

“WHEN THE MAGISTERIUM INTERVENES. . .”

Topic:	Investigations regarding the Exercise of the Magisterium in Contemporary Social and Ecclesial Contexts
Convener and Moderator:	Richard R. Gaillardetz, Boston College
Presenters:	Colleen Mallon, Aquinas Institute of Theology Gerard Mannion, University of San Diego

This three-year research seminar has been dedicated to a study of the exercise of the magisterium, with special attention to new developments in fundamental theology, ecclesiology and cultural analysis. This third and final session began with the convener’s review of the various contributions from the previous two sessions. We then heard two presentations by Colleen Mallon and Gerard Mannion, which summarized full papers that have been posted on the CTSA website.

Mallon’s paper offered an ecclesiological reflection on the experience of the visitation of USA religious women and the investigation of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR). Her paper attended to three interrelated concerns that offered points of departure for further ecclesiological reflection and development: 1) the reception of the renewal of religious life within the church; 2) emerging lay ministries and their relationship to the renewal of religious life; and 3) the gift and task of *being ecclesial* for a global world. Mallon’s proposed that we see the dual magisterial interventions as particular (provocative) moments in the ongoing journey of the ecclesial reception of Vatican II.

The discussion of Mallon’s paper quickly focused on her reflections on the demands of dialogical communion. Some participants asked whether dialogue, although an undeniable value in the church, might not have limits. In the case of manifest power inequities among the dialogue partners, might it sometimes be necessary to “leave the table”? Another participant suggested that what was needed was “principled engagement” in which dialogue was constituted on the basis of established principles that predetermined appropriate boundaries for the dialogue.

Mannion’s paper began with a brief discussion of the importance of viewing the magisterium in its historical and developmental context, after which he explored potential methods and tools for analyzing the understanding and exercise of magisterium in the past four decades or so. His paper focused, in particular, upon the notion of ‘social imaginary’ in order to help explore the wider implications of the prevailing understanding of magisterium across recent decades, especially the impact this has had upon differing aspects of ecclesial being, as well as upon the wider social contexts of Catholics. Mannion contended that this approach might help us appreciate that those who exercise magisterium do not do so in a moral, social and political vacuum. The pronouncements, results and consequences of magisterium do not ‘drop from heaven’. Magisterium is never exercised in a neutral environment or context. He concluded with a consideration of a more participatory sense of magisterium that is aware of its own necessary limitations and one which can be at home in postmodernity and live with ambiguity.

The discussion explored the use of Mannion's understanding of the 'social imaginary' with some helpful reflections on the extent to which he was employing the term in ways distinctive from Charles Taylor's own usage. Was it possible that he was calling on the concept to carry more weight in his argument than it could bear? Mannion pointed out that the concept was simply a tool for analysis and that it was his critique of the larger imaginative framework in which the magisterium is now understood that was the real concern in his paper.

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