

THE TWO MAGISTERIA: AN INTERIM REFLECTION

The title of my paper, according to the convention program, was to be "New Modalities in the Exercise of the Church's Teaching Office." After accepting the assignment, I began to watch for developments. Without detecting any dramatic innovations, I did note the well publicized controversies regarding certain actions of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith; I also observed, and to some extent participated in, the growing cooperation between certain theologians and bishops here in the United States. I had thought that I would make these two sets of developments the main theme of the present paper, but a few weeks ago I received in the mail a report of the CTSA Committee on Cooperation Between Theologians and the Church's Teaching Authority. This report admirably summarizes the very developments of which I had planned to speak, so that as a result I somewhat changed my plans. It might better serve the purpose of this convention, I decided, if I were to turn my attention to the underlying theological questions. The problem of the "two magisteria" has repeatedly drawn the attention of this Society in the past,¹ and will presumably continue to do so in the future. Thus, mine is necessarily an interim reflection.

In the following pages I shall address a series of important questions concerning which there are differences of opinion. The general thesis holding together the separate sections is that the Church has and needs two kinds of teacher—a class of official teachers whose task is to establish the official doctrine of the Church and a class of theologians whose function is to investigate the questions concerning faith in a scholarly way. These two classes are inseparably united, reciprocally dependent, but really and irreducibly distinct. Their relationships are frequently tense, and the tensions must be kept from becoming disruptive, lest the entire Church suffer harm. The avoidance of disruptive conflict demands restraint and mutual respect on the part of all concerned.

I. THE PROBLEM OF THE "TWO MAGISTERIA"

In the past decade there has been a great deal of controversy about how many magisteria there are in the Church—one, two, or three. The parties to the discussion have often been talking past each other, understanding the terms in a different sense. However the question is resolved, I think it necessary to hold that there are two groups in the Church who are specially concerned with the study and communication of sacred doctrine, and who exercise a recognized teaching function in the doctrinal area.

¹ See, for instance, the articles of R. A. McCormick and Bishop J. R. Quinn in the *CTSA Proceedings* for 1969, pp. 239-61; my own Presidential Address in the 1976 *Proceedings*, pp. 235-46; and many other papers on related themes.

Since the beginning of the nineteenth century the term "magisterium" has been rather commonly applied to those who teach officially in the name of the Church, and to whom it pertains by reason of their office to establish Catholic doctrine. This group is frequently called the magisterium, but those who recognize more than one magisterium use a qualifying adjective such as "pastoral," "authentic," "ecclesiastical" or "hierarchical" to designate this body of official teachers.

The term "pastoral" would be suitable if understood to mean the magisterium which is exercised by pastors with a view to feeding the flock of Christ with the word of God, but unfortunately the term "pastoral" has come to imply something non-dogmatic, merely practical and hortatory. In this latter sense the term "pastoral" is not appropriate.

The adjective "authentic" is an attempted English translation of the Latin "authenticus," which means authoritative in a formal or juridical sense. In English the term "authentic" commonly means "genuine." To speak of the official magisterium as "authentic" is misleading, since it suggests that any other magisterium is spurious—a suggestion not conveyed by the Latin.

The terms "ecclesiastical" and "hierarchical" seem to me to be satisfactory. The former was used by the International Theological Commission in its Theses of 1976,² and successfully indicates the power of this magisterium to commit the Church institutionally. The term "hierarchical" indicates that this magisterium is vested in, or derived from, the pope and the episcopal college.

Since the Middle Ages the term "magisterium" has been applied to the teaching function of theologians and to the theologians as teachers. In view of the scholastic usage, the term is appropriate to designate those who have an academic degree in the sacred sciences, especially if, as often happens, they hold academic chairs for teaching these subjects. Though each such theologian exercises a magisterium in the scholastic sense, theologians do not normally act together as a corporate teaching body, though it sometimes happens that a given university faculty of theology expresses a common opinion on some point.

The neo-Scholastic manuals of the early and middle twentieth century commonly spoke of two magisteria, the one consisting primarily of bishops who teach by virtue of the authority of office; the other, of scholars who teach by virtue of their acknowledged learning and acumen.³

In recent decades it has become rather common to use the term "magisterium" without qualification to designate the hierarchical

²International Theological Commission, *Theses on the Relationship Between the Ecclesiastical Magisterium and Theology* (Washington, D.C.: USCC, 1977).

³I. Salaverri, *De Ecclesia Christi*, nos. 503-04, in *Sacrae Theologiae Summa* 1, 2nd ed. (Madrid: BAC, 1952), pp. 648-49, distinguishes between *magisterium docens* and *magisterium attestans*, the former imparting knowledge by way of argumentation, the latter by way of authority. Francis A. Sullivan, in his *De Ecclesia*, Vol. 1, 2nd ed. (Rome: Gregorian University, 1965), pp. 258-59, distinguishes between *magisterium mere docens, seu scientificum* and *magisterium attestans*. Like Salaverri and others, he attributes to the hierarchy a *magisterium attestans* which can obligate the hearer to divine faith in view of the divine mission of the teacher.

teachers. Except among theologians, it is relatively rare to speak of a magisterium of theologians. The argument is sometimes made that it would be confusing to use the term "magisterium" to designate two groups which do not teach with the same kind of authority,⁴ but this objection, if valid, would prohibit many other analogous predications, such as Trent's use of the term "sin" to designate both personal and original sin. The dual use of the term "magisterium," to which I shall adhere in this article, has the advantage of bringing out the fact that there are two groups with acknowledged competence to teach sacred doctrine. Those who militantly oppose talk of a theological magisterium frequently have little respect for scholarship and incline toward an almost magical view of the attainment of truth in matters of faith. Raymond Brown, however, is correct in pointing out that the crucial question is not whether the theological enterprise is called a magisterium but rather whether "the legitimate role of theologians in shaping the teaching of the Church is respected."⁵

I would add that in my opinion it is preferable not to admit more than two magisteria. Those who do not teach either by hierarchical authority or by scholarly expertise do not have or constitute a magisterium, properly so called. The recent grass roots movement against liberal or progressive theology is not, in the ordinary sense, a magisterium, though it may be so called in an improper sense.

II. QUALIFICATIONS FOR MEMBERSHIP IN EACH MAGISTERIUM

(A) Hierarchical Magisterium

Since its foundation the Church has been a hierarchical society. According to the Catholic understanding (based on various New Testament texts) it was Peter and the college of the Twelve who initially shaped the Church's message, and it is their successors who do so today. In view of the Catholic doctrine of apostolic succession, this means that the official magisterium pertains in the first place to bishops.

According to Vatican II, every bishop, by ordination, receives a share in the ecclesiastical teaching power (*munus docendi*). To be in hierarchical communion with the episcopal college is a necessary condition for the exercise of the teaching power (*Lumen gentium* 21). If one thinks not simply in terms of sacramental empowerment but also in terms of "grace of office" it will be apparent that those who have greater pastoral responsibility will have—*ceteris paribus*—a greater share in the Church's magisterium, for the grace of office is normally proportionate to the responsibilities of the incumbent. In official Catholic documents the pope is recognized as having a preeminent magisterium in view of his role as successor of Peter, though in respect to sacramental orders he is on a level with all other bishops. By the same token, it would

⁴Cf. W. E. May, "The Magisterium and Moral Theology," in J. J. O'Rourke and S. T. Greenburg, eds., *Symposium on the Magisterium: A Positive Statement* (Boston: Daughters of St. Paul, 1978), pp. 71-94, esp. pp. 76-77.

⁵R. E. Brown, "Magisterium vs. Theologians: Debunking Some Fictions," *Chicago Studies* 17 (1978), 291.

seem that the ordinaries of major sees would have a greater magisterial function than suffragan bishops, titular bishops and retired bishops. An exclusive concentration on the sacramental basis of the hierarchical magisterium could obscure these important distinctions.

History and canon law make it clear that the hierarchical magisterium is not the exclusive prerogative of bishops. Nonbishops (cardinals, abbots, monks, presbyters and laity) have played important roles as voting members and even as presidents of ecumenical councils, at which the supreme magisterium is solemnly exercised. Even in the present (1917) Code of Canon Law certain nonbishops have the right to attend ecumenical councils with voice and vote (ca. 223). At some councils nonbishops have constituted a majority of the voting members.⁶ It would seem, however, that the pope and bishops are empowered to limit active participation at ecumenical councils to themselves alone, and that others share in the magisterium only inasmuch as the hierarchy permit or invite them to do so. Consistently with Vatican II, one may hold, as Karl Rahner does, that the bishops alone are official teachers in the Church by divine right.⁷

Membership in the hierarchical magisterium may be further extended by canonical mission. Vatican II speaks of pastors who are not bishops exercising a magisterium (*Christus Dominus* 30). Just as they received jurisdiction through canonical mission, so, it would appear, they receive a share in the ecclesiastical magisterium, so that they can as true pastors teach the people committed to their charge. By analogy one may say that anyone who is given a canonical mission to preach in the name of the Church at a public liturgy, at a parish mission, or the like, has a certain temporary share in the ecclesiastical magisterium (cf. can. 1328).

Orders, jurisdiction and canonical mission are formal or institutional constituents of the ecclesiastical magisterium. But it would be a mistake to reduce this magisterium to its formal authority. The Holy Spirit distributes gifts as he pleases, and his gifts are variously received according to the cooperation of individuals. The charism of the magisterium, like the grace of preaching, does not function *ex opere operato*. Thus in point of fact the power of an individual office-holder to express the faith of the Church in a correct and effective manner will depend on a number of imponderables. Where infallibility has been promised, we have the assurance that, provided the conditions for an infallible act have been fulfilled, the statement will not be downright error; but even in infallible teaching the positive value of what is said will depend on many contingent variables. The same is even more evidently true of noninfallible teaching. Pope differs from pope, bishop from bishop, council from council, and encyclical from encyclical.

Among the qualities that contribute to the effective functioning of the ecclesiastical magisterium one may, without any claim to complete-

⁶Much useful information on the history of representation at the Councils is gathered by Hans Küng in his *Structures of the Church* (New York: Nelson, 1964), pp. 74-92.

⁷K. Rahner, "The Teaching Office of the Church in the Present-Day Crisis of Authority," *Theological Investigations*, Vol. XII (New York: Seabury, 1974), pp. 16-17.

ness, mention native intelligence, eloquence, industry and piety. Important also is the responsiveness of the office-holder to the leading of the Spirit and to the needs, gifts and concerns of the faithful. The proper use of theological and other advisers will enhance the authority of popes and bishops.

(B) *Theological Magisterium*

Membership in the theological magisterium is likewise an analogical concept depending on a multiplicity of factors that cannot be mechanically weighted. Prescinding from the question whether an unbeliever can in any sense be a theologian, it would seem that a nonmember of the Church could not belong to the Church's theological magisterium. Membership in this magisterium is ecclesially grounded in faith, baptism and sacramental communion with the Church.

What distinguishes the theologian from other members of the Church is, of course, theological competence, which itself is a matter of learning and of specific skills. To be a member of the theological magisterium one must have acknowledged competence, which is normally indicated by factors such as the possession of an advanced theological degree, a distinguished career of teaching, noteworthy publications and esteem by one's colleagues. The term "theologian" obviously applies more properly to creative and influential thinkers than to the pedestrian, run-of-the-mill college or seminary professor.

In a few recent publications it seems to be suggested that one cannot be a theologian without receiving a "canonical mission."⁸ Although the concept of "canonical mission" for preachers, catechists and others has an earlier history, the extension of this concept to professors of religious studies apparently began in Germany after the disturbances of 1848, when special measures were considered necessary to protect the independence of Catholic teachers from interference by the State.⁹ This historically conditioned maneuver ought not to be the ground for redefining the concept of the Catholic theologian.

Whatever the ultimate resolution of this question may be, it seems hardly tenable that one could not be a theologian without a formal or explicit mission from the hierarchy. The work of the theologian has an ecclesial foundation in his being a baptized, believing member of the Church. The vast majority of acknowledged Christian and Catholic theologians, past and present, have had no consciousness of being canonically commissioned by the hierarchy.

The tendency in some circles to see canonical mission as a prerequisite is comparable to the tendency, prior to Vatican II, to limit the

⁸The International Theological Commission in explaining its first thesis seems to treat "canonical mission" as a necessary constituent of the theologian's identity. In explaining Thesis 7, however, the ITC speaks of theology done by those who do not have an "explicit" canonical mission. They leave the idea of an implicit canonical mission unclarified.

⁹See H. Flatten, "Missio canonica," in T. Filthaut and A. Jungmann, eds., *Verkündigung und Glaube. Festschrift für F. X. Arnold* (Freiburg: Herder, 1958), pp. 123-41; also J. H. Provost, "Canonical Mission and the Catholic Universities," *America* 142, 22 (June 7, 1980), 475-77.

lay apostolate to those who participate in the mission of the hierarchy through "Catholic Action," as this was defined by Pope Pius XI. Vatican II recognized that the apostolate of the laity as such does not rest upon any special sacramental commission, since through their baptism and confirmation, "all are commissioned to that apostolate by the Lord Himself" (*Lumen gentium* 33). The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, in its recommendation that the laity acquire competence in the sacred sciences, and be accorded freedom to express their minds about the matters in which they enjoy competence, suggests that theological research and teaching should not be reserved to persons specially commissioned by the hierarchy (*Gaudium et spes* 62).

If canonical mission confers the right to speak and teach in the name of the Church, it would make its recipient to that extent a participant in the functions and authority of the hierarchical magisterium rather than simply in the functions of the scholarly or theological magisterium.¹⁰ To require that every theologian have a canonical mission could be detrimental, in the long run, to both hierarchy and theology. The hierarchy would run the risk of becoming excessively enmeshed in theological controversies, and the theologians, for their part, would find it difficult to maintain that measure of autonomy and critical distance which is desirable for the exercise of their specific role, as we shall presently explain.

III. FUNCTIONAL SPECIALITIES OF EACH MAGISTERIUM

(A) Hierarchical Magisterium

The doctrinal function of the hierarchy has been variously understood in different periods of history. Generally speaking, until the nineteenth century the judicial aspect was emphasized; the bishops were characterized as *iudices fidei*.¹¹ Since the nineteenth century, the tendency has been to distinguish more clearly between the teaching role of the hierarchy and their role of government or pastoral rule. The teaching function has been seen as wider than the merely judicial. To do justice to the full dimensions of the hierarchical magisterium, it seems desirable to distinguish the following four functions:

1. *Proclamatory*. The hierarchical magisterium continues to herald the apostolic kerygma. In the words of Cardinal W. W. Baum, "The purpose of the episcopal magisterium is to ensure the permanence within the church of the apostolic proclamation of the faith."¹² Or, in the

¹⁰Yves Congar, *Lay People in the Church* (Westminster, Md.: Newman, 1957), p. 282, suggests that those who teach with an implicit canonical mission, conferred through the bishop's approval of their appointment, participate "in the mission of the magisterium, and to that extent in its authority in some way, but not in its power."

¹¹Robert Bellarmine, *De controversiis, controversia quarta, De conciliis*, Book I, chap. 18, asserts: "episcopus in conciliis non consiliares sed iudices esse" (*Opera*, Vol. 2 [Paris: Vivès, 1870], pp. 223-25).

¹²Cardinal W. W. Baum, "The Magisterium and the Light of Faith," *Origins* 8 (June 22, 1978), 79.

words of Gregory Baum, we may say: "What is required at this time is that we understand the magisterium first of all as kerygma, as a ministry of God's word, as a proclamation that renders the self-revealing God present in the community."¹³

2. *Explanatory.* The message must be set forth with sufficient explanation so that the faithful can see its implications and consequences, both theoretical and practical. The majority of the material in the papal encyclicals, in bishops' pastoral letters, and in the documents of a council such as Vatican II, is instructional rather than strictly kerygmatic or judicial. The individual statements are intended to be helpful and enlightening, and are not normally put forth as propositions requiring assent.

3. *Promotional.* The hierarchical magisterium, as we have seen, belongs primarily to those who are pastors in the Church. As pastors, they have the responsibility to see that teaching is done, and that it is authentically Christian teaching. The magisterial performance of a pope or bishop is not to be judged simply in terms of what he personally understands and says, but even more importantly in terms of his ability to structure a process in which others, including those without hierarchical mission, can successfully communicate, explain and defend the Christian faith.

4. *Judicial.* When contradictions and controversies develop within the community, it falls to those in positions of pastoral leadership to decide what may and may not be taught as Christian doctrine. The decision in such cases will be in the first instance practical; it will be, in the helpful phrase of Bishop Pilarczyk, a *iudicium docenditatis*, arising from "a policy-making power based on revelation and pastoral need."¹⁴ Indirectly, however, this judgment will have implications for belief, inasmuch as the Christian is convinced that what is incompatible with the gospel message is also false, and what is affirmed in the name of the gospel is also true.

It should not be assumed without examination that the judgment of the pastoral authorities will, if given, be restrictive. In some cases the hierarchy feels obliged to prohibit a certain teaching and to impose the contradictory. In other cases, the decision may be that a given opinion is to be tolerated since it is not, or not manifestly, contrary to the gospel. An important function of the hierarchical magisterium is to restrain the mutual animosities of the theological schools, and to prevent them from recklessly branding one another's tenets as heretical. The most dramatic instance of a permissive or protective exercise of the ecclesiastical magisterium was the outcome of the dispute on actual grace in the seventeenth century (DS 1997).

The judicial interventions of the magisterium can of course be made with varying degrees of emphasis. The most decisive are "irreformable" definitions, in which the rejected positions are anathematized as

¹³Gregory Baum, "The Problem of the Magisterium Today. III. Towards a Renewed Theology of the Magisterium," *IDO-C* Doss. 67:32/33 (October 8, 1967), 3.

¹⁴U. S. Bishops' Committee on Doctrine, "Report: An Ongoing Discussion of Magisterium," *Origins* 9 (February 7, 1980), 546.

heresies. Others may be reformable decisions which nevertheless carry with them a certain presumption of truth and which may carry with them an implied command to terminate a theological debate. The position of Pius XII to this effect in *Humani generis* (DS 3885), even though not explicitly repeated by Vatican II, still seems to stand, especially in view of its reaffirmation by Paul VI.¹⁵

These four functions of the hierarchical magisterium can be brought into a certain kind of unity. All of them are concerned with the faith of the Church as a community. The life-context in which the hierarchical magisterium operates is communal; it is vitally connected with the bishop's role in the proclamation of the word, in the conduct of sacramental worship and in the pastoral government of the people of God. Because of its relationship to the Church as a gathering of all who share the same Christian faith, the hierarchical magisterium takes pains not to commit itself to the principles of a particular school or system, which could scarcely be made mandatory for the community as such. The hierarchical teacher may of course be a theologian and an adherent of a particular school of thought. He may sometimes speak as a "private doctor," but in the exercise of his hierarchical magisterium he will seek to express the faith of the Church. For this reason hierarchical statements are normally drawn up through an extensive process of consultation, in which various groups have input. Unlike theological statements, they deliberately seek to leave unsettled what is still an object of legitimate discussion. One does not turn to such statements for systematic depth and consistency, but for an indication of the limits within which speculation may be freely pursued.

(B) Theological Magisterium

Since this paper is addressed to a society of professional theologians, I may take for granted a familiarity with theological method. It would be superfluous to say more about theology than is strictly necessary to bring its task into relationship to that of the hierarchical magisterium. Theology aims to achieve by methodical investigation a more exact and sophisticated understanding of the Christian faith. For present purposes four major areas of theology may be distinguished:

1. *Fundamental theology* concerns itself with the theological explanation of how faith arises, how it is grounded in its own sources and how it is justified before the bar of reason.
2. *Biblical and historical theology* concern themselves with the past expressions of the Church's faith and with the continuing claims of such expressions on the believer today.
3. *Systematic theology* seeks to grasp the inner unity and coherence of the Christian message, to see how it harmonizes with contemporary secular knowledge and what light it casts on the human problems of the day.

¹⁵Pope Paul VI, Address to Cardinals of June 23, 1964, *AAS* 56 (1964), 588-89.

4. *Pastoral theology* (including moral and spiritual theology) investigates, methodically and critically, what imperatives for Christian action arise from Christian faith.

To differentiate between hierarchical and theological teaching, it will be important to note that the theologian inquires as an individual, and is concerned not so much with ascertaining the unchanging and universal content of Christian faith as with exploring the nature and grounds of faith, the interrelationship of Christian beliefs and the reinterpretation of traditional beliefs in a contemporary context. In order to achieve systematic understanding the theologian adopts epistemological and philosophical postulates which are neither divinely revealed nor self-evident to all. The conclusions of theology are not set forth as requiring assent in the name of Christian faith, but as aids for better understanding certain aspects of that faith.

In summary, then, one may say that the functional specialty of the ecclesiastical magisterium is judgment; that of the theologian is understanding. The hierarchy as judges publicly proclaim what is vital for the life and witness of the Christian community. Theologians as students and professors methodically pursue personal insight into the meaning and implications of faith. Although theologians are sometimes called upon to make judgments regarding the orthodoxy of various theories, they are not always well equipped to render such judgments, for the methods of theology are too specialized to establish, by themselves alone, what is or is not consonant with the preaching, worship and behavior of the Christian community as such.

IV. RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN THE TWO MAGISTERIA

Theories regarding the relationship between the theologians and the hierarchical teachers tend to fall into three major types: reductionist, separatist and dialectical. The reductionist theories are of two kinds: those that reduce theology to the hierarchical magisterium and those that reduce the hierarchical magisterium to the theological.

The characteristic of reductionism, as I am here using the term, is to hold that since both theology and hierarchical teaching aim to transmit the truth about Christian faith, both have the same formal object. On this theory every true theological statement could in principle be made an utterance of the official Church and be imposed upon the faithful as requiring assent. For the authoritarian mentality, theology proposes but the ecclesiastical magisterium disposes. On the ground that the ecclesiastical magisterium has a higher route of access to the truth (*charisma veritatis*), it is argued that the pope and bishops, by virtue of their grace of office, can do better everything that the theologian as such can do. The idea that the theologian might also have a grace of office seems not to be considered. Some go so far as to say that the pope, by reason of office, is the greatest theologian in the Church, and the bishop the greatest theologian in the diocese. The private theologian, therefore, becomes a mere servant of the hierarchy, without any distinctive competence or autonomy.

By a curious inversion, this theory can easily turn into its own opposite. One can hold that since the ecclesiastical magisterium and theology have identically the same object, the magisterium cannot speak definitively until scientific theology has first established the truth of what is to be said. This view of the matter would deprive the ecclesiastical magisterium of any real authority, for the theologians could always claim that the bishops had acted without full awareness of the latest deliverances of scholarship.

Reacting against the total identification of the two spheres of competence, some have totally separated them. According to this view the role of the hierarchy would be to articulate the faith as known through tradition and authority, without any reliance on scholarly advice. Theology, conversely, would engage in open-ended inquiry according to the standards of critical reason, without any appeal to authority. In this theory, the autonomy of theology from the magisterium is purchased at too high a price, for theology forfeits the specific feature that differentiates it from the other human sciences—namely, its acceptance of the Christian faith as a guiding principle. On the other hand, the hierarchical magisterium, by being made immune from rational criticism, is deprived of the benefit of informed scholarship and thereby impeded.

In contradistinction to both the reductionist and separatist positions, the position I have outlined, with its differentiation of functional specialties, provides for a dialectical relationship of relative autonomy within mutual acceptance. Theology—or at least Catholic theology—depends on the hierarchical magisterium, for, as an understanding achieved within faith, it must accept the revealed datum as proclaimed and safeguarded by the official organs of the Church. To the extent that it reinterprets the tenets of faith, theology will turn to the hierarchical magisterium for confirmation of the acceptability of the reinterpretation. If the magisterium fails to respond, theology may lose its bearings and become erratic.

While depending on the ecclesiastical magisterium, theology has a certain relative autonomy. It cannot expect the magisterium to do its work for it. Theology, and theology alone, can explore the intelligibility of faith with the exacting methods of critical investigation compatible or incompatible with the gospel message, but it cannot, nor should it attempt to, endorse any one theological system as if it alone could illuminate the Christian revelation.

The hierarchy, for its part, retains a certain autonomy, for it does not have to learn the Christian message from theologians. The theologians cannot tell the popes and bishops that the Christian faith, as professed by apostles and the Fathers, and as attested by the Scriptures and the Councils, is no longer true. But for the appropriate restatement of the Christian faith in the framework of contemporary knowledge, the hierarchy does have a certain dependence on scholarly inquiry. In drawing up encyclicals and conciliar statements, the hierarchical magisterium relies heavily on *periti*, whose responsibility is to make sure that the statements are abreast of the science and learning of the day. Only to

a very minor extent does the official magisterium originate its own doctrine. For the most part, it takes over the terminology, thought-categories and theories of theologians, insofar as these can be made to bear and convey the Christian faith, as believed and held by the Church at large. Without committing itself to what is technical or idiosyncratic in the theological opinions, the official magisterium makes use of certain theological formulations in an instrumental way for a new and contemporary restatement of the faith. If the theologians cease to perform their work, or perform it badly, the magisterium is hampered in its task. If the theologians are doing their work properly, and the official teachers are not taking advantage of that work, the official statements may fall short of what is demanded and be subject to criticism.

It is often asserted that the official magisterium has formal authority to proclaim the Christian message in the name of Christ. This allegedly distinguishes it from the magisterium of the theologian, which is held to have no authority except the force of its own arguments. This contrast, however, is too sweeping. The hierarchical magisterium does have formal authority, but for it to function effectively it cannot rely on formal authority alone. The office must be used in order to acquire the knowledge, understanding and discretion needed to express the Christian message in a pastorally effective way. Without taking such measures, the hierarchical magisterium may fail to speak when and as it should; it may even, in some respects, deviate from the Christian message.

The theological magisterium, for its part, must seek to convince and persuade, but because of the very nature of Christian revelation it cannot always offer proofs of the kind expected in the "hard sciences." It relies on authoritative Scriptures and church pronouncements. Often enough, the certified or manifest learning, prudence and holiness of a theologian will be crucial factors in winning assent for his or her theological opinions. In singling out certain theologians as Fathers and Doctors of the Church, the hierarchical magisterium commends their views as harmonious with the faith and as offering deeper insight into the truth of revelation. Thus the theologians, by virtue of their credentials, may enjoy an authority surpassing the intrinsic force of the evidences they are able to propose.

V. TENSIONS BETWEEN THE TWO MAGISTERIA

For the hierarchy and the theologians to benefit from each other's teaching it is important for them to have, as they do, both common ground and different points of view. Their common ground makes communication possible; their different points of view make communication necessary.

The two groups have common ground insofar as both are concerned with the Christian faith and with the beliefs and doctrines implied in faith. The way the gospel is officially proclaimed affects the way it is theologically understood, and every shift in the theological understanding of the faith contains consequences for proclamation.

The different outlooks of the two groups will give them different concerns or orientations. The official magisterium will particularly insist on fidelity to the apostolic kerygma, with continuity in the tradition, and with solidarity in the Church as a worldwide community of faith and witness. The hierarchy will be solicitous that the integrity of the revealed mysteries be not infringed and that the "hard sayings" of the gospel be not watered down in the interests of credibility and rational coherence. They will be acutely aware of the danger that the distinctive witness of the Church could be eroded by contagion with the spirit of the age. With full awareness of the risks involved in condemning new theories, which may later appear to have been essentially correct, the hierarchy will not shirk its responsibility for pointing out the dangers they see, or think they see, in certain new theories and proposals. They will feel a particular urgency to use their authority when the new theories have a direct and immediate impact on the faith and morals of the Christian people.

Theologians, while respecting the point of view of the hierarchy, will often have a somewhat different concern. They will feel it incumbent upon themselves to make new and constructive proposals as to how the faith can be better understood by the people of a given time and culture. They will wish to update the received formulations of the faith and to renew Christian preaching in such a way that it creates no unnecessary offense for contemporary audiences. They will insist that the Church honestly face up to contemporary questions and difficulties, and that it not engage in mystification in order to win assent for statements that are no longer tenable.

Although a certain degree of tension between the theological community and the hierarchical magisterium is normal and healthy, various factors in our time have tended to escalate the tension to the point where it becomes explosive. For several reasons, the cultural environment creates difficulties for church authority. We live in a time of rapid change in which traditional ideas and institutions are commonly suspected of being outmoded. Many Christians feel alienated from their heritage and, as they seek to appropriate it in their own style, they diverge from one another, thus placing heavy strains on the ecclesiastical magisterium, which is concerned with continuity and solidarity. The modern Western experience of democratization in the political order has aroused in many quarters the feeling that church doctrine ought not to be controlled by a hierarchy that acts without consent of the governed.

In addition it must be noted that in the modern world it is difficult for the Church to maintain its own system of communications. Religious news is reported to most church members by secular media, which almost inevitably reflect the point of view of the dominant secular culture. The communications industry has an inbuilt tendency to simplify, to stereotype and to foment contestation. To reach a wide audience, the media of communication frequently report the statements of church leaders and theologians in a simplistic manner, overlooking the necessary qualifications and nuances. A great deal of the polariza-

tion in the Church is due to distortions introduced by the communications system.

Under these circumstances the emergence of the "third magisterium," previously mentioned in this paper, was predictable. Many simple and devout believers, convinced that large numbers of liberal theologians have betrayed the faith, are understandably alarmed. Conservative Catholics, like conservative Protestants, want their religion in a simple, comprehensible form; they tend to be fundamentalistic in their reading of the Bible, the creeds and ecclesiastical documents. As a rule, they have not been trained to distinguish between the deposit of faith and the traditional formulations, nor have they been sensitized to the cultural relativity of doctrinal pronouncements. When Catholic theologians are reported as apparently contradicting what has been officially taught, these traditional believers cannot understand why the bishops and Rome hesitate to condemn the new opinions.

Rome and the bishops therefore find themselves under great pressure from militant conservative groups to "lower the boom" on theologians who feel themselves to be loyally carrying out their constructive and critical functions, as described above. Many bishops understand the nature of the theological enterprise, but they wish to avoid upsetting the "third magisterium," who are devout and powerfully organized. Often church officials do not have equally close contact with young and marginal Catholics, whose concerns are directly opposite to those of the the "third magisterium." In yielding to the conservatives, the hierarchy sometimes unintentionally drive these others out of the Church.

As a rough generalization, then, we may say that theologians, because of their critical role, are in danger of yielding too much to the pressures of the secular media, seeking novelty at the expense of tradition and rationality at the expense of mystery. Bishops, on the other hand, because of their preservative and unitive role, are more likely to yield to the demands of reactionary and fundamentalist groups, who have no patience with the subtleties of theological investigation. The extrinsic influences of the secular media on the one hand, and the "third magisterium" on the other, have sharpened the normal tensions between the hierarchical magisterium and the theologians to the point where the two are in danger of becoming opposed parties.

In the present situation the entire Church is threatened by a collapse of trust in its appointed leaders. The predominant difficulties are not between bishops and theologians, who can generally understand each other and communicate quite well. These two groups, however, are being driven apart by forces that would put them in opposite camps. A few years ago, perhaps, dissent was a major difficulty. But theological dissent is no longer the chief problem. Dissent, after all, presupposes that the dissenter has a deep concern for the institution and its traditions, and considers it important to persuade the authorities to change their position. The contemporary phenomenon is rather a general apathy—found especially among nontheologians—regarding the actions of official leaders. Many young people in the Church, and others not so young,

have a habitual and general distrust of the hierarchy. It does not occur to them that Rome or the bishops are likely to offer valuable guidance on any of the serious religious problems confronting humanity.

The current crisis, as I understand it, is partly due to the discord between hierarchy and theologians. It can to some extent be remedied by a new spirit of cooperation between them as the two groups most directly concerned with Christian doctrine. For the good of the whole Church, including themselves as portion of the Church, they must seek to overcome their mutual suspicions and to respect each other's legitimate concerns. Each of these magisteria must recognize, and be on guard against, its own vocational hazards.

The hierarchical magisterium, as a class, is normally tempted to identify traditional formulations too simplistically with the deposit of faith and to appeal to the authority of office as an excuse for not looking into new and complex questions. This kind of attitude on the part of churchmen in the nineteenth century made it very difficult for progressive scholars to open up the biblical question, and one suspects that the same may be said in our time regarding recent developments in the morality of sex and the family life. If they are to regain influence with now alienated intellectual Catholics, the bishops must not simply go by the book in condemning new ideas and their authors. They must sincerely and evidently examine the issues on their merits. Before rejecting any new doctrinal proposal, they must assure themselves that they have really heard and appreciated the reasons and motivations of those who favor the proposal. Where there is widespread and persistent dissent on the part of committed Catholics, the hierarchy must carefully inquire whether something has gone wrong with the decision-making process. If the decision was not substantively wrong—a possibility we can rarely exclude—at least the way in which it was reached, expressed and imposed may have been deficient. Even when they cannot agree with the dissent, the pope and bishops would be well advised to protect the Christian freedom of those who dissent, and seek to collaborate with them for a restoration of consensus on essentials.

But it is not only the bishops who have to examine their consciences regarding their attitude toward theologians. Theologians are quite capable of unfairly attacking the motives and competence of bishops, popes and curial officials. They might ask themselves periodically whether they sincerely acknowledge that grace of office—that *charisma veritatis*—which according to Catholic tradition is vested in the papacy (Vatican I, DS 3071) and in the episcopacy (Vatican II, *Dei Verbum* 8). Something has gone wrong when a theologian is basically distrustful of the official teachers, and when noninfallible doctrines are treated as mere opinions without real binding force. On the part of certain theologians one notes a passion to keep all questions open in the name of academic freedom, and to assume that when any condemnations are issued there must have been a lack of due process. Some theologians seem to think that honesty requires them to be continually protesting against the hierarchical magisterium, and to dismiss any of their col-

leagues who collaborate with episcopal and papal commissions as "court theologians."¹⁶ Against such deviations, it must be emphasized that theologians who work in the service of the hierarchy can be honest, sincere and scholarly.

It is not likely, or even desirable, that measures such as those here suggested will eliminate all the tensions between the two magisteria in the Church. For the benefit of all concerned, each must pursue its distinct tasks, lest the Church be deprived of the necessary checks and balances. But to achieve their goals, both must be able to hear and influence each other. The current breakdown of communications threatens to leave each group in the position of competing with the other for influence in the Church. Rival and competing magisteria they must not be. They need each other for their own good and the good of the Church. Catholic theology depends upon a consensus in the faith, which the ecclesiastical magisterium is charged with maintaining. And the hierarchical magisterium draws continually on the scholarship of theologians as it seeks to renew and strengthen the proclamation of the Church.

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¹⁶This term, frequently used by Hans Küng, appears in H. Häring and K.-J. Kuschel, eds., *Hans Küng: His Work and His Way* (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday Image, 1980), p. 176.