

SUNDAY CATECHISM / 13

The Magisterium

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Sunday Catechism



In today's lesson we reflect on the Magisterium of the Church.

- Where does the Magisterium stand in respect to Revelation and the two sources of Revelation?

Firstly, the Magisterium **is not a third source of Revelation**, therefore it cannot be considered on the same level as Sacred Scripture and Divine Tradition.

Exactly what its place is, is explained by a text of the Dogmatic Constitution Dei Verbum, in paragraph number 10:

" The task of authentically interpreting the word of God, whether written or handed on, (8) has been entrusted exclusively to the living teaching office of the Church, (9) whose authority is exercised in the name of Jesus Christ. This teaching office is not above the word of God, but serves it, teaching only what has been handed on".

This means the Magisterium of the Church does not have a constitutive role. It does not constitute Revelation, it is not one of the sources or modes of transmission of Revelation, but instead has an **interpretative role** and in this sense it is traditionally also called **regula fidei proxima**, i.e. the proximate rule of faith. Whereas the remote rule of faith, the Holy Scriptures and Tradition, are its foundation.

- What does the Proximate Rule mean?

It means that the Magisterium gives us the authentic interpretation of these sources and therefore takes the part of an interpretative element.

- What are the implications of the text quoted above?

1- The Word of God, must never be understood as a synonym of the Bible. The Word of God is Revelation and consequently includes the written and oral, the Scriptures and Tradition. This must always be remembered.

2- What is meant by the Magisterium being an interpretative and not a constitutive element? It means that it does not constitute a new Revelation, it does not add material to Revelation. It is by Faith that Revelation reaches completion and concludes with the death of the apostles.

Revelation is not in constant development, it ended with the death of the apostles and with it we have a defined and established *depositum*.

- Does this mean that Revelation is a dead letter?

It doesn't, because being Divine Revelation is a depositum that is always alive, always contemporary, always investigable and inexhaustible in its power of illumination and vivification of the person who approaches Revelation. The fact that it is a completed

does not mean that it belongs to the past.

It means, on the other hand, that no new Revelation is to be expected and nor anything that would transcend Revelation. The only thing that can "transcend" Revelation is the beatific vision, which is not a new Revelation but lifts the veil before us.

Therefore there is no more perfect Gospel yet to be revealed, as various schools of thought suggest and are expecting.

An important difference needs to be drawn between:

- **The development of dogma, also called organic development**

- **The idea of change, or evolution with discontinuity.**

These are two opposite concepts.

As Revelation, is in itself complete, its development is on our part, not on the part of Revelation. The dogma, the doctrine develops, is specified and is expressed. It is like a body that develops, it is always the same body, which maintains its own physical characteristics, the same order and relationship between the parts, but like a child it grows and develops into an adult.

- **How is the development of dogma, which is a factual reality, historically brought about?**

- From the **in-depth** study of linguistic knowledge and expression.

- From the **development of heresies, errors, new theological hypotheses** which push us to deepen, clarify and distinguish.

Dei Verbum, paragraph 10, also explains that the Magisterium of the Church, with the help of the Holy Spirit,

"(...) listening to it devoutly, guarding it scrupulously and explaining it faithfully in accord with a divine commission (...), it draws from this one deposit of faith everything which it presents for belief as divinely revealed".

This text insists that the **Magisterium is dependent on the Word of God, understood as Scripture and Tradition**. Therefore once again, we find the scope of the Magisterium is the interpretation of the Word of God, subjected to and faithful to Revelation.

3. The third consideration that we can draw from Dei Verbum's text concerns the content. The content of the Magisterium is only **what has been passed down**, which in the traditional way is defined as **res fidei et morum**. As for the content, the Magisterium does not deal with everything, but only with what has been passed down.

The object of faith is classically divided into a primary object and a secondary object:

- **The primary object is that contained in the depositum fidei.**
- **The secondary object are those contents specifically of faith and morality, which are not directly contained in the depositum fidei, but are necessarily connected to it.**

It is not possible to preserve, safeguard, expose the depositum fidei correctly if I do not also defend that truth which is directly and necessarily connected to it. At the same time, I cannot insert what is not contained and connected to it.

An Example. If it is necessary to explain the principle of mankind's relationship with Creation - a principle that falls within the competence of the Magisterium - then it is necessary to explain how this principle is present and presented in Revelation. But the Magisterium does not have the competence to say that a certain measure debated in the scientific field (eg: CO2 emission) is the most adequate to respect Creation. It is not its responsibility.

Another example. The very topical issue of vaccinations. Certainly it is part of the Magisterium that mankind should prudently protect his own health and that of others; on the other hand, it is not the competence of the Magisterium in any way to define exactly what the strategies are for achieving personal and public health. Only what has been passed down falls within the specific content and object of the Magisterium.

If it is true that it has been passed down that one cannot take his own life but must guard it, he cannot damage his own health and that of others, with all the consequences that implies. It has not been passed down, however, that this or that specific serum or drug, etc. is the most suitable to achieve this purpose.

There is currently a tendency to significantly stretch the mesh of the Magisterium's purpose in order to include indications that don't concern it; while on the other hand, an attempt is being made to restrict it to avoid clear teachings, which some do not want to accept.

