

CLARITY, CHARITY AND TRUTH APPRECIATING THE RICHNESS IN OUR FAITH

As a conclusion to this brief series on levels of teaching, I will offer a few more examples for the purposes of comparison. Sometimes examples are easier to process than technical definitions. A teaching at the highest level (infallible dogma) may be achieved in several ways, and not only by means of a solemn papal decree. Many teachings of this sort are simply part and parcel of the very fabric of Catholic belief, flowing seamlessly from basic commandments and tenets of the faith. For example, the immorality of euthanasia constitutes an infallible teaching by the *ordinary and universal* Magisterium. We have consistently taught, always and everywhere, the sanctity of human life. And in the ordinary course of events, this teaching has been consistently articulated. No Pope has made an *ex cathedra* statement to this effect because it is not needed. St. John Paul II himself, in his encyclical “The Gospel of Life” (para. # 65) wrote: “this doctrine is based upon the natural law and upon the written Word of God, is transmitted by the Church’s Tradition and taught by the ordinary and universal Magisterium.” Notice he used the word *ordinary*.

Indeed, the ordinary and universal Magisterium can and does contain truths that are to be seen as definitive, even though they are articulated in a different forum. They truly represent the handing down of the truths of the faith by means of Tradition with a capital ‘T.’ Part of this reason is practical. Can you imagine the impracticality of calling an Ecumenical Council of all the world’s bishops every time a definitive doctrinal or moral teaching were to be issued? It is no small feat to gather 300 bishops of the world for a Synod, much less 4,000 of them for a Council! The *extraordinary magisterium* is most often exercised through an Ecumenical Council, a gathering of **all** the world’s bishops. At the time of the Reformation, the **Council of Trent** dogmatically declared that there are seven sacraments, named the complete list of the books of Scripture (though they had been accepted universally for centuries), and clarified the teaching on indulgences. Only twenty-one such Councils have taken place in the Church’s history. Many generations can pass between such Councils.

Even rarer is the solemn papal pronouncement *ex cathedra* (“from the chair”), a singular papal pronouncement that carries the weight of infallibility. I seriously doubt that we are likely to see an *ex cathedra* dogmatic definition from a pope any time soon, because the Church of today favors an approach that brings together all members of the Magisterium (i.e. the world’s bishops) more than a solitary papal exercise. However, Pope John Paul II’s 1994 Apostolic Letter reserving priestly ordination to men, while not wishing to proceed to a dogmatic definition, clearly intended to reaffirm that this doctrine is to be held definitively according to the ordinary and universal Magisterium. Other examples could be cited for matters of faith that are *connected* to revelation, even if not explicitly in revelation, as would be, for example, the Trinity. One such example is a papal canonization, a solemn act by the Pope to be sure that is to be held definitively.

There is no question that Pope Francis’ Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* has engendered its share of commentary, including questions about whether its teaching introduced doctrinal change in addition to its call for a new pastoral approach. There ought to be no question that it was an act of the *ordinary* papal magisterium, and as such calls for our assent. But its interpretation is so varied, based upon the different individual and collective episcopal statements, that Catholics increasingly are asking for clarification. This discussion would be the source of many columns, but for now I pray that we will gain more clarity of interpretation in the months ahead. At times, Church teaching is deliberately nuanced for good reason. By the same token, it cannot be so nuanced as to be unintelligible, for that serves neither the professional theologian with a Ph.D nor the faithful Catholic in the pews on Sunday morning.

We can speak of several levels of Church teaching. First, there is the solemn definition. The Pope can do this with or without an ecumenical council. Secondly, we speak of the ordinary and universal magisterium as clarified by Vatican II’s *Lumen Gentium* # 25: “Although the individual bishops do not have the prerogative of infallibility, they can yet teach Christ’s doctrine infallibly. This is true even when they are scattered around the world, provided that, while maintaining the bond of unity among themselves and with

the successor of Peter, they concur in a teaching as the one which must be definitively held” (cf. euthanasia above).

Next, there are the teachings set forth by the authentic ordinary Magisterium in an authoritative, though non-definitive way. The teaching of papal encyclicals often falls into this category. They clearly carry more weight than a papal interview at 30,000 feet following an apostolic visit. Finally, we speak of teachings that are not intended to be definitive and rather call for “a religious submission of mind and will... to the teaching which either the supreme pontiff or the college of bishops pronounces on faith and morals when they exercise the authentic magisterium, even if they do not intend to proclaim it by a definitive act” (Code of Canon Law, para. #752). Our faith is rich, made up of numerous concentric circles surrounding the core of our faith in Jesus Christ. We are invited to appreciate the faith and all its complexity and richness, though never forgetting the fundamentals. We are called to love God and our neighbor as ourselves.

- **Twenty Four Hours for the Lord** is returning to the Cathedral from **12:00 Noon on Friday, March 24 through 12:00 Noon on Saturday, March 25**. During this time (except during Mass), a priest(s) will be available for the Sacrament of Penance and we will have Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. Please spread the word– it was so well received last year.
- I am grateful to all who volunteer at the Cathedral and to those who have answered our more recent call to service. We are gaining new lectors, Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion, sanctuary care and flower arrangement assistance, to name but a few.
- Issuing judgments regarding reported apparitions is never an easy one for the Church. We believe that the Blessed Mother indeed has appeared in the course of history, but there have also been many of dubious nature that require some statement from those entrusted with protecting the faith. With the recent naming of a special papal envoy to assist in **Medjugorje**, perhaps a more definitive statement will soon emerge regarding the authenticity of those apparitions.
- **Pope Urban VII** holds the record as the shortest reigning pope in history– just 12 days in 1590. But he made them count, forbidding tobacco in all forms “in the porchway of or inside a church.” Known for his charity to the poor, he succumbed to malaria.
- Parishioner and RCIA volunteer **Larry Pavlicek** has written a crime novel, based in part upon his experiences working for the FBI. He is having a book signing on Monday, March 20th, from 3:00-6:00 p.m. at Emmett’s Public House, 695 Grand Avenue, St. Paul.

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. John L. Ubel,
Rector