers, 1968, pp. 126-127.

culture. For the past several hundred years, the "master concept" of education was (and still is in some places) dominant. According to this concept education is basically the handing down of the wisdom, experience, and research of the professor to a rather passive and non-participative audience of students.⁴

It could be argued that the cumulative effect of influence such as these (more could be adduced) was the formation and settling of a notion of teaching in the Church which manifested three characteristics: (1) it unduly distinguished and separated the *docens* and *discens* function, with a consequent almost unique emphasis on the right to teach, little being said about the duty incumbent on the teacher to learn; (2) it unduly identified the teaching function in the Church with a single group in the Church (the hierarchy); (3) it unduly isolated a single aspect of the teaching function (the judgmental). Such a general notion of teaching in the Church narrowed the meaning of the term *magisterium*. It came to be synonymous with the hierarchical issuance of authoritative judgments.

Obviously this notion of teaching influenced both the theology of the magisterium and the style of its exercise. First of all, the theology of the magisterium so understood laid heavy stress on the authority of the teacher and a correspondingly lesser stress on evidence and the processes whereby it is gathered. In this perspective Christian unity was too easily identified with theological uniformity. Secondly and correlatively, a theology of response to authoritative teaching developed which was heavily obediential in emphasis. Thirdly, theologians tended to be viewed as agents of the hierarchy whose major, and perhaps even sole task, was to mediate and apply authoritative teaching. Their creative efforts—their more proper educational and theological task—were viewed with distrust. The result of this, of course, was a polarization between theologians and hierarchy, a growing lack of exchange and communication.

Let us now focus our attention on the seven aforementioned factors as they affect the notion of teaching in the postconciliar Church.

The self-definition of the Church. Vatican II provided a new self-

⁴ Some reflection of this notion of teaching is seen in Cardinal Ruffini's contention that loyalty to the message of Christ is a purely passive attitude with regard to the magisterium. Cf. *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, I, 120.

definition of the Church as the People of God, a *communio*. In this concentric rather than pyramidal model of the Church, it is the People of God who are the repository of Christian revelation and wisdom. As Leon Cardinal Suenens has pointed out in a recent interview: "The Church, seen from the starting point of baptism rather than that of the hierarchy, thus appeared from the first as a sacramental and mystical reality first and foremost, rather than—which it also is—a juridical society. It rested on its base, the People of God, rather than on its summit, the hierarchy. The pyramid of the old manuals was reversed."⁵ Obviously such a model suggests, among other things, the need of broad communication if the wisdom resident in the Church is to be gathered, formulated, and reflected to the world.

The influence of the mass media. There is rapid communication of information and thought in a world dominated by television. Furthermore the wide circulation of the weekly news magazines and their continuing fascination with religious news has brought technical theology into the marketplace. The scholar is in our time a popularizer whether he likes it or not. This means that the Catholic community is better informed theologically than ever.

Awareness of the complexity of issues. In general Catholics participate more fully than before in the social and intellectual world about them. This means exposure to many modes of thought and to the enrichment consequent upon the convergence of a variety of special competences. Seminaries have drawn increasingly close to the intellectual life of the university. This type of fuller involvement in the secular world has already produced an atmosphere which highlights the depth and complexity of contemporary theological problems, the many competences necessary for their adequate analysis, and the necessarily tentative character of some earlier formulations.

The manner of the exercise of authority in the Church. With its teaching on the nature of the Church and the collegiality of bishops, Vatican II began a process of decentralization of authority in the Church. Add to this the fact that the postconciliar Church lives in a secular world whose institutions are increasingly sensitive to the values of participatory democracy and it is easy to agree with the

⁵ *The National Catholic Reporter*, May 28, 1969, p. 6.

French bishops when they state: "We have reached a point of no return. From now on the exercise of authority demands dialogue and a certain measure of responsibility for everyone. The authority needed for the life of any society can only be strengthened as a result."⁶

Educational status of laity and clergy. Educational specialization and the widespread availability of higher education mean that the clergy is no longer the best educated group in the Church. Many laymen enjoy special expertise, are capable of relating this expertise to doctrinal issues, and can often express themselves articulately in religious and theological matters. Vatican II explicitly recognized this competence when it stated: "Laymen should also know that it is generally the function of their well-formed Christian conscience to see that the divine law is inscribed in the life of the earthly city. . . . Let the laymen not imagine that his pastors are always such experts that to every problem which arises, however complicated, they can readily give him a concrete solution, or even that such is their mission. Rather, enlightened by Christian wisdom and giving close attention to the teaching authority of the Church, let the layman take on his own distinctive role."⁷

Status of relations between ecclesial groups. We live in an ecumenical age. We experience a new willingness of the Church to seek answers from and in association with other non-Catholic ecclesial groups. As Vatican II noted: "In fidelity to conscience, Christians are joined with the rest of men in the search for truth and for the genuine solution to the numerous problems which arise in the life of individuals and from social relationships."⁸

Educational theories and styles dominant in a particular culture. Contemporary education is much more aware of the need to stimulate the student to self-involvement, to creativity, to experiment. The discussion, the seminar, the cross-disciplinary dialogue are the ways of modern education.

The cumulative effect of these influences has been a renewed notion of teaching in the Church. In contrast with the characteristics associated with an earlier notion of teaching, this renewed approach

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁷ Cf. *Documents of Vatican II* (Abbott), n.43, p. 244.

⁸ *Ibid.*, n.16, p. 214.

shows these characteristics: (1) it sees the learning process as an essential part of the teaching process; (2) it regards teaching as a multi-dimensional function only a single aspect of which is the judgmental; (3) it therefore sees the teaching function as involving the charisms of many persons, not just that of the hierarchy. The term *magisterium* increasingly suggests above all a pluridimensional function in the Church in which all of us have varying responsibilities.

The repercussions of this notion of teaching in the Church are beginning to appear in both the theology of the magisterium and the suggested style of its exercise. First of all, without negating the authoritative character of papal or collegial-episcopal pronouncements, contemporary theology devotes more attention to evidence and sound analysis in assessing the ultimate meaning and value of such teachings. In other words, teaching must persuade, not only command. Secondly, there is a developing theology of response to authoritative non-infallible teaching which emphasizes a docile personal assimilation and appropriation of authentic teaching as the appropriate immediate response, rather than an unquestioning assent.⁹ Finally, the creative reflection of theologians and the prophetic charisms of all Christians are seen as utterly essential if the hierarchy is to express the faith in our times in a meaningful, contemporary, and persuasive way.¹⁰ Polarization between theologians and bishops is, from this point of view, simply disastrous.

⁹ Cf. "Notes on Moral Theology," *Theological Studies* 29 (1968) 714-718. A recent statement by the Canadian bishops speaks in terms very close to those I have used in the *TS* reference. They state: "In the presence of other (non-infallible) authoritative teaching, exercised either by the Holy Father or by the collectivity of the bishops he must listen with respect, with openness and with the firm conviction that his personal opinion, or even the opinion of a number of theologians ranks very much below the level of such teaching. His attitude must be one of desire to assent, a respectful acceptance of truth that has upon it the seal of God's Church." (I have taken the quote from a release of *Documentary Service*, the press department of the USCC.)

¹⁰ The term "prophetic charisms" is used here and hereafter to indicate the participation of the People of God in Christ's prophetic office. I shall understand this prophetic function in a general way as a share in the witness given to the gospel. This is the sense given to the term in Vatican II's Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, n.12. "By these (charismatic) gifts He makes them fit and ready to undertake the various tasks or offices advantageous for the renewal and upbuilding of the Church. . . ." Cf. also R. Mackenzie whose brief treatment of charisms is excellent. Also H. Küng, "The Charismatic Structure of the Church," *Concilium* 4 (1965) 23-33.

THE PLURIDIMENSIONAL CHARACTER OF TEACHING
IN THE CHURCH

We have said that recent thought views the teaching function in the Church as a pluridimensional process. In order to clarify the specific teaching roles of the theologian and the hierarchy in the contemporary Church, it is important to list briefly the many processes which pertain to this renewed notion of teaching. I would list the following: (1) The search for new understanding by asking fresh questions, hypothesizing, testing old formulations, attempting new ones. (2) The discovery of the action of the Spirit in the Church by eliciting the insights of all competences, encouraging communication and dialogue among Christians, supporting individual charisms.¹¹ (3) Determination of the identifiable dimensions of Christian faith in our times by bringing the wisdom, reflection, experience of the entire Church to authoritative expression, either infallibly or in guidelines less than infallible.¹² (4) The publication and circulation of this expression in an effective way through the various communications media. These processes together constitute the teaching function of the Church as she goes about her task of preserving and deepening the faith committed to her.

If these processes all pertain to the teaching function of the Church, it is clear that all of us have a responsibility within the magisterium (in this larger sense). When these functions are related to individual persons in the Church, it might be possible to say that the magisterium is composed of three distinguishable components: the prophetic charism (very broadly understood, as previously noted, so as to include the many competences involved), the doctrinal-pastoral charism of the hierarchy, the scientific charism of the theologian. It is the interplay of these charismata which constitutes

¹¹ "At the same time all the work of preserving and maintaining the faith is concerned with a dynamic reality, filled by the Spirit of God, and so rich that the Church cannot but be preoccupied with its mystery throughout the whole of its history. *All levels of the people of God have an active share in this work and reality.*" (Aloys Grillmeir in *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, I, 165, emphasis added.)

¹² Cf. George C. McCauley, S.J., "Episcopacy and Theology" *Jesuit Educational Quarterly* (for private circulation) 31 (1968) 17-22.

the full teaching function of the Church, and I would suggest that it is the proper and harmonious interplay of these functions which yields a healthy, vigorous, and effective magisterium.

THE TEACHING ROLE OF THE HIERARCHICAL MAGISTERIUM
AND OF THEOLOGIANS

It is clear, then, that both the hierarchical magisterium and theologians have a teaching role in the Church in the sense that they perform essential tasks within the entire teaching process. The fullness of teaching competence is found in neither. The theologian, qua theologian, has not been commissioned to serve the People of God by bringing to authentic expression (authoritative judgment) the Christian faith or its application to conduct (*fidem credendam et moribus applicandam*)¹³ in our time. Only the Pope and the bishops acting collegially are authentic teachers, that is, "teachers endowed with the authority of Christ."¹⁴ Only they possess the promise of the guidance of the Spirit in this essential task.

Theologians are not authoritative teachers in this sense. It is the theologian's task to reflect upon revelation systematically in order to deepen our understanding of it, and prepare the beginnings of a clear, precise, consistent, topical, persuasive formulation. For this task he needs the many intellectual tools proper to the theologian. After noting that the Church is, among other things, a thinking Body, Roderick Mackenzie, S.J., says: "The organ of the Church's thinking, the members through whom she performs this vital activity, are her scholars, her thinkers, her intellectuals. They are those to whom the Spirit gives the charisms of research, study, scholarship, to qualify them to render the Church this service. *These are specific and irreplaceable, and distinct from the charism of the magisterium.*"¹⁵

The bishops, qua bishops, do not possess this scientific competence, these charisms. Therefore, their deputization to give authentic expression to the faith includes a mandate to draw upon the best

¹³ Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, n.25.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, n.25.

¹⁵ Mackenzie, *art. cit.*, 123, emp. added.

theological knowledge available.¹⁶ Without such consultation bishops could hardly measure up to the fullness of their pastoral responsibilities. That is, the teaching function of the Church cannot occur without the contributions of all components. If we say it can, we have denied that they are true components of the teaching process.

The theologian, therefore, has a teaching role not only in the sense that he mediates and applies decisions of the hierarchy, but in the more authentic sense that he analyzes the Christian message in contemporary times by exploring, questioning, innovating, hypothesizing. His reflection, analysis, and formulation is a necessary prerequisite for the proper (contemporary and persuasive) expression of the faith by hierarchical leaders. In this sense, he educates the hierarchical magisterium. Pope Paul VI said exactly this in his allocution to the members of the International Congress on the Theology of Vatican II (Oct. 2, 1966). After noting that theologians are mediators and interpreters between the Christian people and the magisterium, he stated: "Sacred theology has the function of studying and analyzing the truths of divine revelation, and of presenting its findings to the Christian community *and in particular to the*

¹⁶ Vatican II (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, n.25) points out that "the Roman Pontiff and the bishops, in view of their office and of the importance of the matter, strive painstakingly and by appropriate means to inquire properly into that revelation and to give apt expression to its contents." The Latin is *sedulo operam navant* and is to be taken as a legal indicative stating a moral obligation. (Cf. *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, I, 214) Thus the term means "they *must* strive earnestly." This moral duty is not a purely extrinsic and legal one whose fulfillment is ultimately unrelated to the soundness of teaching.

The "apt means" to be used by the hierarchy are listed by Rahner as: "Constant recourse to Scripture, the theological work of exegetes, historians and dogmatic theologians, and the free untrammelled exchange of views, living contact with the instinct of faith which cannot err in the faithful as a whole, and ecumenical dialogue. The 'hierarchy of the truths of faith' must be respected, the spiritual and theological heritage of the Eastern Churches must be revived, there must be a frank and courageous dialogue with the spiritual and social realities of each age, the charismatic element in the Church must be taken seriously. A constant effort must be made to overcome the restricted outlook of the various schools, each of which is legitimate in itself, but which are too easily tempted to identify themselves with the mind and doctrine of the believing Church. And finally 'public opinion' in the Church must be adequately taken into account." (*Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, I, 214).

magisterium, so that through the teaching of the hierarchy of the Church these findings may enlighten the whole Christian people."¹⁷

A fine example of the respective teaching roles of theologians and bishops was provided by Vatican II where the prior work of theologians and their close cooperation with the conciliar fathers made possible a truly relevant and authoritative expression of the Christian faith. The great documents of Vatican II could not exist as authentic documents without the theologians or without the bishops.

While the individual bishop or even national hierarchies do not constitute the college of bishops, and therefore are not the magisterium, still what is desirable, I should think, is that the type of collaboration which made possible the great documents of Vatican II continue in the ordinary relations of theologians and bishops. The conciliar experience was an active learning process for everyone involved. It is the spirit of the learning process which ought to characterize the ordinary relationship of bishops and theologians. And the learning process is based upon frequent dialogue in a spirit of openness, humility, mutual trust and respect, and an awareness of the incompleteness of one's own charism.

THE SCOPE OF THE PRACTICAL PROBLEM

Today's exchange between a bishop and a theologian suggests that the relationship between the two touches a contemporary problem. Specifically, it suggests some degree of mutual dissatisfaction with the relationship as it now exists, especially in the American Church. Unless I am badly mistaken, the precise sore or at least tender spot is the confusion of teaching roles. That is, there are some, perhaps many, bishops who believe that theologians have arrogated to themselves an *authoritative* teaching function in the way they speak and act. On the other hand theologians believe that some bishops have arrogated to themselves *theological* competence in the judgments they make and in the procedure they follow—procedures which dispense with truly adequate theological consultation.

¹⁷ As cited in Mackenzie, *art. cit.*, 118-119.

This tension is understandable. We are men. Furthermore the specific teaching functions of the theologians and the hierarchy, though distinct, are very closely associated within the total process. Therefore the theologian constantly experiences the temptation to turn competence into authority. The bishop experiences the temptation to turn his charism of authority into competence. These temptations are all the more severe in a situation where there are not only "bootleg" theologians in abundance, but many of us who have not merited the theological respect we are asking for. Walter Burghardt, S.J., pointed this out very forcefully in his presidential address last year. The severity of the urge is not alleviated when we note that many bishops are more administrators than pastoral leaders conscious of their genuinely episcopal duties.

Some recent events are almost symbols of this tension. For example, *Humanae Vitae* was viewed by many as symptomatic of a preconconciliar concept of the magisterium at work in the postconciliar Church and world. Theologians complain that the consultative opinions of theological and episcopal majorities were rejected, a heavy emphasis on tradition, authority, and obedience overshadowed the persuasiveness of evidence, and the encyclical was issued with almost no psychological preparation for its message. On the other hand, the bishops complain that theological dissent often failed to appear as the terminus of a respectful and docile attempt to appropriate the teaching of the encyclical.

Even closer to home, theologians have complained that the pastoral letter of the American bishops, *Human Life in Our Day*, while not without its fine qualities, contained regrettable elements directly attributable to a lack of broad consultation and cooperation with theologians. For example, in its presentation of the teaching of *Humanae Vitae*, the pastoral adopted the philosophical argument associated with the work of one individual (G. Grisez). This analysis had been weighed carefully in the theological community and was not beyond legitimate criticism. Theologians argue that had a sufficiently representative group of theologians been collaborators in the drafting of this document, or had they been invited to the conference as *periti*, this type of thing would not have happened. On the other hand,

perhaps many bishops would counter: why collaborate with theologians whose prudence, perhaps even competence, is doubtful?

Thus, if there is not polarization between bishops and theologians, there is at least noticeably apathy in the relationship. This is a very unhappy situation—and one with identifiable consequences. I believe it is safe to say that the hierarchical magisterium is in deep trouble. For many of the educated faithful it has ceased to be truly credible. The layman often experiences the magisterium as decrees from Rome or the hierarchy which control his life without any sense of participation on his own part. Hence he tends to form his opinions through those channels which admit the relevance and value of his reflection and experience, and are therefore more persuasive to him.

Now obviously all of us as a community share the blame for this state of affairs to some degree. But regardless of how we word the matter, the reasons for the situation seem to me to be reducible to the fact that the various teaching functions in the Church are not relating harmoniously. That is, the style of teaching is seriously defective. At the risk of being very partial and perhaps unfair, I would suggest that this lack of harmony can be attributed above all to the fact that the bishops have not concerned themselves sufficiently with the other (than judgmental) aspects of teaching. Specifically, they have not taken with sufficient seriousness the other charisms involved in the total teaching function.

The importance of these other charisms to the teaching function is, as we have already noted, enormous. Not only is the depth, clarity, precision, and contemporaneity of the teaching itself at stake, but its acceptance by the community. Cardinal Suenens recently asserted that:

I think, further, that it is of very great importance psychologically, in order to ensure the acceptance and internal loyalty of the people of God, that encyclicals and important documents from the Holy See should be seen by everyone as the result of a wide collaboration between Rome and the individual Churches. Once this has been agreed in principle, then we should of course have to consider what are the best

ways and means of putting it into effect. To bring about such co-responsibility, it goes without saying, we should have to respect the charism proper to each group, and the supreme authority must preserve its supremacy intact. But we should in some way have overcome the "credibility gap" to which our American friends so often refer.¹⁸

What Suenens says here of papal encyclicals is equally true of national episcopal pastoral letters and directives. They must be the precipitate of a broad collaborative process involving all the functions we have noted. In other words, the doctrinal-pastoral charism of the hierarchy can only function adequately and effectively in the Church if it is in close association with what we have called the scientific charism of theologians and the prophetic charisms of others in the Church.

If this close association—a genuinely new style of teaching—is to be established, there must be improved communication within the Church. Francois Houtard has pointed out¹⁹ that we are familiar with one-way communication, from top to bottom (encyclicals, papal decrees, pastoral letters etc.). This type of communication, as we have noted, has often been the expression of a concept of authority and of the Church which must be said to be preconiliar. It is no longer psychologically acceptable to modern man. What is now needed, according to Houtard, is a two-way type of communication which allows information, ideas, reactions, criticisms, etc., to travel from the periphery to the center. Unless this is established, the various teaching functions will continue to operate in isolation and independence, and hence will fail to make use of the full wisdom of the Church.

There are many practical steps which can be taken to facilitate this communication within the Church. We are familiar with priests' senates, priests' associations, parish councils, episcopal councils, the Synod of Bishops. Where theologians are concerned, it has been suggested that they should be present at synods and episcopal con-

¹⁸ *National Catholic Reporter*, May 28, 1969, p. 6.

¹⁹ Francois Houtard, *The Eleventh Hour*. New York: Sheed & Ward, 1968, p. 138.

ferences. Documents of these conferences should be submitted to theologians in advance. The theological collaborators in hierarchical statements might be made public and diverging views of bishops should not be hidden or suppressed in an attempt to speak only where consensus is available. Disagreement can be very educative.

But the mere multiplication of such practical steps can only sustain the desired two-way communication if it stems from a rather radical change in the episcopal self-image. Cardinal Suenens has stated: "The bishop also must take a fresh look at his position among the People of God under his care; he must come closer to his clergy and faithful; he must live as they do—even down to the kind of clothes he wears—while yet preserving in its totality the authority he receives from God in virtue of his consecration. This kind of union between bishop and people will make new demands upon us, and the changes are only beginning."²⁰

"A fresh look at his position among the People of God." Here, I believe, is the key to the necessary stylistic adaptations of the magisterium in our time. Such a fresh look would convince bishops that the proper exercise of their doctrinal-pastoral charism demands a good deal of listening, a good deal of stimulating to thought and reflection, a good deal of exchange of ideas, of circulation of insights, of tolerance of occasional excesses. In brief, it means that the bishop must be much more involved in the learning processes of teaching than a preconciiliar notion of the Church and of authority—hence of teaching—intimated. In our day the credible teacher is the most eager, humble, open-minded learner. But this learning process is only possible at the episcopal level if there is a radical change in the image and role of the bishop as we have come to experience it. The bishop can no longer be chosen for his ability to administer a sprawling, highly complex local institution. Taxing administrative duties must be delegated to others to allow the bishop to participate more fully in the establishment of a vital system of two-way communication in the local Church. The effectiveness of teaching (and even more broadly of episcopal leadership) in our day will depend on the effectiveness of the bishop in making his person and his position a

²⁰ *National Catholic Reporter*, *loc. cit.*, p. 6

rallying point for Christian thought and creative action. If this happens around the world, obviously the world will listen to (*obsequium*) the hierarchy because it will be clear that the Church is speaking.

Cardinal Suenens has written that "authority, if it is to be effective, must gain consent, and consent can only be gained where those involved have been able to take part—and their part is a very real one, though it requires careful definition—if not in the final decision, at least in the steps leading up to it." This statement is also applicable, I believe, to authoritative teaching. When so applied, it insists that teaching is composed of several functions and therefore that the teaching roles of the hierarchy and theologians have been adequately described only if they have been described so as to promote the harmonious relationship of all of these functions. In our times this means above all communication. If we fail here, the authoritative pronouncements of the hierarchy will seem to originate from a venerable but isolated and other-worldly board of trustees who no longer speak for the Church. That this would be a catastrophe for the Christian world is beyond cavil.

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