Amoris Laetitia: Its Teachings and Magisterial Authority

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The Nature of the Magisterium

The word *magisterium* comes from the Latin word *magister,* which means *master*[1] and pertains etymologically to the *authority* of schoolmasters or teachers[2] as well as their particular role.[3] The present definition of the term *magisterium*, however, in Catholic usage, is the product of historical development, where an evolving ecclesiology is vital to the development of the notion of the Church's authority and role as teacher.

In the Judaeo-Christian tradition, this teaching authority and role as teacher have often been symbolized by a chair. In Matthew 23:2, for instance, we find an explicit mention of the Seat of Moses or the Chair of Moses. Medieval universities would, in turn, introduce the custom of having chairs in the lecture halls, which the professors literally occupied as they conducted their lectures sitting down. Until today, universities continue to employ the term "professorial chairs." Vis-à-vis the magisterium, St. Thomas Aquinas speaks of two "chairs": the pastoral chair of the bishop and the professorial

1 Francis Sullivan, SJ, *Magisterium: Teaching Authority in the Catholic Church* (New York: Paulist Press, 1983), 24.

2 Richard Gaillardetz, *By What Authority: A Primer on Scripture, the Magisterium, and the Sense of the Faithful* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2003), 60.

3 Francis A. Sullivan, "Magisterium," in *Dictionary of Fundamental Theology*, edited by René Latourelle (Makati: St. Paul's, 1994), 614.

chair of the university theologian.[4] For him, both instances of magisterium involve different but complementary forms of teaching authority in the Church: the bishop's authority coming from his role as prelate and the theologian's authority coming from his expertise in theology.[5] Today, however, the term has largely been narrowed down to mean only the teaching office of bishops and is rarely applied anymore to university professors.[6]

Succinctly put, the word *magisterium* pertains to the Church's teaching function.[7] At the same time, it can refer to those who exercise this teaching function in the Church which is the College of Bishops, i.e., the Pope and the bishops.[8] It refers to the authoritative teaching of those who are commissioned to speak to the community in the name of Christ to clarify the faith that the community professes.[9] The magisterium, in this regard, has the task of preaching and preserving the faith of the community. Moreover, the magisterium also refers to the group of individuals who perform the function of official teachers.[10] Examples of this are bishops' conferences and synods. Noticeably, the word magisterium here is tightly related and even equated to the Church hierarchy. However, the Church hierarchy in expressing Church teachings does not despise the faithful, inasmuch as their teachings ought to reflect the sense of faith (*sensus fidei*) of the faithful. The magisterium speaks for the community, to the community,

4 Ibid.
5 Sullivan, SJ, *Magisterium: Teaching Authority in the Catholic Church,* 24-25.
6 Ibid., 25.
7 Avery Dulles, SJ, *Magisterium: Teacher and Guardian of the Faith* (Florida: Sapientia Press of Ave Maria University, 2007), 2.
8 Sullivan, "Magisterium," in *Dictionary of Fundamental Theology*, 614.
9 Ibid., 2-3.
10 Ibid., 3.

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and with the community.

When the magisterium delivers teaching, it hopes to receive the salvific response of faith.[11] Hence, it demands certain obligations on the part of the members of the Church to believe what it teaches. In some cases, the rejection of authoritative teachings can mean exclusion of oneself from the Church.[12] However, the magisterium's call for obedience to what it teaches demands free internal assent, that is, it appeals to the intellect of the believer.[13] Assenting to the teaching of the magisterium is not about blind obedience. Rather, true assent involves an informed, educated, and free obedience to the faith.

Furthermore, the magisterium does not claim to be the original source of revelation, but only its witness and preserver.[14] In this regard, *Dei Verbum* states that the teaching office of the Church (magisterium) 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. In accord with a 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.[15] From here, it follows that the magisterium has a servile role in relation to the Word of God. God remains the supreme *magister* through the institutional *magisterium* of the Church.

11 Ibid.
12 Ibid.
13 Ibid.
14 Ibid., 6-7.
15 Vatican II, *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation* (Dei Verbum) no. 10, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651118_dei-verbum_en.html (accessed April 4, 2017).

The magisterium has three functions according to Avery Dulles, namely, heralding the apostolic faith, defending the faith against opposed errors, and clarifying the faith by bringing forth from the treasury 'things new and old.'[16] Above all, the primary task of the magisterium is to serve humanity today, to save them from the disease of their increasingly secular intelligence, and to shepherd the Lord's flock.[17] Again, at the core of the magisterium's nature is the fact of its servile position in relation to God in Christ and its ministerial task towards the People of God.

Highlights of *Amoris Laetitia*

Amoris Laetitia deals primarily with the family. It is an updating of the Church's pastoral teaching on the family, in consultation with bishops from around the world. Although it upholds firmly the Church's traditional teachings on the family, it nevertheless has taken a dauntless stance regarding the pastoral care of the family.

Here are some highlights of the apostolic exhortation:

1. **The Church's magisterium does not have all the answers to doctrinal, moral, and pastoral issues (cf. AL[18], 3).** This rephrased statement from Pope Francis can be shocking to some conservative believers. However, albeit negatively phrased, the Pope here can be understood as positively encouraging local ordinaries to provide suited and localized solutions to its pastoral problems especially when it

16 Dulles, SJ, *Magisterium: Teacher and Guardian of the Faith,* 60-63.

17 John Francis Whealon, "The Magisterium," in *Readings in Moral Theology no. 3: The Magisterium and Morality,* ed. Charles E. Curran and Richard A. McCormick, SJ (New York: Paulist Press, 1982), 200.

18 The abbreviation *AL* stands for *Amoris Laetitia* and the number following it designates the paragraph where the paraphrased or directly quoted statement appears.

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comes to the family (AL, 3; 199 ff.). This suggests decentralization of power in the Church, as the Pope seeks to empower the local bishops in their inherent pastoral authority to resolve pastoral, doctrinal, and moral issues at their level. He also recognizes in this line the diversity of cultures and traditions within the Church such that general principles should be inculturated if they are to be respected and applied (AL, 3). Moreover, he says that theologizing on marriage must be grounded on the concrete and practical realities of families (AL, 36). In this, he notes that the International Theological Commission declared that natural law could not be presented as an already established set of rules that impose themselves *a priori* on the moral subject. Rather it is to be regarded as a source of objective inspiration for the deeply personal process of making moral decisions (AL, 305).

2. **The family is the joy of the Church and the visible image of the Creator.** In the opening statement of the exhortation, Pope Francis says that the joy of love experienced in the family is also the joy of the Church (AL, 1). He further notes that the family is not a problem but an opportunity for human sanctification and growth (cf. AL, 7; 210). In the fruitfulness of the married couple, they are serving as a "living and effective 'image'" of God's creative act (AL, 10). The exclusivity of conjugal love serves as an icon of the reciprocal loving relationship between God and his people (AL, 70). Hence, the fruitful love of the couple becomes a symbol of God's inner life – the loving communion of the Trinity (AL, 11) that underlies the self-giving love of fruitful marriage life (AL, 13) and its attendant maturity, mercy, and patience towards gradual human growth (AL, 92; 93; 238; 308). Furthermore, he emphasizes that the family is a Domestic Church (AL, 15). Therefore, it is a place where the faith is nurtured among family members, especially the children (AL, 16).

3. **Family is challenging yet a venue for sanctification.** The family is called to grow in faith through prayers, reading of the Scriptures, Eucharistic communion, and love (AL, 29). The pope is inviting

families to fight individualism (AL, 33), the culture of the ephemeral (AL, 39), narcissism, pornography and the commercialization of the body (AL, 41), the mentality against having children (AL, 42), consumerism (Ibid.), migration's adverse effects on the family (AL, 46), family violence and drug addiction (AL, 51), and social injustices related to the family (AL, 44). Likewise, he invites families to understand the appropriate use of freedom, calling on couples to remove from themselves the fear of being trapped in a relationship (AL, 34) since marriage is a life-long sharing (AL, 123). The Pope also recognizes the challenge of raising children, especially in their education under present circumstances (AL, 84). In this regard, he notes that the Church should provide suitable pastoral assistance to parents in educating their children (AL, 85). As a means of sanctification, spouses must mutually belong to each other, as they become the concrete sign of Christ's relationship with the Church (AL, 72). Moreover, he underlines that marriage is a vocation and ought to be a product of vocational discernment (ibid.). In light of this, sexual union in marriage is a path of growth in the couple's life of grace (AL, 74). The Pope furthermore stresses the importance of the formation of conscience in the family (AL, 37) and the cultivation of charity (AL, 53). In times of family difficulties, the family should resort to the Sacraments of Reconciliation and Eucharist where they encounter the demanding yet compassionate Jesus (Al, 38). Lastly, he says that family crises should be faced together by the couple (AL, 234).

4. **Marriage is a gift.** God made everything good (AL, 61). Hence, marriage, as a good, is a gift from God (Ibid.). Moreover, it is the fullness of revelation in Christ that restores God's original plan and fulfills it (AL, 62). In this way, according to Pope Francis, Christ bestows on marriage and the family the grace to bear witness to God's covenantal love and the life of communion (AL, 63; 67). Marriage is likewise a gift to the Church since through it she understands her being a family (AL, 67). It is also a gift given for the sanctification and salvation of spouses (AL,

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72). Moreover, the Pope stresses that being a gift, it is at the same time a vocation. The proper response to this gift according to him is commitment, creativity, perseverance, and daily effort for the family (AL, 74). Furthermore, this gift of God, the pope teaches, is indissoluble (AL, 86).

5. **The Church sees with the eyes of Christ those couples in irregular situations.** Pope Francis takes a radical stance on showing mercy and consideration towards irregular marriages (AL, 78). He cites *Familiaris Consortio* no. 84 on the need for careful discernment of situations on the pastoral care of irregular marriages and counsels people to avoid rash judgment on such cases (AL, 79). Included in these irregular situations is the issue of adoption, begetting children by other means than what is natural, regulation of birth, abortion, and euthanasia (AL, 80-84). Marital separation, on the one hand, should be considered only as a last resort (AL, 241). Divorced persons who entered a new union should feel that they remain part of the Church; they are not excommunicated, teaches the Pope (AL, 243). Very importantly, he clarifies that such an attitude on the part of the Church is not a sign of weakening faith vis-à-vis the indissolubility of marriage but its expression of charity (Ibid.). Nonetheless, the Church in preventing divorce to happen takes as its vital pastoral work the strengthening of family love and the healing of family wounds (AL, 246). Though the Church possesses Christ's attitude of boundless love without exception, still it does not bestow on homosexual unions the dignity of marriage (AL, 251). Nonetheless, the Church does not condemn anyone forever for it is tasked to pour out the balm of God's mercy on all since this is the logic of the Gospel (AL, 296-297). To those who have difficulty in living God's law to the full, the invitation is *via caritatis* (AL, 306). In addition, the pope strongly notes that mercy is always the criterion of being God's children (AL, 310).

6. **Love is the foundation of marriage.** Here the pontiff underlines the Pauline hymn on love found in 1 Corinthians 13. He says that we cannot encourage a

path of fidelity and mutual self-giving without growth in conjugal and family love (AL, 89). Love in itself is always a gift of God (AL, 228). Marriage's goal above all is the perfection of the couple's love (Ibid.). This love is nurtured and experienced in the daily life of the family (AL, 90). It coexists with imperfection (AL, 113) and it fights injustice (AL, 96). It is equally hopeful (AL, 116) and never gives up (AL, 119). More importantly, the Pope conveys especially to young couples that one marries for love and not for something else (AL, 131-132). The loving communion within the family, i.e. in all its members, introduces fraternity to the world (AL, 194). In addition, married love is inclusive of discerned reasons that ensure genuine and stable commitment (AL, 209). In all these, marriage is a kind of salvation history which speaks of gradual growth over time and God's unfailing love (AL, 221).

7. **God created sexuality as a marvelous gift to his creatures** (AL, 150). The Pope here takes his cue from St. John Paul II's theology of the body. The Church does not diminish the value of human sexuality and sexual desires (Ibid.), he argues. He further teaches that sexuality is not a matter of gratification or entertainment but an interpersonal language of the sacred and inviolable human dignity of the persons involved (AL, 151). Sexual differentiation is the source of procreative fruitfulness and love that transforms a person into a gift (Ibid.). Thus, sexuality must be seen as a gift that enriches the relationship of spouses (AL, 152). On the other hand, we must not allow sexuality to be reduced to a utilitarian and consumeristic mentality (AL, 153). Thus, sex within marriage must involve communication and not domination (AL, 154; 155) because the persons involved are subjects, not objects. Tantamount to this assertion of the Pope is the rejection of sexual submission, for love excludes every kind of servile subjection (AL, 156). What instead should occur is mutual subjection (Ibid.). Finally, sexuality is meant to aid the fulfillment of the other in conjugal love (Ibid.).

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8. **Virginity is a form of love (AL, 159).** It is interesting how the Pope includes the topic of virginity in his discussion on the family. He teaches that the family's value lies in its symbolization of love that does not possess the other and thus speaks of the freedom of God's kingdom (AL, 161). He also encourages married couples, in this regard, to live out their conjugal love vis-à-vis Christ's definitive love (Ibid.). Nevertheless, it remains that virginity and marriage, according to the Pope, are different ways of loving (Ibid.). Married couples can inspire celibate persons and vice versa, in witnessing to God's generosity and fidelity (AL, 162).

9. **Love is fruitful.** Conjugal love does not end with the couple but with the begetting of offspring (AL, 165) for children are living reflections of spousal love (Ibid.). They are wonderful gifts of God (AL, 222). Significant to this is motherhood where the woman joins with God in bringing forth new life (AL, 168). Motherhood is the antidote to the escalation of self-centered individualism, according to Pope Francis (AL, 174). Moreover, the child in the womb is part of God's eternal loving plan (Ibid.) and should be accepted as is (AL, 170). The Pope emphasizes that it is important for the child to feel wanted (Ibid.) and loved (172). In this regard, the presence of the father is integral to the growth of the children (AL, 176). It is God who sets the father in the family and his absence is not good for the children (AL, 177). For couples who cannot beget children, the Pope suggests adoption as a generous way of being parents (Al, 179). Adoption is an act of love, offering the gift of family to someone who has none (Ibid.). The education of children is another key factor in marriage. The education of children involves encouraging the responsible use of freedom in facing issues with good sense and intelligence (AL, 262). Parents should be their children's first moral educators and not just the schools (AL, 263) by developing in children good habits (AL, 266) and discipline (AL, 268-270). Lastly, fruitful married love entails care for the ills of society (AL, 183-184).

10. **Care for the elderly.** In this Apostolic Exhortation, Pope Francis includes a discussion on the elderly. Here, he encourages families especially the younger generation to care for the elderly. He says that the elderly helps us to appreciate the continuity of generations (AL, 192). Contact with the elderly also ensures the transmission of values (Ibid.). Likewise, they are instrumental in the younger people's initiation to the faith (Ibid.). The elderly, asserts Pope Francis, provides humanity its historical memory and the realization that all of humanity is part of an age-old pilgrimage (AL, 192-193). He further contends that a family that fails to respect and cherish its grandparents, who are its living memory, is already in decline, whereas a family that remembers has a future (AL, 193).

11. **The Parish as a family of families (AL, 202).** The parish is significant in the life of the family. Pope Francis reminds us that the key pastoral care of families is offered by the parish (Ibid.). Nonetheless, there is need for a more adequate formation of priests, deacons, religious, catechists and other pastoral workers on the pastoral care for the family (Ibid.). The Pope says that seminarians should be well-formed to do family apostolate (Ibid.). They must be adequately exposed to parish work (Ibid.). Similarly, lay leaders must be given training on pastoral care for families by tapping the help of varied secular fields (Ibid.). The parish, too, must serve as the place where experienced couples can help younger couples (AL, 223). Furthermore, attending to domestic violence and sexual abuse cases, according to Pope Francis, need good pastoral training (Ibid.). Pastors, on the other hand, must encourage families to grow in faith (AL, 227). Pastoral care for families, says the pontiff, has to be fundamentally missionary – going out to where people are (AL, 230).

12. **The need for sex education.** Quoting Vatican II, the Pope notes that there should be a positive and prudent sex education for children and adolescents (AL, 280). It should take into consideration young people's maturity. As such, sex education should be age-appropriate (AL, 281). It must foster a sense of modesty

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> (AL, 282) among young people. It must not also deal primarily with protection through the practice of safe sex since such notion devalues the natural procreative finality of sexuality as if an eventual child were an enemy (AL, 283). Similarly, it is not good to invite adolescents, says the pope, to toy with their bodies. Instead, they should be taught sensitivity to various expressions of love, mutual concern and care, loving respect and deeply meaningful communication (AL, 283-285). Sex education should help young people accept and appreciate their own bodies as created by God and not as something which they have absolute dominion over (AL, 285).

Amoris Laetitia's Magisterial Authority

Amoris Laetitia is the product of consultation, theological reflection, and votation of the two-phased synod of bishops on the family from 2014-2015.[19] In a sense, the document does not only carry with it the personal magisterial authority of the Pope but also the collegial magisterial authority of the synod. In an intimate manner, the Pope calls this synod as traveling on a journey together.[20] This is how the current Pontiff leads the Church, that is, through the exercise of synodality where he deliberately consults and confers with a great number of people in the Church.[21] He makes sure that he had carefully

19 Gerry O'Hanlon, "The Joy of Love – Amoris Laetitia," *The Furrow* 67 (June 6, 2016): 328.

20 Richard Gaillardetz, "A More Pastoral Magisterium: Papal Authority in the Francis Era," *Commonweal* 144 Issue 2 (Jan 27, 2017): 19. http://web.a.ebscohost.com/ehost/detail/detail?vid=19&sid=12308852-7d35-415c-840b-67568c7fa73c%40sessionmgr4009&hid=4109&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWhvc3QtbGl2ZQ%3d%3d#AN=120712746&db=asn (accessed 1 May 2017).

21 Michael J. O'Loughlin, "Walking with Peter: A Confident Pope Sets a New Example for Governing the Church," *America* 216, no. 2 (January 23, 2017): 29. http://web.a.ebscohost.com/ehost/detail/detail?vid=15&sid=12308852-7d35-415c-840b-67568c7fa73c%40sessionmgr4009&hid=4109&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWhvc3QtbGl2ZQ%3d%3d#AN=ATLAn4027100&db=vah (accessed 20 April 2017).

listened to and dialogued with the members of the Church before making crucial statements and decisions, not wanting to miss anything significant for the growth and future of the Church. Although diversity and dissent are unavoidable in Synods, this is not worrisome to the Pope who believes that if God guides the path, one does not have to be anxious.[22] Moreover, the local churches as represented by their respective bishops in the synod are gathered *cum Petro et sub Petro*, with Peter and under Peter. Peter is the guarantor of the unity of the Church.[23]

Synods, by nature, exercise the power of governance for the pastoral needs of the people of God.[24] However, as noted by Avery Dulles, Canon Law does not say anything about the magisterial authority of the synod and their decrees cannot be promulgated until the Holy See reviews them.[25] Thus Pope Francis himself had to promulgate the conclusions drawn by the synods on the family. In this regard, Synods technically have no independent magisterial authority[26] apart from the pope when it addresses moral and faith issues concerning the universal Church.

The papal document, *Amoris Laetitia*, concerns itself principally with pastoral matters affecting the family. It is pastoral magisterium in nature.[27] This is not the same as saying that the document waters down doctrinal precepts to accommodate pastoral needs. Being a post-synodal apostolic exhortation, it means that it is a document issued by the

22 Ibid., 33.
23 Ibid.
24 See also Dulles, SJ, *Magisterium: Teacher and Guardian of the Faith,* 56.
25 Ibid.
26 Ibid.
27 Gaillardetz, "A More Pastoral Magisterium: Papal Authority in the Francis Era," 18.

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Pope in response to the deliberations of a synod of bishops.[28] Apostolic exhortations are one of the most authoritative papal documents and they are usually addressed to the Universal Church.[29] Here, the pope utilizes his ordinary magisterium, which does not automatically enjoy infallibility.[30] Thus, it is no wonder that the document is open to questions concerning its tenets, while nonetheless remaining authoritative.

The pope's job description is not simply to guard the deposit of faith but also to shepherd through instructing, which is not only a teaching act but also a pastoral act.[31] Thus, the Pope can deliver a magisterial pronouncement as a valid exercise of his pastoral ministry in the entire Church. And this is precisely what Pope Francis did in this apostolic exhortation on the family. His apostolic exhortation amounts to the category of being an instruction, and its authority arising out of the nature of the Church that issues it and the Holy Spirit's activity within the same Church.[32]

Therefore, *Amoris Laetitia* is unquestionably a magisterial act, being in itself a post-synodal apostolic exhortation.[33] It is

28 Gaillardetz, *By What Authority: A Primer on Scripture, the Magisterium, and the Sense of the Faithful*, 80.

29 Francis Sullivan, SJ, *Creative Fidelity: Weighing and Interpreting Documents of the Magisterium* (New York: Paulist Press, 1996), 21.

30 Dulles, SJ, *Magisterium: Teacher and Guardian of the Faith,* 70.

31 Brandon R. Peterson, "Who is he to judge? Magisterial Authority in the Modern World," *America* 213, no. 18 (December 7, 2015): 20. http://web.a.ebscohost.com/ehost/detail/detail?vid=11&sid=12308852-7d35-415c-840b-67568c7fa73c%40sessionmgr4009&hid=4109&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWhvc3QtbGl2ZQ%3d%3d#AN=ATLAn3832052&db=vah (accessed 14 April 2017).

32 Ibid., 22.

33 Antonio Spadaro, SJ, "The Demands of Love: A Conversation with Cardinal Schonborn about 'The Joy of Love'," *America* 215, no. 4 (August 15, 2016): 23. http://web.a.ebscohost.com/ehost/detail/detail?vid=4&sid=12308852-7d35-415c-840b-67568c7fa73c%40sessionmgr4009&hid=4109&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWhvc3QtbGl2ZQ%3d%3d#AN=ATLAn3953973&db=vah (accessed 3 April 2017).

the Pope and the Synod's way of interpreting authentically the word of God and acting as the Church's living magisterium.[34]

Conclusion

Lumen Gentium no. 25 states that

> The religious submission of mind and will must be shown in a special way to the authentic magisterium 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 judgment made by him are sincerely adhered to, according to his manifest mind and will. His mind and will in the manner may be known either from the character of the documents, from his frequent repetition of the same doctrine, or from his manner of speaking.[35]

Amoris Laetitia is an example of the authentic magisterium of the Roman Pontiff, falling under the category described in the above quotation. The response towards it in this regard should then be reception due to the ordinary exercise of the pope's supreme teaching authority, even apart from a solemn ex cathedra judgment.[36] Although it does not enjoy infallibility, it remains to be an authoritative teaching offered under the exercise of his being the universal pastor of the Church. In the Pope's exercise of his pastoral ministry like the rest of the bishops, he is endowed by Christ with a special outpouring

34 Ibid., 24.

35 Vatican II, *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (Lumen Gentium),* 21 November 1964, Vatican Archive, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html (accessed April 24, 2017), no. 25.

36 Richard R. Gaillardetz, *Teaching with Authority: A Theology of the Magisterium in the Church* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1997), 177.

https://publications.lst.edu/

of the Holy Spirit[37], a "grace of office," so to speak. This same Spirit is the ultimate guarantor of the moral authority of *Amoris Laetitia*.

Amoris Laetitia possesses the same doctrinal value as that of an encyclical being an integral part of the ordinary magisterium of the pope. Hence, it demands both internal and external assent.[38] Without invoking the guarantee of infallibility, the Pope's apostolic exhortation is characteristically authoritative.[39] Its teaching must be regarded with seriousness and religious assent.

Assent refers to the act by which what is contained in the decree is affirmed or regarded to be true.[40] It is moreover an "act of the mind."[41] Assent must be sincere and internal; mere respectful silence or external conformity is not adequate.[42] This assent is also religious in nature since the pope is authorized to teach in the name of Christ.[43] Implicit in religious assent is the belief that the Pope in his pronouncements is guided and aided by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit as such is the default guarantor of the rectitude of any and all Church teachings.

37 John Paul II, *Apostolus Suos,* Vatican Archive, http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/motu_proprio/documents/hf_jp-ii_motu-proprio_22071998_apostolos-suos.html (accessed April 24, 2017), no. 2.

38 John C. Ford, SJ and Gerald Kelly, SJ, "Doctrinal Value and Interpretation of Papal Teaching," in *Readings in Moral Theology no. 3: The Magisterium and Morality,* ed. Charles E. Curran and Richard A. McCormick, SJ (New York: Paulist Press, 1982), 6.

39 Joseph A. Komonchak, "Ordinary Papal Magisterium and Religious Assent," in *Readings in Moral Theology no. 3: The Magisterium and Morality,* 71.

40 Ibid.

41 Sullivan, SJ, *Creative Fidelity: Weighing and Interpreting Documents of the Magisterium,* 24.

42 Komonchak, "Ordinary Papal Magisterium and Religious Assent," 71.

43 Ibid.

Nevertheless, theologians, experts, and the faithful can still raise questions concerning non-infallible Church teachings like *Amoris Laetitia,* but always with responsibility and observing due process. Dissent must involve a close collaboration between the dissenting party and the Church authority in clarifying issues pertaining to the Church teaching being questioned. This kind of dissent is responsible. Any dissent that simply ignores the magisterial teaching of *Amoris Laetitia*, without observing a legitimate and responsible process of voicing out its disagreement, diminishes the prophetic voice of the Church in the secular world.[44]

More than being a doctor of the law who lays down rules to follow, the Pope in *Amoris Laetitia* sets out tools for assessment instead.[45] This is why he relies heavily on the discernment[46] of family-related cases on the part of the pastors at the ground level. Discernment, in the mind of Pope Francis as can be gleaned in *Amoris Laetitia,* is following one's own conscience with courage.[47] Here, he is asserting the long-standing Catholic teaching on the authority and inviolability of a well-formed and informed conscience.[48] The Church has long believed that conscience is the place where

44 Peterson, "Who is He to judge? Magisterial Authority in the Modern World," 22.

45 Jean-Paul Vesco, "Pope Francis Makes Use of Tradition," *Concilium* no. 4 (October 2016): 116. http://web.a.ebscohost.com/ehost/detail/detail?vid=7&sid=12308852-7d35-415c-840b-67568c7fa73c%40sessionmgr4009&hid=4109&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWhvc3Qtbi-Gl2ZQ%3d%3d#AN=120368929&db=asn (accessed 3 April 2017).

46 Antonio Spadaro and Louis J. Cameli, "Watching for God: The Gift and Challenge of Discernment in 'The Joy of Love'," *America* 215, no. 3 (August 1, 2016): 24. http://web.a.ebscohost.com/ehost/detail/detail?vid=9&sid=12308852-7d35-415c-840b-67568c7fa73c%40sessionmgr4009&hid=4109&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWhvc3QtbGl2ZQ%3d%3d#AN=ATLAn3938444&db=vah (accessed 4 April 2017).

47 Ibid., 25.

48 Todd A. Salzman and Michael G. Lawler, "Amoris Laetitia and Catholic Morals," *The Furrow* 67 no. 12 (December 2016): 675.

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the deepest encounter with God happens. All good-willed and honest discerning Christians will find conscience as the surest guide in dire moral and spiritual needs. In fact, the Church does not exist to replace conscience, but to form it, reminds Pope Francis (AL, 37). There is, therefore, a great need to educate and form every person's conscience to enable them to make good moral decisions. This task belongs not only to pastors but also to the faithful. A good partnership between the pastor and the believer in the formation of conscience is of great importance in this regard. Forming one's conscience is a communal act. An individual cannot fulfill it alone.

In *Amoris Laetitia,* we are confident enough that God will not stop giving to his Church a magisterium responsive to the needs of the times and firm enough to resist the possibility of errors.[49] Therefore, we pay it due respect not only because the Pope teaches it but also because we believe that it is guided by the Holy Spirit.

49 Avery Dulles, SJ, *A Church to Believe in: Discipleship and the Dynamics of Freedom* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Co., 1982), 117.