

MAGISTERIUM AND THEOLOGY

At some point in my preparation of this paper it occurred to me that the theme chosen for this convention was substantially the one that Melchior Cano had treated over four centuries ago in his famous work *De Locis Theologicis*.¹ I have to confess I had never had this book in my hands before, but I was moved to take a look to see how he had treated the question, and I found it rather worthwhile to do so. The first thing I noted was that he did not speak of Scripture and apostolic tradition as two *fontes*, but as the two *loci* where all revealed truths, all the *principia propria* for theology, are to be found. After these he named five *loci* which interpret what is contained in Scripture and Tradition. Of these five, the first three, which offer certain arguments for theology, are the faith-consensus of the Catholic Church, doctrinal decisions of general councils, and doctrinal decisions of the popes; the other two, offering probable arguments, are the writings of the fathers and of theologians.²

In Melchior Cano's terminology, then, I will be speaking of the magisterium as a *locus theologicus*. To put it more specifically, I'll be speaking of the second and third of his *loci interpretativi*: namely, the magisterium as exercised by councils and by popes. And I'll be asking much the same questions that Cano was asking: what is the significance of these *loci* for theology? How should theologians make use of them?

Speaking of using them raises the question of where one finds them. Well, for the councils we have the various collections of *Acta*, and for the popes we have the *Bullarium* and the *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*. But for common every-day consultation, I'm sure most of us would turn to our copy of Denzinger. So I'm going to make my question very concrete by phrasing it this way: what is the significance of Denzinger's *Enchiridion* as a collection of *loci* for Catholic theology today?

If we rightly share Karl Rahner's disdain for what he called "Denzinger-theology,"³ does that mean that what is contained between the covers of Denzinger's *Enchiridion* has no more importance for our work as Catholic theologians? Karl Rahner, for one, did not think so. Indeed he thought Denzinger important enough to devote a good deal of his own time during his productive years between 1952

¹Melchior Cano died in 1560; his *De Locis Theologicis* was first published at Salamanca in 1563.

²See especially Lib. I, Cap. 3 and Lib. XII, Cap. 2.

³Karl Rahner, "Membership of the Church according to the Teaching of Pius XII's Encyclical 'Mystici Corporis Christi,'" *Theological Investigations* 2 (London: Darton Longman and Todd, 1963) 2, n.2.

and 1957, to seeing the 28th, 29th, 30th and 31st editions through the press. He wanted this hand-book to be kept up-to-date and to be improved, not, obviously, for the perpetuation of what he called "Denzinger-theology," but out of his profound respect for its contents, and his Catholic sense of the proper weight to be given to the documents of the magisterium. It also was Rahner who arranged to have Adolf Schönmetzer take over the task of preparing new editions when he could no longer do it himself. I feel sure that you have profited from the very considerable improvements that Fr. Schönmetzer made in subsequent editions, especially in the historical and critical introductions he provided for so many of the texts. Perhaps not many are aware of the fact that the kind of painstaking work he did in preparing the 32nd to the 36th edition of Denzinger eventually cost him his eyesight. I'm sure he would have been the last person in the world to want people to use the fruit of his labor just to do "Denzinger-theology," which Rahner described as a theology that limits itself to defending and commenting on the clear and explicit doctrinal pronouncements of the magisterium.⁴ As Yves Congar has pointed out, the way to avoid the stigma of doing "Denzinger-theology" is not by throwing this book out, but by using it correctly.⁵

But before going into the question of its proper usage, let us recall what it contains. The full title reads: *Enchiridion Symbolorum, Definitionum Declarationum*. So we have here three different kinds of documents: baptismal creeds, solemn definitions, and a variety of non-definitive statements of the magisterium. Since each of these is really a different kind of *locus* for theology, it will be helpful to consider each separately.

BAPTISMAL CREEDS

The first one hundred numbers in the recent editions of Denzinger are reserved for the professions of faith that were used in the liturgy, especially of baptism, during the early centuries. They constitute a priceless witness to the way the apostolic faith was handed on from generation to generation in the churches: a witness all the more impressive in that they show that at the time when there was no one uniform creed being used everywhere, the creeds of the particular churches manifest a common faith. We don't know who composed these ancient creeds, but they can rightly be described as documents of the magisterium, since it was the bishops, presiding over the liturgy of baptism, who were responsible for the faith which the candidates for baptism were called upon to profess.

The early baptismal creeds constitute a primary *locus* for theology, since they are such authentic witnesses to the faith of which theology seeks understanding. In a broad sense one can say that the major purpose of all subsequent interventions of the magisterium has been to explicitate, clarify and defend the true sense in which various articles of the baptismal creed are to be understood. One can also say that what we theologians are seeking is a deeper understanding of the faith in which we ourselves were baptized.

⁴Rahner, "Membership of the Church," 2.

⁵Yves Congar, "Du bon usage de 'Denzinger,'" in *Situations et taches presentes de la théologie* (Paris: Cerf, 1967) 111-33.

Reflection on these baptismal creeds reminds us that it is through the church in which we were baptized that we have received the faith we are seeking to understand. Our faith has to be ecclesial faith, or it will not be Christian faith at all. It follows that our theology, as reflection on our own faith, is necessarily ecclesial as well. As we ourselves are believers only as committed members of a community of faith, so also we work as Catholic theologians as committed participants in the faith, life and worship of the Catholic Church. As Avery Dulles has pointed out: "To be a true theologian, one must dwell in spirit within the community of faith; one must participate in the Christian symbols and in their meaning for the community. This kind of participatory knowledge will make it possible to see the formulas in relation to the unexplicit meaning which they carry for those who share in the tradition."⁶

The *credo ecclesiam* of our baptismal profession means that we look upon the church with the eyes of faith. We see the church as the fruit of Christ's definitive victory over the powers of evil, assured of the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth that will lead her into all the truth. Our *credo ecclesiam* means also that we believe that the episcopal and papal structure of the Catholic Church corresponds to God's design for his church. We believe that the authority with which bishops and popes lead and teach in the church comes to them ultimately from Christ, and that in the exercise of their office they enjoy a special assistance of the Holy Spirit, in virtue of which we believe that when they teach in a definitive way they will not lead the church into serious errors in its faith, and that even in their non-definitive teaching they provide generally reliable witness to the faith of the church.

A practical consequence of all this is that we approach the *Documenta magisterii ecclesiastici* which constitute the rest of Benzinger's *Enchiridion*, with an attitude of faith. We come prepared to offer our *obsequium fidei* to what we find there as defined dogma; and to offer the appropriate degree of *obsequium religiosum* to what is taught there authoritatively but not definitively.

We also approach these documents as theologians, and that means our approach must also be methodical, systematic, critical. One of the first questions we will want to ask is: of all the eight hundred or so documents collected here, which ones contain "definitions" and which are merely "declarations" (the generic term used in the title for all non-definitive statements of the magisterium)? In his introduction, Schönmetzer mentions the fact that some people had suggested to him that he use some editorial device to mark out the dogmatic definitions from everything else in the *enchiridion*.⁷ Needless to say he wisely refused to take up this challenge. But it is a challenge that Catholic theology cannot ignore.

Indeed it is a primary task of theology to establish the criteria by which defined dogmas can be distinguished from all other statements of doctrine, and then, by applying these criteria, to identify the definitions that call for our *obsequium fidei*.

⁶Avery Dulles, "The church, Sacrament and Ground of Faith," in Rene Latourelle and Gerald O'Collins, eds., *Problems and Perspectives of Fundamental Theology* (New York/Ramsey: Paulist, 1982) 272.

⁷34th edition (Barcelona: Herder, 1967) 7.

Since solemn definitions constitute a special *locus theologicus*, demanding a response and critical reflection that will be quite different from what is appropriate as regards statements of the ordinary magisterium, let us consider these two kinds of statements separately.

DOGMATIC DEFINITIONS AS A LOCUS FOR THEOLOGY

An outstanding example of the kind of work that needs to be done to establish the criteria by which dogmatic definitions can be identified, has been provided by the research that Piet Fransen and others have done on the meaning of such terms as *fides*, *haeresis*, *anathema sit*, in the documents of the Council of Trent.⁸ This research has shown conclusively that Trent defined far fewer dogmas, in the modern sense of this term, than was previously thought to be the case. No doubt much further work along this line needs to be done. Here, then, is a critical task for theology, and one in which church historians will play an indispensable role as well.

What kind of statements will theology identify as dogmatic definitions? One essential quality of such statements is that they are professions of faith. When councils define dogmas of faith they do not say: "We decree such and such," but rather: "We believe such and such." When they use the term: "We define," they are giving to the faithful a solemn assurance that something has been revealed by God; the assent that is called for is not to the definers, but to the truth as revealed, and hence to God who has revealed it.

When the magisterium defines a doctrine as divinely revealed, it implicitly defines that this doctrine is objectively contained in what *Dei Verbum* calls "the sacred deposit of the Word of God," which is committed to the church in the form of Scripture and Tradition (DV 10). To quote a memorable passage of the same Constitution: "This teaching office is not above the word of God, but serves it, teaching only what has been handed on, listening to it devoutly, guarding it scrupulously, and explaining it faithfully by divine commission and with the help of the Holy Spirit; it draws from this one deposit of faith everything which it presents for belief as divinely revealed" (DV 10).

For theologians who believe, as we do, in the infallibility of the magisterium in defining dogmas of faith, the certain identification of such a dogma calls for our act of faith in the truth that has been defined. We will share in the profession of faith that the council or pope has made in defining it. Our acceptance of the statement as a dogma of faith gives us absolute assurance *that* this truth is revealed, and hence *that* it can be found in Scripture and Tradition. However, the statement of the magisterium will rarely give a satisfactory answer to the question as to *how* it is revealed; *how* it is there in the "one deposit of faith." This is where theology enters the picture. But various answers have been given to the question as to how this particular function of theology should be understood.

I think it could be instructive if we first recall how Pope Pius XII answered this question in his 1950 encyclical *Humani generis*. There he said:

⁸Piet Fransen, "The Authority of Councils," in John M. Todd, ed., *Problems of Authority* (Baltimore: Helicon, 1962) 43-78.

It is likewise true that theologians must always return to the sources of divine revelation, for it is their task to show how what is taught by the living magisterium is found, whether explicitly or implicitly, in Sacred Scripture and in divine Tradition. . . . Along with these sacred fonts God has given to his church the living magisterium, for the sake of clarifying and spelling out what is contained only obscurely and implicitly in the deposit of faith . . . it is evident how wrong a method it is to explain what is clear from what is obscure; rather it is the exactly contrary procedure that all should follow. Wherefore Our Predecessor of immortal memory, Pius IX, when teaching that it is theology's most noble function to demonstrate how doctrine defined by the church is contained in the sources, not without grave reason added those words: "in the very same sense in which it has been defined." (D-S 3886).

Joseph Ratzinger expressed his dissatisfaction with this view of the role of theology in no uncertain terms, in his commentary on *Dei Verbum*, where he said;

Thus the risk of a false orientation cannot be dismissed when *Humani generis* (which incidentally quotes Pius IX on the point) declares that it is obviously wrong to seek to clarify what is clear by the help of what is obscure—which means in the context that it is not the teaching office that can be clarified by Scripture, but only, on the contrary, Scripture by the teaching office. This is then developed to the point at which the task of theology is described as that of showing how what the teaching office has established is contained in the sources—'and that precisely in the sense in which it has been defined.' One can hardly deny that the point of view which sees only Scripture as what is unclear, but the teaching office as what is clear, is a very limited one and that to reduce the task of theology to the proof of the presence of the statements of the teaching office in the sources is to threaten the primacy of the sources which, (were one to continue logically in this direction) would ultimately destroy the serving character of the teaching office.⁹

One can hardly disagree with Ratzinger's criticism of an understanding of the role of theology that would reduce it to proving that what has been taught by the magisterium is found in the sources. Nor can it be denied that this is how Pius XII described it in this passage of *Humani generis*. However, in the interests of truth it should be noted that the earlier statement, of Pius IX, to which reference was made, was more carefully expressed. What Pius IX said was that it *pertains to* theology's most noble function to show how doctrine is contained in the sources of revelation in that very sense in which it was defined.¹⁰ This would not so clearly *reduce* theology's role to providing such proof, as Pius XII seems to have done.

In any case, I'm sure that none of us would be satisfied with the apologetic and defensive role the two Pius's have assigned to theology here. Their statements suggest a theological method that begins with the defined dogmas, and returns to Scripture, the Fathers and early councils only in search of proof-texts that will support and defend the dogmas. In this view, the purpose of the theologian's return to the sources would be to bring the clear light of the defined dogma to illuminate the obscurities in Scripture and Tradition. What is lacking here is the

⁹In H. Vorgrimler, ed., *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, vol. 3, (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969) 197.

¹⁰Pius IX, "Inter Gravissimas," Oct. 28, 1870, *Acta Pii IX* pars I, vol. 5, 260.

recognition of the primacy of the sources, and of the critical function of theology to examine the dogma itself in the light of the sources: not, to be sure, with a view to rejecting the dogma, but with a view to integrating it into the whole of revelation where alone any particular doctrine can be adequately understood.

It is the nature of a dogmatic statement to be an interpretation, in a particular context, of some particular aspect of the Word of God. In most cases the magisterium felt it was necessary to speak definitively on this particular point because it was in danger of being obscured or negated by a contemporary heresy. For this reason the dogmatic statement focused on the truth being threatened, leaving out many other related truths that did not require affirmation at the time.

However, the necessarily partial nature of any dogmatic statement can lead to one-sided and distorted interpretations, if the aspect of revealed truth which the dogma affirms is not seen against the background of the other truths with which it must be kept in proportion. Hence, one purpose of the theologian's return to the sources will be to identify the aspects of revealed truth left unspoken in the dogma, but with which the dogma has to be kept in balance, since its very truth depends on its integration into the whole of revelation. One recent example of the fruitfulness of such a return to the sources has been the reinsertion of the dogma of papal primacy into the more comprehensive doctrine of episcopal collegiality.

Another reason why the theologian's return to Scripture can shed new light on a defined dogma, and even make it obvious that we can no longer formulate the dogma in exactly the same way as it was by those who originally defined it, can be that the way the dogma was formulated reflected the way that Scripture was being interpreted at that time. For instance, there are elements in Trent's doctrine about original sin that depend on a literal interpretation of the story about Adam and Eve in Genesis. One can hardly expect the Fathers of Trent to have questioned the factual historicity of this account, including the physical descent of the whole human race from this one pair. The modern theologian then will have to examine Trent's dogmatic statements about original sin with a critical eye, in the light of the modern exegesis of Genesis, in order to discern what is permanently true in the dogma, from the elements that depend on a kind of scriptural exegesis that we can no longer practice. So the theologian returns to Scripture not just to prove that the dogma is found there, but rather, with the advantage of a better exegetical method than was available to the people who defined the dogma, to seek a better understanding of what is permanently true in the dogma itself, and to propose a more adequate way of expressing that truth.

While as men and women of faith we accept dogmatic statements with confidence in the permanent truth of their meaning, as theologians we examine the same statements critically with awareness of the historicity which they share with every human statement. Bernard Lonergan has expressed this in his typically incisive way, in the following passage from his *Method in Theology*: "The permanence of dogmas results from the fact that they express revealed mysteries. Their historicity, on the other hand, results from the facts that (1) statements have meanings only in their contexts, and (2) contexts are ongoing and ongoing contexts are multiple. What is opposed to the historicity of the dogmas is, not their permanence, but classicist assumptions and achievements. Classicism assumed that cul-

ture was to be conceived not empirically but normatively, and it did all it could to bring about one universal, permanent culture. What ended classicist assumptions was critical history. What builds the bridges between the many expressions of the faith is a methodical theology."¹¹

I think it could be instructive at this point to compare two fairly recent statements of the Roman magisterium, one of which would seem to reflect the classicist assumptions of which Lonergan speaks, while the other acknowledges the historically conditioned nature of dogmatic formulations.

The first is from Paul VI's Encyclical *Mysterium fidei* of September 3, 1965. Referring to the formulas with which the Council of Trent had expressed the dogma about the Eucharist, he declared: "By means of the formulas which the church uses in proposing dogmas of faith, concepts are expressed which are not tied to some definite human culture, to some particular level of knowledge, to one or another theological school; rather they manifest what the human mind perceives about things by universal and necessary experience, and that it expresses with appropriate and definite terms, whether derived from common or more cultivated language. For this reason, these formulas are well adapted to all men of all times and all places."¹²

Eight years after the publication of *Mysterium fidei*, and while Paul VI was still Pope, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith published its Declaration entitled *Mysterium Ecclesiae*, in which, for the first time, a document of the Roman magisterium clearly recognized the historically conditioned character of dogmatic statements. The document is surely familiar to you, but it seems worthwhile to recall its key passage here, so as to bring out the newness of this approach, as compared with what we have just quoted from the papal encyclical of 1965.

Having noted that some of the difficulties which the church encounters in the transmission of divine revelation arise from the historical condition that affects the expression of revelation, the Congregation goes on to say:

"With regard to this historical condition, it must first be observed that the meaning of the pronouncements of faith depends partly upon the expressive power of the language used at a certain point in time and in particular circumstances. Moreover, it sometimes happens that some dogmatic truth is first expressed incompletely (but not falsely), and at a later date, when considered in a broader context of faith or human knowledge, it receives a fuller and more perfect expression. . . . Finally, even though the truths which the church intends to teach through her dogmatic formulas are distinct from the changeable conceptions of a given epoch and can be expressed without them, nevertheless it can sometimes happen that these truths may be enunciated by the Sacred Magisterium in terms that bear traces of such conceptions."¹³

While the 1973 Declaration marks a welcome advance over the Encyclical of 1965, one would still share Karl Rahner's criticism of the idea that it only "sometimes happens" that the terms used in dogmatic formulas bear traces of the

¹¹Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972) 326.

¹²Paul VI, "Mysterium Fidei," Sept. 3, 1965, AAS 57 (1965) 758.

¹³"Mysterium Ecclesiae," June 24, 1973, AAS 65 (1973) 402-403.

changeable concepts of a given epoch, and that they can actually be expressed without them. He remarks: "Here the authors of the document are evidently still influenced by the earlier notion of 'natural' and general human terminology, which can always and everywhere be understood without further explanation, and which is independent of the wider context of the history of thought as a whole."¹⁴

Obviously, much more needs to be said about the dogmatic pronouncements of the magisterium as *loci theologici*, and about theology's hermeneutical task of grasping the meaning of dogmas in their own context, and of translating that meaning into concepts and terms that are appropriate to the culture to which the theologian belongs. However, that would lead into the whole question of theological method, which is beyond the scope of this paper. So I shall move on to say something about the other kind of magisterial statements we find in Denzinger: the one described in the title as *declarationes*.

NON-DEFINITIVE TEACHING OF THE MAGISTERIUM AS A LOCUS FOR THEOLOGY

While there are other examples of this kind of teaching in Denzinger, I shall focus my remarks on papal encyclicals and doctrinal declarations of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

In general, I believe one has to agree with Pius XII when he said in *Humani generis* that "for the most part (*plerumque*), what is proposed and insisted on in Encyclical Letters already belongs to Catholic doctrine on other grounds" (D-S 3885). A reading of the major encyclicals of the past century or so would I believe bear out the truth of this claim. This means that the formal authority of the encyclical as ordinary magisterium may be of a lesser order than the intrinsic authority of the doctrine itself, which may already be dogma of faith, whether defined solemnly or not.

The Pope's use of the word *plerumque* suggests one aspect of our role as theologians as regards papal encyclicals: to distinguish within the document between what already belongs to Catholic doctrine, possibly even to dogma, from what does not. In the light of such discernment, our response as Catholics will be appropriate to the objective weight of the doctrine itself. Our critical role as theologians will focus on the way that the papal document has conceptualized and formulated the doctrine: in other words, on the strictly theological component of this particular expression of the doctrine. It is inevitable that a certain kind of theological reflection will have gone into the way the doctrine is now being presented to the Catholic faithful. Without questioning the truth of the dogma or the well-established Catholic doctrine that is being taught, we can look critically at the theological element which, as Rahner has put it, is always part of the "amalgam" when a doctrine is conceptualized and formulated.¹⁵ It is possible that we may find that this element reflects a theological point of view that does not take account of im-

¹⁴Karl Rahner, "Mysterium Ecclesiae," *Theological Investigations* 17 (London: Darton Longman & Todd, 1981) 149.

¹⁵Karl Rahner, "Magisterium and Theology," *Theological Investigations* 18 (London: Darton Longman & Todd, 1983) 54-73.

portant developments in human knowledge. It would seem to me that in such a case, it is altogether appropriate for a Catholic theologian to express his critique of the theological component, and, as a positive contribution, to propose what he thinks would be a more satisfactory way of presenting this doctrine.

Of course it has to be kept in mind that it is no simple matter to draw the line between what in any dogma is the permanent truth which is the object of our faith, and the possibly reformable theology with which it has been conceptualized. When a theologian proposes what he has reason to believe would be a better way to understand and express a doctrine, the question may well be raised whether his new formulation does justice to the truth that is at stake. The burden of proof falls on him to show that his criticism of the official teaching only affects the theological component of the amalgam, and fully preserves the dogmatic truth involved.

Here we must point out an important difference between those statements of the magisterium which enunciate dogmatic truth, and other kinds of statements that we may find in such documents as papal encyclicals and declarations of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. When it is question of dogma, theology will enter into the statement as the form in which the dogma has been conceptualized. Any new conceptualization will intend to safeguard the permanent truth of the dogma. However, experience shows that in documents of the ordinary magisterium, statements are sometimes made where theology enters not only into the form, but into the very substance of what is being taught. In other words, a critical examination of such documents can detect the presence of what are really theological options that are being given the weight of official sanction and presented as the teaching of the magisterium.

It seems that the best one can hope for is that the theological options that are elevated to the rank of official teaching in documents of the ordinary magisterium, would reflect the best theological opinion available at the time. When this is the case, one can expect that, at the time when it is promulgated, such teaching will meet general acceptance in the theological community. Subsequently, of course, in the light of theological progress, it may become evident that a position which was adopted by the magisterium in its ordinary teaching, is no longer the best opinion available. In such a case, the ideal result would be for the magisterium to acknowledge the fact that its previous teaching was a matter of theology rather than of dogma, and to restate its doctrine in the light of the progress that has been made in the understanding of the question in the meanwhile.

However, for several reasons, there is bound to be resistance to such a revision of official teaching. First, I think it is understandably difficult for a pope to depart openly and explicitly from the teaching of his recent predecessors. A modern pope of course can easily enough acknowledge the fact that the claim of medieval popes to divinely-granted power to judge and depose temporal sovereigns was not a matter of dogma, but a theological conclusion whose minor premises are now seen to be unsound. Similarly, popes can now admit that the teaching of the Council of Florence that all pagans, Jews, heretics and schismatics would go to Hell if they did not become Catholics was based on the assumption that all such persons were guilty of the sin of infidelity, and did not necessarily follow from the dogma about the church's necessity for salvation.

However, psychologically, it seems much more difficult for a pope to correct the teaching of his recent predecessors. The natural resistance of the Roman magisterium to the correction of previous papal teaching can result in the practice of choosing consultants for future statements regarding the same issue, only from among those known to stand firm with the previous teaching. Such one-sided consultation will normally result in the reaffirmation of the previous teaching, which, because of genuine theological progress that has been made on the issue, may no longer obtain the consensus of the theological community.

I would like to suggest what I see as a concrete example of the kind of situation I am referring to here. It has to do with the kind of consultation that took place in the preparation of the *schema de Ecclesia* that was presented to the Second Vatican Council during the first period in 1962. As is well known, the Preparatory Theological Commission that was responsible for this *schema* was dominated by the then Holy Office, with its Prefect, Cardinal Ottaviani, as its head, and Fr. Sebastian Tromp, a leading consultor to the Holy Office, as its secretary. The selection of theologians to be named to this Commission, and the extent to which some who were named were actually listened to, reflected the kind of theology that characterized the Holy Office during the 1950's.

One of the basic assumptions of this theology, as one can see from the references given in the notes to the *schema*,¹⁶ was that the council would in no respect depart from the official positions already taken by the popes in their encyclicals.¹⁷ Theologians who had expressed criticism of any such papal teaching had no significant role in the preparation of this *schema*.

We know what happened when the bishops came to Rome for the council, with theologians of their own choosing, and went to work on that preparatory *schema*. It met with such a negative reception that it was withdrawn without even being put to a vote. In the course of the next two years, the council hammered out a dogmatic constitution on the church that, while not perfect, and surely not the last word, has deservedly been well received by the theological community. On a number of significant issues, it does depart from what had been previous papal teaching: departures that were accepted and confirmed by the papal magisterium in the person of Pope Paul VI.

In his book, *The Papacy and the Church*,¹⁸ J. Robert Dionne has examined in painstaking detail the process that led up to the acceptance by Paul VI of the reversal of previous papal teaching on such issues as the Catholic attitude to non-Christian religions, church-state relations, and religious liberty, as well as the ecclesiological issues of church identity and church membership. After demonstrating the sometimes neglected fact that the reception of papal teaching in the Catholic Church, from the time of Pius IX to the end of the Second Vatican Council, was

¹⁶*Acta Synodalia Concilii Vaticani Secundi* I/4 (Vatican City: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1971) 16-91.

¹⁷Umberto Betti, "Chiesa di Cristo e Chiesa Cattolica," *Antoniano* 61 (1986) 726-45.

¹⁸J. Robert Dionne, *The Papacy and the Church. A Study of Praxis and Reception in Ecumenical Perspective* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1987).

predominantly positive, he goes on to show that on those five issues, it was the critical reception by some Catholic theologians that had brought to light the fact that a position at variance with the official teaching was more solidly embedded in Catholic tradition than the official position was. It was the recognition of this fact that eventually brought about the consensus at Vatican II in favor of the change.

Dionne's thesis, then, is that recent history proves that the development of doctrine in the Catholic Church is not a one-directional affair, of authentic teaching by the magisterium and unquestioning assent by the rest of the church. Rather, it involves the interplay of authoritative teaching, and the reception of this teaching by the church. While this reception will normally be positive, it sometimes includes "respectful and responsible 'talking back'" on the part of Catholic theologians,¹⁹ which can lead to the acceptance of a change of position on the part of the papal magisterium itself.

I believe that Dionne's thesis is correct. The question I would raise, however, is whether he has given sufficient consideration to the fact that it required the extraordinary event of an ecumenical council to make possible the broad consultation of the whole church that resulted in the differences between the teaching of Vatican II and that of previous papal encyclicals. Reflecting on the kind of doctrine we find in the *schemata* prepared by the Preparatory Theological Commission, I feel justified in doubting whether the ordinary magisterium of the Holy See would have been likely to undertake any such revision of papal teaching if it had not been exposed to the fresh ideas brought to Rome by the bishops and their theologians. One can only hope that in the preparation of important doctrinal statements, the Holy See would not repeat the mistake made by the preparatory commission, but rather follow the example of the council, where the bishops listened to all shades of Catholic theological opinion before coming to their judgment. What the council has demonstrated is that even theological opinion that is critical of papal teaching deserves a fair hearing, and can lead the church to a better grasp of its own tradition. I suggest that this is what the bishops had in mind when they declared that "all the faithful, clerical and lay, possess a lawful freedom of inquiry and of thought, and the freedom to express their minds humbly and courageously about those matters in which they enjoy competence" (GS 62).

FRANCIS A. SULLIVAN, SJ
Gregorian University

¹⁹Dionne, *Papacy and Church*, 292.