

DIVINE GRACE AND HUMAN NATURE AS SOURCES FOR THE UNIVERSAL MAGISTERIUM OF BISHOPS

THOMAS F. O'MEARA, O.P.

[Theologians have discussed for a century and a half the ecclesial institution of the ordinary universal magisterium of bishops when it functions apart from an ecumenical council. Teaching by bishops from the entire world involves the activity and identity of the bishop and his relationship to other Christians who ponder and teach the faith. Analysis of how grace impacts the bishops in their scattered college has been little developed in theology as well as in the psychology and social interaction of the teaching. The author here looks at this activity of an episcopal teacher within the worldwide college as it flows from human nature and from divine grace.]

MANY QUESTIONS ARISE about the ecclesial institution of the ordinary universal magisterium of bishops when it exists or functions apart from an ecumenical council. An ecclesiology propounding episcopal activity by bishops from the entire world, a universal magisterium, is recent, and theories of how the bishops hold a united teaching within their scattered college are little developed. Furthermore, there would naturally be uncertainty about how one acts within a collective educational entity, indeed, within a teaching college whose members have little contact with each other. How is this activity of the bishop expressing the faith in a large group of individuals related to the Holy Spirit and to the wider Church?¹

My article explores the particular presence of the Holy Spirit, the role of grace, in this episcopal activity of teaching. "The ordinary universal magisterium . . . refers to the ordinary infallible teaching of the bishops, that

THOMAS F. O'MEARA, O.P., received his doctorate in theology from the Ludwig-Maximilian University in Munich. He is the William K. Warren Professor Emeritus at the University of Notre Dame. He has published widely in the areas of ecclesiology and ministry, theologies of grace, Thomas Aquinas, and German philosophical theology of the 19th and 20th centuries. His most recent books include *Erich Przywara, S.J.: His Theology and His World* (Notre Dame, 2002) and *A Theologian's Journey* (Paulist, 2002).

¹ See Ladislav Orsy, "Reflections on the Text of a Canon," in *Dissent in the Church*, Readings in Moral Theology, no. 6, ed. Charles E. Curran and Richard A. McCormick (New York: Paulist, 1988) 236 ff. Orsy also offers a valuable theology of thinking and believing within the Church in "On Being One with the Church Today," *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits* 7 (1975) 21–43.

teaching which occurs when the bishops, while dispersed throughout their local dioceses, nevertheless propose as one body that a particular teaching must be held definitively.”² The idea that the Spirit assists the bishop to teach is casually repeated in documents of the Church and in the writings of theologians. Bishops teach in the local church but also teach as part of a worldwide college. Special groups, special people, and special activities presume a special “assistance of the Spirit.” If assistance is a term frequently used for grace guiding church teachers, is this assisting presence of the Spirit a force outside the graces of Christian life and ministry? Is it a permanent influence, or a transitory efficacious guidance? How is it ready at hand to lead the intellect (and other aspects of the episcopal personality) to teach correctly about one, perhaps controverted, area? Theology needs to explore further the relationship between the grace that bishops receive to teach with baptismal, charismatic, and sacramental modalities of grace and how they interact with an individual person.

In what follows I inquire—inquiry need not at first go far beyond questioning—into influences upon a bishop acting in a ministry of teaching for a local church who is also seen as contributing to some kind of worldwide consensus. I consider this activity of making a doctrinal decision by the episcopal teacher within a particular theological perspective, namely, as it flows from nature and from grace.

ECCLESIAL MAGISTERIUM AND THE HOLY SPIRIT

Magisterium implies teaching in the Church. Ecclesial teaching, ministry, and profession, are not so easy to describe. We are not thinking of the assembly of an ecumenical council inevitably involved in an intense process of theological learning and important universal teaching nor of bishops teaching in a way that is ordinary and local. Basically bishops have from the beginning taught the truths of faith, sustained a tradition, or represented a local church. Theories (they are barely theologies) of the ordinary magisterium of bishops come from the 19th century.³

A few theologians from the early-20th century mention acts of teaching. An article in the *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique* states briefly: “The bishop as a member of the universal magisterium has the right to assist at a general council . . . , [and] in his role as teacher and guardian of the faith he can and must use his authority to teach defined truths and to proscribe, whether within or outside of a diocesan synod, errors already proscribed by the Holy See. Moreover, as inquisitor and defender he can condemn opin-

² Richard Gaillardetz, *Witnesses to the Faith: Community, Infallibility, and the Ordinary Magisterium of Bishops* (New York: Paulist, 1992) 4.

³ *Ibid.* esp. chaps. 3, 4, 5.

ions contrary to *sana doctrina* that might be present in his diocese . . . and denounce publications, books, and journals propagating novelties in the matter of faith or ideas endangering good morals.”⁴ In 1925 Reginald Schultes wrote: “The ordinary or universal magisterium is exercised when the Church *preaches* revealed doctrine to the faithful, *teaches* it in schools, *makes it known* through the bishops, and bears witness to it through the Fathers, teachers of Christ’s Church, and theologians.”⁵ Here a broad magisterium seems to include Christians who are not bishops. Vatican II states in quite general language: “Although individual bishops do not enjoy the prerogative of infallibility, they do, however, proclaim infallibly the doctrine of Christ when, even though dispersed throughout the world but maintaining among themselves and with Peter’s successor the bond of communion, in authoritatively teaching matters to do with faith and morals, they are in agreement that a particular teaching is to be held definitively.”⁶

Very few develop (or even mention) a theology of the graces given to a bishop to guide faith and life. John Boyle notes the “absence in most theological discussions of church teaching authority of any extended consideration of the work of the Holy Spirit . . .,”⁷ while Richard Gaillardetz writes that there is need for “a consideration of a theology of the assistance of the Holy Spirit which goes beyond the underdeveloped, monochromatic treatments of many of the neo-Scholastic ecclesiologies,” because “a proper respect for the mysterious activity of God’s grace precludes any schematic development of precisely how the Spirit is thought to work through these human processes.”⁸ Boyle and Gaillardetz are almost alone in authoring a few pages on the assistance of the Spirit grounding a special teaching in the Church about revelation. Yves Congar noted that, while episcopal authority claims the Spirit’s assistance, there have been other authorities (prophets, teachers, charismatics) whose personality, faith, and gift convinced Christians that they too held a pneumatic authority. “In the Church there has always been a teaching ministry, [an authority] connected

⁴ E. Valton, “Évêque: Questions théologiques et canoniques,” *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique* 5.2 (Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1924) col. 1712.

⁵ Schultes, *De ecclesia catholica praelectiones apologeticae* (Paris: Lethielleux, 1925) 359. Although Schultes referred to *Tuas libenter* of Pius IX, he did not mention the bishops and their magisterium again and moved immediately to 100 pages on the papacy.

⁶ *Lumen gentium* no. 25. Translation here and throughout my article from *Vatican Council II: The Basic Sixteen Documents*, inclusive language version, ed. Austin P. Flannery (Northport, N.Y.: Costello, 1996).

⁷ Boyle, *Church Teaching Authority: Historical and Theological Studies* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1995) 167.

⁸ Gaillardetz, *Witnesses to the Faith* 183; see also his *Teaching with Authority: A Theology of the Magisterium in the Church* (Collegeville: Liturgical, 1997) 147.

either with charismata or with an authority endowed with charisma.”⁹ In the last analysis the grace aiding the bishop, named by theologies of different periods as charism, assistance, or grace, does not escape language that is vague or poetic.¹⁰

A college exists as a gathering of human individuals for some purpose. The Spirit, as far as we know, does not as such contact a group directly. What changes in an individual bishop when he becomes a part of that dispersed magisterium? Does some new assistance come when he is formally notified that an issue seeks episcopal attention; if so, has not grace already prepared him for learning, reflection, and teaching? How does the group become more than its parts, and how does that happen in the realm of grace and of human person?

Do bishops teach much today? Teaching is not the same as confecting a sacrament, a causality grounded in intention, a quick action, and a dozen words. As teachers know, teaching is not the reading forth of sentences but the personal consideration of a topic expressed in an engaging manner in front of a congregation or class. Study converses with sources, living and dead, while thinking is the result of knowledge, experience, and commitment, and both precede teaching. This teaching by many in a global symphony lacks much contact between the players. Regardless, the ordinary magisterium today is not an assembly of teachers asking each other about their study, their theological research, and their pedagogical activities.

In what follows I look at two sources of the individual bishop’s activity in preserving faithfully the teaching of Jesus. Under the motto of “*gratia non tollit sed perficit naturam*”¹¹ I proceed first to grace and then to human nature.

WHAT KIND OF GRACE?

In pondering the psychology of the teaching bishop, I pass beyond venerable questions about how the free and fallen subject accepts or refuses grace. One would think that God’s grace begun in baptism and strengthened in sacramental ordination works to guide the bishop’s daily ministry, a ministry occurring in various decisions, some prudential and administrative, some spiritual and theological. A more intense divine assistance is

⁹ Congar, “A Semantic History of the Term ‘Magisterium’,” in *The Magisterium and Morality*, Readings in Moral Theology, no. 3, ed. Richard McCormick and Charles Curran (New York: Paulist, 1982) 297.

¹⁰ Congar mentions patristic phrases about a *magisterium in coelis* or an internal *magisterio Spiritus Sancti* (Augustine, *Sermo* 298, 5 [Migne, PL 38.1367]; Leo I, *Sermo* 78 [PL 54.416] and notes the very general language in the early ecumenical councils such as *Spiritus Sancti ductu* (*Tradition and Traditions: An Historical and a Theological Essay* [New York: Macmillan, 1967] 346 ff.).

¹¹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* [ST] 1, q. 1, a. 8.

presumed, however, when a claim is made for a new, important, sometimes definitive teaching that guards revelation. To gain an initial orientation in this area one might observe how certain documents of Vatican II mention, without developing a theology of it, some activity of the Spirit.

The council first mentions this reality within the entire Church. "The holy people of God shares also in Christ's prophetic office The whole body of the faithful . . . cannot be mistaken in belief," and the Church in a positive way makes the faith known to others and penetrates the faith "more deeply through right judgment, and applies it more fully in daily life."¹² An individual person is sustained by the Spirit first as a man or woman active in faith's acceptance of revelation and existing prior to special gifts and charisms for ministry in the Church. The "light of the Holy Spirit"¹³ is one and transcendent and yet aids different groups. The bishops "exercise their own proper authority for the good of their faithful, indeed even for the good of the entire Church . . . , the organic structure and harmony of which [the Church] are strengthened by the continued influence of the Holy Spirit."¹⁴ Teaching is part of their office, a service touched by the Spirit: they are "teachers endowed with the authority of Christ who preach the faith to the people assigned to them." The text goes on, in terms of the collectivity of the bishops, to say that the "assistance of the Holy Spirit" or "the influence of the Holy Spirit," is present in the "body of bishops" when "they exercise the supreme teaching office" in matters of "the divine deposit of faith."¹⁵ The *Constitution on Divine Revelation* speaks of the episcopate having received "the sure charism of truth" by which the Holy Spirit "helps" and "leads" believers to the full truth of revelation.¹⁶

¹² *Lumen gentium* no. 12. This text speaks of a "supernatural sense of the faith," of the Spirit of truth arousing and sustaining the people of God, and of charisms that are not just extraordinary and rare but "more simple and widely diffused." On the happy decline of the separation of *ecclesia docens* from *ecclesia discens*, see Michael Fahey, "Church," in *Systematic Theology: Roman Catholic Perspectives*, ed. Francis Schüssler Fiorenza and John P. Galvin (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991) 2.49–51.

¹³ *Lumen gentium* no. 25.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* no. 22. See also the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation: "And it comes from the preaching of those who, on succeeding to the office of bishop, have received the sure charism of truth And the Holy Spirit, through whom the living voice of the Gospel rings out in the church . . . leads believers to the full truth . . ." (*Dei Verbum* no. 8). After Vatican II, Paul VI wrote in *Humanae vitae* of "the light of the Holy Spirit which is given in a particular way to the pastors of the church in order that they may illustrate the truth" (*Humanae vitae* no. 28). The 1983 Code of Canon Law speaks of exercising power or function, issuing decrees and possessing infallible teaching authority (c. 337 and c. 749). See also John Boyle, "Church Teaching Authority in the 1983 Code," in *Dissent in the Church* 191–230.

¹⁵ *Lumen gentium* no. 25.

¹⁶ *Dei Verbum* no. 8. The Latin term *instructam*, ambiguous in English, reflects ideas of both endowing and instructing.

The theology of the ordinary magisterium appeared in an early formal format in the 19th century. Catholic theology from 1850 to 1950 (indeed from 1550 to 1950) was formulated almost exclusively in baroque neo-Scholastic categories, words, and thought-forms. Baroque theology, after the age of Galileo and Descartes, was a celestial mechanics of divine forces sent for precise tasks. José Martin-Palma concludes a detailed study of grace in the early modern period: “Actual grace is clearly the most popular theme of baroque theology.”¹⁷ That theology was developed to empower active ministers of the Church and gospel, men and women going out to evangelize a vast world or embarking upon the interior adventure of a cloistered life. Actual graces enable the faculties of human personality through its freedom to practice virtue and avoid vice. An actual grace (little mentioned in medieval theologies) is a passing force from God at a level other than that of created being. Grace here is individualized in psychological location and personal goal even as it is somewhat indiscriminate and transitory (like electric power in an appliance). As with the dramatic figures in baroque art, almost alive in their expressions, the Church of that age of activity is actualized by graces set in a mechanics of transitory forces. In the 19th and 20th centuries, catechisms and seminary manuals did treat sanctifying grace, the principle of a perduring trinitarian life shared with Christians, but quickly moved on to treat at much greater length actual graces. Without dwelling on the misconception of efficacious grace bypassing or breaking through an individual’s personality or that of a divine insertion of intellectual species (ideas) in a human mind, the theology of the ordinary magisterium has been basically located within a neo-Scholastic schema of various kinds of graces, operative and cooperative, efficacious and sufficient, institutional and charismatic. Ecclesiologies made a point of mentioning the role of the Spirit, but very few did more than speak of “assistance” or “charism.” Schultes concluded with two vague modes of assistance. “The first is negative and consists in preventing the Church from misleading itself and others. The second is positive and consists in illuminating the Church so that it knows the truth and teaches it to the faithful.”¹⁸ In 1927, Louis Billot wrote that the “gift of grace” cannot be habitually lodged in the episcopal teacher, nor does the “influx of the Holy Spirit in the Church” give new revelations. The bishop’s charism, part of the Church’s “inspirations and interior intimations and other internal helps of the multiform grace of the Holy Spirit . . . , [is] a

¹⁷ *Gnadenlehre von der Reformation bis zur Gegenwart*, Handbuch der Dogmengeschichte, Bd. 3, Faszikel 5b (Freiburg: Herder, 1980) 100.

¹⁸ Schultes, *De ecclesia catholica* 285. Louis Billot spoke of “inspirations and illuminations and other interior aids of the multiform grace of the Holy Spirit” (*Tractatus de ecclesia Christi* [Rome: Gregorian University, 1927] 368).

divine influx, and, as they say, assistance.” Directed toward faithful custody and exposition, that assistance is “a kind of providence directing the magisterium and pre-directing it in proposing revelation already made and in explaining things implicitly contained in it There are various positive means serving this providence . . . like the study of the saints and teachers of the Church in their writings.”¹⁹ Hermann Dieckmann wrote in the 1920s: “Generally the Holy Spirit will preserve the organs of the authoritative magisterium from error, especially in those issues prepared with necessary diligence, caution, and scholarship.”²⁰ A mechanics of grace has colored the sparse theology of the Spirit enabling the ordinary magisterium of bishops.²¹

Charles Journet wrote more than a few lines on “an exterior aid, a

¹⁹ Billot, *Tractatus de Ecclesia Christi* 378–80. About 1950, Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange began a chapter on kinds of grace with seven natural and supernatural ways in which God moves the human intellect; he then described created grace as divided into internal and external, sanctifying and charismatic, habitual and actual, while in the *gratiae gratis datae* (charisms) he saw three modes dealing with a deeper knowledge of revelation, with miracles, and with discernment, preaching in tongues, and prophecy (Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *Grace* [St. Louis: Herder, 1952] 150, 155, 170, taken from an article in *La vie spirituelle* 4 [July, 1923] 419) and included by Jacques Maritain in *Art and Faith* [New York: Philosophical Library, 1948] 122).

²⁰ Hermann Dieckmann, *Theologia fundamentalis: de ecclesia* (Freiburg: Herder, 1925) 74. Erich Przywara, S.J., wrote in 1929 of the authority of the bishop of Rome as a manifestation of sacramentality, of grace acting through human nature. If the pope has an independent claim on grace, nonetheless, this comes to and through his natural gifts. The pope should represent, image, and serve the idea of Catholicism, the idea of the sacrament which can draw *ex opere operato* on grace but upon a grace which is conditioned *ex opere operantis*. His grace and activity correspond to that of Christ who leaves the Godhead to be among sinful people in order to offer to God a new humanity (“Corpus Christi Mysticum—Eine Bilanz [1941],” in *Katholische Krise* [Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1967] 146).

²¹ Thomas Aquinas built his theology around the idea that grace is, first of all, a life and not a transient force: actual grace appears less than six times in his works. He drew his view on grace from an Aristotelian philosophy of nature: “Just as in natural things nature itself is distinguished from its movements and operations, so in the realm of grace there is a difference between grace, love, and the other virtues” (*De Veritate* 27, 2). Chenu summarizes this: “Grace is in us like a nature, i. e., like a most interior principle, most ours and at the same time most divine, possessing a dynamism which makes us capable of living communion with God” (Chenu, *St. Thomas d’Aquin et la théologie* [Paris: Seuil, 1959] 67). Grace is “a kind of sharing in the life of the Trinity” (*ST* 1-2, q. 112, a. 1) which assumes in us the form of a living, perduring principle of operations. This life-principle in and for the supernatural realm is not a transitory divine force moving a human power but perdures vitally unless forcefully driven out by sin. This underlying life contacting people *diversimode* (*ST* 2-2, q. 183, a. 2) grounds Christian activity. At ordination a bishop through interior grace is given a power, a *potestas* (a source of activities, not a potentiality) to be a bishop, to do things for the entire Church (e.g., ordain

present providential influx,” sustaining the ministry of the bishops, although he mentioned in passing “the living faith of the Church and the contemplative gifts of knowledge and of wisdom which dwell in her in a constant and permanent manner.”²² Journet is an exception in his attempt to offer a theology of inspiring graces and degrees of ecclesial actions through an ecclesiology that combines other genres of Christian writings

clergy), and to teach and preach without further designation. This is seemingly not a charism but an enhancement of sanctifying grace by an empowerment coming from the sacrament. Bishops lead and teach, particularly through preaching. “There are different kinds of instruction in the Church. One brings conversion to the faith . . . and belongs to any preacher or any one of the faithful; the second treats the basics of faith and belongs to ministers, mainly to priests; the third is on Christian life and belongs to the godparents; the fourth is on the profound mysteries of faith and the completion of Christian life and belongs to bishops” (*ST* 3, q. 71, a. 4, ad 3). The bishop needs to have some experience of mature Christian life and a general capability for teaching, and to intend after ordination to strive for growth in knowledge of Christianity (*ST* 2-2, q. 185, a. 5, ad 3). “Those ordained need not be instructed in the totality of Scripture but more or less according to their office . . . , [according to] the ministerial activities of that order” (*ST* Supplement, 36, 2). Having received a *spirituale magisterium*, a bishop should be endowed with knowledge, capabilities, an interest in hard work, and other such qualities (*Quaestio quodlibetalis* 8, a. 6). Aquinas did not speak of a collective magisterium of bishops apart from a council nor of the pope consulting bishops. Congar observed: “One cannot at all attribute to St. Thomas the idea of episcopal collegiality” (“Saint Thomas,” in *L’Église de S. Augustin à l’époque moderne* [Paris: Cerf, 1970] 238). Aquinas’s view of a pope or ecumenical council composing a creed pictures a charism of discernment and judgment about basic truths clearly connected to Scripture (see Ulrich Horst, “Kirche und Papst nach Thomas von Aquin,” *Catholica* 31 [1977] 151–67; Congar, “Saint Thomas and the Infallibility of the Papal Magisterium [*ST* II-II, q. 1, a. 10],” *The Thomist* 38 [1974] 81–105). The goal of the *operatio episcopalis* is the benefit of fellow Christians (*ST* 2-2, q. 185, a. 1). Thomas warns away from desiring the episcopacy because it requires experience and maturity (*In I ad Titum, Super epistolas S. Pauli lectura* 2 [Turin: Marietti, 1953] chap. 3, lect. 2.232; see also, Horst, “Darf man das Bischofsamt erstreben? Thomas von Aquin und die Sonderstellung des Bischofs in der Kirche,” in *Für Euch Bischof, mit Euch Christ: Festschrift für Friedrich Kardinal Wetter*, ed. Manfred Weitlauff and Peter Neuner [St. Ottilien: EOS, 1998] 179–93). Bishops can be impeded from assisting in the salvation of others by being senile, by tying church office to money and power, and by lacking adequate knowledge for leadership (*ST* 2-2, q. 185, a. 4). Aquinas’s sharp distinction between the grace of Christian life (*gratia gratis faciens*) and charism (*gratia gratis data*) affirms rare charisms as given to the few writers of inspired books or to seers into the future. The bishop’s ministry flows from the grace of the sacrament of his episcopal ordination, while a quasi-miraculous and automatic impulse unrelated to graced life or an infused supernatural teaching without a proper response in the personality would be alien to him.

²² Journet, *The Church of the Word Incarnate: An Essay in Speculative Theology*, vol. 1, *The Apostolic Hierarchy*, trans. A. H. C. Downes (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1954) 337 f.

with Scholasticism. The format, however, of his theology of bishops' teaching is not imaginative and involves an uncritical employment of instrumental causality and renders the declaratory power of the collectivity of bishops proposing Christian truth into "an organ by which the ordinary and daily teaching of the Church can be given to the world with true and absolute infallibility."²³ An impersonal channel of causality, "the visible chain of a hierarchy,"²⁴ imparts grace and statements to bishops. Christ "as physical instrument of the divine power" flows into the hierarchy considered as an "instrument for contacting us."²⁵ Conscious, free, and active people, however, are not automatic agents, channels, or recipients. Theological language should not imply that instrumental causality among human beings acts like links in a chain or a pipeline. Instrumental causality has quite a different meaning for a teacher than for a saw. A theology that diminishes proper causality either for the sake of divine primary causality (which in fact has chosen to be present on earth through the two modes of creation and Incarnation) or for an exaggerated supernaturalism of the human person used as a tool by God is not in the spirit of Thomas Aquinas. "It is proper for an instrument to be moved by the principal agent. An inanimate instrument, like a saw, is moved by the artisan by corporeal motion; an instrument animated by a rational soul is moved through its will, as a servant is moved to do something by the command of the master."²⁶ Direct, efficient, instrumental causality in a succession of transmitters dampens analogy and mystery; it changes Pneumatology into fundamentalism.

Yves Congar, as he was entering into the preparatory work for Vatican II, wrote perceptively in his diary of 1960: "It would be very risky to have a kind of council that was prefabricated in Rome or totally under a Roman direction. A large number of bishops, however, are not capable of having a view on the needed range of questions, above all, concerning their ideological and theological aspects. They are at the level of daily pastoral preoccupations. Even more, they have quite lost the habit of studying and deciding for themselves. They are accustomed to receiving decisions totally made in Rome and to see condemned and suppressed what previously they

²³ Ibid. 414.

²⁴ Ibid. 16; see also Thomas O'Meara, "The Teaching Office of Bishops in the Ecclesiology of Charles Journet," *The Jurist* 49 (1989) 23–48.

²⁵ Journet, *The Apostolic Hierarchy* 7, 124. The ministers of the sacraments, their sacerdotal power, and the sacraments themselves appear too much as external instruments, "transmitters of impulsions coming from Christ which . . . blossom into graces" (ibid.). Gaillardetz notes Hermann Schell's attempt a century ago to move the inspiration of the Spirit from a direct line of facile causality to a personal, covenantal contact (*Teaching with Authority* 131 ff.).

²⁶ *ST* 3, q. 18, a. 1, ad 2.

themselves thought to be good.²⁷ He wrote too of a needed reformulation of the reality of episcopal teaching by means of new theologies richer than those considering only juridical rights and powers. One must think beyond the Scholastic framework with its “physicism” and its ontology where the action of God and ecclesiastical operation are intertwined, even identified.²⁸

We leave the mechanics of Scholastic and Latin theologies with their too easy and clear-cut divisions, leave the network of active graces contacting a faculty of the bishop’s mind, inspiring him to affirm this or that proposition, eliciting obedience from a will at a moment of decision. Gaillardetz notes how theology succumbed “to an overly mechanistic conceptualization of the church teaching as produced by the hierarchy according to a kind of instrumental causality . . . based on the infrustrability of the Holy Spirit, yet without considering the question of any real human causality.”²⁹

We are left with further questions. Does any or every activity, formal or real, within the collective ordinary magisterium of bishops receive from the Holy Spirit a special guidance to teach correctly? Is this guidance a charism in the form of an actual grace? Does the transient grace come only at the time of decision or during the time when the subject matter is being investigated? Francis Sullivan observes: “If one holds that the ordinary magisterium of the bishops, even as infallible, is a permanent or habitual form of activity . . ., one would have to conclude that it is not a *strictly* collegial action . . . [but in fact] it necessarily has a *truly* collegial character, since only the college as such can be understood as the subject of this infallibility.”³⁰ One might imagine this assistance as something present over some time, as a pneumatic life awaiting further outside stimuli, but one may not

²⁷ Yves Congar, *Mon Journal du Concile 1* (Paris: Cerf, 2002) 9.

²⁸ Congar, *Tradition and Traditions* 220.

²⁹ Gaillardetz, *Witnesses to the Faith* 110. Minute attention to many degrees of approbation for texts (*offensivum piis auribus*) or to the virtual deductions of propositions from the truths of revelation as found in the theologies of the development of dogma from the 1950s are intellectual counterparts to the mechanics of actual graces influencing the will.

³⁰ “On the Infallibility of the Episcopal College in the Ordinary Exercise of Its Teaching Office,” in *Acta congressus internationalis de theologia Concilii Vaticani II*, ed. Edouard Dhanis and Adolf Schönmetzer (Vatican City: Typis Polyglottis, 1968) 194. For a discussion of whether the “infallibility of this ordinary magisterium is explained through the summation of the authentic magisterium of the individual bishops” see H. Pissarek-Hudelist, “Das ordentliche Lehramt als kollegialer Akt des Bischofskollegiums,” in J. B. Metz, *Gott in Welt 2* (Freiburg; Herder, 1964) 171. Francis Sullivan has noted that “Hans Küng’s theory about the way the Holy Spirit maintains the Church in the truth seems to me to call for a more extraordinary, almost miraculous, kind of intervention of the Holy Spirit, that would be needed in the emergency situation that would be caused by the solemn definition of a false teaching, which the faithful would then have to detect and refuse to believe. It

run the risk of making what is extraordinary ordinary, of presenting divine grace as an indifferent force. Is the Spirit dormant much of the time? Is the charism of infallibility so powerful that it breaks through an ignorant and self-absorbed baptized subject? Questions such as these, as Hervé Legrand has noted, do not diminish the authority of the leader of the local church but rather lead to a deeper “revalidation of the episcopate amid the Church and in the universal Church.” “It is not surprising that these problems are still very much present because the Council outlined a task that will take a long time to achieve.”³¹

HOW DOES GRACE INFLUENCE A HUMAN PERSON?

In neo-Scholastic psychological theologies the bishop seems to be suspended between ordination and papacy. The theological expression of the ordinary magisterium has existed exclusively within late baroque neo-Scholasticism. In that limited framework growth, change, and experience are absent. Theology and spirituality have yet to offer a plausible synthesis of the several facets of what we call grace present in baptism, orders, charism, ministry, and inspiration. We are today not beyond those sparse frameworks of the past, beyond what Hervé Legrand calls “a relative sterility and a persistence of age-old difficulties,”³² a sharp division between sanctifying and charismatic forms of grace; a mechanics of actual graces as charisms; a separation between the grace of the Christian life and the grace of episcopal ministry. Past theologies gave no view of the grace of an individual summoned to a collegial decision or of a grace guiding the decision of all the members of the college. What is the relationship of an assisting grace to the grace of the bishop’s Christian life and then to the grace of the episcopal office bestowed by ordination. Are these rare transitory graces? If an infallible judgment is rare, an “extreme limit,”³³ the

suggests to me a notion of the Spirit’s work as that of controlling and repairing damage already done, rather than that of simply seeing to it that such damage was not done in the first place In any case, it is certainly the official teaching of the Catholic Church, confirmed by both Councils of the Vatican, that the ‘charism of infallibility’ comes into play not in every exercise of hierarchical teaching authority, but only when certain very definite and exacting conditions are fulfilled” (*Magisterium: Teaching Authority in the Catholic Church* [New York: Paulist, 1983] 97, 99).

³¹ Hervé Legrand, “Les Évêques, les églises locales et l’église entière: Évolutions institutionnelles depuis Vatican II et chantiers actuels de recherche,” *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 85 (2001) 461–509, at 473 and 505.

³² *Ibid.* 465.

³³ Jean-Marie R. Tillard, *The Bishop of Rome*, trans. John de Satgé (Wilmington, Del.: Glazier, 1983) 172; see also Otto Hermann Pesch, “Bilanz der Diskussion um die Vatikanische Primats- und Unfehlbarkeitsdefinition: Die Schuldlogik,” in

daily and more ordinary modes of learning and charism in the bishop's ministry need to be considered in their modest forms.

Although there are spiritualities of the baroque and modern period in which the human subject is largely passive (this inactivity would be a supposed honor to a transcendent God), most Roman Catholic theologies avoid considerable passivity, because such an ideology makes difficult personal development. It is best to presume that nature influences grace: grace enters into the contours of this individual whose personality is a gift of God; an individual's unique personality can welcome grace or curtail grace. God is free to make this person or not, but, once he or she exists, the divine freedom welcomes or permits the influence of the personality on divine assistances. Grace is not a general indifferent force but "a special love"³⁴ from the Word and Spirit—but to and in us. Because God is one, grace, no matter how divine, is not independent of each providentially created individual personality.

Theology today, in looking at human nature, has gone beyond the framework of medieval and baroque theologies with their limited Aristotelian psychology. After some centuries of the modern turn to the subject, whether in Kant or Heidegger, Monet or Picasso, contemporary approaches will be different, since nature now means a personality developing, changing over a lifetime. Studies on ecclesial magisterium, however, lack any adequate discussion of a psychology of the graced teacher. That absence can imply that the bishop's personality is of little import and that the Spirit brusquely infuses ideas and decisions into any subjectivity. A grace for the ordinary magisterium, grace assisting acts of teaching, is not miraculous but like other graces becomes efficacious within the life of a particular individual. In today's Church, grace appears in the baptized Christian minister as ordinary and new, charismatic and ecclesial.

Teaching is not a hidden enterprise. Teaching always involves study, learning, and reflection. It seems unlikely that when those three are absent a divine power replaces them. Most bishops are not teachers by profession or accomplishment, although they can be teachers by seeking to apply successfully to contemporary issues the richness of the gospel, the complexity of tradition, and the history of theologies. How does a bishop become informed in an area under study, and how does he become a teacher? Does the special assistance of the Spirit turn those who are not even students into teachers? Bruno Schuller observes: "Make no mistake: teaching authority consists primarily of superior insight. Teaching is the transmission of truth and presupposes insight into the truth which is trans-

Dogmatik im Fragment: Gesammelte Studien (Mainz: Matthias-Grünwald, 1987) 221–31.

³⁴ *ST* 1-2, q. 110, a. 1.

mitted.”³⁵ The bishop might have had a poor or a good basic theological education in the seminary; he might or might not continue those studies by serious reading and by attending theological workshops and conferences. It would be hard to defend the idea that after ordination, thanks to the grace of office and a series of actual graces of inspired thinking, the bishop need not learn, need not (like other Christians) work to be informed. Karl Rahner contrasts a bishop who is continuously educated by theological discussions with a bishop who draws on the axioms of a long-past seminary education and on childhood’s devotional clichés.³⁶ The bishop who does not read cannot teach beyond a catechetical level.

Unquestioned authority and pastoral indifference further theological and organizational sectarianism. Criticism of theological originality or distinction is sometimes a disguise for intellectual indolence. To avoid uncertainty and work, some church leaders live in a tiny sect hostile to the greater number of knowledgeable and creative theologians, teachers, and ministers. Teaching is not the same as confronting different viewpoints or demanding obedience as an act of asceticism. It is a search for the truth, a search for the truth in a revelation more than human, an intellectual search that is, as Chenu put it, holy because Truth is holy.³⁷

Episcopal teaching in crises and in new times should reflect somewhat the views of the local church. The bishop’s effort to listen to others in a detached openness is important as well as his grasp of how faith and grace live in people today. Zeal and interest in the living church sustain learning and curiosity just as zeal’s opposites—laziness, lack of interest, depression, or anxiety—stifle life: they inevitably flee and condemn what other people think about their faith.³⁸

Human freedom is the unavoidable milieu of grace. The human person-

³⁵ Schuller, “The Authentic Teaching of the Magisterium of the Church,” in *The Magisterium and Morality* 16.

³⁶ Rahner, “Theology and Magisterium: Self-Appraisals,” in *Dissent in the Church* 38.

³⁷ Chenu, *St. Thomas d’Aquin et la théologie* 46.

³⁸ It is not easy to verify the special assistance of the Spirit in the lives of all bishops in challenging times. It would take us too far afield to consider the bishop whom God’s plan and will did not initially or directly intend to labor in that position; his career and office require God’s compensating grace and even then he may prove to be inadequate. After World War II a dozen French bishops (half of what Charles de Gaulle requested) were removed as serious collaborators with the Nazis (see Jean-Louis Clément, *Les évêques au temps de Vichy: Loyalisme sans inféodation: les relations entre l’Eglise et l’Etat de 1940 à 1944* [Paris: Beauchesne, 1999] and the review article on the pertinent literature in English and French by Thomas Kselman in *French Historical Studies* 23 [2000] 513–30). As studies appear on the roles of national groups of bishops faced with Nazi politics, what is striking is the absence not only of courage but of prudence and evangelical morality in dealing with the transportation of populations. Michael Phayer’s study of European

ality, according to any psychology, has a complexity where psychological freedom opens to the varied personal presences of the Spirit. There are also freedoms from marked neurosis or vice, from social or ecclesiastical constraint. Intricate patterns of life influence the ways in which a person learns in order to attain some limited truth. Through these freedoms the Spirit contacts a church with its bishop. Of course, curtailment from on high of the bishops' freedom to study, discuss, and learn, whether enforced by the state or by the papacy, removes some of the sources of real teaching and makes the exercise of magisterium questionable.

Ambition brings a cluster of psychological problems that challenge both ministry and grace. Ambition is a kind of obsession about attaining a public position, a compelling will to possess honor, and the pursuit of questionable means to reach it. Usually to attain the desired position the ambitious must seek favor with those who can bestow it, and so the ideology of the patron must be accepted without any deviations. Among that oligarchy of the like-minded providing positions of advancement there is little place for new ideas, for independent voices. Entry into an episcopate having a controlling ideology and group will usually require an allegiance to theological and canonical conclusions excluding discussion and progress. There may be a required passivity by which no one with pastoral analysis and plans, with ability for public leadership and prophetic perspective is selected. There may be an external requirement of class, education (or lack of it), race, or sexual orientation. In the ecclesial disaster of the multiple cases of sexual abuse and their serious mishandling by bishops in the U.S.A. one suspects that several of these filters have been at work. Further, a group of bishops having a perspective mainly suited to the advancement of themselves in a modern society of powerful and moneyed classes puts in place ideologies that keep the gospel and the Spirit away from challenging evangelically Church or society.

Because grace builds upon the human personality, psychological disorders will impede the graces sent to assist ministry. There are ways of living that close off the human subject from the Spirit. Chronically withdrawn, hostile, or schizophrenic personalities can hinder grace as can depression, anxiety, and addiction. God does not withhold his saving and healing ministrations to the depth of any person, but such a personality can limit further assistance for interpreting revealed truth to inspire men and women.

hierarchies silent before or complacent with the Nazi will to exterminate the Jews reads like a magisterium of error. See his *The Catholic Church and the Holocaust 1930–1965* (Bloomington: Indiana University, 2000). On the German bishops avoiding criticism of Hitler and resistance to him, see Antonia Leugers, *Gegen eine Mauer bischöflichen Schweigens: Der Ausschuss für Ordensangelegenheiten und seine Widerstandskonzeption 1941 bis 1945* (Frankfurt: J. Knecht, 1996).

Deeply neurotic grooves of living will impede ministry, and it cannot be presumed that one or several graces will compensate for psychological distortion.³⁹ Richard McCormick spoke of the separation between authority and leadership, between authoritarianism and service of the gospel, between the one controlling and the controlled group. “In [church] teaching there is [often] the dominance of the negative, the condemnatory and an intolerance of pluralism. In administering there is oppressive centralization. . . . In theologizing there is fear of the fresh issue, enslavement to the traditional phrase and contentment at being derivative. The use of power is secretive: discussion is closed and draws on very limited competence.”⁴⁰ Clearly a neurotic milieu blocks the Spirit teaching deeper truths.

THE ASSISTANCE OF GRACE: SUGGESTED DIRECTIONS

Few contemporary theologians treat this topic of ecclesial teaching from within the realms of nature and grace, although a few offer some directions. McCormick, observing the easy mustering of the special assistance of the Holy Spirit to support more and more claims to infallibility (a “creeping infallibilism”), concluded that the assistance of the Holy Spirit is something analogous. “If, however, the teaching is not presented in a final and definitive way, the assistance of the Spirit must be understood in a different (that is, analogous) way.”⁴¹ The term analogous is one expression for the subtle and varied influences of the Spirit and the multiple but modest ways in which our personality might respond. Gaillardetz comments: “It is vital

³⁹ See Donald B. Cozzens, *Sacred Silence* (Collegeville: Liturgical, 2002); Eugene Kennedy, *The Unhealed Wound: the Church and Human Sexuality* (New York: St. Martins, 2001).

⁴⁰ McCormick, “Authority and Leadership: The Moral Challenge,” *America* 175 (1996) 14. John Henry Newman wrote: “This age of the church is peculiar—in former times, primitive and medieval, there was not the extreme centralization which now is in use. If a private theologian said anything free, another answered him. If the controversy grew, then it went to a bishop, a theological faculty, or some foreign Univeristy. The Holy See was but the court of ultimate appeal. Now, if I, as a private priest, put anything into print, *Propaganda* answers me at once” (“To Emily Bowles [May 19, 1863],” in *The Letters and Diaries of John Henry Newman* 20 [London: Nelson, 1970] 445).

⁴¹ McCormick, “The Search for Truth in the Catholic Context,” in *Dissent in the Church* 426 f. An expansion of claims to infallibility was already a problem in 1952; see Johannes Beumer, “Sind päpstliche Enzykliken unfehlbar?” *Theologie und Glaube* 42 (1952) 263–79. Congar wrote in 1971: “An inflation of the category of infallibility has developed as if . . . there did not exist an immense domain of partial truth, of probable certitude, of research and approximations, or even of very precious truth not protected from the risks of human finitude” (Congar, “Indéfectibilité et infallibilité du corps organique de l’Église,” in *Ministères et communion ecclésiale* [Paris: Cerf, 1971] 151).

that the assistance of the Holy Spirit be closely associated with the entire teaching-learning process. The doctrinal competency of the bishops to teach authoritatively but not infallibly regarding concrete moral matters is derived largely from the teaching process itself. Here McCormick redirected attention away from a supernaturalist preoccupation with the *charisma veritatis* . . . towards the way in which episcopal teaching articulates the fruit of the church's corporate discernment."⁴² The magisterium is teaching, and teaching is learning and thinking. The repression of theologians and the baptized with interpretations that may in fact be true is not an occasion of their holiness but an unhealthy situation of a "one-dimensional reductionism. Theological preferences—and often psychological discomforts and unexamined institutional loyalties from which they spring—are promulgated without benefit of analysis."⁴³ Both bishops' magisterium and theologians' exploration exist within the community of all believers, and their relationship in today's world of media will be public.

Some suggest that the theology of Karl Rahner would be an ideal resource for understanding these issues. His synthesis of existential and transcendental modalities in the graced personality leads to an ecclesiology where the Church's community is a diverse subject. The Church lives in culture and history, and this inevitably brings forth analogous circles of teaching authority ranging from the bishop to teachers at various levels. Rahnerian theology employs a dialectic of divine ground and historical, ecclesial diversity. In the Church bishops receive a "promised assistance of the Spirit of Christ" that can be called "a specific charism."⁴⁴ "This faith, this history of faith, this development of dogma on which the teaching office depends in the concrete, are factors to which all the members of the Church contribute, each in his own way, by their lives, the confession of their faith, their prayers, their concrete decisions, the theology which they work out for themselves, and their activities in all this are very far from being confined merely to putting into practice truths and norms deriving from the teaching office itself."⁴⁵ The charismatic exists as an individual personality enabled by God's self-giving grace within a community and so

⁴² Gaillardetz, "Richard McCormick and the Moral Magisterium," *Louvain Studies* 25 (2000) 360.

⁴³ McCormick, "The Search for Truth in the Catholic Context," *America* 156 (November 8, 1986) 277.

⁴⁴ Karl Rahner, "The Teaching Office of the Church in the Present-Day Crisis of Authority," in *Theological Investigations* 12, trans. David Bourke (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1974) 3–30, at 8, 4, and 11 [German original 1969]; see also Ulrich Möbs, *Das kirchliche Amt bei Karl Rahner: Eine Untersuchung der Amtsstufen und ihrer Ausgestaltung* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1992).

⁴⁵ Rahner, "The Teaching Office of the Church in the Present-Day Crisis of Authority" 8.

cannot be described in terms of a transitory mechanics. Neither unity nor apostolicity but the living realization of the charismatic in all Christians is “the first and most ultimate among the formal characteristics inherent in the very nature of the Church as such.”⁴⁶ For centuries the bishop was viewed as theologically important because he represents his local church and its faithful members. McCormick finds central in Rahner the view that church leaders enjoy a presumption of truth only to the extent that they avoid social and psychological forces that undermine and discredit such a presumption and to the extent they have tapped the available source of human understanding.⁴⁷ A simple consideration of Rahner’s principles suggest that teaching in the Church will have a historical dimension, drawn from the long history of salvation and the variety of human cultures. It will not be bureaucratic, dramatically charismatic, or solely hierarchical but will touch the variety of people in the Church. If grace contacted the Aristotelian personality in the 13th century, it now contacts an existential and social person.

Prior to Vatican II, not a few discussions over the collective magisterium of bishops omit mention of the local church and thereby present the bishop as the sole agent. Hermann Pottmeyer, however, presumes that “a collegial structure and way of acting” should be visible in the teaching office of the bishop. Its decisions for the entire Church “are infallible because they represent the infallible faith of the Church which also comes to expression in the infallible consensus about the faith in the people of God (as in *Lumen gentium* no. 12).”⁴⁸ Sadly, today the views of increasingly educated and ministerially active Catholics may not be sought because their independence, realism, and progressiveness are feared (sometimes they are unjustly labeled as ephemeral or corrupt). Is the bishop part of a consultation in his college because he represents his own views, statements born of special illumination, or because he serves as the leader of a local church, to its people? After all, the local church lives and remains before and after he arrives.

To further “theological clarity about the work of the Holy Spirit sent by the Father and Son,”⁴⁹ John Boyle suggests an approach touching on grace and subjectivity. Faith and grace, transformative of as well as suited to the person, lead the individual to perceive the world differently and to find certain values congenial, certain religious perspectives and orientations connatural. One must accept limits for the work of the Spirit: just as the

⁴⁶ Rahner, “Observations on the Factor of the Charismatic in the Church,” in *Theological Investigations* 12.81–97, at 97; ideas taken into *Lumen gentium* no. 12.

⁴⁷ McCormick, “The Search for Truth” 278.

⁴⁸ Pottmeyer, “Bischof: Systematisch-Theologische,” *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche* 3rd ed. (Freiburg: Herder, 1991) 2.495.

⁴⁹ Boyle, *Church Teaching Authority: Historical and Theological Studies* 167.

historical Jesus presented limitations to the Spirit so does the Body of Christ in time have limits. Insight comes through the sacrament of orders inasmuch as it leads into a broad, analogous range of episcopal activities. The Church is “a community of moral discernment with its multiple gifts of the Spirit [where] . . . some in the church should be called to various offices, including the teaching office, to which gifts of the Spirit are given through the reception of the sacrament of orders. The same transformation of subjectivity which is brought about by the gift of grace and faith can be carried further by the work of the Spirit in this sacrament.”⁵⁰ As would be expected in a contemporary theology moving beyond a closed, administrative oligarchy to a wider pneumatic communion, the reality of some assistance—Boyle speaks of the Spirit’s anointing, gifts, and work—comes not in a transient extraordinariness of graces but flows from the Christian life maturely engaged in ecclesial ministry. The Spirit touches the entire Church living in history, and for reception a process of self-correction, humility, learning, and courage is needed. “It is not a simple matter to develop purely formal criteria for infallible moral teaching,” and perhaps the community not only contributes to the bishop teaching but “stimulates discernment by the authoritative teachers and a new, perhaps modified proposition of the Christian faith and its implications. The limits of communal discernment should not be too narrowly drawn, since grace and the gifts of the Spirit are not confined to the institutional limits of the church.”⁵¹ The bishop’s grace and teaching have an ecclesial context, one that today is enhanced by the expansion of lay ecclesial ministry. As Ladislav Orsy puts it: “There is a paradox of the church: It is endowed with divine gifts and it is subject to human limitations; it is in possession of the truth and it has to seek the truth. This search [‘due to the gentle assistance of the Spirit’] is the task of the whole church.”⁵²

Congar was of the opinion that some of the new directions in ecclesiology in the 20th century were linked to grace presented as contemporary, vital, human, and concrete (“*actualisme de la grâce*”)⁵³ and were allied to Pneumatology. Pneumatology is no longer a rare function of an ecclesiology of hierarchy or a sparse field of metaphysical relationships in God but the milieu of the Church. An organic approach taken from theologies of the Body of Christ and communion, found in patristic theologians as well

⁵⁰ Boyle, “The Natural Law and the Magisterium,” in *The Magisterium and Morality* 444.

⁵¹ Ibid. 446; Boyle, *Church Teaching Authority* 168 f.

⁵² Orsy, “Reflections on the Text of a Canon,” in *Dissent in the Church* 233 f.; phrase in brackets from 235.

⁵³ Congar, *L’Église de S. Augustin à l’époque moderne* 466. Chenu observed that “grace is social” (“Corps de l’Église et structures sociales,” *Jeunesse de l’Église* 8 [1948] 151).

as German and French thinkers influential over the past two centuries, questions a theology where graces come solely and transitorily to the leader of the local church. Graces of learning and discernment can be in many members of the Church, in lay ministers and the baptized. Grace in the baptized touches the bishop when he is in contact with them. Congar wrote that “the hierarchic reality finds its place entirely in the fraternal union of the baptized.”⁵⁴ The Spirit’s gifts and ministry to one person lives within not above the community of the Church. “Persons are the great wealth of the church. Each one is an original and autonomous principle of sensitivity, experience, relationships and initiatives The Spirit is unique and present everywhere, transcendent and inside all things, subtle and sovereign, able to respect freedom and to inspire it.”⁵⁵ In the Church’s communion, charisms and ministries abound since they flow normally from baptism. Congar’s *Tradition and Traditions* includes a section on “The Holy Spirit, the Transcendent Subject of Tradition: His Active Presence in the Church, the Body of Christ.” These pages were drawn from the organic ecclesiology of J.A. Möhler from the early patristic theologians and from the intellectual milieu of Schelling; there the Spirit is the soul or transcendental living ground of the entire Church. “The Spirit creates, from within, the unity of the community, and also the organs or expressions of its special genius, i.e., its tradition The role thus vested in the Holy Spirit is the actualizing and interiorizing of what Christ said and did.”⁵⁶ Congar sketched a theology that takes seriously the flow of history up to the present moment, one of personal communion where there is diversity in the gifts of the members of the Church, while the Spirit’s presence is free and analogical, brought to visible importance in ecclesial “events.”⁵⁷ Church and ecclesiology exist dialectically between history and the tran-

⁵⁴ Congar, *Blessed Is the Peace of My Church* (Denville: Dimension Books, 1973) 78. For insights on the Spirit and the baptized in the life of the Church, see John J. Markey, *Creating Communion* (Hyde Park, N.Y.: New City, 2003).

⁵⁵ Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit 2* (New York: Seabury, 1983) 16–17, 46.

⁵⁶ *Tradition and Traditions* 340, 342; see also Thomas O’Meara, “Beyond ‘Hierarchology’: Johann Adam Möhler and Yves Congar,” in *The Legacy of the Tübingen School*, ed. Donald J. Dietrich and Michael Himes (New York: Crossroad, 1997) 173–91.

⁵⁷ *Tradition and Traditions* 343–44. “To this was added in the Middle Ages the idea, the ambiguity and danger of which we have seen, that God unceasingly ‘inspires,’ ‘suggests’ or ‘reveals’ to the Fathers and councils in a really present way, by a kind of vertical contact, both the doctrinal meaning of revelation and even certain determinations of the sacramental or institutional life of the church. This idea threatened to weaken the ideal of a scrupulous conservation of the ancient deposit [and was] . . . oriented to the transcendent present action of God (ibid. 178).

scendent, between the given of revelation and the activities of person and community.

Theologies of grace, charism, and epiclesis are corrections for an excessive institutionalization claiming and controlling divine forces in a mechanistic mode. The bishop's grace is ordinary, diverse, modest and not an indifferent, automatic, or infallible assistance. What some see as normal would be disastrous: the isolation of the teaching bishop from other believers. There should be no fleeing what ordinary Christians believe and no repression of what they initially think.

CONCLUSIONS

Theologies as different as those of Aquinas and Rahner encourage us to take seriously the human, to consider how extensive the contours and powers of a personality receiving or blocking the divine presence can be. We can apply to the ordinary magisterium a line George Bernard Shaw wrote about marriage: "Before we insist it is divine we should show it is human."

(1) Mechanics and history—I return now to this pair. In every mechanics, whether of water or electrical power, there are only two forms: on and off. A theology of the switch needs no preparation or further development and avoids mature reflection on the graces of the Holy Spirit and is easily manipulated by authority for its goals. It is difficult to find anything automatic in real teaching. In past vague phrases, after a general affirmation about assistance has been repeated, there is no development of how this force assists the bishops' teaching. What does it give? An initial direction, a general confirmation, or a ratifying judgment? Does it touch interior episcopal ideas or a final text issued by the authors? When grace is divinely automatic, then the human is neglected, and the limitations of the Church are overlooked. A minimalist ontology of grace in the teaching agents of the Church can lead to two extremes that resemble each other: an assistance of the Spirit described in a supernatural mechanistic way in order to suit rather than guide the policies of authorities; or an assistance—much is claimed for it—left general and perceived by educated Catholics as lacking reality, as being at best a religious hope or ideal.

(2) A theology of the ordinary magisterium of bishops around the world, when it is automatic and mechanical, seeks to escape the richness of Christian revelation as cultural history draws from it ideas and forms for Christian life. History is the milieu of teaching in the Church. Ulrich Horst observes about Vatican I:

The victory over history which seemed at that time prophetic led to a capitulation to history with all the fatal consequences which our generation had to bear. Who is surprised that in that atmosphere of mistrust and uncertainty ultimately only con-

flicts or banalities would flourish. It is equally clear that the questions did not disappear but became only larger and more disturbing . . . ; this was not caused by the presumption or neglect of the theologian but by the needs and tasks neglected or shoved aside. Ultimately the magisterium suffered as much as anyone We have learned that history—its colorful diversity annoyed those who sought the security of an earlier time, a time that ultimately fell apart in the midst of history—was not the great nay-sayer of faith as was imagined but was the medium in which the faith primarily lives and unfolds itself. That this is true is shown in understanding the beginnings of the biblical history and the unbroken tradition of the Church.⁵⁸

The rhetorical perspective that the modern world is bad, people are selfish, and history is relativizing are excuses for not pondering the issues of the age, for not studying revelation, and for not listening to the Spirit.

Into every age flow attempts by Providence to guide people living in that period. Time cooperates with the Spirit who, as church history shows, tends not to act instantly or precipitously; there should be time for the Spirit to be active in the complex, changing, organic life of the Body of Christ. The Spirit and the gospel are always inviting the Church not to go down the paths of autocracy and magic. Respectful consideration of how important ecclesial teaching is furthered by what Aquinas called “the diverse modes” of grace will conclude that in human life whatever special presences of the Spirit exist they retain a transcendence. The Spirit continues the reign of God, a religious realm Jesus definitely does not link to religious solipsism and control, a reign opposed to religious ignorance and power. Healthy theologies of grace welcome all that can be known about the human personality and they further the spiritualities of each individual and each age. If the contours of a personality are distorted and self-absorbed, one must argue long for evidence of graced assistance.

(3) The universal episcopal magisterium since 1900 has been frequently

⁵⁸ Horst, “Theologie und Lehramt: Historische Anmerkungen zu einem aktuellen Thema,” *Münchener theologische Zeitschrift* 38 (1987) 63. Max Seckler saw revelation being understood in the period after Vatican I not only as a deposit of ideas but as a deposit entrusted in a special and exclusive way to the magisterium. The magisterium’s field of endeavor is not just revealed faith and morality but all areas of human moral activity reaching even to politics and music. There was an identification of the office of the pope with that of Christ or his Spirit. This resulted in the expansion of a legal system of investigation and control toward its rival, theology. The substitution of the teaching of the magisterium for revelation as the subject matter of theology, and the attempt to reduce theologians to secretaries of the bishops and popes were consequences of this ethos. “[Under Pius XII] theologians had neither the legitimate claim to be pursuing theological science nor the inner dynamic of charis or apostolic zeal; they did their work *ex delegatione*. . . .” Seckler goes on to show how this changes dramatically and immediately under Paul VI (“Die Theologie als kirchliche Wissenschaft nach Pius XII. und Paul VI.,” *Theologische Quartalschrift* 149 [1969] 222, 233).

depicted as a faceless group responding to an inquiry by the central administration of the Church seeking support for a particular position. Perhaps this is a separate magisterial act—bishops approving a teaching of the See of Rome—but it is not primarily what should be meant by the teaching of bishops, as a group or alone. The broader teaching activity of bishops may have been moved to the background after the definition of the Assumption of Mary in 1950 when bishops were asked their views on that dogma in little more than a ceremonial way. The activity of magisterium should be more than the bishop at the service of the bishop of Rome; it should be more of a judging, a discernment, a witness to what the bishop already believes and presumes that others should believe. Polling is not teaching. An opinion given to an inquiry from a higher ecclesiastical authority is not expressing faith but ratification of some decision. There can be, of course, no question of an implicit or silent inquiry from Rome. Something as important as the conclusions of the worldwide teaching college cannot be presumed. Scholars have noted that the magisterium of bishops, whether local or universal, has more and more presented itself according to the model of recent papal authority, even according to the extraordinary magisterium of the bishop of Rome, so that its exercise is heightened, deliberation is rare, and other voices are neglected. Since Vatican II ecclesialogists have suggested other models: prophetic, liturgical, consensus, communion,⁵⁹ but no one has pursued very far the charismatic or psycho-social dynamics of how the Spirit would speak through this body.

What is the bishop's link with another complex term and reality, namely tradition? How does he truly enter that dynamic intellectually and socially? The bishop may be polled today because it is hoped that he is repeating past creeds and traditions: if so, he should know the history and theology of a topic in tradition. His expression of it should be theological and vital and not automatic, devotional, or antiquarian.

Today the magisterium of bishops should find the ecumenical or general council as its normal place of serious decision, and should also be present in regional and national conferences. One contemporary approach to teaching within the Church lies in the composition of pastoral letters by a regional or national group of bishops. Such groups face new issues, draw on resources and experts and prepare for a text by consultation. Boyle observes: "The role of authoritative teachers in this process of formulating pastoral directives [drawing on liturgy, the insights of theological schools, the views of lay ecclesial ministers, etc.] is clearly one of discernment and articulation, a function fully in harmony with the gifts of the Spirit given to

⁵⁹ Gaillardetz, *Witnesses to the Faith* 167–70.

bishops by their ordination.”⁶⁰ The Spirit assists the development of a particular teaching in a community, and the community with all its ministries on its own ponders and expresses faith. The bishop is not the solitary churchman with his own views but the active coordinator and leader of a communal learning process.

(4) The Holy Spirit is one. It often appears as though there is a Spirit working through the pope, another through the bishops, and a third active in everyone else in the Church. There is, however, one Spirit speaking through dramatic and definitive propositions and also through the ideas of theologians and pastors and people struggling with daily life.⁶¹ There is one Spirit and one gospel, although there can be various authorities, theologies, ministries, and charisms. Assistances of the Spirit will act in consort with each other. All graces live within someone’s personal subjectivity. The bishop’s varied ministry is related to his baptismal grace and to an intensification of the grace of episcopal ministry bestowed by ordination. Moreover, faith and theology ultimately treat the mystery of God. Raymond Schwager begins an article on the tensions between magisterium and theology by recalling that “God’s being and nature transcends in the deepest way our potentiality to know.”⁶² The powerful radicalism of the New Testament is not so easily locked up in phrases, and ultimately the mystery of the infinite God is unimaginably greater than what God has revealed.

My theme has been grace and nature. Difficulties with regard to believing in a magisterium of bishops will multiply when the theology of supernatural assistance is sparse and automatic. Church teaching becomes less credible as the absence of a credible process in the universal college discerning important teaching is publicized. Perhaps a latent uncertainty among church officials about how and when the Spirit gives assistance prompts an ever shriller insistence on obedience. Chenu wrote already in the 1950s: “The impoverishing of the object of faith in favor of its transmitter, the church, led to an alteration of values in the minds of the faithful. The first result was an increased willingness to accept without question the decrees of the church, docility to its teaching, matriculation into its organism . . . , a tendency to distrust the mystical believer It is imperative that the whole system [of the church’s magisterium in Christian life] be

⁶⁰ Boyle, *Church Teaching Authority* 61. Nelson Minnich describes the search for a role for theologians oscillating between advice and vote at past councils because some bishops were quite uneducated (“The Voice of Theologians in General Councils from Pisa to Trent,” *Theological Studies* 59 [1998] 420–41).

⁶¹ McCormick, “The Search for Truth in the Catholic Context,” in *Dissent in the Church* 430.

⁶² Schwager, “Kirchliches Lehramt und Theologie,” *Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie* 111 (1989) 163.

revised in order to ensure that the inevitable unilateralism resulting from reaction to a particular problem has not distorted the balance of the organic synthesis.”⁶³ Authority in an age of media and education risks being ignored when it makes striking claims that have a basis only in simple neo-Aristotelian or devotional phrases. In our age of realism words such as assistance or charism can become a cliché or a myth. Contributions from the entire Church, from human psychology and social communication, realistic forms of teaching and conversation among bishops as well as a modern theology of the graced individual can preserve episcopal teaching from decline. Without a psychology of grace, an ecclesiology of the Body of Christ, and a spirituality of an individual bishop, church leaders, far from being viewed as teachers of God’s revelation, will be seen as an isolated oligarchy, a gnostic priestly caste claiming (in a society of ceaseless education) access to special sources knowing God’s will.

Contemporary commentators on the American political scene have suggested that politicians and government officials are no longer seen as representatives of the people but as members—before and after being given government positions and regardless of party affiliation—of a permanent political class, an oligarchy established not by elections but by consultants, donor bases, and media.⁶⁴ The Catholic Church is on the way to the same situation. Ultimately Christianity has as its historical form not a baroque monarch but a community that is the Body of Christ. Evidently the theology of the ordinary magisterium is only in its beginnings, and in each moment of its progressive realization and understanding the guide should be Paul’s advice cited by Vatican II: “Do not extinguish the Spirit” (1 Thessalonians 5:19).

⁶³ Chenu, “The Eyes of Faith,” in *Faith and Theology* (New York: Macmillan, 1968) 11.

⁶⁴ Joan Didion, *Political Fictions* (New York: Knopf, 2001). Other authors find a decline in the quality of government agencies because they hire only those with a “consciousness of kind.”