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**INTERNATIONAL  
THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION**

**THESES ON THE  
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN  
THE ECCLESIASTICAL  
MAGISTERIUM AND  
THEOLOGY**

**With Commentary**



# THESES ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE ECCLESIASTICAL MAGISTERIUM AND THEOLOGY

INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION

June 6, 1976

THE THESES SUMMARIZE THE CONCLUSIONS OF A  
PLENARY SESSION OF THE INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL  
COMMISSION HELD SEPTEMBER 25 - OCTOBER 1, 1975.  
THEY WERE DRAWN UP BY REV. OTTO SEMMELROTH, S.J.  
AND REV. KARL LEHMANN AND WERE APPROVED BY THE  
"GREAT MAJORITY" OF THE COMMISSION.

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A COMMENTARY ON THE THESES OF THE  
INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION  
ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE  
ECCLESIASTICAL MAGISTERIUM AND THEOLOGY

By

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# THESES ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE ECCLESIASTICAL MAGISTERIUM AND THEOLOGY

## Introduction

“The relations between the magisterium and theology not only . . . are of the greatest importance but must also be considered to be of very great contemporary interest today.”<sup>1</sup> The following pages are an attempt to clarify the relationship between “the mandate given to the ecclesiastical magisterium to protect divine revelation and the task given to theologians to investigate and explain the doctrine of the faith.”<sup>2</sup>

### Thesis 1

By “ecclesiastical magisterium” is meant the task of teaching which by Christ’s institution is proper to the college of bishops or to individual bishops linked in hierarchical communion with the Supreme Pontiff. By “theologians” are meant those members of the Church who by their studies and life in the community of the Church’s faith are qualified to pursue, in the scientific manner proper to theology, a deeper understanding of the Word of God and also to teach that Word by virtue of a canonical mission. When the New Testament and the subsequent tradition discussed the magisterium of pastors, theologians or teachers, and the relationship between them, they spoke analogously, in terms both of similarity and dissimilarity; along with continuity, there are rather profound modifications. The concrete forms in which they have been related to one another and co-ordinated have been rather varied in the course of time.

# **I. Elements Common to the Magisterium and to Theologians in the Exercise of their Tasks**

## **Thesis 2**

The element common to the tasks of both the magisterium and theologians, though it is realized in analogous and distinct fashions, is "to preserve the sacred deposit of revelation, to examine it more deeply, to explain, teach and defend it,"<sup>3</sup> for the service of the people of God and for the whole world's salvation. Above all, this service must defend the certainty of faith; this is a work done differently by the magisterium and by the ministry of theologians, but it is neither necessary nor possible to establish a hard and fast separation between them.

## **Thesis 3**

In this common service of the truth, the magisterium and theologians are both bound by certain obligations:

1. They are bound by the Word of God. For "the magisterium is not above the Word of God, but serves it, teaching only what has been handed down, as . . . it listens to this, guards it scrupulously, and expounds it faithfully; and it draws from this one deposit of faith all that it proposes as being divinely revealed."<sup>4</sup> For its part, "sacred theology relies on the written Word of God along with sacred Tradition as on a permanent foundation, and by this Word it is most firmly strengthened and constantly rejuvenated as it searches out, under the light of faith, all the truth stored up in the mystery of Christ."<sup>5</sup>

2. They are both bound by the "sensus fidei" (supernatural appreciation of the faith) of the Church of this and previous times. For the Word of God pervades all time in a living manner through the supernatural appreciation of the faith (communi sensu fidei) of the whole people of God, in which "the whole body of the faithful, anointed by the Holy One, cannot err in believing,"<sup>6</sup> if "in maintaining, practicing and confessing the faith that has been handed down, there is a harmony between the bishops and the faithful."<sup>7</sup>

3. Both are bound by the documents of the tradition in which the common faith of the people of God has been set forth. Although the magisterium and the theologians have different tasks with regard to these documents, neither of them can neglect

these traces of the faith left in the history of salvation of God's people.

4. In exercising their tasks, both are bound by pastoral and missionary concern for the world. Although the magisterium of the Supreme Pontiff and of the bishops is specifically called "pastoral," the scientific character of their work does not free theologians from pastoral and missionary responsibility, especially given the publicity which modern communications media so quickly give to even scientific matters. Besides, theology, as a vital function in and for the people of God, must have a pastoral and missionary intent and effect.

#### Thesis 4

Common to both, although also different in each, is the manner, at once collegial and personal, in which the task of both the magisterium and the theologians is carried out. If the charism of infallibility is promised to "the whole body of the faithful,"<sup>8</sup> to the College of Bishops in communion with the Successor of Peter, and to the Supreme Pontiff himself, the head of that College,<sup>9</sup> then it should be put into practice in a co-responsible, co-operative, and collegial association of the members of the magisterium and of individual theologians. And this joint effort should also be realized as much among the members of the magisterium as among the members of the theological enterprise, and also between the magisterium on the one hand and the theologians on the other. It should also preserve the personal and indispensable responsibility of individual theologians, without which the science of faith would make no progress.

## II. Differences between the Magisterium and Theologians

### Thesis 5

Something must first be said about the difference in the functions proper to the magisterium and to theologians.

1. It is the magisterium's task authoritatively to defend the catholic integrity and unity of faith and morals. From this follow specific functions; and, although at first glance they seem particularly to be of a rather negative character, they are, rather, a positive ministry for the life of the Church. These are: "the task of authoritatively interpreting the Word of God, written and handed-down,"<sup>10</sup> the censuring of opinions which endanger the faith and morals proper to the Church, the proposing of truths which are of particular contemporary relevance. Although it is not the work of the magisterium to propose theological syntheses, still, because of its concern for unity, it must consider individual truths in the light of the whole, since integrating a particular truth into the whole belongs to the very nature of truth.

2. The theologians' function in some way mediates between the magisterium and the People of God. For "theology has a two-fold relation with the magisterium of the Church and with the universal community of Christians. In the first place, it occupies a sort of mid-way position between the faith of the Church and its magisterium."<sup>11</sup> On the one hand, "in each of the great socio-cultural regions, . . . theological reflection must submit to a new examination, guided by the tradition of the universal Church, the facts and words revealed by God, contained in the Scriptures, and explained by the Fathers of the Church and by the magisterium."<sup>12</sup> For "recent research and discoveries in the sciences, in history and philosophy, bring up new questions which . . . require new investigations by theologians."<sup>13</sup> In this way, theology "is to lend its aid to make the magisterium in its turn the enduring light and norm of the Church."<sup>14</sup>

On the other hand, by their work of interpretation, teaching and translation into contemporary modes of thought, theologians insert the teaching and warnings of the magisterium into a wider, synthetic context and thus contribute to a better knowledge on the part of the People of God. In this way, "they lend their aid to the task of spreading, clarifying, confirming and defending the truth which the magisterium authoritatively propounds."<sup>15</sup>



## Thesis 6

The magisterium and the theologians also differ in the quality of the authority with which they carry out their tasks.

1. The magisterium derives its authority from sacramental ordination which “along with the task of sanctifying confers also the tasks of teaching and ruling.”<sup>16</sup> This “formal authority,” as it is called, is at once charismatic and juridical, and it founds the right and the duty of the magisterium insofar as it is a share in the authority of Christ. Care should be taken that personal authority and the authority that derives from the very matter being proposed also be brought to bear when this ministerial authority is being put into effect.

2. Theologians derive their specifically theological authority from their scientific qualifications; but these cannot be separated from the proper character of this discipline as the science of faith which cannot be carried through without a living experience and practice of the faith. For this reason, the authority that belongs to theology in the Church is not merely profane and scientific, but is a genuinely ecclesial authority, inserted into the order of authorities that derive from the Word of God and are confirmed by canonical mission.

## Thesis 7

There is also a certain difference in the way in which the magisterium and the theologians are connected with the Church. It is obvious that both the magisterium and the theologians work in and for the Church, but still there is a difference in this ecclesial reference.

1. The magisterium is an official ecclesial task conferred by the sacrament of Orders. Therefore, as an institutional element of the Church, it can only exist in the Church, so that the individual members of the magisterium use their authority and sacred power to build up their flocks in truth and holiness.<sup>17</sup> This responsibility applies not only to the particular churches under their charge, but “as members of the episcopal College, . . . each of them must by Christ’s institution and command show a care for the universal Church which . . . would be a great benefit for the universal Church.”<sup>18</sup>

2. Even when it is not exercised in virtue of an explicit "canonical mission," theology can only be done in a living communion with the faith of the Church. For this reason, all the baptized, insofar as they both really live the life of the Church and enjoy scientific competence, can carry out the task of the theologian, a task which derives its own force from the life of the Holy Spirit in the Church which is communicated by the sacraments, the preaching of the Word of God, and the communion of love.

## Thesis 8

The difference between the magisterium and the theologians takes on a special character when one considers the freedom proper to them and the critical function that follows from it with regard to the faithful, to the world, and even to one another.

1. By its nature and institution, the magisterium is clearly free in carrying out its task. This freedom carries with it a great responsibility. For that reason, it is often difficult, although necessary, to use it in such a way that it not appear to theologians and to others of the faithful to be arbitrary or excessive. There are some theologians who prize scientific theology too highly, not taking enough account of the fact that respect for the magisterium is one of the specific elements of the science of theology. Besides, contemporary democratic sentiments often give rise to a movement of solidarity against what the magisterium does in carrying out its task of protecting the teaching of faith and morals from any harm. Still, it is necessary, though not easy, to find always a mode of procedure which is both free and forceful, yet not arbitrary or destructive of communion in the Church.

2. To the freedom of the magisterium there corresponds in its own way the freedom that derives from the true scientific responsibility of theologians. It is not an unlimited freedom, for, besides being bound to the truth, it is also true of theology that "in the use of any freedom, the moral principle of personal and social responsibility must be observed."<sup>19</sup> But the theologians' task of interpreting the documents of the past and present magisterium, of putting them in the context of the whole of revealed truth, and of finding a better understanding of them by the use of hermeneutics, brings with it a somewhat critical function which obviously should be exercised positively rather than destructively.

## Thesis 9

The exercise of their tasks by the magisterium and theologians often gives rise to a certain tension. But this is not surprising, nor should one expect that such tension will ever be fully resolved here on earth. On the contrary, wherever there is genuine life, tension also exists. Such tension need not be interpreted as hostility or real opposition, but can be seen as a vital force and an incentive to a common carrying out of the respective tasks by way of dialogue.

### **III. A Method for Promoting Today the Relationship between Theologians and the Magisterium**

#### **Thesis 10**

The basis and condition for the possibility of this dialogue between theologians and the magisterium are community in the faith of the Church and service in building up the Church. They embrace the diverse functions of the magisterium and theologians. On the one hand, this unity in the communication and participation in the truth is a habitual association which is antecedent to every concrete dialogue; on the other, it is itself strengthened and enlivened by the various relations dialogue entails. Thus dialogue provides excellent reciprocal assistance: the magisterium can gain a greater understanding as it defends and preaches the truth of faith and morals, and the theological understanding of faith and morals gains in certainty from corroboration by the magisterium.

#### **Thesis 11**

The dialogue between the magisterium and theologians is limited only by the truth of faith which must be served and explained. For this reason, the whole vast field of truth lies open to such dialogue. But this truth is not something uncertain and utterly unknown, always having to be sought; it has been revealed and handed on to the Church to be faithfully kept. Therefore, the dialogue reaches its limits when the limits of the faith are reached.

This goal of the dialogue, the service of the truth, is often endangered. The following types of behavior especially limit the possibility of dialogue: wherever the dialogue becomes an "instrument" for gaining some end "politically," that is, by applying pressure and ultimately abstracting from the question of truth, the effort is bound to fail; if a person "unilaterally" claims the whole field of the dialogue, he violates the rules of discussion; the dialogue between the magisterium and theologians is especially violated if the level of argument and discussion is prematurely abandoned and means of coercion, threat, and sanction are immediately brought to bear; the same thing holds when the discussion between theologians and the magisterium is carried out by means of publicity, whether within or outside the Church, which is not sufficiently expert in the matter, and thus "pressures" from without have a great deal of influence, e.g. the Mass media.

## Thesis 12

Before opening an official examination of a theologian's writings, the competent authority should exhaust all the ordinary possibilities of reaching agreement through dialogue on a doubtful opinion (e.g., personal conversation, or inquiries and replies in correspondence). If by these forms of dialogue no real consensus can be reached, the magisterium should employ a full and flexible stock of responses, beginning with various forms of warning, "verbal sanctions," etc. In a very serious case, the magisterium—after consulting theologians of various schools and having exhausted the means of dialogue—for its part must necessarily clarify the compromised truth and safeguard the faith of the believers.

According to the classical rules, the fact of one's professing "heresy" can only be definitively established if the accused theologian has demonstrated "obstinacy," that is, if he closes himself off from all discussion meant to clarify an opinion contrary to the faith and, in effect, refuses the dialogue. The fact of heresy can be established only after all the rules of the hermeneutics of dogmas and all the theological qualifications have been applied. In this way, even in decisions which cannot be avoided, the true "ethos" of the dialogue-procedure can be preserved.

June 6, 1976

## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> Pope Paul VI, "Address to the International Congress on the Theology of Vatican II," October 1, 1966, *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, 58 (1966), 890.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 891

<sup>4</sup> Vatican II, *Dei Verbum*, no. 10.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 24.

<sup>6</sup> Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 12.

<sup>7</sup> Vatican II, *Dei Verbum*, no. 10.

<sup>8</sup> Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 12.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 25.

<sup>10</sup> Vatican II, *Dei Verbum*, no. 10.

<sup>11</sup> Pope Paul VI, *loc. cit.*, p. 892.

<sup>12</sup> Vatican II, *Ad Gentes*, no. 22.

<sup>13</sup> Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 62.

<sup>14</sup> Pope Paul VI, *loc. cit.*, p. 892.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 891.

<sup>16</sup> Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 21.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 27

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 23.

<sup>19</sup> Vatican II, *Dignitatis Humanae*, no. 7.



# A COMMENTARY ON THE THESES OF THE INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE ECCLESIASTICAL MAGISTERIUM AND THEOLOGY

## Introduction

The theme which the International Theological Commission discussed in its October, 1975 meeting is the same topic which Pope Paul VI spoke about in his address to the International Congress on the Theology of the Second Vatican Council, October 1, 1966. It seems only fitting, then, to refer to some of the views he expressed then.

In particular, it should be noted that the relationship between the ecclesiastical magisterium and theology is a close one. By way of introduction, this relationship might perhaps be explained as follows: it is the task of the whole Church and therefore of those organs especially delegated for it, to proclaim to men the word which it has heard. Two tasks, then, have to be carried out simultaneously: hearing the Word of God and proclaiming it by a witness of both word and life. This latter must be undertaken by the common witness of all the faithful, but in a special way by the witness of those equipped for this either by official ministry or by scientific qualifications. This indivisible unity of hearing and teaching has a different nuance in the two different ways in which the task of teaching is carried out, ministerially or scientifically. One could perhaps say that the theologians' primary task is the hearing of the Word of God—in a qualified, scientific way, of course—while the task of the ecclesiastical magisterium is more that of proclaiming the Word of God it has heard, but with the help of theological experts.

## Thesis 1

Two questions are considered in this thesis. First it is necessary to discuss what is meant by the terms "ecclesiastical magisterium" and "theologians." Both of them in fact can be understood to have a teaching office for the task of teaching belongs both to bishops and to theologians, although in different ways. At the same time, it should be noted that discussion of the ecclesiastical magisterium and of teachers has not been carried on in univocal terms in every age of the Church. Analogy applies here, both with regard to the understanding of the two realities and with regard to the concrete way in which they are exercised. For example, in some

earlier times more than in later ones, the office of bishop and the exercise of theology were undertaken by the same person. Later, the ecclesiastical magisterium and scientific theology were linked rather by way of cooperation.

**Part I** considers elements which are common to the ecclesiastical magisterium and to theologians as they carry out their tasks. For it is very important, while noting the diversity of the two tasks, not to forget that they must cooperate with one another as they fulfill their ecclesiastical functions.

## Thesis 2

In fact, true theology, understood in the Catholic sense, is no less a task to be undertaken within the Church than is the ecclesiastical magisterium. Each task must safeguard the certainty of faith, whether by a deeper understanding and scientific defense of the faith, or by authoritatively proclaiming it and defending it against adversaries.

## Thesis 3

Certain common obligations bind both the magisterium and the theologians. It is true that the authority which each enjoys differs from that of the other, but in both the magisterium and the theologians' task there is a genuine authority. For this reason, each must be aware that this authority is not absolute, but has to be exercised in the form of service, the service of the Word of God. This hearing or "obedience of faith" (Rom. 1:5; 16:26) accomplished by theologians by means of their scientific investigations serves that better hearing which theologians offer to bishops, and this co-operation with them serves the proclamation of the Word of God which bishops undertake.

In carrying out this common task, both theologians and the magisterium draw what the Word of God has communicated to the Church from the common faith (*E communi sensu fidelium*) of the community in the past and in the present. For what belongs to the common patrimony of the Church's faith becomes manifest in the faith of the universal Church in its varied dimensions, the whole Church of today and the whole Church of past ages.

In the course of time, the Church has left records by which the faith by which the Church lived in past ages may be discerned. The investigations of theologians and the witness of



the ecclesiastical magisterium are both bound to these, i.e., documents of various kinds which have come down to us, for they are the documents of the believing Church itself in its passage through history.

Theological investigations and the exercise of the magisterium's task are not undertaken purely for academic reasons or simply for the sake of polemical controversy. The reason why the truth of faith is investigated, why it is kept intact, why it is proclaimed as the Gospel, is pastoral and missionary. Men must be brought to live by faith. The pastoral character of the ecclesiastical magisterium is more apparent than that of the theologians. But the theologians themselves cannot undertake their task without some pastoral reference, and the care of souls is even an internal element of the theological enterprise itself. This pastoral character affects theology both negatively and positively. Negatively, it means that the theological effort must be careful that the faith of believers not suffer harm because difficult explanations and disputed questions reported in the public communications media are heard and seen by people who are unduly disturbed by such publications. Positively, it means that the theological effort is used in proclamation and preaching and in religious education. The theological effort, scientific as it is, not only cannot be kept behind closed doors, by its very purpose as a ministry in the service of the preaching of the Word of God, it affects the life of the ecclesiastical and human community.

#### Thesis 4

This thesis draws attention to the collegial or communitarian nature of both the magisterium's task and the theologians' enterprise. Although each of them can and must be carried out through the personal work of an individual bishop or theologian, still the pertinent charism given to each member of the magisterial and theological communities, is given because of their link with the college or the ecclesiastical community. This communion and collegiality must be respected in the carrying out of the office or of the scientific work. Special care should be taken for fostering community between the magisterial college and the community of those who devote themselves to the theological enterprise.

The Second Vatican Council made a special point of recalling the collegiality of the episcopal college, so that individual bishops neither should nor can perform their tasks without reference to the college. On the other hand, neither can theo-

logians perform their work if they do not pay attention to the work and opinions of their colleagues, and this not merely because of the demands of scientific method, but also because of the needs of a living community which is both intellectual and charismatic.

**Part II:** The common elements which link the task of the ecclesiastical magisterium and the ministry of theologians do not eliminate the difference between them. They differ especially on four points: the function proper to each, the quality of authority proper to each, the different way in which each is linked with the Church, and the proper and specific freedom each enjoys.

### Thesis 5

The magisterium exercises the role of defending the integrity and unity of faith and morals. This cannot be done merely by decree, but only according to the measure of the truth proposed in the exercise of the role. For this reason, it needs the help and cooperation of the science of the theologians who in fact attempt scientifically to uncover the truth of God's Word hidden in the words of men. The task of defending the integrity and unity of the faith at first glance appears rather negative or restrictive. In fact, however, it is carried out in a positive way for the life of the Church, *i.e.*, by the authoritative interpretation of the Word of God, which includes at once the exclusion of opinions contrary to faith and, much more, an introduction into a deeper understanding of the faith.

The remarks in Thesis 5,2, about the somewhat mediatorial function of theologians between the magisterium and the People of God, must not be understood exclusively. Still, it is a matter of great importance. For the things which the ecclesiastical magisterium proclaims as matters of faith or as ecclesiastical doctrines must be communicated with the help of theological interpretation and explanation to the People of God living here and now, who do not always correctly understand what the magisterium has taught in the past or is teaching now. On the other hand, the magisterium itself needs the cooperation of the theologians in order to discern what is true and what is erroneous in the faith of the Christian people, for the faith of the community of the People of God is also a norm for what the magisterium can proclaim and require all to accept. Since scientific means must be employed in carrying

out this task, the ecclesiastical magisterium needs the serious cooperation of the theologians. And theologians themselves must, therefore, be aware of this ministry.

#### Thesis 6

While the sources of the authority with which the ecclesiastical magisterium and the theologians fulfill their roles are distinct, the valid distinction should not lead to a false opposition.

On the one hand, the specific authority of the ecclesiastical magisterium derives from the sacramental ordination by which its members are brought into the college of bishops to which as such belongs the highest pastoral authority in the Church. But it should be noted that this "formal authority" should coincide with a certain personal authority, deriving either from the person's own behavior or from the scientific authority which a theologian acquires for himself by his study and research. These need not be mutually exclusive, as is clear in the case of a man consecrated a bishop and pastor in the Church who has also acquired the other authority for himself in theological study, or of a man consecrated a bishop and teacher who makes use of the help and cooperation of an expert theologian as he carries out his task.

As for the authority of a theologian, it should be noted that this is not only an intellectual authority, but also derives from his share in the life of the Church whose living faith is investigated and explained by the theological enterprise.

#### Thesis 7

There is no doubt that in exercising their tasks, both the ecclesiastical magisterium and theologians are bound to the Church; but the manner in which each is linked to the Church differs.

With regard to the ecclesiastical magisterium, the link with the Church derives from the fact that it is an office and ministry in and for the Church, which has no meaning outside the Church. And this is particularly true with regard to the office of teaching—magisterium—and all the more because this magisterium must be exercised in the manner of a judge who discerns the truth or falsehood of proposed opinions.

Similar comments hold also for theologians, when and to the degree that they carry out their task not only as research-

ers but also as teachers and do this by canonical mission. But even when the science of theology is pursued, not as an official exercise, but as personal research, it remains linked with the Church, for theology, as the science of faith, can only be carried out truly in the living context of the Church's faith. For the objective faith (*fides quae*) can only be investigated by those who live in the Church with a living subjective faith (*fides qua*.)

### Thesis 8

There is a great deal of talk today about the freedom of the science of theology, and this scientific freedom is often presented as incompatible with the restrictions which authority brings to bear. As a result, it is often overlooked that genuine freedom belongs to both the ecclesiastical magisterium and theological science, and that the freedom proper to the one must be respected by the other.

In discussing freedom, whether in the ecclesiastical magisterium or in scientific theology, it must not be forgotten that freedom is not license, but is linked with a great responsibility which necessarily puts restrictions on it. This remark must not destroy the scientific freedom of theologians, which itself, however, is not unlimited but is bound by the truth which has been proclaimed by the Word of God and guarded by the magisterium. No doubt it is very difficult to preserve the freedom of both magisterium and theologians. It is a constant struggle to exercise this freedom without violating its necessary restrictions and to observe and guard the restrictions without destroying the freedom proper to the ministry of the truth.

### Thesis 9

This thesis provides the transition to the third part which discusses a properly understood dialogue between the magisterium and theology. For from what has been said, it can hardly be doubted that tension will arise. Constant effort is required in order to keep in harmony the common and different elements. But such tension is always experienced whenever there are diverse elements which must co-exist but which are not easily synthesized. Dialogue is a means, if not simply for removing this tension, at least for making it fruitful.

(Otto Semmelroth, S.J.)

**Part III** of the theses offers a contribution to prevent the tension between magisterium and theologians described in Thesis 9 from harming the common good of the Church. There are many means and instruments available to prevent this, among which dialogue stands out as the chief way and a valid method for setting up a fruitful relationship between theologians and magisterium.

The notion of dialogue must be properly understood. It is not a vague conversation, indefinite and interminable. Dialogue serves the search for truth. If dialogue even at the highest level serves the true freedom and "initiative" of all participants, it does not take the place the role of the judges of the faith, and it must not impede decisions from the magisterium which are needed to defend the faith of the Church. Hence, "dialogue" must not be understood in a superficial and popular sense; it must be purified of these implications and be in accord with the Christian faith.

#### Thesis 10

Dialogue has certain presuppositions, without which it would not reach the truth. Every dialogue between the magisterium and theologians presupposes a basic "solidarity" which consists in the common faith of the Church. This unity respects and retains the diverse functions of the magisterium and of theology. True dialogue lives in and arises out of this common basis, and it would lack any sense if this profound community in the faith were absent or were simulated. For this reason, for a dialogue to lead to the truth, it must not be directed only by expertise, but above all by sincerity, by courage in stating the truth, and by eagerness to hear the truth. Since this community is often neglected or doubted today, it is necessary to emphasize this "basis" for all dialogue between magisterium and theologians must be stressed.

The thesis has another point: the proper functions of the magisterium and of theology must not be confused. If they keep to their own responsibilities, as these are set out at the end of the thesis, they will be an excellent help to one another. This thesis rejects the attempts of those who would more or less like to do away with the task of the magisterium and assign *exclusive* competency in matters of faith and morals to scientific theology and so to theologians.

#### Thesis 11

Consequently, the question arises of the limits of the

dialogue between magisterium and theologians. Two points are of major importance: (1) If community in the faith is preserved, there is no intrinsic limit to the dialogue, although this does not mean an indefinite process in the search for truth. (2) The dialogue method reaches its limits where the truth of faith is harmed.

But there are dangers intrinsic to dialogue which can destroy conversation. The dialogue can easily be damaged, for example, if means of external coercion are employed. While today this is not a grave danger, there is a new situation in the relation between magisterium and theologians which has not existed in this form until now. At one time the dialogue between magisterium and theologians on doubtful matters was conducted *directly*, between the competent authority and the individual theologian. Today, in cases of conflict, "publicity" often intervenes between magisterium and theologians. Thus pressure is applied, tactical moves are considered, etc., in all of which the "atmosphere" of dialogue is lost. The authenticity of the dialogue is thus reduced. Facts of this sort constitute a new situation, which certainly deserves further consideration.

#### Thesis 12

The theses do not intend to discuss specific questions and especially not juridical questions about the external structure of the dialogue, particularly in cases of conflict. But the thesis does intend to indicate the significance and the "locus" of the dialogue method before a formal doctrinal investigation is undertaken and, insofar as this is possible, even during the "Ratio agendi," (title of a document of the S. Cong. for the Doctrine of the Faith outlining the steps of a doctrinal investigation).\* The doctrinal procedure represents the last and decisive step, when all the other forms (see the text) have become vain and useless. The thesis recommends the use of the dialogue method even to the magisterium in the sense that it make use of a "graduated store" of reactions to doubtful opinions (see the ones proposed in the text). The classical rules of the hermeneutics of dogmas provide good and clear help. But the thesis also clearly recognizes that dialogue comes to an end when the theologian definitely contradicts the truth of faith. In this case, it is the theologian himself who in the last analysis has refused the dialogue.

(Karl Lehmann)

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\* *Nova agendi ratio in doctrinarum examine*, Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, January 15, 1974, AAS, 63 (1974), 234-36.



