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BOOK REVIEW

Francis A. Sullivan, *Magisterium: Teaching Authority of the Catholic Church*, Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 2011. Pages: 234. ISBN: 978-81-88821-72-3

Sullivan's work, spread out into 8 chapters, offers a systematic presentation of the "modern Catholic thinking about the nature of teaching authority in the Church" (p. 2). His analysis of the various events and developments in the past two decades is centred around "the belief which a great many Christians besides Catholics share, namely, that the Church of Christ is maintained in the truth of the Gospel by the Holy Spirit" (p. 2).

The first chapter, "The Infallibility of the People of God," affirms that "Christian faith in the indefectibility of the Church is ... totally a matter of confidence in divine promises and divine grace" (p. 5) which assures that the Lord will be with her till the end. Referring to the properties of the Church, he reiterates that Church is indefectibly one, holy, catholic and apostolic and that the faith of the church is normative for the individuals. At the very outset he clears some basic considerations like subsistence of the Church of Christ in the Catholic Church (p. 20); *sensus fidei* (21) and *sensus fidelium* (22).

The second chapter "*Magisterium*" presents, in the light of the teachings of Vatican II (*DV* and *LG*) and quoting Thomas Aquinas, the original and modern common Catholic understanding of the term *magisterium*; distinction between the pastoral or hierarchical teaching function of bishops and that of the theologians and the exegetes pp. 24, 28), and related concepts like "universal magisterium" and distinction between authentic and authoritative teaching.

In the third chapter, "Biblical and Historical Basis for the Teaching Authority of Bishops," the author responds to Hans Küng's criticism that Church's foundational theory and belief of apostolic succession of bishops and the resulting authoritative teaching function and infallibility of the college of bishops, taught by Vatican II, are having no basis but "feet of clay." Based on statements of *LG* 21-25 and post-conciliar declaration of Theological

Commission of the Council (1964) Sullivan establishes that “within one century or so after the death of the apostles, practically every Christian church ... was being led by a single bishop” (p. 42) and these bishops were considered as successors of apostles, though not in a “direct and exclusive sense” by divine institution.

The fourth chapter “The Bearers of the Pastoral Teaching Office” presents Vatican Council’s teaching (LG 25-27) on the teaching function of individual bishops in the dioceses as pastoral, authoritative and fallible (p. 53); the ecumenicity of the Ecumenical councils; various ways of exercising their pastoral teaching ministry and the various degrees of assent required (p. 60). It considers the teaching authority of the ecumenical councils as well as the pope and critically examines, on the basis of the principle of collegiality, if the pope can define a dogma without convening a council to discuss the question (p. 75).

While dealing with the “Infallibility of the Magisterium in Defining Dogmas of Faith,” the author affirms that “a non-revealed proposition even if it could be infallibly defined to be true, could never be defined as a dogma of faith, because only what is in itself divinely revealed can be an object of divine faith” (p. 79). The conditions attached to the subject, object and act of defining a teaching as infallible are discussed (pp. 99-106). The non reception of the infallibility of pope by the other Christians, and its implications on the prospects of Christian reunion are also treated (p. 112).

The next chapter discusses “The Infallibility of the Ordinary Universal Magisterium and the Limits of the Object of Infallibility” (119-152). With reference to the encyclical *Humane Vitae*, “whether a moral doctrine like that on methods of contraception has been, or ever could be, infallibly taught” has been beautifully discussed. Sullivan deliberates on the primary and secondary object of the infallible magisterium, the natural moral law, its various aspects and the authority of the magisterium to teach infallibly on it.

Dealing with “The Non-Definitive Exercise of Papal and Conciliar Teaching Authority,” Sullivan affirms that though non-infallible, the teachings of the encyclicals are supreme and authoritative and that the faithful are obliged to accept and embrace or to adhere to what is taught, according to the mind of the pope or council (p. 154). He says that there is a possibility with conditions for a “legitimate dissent from the ordinary teaching of the magisterium” (p. 171). This hints at the authoritative but “reformable” nature of the non-definitive teaching authority.

In the final chapter, "The Magisterium and the Role of the Theologians in the Church," the author presents in three parts the relationship between magisterium and theologians: i) the commonalities that exist between the magisterium and the theologians in the discharge of their task; ii) the differences in the functions and especially the role of the theologians in the teaching office, and iii) a method for improving the relationship between them.

Although the author admits that this work has "non specialists in mind" he treats the matter with such expertise and elaboration that it is helpful for the scholars and those in offices as well as students and the public. However, some more references to the canons of the code/s, along with Vatican Documents, would have been helpful. Sullivan concludes his scholarly work with the following words: "If a teacher must keep on learning in order to teach well, he has to accept his need to be taught. This applies to the *magisterium cathedrae pastoralis* and to the *magisterium cathedrae magistralis*" (p. 218).

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