

I. Catholic theologians in general admit three areas of moral doctrinal statements/ of the magisterium:

1. formally revealed moral principles, either explicit or implicit in the "deposit of faith.

Vatican II, Lumen Gentium, states

"This infallibility (in faith and morals) with which the ~~divine~~ Redeemer willed his church to be endowed in defining a doctrine of ~~xi~~ faith and morals extends as far as extends the deposit of divine revelation, which must be religiously guarded and faithfully expounded ("tantum patet quantum divinae revelationis patet depositum, sancte custodiendum et fideliter exponendum"). n. 25

So that infallibility <sup>extends</sup> does, even to explaining what is implicit in the text and what must be explicitated for its true total exposition. These are often called the primary and secondary objects of infallibility.

2. A second area of moral statements: virtually revealed moral principles, i.e. those deduced by reasoning from the formally revealed, where one premise would be a revealed truth, and the other a truth of natural reasons

3. A third area of moral~~s~~ statement or affirmation, all the principles of natural law, all moral truth to be known by reason ~~xxx~~ alone, with correct explanation, interpretation, application.

These are the three areas in which a moral truth proposed by the ecclesial magisterium may be ~~xxx~~ found to lie.

II. There are two degrees of authority with which the church is reckoned to teach a moral truth, and in consequence two subjective reactions of the faithful to the two different propositions:

1. First there are truths proposed infallibly by the church.

Vatican I taught: "By divine and catholic faith, everything must be believed which is contained in the written word or in tradition and which is proposed by the church as divinely revealed object of belief, in solemn Decree or in ordinary universal magisterium" DB 1792.

And Vatican II (LG n. 25) "But when either the Roman Pontiff or the body of bishops together with him defines a judgment, they pronounce it in accord with revelation itself. All are obliged to maintain and to be ruled by this revelation."

The required reaction ~~substantivum~~ then to infallible teaching is an act of divine faith.

2/ Second: there are truths not proposed infallibly, but authoritatively or authentically, which required and receive something less than the assent of faith.

In Casti Connubii, Pius XI had written, "The faithful must be obedient not only to the solemn definitions of the church, but also, in proper proportion, to other constitutions and decrees."

Humani Generis taught: "Let teachers in ecclesiastical institutions be aware that they cannot with tranquil conscience exercise the office of teaching entrusted to them, unless in the instruction of their students they religiously accept and exactly observe the norms which we have ordained. That due reverence and submission which in their unceasing labour they must profess towards the teaching authority of the church, let them instil also into the minds and hearts of their students."

While Lumen Gentium has this: "In matters of faith and morals the bishops speak in the name of Christ, and the faithful are to accept their teaching and to adhere to it, with a religious assent of soul.

This religious submission of will and mind, must be shown in a special way to the authentic teaching authority of the Roman Pontiff, even when he is not speaking ex cathedra. That is, it must be shown in such a way, that his supreme magisterium is acknowledged with reverence, the judgments made by him are sincerely adhered to, according to his manifest mind and will. His mind and will in the matter may be known chiefly either from the ~~lx~~ character of the documents, from his frequent repetition of the same doctrine, or from his manner of speaking."

LG n. 25.

III. The doctrinal content of this encyclical is not proposed as divinely revealed truth, infallibly taught by the Roman Pontiff. There is simply no suggestion that it is.

For this reason:

1. there can be no question of an assent of divine and catholic faith.
2. we can prescind from the whole controversy as to whether virtually revealed truths can be the object of infallible magisterium.
3. we can prescind from the controversy as to whether the morality of ~~birth~~ ~~artificial~~ artificial contraception, merely as a truth of natural law, COULD be the object of an infallible proposition. Some authors, e.g. Joseph Fuchs, Richard McCormick, John Reed, would maintain that the whole range of natural morality (morality known by reason, but not formally revealed) lies within the competence of the church to be proposed infallibly. Others, such as Gregory Baum, Kevin Kelly (Clergy Review, 52, 1967, pp. 682-94) and - with some differences, F. A. Sullivan - would not admit that the magisterium can propose as ~~divinely revealed~~ to be accepted with divine faith, truths of natural law, unless these are explicitly revealed.



F.A. Sullivan in his *de Ecclesia (romae, 1963)* describes the assent somewhat as follows. "That which is taught by the ordinary magisterium in faith and morals, demands an internal religious assent, but not an absolute assent which is reserved for infallibly proposed teaching." (o.c. p. 340)

This is hardly assent in the usual sense, but rather "provisional agreement" or "conditional acceptance". It is an affirmation not necessitated by intrinsic evidence in favour of the teaching, but motivated by personal obedience to the divinely guided authority of the church. It is not unconditional assent, (as would be the case in infallible teaching), but made with at least two conditions, "

1. "unless the church decides otherwise" and
2. "unless the contrary becomes evident."

This assent excludes prudent fear of error, and provides justifiable basis for activity.

This is not far removed from the view of Rahner and Vorgrimler in their *Theological Dictionary* (Freiburg, 1965).

In the case of authentic or authoritative but non-infallible truths, - - "The church requires our internal assent to these truths, but not the absolutely irrevocable assent of faith. A person may withhold this assent, which is posited on the basis of the church's authority, if in view of certain considerations which supersede the state of the question as it has hitherto been proposed, he becomes convinced that an opinion proposed authentically but not infallibly by the church, no longer does the matter justice."

For Gregory Baum, the attitude of mind required by such propositions would be a readiness to learn, to absorb, make our own the teaching proposed.

Catholics believe there is a teaching authority in the church through which God secures the saving truth necessary or useful for salvation, and they sincerely try to assimilate this.

Occasionally the Catholic will find it difficult to assimilate the teaching authoritatively proposed, If he finds it impossible not only to assimilate that teaching but even to reconcile it with the total Gospel as preached by the church, he may responsibly reveal his convictions and work towards a revision of the official position.

~~Though I do not think I would see that~~

Such Catholic cannot give internal assent to a proposition which appears to him evidently wrong. By the same token he would not be bound to any act or omission contrary to his conscience.

Bruno Schuller puts the matter thus:

"Doubt about authentic teaching can only be justified on serious grounds, shared by a large number of competent Christians regarding the teaching in question. In general, one can adopt an opinion that varies from the authentic teaching, only if one is certain of the magisterium's silent approval, amounting to a practical retreat from <sup>the earlier</sup> ~~the earlier~~ position." TD 15, 1967, p. 99.

We certainly don't have a "practical retreat from the earlier position", but it is surely true that the doubt about the authentic teaching seems justified on serious grounds, and is shared by a large number of competent Christians (notably all the ~~Christian~~ X<sup>t</sup>ian churches, with the exception of the Roman communion) including some bishops, many theologians.

Conclusions.

1. It seems to me difficult to deny that a Roman Catholic may find it impossible to give internal assent to the doctrine proposed, <sup>or to its unique security</sup> ~~as to its unique security~~ and may see many reasons, cogent and unanswered, which persuade in the contrary sense. In such a situation, faced with the ~~serious~~ necessity of a decision as to practice - a decision fraught with weighty consequences, for the stability and welfare of his family, - it seems to me that a Catholic might well be justified in adopting a practice at variance with the authentic or authoritative teaching, - in thoroughly good conscience, It seems to me too that he might continue in reception of the sacraments in such a case, - while continuing study and prayer for guidance and light.

2. It seems to me that a confessor - whether he shared such difficulty in accepting the authentic teaching or not, - might legitimately recognize the validity of such a position of his penitent, and indeed might even instruct the penitent in this sense, *or i.e. might point out the licity of such conduct*  
*observatis observandis.*  
It is clear that such is not to be done lightly or without all the steps prudence might dictate to avoid scandal, or a decay of faith and reverence for the teaching authority of the church.