



St. Mary's Catholic Church

538 Broadway
Providence, Rhode Island 02909

Adult Education
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Donum Veritatis

Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith

Context

"This Instruction was adopted at a Plenary Meeting of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and was approved at an audience granted to the undersigned Cardinal Prefect by the Supreme Pontiff, Pope John Paul II, who ordered its publication.

May 24, 1990, the Solemnity of the Ascension of the Lord

"Theology has importance for the Church in every age so that it can respond to the plan of God "who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim 2:4). In times of great spiritual and cultural change, theology is all the more important. Yet it also is exposed to risks since it must strive to "abide" in the truth (cf. Jn 8:31), while at the same time taking into account the new problems which confront the human spirit. *In our century, in particular, during the periods of preparation for and implementation of the Second Vatican Council, theology contributed much to a deeper "understanding of the realities and the words handed on" (Dei Verbum). But it also experienced and continues to experience moments of crisis and tension."*

I. Introduction & The Truth, God's gift to His People

Role of truth:

The truth which sets us free is a gift of Jesus Christ (cf. Jn 8:32). Man's nature calls him to seek the truth while ignorance keeps him in a condition of servitude. Indeed, man could not be truly free were no light shed upon the central questions of his existence including, in particular, where he comes from and where he is going.

Relation of Faith and Reason:

In the Christian faith, knowledge and life, truth and existence are intrinsically connected. Assuredly, the truth given in God's revelation exceeds the capacity of human knowledge, but it is not opposed to human reason. Revelation in fact penetrates human reason, elevates it, and calls it to give an account of itself.

Necessity of theology and risks:

- Because God desires all men to be saved
- Risk to "abide" in the truth while presenting it to the current culture

Truth: God's Gift to His People (establishes role of the theologian in larger context)

- n. 2 in relation to Him – unites us, sets us free
- n. 3 unites individuals by being united to God
- n. 4 response to this gift is the "life of faith" of the Church
- n. 5 the Spirit of truth distributes among the faithful of every rank special graces "for the common good"

II. The Vocation of the Theologian

n. 6

His role is to pursue in a particular way an ever deeper understanding of the Word of God found in the inspired Scriptures and handed on by the living Tradition of the Church. He does this in communion with the Magisterium which has been charged with the responsibility of preserving the deposit of faith. Theological science responds to the invitation of truth as it seeks to understand the faith. It thereby aids the People of God in fulfilling the Apostle's command (cf. 1 Pet 3:15) to give an accounting for their hope to those who ask it.

n. 7-8 his work demanded by faith and charity (must keep this context in mind)

Dynamism in faith – to share itself and make apostles

Dynamism in charity Love is ever desirous of a better knowledge of the beloved.

“From this double origin of theology, inscribed upon the interior life of the People of God and its missionary vocation, derives the method with which it ought to be pursued in order to satisfy the requirements of its nature.”

Given this, his work must include prayer which stands as a corrective.

n. 9 true sense of critical method of the science

Through the course of centuries, theology has progressively developed into a true and proper science. The theologian must therefore be attentive to the epistemological requirements of his discipline, to the demands of *rigorous critical standards*, and thus to a rational verification of each stage of his research. The obligation to be critical, however, *should not be identified with the critical spirit which is born of feeling or prejudice*. The theologian must discern in himself the origin of and motivation for his critical attitude and allow his gaze to be purified by faith.

n. 10 against modernist view (faith a mere feeling unrelated to science)

Even though it transcends human reason, revealed truth is in profound harmony with it. It presumes that reason by its nature is ordered to the truth in such a way that, illumined by faith, it can penetrate to the meaning of Revelation. Despite the assertions of many philosophical currents, but in conformity with a correct way of thinking which finds confirmation in Scripture, human reason's ability to attain truth must be recognized as well as its metaphysical capacity to come to a knowledge of God from creation.

Rather weak statement regarding suitable philosophies

Here it is important to emphasize that when theology employs the elements and conceptual tools of philosophy or other disciplines, discernment is needed. The ultimate normative principle for such discernment is revealed doctrine which itself must furnish the criteria for the evaluation of these elements and conceptual tools and not vice versa.

n. 11 not scandalizing the faithful must be a principle of his procedure

The freedom proper to theological research is exercised within the Church's faith. Thus while the theologian might often feel the urge to be daring in his work, this will not bear fruit or "edify" unless it is accompanied by that patience which permits maturation to occur

n. 12 the freedom of research which is proper to theology

Freedom of research, which the academic community rightly holds most precious, means an openness to accepting the truth that emerges at the end of an investigation in which no element has intruded that is foreign to the methodology corresponding to the object under study.

In theology this freedom of inquiry is the hallmark of a rational discipline whose object is given by Revelation, handed on and interpreted in the Church under the authority of the Magisterium, and received by faith. These givens have the force of principles. To eliminate them would mean to cease doing theology.

III. The Magisterium of the Church's Pastors

n. 13 Magisterium is ultimate guide for revealed truth

"God graciously arranged that the things he had once revealed for the salvation of all peoples should remain in their entirety, throughout the ages, and be transmitted to all generations" He bestowed upon His Church, through the gift of the Holy Spirit, a participation in His own infallibility.

Magisterium, which is the sole authentic interpreter of the Word of God, written or handed down, by virtue of the authority which it exercises in the name of Christ.

n. 14 Magisterium not an extrinsic element

The function of the Magisterium is not, then, something extrinsic to Christian truth nor is it set above the faith. It arises directly from the economy of the faith itself, inasmuch as the Magisterium is, in its service to the Word of God, an institution positively willed by Christ as a constitutive element of His Church. The service to Christian truth which the Magisterium renders is thus for the benefit of the whole People of God called to enter the liberty of the truth revealed by God in Christ.

n. 16 Scope of the Magisterium

That the Magisterium can make a pronouncement "in a definitive way" on *propositions which, even if not contained among the truths of faith, are nonetheless intimately connected with them*, in such a way, that the definitive character of such affirmations derives in the final analysis from revelation itself.

What concerns *morality* can also be the object of the authentic Magisterium because the Gospel, being the Word of Life, inspires and guides the whole sphere of human behavior.

Follows from this that "the competence of the Magisterium also extends to that which concerns the *natural law*."

And things which can be known by natural reason

n. 17 non-infallible teachings

Divine assistance is also given to the successors of the apostles teaching in communion with the successor of Peter, and in a particular way, to the Roman Pontiff as Pastor of the whole Church, when exercising their ordinary Magisterium, even should this not issue in an infallible definition or in a "definitive" pronouncement but in the proposal of some teaching which leads to a better understanding of Revelation in matters of faith and morals and to moral directives derived from such teaching.

One must therefore take into account the proper character of every exercise of the Magisterium, considering the extent to which its authority is engaged. It is also to be borne in mind that all acts of the Magisterium derive from the same source, that is, from Christ who desires that His People walk in the entire truth. For this same reason, magisterial decisions in matters of discipline, even if they are not guaranteed by the charism of infallibility, are not without divine assistance and call for the adherence of the faithful.

n. 18 the documents issued by this Congregation expressly approved by the Pope participate in the ordinary magisterium of the successor of Peter.

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IV. Proper Relationship Between Theologians and Pastors

A. Collaborative Relations

n. 21 They share the same end or goal

The Magisterium authentically teaches the doctrine of the Apostles. And, benefiting from the work of theologians, it refutes objections to and distortions of the faith and promotes, with the authority received from Jesus Christ, new and deeper comprehension, clarification, and application of revealed doctrine.

n. 22

The office of teaching demands cooperation with the Magisterium – he takes oath of fidelity.

When the Magisterium of the Church makes an infallible pronouncement and solemnly declares that a teaching is found in Revelation, the assent called for is that of theological faith. This kind of adherence is to be given even to the teaching of the ordinary and universal Magisterium when it proposes for belief a teaching of faith as divinely revealed.

When the Magisterium proposes "in a definitive way" truths concerning faith and morals, which, even if not divinely revealed, are nevertheless strictly and intimately connected with Revelation, these must be firmly accepted and held.

When the Magisterium, not intending to act "definitively", teaches a doctrine to aid a better understanding of Revelation and make explicit its contents, or to recall how some teaching is in conformity with the truths of faith, or finally to guard against ideas that are incompatible with these truths, the response called for is that of the religious submission of will and intellect.(23) This kind of response cannot be simply exterior or disciplinary but must be understood within the logic of faith and under the impulse of obedience to the faith.

n. 24

The willingness to submit loyally to the teaching of the Magisterium on matters per se not irreformable must be the rule. It can happen, however, that a theologian may, according to the case, raise questions regarding the timeliness, the form, or even the contents of magisterial interventions. Here the theologian will need, first of all, to assess accurately the authoritativeness of the interventions which becomes clear from the nature of the documents, the insistence with which a teaching is repeated, and the very way in which it is expressed.(24)

When it comes to the question of interventions in the prudential order, it could happen that some Magisterial documents might not be free from all deficiencies. Bishops and their advisors have not always taken into immediate consideration every aspect or the entire complexity of a question. But it would be contrary to the truth, if, proceeding from some particular cases, one were to conclude that the Church's Magisterium can be habitually mistaken in its prudential judgments, or that it does not enjoy divine assistance in the integral exercise of its mission. In fact, the theologian, who cannot pursue his discipline well without a certain competence in history, is aware of the filtering which occurs with the

passage of time. This is not to be understood in the sense of a relativization of the tenets of the faith. The theologian knows that some judgments of the Magisterium could be justified at the time in which they were made, because while the pronouncements contained true assertions and others which were not sure, both types were inextricably connected. Only time has permitted discernment and, after deeper study, the attainment of true doctrinal progress.

26. In the dialogue, a two-fold rule should prevail. When there is a question of the communion of faith, the principle of the "unity of truth" (*unitas veritatis*) applies. When it is a question of differences which do not jeopardize this communion, the "unity of charity" (*unitas caritatis*) should be safeguarded.

27. Even if the doctrine of the faith is not in question, the theologian will not present his own opinions or divergent hypotheses as though they were non-arguable conclusions. Respect for the truth as well as for the People of God requires this discretion (cf. Rom 14:1-15; 1 Cor 8; 10: 23-33). For the same reasons, the theologian will refrain from giving untimely public expression to them.

28. The preceding considerations have a particular application to the case of the theologian who might have serious difficulties, for reasons which appear to him wellfounded, in accepting a non-irreformable magisterial teaching.

Such a disagreement could not be justified if it were based solely upon the fact that the validity of the given teaching is not evident or upon the opinion that the opposite position would be the more probable. Nor, furthermore, would the judgment of the subjective conscience of the theologian justify it because conscience does not constitute an autonomous and exclusive authority for deciding the truth of a doctrine.

30. If, despite a loyal effort on the theologian's part, the difficulties persist, the theologian has the duty to make known to the Magisterial authorities the problems raised by the teaching in itself, in the arguments proposed to justify it, or even in the manner in which it is presented. He should do this in an evangelical spirit and with a profound desire to resolve the difficulties. His objections could then contribute to real progress and provide a stimulus to the Magisterium to propose the teaching of the Church in greater depth and with a clearer presentation of the arguments.

In cases like these, the theologian should avoid turning to the "mass media", but have recourse to the responsible authority, for it is not by seeking to exert the pressure of public opinion that one contributes to the clarification of doctrinal issues and renders service to the truth.

B. The problem of dissent

32. The Magisterium has drawn attention several times to the serious harm done to the community of the Church by attitudes of general opposition to Church teaching which even come to expression in organized groups.

The ideology of philosophical liberalism, which permeates the thinking of our age, must be counted among the factors which may exercise their remote or indirect influence. Here arises the tendency to regard a judgment as having all the more validity to the extent that it proceeds from the individual relying upon his own powers. In such a way freedom of thought comes to oppose the authority of

tradition which is considered a cause of servitude. Ultimately, freedom of judgment understood in this way is more important than the truth itself. We are dealing then here with something quite different from the legitimate demand for freedom in the sense of absence of constraint as a necessary condition for the loyal inquiry into truth.

The weight of public opinion when manipulated and its pressure to conform also have their influence. Often models of society promoted by the "mass media" tend to assume a normative value.