

## Getting along with the Pope V

ran, who were always saying "This (X) hasn't been solemnly defined...therefore we do not have to believe it.") It was made abundantly clear then, during the pontificates of John Paul II and Benedict, that a pope can confirm or reaffirm something, and do so without any *ex cathedra* definition.

Without going too much into what are sometimes called "theological notes," know that these are a handy tool to make some distinctions about what we must believe, and how we are to believe it. So the doctrines in the first level of belief are called *de fide credenda* (or sometimes just *de fide*, of the faith), because they have their immediate basis in the Word of God itself. "On the third day he rose from the dead" is an example of this. The truths of the second level are called *de fide tenenda* (to be held of the faith), because they are based on the assistance of the Holy Ghost to the magisterium.

Another distinction between these two levels of doctrine is the kind of punishment or censure which can be merited by dissent from either. Anyone who knowingly and obstinately rejects any of the truths of the first level merits the canonical censure of heresy, which puts them outside of the Church. What "knowingly" means in this instance may be understood by the distinction between formal and material heresy. Material heresy is holding a position which is heretical, but not knowing it is heretical. This applies to almost all of us, since we can easily misunderstand or grasp a doctrine incorrectly. But the material heretic, once shown what the truth is, will often quickly disavow the former position in favor of the truth. A formal heretic is one who holds a heretical position, and insists on holding even after being shown the truth. So the censure (excommunication) would apply only to a formal heretic. "Obstinately" rejecting the truth is the

holding of a heretical position after correction – even multiple corrections.

Pope Benedict XVI clarified this further, since there have been no lack of theologians who say "yes" to the universal and ordinary magisterium, yet who qualify their assent by saying that the understanding of universal must be qualified. This gets very complicated, and I hope I'm not oversimplifying, but basically it boils down to a question of whether we say the magisterium is of time only (synchronic), or both time and space (diachronic). In other words, is the universal magisterium just today's episcopacy (here and now), or is it today's episcopacy and the bishops who came before us?

To this question he wrote, "It should be noted that infallible teaching of the ordinary and universal magisterium is not only set forth with an explicit declaration of a doctrine contained in a practice of the Church's faith, derived from revelation or, in any case, necessary for eternal salvation, and attested to by the uninterrupted Tradition: such an infallible teaching is thus objectively set forth by the whole episcopal body, understood in a diachronic and not necessarily merely synchronic sense. Furthermore, the intention of the ordinary and universal magisterium to set forth a doctrine is not generally linked to technical formulations of particular solemnity; it is enough that this be clear from the tenor of the words used and from their context."

Again, it has been typical of dissenters to proclaim that "The correct formula was not used! So there's nothing wrong with the pill! John Paul didn't use the formula about women's ordination, so the subject remains open!" Nonsense. There is no one (or magisteric) formula that makes a teaching infallible.

The Decree *Pastor Aeternus* from Vatican I, defined well the infallibility of the pope when speaking *ex cathedra* (literally "from the chair" that is, as the Supreme Pontiff), but did not address the second class of truths, namely, definitively proposed statements on matters closely connected with revealed truth. But there was a good amount of agreement amongst good theologians on the basic principles. Take for example, Dr. Ludwig Ott, in his work *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*. "The totality of the Bishops is infallible, when they, either assembled in general council or scattered over the earth, propose a teaching of faith or morals as one to be held by all the faithful."

This position was reiterated at the Second Vatican Council, in the constitution *Lumen Gentium*. "Although the individual bishops do not enjoy the prerogative of infallibility, they nevertheless proclaim Christ's doctrine infallibly whenever, even though dispersed through the world, but still maintaining the bond of communion among themselves and with the successor of Peter, and authentically teaching matters of faith and morals, they are in agreement on one position as definitively to be held. This is even more clearly verified when, gathered together in an ecumenical council, they are teachers and judges of faith and morals for the universal Church, whose definitions must be adhered to with the submission of faith."

Just a note on the Synod on the Family here – the bishops are nowhere near coming to any sort of agreement at this point. And it seems likely that they will not reach any agreement on the Kaspar thesis, so much in the news these days. A further note would be this – that the agreement of the bishops and popes since the early

Church has been unanimous on the matter of Holy Matrimony. If this constant teaching is contradicted, then this would be tantamount to rejecting the doctrines which are on level one. And thus, "Whoever obstinately places them in doubt or denies them falls under the censure of heresy, as indicated by the respective canons of the Code of Canon Law."

The doctrines which may be found in the second level are sometimes referred to as "secondary truths;" they follow immediately and necessarily from the first level, either logically, (if "What God has joined let no man put asunder" then the doctrine of the indissolubility of Matrimony), or historically, (the existence of purgatory even if the name isn't used in Scripture, but prayers for the dead being offered at the earliest Masses). St. John Paul II wrote that "When the Magisterium proposes 'in a definitive way' truths concerning faith and morals, which, even if not divinely revealed, are nevertheless strictly and intimately connected with Revelation, these must be firmly accepted and held. Every believer therefore, is required to give firm and definitive assent to these truths, based on faith in the Holy Spirit's assistance to the Church's Magisterium, and on the Catholic doctrine of the infallibility of the Magisterium in these matters."

So these truths of the second level are given to the Church either through the solemn magisterium or the ordinary Magisterium, or if you will, by the defining acts of the solemn magisterium or the non-defining acts of the ordinary Magisterium. Cardinal Ratzinger clearly attributed infallibility to both classes of teaching. This is important for so many theologians who were Magisterial minimalists (for example, Fr. Richard McBrien, or Fr. Charles Cur-