

Lesson Nine: Authority Part II–The Magisterium

We are coming to the end of the Study now in these last two weeks. It will take two more or a total of three to cover this most interesting aspect of our Study. Upon what authority or upon what basis does the RCC proclaim its teaching? As I stated when we closed last week many faithful Catholics believe it is based on the Bible. It is true that the Bible is part of the foundation (although often misrepresented). Yet there are two more aspects that form the tripod upon which the RCC rests: the Magisterium and Tradition. Today we will look at the Magisterium.

Once again for newcomers: we are letting the Catholic Church speak for itself.

- Catechism of the Catholic Church- Edited by Joseph Ratzinger [Also known as Pope Benedict XVI (1994)]

So we have covered salvation, The Mass and Mariology. That only leaves us this question of Authority.

I need to repeat this from last time: The Church teaches that the **Bishops** have inherited from the Apostles three particular powers.

- Teaching power [77, 888-892]
- Sacerdotal or sanctifying power [893]
- Ruling power or Pastoral power [883, 894-896]

The Church teaches that the Bishop of **Rome** is the head of the Church's bishops and the entire church body. He is the Pope (father) and the supreme teacher and shepherd of the church. [882, 937]. The Pope authority has roots in a doctrine called *primacy* from the Latin word meaning **first** [881]. Peter was the first Pope claims the Church since he was first among the apostles and also was primary ruler of the church [552, 765, 862]. When he speaks in his official capacity as Pope 1) he speaks with the **authority** of Christ 2) his declarations are **infallible**, immutable and irrevocable 3) he is **never** wrong even if his line of reasoning to arrive at his conclusion is totally wrong. Once he makes a statement it is infallible.

“We teach and declare that, according to the gospel evidence, a primary jurisdiction over the whole church of God was immediately and directly promised to the blessed apostle Peter and conferred on him by Christ the Lord.” – Vatican I First Dogmatic Constitution of the Church chapter 1.

It is interesting to note that like so many other teachings of the church the infallibility of the Pope was an **evolved dogma**. In contrast to the divine revelation of scripture in which God revealed himself to man directly via inspiration (2 Tim 3.16); the teaching of the church regarding many of the claims about Mary, the Mass, the Bishops and the Pope were **discovered** having risen up from among the masses of the church and then later “pronounced, declared and defined,” in some dogmatic statement (dogma) by a sitting Pope. In other words, the church does not get all of its doctrine from a fixed standard of divine truth which it receives but from within its own structure of teaches. Papal infallibility was one of those evolved doctrines.

TEACHING AUTHORITY [85-90, 168-171, 888-892, 2032-2040, 2049-2051]

The RCC teaches that God has appointed the bishops as the teachers of the Catholic faith. The teaching authority that resides in the bishops is called the Magisterium – from Latin for **Master**. Only the bishops have the right to judge and teach the true meaning of revelation [85, 100, 939].

“The task of giving an authentic interpretation of the Word of God, whether in its written form or in the form of tradition, has been entrusted to the living teaching office of the Church alone. Its authority in this matter is exercised in the name of Jesus Christ.” – Vatican II – Dogmatic Constitution on Divine revelation – No. 10

The Catholic faithful are to obey the bishops as they would obey Jesus Christ.

“The bishops have by divine institution taken the place of the apostles as pastors of the Church, in such wise that whoever listens to them is listening to Christ and whoever despises them despises Christ and him who Christ sent.” – Vatican II- Dogmatic Constitution of the Church No. 20

Therefore:

“...the faithful, for their part are obliged to submit to their bishop’s decision, made in the name of Christ, in matters of faith and morals, and to adhere to it with a ready and respectful allegiance of mind.” – Vatican II- Dogmatic Constitution of the Church No. 25.

When they say matters of faith they mean confirming all teaching about Mary, the Mass, the Eucharist, etc. Morals has to do with matters of conduct. So, the church can claim for itself “*Semper Eadem*” or its teaching is **always the same** and always consistent.

INFALLIBILITY [890-891, 2032-2040, 2051]

The Bishops

The RCC teaches that the collective of the bishops teaching in **infallible**. This infallibility applies whether expressed by decree of a council or by way of every day ministry [2033-2034].

The Pope

The RCC teaches that this infallibility extend to the Pope in a very special way. As stated many times he is the Head of the Church – The Holy See so he has special insight and revelation.

“...we teach and define as divinely revealed dogma that when the Roman pontiff speaks *ex cathedra*, that is, when in the exercise of his office as shepherd and teacher of all Christians, in virtue of his supreme apostolic authority, he defines a doctrine concerning the faith or morals to be held by the whole church, he possesses, by the divine assistance promised to him in blessed Peter, that infallibility which the divine Redeemer willed his church to enjoy in defining doctrine concerning faith or morals. Vatican I – First Dogmatic Constitution of the Church: Session 4, chapter 4

To speak *ex cathedra* literally means to speak from the chair of **authority**. The Pope occupies the offices of *prophet, priest and king* in the RCC. The RCC teaches that he does not and cannot teach **false doctrine**. Vatican II therefore declared that he needs no further affirmation and his teaching is never to be questioned... Dogmatic Constitution no 25.

In addition, when the Pope speaks at any other time even when it is not *ex cathedra* or *out of the chair* he is still to be obey on the basis of apostolic authority.

A BIBLICAL RESPONSE

One would think that at a time when more people than ever are educated and there is more technology available meaning the Pope's and bishop's words and dogmas can be easily compared – that the infallibility teaching would fall by the wayside. Not so, in fact they are doubling down on it. The church has up until Pope Francis unswervingly maintained infallibility and the "always the same," stance on Church doctrine.

SCRIPTURE IS THE ONLY INFALLIBLE GUIDE FOR THE CHRISTIAN.

The RCC places lots of weight on the **inheritance** of the papal authority by the Pope and the inheritance of apostolic authority by the bishops. There is no doubt that the apostles' teaching was important and foundational. *Ac 2:42 And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. Eph 2:20 having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, Yet they did not claim inerrancy. The only infallible thing the apostles ever said is what the Holy Spirit inspired them to write (2 Tim 3.16).*

Paul did not claim infallibility nor did he recognize it in Peter. *Ga 1:8-9*

The only standard of measure for examining teaching is the **scriptures**. At the time of New Testament writing that referred to the Old Testament. Today it refers to the entire Bible.

- *1 Th 5:21 Test all things; hold fast what is good.*
- *Is 8:20 To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.*
- *Ac 17:11 These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so.*

It is the word of God that we must heed and hold on to. Even under the ministry of anointed Bible teachers ultimately it is the word of God that must **measure** the message.

- *2 Pe 1:19 -21 ...for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.*
- *2 Ti 3:16 All Scripture is given by inspiration of God,...*

THE HOLY SPIRIT IS THE ONLY INFALLIBLE AND AUTHORITATIVE TEACHER FOR THE CHRISTIAN

The RCC uses the idea that it is a **moral** “necessity” that the Magisterium be infallible. Without the magisterium chaos would reign and there would be myriad opinions on the meaning of scripture.

It is indeed an attractive idea that there would be one teaching authority to establish what the Word of God means and how it applies. God did not however supply such an earthly authority and the idea of inventing one has not helped. The fact is that the New Catechism for the Catholic Church which was finished in 1992 and finished in English in 1994 is proof of that fact. It was written because of schisms, division and competing doctrines in the RCC. Here are some of the ongoing battles for truth in the RCC.

- The existence of angels
- The direct creation of the human soul (allowing for biological evolution)
- The fall of Adam and original sin
- The virgin birth
- The atonement of Christ – is it necessary?
- The reality of the mass – is the sacrifice real? Transubstantiation?
- The presence of Christ in the Eucharist
- The infallibility of the Magisterium
- The hierarchy and the papal authority
- The efficiency of sacraments
- The Trinity
- Purgatory
- Sexual ethics

All of those the teachers are arguing about. The following the laity or the catholic faithful are questioning:

- The use of contraception
- Exclusion of women from bishopric
- Celibacy

The Magisterium is not a "moral necessity". God gave the **Holy Spirit** for the purpose of guiding us into all truth and holiness (Jn 16.13-15; Jn 14.16-18; Eph 1.13; Rom 8.14; Acts 8.29).

The Holy Spirit raises up elders, pastors teachers to **equip** the saints. (Eph 4.11-12; Titus 1.9). There is never contradiction between the Holy Spirit and The Word. Or better stated, the Holy Spirit is never guiding any teacher to say or instruct in **disregard** or **contradiction** of God's Word.

God has written His book to **ordinary** Christians – yes to the saints, bishops and deacons (Phil 1.1) but not to anyone who will rule over or ride over the others. In 1 Peter 5.1-4 Peter [the supposed first Pope] taught the dispersed leaders – shepherd to pastor or tend the flock voluntarily and not for illicit or unreasonable gain. They were never to "lord it over the flock". What does that mean? It means that there is no hierarchy and no one has the final authority or the final word But Jesus.

The Bible and the Magisterium

The RCC acknowledges the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit and the authority of the Bible [101-108, 737-741, 788]. Yet the RCC maintains that the Magisterium and **not** the Bible holds **ultimate** authority.

"...the teaching office of the church is more important than the Bible: only and infallible church can tell us what books belong to the Scripture, and only and infallible Church can interpret the true meaning of Scripture; no one can do this for himself. Thus the Catholic can read only one Bible, the Bible which is published by the Church. In other words: The immediate and highest rule of faith is the living office of the Church." – *Dogmatic Theology for the Laity*¹ –

¹ Mathias Premm, *Dogmatic Theology for the Laity* (Rockford IL: Tan Books, 1967), pg 29

Vatican II seemed to point to more Biblical authority and was encouraging people to read the Bible where in the past they had not done so. Yet, still thought they are encouraged to read they are not allowed to decide what it means.

“...in matter of faith and morals, belonging as they do to the establishing of Christian doctrine. That meaning of holy scripture must be held to be the true one, which holy mother church held and holds, since it is her right to judge of the true meaning and interpretation of holy scripture. In consequence, it is not permissible for anyone to interpret Holy Scripture in a sense contrary to this, or indeed against the unanimous consent of the fathers.” – Vatican I – Session 3, “Dogmatic Constitution on the Catholic Faith, ” chapter 2, “On Revelation”

Even Catholic Scholars and theologians are **required** to teach “under the watchful eye of the Magisterium.”

An Example case.

Turn in your Bible to Exodus 20.4-5

Okay we have one more week to wrap this up.