

si si no no

"But let your speech be, 'Yes, yes,' 'No, no,' and whenever it is beyond these comes from the evil one. (Mt. 5:37)"

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Clear Ideas, On the Pope's Infallible Magisterium

What worries Catholics most in the current crisis in the Church is precisely the "problem of the Pope." We need very clear ideas on this question. We must avoid shipwreck to the right and to the left, either by the spirit of rebellion or, on the other hand, by an inappropriate and servile obedience. The serious error which is behind many current disasters is the belief that the "Authentic Magisterium" is nothing other than the "Ordinary Magisterium."

The "Authentic Magisterium" cannot be so simply identified with the Ordinary Magisterium. In fact, the Ordinary Magisterium can be **infallible** and **non-infallible**, and it is only in this second case that it is called the "Authentic Magisterium." The *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique* [hereafter referred to as *DTC* - *Ed.*] under the heading of "papal infallibility" (vol. VII, col. 1699ff) makes the following distinctions: **1)** there is the "infallible or *ex cathedra* papal definition in the sense defined by Vatican I" (col. 1699); **2)** there is the "infallible papal teaching which flows from the pope's Ordinary Magisterium" (col. 1705); **3)** there is "non-infallible papal teaching" (col. 1709).

Similarly, Salaverri, in his *Sacrae Theologiae Summa* (vol. I, 5th ed., Madrid, B.A.C.) distinguishes the following: **1)** Extraordinary Infallible Papal Magisterium (no. 592ff); **2)** Ordinary Infallible Papal Magisterium (no. 645ff); **3)** Papal Magisterium that is *mere autenticum*, that is, only "authentic" or "authorized" as regards the person himself, not as regards his infallibility (no. 659ff).

While he always has full and supreme doctrinal authority, the pope does not always exercise it at its highest level, that is at the level of infallibility. As the theologians say, he is like a giant who does not always use his full strength. What follows is this:

1) "It would be incorrect to say that the pope is infallible simply by possessing papal authority," as we read in the Acts of Vatican I (Coll. I ac. 399b). This would be equivalent to saying that the pope's authority and his infallibility are the same thing.

2) "It is necessary to know "what degree of assent is due to the decrees of the sovereign pontiff when he is teaching at a level which is not that of infallibility, *i.e.*, when he is not exercising the supreme degree of his doctrinal authority" (Salaverri, *op.cit.*, no. 659).

Error by Excess and/or By Defect

Unfortunately this three-fold distinction between the Extraordinary Magisterium, the Ordinary Infallible Magisterium, and the authentic non-infallible Magisterium, has fallen into oblivion. This has resulted in two opposite errors in the crisis situation of the Church at the present time: the error by **excess** of those who extend papal infallibility to all acts of the pope, without distinction; and the error by **defect** of those who restrict infallibility to definitions that have been uttered *ex cathedra*.

The error by excess actually eliminates the Ordinary Non-Infallible or "Authentic" Magisterium and inevitably leads to Sedevacantism or to servile obedience. The attitude of the people of this second category is, "The pope is always infallible and so we always owe him blind obedience."

The error by defect eliminates the Ordinary Infallible Magisterium. This is precisely the error of the neo-Modernists, who devalue the ordinary papal Magisterium and the "Roman tradition" which they find so inconvenient. They say, "The pope is infallible only in his Extraordinary Magisterium, so we can sweep away 2000 years of ordinary papal Magisterium."

Both of these errors obscure the precise notion of the Ordinary Magisterium, which includes the Ordinary Infallible Magisterium and the ordinary, "authentic," non-infallible Magisterium.

Confusion and Controversy

These two opposing errors are not new. They were denounced even before Vatican II. In 1954, Fr. Labourdette, O.P., wrote:

Many persons have retained very naive ideas about what they learned concerning the personal infallibility of the sovereign pontiff in the solemn and abnormal exercise of his power of teaching. For some, every word of the supreme pontiff will in some way partake of the value of an infallible teaching, requiring the absolute assent of theological faith; for others, acts which are not presented with the manifest conditions of a definition *ex cathedra* will seem to have no greater authority than that of any private teacher (*Revue Thomiste* LIV, 1954, p. 196)!

Dom Paul Nau has also written about the confusion that has arisen between the pope's authority and his infallibility:

By a strange reversal, while the personal infallibility of the pope in a solemn judgment, so long disputed, was definitively placed beyond all controversy, it is the Ordinary Magisterium of the Roman Church which seems to have been lost sight of.

It all happened - as is not unheard of elsewhere in the history of doctrine - as if the very brilliance of the Vatican I definition had cast into shadow the truth hitherto universally recognized; we might almost say, as if the definition of the infallibility of the solemn judgments made these henceforth the unique method by which the sovereign pontiff would put forward the rule of faith [*Pope or Church?* Angelus Press, 1998, p. 13].

On the temporary fading of a doctrine from Catholic consciousness, see the entry "*dogme*" in *DTC* (vol. IV).

Dom Nau also mentioned the disastrous consequences which flow from this identification of the pope's authority and his infallibility:

No place would be left, intermediate between such private acts and the solemn papal judgments, for a teaching which, while authentic, is not equally guaranteed throughout all its various expressions. If things are looked at from this angle, the very notion of the Ordinary Magisterium becomes, properly speaking, unthinkable [*Pope or Church?* p.4].

Dom Nau considered from where this phenomenon had developed:

Since 1870 [the year of Vatican I - *Ed.*], manuals of theology have taken the formulae in which their statements of doctrine have been framed from the actual wording of the Council text. None of these treated in its own right of the ordinary teaching of the pope, which has accordingly, little by little, slipped out of sight and all pontifical teaching has seemed to be reduced solely to solemn definitions *ex cathedra*. Once attention was entirely directed to these, it became customary to consider the doctrinal interventions of the Holy See solely from the standpoint of the solemn judgment, that of a judgment which ought in itself to bring to the doctrine all the necessary guarantees of certainty (*ibid.*, p. 13).

This is partly true, but we should not forget that liberal theology had already been advertising its reductive agenda. That is why Pius IX, even before Vatican I (1870) felt obliged to warn German theologians that divine faith's submission "must not be restricted only to those points which have been defined" (Letter to Archbishop of Munich, Dec. 21, 1863).

The naive ideas entertained by many on the question of papal infallibility after Vatican I played into the hands of the liberal theory. In fact, while the two errors are diametrically opposed, they are at one in equating papal authority and papal infallibility. What is the difference between them? The error by excess, regarding as infallible everything that comes from papal authority, stretches the pope's infallibility to the extent of his authority. The error by defect, considering only those things authorized that emanate from the pope's *ex cathedra* infallibility, restricts papal authority to the scope of the infallibility of the pope's Extraordinary Magisterium. Thus both errors have the same effect, namely, to obscure the very notion of the Ordinary Magisterium and, consequently, the particular nature of the Ordinary Infallible Magisterium. It is essential for us to rediscover this notion and its nature because they are of the greatest importance in helping us to get our bearings in the time of crisis.

The Ordinary Magisterium in Shadow: *Humanae Vitae* and *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*

The lack of clear ideas on the pope's Ordinary Magisterium appeared in full with Pope Paul VI's encyclical, *Humanae Vitae*, and more recently with *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*, in which Pope John Paul II repeated the Church's refusal to ordain women.

When *Humanae Vitae* came out, various theologians indicated that the notion of ordinary papal Magisterium was obscured. Generally speaking, those who supported the infallibility of *Humanae Vitae* deduced "the proof" [of this infallibility - *Ed.*] on the basis of the Church's constant and universal Authentic Magisterium, which has never been abandoned and therefore was already definitive in earlier centuries." In other words, on the basis of the Ordinary Infallible Magisterium (E. Lio, *Humanae Vitae ed infallibilit *, Libreria Ed. Vaticana, p. 38). They should have noticed that even the notion of the Ordinary Infallible Magisterium and its particularity [its constancy and universality - *Ed.*] had been effaced from the minds not only of the ordinary faithful but also of the theologians. Cardinal Siri commented:

By presenting only two possible hypotheses for the case in question [the encyclical *Humanae Vitae* - *Ed.*], namely, an *ex cathedra* definition [which was avoided - *Ed.*] that is, proceeding from the solemn Magisterium, and that of the Authentic Magisterium [which does not of itself imply infallibility - *Ed.*], a grave sophism in enumeration has been committed. It is in fact a serious error, because there is another possible hypothesis, *i.e.*, that of the Ordinary Infallible Magisterium. It is very strange how certain people are at pains to avoid speaking about this... It is necessary to realize that there is not only a solemn Magisterium and a simply Authentic Magisterium; between these two there is also the Ordinary Magisterium which is endowed with the charism of infallibility (*Renovatio*, Oct.-Dec., 1968).

The same "sophism of enumeration" was pointed out 30 years later by Msgr. Bertone, speaking against the opposition to *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*. On this occasion he explicitly denounced the tendency "to substitute *de facto* the concept of authority for that of infallibility" (*L'Osservatore Romano*, Dec. 20, 1996).

In fact, it is not only the Ordinary Infallible Magisterium which has fallen into oblivion, but, since authority and infallibility have been equated, the distinction between Ordinary Infallible Magisterium and the ordinary Authentic Magisterium has also been consigned to oblivion. After Vatican I, as Dom Nau wrote,

Catholics have no longer any reason for hesitating about the authority to be recognized in the dogmatic judgments pronounced by the sovereign pontiff: their infallibility has been solemnly defined in the Constitution *Pastor Aeternus*... But definitions of this sort are relatively rare. The pontifical documents which come most frequently before the Christian today are encyclicals, allocutions, radio messages which usually derive from the Ordinary Magisterium or ordinary teaching of the Church. Unfortunately, this is where confusions remain still possible and do occur, albeit all too often (*op.cit.* p. 3).

Thus, we will devote ourselves, not to the Extraordinary Magisterium (whose infallibility is generally acknowledged), but to the Ordinary Magisterium. Once we have illustrated the conditions under which it is infallible, it will be clear that outside these conditions we are in the presence of the "authentic" Magisterium to which, in normal times, we should accord due consideration. In abnormal times, however, it would be a fatal error to equate this "authentic" Magisterium with the infallible Magisterium (whether "extraordinary" or "ordinary").

The Point of the Question

The infallible guarantee of divine assistance is not limited solely to the acts of the Solemn Magisterium; it also extends to the Ordinary Magisterium, although it does not cover and assure all the latter's acts in the same way" (Fr. Labourdette, O.P., *Revue Thomiste* 1950, p. 38).

Thus, the assent due to the Ordinary Magisterium "can range from simple respect right up to a true act of faith." (Msgr. Guerry, *La Doctrine Sociale de l' glise*, Paris, Bonne Presse 1957, p. 172). It is most important, therefore, to know precisely when the Roman pope's Ordinary Magisterium is endowed with the charism of infallibility.

Since the pope alone possesses the same infallibility conferred by Jesus Christ upon his Church [*i.e.*, the pope plus the bishops in communion with him, cf. Dz. 1839], we must conclude that the pope, in his Ordinary Magisterium, is infallible in the same degree and under the same conditions as the Ordinary Magisterium of the Church is.

Thus the truth that is taught must be proposed as already defined, or as what has always been believed or accepted in the Church, or attested by the unanimous and constant agreement of theologians as being a Catholic truth [which is therefore strictly obligatory for all the faithful ("Infallibilit  du Pape," *DTC* vol. VII, col. 1705).

This condition was recalled by Cardinal Felici in the context of *Humanae Vitae*:

On this problem we must remember that a truth may be sure and certain, and hence it may be obligatory, even without the sanction of an *ex cathedra* definition. So it is with the encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, in which the pope, the supreme pontiff of the Church, utters a truth which has been constantly taught by the Church's Magisterium and which accords with the precepts of Revelation (*L'Osservatore Romano*, Oct. 19, 1968, p. 3).

No one, in fact, can refuse to believe what has certainly been revealed by God. And it is not only those things that have been defined as such that have certainly been revealed by God; the latter also include whatever has been always and everywhere taught by the Church's Ordinary Magisterium as having been revealed by God. More recently, Msgr. Bertone reminded us that the Ordinary Pontifical Magisterium can teach a doctrine as **definitive** [bold emphasis in original] in virtue of the fact that it has been constantly preserved and held by Tradition.

Such is the case with *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* when it repeats the invalidity of the priestly ordination of women, which has always been held by the Church with "unanimity and stability" (*L'Osservatore Romano*, Dec. 20, 1996).

Cardinal Siri, still speaking of *Humanae Vitae* in the issue of the review *Renovatio* to which we have referred, explains as follows:

"The question, therefore, must be put objectively thus: given that [*Humanae Vitae*] is not an act of the Infallible Magisterium and that it therefore does not of itself provide the guarantee of "irreformability" and certitude, would not its substance be nonetheless guaranteed by the Ordinary Magisterium under the conditions under which the Ordinary Magisterium is itself known to be infallible?"

After giving a summary of the Church's continuous tradition on contraception, from the *Didache* to the encyclical *Cannubii* of Pope Pius XI, Cardinal Siri concludes:

This Encyclical recapitulated the ancient teaching and the habitual teaching of today. This means that we can say that the conditions for the Ordinary irreformable [*i.e.*, infallible - *Ed.*] Magisterium were met. The period of widespread turbulence is a very recent fact and has nothing to do with the serene possession [of the Magisterium - *Ed.*] over many centuries (*Renovatio*, *op.cit.*).

It is an error, therefore, to extend infallibility unconditionally to the whole of the Ordinary Magisterium of the pope, whether he is speaking *urbi et orbi* or just addressing pilgrims. It is true that the infallibility of the Extraordinary Magisterium is not enough for the Church; the Extraordinary Magisterium is a rare event, whereas "faith needs infallibility and it needs it every day," as Cardinal Siri himself said (*Renovatio*, *op.cit.*). But Cardinal Siri is too good a theologian to forget that even the pope's infallibility has conditions attached to it. If the Ordinary Magisterium is to be infallible, it must be traditional (cf. Salaverri, *loc.cit.*). If it breaks with Tradition, the Ordinary Magisterium cannot claim any infallibility. Here we see very clearly the very special nature of the Ordinary Infallible Magisterium, to which we must devote some attention.

The Special Nature of the Ordinary Infallible Magisterium

As we have seen, Cardinal Siri observes that the *Humanae Vitae*, even if it is not an act of the *ex cathedra* Magisterium, would still furnish the guarantee of infallibility, not "of" itself, but insofar as it recapitulates "the ancient teaching and the habitual teaching of today" (*Renovatio*, *ob.cit.*). In fact, in contrast to the Extraordinary Magisterium or the Solemn Judgment, the Ordinary Magisterium

does not consist in an isolated proposition, pronouncing irrevocably on the Faith and containing its own guarantees of truth, but in a collection of acts which can concur in communicating a teaching.

This is the normal procedure by which Tradition, in the fullest sense of that term, is handed down; ...(*Pope or Church?* *op. cit.* p. 10).

This is precisely why the *DTC* speaks of "infallible papal teaching which flows from the pope's Ordinary Magisterium" (*loc.cit.*). So, while a simple doctrinal presentation [by the pope] can never claim the infallibility of a definition, [this infallibility] nonetheless is rigorously implied when there is a convergence on the same subject in a series of documents whose continuity, in itself, excludes all possibility of doubt on the authentic content of the Roman teaching (Dom Nau, *Une source doctrinale: Les encycliques*, p. 75).

If we fail to take account of this difference, we are obliterating all distinction between the Extraordinary Magisterium and the Ordinary Magisterium:

No act of the Ordinary Magisterium as such, taken in isolation, could claim the prerogative which belongs to the supreme judgment. If it did so, it would cease to be the "Ordinary Magisterium." An isolated act is infallible only if it is precisely Judge engages his whole authority in it so that he cannot go back on it. Such an act cannot be "reversible" without being plainly subject to error. But it is precisely this kind of act, against which there can be no appeal, which constitutes the Solemn [or Extraordinary] Judgment, and which thus differs from the Ordinary Magisterium" (*ibid.*, note 1).

It follows that

the infallibility of the Ordinary Magisterium, whether of the Universal Church or that of the See of Rome, is not that of a judgment, not that of an act to be considered in isolation, as if it could itself provide all the light necessary for it to be clearly seen. It is that of the guarantee bestowed on a doctrine by the simultaneous or continuous convergence of a plurality of affirmations or explanations, none of which could bring positive certitude if it were taken by itself alone. Certitude can be expected only from the whole complex, but all the parts concur in making up that whole (*Pope or Church?* *op. cit.*, p. 18).

Dom Paul Nau explains further:

In the case of the [Ordinary] universal Magisterium, this whole complex is that of the concordant teaching of the bishops in communion with Rome; in the case of the Ordinary pontifical Magisterium [*i.e.*, the pope alone - *Ed.*], it is the continuity of teaching of the successors of Peter; in other words, it is the "tradition of the Church of Rome," to which Msgr. Gasser appealed at Vatican I (*Collana Lacinetti*, col. 404).

About this subject, A.C. Martimort wrote:

Bossuet's error consisted in rejecting the infallibility of the pope's Extraordinary Magisterium; but he performed the signal service of affirming most of all the infallibility of the Ordinary Magisterium [of the pope] and its specific nature, which means that every particular act bears the risk of error... To sum up: according to the Bishop of Meaux, what applies to the series of Roman popes over time is the same as what applies to the episcopal college dispersed across the world (*Le Gallicanisme de Bossuet*, Paris, 1953, p. 558).

In fact, we know that the bishops, individually, are not infallible. Yet the totality of bishops, throughout time and space, in their moral unanimity, do enjoy infallibility. So if one wishes to ascertain that the Church's infallible teaching one must not take the teaching of one particular bishop: it is necessary to look at the "common and continuous teaching" of the episcopate united to the pope, which "cannot deviate from the teaching of Jesus Christ" (E. Piacentini, O.F.M. Conv., *Infallibile m me dans les causes de canonisation?* ENMI, Rome 1994, p. 37).

The same thing applies to the Ordinary Infallible Magisterium of the Roman pope on his own: this Ordinary Magisterium is infallible not because each act is uttered by the pope, but because the particular teaching of which the pope's act consists "is inserted into a totality and a continuity" (Dom P.Nau, *Le encycliques*, *op.cit.*), which is that of the "series of Roman popes over time" (Martimort, *op.cit.*).

We can understand why, in their Ordinary Magisterium, the pope and the Roman popes have always been careful to associate themselves with their "venerable predecessors," often quoting them at length. "The Church speaks by Our mouth," said Pope Pius XI in the *Casti Cannubii*. Pope Pius XII in *Humanae Vitae* emphasized that "most of the time what is set forth and taught in the encyclicals is already, for other reasons, part of the patrimony of Catholic doctrine."

The very particular nature of the pope's Ordinary Infallible Magisterium was quite clear until Vatican I. While this Council was in session, *La Civilt  Cattolica*, which published (and still publishes) under the direct control of the Holy See, replied in these words to Fr. Gr try, who had criticized Pope Paul IV's Bull *Cum ex Apostolus*:

We ask Fr. Gr try, in all serenity, whether he believes that the Bull of Paul IV is an isolated act, so to speak, or an act that is comparable to others of the same kind in the series of Roman popes. If he replies that it is an isolated act, his argument proves nothing, for he himself affirms that the Bull of Paul IV contains no dogmatic definition. If he replies, as he must, that this Bull is, in substance, conformable to countless other similar acts of the Holy See, his argument says far more than he would wish. In other words, he is saying that a long succession of Roman popes have made public and solemn acts of immorality and injustice against the principles of human reason, of impiety towards God, and of apostasy against the Gospel (vol.X, series XVII, 1870, p.54).

This means, in effect, that an "isolated act" of the pope is infallible only in the context of a "dogmatic definition"; outside dogmatic definitions, *i.e.*, in the Ordinary Magisterium, infallibility is guaranteed by the complex of "countless other similar acts of the Holy See," or of a "long succession" of the successors of Peter.

Practical Application

Because it declared itself to be non-dogmatic, the charism of infallibility cannot be claimed for the last Council, except insofar as it was re-iterating traditional teaching. Moreover, what is offered as the Ordinary Pontifical Magisterium of the recent popes - apart from certain acts - cannot claim the qualification of the "Ordinary Magisterium." The pontifical documents on the novelties which have troubled and confused the consciences of the faithful manifest no concern whatsoever to adhere to the teaching of "venerable predecessors." They cannot adhere to them because they have broken with them. Look at the footnotes of *Dominus Jesus*; it's as if the Magisterium of the preceding popes did not exist. It is clear that when today's popes contradict the traditional Magisterium of yesterday's popes, our obedience is due to yesterday's popes: this is a manifest sign of a period of grave ecclesial crisis, of abnormal times in the life of the Church.

Finally, it is evident that the New Theology, which is so unscrupulous in contradicting the traditional teaching of the Roman Pontiffs, contradicts the Infallible Pontifical Magisterium; manifestly, a Catholic must in all conscience reject and actively attack it.

The Almost Total Eclipse of the "Authentic" Magisterium

The Church's current crisis is not at the level of the Extraordinary or Ordinary Infallible Magisterium. This would be simply impossible. Furthermore, it is not at the level of the Ordinary Infallible Magisterium because the Council did not wish to be a dogmatic one, and because Pope Paul VI himself indicated what theological "note" it carried: "Ordinary Magisterium; that is, it is clearly authentic" (General Audience of Dec. 1, 1966: *Encycliques et discours de Paul VI*, Ed.Paoline, 1966, pp.51,52). Lastly, it is not at the level of the Ordinary Infallible Magisterium. The turmoil and division in the Catholic world have been provoked by a break with this doctrinal continuity. Such a break is the very opposite of the Ordinary Infallible Magisterium. Thus Paul VI's *Humanae Vitae*, or John Paul II's intervention against women's ordination in *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* caused no dismay to the Church's obedient sons.

The present crisis is at the level of what is presented as the simply "authentic" Magisterium, which, as Cardinal Siri reminds us, "does not of itself imply infallibility" (*Renovatio*, *op.cit.*). But are we really dealing with the "authentic" Magisterium?

The answer of *Iota Unum* [available from Angelus Press. Price: \$24.95] wrote:

Nowadays it is no longer the case that every word of the pope constitutes Magisterium. Now, very frequently, it is no more than the expression of views, ideas and considerations that are to be found disseminated throughout the Church... and of doctrines that have spread and become dominant in much theology (" glise et Contre- glise au Concile Vatican II," Second Theological Congress of *SINONO*, June 1996).

The Magisterium, however, even in its non-infallible form, should always be the teaching of the divine Word, even if uttered with a lesser degree of certitude. Nowadays, it is very often the case that "the Pope does not manifest the divine word entrusted to him," but rather "expresses his personal views" which are those of the New Theology. Here we are faced with a "manifestation of the decadence of the Church's Ordinary [authentic] Magisterium," a decadence which "is creating a very grave crisis for the Church, because it is the Church's central point which is suffering from it" (*ibid.*).

Can one really speak of the "authentic" Pontifical Magisterium, or would it be more accurate to speak of an almost total eclipse of the Authentic Pontifical Magisterium in the face of an analogous crisis at the level of the episcopal Magisterium?

The Danger of Being Drawn into Error

Catholic are least prepared to meet the crisis of the Authentic Pontifical Magisterium because of the confusion in their minds regarding the distinction between the pope's Ordinary Infallible Magisterium and his simply "authentic" Ordinary Magisterium. This problem was pointed out before Vatican II; it has caused and continues to cause Catholics to be drawn into error who wrongly believe that they should give equal assent to the pope's every word, neglecting the distinctions and precise conditions which we now review.

"The command to believe firmly and without examination of the matter in hand... can be truly binding only if the authority concerned is infallible" (Billot, *De Ecclesia*, thesis XVII). That is why a firm and unconditional assent is demanded in the case of the Infallible Magisterium (whether Extraordinary or Ordinary).

As regards those non-infallible doctrinal decisions given by the pope or by the Roman congregations, there is a strict duty of obedience which obliges us to give an internal assent... that is prudent and habitually excludes all reasonable doubt, but this assent is legitimized [not by infallibility, but rather] by the high degree of prudence with which the ecclesiastical authority habitually acts in such circumstances" (entry " glise" in *DTC*, vol.IV, col. 2209).

This is why we owe the "authentic" Magisterium not a blind and unconditional assent but a prudent and conditional one:

Since not everything taught by the Ordinary Magisterium is infallible, we must ask what kind of assent we should give to its various decisions. The Christian is required to give the assent of faith to all the doctrinal and moral truths defined by the Church's Magisterium. He is not required to give the same assent to teaching imparted by the sovereign pontiff that is not imposed on the whole Christian body as a dogma of faith. In this case it suffices to give that inner and religious assent which we give to legitimate ecclesiastical authority. This is not an absolute assent, because such decrees are not infallible, but only a prudential and conditional assent, since we live in questions of faith and morals there is a presumption in favor of one's superior... Such prudential assent does not eliminate the possibility of submitting the doctrine to a further examination, if that seems required by the gravity of the question (Nicolas Jung, *Le Magist re de L' glise*, 1935, pp.153,154).

Unfortunately, all these truths have disappeared from Catholic consciousness, just as the notion of the "authentic" Magisterium has. The Catholic world is all the more in danger of being drawn into error, since it nourishes the naive and erroneous conviction that God has never permitted the popes to be mistaken, even in the Ordinary Magisterium (and here no distinctions are drawn), and so imagine that the same assent should always be given to the papal Magisterium - which in no way corresponds to the Church's teaching.

Infallibility and the "Grace of State"

Our discussion of the "grace of state" of the sovereign pontiff proceeds in the context of the Authentic Magisterium. When the pope engages his infallibility, he enjoys a divine assistance that is entirely special, over and above the grace of state. Nonetheless, even infallibility does not reduce him to the level of an automaton. In fact:

The Divine assistance does not relieve the bearer of the infallible doctrinal power of the obligation of taking pains to know the truth, especially by means of the study of the sources of Revelation (*Dz* 1836).

That is why, in his Infallible Magisterium, the pope enjoys: **1)** the **positive** assistance of the Holy Spirit so that he can attain the truth, and **2)** the **negative** assistance which preserves him from error. Ultimately, in a case where a pope, by negligence or ill will, were to fail in his duty of seeking out the truth by the appropriate means, infallibility guarantees that God, through a purely negative assistance, would prevent the proclamation of an *ex cathedra* of error.

This guarantee does not exist in the case of the Authentic Magisterium because it does not enjoy the charism of infallibility. That is why everything is entrusted to the grace of state alone, which impels the pope to act with that "high degree of prudence" which, normally, shines forth from the Authentic Magisterium of the successors of Peter. If, however, a pope were to fail to attain this, no divine promise guarantees God will intervene and stop him.

In such a case, indeed, the Catholic world would run the risk of being drawn into error. But it would not be because the pope lacked infallibility; under the due grace, the pope would enjoy infallibility just like his predecessors. Nor would it be because he was deprived of the grace of state, but rather that he had not laid hold of that grace. The risk of this is all the greater since the principles we are here setting forth have fallen into oblivion.

When the Catholic world had a clear grasp of these principles the danger of being drawn into error was far less. In the history of the Church, we find it was the justified resistance of cardinals, whom St. Robert Bellarmine wrote to Clement VIII:

Your Holiness knows the danger to which Sixtus V exposed himself and all the Church, when he undertook to correct Holy Scripture according to the lights of his own personal knowledge. Truly, I do not know whether the Church has ever been subject to a more grave danger (entry " suites: travaux sur les Saintes Ecritures" in F. Vigouroux, *Dictionnaire de la Bible*, vol.III, cols. 1407-1408).

This danger was identified and rejected by the Catholic world. In reality, those who *attribue* infallibility always to the pope are doing a service neither to themselves, nor to the Church, nor to the pope himself, as the present times are plainly showing us. A pope's *faux pas* are a severe trial for the entire Catholic world.

Normal Times and Abnormal Times

In normal times the faithful can rely on the "authentic" Pontifical Magisterium with the same confidence with which they rely on the Infallible Magisterium. In normal times, it would be a very grave error to fail to take due account of even the simply "authentic" Magisterium of the Roman pope. This is because if everyone were permitted, in the presence of an act of the teaching authority, to suspend his assent or even to doubt or positively reject it on the grounds that it did not imply an infallible definition, it would result in the ecclesiastical Magisterium becoming practically illusory in concrete terms, because the ecclesiastical Magisterium is only relatively rarely expressed in definitions of this kind (*DTC*, vol.III, col.1110).

It must not be forgotten (as it has been forgotten nowadays) that the security of the Authentic Magisterium is not linked to infallibility, but to the "high degree of prudence" with which the successors of Peter "habitually" proceed, and to the "habitual" care they take never to swerve from the explicit and tacit teaching of their predecessors. Once this prudence and care are missing, we are no longer in normal times. This is a situation it would be a fatal error to equate the Authentic Magisterium of the Roman pontiff with his Infallible Magisterium (Ordinary or Extraordinary). These abnormal times are rare, but they are not impossible. If we are not to be drawn into error, we urgently need to remember that the assent due to the non-infallible Magisterium is

...that of inward assent, not as of faith, but as of prudence, the refusal of which could not escape the mark of temerity, unless the doctrine rejected was an actual novelty or involved a manifest discordance between the pontifical affirmation and the doctrine which had hitherto been taught (Dom P.Nau, *Pope or Church?* *op.cit.* p.29).

Dom Nau makes it clear that this prudential assent does not apply in the case of a teaching that **is** "already traditional," which would belong to the sphere of the Ordinary Infallible Magisterium. However, in the case of a teaching which is **not** "already traditional," the reservation which interests us does apply: "unless the doctrine rejected...involved a manifest discordance between the pontifical affirmation and the doctrine which had hitherto been taught." Such a situation would legitimize the doctrine's rejection and would imply no "mark of temerity." Is this kind of "discordance" an impossible hypothesis? Dom Nau, whose attachment to the papacy was without doubt, wrote:

This is not a case which can be excluded *a priori* since it does not concern a formal definition. But, as Bossuet himself says, "It is so extraordinary that it does not happen more than twice or thrice in a thousand years" (*Pope or Church?* p.29).

In such a case, refusing one's assent does not only not manifest temerity: **it is a positive duty**. The "discordance" with "doctrine which had hitherto been taught" dispenses the Catholic from all obligation to obedience on this point:

The general principle is that one owes his assent to the orders of a superior unless, in a particular case, the order appears manifestly unjust. Similarly, a Catholic is bound to adhere interiorly to the teachings of legitimate authority until it becomes evident to him that a particular assertion is erroneous (*DTC*, vol.III, col.1110).

In the case we are examining, evidence of error is provided where an act of the Authentic Magisterium is discordant with the Extraordinary or Ordinary Infallible Magisterium, *i.e.*, in discord with the traditional doctrine, to which the Catholic is bound for eternity.</