

THE MAGISTERIUM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

A “Cheat Sheet”/Quick Reference Guide

Definitions:

Magisterium: the teaching office of a pope or a bishop in union with the pope;

Extraordinary magisterium: non-ordinary solemn teaching

Ordinary magisterium: part of the regular teaching duties

Universal magisterium: taught to the entire Church

Infallible (irreformable): unable to be in error due to a special charism from Christ and, therefore, unable to be reformed

Non-infallible (reformable): able to be false (*very rare*) and, therefore, able to be reformed (which means clarified, corrected – even overturned/contradicted – see e.g.’s below)

The following outline is drawn from my Fundamental Theology class notes and from the CDF document “Doctrinal Commentary on the Concluding Formula of the Professio Fidei”:

<https://www.ewtn.com/library/CURIA/CDFADTU.HTM>

I. Dogmas of divine and catholic faith:

A. Doctrines that are “divinely and formally revealed”

B. Manner and quality of proposal – infallible in each instance:

1. Extraordinary Magisterium:

a. Papal: “ex cathedra” solemn definitions

b. Solemn definitions of ecumenical councils:

2. Ordinary and Universal Magisterium

a. Pope alone: confirmation or re-affirmation of a doctrine

b. Bishops in communion with the pope teaching something to be held definitively as revealed.

C. Assent: theological faith

D. Censure: Heresy

E. Examples:

1. The articles of faith of the Creed

2. Christological and Marian dogmas

3. Doctrine of the institution of the sacraments by Christ and their efficacy with regard to grace

II. Definitive teachings on faith and morals (or intrinsically connected to faith and morals):

A. Teachings that are not proposed as being formally revealed (i.e., they may or may not be revealed, but they are *not proposed* by the magisterium as being revealed).

B. Manner and quality of proposal – infallible in each instance

1. Extraordinary Magisterium:

- a. Papal: “ex cathedra” solemn definitions
- b. Solemn definitions of ecumenical councils:

2. Ordinary and Universal Magisterium

- a. Pope alone: confirmation or re-affirmation of a doctrine
- b. Bishops in communion with the pope teaching something to be held definitively as revealed.

C. Assent: firmly to be accepted and held 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”

D. Censure: loss of full communion with the Catholic Church

E. Examples:

1. Logical connection to divine revelation (by implication, these may be able to be declared as divinely revealed):

- a. The doctrine of papal infallibility before Vatican I
- b. Doctrine that priestly ordination is reserved only to men
- c. The illicitness of euthanasia
- d. Illicitness of prostitution
- e. Illicitness of fornication

2. Necessary historical connection to divine revelation (not able to be declared as divinely revealed):

- a. The legitimacy of the election of the Supreme Pontiff
- b. The legitimacy of the celebration of an ecumenical council
- c. The canonizations of saints (dogmatic facts)
- d. The declaration of Pope Leo XIII in the Apostolic Letter *Apostolicae Curae* on the invalidity of Anglican ordinations

III. Non-definitive teachings of the magisterium:

A. Teachings on faith and morals (or connected thereto) presented as true (or at least as sure) that have not been defined with a solemn judgment or proposed as definitive by the ordinary and universal Magisterium

B. Manner of proposal: ordinary and universal Magisterium (the pope alone, or pope and bishops together)

*****These teachings are NOT infallible and therefore they are reformable (i.e., able to be modified, clarified, corrected, or contradicted/overturned)**

C. Assent: Religious submission of will and intellect

D. Censure: Erroneous or (regarding prudential teachings) rash/dangerous

E. Examples:

The teaching of Florence that the matter of Holy Orders is the handing on of the instruments

The teaching of the Roman Catechism (Catechism of the Council of Trent) on delayed animation

JPII's teaching in *Evangelium Vitae* that capital punishment may only be used for a polis to defend itself ("self-defense")

Global warming is real and it is caused by man (*Laudato Si*)

GS, a. 24, First and greatest commandment is love of God **and of neighbor**