

Chapter 17 — Catholic Teaching

The Infallible Magisterium

A statement presented by the patriarch at the June 1962 session of the Central Commission with respect to a draft of a schema “On respect for the magisterium of the Church.”

No. 6 distinguishes in the Church between the infallible and immutable *magisterium* of the pope and an ecumenical council and the “non-infallible” *magisterium*, which requires not only a respectful silence but also an “internal religious compliance,” so much so that “when the Roman pontiffs in their actions concerning a matter that had hitherto been controversial, having given their attention to it, lay down a decision, that matter, according to the thinking and wishes of the same pontiffs, can no longer be considered a question for free disputation among the theologians.” May we be permitted to make the following remarks on this subject:

1. The “non-infallible” *magisterium* is, by the very strength of the term and by definition, “fallible,” and thus susceptible to error. If it is susceptible to error, like every other human teaching, even the most authoritative, the intervention of the pope cannot give to the doctrine that he proposes either the force of a dogma of faith or such a certitude that it removes every basis for possible discussion. Otherwise this “fallible” or “noninfallible” teaching would be practically equivalent to an “infallible” definition. The schema must explain clearly what the internal and essential difference is between the “infallible” teaching of the Roman pontiffs and their teaching that is theoretically called “fallible” but that still is to be considered as practically infallible, not allowing discussion. We do not wish to deny the assertion of the schema, but we ask that a clarification be presented, for, apparently, such an assertion seems to have no other goal than to extend surreptitiously the scope of pontifical infallibility and to transform into immutable certitudes, and thus practically dogmas, all the teaching of the popes, which, as is well known, includes, especially in recent years, almost all the field of human knowledge.
2. It is necessary to specify whether this exceptional authority of the pontifical teaching also extends, and if so to what extent, to all the dicasteries of the Roman Curia and to the persons who constitute it. Some of our separated brethren complain at times that in the Catholic Church everyone considers himself somewhat infallible.
3. It is also necessary to state precisely that this practical infallibility claimed for the teaching of the popes, even outside every dogmatic definition as such, does not extend to disciplinary measures taken by the Roman Curia, measures susceptible of being based on inexact information or on human motives.
4. While safeguarding the deposit of the faith, it is necessary, it seems to us, to avoid a continuously increasing constriction of the area of truths that are called in our Eastern tradition *theologoumena*: truths that have not yet been transformed into dogmas and

whose reasoned discussion constitutes the proper work of theology. Their denial is not reasonable, but it does not automatically draw the thunderbolt of ecclesiastical censures. In other words, there should be no fear of leaving the widest possible field to the freedom of reasoned theological reflection, but with the way open for intervention if the domain of dogma is in danger. Certain Catholic authorities behave as if, for them, everything must be certain and evident. There is a violent reaction when what to them appears evident is not so in others' eyes. Many troubles in the Church would be avoided if persons knew how to be firm on dogmas and definite truths, while respecting freedom of theological thought for all other matters.

Thomism

A statement presented by the patriarch at the session of the Central Commission in June 1962.

It is our opinion that, in spite of the very high regard that one must have for St. Thomas Aquinas, it is not fitting that this council should declare that his doctrine is purely and simply the very doctrine of the Church or of the council. Therein is the risk that the Angelic Doctor be substituted for all the teaching and the entire Tradition of the Church. From the viewpoint of bringing Christians together, there is more than one disadvantage in the pure and simple adoption of the whole Thomistic system as the Church's own doctrine. Here are a few examples:

1. The Thomistic system, in fact, cannot be called universal in the Church. The East, in particular, possesses another theological system, which must not be cast aside from Catholic thought.
2. Thomistic terminology does not always conform with that in traditional usage in the Eastern Church, especially on the subject of the sacraments.
3. There is an involuntary risk of giving St. Thomas' doctrine more consideration than the collective thought of the Fathers who constitute the ecclesial Tradition. In addition, the patristic thought of St. Thomas, although commendable for his epoch, is deficient on certain points compared with modern research.
4. St. Thomas is of his epoch and shares a good number of the prejudices of his time in regard to Easterners. He must not be utilized in dialogue with the Orthodox except with discretion.
5. Finally, Scholasticism, which is dependant on St. Thomas, has gradually made certain positions of its master more inflexible, and renders dialogue with the Orthodox still more difficult.

However that may be, Thomism is perhaps the most perfect expression of the theological evolution of the West in the Middle Ages. But Eastern theology does not die easily. It is better to leave the framework of the Church's universal theology open to a number of currents. Thus while recommending St. Thomas for the study of theologians, the council must avoid making it something absolute. Divinity is infinitely rich and varied. Nothing is more impoverishing than to contemplate it from a single viewpoint

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It is impossible to accept in a text emanating from this council, and thus of universal significance both as to time and as to place, a constantly repeated call for the adoption in

Catholic teaching of the doctrine, the method, and the principles of St. Thomas. Although dogma, as a revealed given fact, cannot change, its human expression, on the contrary, is subject to variation. It is the fruit of each people's own cultural spirit, a result of its mental inclination, its traditions, and of the circumstances under which its history has unfolded. In right and in fact, a number of currents of theological thought have existed and will exist in the Church, without prejudice to the fundamental unity of dogma. To tie dogma to a human culture necessarily coexistent with the particular civilization of a people, is unlawful and actually impossible, because it is against nature. Besides, that is to impoverish it, reduce it, whereas it is the message of God to men, all men. It is agreed that Thomism, itself an heir of Aristotelian philosophic thought, has contributed much to the Church, and that present day theological expression owes much to it, and it is only just to recognize it; but one cannot impose it, bind it to dogma, above all in a conciliar document.