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# The Teaching Office of the Church\*

BY COLIN BROWN

FOR long enough the question of the teaching office of the church has simmered gently in the background of ecumenical discussion. At the end of July 1968 it was brought back to boiling point by no one less than the Pope himself with his Encyclical *Humanae Vitae*. What interests us here is not that the Pope decided against all artificial means of birth control. The point would be just as crucial if he had decided for them. Nor is it that the Pope spoke out on the subject—for Christian ministers have a right and duty to speak out on any issue which seriously affects the lives of the people to whom they minister. The burning issue for the Protestant is the *way* in which the Pope spoke and the *kind* of authority which is claimed for his teaching.

Consequently, now that We have sifted carefully the evidence sent to Us and intently studied the whole matter, as well as prayed constantly to God, We, by virtue of the mandate entrusted to Us by Christ, intend to give Our reply to this series of grave questions (§ 6).

The point is brought out by the formula introducing the papal judgment and by the comments towards the end defending its rigour. In the former case the Pope has pointed out that he has found it necessary to override the views of the commission instituted by his predecessor. He then expresses the authority for his teaching.<sup>1</sup> This affirmation of papal authority is amplified and counterbalanced in the passage towards the end which reaffirms the authority of the Church, however unpopular its teachings.

It should cause no surprise that the Church, any less than her divine Founder, is destined to be a 'sign of contradiction'. She does not, because of this, evade the duty imposed on her of proclaiming humbly but firmly the entire moral law, both natural and evangelical.

Since the Church did not make either of these laws, she cannot be their arbiter—only their guardian and interpreter. It could never be right for her to declare lawful what is in fact unlawful and therefore always intrinsically opposed to the true good of man (§ 18).

The Encyclical seems to have taken many people by surprise. But to the outsider at least the Pope is saying in principle no more and no less than Vatican II—if one puts together the *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation* and the *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*.

Sacred tradition and sacred Scripture form one sacred deposit of the word of God, which is committed to the Church. Holding fast to this deposit, the entire holy people united with their shepherd remain always steadfast in the teaching of the apostles, in the common life, in the breaking of the bread, and in prayers (cf. Acts 2: 42, Greek text), so that in holding to, practising and professing the heritage of the faith, there results on the part of the bishops and faithful a remarkable common effort.<sup>2</sup>

\* A paper read at a meeting of Roman Catholics and Anglicans in September 1968.

The task of authentically interpreting the word of God, whether written or handed on,<sup>3</sup> has been entrusted exclusively to the living teaching office of the Church,<sup>4</sup> whose authority is exercised in the name of Jesus Christ.<sup>5</sup> This teaching office is not above the word of God, but serves it, teaching only what has been handed on, listening to it devoutly, guarding it scrupulously, and explaining it faithfully by divine commission and with the help of the Holy Spirit; it draws from this one deposit of faith everything which it presents for belief as divinely revealed.

It is clear, therefore, that sacred tradition, sacred Scripture, and the teaching authority of the Church, in accord with God's most wise design, are so linked and joined together that one cannot stand without the others, and that all together and each in its own way under the action of the one Holy Spirit contribute effectively to the salvation of souls.<sup>6</sup>

If this extract from the *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation* seems to put the stress on the collective authority of the church guided by the Holy Spirit, it must be remembered that this must be read in the context of papal and collegiate authority which had already been defined in the *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*.

Just as, by the Lord's will, St. Peter and the other apostles constituted one apostolic college, so in a similar way the Roman Pontiff as the successor of Peter, and the bishops as the successors of the apostles are joined together. The collegial nature and meaning of the episcopal order found expression in the very ancient practice by which bishops appointed the world over were linked with one another and with the Bishop of Rome by the bonds of unity, charity, and peace; also, in the conciliar assemblies which made common judgments about more profound matters<sup>9</sup> in decisions reflecting the views of many.<sup>10</sup> The ecumenical councils held through the centuries clearly attest this collegial aspect. And it is suggested also in the practice, introduced in ancient times, of summoning several bishops to take part in the elevation of someone newly elected to the ministry of the high priesthood. Hence, one is constituted a member of the episcopal body by virtue of sacramental consecration and by hierarchical communion with the head and members of the body.

But the college or body of bishops has no authority unless it is simultaneously conceived of in terms of its head, the Roman Pontiff, Peter's successor, and without any lessening of his power of primacy over all, pastors as well as the general faithful. For in virtue of his office, that is, as Vicar of Christ and pastor of the whole Church, the Roman Pontiff has full, supreme, and universal power over the Church. And he can always exercise this power freely.

The order of bishops is the successor to the college of the apostles in teaching authority and pastoral rule; or, rather, in the episcopal order the apostolic body continues without a break. Together with its head, the Roman Pontiff, and never without this head, the episcopal order is the subject of supreme and full power over the universal Church.<sup>11</sup> But this power can be exercised only with the consent of the Roman Pontiff. For our Lord made Simon Peter alone the rock and key-bearer of the Church (cf. Matt. 16: 18-19), and appointed him shepherd of the whole flock (cf. Jn. 21: 15ff.).

It is definite, however, that the power of binding and loosing, which was given to Peter (Matt. 16: 19), was granted also to the college of apostles, joined with their head (Matt. 18: 18; 28: 16-20).<sup>12</sup> This

college, insofar as it is composed of many, expresses the variety and universality of the People of God, but insofar as it is assembled under one head, it expresses the unity of the flock of Christ. In it, the bishops faithfully recognising the primacy and pre-eminence of their head, exercise their own authority for the good of their own faithful, and indeed of the whole Church, with the Holy Spirit constantly strengthening its organic structure and inner harmony.

The supreme authority with which this college is empowered over the whole Church is exercised in a solemn way through an ecumenical council. A council is never ecumenical unless it is confirmed or at least accepted as such by the successor of Peter. It is the prerogative of the Roman Pontiff to convoke these councils, to preside over them, and to confirm them.<sup>13</sup> The same collegiate power can be exercised in union with the Pope by the bishops living in all parts of the world, provided that the head of the college calls them to collegiate action, or at least so approves or freely accepts the united action of the dispersed bishops, that it is made a true collegiate act.<sup>14</sup>

For the Protestant onlooker these statements raise a host of questions. For the sake of convenience I will confine my observations to three groups of questions: (i) *The Authority of the Pope*; (ii) *The Teaching Office in General*; and (iii) *The Teaching Office and Tradition*. All three are inter-related, as the above pronouncements clearly state.

### THE AUTHORITY OF THE POPE

#### 1. *A Perennial Question*

The question of the authority of the Pope is no new one. In the early church it is illustrated by the conflict between Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage (248-258), and Pope Stephen which is highlighted by the variant readings of chapter four of his work *On the Unity of the Catholic Church*. The majority of scholars to-day agree that the so-called Primacy Text was the original one. Here Cyprian affirmed that:

The other Apostles were, to be sure, what Peter was, but primacy is given to Peter, and the Church and the throne is shown to be one. And all are pastors, but one flock is indicated, which is fed by all the Apostles with unanimous consent. If a man does not hold this unity of Peter, does he believe himself to hold the faith? If a man deserts the throne of Peter, on whom the Church is founded, is he confident that he is in the Church?

But the Received Text drops the reference to Peter and asks:

If a man does not hold this unity of the Church, does he believe himself to hold the faith? If a man withstands and resists the Church, is he confident that his is in the Church?

The most likely explanation seems to be that of M. Bevenot and followed by Henry Bettenson<sup>15</sup> that Cyprian himself changed the text after his own breach with Rome.

The question became acute in the Middle Ages when Boniface VIII (1294-1303) promulgated the Bull *Unam Sanctam* (1302) which gave a definition of the unity of the Church, its necessity for salvation, its divine origin, and the foundation of the authority of the Roman Pontiff. It spoke in the most unambiguous way of the two swords. The spiritual is wielded by the Church; the temporal on behalf of the Church. 'The first is wielded by the hand of the priest, the second

by the hand of kings and soldiers but at the wish and by the permission of the priests.' After reaffirming the position of the pope as the divinely instituted successor to Peter, the bull rounded off its teaching with the bald claim:

Further, We declare, say, define, and pronounce that it is absolutely necessary for the salvation of every human creature to be subject to the Roman Pontiff.<sup>16</sup>

We pass over the debates of the Reformation period<sup>17</sup> and come to the epoch-making definitions of Vatican I where *The First Dogmatic Constitution on the Church of Christ* defined the primacy and infallibility of the Pope. To many, both inside and outside the Catholic fold, this represented the culmination and logical conclusion of previous claims and definitions. Chapter one establishes apostolic primacy in Peter with the aid of the familiar classic texts (Jn. 1: 42; Matt. 16: 16-19; Jn. 21: 15, 17).

We teach and declare, therefore, according to the testimony of the Gospel that the primacy of jurisdiction over the whole Church of God was immediately and directly promised to and conferred upon the blessed Apostle Peter by Christ the Lord.<sup>18</sup>

Chapter two took the next step by arguing for the continuation of this primacy in the Roman Pontiffs. This was necessary for the spiritual welfare of the church.<sup>19</sup> Chapter three took up the thought of the Council of Florence and declared that:

All the faithful of Christ must believe 'that the holy Apostolic See and the Roman Pontiff have the primacy over the whole world, and that the same Roman Pontiff is the successor of St. Peter, the Prince of the Apostles, and the true vicar of Christ, the head of the whole Church, the father and teacher of all Christians; and that to him, in the person of St. Peter, was given by our Lord Jesus Christ the full power of feeding, ruling, and governing the whole Church.'<sup>20</sup>

Chapter four defined the infallible teaching authority of the Pope, that the Roman Pontiff, when he speaks *ex cathedra*, that is, when acting in the office of shepherd and teacher of all Christians, he defines, by virtue of his supreme apostolic authority, doctrine concerning faith or morals to be held by the universal Church, possesses through the divine assistance promised to him in the person of St. Peter, the infallibility with which the divine Redeemer willed his Church to be endowed in defining doctrine concerning faith or morals; and that such definitions of the Roman Pontiff are therefore irreformable because of their nature, but not because of the agreement of the Church.<sup>21</sup>

To each of the four chapters anathemas were appended.

## 2. *The New Testament Basis*

As the last words of the last quotation make clear, papal authority is no mere matter of convenience and church politics. It depends upon divine institution which in turn means that the validity of the claims depend upon the validity of Catholic exegesis of the key NT passages. It was almost inevitable that Protestant apologists threw in everything they had got to show that the Catholic interpretation of Matthew 16 could not have been further from our Lord's mind. It was urged that the rock was not Peter but Peter's faith or act of confession, or even that Jesus was contrasting himself the true solid

rock with Peter a tiny, loose stone. But in recent years the whole question has been reopened by Oscar Cullmann in his *Peter: Disciple—Apostle—Martyr*.<sup>23</sup>

Cullmann accepts Roman Catholic identification of the rock in Matthew 16: 18 with Peter.<sup>23</sup> He believes that there is a parallelism in the two halves of Jesus' statement, and that the word for rock was the Aramaic *kepha* in both instances. Although the Greek *petros* generally means a detached rock or boulder and *petra* a mass of living rock, the two words were also used synonymously. The distinction in the Greek translation of Matthew 16: 18 may be accounted for by using the masculine form as a proper name in preference to a feminine form. In John 1: 42 and 1 Corinthians 1: 12 the Aramaic original is preserved in the transliteration *Kephas*.

But having said this, Cullmann hastens to add that, 'On exegetical grounds we must say that the passage does not contain a single word concerning successors of Peter'.<sup>24</sup> It would seem that Peter was the rock in the sense that he was the first member of the church proper, the representative spokesman of the disciples, the first of their number to confess Jesus as the Christ. He used the keys of the kingdom (Matt. 16: 19; cf. 23: 13; Rev. 1: 18; 3: 7; Isa. 22: 22; Rev. 21: 25; Matt. 18: 18 and Jn. 20: 23) in opening the church first to the Jews (Acts 2) and then to the Gentiles (Acts 10) by proclaiming the gospel to them. He also exercised leadership in the appointment of Matthias to the apostolic band (Acts 1) and discipline in the case of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5: 1-11). He figured prominently in the early days of the church in bearing witness before the Jews and their leaders (Acts 4: 8ff.; 5: 15); 5: 29; 9: 32).

But once the church was opened and established, Peter's foundational work was done. After his imprisonment (Acts 12) he begins to occupy a less prominent place. His work is confined to the Jewish mission (Gal. 2: 8). It is James, the Lord's brother, who appears to preside over the first great council of the church at Jerusalem (Acts 15: 19ff.) delivering the decisive judgment, even though Peter played an important part in the debate (Acts 15: 7ff.). Moreover, nowhere in the NT writings does Peter lay claim to primacy. In the opening verses of his two epistles he describes himself as an apostle (cf. also 1 Cor. 9: 5). In the epistles and Revelation the metaphor of the building is used several times to describe the church. Peter himself describes believers as 'living stones . . . built into a spiritual house' (1 Pet. 2: 5). The apostles and prophets are the foundation of the household of God (Eph. 2: 20). But nowhere is there any suggestion of Peter being a special kind of foundation. Still less is there any thought of the foundation continuing right through the building. Christ himself is the ultimate foundation, the chief cornerstone (1 Cor. 2: 11; Lk. 20: 17; Ps. 118: 22f.; Acts 4: 11; 1 Pet. 2: 4-8; Isa. 8: 14f.; cf. Eph. 2: 20; Rev. 21: 14). Neither the epistles nor Acts appear to know anything of a permanent primacy and jurisdiction of Peter. Nor is there any hint of such an authority being handed on.<sup>25</sup>

As Cullmann says, the command to Peter to feed Christ's lambs (Jn. 21: 16ff.) 'is certainly limited by his martyrdom'.<sup>26</sup> In itself this passage indicates the kind of task to which Peter was commissioned;

not his place in the hierarchy of the church. The promise in Matthew 16: 18 with regard to the church that *pulai hadou ou katischusousin autes* seems in context to be not so much a promise that the church will survive all the assaults of evil in this world.<sup>27</sup> Rather the notion of Hades as the abode of the dead and of *ekklesia* as the people of God suggests the picture of the pilgrim church wandering (like ancient Israel) through the land occupied by hostile powers. But not even the armed fortress of death through which the church must pass will be able to keep the church from its goal.<sup>28</sup>

It must be admitted that many Protestants are embarrassed by the promise: 'Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven' (Matt 16: 19). According to rabbinic usage two explanations seem equally possible for the words 'bind' (*deses*) and 'loose' (*luses*).<sup>29</sup> They mean either 'prohibit' and 'permit', i.e. 'establish rules',<sup>30</sup> or 'put under the ban' and 'acquit'.<sup>31</sup> Cullmann accepts both meanings, pointing out that the power to teach and to discipline cannot be sharply separated. In the early chapters of Acts Peter did both. It is a continuation of the ministry of Christ in which the disciples have already begun to participate (Matt. 11: 4ff.; cf. 10: 7f.). The remission of sins is the condition of entry into the kingdom. Now that Peter has confessed Christ, he is given even greater authority than that required to heal. But the promise of authority to forgive sins is not confined to Peter. It is given to the disciples (Matt. 18: 18; Jn. 20: 23), and by implication in the former passage to the church at large. Matthew 18: 15-35 explains how this authority works. An individual has power to remit a sin committed against him personally if the guilty party is penitent (Matt. 18: 15). The church has authority to cast the impenitent out of its fellowship (18: 15-20), for anything truly performed in the name of Christ is binding. On the other hand, the remainder of the chapter deals with God's judgment upon those who are in a position to forgive and do not.' Their own guilt and condemnation will be all the greater (18: 21-35; cf. 5: 21-26; 6: 12). In this passage Peter is told to forgive until seventy times seven; These passages show that Peter was given a real power which (as Acts shows) he did exercise. But the power was not confined to him. It was given to the church at large. It was exercised in the remission of sins, the establishment of rules in the early church, and the execution of discipline. These various functions are exemplified, for example, in 1 Corinthians 5 and 6. By contrast the erroneous teaching and conduct of the Pharisees closes the door to the kingdom (Matt. 23: 13ff.).

All things brings us on to the subject of the *magisterium* of the church in general. But before we leave the question of Peter one or two more observations should be made. Whilst it seems probable that Peter visited Rome (cf. 1 Pet. 5: 13) there is no hint in the NT that he was ever bishop of Rome. Moreover, the church seems to be well established (cf. Acts and Romans) without the aid of any of the apostles.<sup>32</sup> Our primary document for the church at Rome in the sub-apostolic age is 1 *Clement*, but this letter seems to know nothing of the primacy of the bishop of Rome. Rome seems to be governed by a college of presbyters. The letter was sent in the name of the church.

It is attributed to Clement personally only by a variant ending preserved in some later manuscripts.<sup>33</sup> The idea of the primacy of the pope only really begins to emerge in the second half of the second century. After that the claims grow and become more explicit. But in principle they all turn upon the NT evidence for the primacy of Peter and the bishops of Rome as his divinely authorised successors. If the above argument is correct, this evidence is utterly lacking. But this not only undermines the Catholic conception of the position of the pope, it removes the basic pivot of the Catholic magisterium. It does so in two ways. It shows that the conception of the papacy is in principle wrong, and in so doing it undermines the *de facto* authority of an ecclesiastical *magisterium* which has consistently affirmed the validity of papal claims. At the same time it undermines confidence in a large part of the *tradition* said to be deposited with the *magisterium*.<sup>34</sup>

#### THE TEACHING OFFICE IN GENERAL

As we have already noticed, Vatican II declared that,

The task of authentically interpreting the word of God, whether written or handed on, has been entrusted exclusively to the living teaching office of the Church, whose authority is exercised in the name of Jesus Christ.<sup>35</sup>

The text goes on to say what surely every devoted Christian would want to say—that the teaching office is not above the Word of God but is its servant, and that it only truly functions in the power of the Holy Spirit. My question here is not to query the idea of a teaching office of the church. The apostle Paul speaks of the gift and office of teaching (1 Cor. 12: 28f.; Eph. 4: 11; and in Tit. 2: 3 of older women!) The NT writers exercised the gift per excellence. Hebrews 5: 12 complains of his readers' need for teachers, whereas they ought to be teachers themselves. Teaching was an important part of our Lord's own ministry (Matt. 4: 23; 9: 35; 21: 23; 26: 55 etc.). Nor is it my purpose to question the idea of a vicariate. All Christian ministry is in some sense a vicariate. The eleven were told to go in the name of the Trinity and baptise, making disciples, of all nations 'teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you' (Matt. 28: 20). Paul describes his ministry as that of an ambassador for Christ, beseeching men on behalf of Christ to be reconciled to God (2 Cor. 5: 20). My question here is to ask: What is the nature of this teaching office?

A recent Catholic work of reference defines the Ecclesiastical Magisterium as follows:

The *solemn* or the ordinary magisterium of the Church is the norm of faith in truths revealed by God. The solemn magisterium consists of papal or conciliary dogmatic definitions. The ordinary magisterium is the unanimous teaching of the bishops united with the pope (Can. 1322-1323). A dogmatic definition must be clear and certain in order to bind in faith. . . . The ecclesiastical magisterium often approves or condemns a doctrine without a final judgment on the absolute truth or falsity of the doctrine. . . . The faithful are bound in conscience to assent to such acts. . . . The object of the magisterium of the Church is the proposal of all truths contained in the Word of God, written or orally handed down through tradition, or the condemnation of errors concerning these truths.<sup>36</sup>



This may sound rather rigid when compared with Vatican II, but even there it was said that the '*Munus . . . authentice interpretandi verbum Dei scriptum bel traditum soli vivo Ecclesiae Magisterio concreditum est*'. The magisterium '*pie audit, sancte custodit et fideliter exponit, ac ea omnia ex hoc uno fidei deposito haurit quae tamquam divinitus revelata credenda proponit*'.

To the Protestant the church is charged with the task of proclaiming the Word of God; but the Word is never exclusively entrusted to it. 'We have this treasure in earthen vessels, to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us' (2 Cor. 4: 7). Man is to live not by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God (Matt. 4: 4). Jesus drew a sharp distinction between 'the commandment of God' and 'the tradition of men' (Mk. 7: 8). Only Scripture qualified as the former in his teaching (cf. also Matt. 5: 17-20). The church's task is to proclaim the Word in Scripture, to preach the word (2 Tim. 4: 2).

This, of course, is bound up with the whole reformed conception of authority and ministry which in turn require much more careful investigation. But perhaps two further observations may be made before we pass on to the question of tradition and the teaching office. The first is that so often in the past the official teachers of the church seem either to have remained silent or backed the wrong side. As a case in point we might instance the long and sorry history of the Arian controversy when the popes remained conspicuous by their silence and many of the bishops only too compliant to the desires of those who happened to hold power. We might also instance the attitude taken by Rome to Luther, Calvin and the English Reformers, not to mention Wycliffe and Hus. But lest this observation seem too deliberately provocative, we might also instance the attitudes of our own Anglican bishops and teachers in numerous domestic matters. The conclusion that a reformed Protestant would draw from this is that whilst men are charged with proclaiming the Word, they often fail, and therefore their teaching can never be regarded with anything but a provisional and subsidiary authority. The teaching office itself is always subject to scripture.

This leads to the second observation: that all down the ages, when the official teaching office has failed, God has raised up teachers. In Old Testament times the prophetic office was raised up when the priestly office failed. Amos 7 gives a vivid illustration of the clash between Amazaiah the official priest of Bethel and Amos the unofficial prophet. We might also instance the case of Paul an unofficial apostle summoned to work among the gentiles (Acts 26: 16ff.; cf. 1 Cor. 15: 8f.), or that of the Reformers. It is tempting to draw the conclusion that all the great teachers of the church are never the official ones but always the unofficial ones. But this would be wrong. In each case, the teacher has had a call from a body of believers or has had his authority recognised by them. In each case the validity of his teaching depends on whether it agrees with scripture.<sup>37</sup>

#### THE TEACHING OFFICE AND TRADITION

At the outset of this section it must be stated that for all Christians

authority is a combination of Scripture, tradition and reason (and perhaps often too emotion). This is so whether they recognise it or not. The big question is not to eliminate one or other of these elements but to try to see that they are rightly related. This is a massive question in its own right. Here we can do no more than make a number of observations.

Catholic apologists sometimes accuse Protestants of having no authority to decide the true interpretation of scripture and thus provide authoritative guidance. But the argument is double edged. What papal pronouncements are infallible? There has never been an infallible list. To the outsider at least the recent encyclical appears to fulfil the requirements laid down by Vatican I for an infallible ex cathedra pronouncement on matters pertaining to faith or morals.

As soon as one begins to ask what is the Catholic teaching on a given point or what was the teaching of such and such a council, the outsider soon finds himself bewildered by the qualifications with which Catholic pronouncements seem to be hedged. In a recent article in *Concilium* on 'The Magisterium in the Changing Church' Gregory Baum shows himself sensitive to the problem.<sup>38</sup> He cannot accept the idea 'that the Church's teaching is a fixed body of truths handed on from generation to generation. . . . There can be no doubt that some doctrinal positions taught by the highest ecclesiastical magisterium in the past no longer expresses present-day teaching.'<sup>39</sup> A case in point is the famous dictum *extra Ecclesiam nulla salus*, the implications of which were apparently rigorously spelt out by the Council of Florence but invested with a new meaning by Vatican II.<sup>40</sup> Baum goes on to comment: 'It would be superficial to say that a change of policy on the part of the Church—religious liberty, ecumenism, dialogue, co-operation, acknowledgment of positive values in other religions—belongs simply to the practical order. No, the change that has taken place is doctrinal. The theologian is therefore obliged to examine the indefectibility and infallibility of the magisterium and face the difficult question of how it can be reconciled with the changing teaching of the Church. The very problem seems to reverse a theological trend of the past century.'<sup>41</sup> He then instances the question of papal infallibility which some schools in the Catholic Church extended to teachings which Baum considers secondary, including the Syllabus of Errors (1864).

In the last century John Henry Newman was acutely aware of the problem—long before the definition of infallibility and the Syllabus. He wrote *The Development of Christian Doctrine* (1845) in his last days as an Anglican partly to convince himself of the validity of the step that he was taking. In the second part of the work he expounded seven 'Notes' which distinguished genuine doctrinal development from error. Needless to say, Newman considered Catholic teaching as genuine development.<sup>42</sup> No doubt Baum would accept much of what Newman wrote. Baum, however, prefers to draw a distinction 'between the *continuous magisterium*, exercised in liturgy and the preparation for it, in which Christ continually teaches the local Churches, and the *intermittent magisterium*, exercised by ecclesiastical decrees, through which the continuous magisterium is strengthened.'<sup>43</sup> The distinction

seems to the present writer to be useful. But in the end Baum admits that, 'There are then three questions in regard to the intermittent magisterium which we are not able to answer. Where is the dividing line between infallible and non-infallible teaching of the Church? What is the precise meaning of defined teaching in its historical context? How far will greater fidelity to the Gospel qualify present teaching?'<sup>44</sup> But this seems to the evangelical Protestant onlooker to be precisely the dilemma of Catholicism today. Baum's article is open-ended. He praises the Encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam* (1964) for formulating questions rather than laying down answers, and ends by saying that the pastoral needs of the Church demands that the magisterium finds new ways of presenting and defending the gospel that are adapted to contemporary needs and are open to the guidance of the Spirit.<sup>45</sup> But again it must be said that this is to formulate a question rather than give an answer. Moreover, it does not solve the problem with which he began—that of the great heritage of tradition and method which now hangs like the albatross around the neck of the ancient mariner.

By contrast I would like to draw attention to the Anglican approach which dates from the Reformation and which has been re-affirmed in the final *Report of the Anglican-Methodist Unity Commission*.

The principles that holy Scripture is the supreme and sufficient rule of faith and life, and that ecclesiastical tradition has value, and claims the Christian's allegiance, only so far as it expounds and subserves holy Scripture, and embodied with great clarity in the formularies of both our Churches. On the theme of authority in the Church, the Anglican Articles speak as follows:

'Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation: so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man, that it should be believed as an article of the Faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation.'<sup>46</sup> The reason why 'the Three Creeds . . . ought thoroughly to be received and believed' is because 'they may be proved by most certain warrants of Holy Scripture'.<sup>47</sup> Even General Councils 'may err, and sometimes have erred, even in things pertaining unto God. Wherefore things ordained by them as necessary to salvation have neither strength nor authority, unless it may be declared that they be taken out of Holy Scripture'.<sup>48</sup> 'The Church hath power to decree Rites or Ceremonies, and authority in Controversies of Faith: And yet it is not lawful for the Church to ordain any thing that is contrary to God's Word written. . . .'<sup>49</sup> 'It is not necessary that Traditions and Ceremonies be in all places one, and utterly alike . . . they . . . may be changed according to the diversities of countries, times, and men's manners, so that nothing be ordained against God's Word.'<sup>50</sup>

Now this seems to me to allow for genuine doctrinal development. It gives a real place to the teaching office of the church, and recognises the need for doctrinal formularies and rules in the church. But the latter are not irreformable. Their authority is a secondary authority. It always depends upon that of Scripture. In a sense a doctrinal formula is like a scientific hypothesis. It is always subject to revision—at least in principle—in the light of fresh truth. Moreover, like a scientific hypothesis, it is always open to public examination and verification. Such formularies can never take the form of a bald *fiat*. To change the metaphor, it could be said that doctrinal formu-

larities act like sign posts and fences. They point the way to where the truth is. They demark the area in which the truth is to be found. But they do not themselves constitute that truth. Unlike prospecting in the wild west, the mere erection of a stake or a fence does not constitute the validity of the claim. A fence may be erected or a sign planted because the position is already defined, in principle at least, by the Word in Scripture.

### CONCLUSION

In conclusion I will list three or four questions and points which seem to be crucial.

1. At the time of the council it was said that the task was now to define the collegiality of the bishops in order to counterbalance the emphasis on the authority of the pope in Vatican I. To the Protestant onlooker this is not the basic question. The root question is that of the church and scripture.

2. Gregory Baum makes a heroic plea for a new approach. Yet in the end he does not solve the problem of the great mass of official teaching which now seems wrong or misleading even to Catholics. In the end this can only be resolved by adopting the approach outlined in the Articles.

3. The church is not the custodian of the Word of God. Rather the reverse. It is the Word of God which keeps the church.

4. It may be that one day that Protestants would be willing to accept the Pope in the capacity of a president of a World Council of Churches or as a kind of super Archbishop of Canterbury. They might do this on the grounds that there is nothing in Scripture against the idea of a chairman and occasion might require such. But this is considerably less than anything claimed for the papacy since the third century. Something will have to give somewhere if unity is ever to be achieved.

5. The question of the teaching office seems likely to be the most intractable. It is also perhaps the most basic of all, because it concerns the principles and authority of the Church. If there was agreement here, the remaining issues would be relatively easy.

<sup>1</sup> Quotations are taken from the English translation *The Regulation of Birth. Encyclical Letter of Pope Paul VI 'HUMANAE VITAE'*, Catholic Truth Society, 1968.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Pius XII, Apostolic Constitution *Munificentissimus Deus*, 1 Nov. 1950: *AAS* 42 (1950), p. 756; Collected Writings of St. Cyprian, *Letter* 66, 8; Hartel, III, B, p. 733: 'The Church (is) people united with the priest and the pastor together with his flock.'

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Vatican Council I, *Dogmatic Constitution on the Catholic Faith*, chap. 3 On Faith: Denzinger, 1792 (3011).

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Pius XII, Encyclical *Humani Generis*, 12 Aug. 1950: *AAS* 42 (1950), pp. 568-69; Denzinger, 2314 (3886).

<sup>5</sup> In a footnote the Eng. tr. points out that, 'The Latin term for the teaching office is *magisterium*, including in its broadcast sense all who proclaim the word with authority in the Church. It generally refers to the Pope and the bishops collectively. Their duty is to serve the word of God!

<sup>6</sup> *Op. cit.*, II, 10, 18 November 1965. Quoted from *The Documents of Vatican II*, general editor Walter M. Abbot, translation editor Joseph Gallagher (Geoffrey Chapman, 1966), pp. 117f.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Eusebius of Caesarea, *Hist. Eccl.*, V, 24, 10: *GCS* II, 1, p. 495 (ed. Bardy, *Sources chr.*, II, p. 69); and Dionysius as given in Eusebius of Caesarea, *Hist. Eccl.*, VII, 5, 2; *GCS* II, pp. 638f. (ed. Bardy, II, pp. 168f.).

<sup>8</sup> For the ancient Councils cf. Eusebius of Caesarea, *Hist. Eccl.*, V, 23:4: GCS II, 1, pp. 488ff. (ed. Bardy, II, p. 66ff.) and passim, Council of Nicea, canon 5: *Conc. Oec. Decr.*, p. 7.

<sup>9</sup> Tertullian, *De ieiunio* 13; *PL* 2, 972 B (*CSEL*, 20, p. 292, 11. 13-16).

<sup>10</sup> St. Cyprian, *Epist.*, 56, 3; Hartel, III B, p. 650 (ed. Bayard, p. 154).

<sup>11</sup> Cf. official *Relatio* of Zinelli during Vatican Council I: Mansi, 52, 1109 C.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Vatican Council I, Schema for the second dogmatic constitution *De Ecclesia Christi*, c. 4: Mansi, 53, 310. See also the *Relatio* of Kleutgen on the revised schema: Mansi, 53, 321 B-322 B; and the statement by Zinelli: Mansi, 52, 1110 A. And see, too, St. Leo the Great, *Serm.* 4, 3: *PL* 54, 151 A.

<sup>13</sup> Code of Canon Law, c. 227.

<sup>14</sup> *Op. cit.*, III. 22 (Eng. tr. pp. 42-44).

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Henry Bettenson, *The Early Christian Fathers* (OUP, 1956), pp. 363f. for interpretation and text.

<sup>16</sup> *The Church Teaches* (B. Herder, 1955), No. 154; Denzinger, 469.

<sup>17</sup> It may be noted in passing that the Bull *Exsurge Domine* (1520) which condemned Luther listed among his errors his denial of papal authority and the connection between Peter and the papacy (*The Church Teaches*, 166-169; Denzinger, 765-768).

<sup>18</sup> *The Church Teaches*, 202; Denzinger, 1822 (Session IV, 18 July 1870).

<sup>19</sup> *The Church Teaches*, 204; Denzinger, 1824.

<sup>20</sup> *The Church Teaches*, 206; cf. 164 (Council of Florence, 1438-45); Denzinger, 1826, cf. 694. Florence was dealing with schismatics.

<sup>21</sup> *The Church Teaches*, 219; Denzinger, 1839.

<sup>22</sup> Eng. tr., (1953) 1962.<sup>2</sup> Cullman gives a survey of interpretations from the fathers to the present on pp. 164-176. For a survey of papal authority generally see H. Burn-murdoch, *The Development of the Papacy* (Faber, 1954).

<sup>23</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 213; cf. 192ff.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> The Catholic scholar, Otto Karrer, has written a scholarly monograph *Peter and the Church: An Examination of Cullman's Thesis* (ET, Herder-Nelson, 1963) in which he admits: 'It is true that Peter's rank as the one who acknowledged the Messiah, and his status as first apostle and rock-foundation of the Church is non-recurring. There is no question of inheritance of these things or of any replacement of the one apostolic beginning appointed by Christ. The foundation-stone has been laid once and for all; but just as with the apostles, so with the first apostle it is true that this unique, non-recurrent characteristic includes something which lasts for ever. Peter's role as the exponent of the revelation is unique: his role as the exponent of unity and the one is authorised to look after this unity is perpetual (p. 92). This seems to say considerably less than the pronouncements we have cited—and to that extent is welcome to Protestant ears—but even so Karrer seems to claim more for Peter than the NT does.

<sup>26</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 214.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Karrer, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Cullmann, *op. cit.*, pp. 208f.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Cullmann, *op. cit.*, pp. 210ff.

<sup>30</sup> G. Dalman, *The Words of Jesus*, ET 1909, p. 214; E. Klostermann, *Das Mattäusevangelium* and Th. Zahn, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus ad. loc.*

<sup>31</sup> A. Schlatter, *Der Evangelist Matthäus*, and J. Schniewind, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus, ad. loc.* Strack-Billerbeck, I, p. 738 give both meanings.

<sup>32</sup> For discussion of archaeological and other data for Peter's visit to Rome see Cullmann, *op. cit.*, pp. 71-157.

<sup>33</sup> *Early Christian Fathers*, tr. and ed. C. C. Richardson (*LCC* I, SCM, 1953), p. 73.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Charles Davis conclusion about the papacy: 'The conclusion I came to was that the biblical and historical data did not make the Roman Catholic Church and its teaching sufficiently credible' (*A Question of Conscience*, Hodder, 1967, p. 125).

<sup>35</sup> *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation*, II. 10 (*The Documents of Vatican II*, pp. 117f.).

<sup>36</sup> *Dictionary of Moral Theology*, compiled under the direction of Francesco Cardinal Roberti and edited under the direction of Monsignor Pietro Palazzini (ET, Burns and Oates, 1962), pp. 725f.

<sup>37</sup> The same test is applied in the OT to 'dreamers of dreams' who perform various wonders (Deut. 13: 1-5).

<sup>38</sup> *Concilium*, Vol. 1, No. 3, January 1967, pp. 34-42.

<sup>39</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 34.

<sup>40</sup> Florence affirmed: 'The holy Roman Church believes, professes, and preaches that "no one remaining outside the Catholic Church, not just pagans, but also Jews or heretics or schismatics, can become partakers of eternal life; but they will go to the 'everlasting fire which was prepared for the devil and his angels' (Matt. 25: 41), unless before the end of life they are joined to the Church'"' (*CT*, 165; Denzinger, 714; Baum, p. 34 cf. Vatican II: *Constitution on the Church*, 15, 16; *Const. on Church in Modern World*, 22 and; *Decree on Ecumenism, Declaration on Non-Christian Religions*).

<sup>41</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 35.

<sup>42</sup> Newman described these 'Notes' as (1) 'Preservation of its Type', (2) 'Continuity of its Principles', (3) 'Its Power of Assimilation', (4) 'Its Logical Sequence', (5) 'Anticipation of its Future', (6) 'Conservative Action upon its Past', and (7) 'Its Chronic Vigour'. He devoted a chapter to each, expounding it in the light of particular doctrines.

<sup>43</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 35.

<sup>44</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 39.

<sup>45</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 41.

<sup>46</sup> Article VI.

<sup>47</sup> Article VIII.

<sup>48</sup> Article XXI.

<sup>49</sup> Article XX.

<sup>50</sup> Article XXXIV. The text goes on to quote the Deed of Union of the Methodist Church. Quoted from *Anglican Methodist Unity. Part 2. The Scheme* (SPCK and Epworth, 1968), No. 55, p. 20.