

## Authority in the Church

Richard R. Gaillardetz, *By What Authority?: Foundations for Understanding Authority in the Church*, Liturgical Press Academic, 2018.

Jimmy Akin, *Teaching with Authority: How to Cut Through Doctrinal Confusion & Understand What the Church Really Says*, Catholic Answers Press, 2018.

**By What Authority?** *As he was walking in the temple area, the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders approached him (Jesus) and said to him, "By what authority are you doing these things? Or who gave you this authority to do them?" Matthew Chapter 11, 27 – 28.*

To understand Church authority, we need to begin by reflecting upon what happened when Jesus laid the foundation for what was to become the Church:

Jesus began to question his disciples, "Who do men say the Son of Man is?" "Some say John the Baptist," they said, "others, Elijah, still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets." Then he asked them, "But who do you say I am?" Simon Peter replied, "You're the Messiah, the Son of the Living God!" In response Jesus said to him, "**Blessed are you, Simon bar Jonah, for it wasn't flesh and blood that revealed this to you, but my Father in Heaven.** And now I tell you, that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys to the Kingdom of Heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will have been bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth will have been loosed in Heaven." (Matthew 16:13-19)

Jesus established the Church as himself – his Body, his real presence to the world until the end of time. The Church speaks with Christ's voice, teaches Christ's truths, with Christ's authority, bringing Christ's presence to the world.

We have all heard the popular slogan "**What would Jesus do?**" WWJD bracelets were very popular and they can serve as useful reminders when making moral choices. Yet if we were to randomly ask five Christians, "What would Jesus do?" in a given situation, we may likely get five different answers, based on various interpretations of Jesus. **But we know that Jesus would in fact do only one thing in any situation.** Since the aim of the Christian life is to conform ourselves to Jesus Christ and to live as Christ does, then **Christ's definitive voice must be the only one that instructs our conscience**, for Jesus alone is the Way, the Truth and the Life.

The central question thus becomes:

**Where do we find Christ's definitive voice? How do we know what Jesus really says and what he would really do?**

Ask yourself this question: **If you belonged to a church where the doctrines were decided upon by human beings, not by Jesus Christ, why would you want to belong to that church?** With the various interpretations of "what would Jesus do" in a given situation, how do you know which one is right? **If you don't believe that your church is truly speaking with the definitive voice of Christ, what foundation do you really have? How do you make your moral decisions?**

**Jesus first asks specifically who do men – human beings – say that he is.** The disciples thus offer various human interpretations, **all based on human thought and their Jewish heritage.** These answers offer **no definitive conclusion** as to who Jesus is because they rely on limited resources: a combination of prior religious experience and human reason. Thus, each of their responses contains some element of the truth, but none has the complete truth. For **experience and reason alone are obviously not enough** to grasp the transcendent, eternal truth of the Son of God.

Then Jesus asks the Apostles **who do they say Jesus is.** This second question implies that **the Apostles are different** from the rest of humanity. They are expected to give a very different answer, because they have a very different resource that not all men possess. Simon's (always the spokesman for the group) response is indeed radically different, because it is not born of human reason. **Simon's answer is purely the product of divine revelation**, received from God alone and passed on just as it was received: "You're the Messiah, the Son of the Living God!" This is why Jesus responds:

"Blessed are you, Simon bar Jonah, for it wasn't flesh and blood that revealed this to you, but my Father in Heaven."

**Simon is "blessed" because he has been singled out by God** to be the recipient of divine revelation – the one proven capable of receiving God's truth exactly as God reveals it, and of passing it on to others unaltered by human invention. Because of this, Jesus declares him to be "Peter," the rock upon whom he will build his Church.

While other Christian believers may offer various human interpretations of Christ, all containing some element of truth, [only Peter and the Church built upon him are designated by Jesus to be the full recipients of divine revelation](#), charged with the mission of safeguarding the fullness of revealed truth and proclaiming it to the ends of the earth until the end of time.

Just as [Jesus was sent by the Father](#) to fulfill God's revelation, in the same manner [Jesus sends the Apostles](#) to pass on that revelation. [Jesus gives Peter and the Church his own authority](#), signified by the keys to the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus will unlock the gates of Heaven by his Paschal Mystery, but will then hand the keys to Peter and the Church to administer, with full authority to act in the very person of Jesus.

In doing so, [Jesus was not giving Peter and the Apostles](#), the first leaders of the Church, [license to do as they pleased – to teach whatever they wanted](#), to do whatever they felt. They were not to find answers to life's challenges the way others responded to the question about who Jesus is – through experience and reason alone. Rather, Jesus was promising that until the end of time, [the Church established upon Peter will be the sole instrument through which Jesus himself will truly act, teach, govern and save](#), revealing the Father with the heavenly gifts Jesus will give to the Church.

[When the Church speaks, acts or governs, it is Jesus speaking, acting and governing through the Church](#), his chosen instrument, revealing the will of the Father. Further, the promise was given not just to Peter and the [Apostles](#) at the time, but to [their successors](#) until the end of time. This "apostolic succession" continues to our day with our Pope and our bishops.

In sending the Apostles on their mission, Jesus performed a very profound action. He was not merely sending them out to act in his name, as his representatives. Jesus breathed his very life – his very self – into the Apostles when he commissioned them, so they would act not just in his behalf, but in his very person with his authority Jesus said to the Apostles, "Peace be with you! [As the Father has sent me, I, too, send you.](#)" And after saying this he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit! Whoever's sins you forgive, they've already been forgiven; whoever's you retain, they've already been retained." (John 20:21-23)

Jesus promises Peter and the Apostles that the Holy Spirit will guide the Church forever they will not be left to their experience and reason alone – [and not to be surprised when the secular world is not convinced](#) of the Gospel they are charged to proclaim.

In one of the most powerful passages of the New Testament, the conversion of Saul (St. Paul), Jesus unequivocally associates himself with the Church. [Saul](#), who has been persecuting members of the [Church](#), encounters Jesus who says, "[Saul, why are you persecuting me?](#) ... I am Jesus whom you are persecuting" (Acts 9:4, 5). Saul has been persecuting the Church, and Jesus is letting him know that in doing so, Saul has been persecuting him, for Christ and the Church are one and the same.

The [Vatican II document Lumen Gentium](#) (paragraph 20) addresses the issue of Church authority through apostolic succession in this way:

The apostolic tradition is manifested and preserved in the whole world by those who were made bishops by the apostles and by their successors down to our time .... The sacred synod consequently teaches that the bishops have by divine institution taken the place of the apostles as pastors of the Church, in such wise that whoever listens to them is listening to Christ and whoever despises them despises Christ and him who sent Christ. ("Whoever listens to you listens to me. Whoever rejects you rejects me. And whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me." Luke 10:16.)

Thus, when Church documents speak of the "[Word of God](#)," they refer [not only to the Bible](#) but also to the "[tradition of the Church](#)," meaning the official teachings of the Apostles and their successors, given their divine mandate to receive and proclaim divine revelation.

The Vatican II document [Dei Verbum](#) (paragraphs 7-10) articulates the full meaning of the "Word of God":

In his gracious goodness, God has seen to it that what he had revealed for the salvation of all nations would abide perpetually in its full integrity and be handed on to all generations. Therefore Christ the Lord in whom the full revelation of the supreme God is brought to completion (see 2 Corinthians 1:20; 3:13; 4:6), commissioned the Apostles to preach to all men that Gospel which is the source of all saving truth and moral teaching, and to impart to them heavenly gifts ....

But in order [to keep the Gospel forever whole and alive within the Church, the Apostles left bishops as their successors, handing over to them the authority to teach in their own place](#). This [sacred tradition, therefore, and Sacred Scripture of both the Old and New Testaments are like a mirror](#) in which the pilgrim Church on earth looks at God, from whom she has received everything, until she is brought finally [to see him as he is, face to face](#) (see 1 John 3:2) ....

Hence there exists a close connection and communication between sacred tradition and Sacred Scripture. For both of them, flowing from the same divine wellspring, in a certain way merge into a unity and tend toward the same end. For Sacred Scripture is the word of God inasmuch as it is consigned to writing under the inspiration of the divine Spirit, while sacred tradition takes the word of God entrusted by Christ the Lord and the Holy Spirit to the Apostles, and hands it on to their successors in its full purity, so that led by the light of the Spirit of truth, they may in proclaiming it preserve this word of God faithfully, explain it, and make it more widely known. **Consequently it is not from Sacred Scripture alone that the Church draws her certainty about everything which has been revealed. Therefore both sacred tradition and Sacred Scripture are to be accepted and venerated with the same sense of loyalty and reverence.**

**Sacred tradition and Sacred Scripture form one sacred deposit of the word of God**, committed to the Church .... The task of authentically interpreting the word of God, whether written or handed on, has been entrusted exclusively to the living teaching office of the Church, whose authority is exercised in the name of Jesus Christ. This teaching office 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.

This has **tremendous implications when it comes to forming our conscience**. Quite often when a Catholic is faced with a moral decision, there are a number of voices taken into account in forming a decision.

A sample list may look like this:

- What does my family have to say about the issue?
- What do my trusted friends say?
- What does the Church say?
- What does society say?
- What does my mentor say?

A thoughtful person truly concerned about doing the right thing will undergo such a healthy exercise in conscience formation, taking into consideration all these views. There is just one thing wrong with this list. A revised, much more appropriate list is:

- What does my family have to say about the issue?
- What do my trusted friends say?
- **What does the Church say?**
- What does society say?
- What does my mentor say?

While it is certainly helpful to listen to and evaluate the many voices speaking about any moral issue, what **a Catholic needs to understand is that the Church, as the authoritative voice of Jesus Christ himself, carries more weight than any other voices combined**. The Church alone speaks with the authority of Jesus, who speaks with the authority of God. Any decision-making process that puts Church teaching on an equal plane with other voices – or beneath them – is leading one down a dangerous path.

Of course, one of the human realities that makes moral decision-making so difficult is that we don't see all issues in our life as God does. From our limited perspective, **God's demands can seem – literally – "unreasonable," and we can easily rationalize any decision into something we believe God really wouldn't mind**.

It is one thing to say: "I don't understand this teaching of the Church. I cannot intellectually grasp the sense of it." It is quite another to say: "The Church is wrong, they don't know what they are talking about." For in saying this, we are saying that Jesus is wrong, that he doesn't know what he is talking about. We aren't expected to understand all that Jesus teaches through his Church, for only God has that full understanding. What we are expected to do is to trust that Jesus does in fact teach through his instrument, that these teachings are truly the will of God, are ultimately for our own good, and that we need to follow them in order to become who we were created to be.

When adults are brought into full communion with the Catholic Church, they publicly make the following statement:

**"I believe and profess all that the holy Catholic Church believes, teaches, and proclaims to be revealed by God."**

They are not asked if they understand all that the Church believes and teaches or if they can intellectually grasp it and give a convincing explanation to others. They are asked if they believe and profess that it is all revealed by God. By answering in the affirmative, they are promising to abide by that teaching, and when they struggle to understand it, they will trust that it is truly God's revealed truth.

St. Augustine of Hippo said,

“Understanding is the reward of faith. Therefore, seek not to understand that you may believe, but believe that you may understand.”

It is one thing to say: "I don't understand a teaching of the Church. I cannot intellectually grasp the sense of it. But I trust it is the true teaching of Christ, and I will make every effort to abide by it." It is quite another to say: "The Church is wrong, they don't know what they are talking about. I'm going to do what I think is right instead." Once again, in saying this, we are saying that Jesus is wrong, that he doesn't know what he is talking about, and that we are choosing our own will over God's.

While authority in general and Church authority in particular carry some negative connotations in our culture, they are in reality an incredibly beautiful, indispensable part of our lives. A world where everyone decides for themselves what is right and wrong is, simply by definition, a world of chaos. A world where there is absolute truth that is available to all and leads to harmonious communion is the only way to live in true peace.

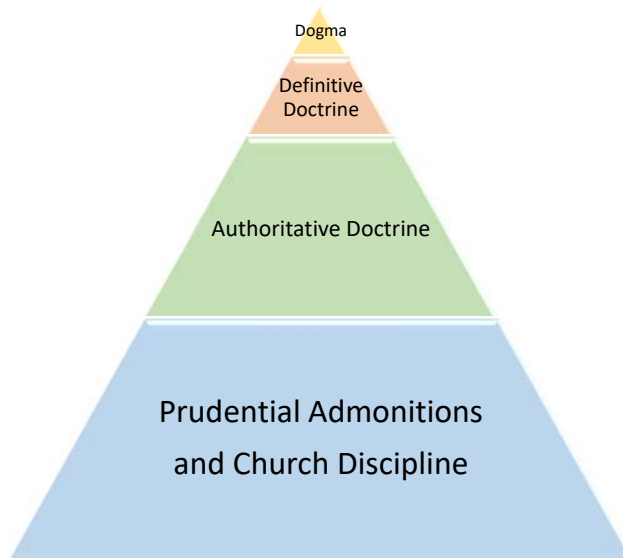
**Some Terminology:**

A **dogma** is any propositional formulation that is (1) divinely revealed and (2) proposed as such by the magisterium, either through a solemn definition of a pope or council or by the teaching of the college of bishops in their ordinary and universal magisterium.

Although the term “**doctrine**” is sometimes used as a synonym for dogma, its field of meaning is much broader.

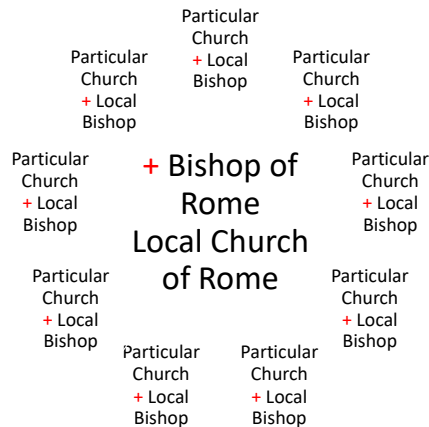
A **doctrine** is any authoritative or normative formulation of a belief of the Church, whether revealed or not. A church doctrine is intended to articulate a formal belief of the Church that it draws in some fashion from its reflection on divine revelation, even if it may not itself be divinely revealed.

LEVELS OF CHURCH TEACHING	RESPONSE OF THE BELIEVER
<b>Dogma</b>	<b>Assent of Faith:</b> The believer makes an act of faith, trusting that this teaching is revealed by God.
<b>Definitive Doctrine</b>	<b>Firm Acceptance:</b> The believer “accepts and holds” these teachings to be true.
<b>Authoritative Doctrine</b>	<b>A Religious Docility of Will and Intellect:</b> The believer strives to assimilate a teaching of the Church into their religious stance, while recognizing the remote possibility of church error.
<b>Provisional Applications of Church Doctrine, Church Discipline and Prudential Admonitions</b>	<b>Conscientious Obedience:</b> The believer obeys (the spirit of) any church law or disciplinary action which does not lead to sin, even when questioning the ultimate value or wisdom of the law or action.



**The Magisterium or Teaching Authority of the Church:** By the Magisterium, we mean the teaching office of the Church. It consists of the Pope and Bishops. Christ promised to protect the teaching of the Church: "He who hears you, hears me; he who rejects you rejects me, he who rejects me, rejects Him who sent me" (Luke 10. 16).

THE EXERCISE OF THE MAGISTERIUM	
<b>Ordinary Magisterium</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Individual bishop (non-infallible)</li> <li>• groupings of bishops (non-infallible)</li> <li>• Bishop of Rome (non-infallible)</li> </ul>
<b>Extraordinary Magisterium</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The College of Bishops issuing a solemn definition while gathered in an ecumenical council (infallible)</li> <li>• The Bishop of Rome (as Head of the College of Bishops) Issuing a Solemn Definition Ex Cathedra (infallible)</li> </ul>
<b>Ordinary Universal Magisterium</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Entire College of Bishops dispersed throughout the world united in judgment that a teaching is to be held as definitive (infallible)</li> </ul>



We here at St. Madeleine Parish are a part of the **Particular Church** of St. Augustine. Our local bishop (or our ordinary) is Bishop Pohlmeier. **A bishop's three-fold munera (office) is to teach, govern, and sanctify.**

#### **Types of magisterial communication:**

A **papal bull** is a type of public decree, letters patent, or charter issued by a **pope** of the Catholic Church. It is named after the leaden seal (bulla) that was traditionally appended to the end in order to authenticate it.

**Encyclical Letter:** Documents offered by the pope as part of his ordinary magisterium and addressed to: (a) the whole college of bishops, (b) the whole Church or (c) the whole world. Encyclicals frequently address doctrinal/theological matters, but are not normally used to define dogma.

**Apostolic Letter:** Papal letters usually sent to some particular category of persons, e.g., a group of bishops

**Apostolic exhortation:** Documents issued by the pope in response to the deliberations of an episcopal synod

**Occasional Papal Addresses:** Speeches given to various groups who are received by the pope in the Vatican as well as speeches the pope gives on his travels.

#### **The Church teaches authoritatively on matters of faith and morals.**

#### **Some Examples**

##### **Example 1: The Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary (Dogma)**

APOSTOLIC CONSTITUTION of Pope Pius IX, *Ineffabilis Deus* (God Ineffable), Dogma of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Dec. 8, 1854

Wherefore, in humility and fasting, we unceasingly offered our private prayers as well as the public prayers of the Church to God the Father through his Son, that he would deign to direct and strengthen our mind by the power of the Holy Spirit. In like manner did we implore the help of the entire heavenly host as we ardently invoked the Paraclete. Accordingly, **by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit**, for the honor of the Holy and undivided Trinity, for the glory and adornment of the Virgin Mother of God, for the exaltation of the Catholic Faith, and for the furtherance of the Catholic religion, by the authority of Jesus Christ our Lord, of the Blessed Apostles Peter and Paul, and by our own: **"We declare, pronounce, and define that the doctrine which holds that the most Blessed Virgin Mary, in the first instance of her conception, by a singular grace and privilege granted by Almighty God, in view of the merits of Jesus Christ, the Savior of the human race, was preserved free from all stain of original sin, is a doctrine revealed by God and therefore to be believed firmly and constantly by all the faithful."**<sup>[29]</sup>

Hence, if anyone shall dare — which God forbid! — to think otherwise than as has been defined by us, let him know and understand that he is condemned by his own judgment; that he has suffered shipwreck in the faith; that he has **separated from the unity of the Church**; and that, furthermore, by his own action he incurs the penalties established by law if he should dare to express in words or writing or by any other outward means the errors he think in his heart.

##### **Example 2: The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary (Dogma)**

APOSTOLIC CONSTITUTION OF **POPE PIUS XII**, *MUNIFICENTISSIMUS DEUS*, (The most bountiful God), DEFINING THE DOGMA OF THE ASSUMPTION, *November 1, 1950*

44. For which reason, after we have poured forth prayers of supplication again and again to God, and have invoked the light of the Spirit of Truth, for the glory of Almighty God who has lavished his special affection upon the Virgin Mary, for the honor of her Son, the immortal King of the Ages and the Victor over sin and death, for the increase of the glory of that same august Mother, and for the joy and exultation of the entire Church; by the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ, of the Blessed Apostles Peter and Paul, and by our own authority, **we pronounce, declare, and define it to be a divinely revealed dogma: that the Immaculate Mother of God, the ever Virgin Mary, having completed the course of her earthly life, was assumed body and soul into heavenly glory.**

45. Hence if anyone, which God forbid, should dare willfully to deny or to call into doubt that which we have defined, **let him know that he has fallen away completely from the divine and Catholic Faith.**

##### **Example 3: The Evil of Artificial Contraception (Infallible by Ordinary Universal Magisterium, nothing more is needed)**

**“Semper ubique et ab omnibus,” “Always everywhere and by everyone.” Universally accepted, agreed upon, or practiced.**

Paul VI wrote *Humanae Vitae* in response to the then newly invented birth control pill, rejecting it as a legitimate means of contraception for Catholics. However, these encyclicals, along with the 20th century’s nearly 100 other Vatican statements condemning artificial birth control, were simply restating the continuous history of moral theology on this topic from ancient times.

The earliest reference to contraception (and abortion) is in the **Didache (The Teaching of the Twelve)**, a document **from the second half of the first century or early second century**. The *Didache* teaches:

**“You shall not practice birth control, you shall not murder a child by abortion, nor kill what is begotten.”**

**Please read:** <https://www.ncregister.com/news/abortion-contraception-and-the-church-fathers>

**St. Basil the Great (A.D. 330-379), *First Canonical Letter*, Canon 2:** “The woman who purposely destroys her unborn child is guilty of murder.

St. Hippolytus of Rome, *Refutation of all Heresies*, circa A.D. 222:

“... women who were reputed to be believers began to take drugs to render themselves sterile, and to bind themselves tightly so as to expel what was being conceived, since they would not, on account of relatives and excessive wealth, want to have a child by a slave or by any insignificant person. See, then, into what great impiety that lawless one has preceded, by teaching adultery and murder at the same time.”

From William J. Jurgens, **The Faith of the Apostolic Fathers**, Volume 1, The Liturgical Press, 1970.

[https://orthodoxwiki.org/Hippolytus\\_of\\_Rome#:~:text=In%20the%20%22Refutation%20of%20All%20Heresies%22%20Hippolytus%20set,were%20taken%20from%20pagan%20philosophy%20and%20oriental%20theosophy](https://orthodoxwiki.org/Hippolytus_of_Rome#:~:text=In%20the%20%22Refutation%20of%20All%20Heresies%22%20Hippolytus%20set,were%20taken%20from%20pagan%20philosophy%20and%20oriental%20theosophy)

ENCYCLICAL LETTER, **PAUL VI, *HUMANAE VITAE*, July 25, 1968**

**14.** Therefore We base Our words on the first principles of a human and Christian doctrine of marriage when We **are obliged once more to declare** that the direct interruption of the generative process already begun and, above all, all direct abortion, even for therapeutic reasons, are to be absolutely excluded as lawful means of regulating the number of children. (14) Equally to be condemned, **as the magisterium of the Church has affirmed on many occasions**, is direct sterilization, whether of the man or of the woman, whether permanent or temporary. (15)

Similarly excluded is any action which either before, at the moment of, or after sexual intercourse, is specifically intended to prevent procreation—whether as an end or as a means. (16)

**Example 4: Ordination of Women to the Priesthood (Definitive Doctrine)**

JOHN PAUL II. APOSTOLIC LETTER, ***ORDINATIO SACERDOTALIS*, May 22, 1994**

ON RESERVING PRIESTLY ORDINATION TO MEN ALONE

**4.** Although the teaching that priestly ordination is to be reserved to men alone **has been preserved by the constant and universal Tradition of the Church** and firmly taught by the Magisterium in its more recent documents, at the present time in some places it is nonetheless considered still open to debate, or the Church's judgment that women are not to be admitted to ordination is considered to have a merely disciplinary force.

Wherefore, in order that all doubt may be removed regarding a matter of great importance, a matter which pertains to the Church's divine constitution itself, in virtue of my ministry of confirming the brethren (cf. Lk 22:32) **I declare that the Church has no authority whatsoever to confer priestly ordination on women and that this judgment is to be definitively held by all the Church's faithful.**

**Example 5: Recent Change in Teaching on Capital Punishment (Authoritative Doctrine)**

Authoritative doctrine represents a third category of church teaching. This includes teachings that the magisterium proposes authoritatively to guide the faith and practice of believers. Authoritative doctrine is drawn from the wisdom of the church as it reflects on Scripture and tradition. Included among authoritative doctrine are many concrete moral teachings, such as the immorality of directly targeting civilians in an act of war or the prohibition of recourse to certain reproductive technologies like in vitro fertilization. Yet, even as these teachings are proposed authoritatively, the magisterium is not ready to commit itself

irrevocably to them. Practically speaking, this means that, however remote, there is at least a possibility of error with respect to these teachings.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church, Second Edition, reads:

2267 Assuming that the guilty party's identity and responsibility have been fully determined, the traditional teaching of the Church does not exclude recourse to the death penalty, if this is the only possible way of effectively defending human lives against the unjust aggressor. (2306)

If, however, non-lethal means are sufficient to defend and protect people's safety from the aggressor, authority will limit itself to such means, as these are more in keeping with the concrete conditions of the common good and more in conformity with the dignity of the human person.

Today, in fact, as a consequence of the possibilities which the state has for effectively preventing crime, by rendering one who has committed an offense incapable of doing harm—without definitively taking away from him the possibility of redeeming himself—the cases in which the execution of the offender is an absolute necessity “are very rare, if not practically non-existent.”<sup>68</sup>

*The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Revised Second Edition, reads:

2267 Recourse to the death penalty on the part of legitimate authority, following a fair trial, was long considered an appropriate response to the gravity of certain crimes and an acceptable, albeit extreme, means of safeguarding the common good.

Today, however, there is an increasing awareness that the dignity of the person is not lost even after the commission of very serious crimes. In addition, a new understanding has emerged of the significance of penal sanctions imposed by the state. Lastly, more effective systems of detention have been developed, which ensure the due protection of citizens but, at the same time, do not definitively deprive the guilty of the possibility of redemption. (2306)

Consequently, the Church teaches, in the light of the Gospel, that “the death penalty is inadmissible because it is an attack on the inviolability and dignity of the person”,<sup>68</sup> and she works with determination for its abolition worldwide.

#### **Where did this come from?**

Promulgation of the change: From a letter to the Bishops regarding the new revision of number 2267 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* on the death penalty, from the *Office of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith*, 1 August 2018, Luis F. Cardinal Ladaria.

7. The new revision of number 2267 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, approved by Pope Francis, situates itself in continuity with the preceding Magisterium while bringing forth a coherent development of Catholic doctrine.<sup>[12]</sup> The new text, following the footsteps of the teaching of John Paul II in *Evangelium vitæ*, affirms that ending the life of a criminal as punishment for a crime is inadmissible because it attacks the dignity of the person, a dignity that is not lost even after having committed the most serious crimes. This conclusion is reached taking into account the new understanding of penal sanctions applied by the modern State, which should be oriented above all to the rehabilitation and social reintegration of the criminal. Finally, given that modern society possesses more efficient detention systems, the death penalty becomes unnecessary as protection for the life of innocent people. Certainly, it remains the duty of public authorities to defend the life of citizens, as has always been taught by the Magisterium and is confirmed by the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* in numbers 2265 and 2266.

8. All of this shows that the new formulation of number 2267 of the *Catechism* expresses an authentic development of doctrine that is not in contradiction with the prior teachings of the Magisterium. These teachings, in fact, can be explained in the light of the primary responsibility of the public authority to protect the common good in a social context in which the penal sanctions were understood differently, and had developed in an environment in which it was more difficult to guarantee that the criminal could not repeat his crime.



### Example 6: (Admonition)

COMMISSION FOR RELIGIOUS RELATIONS WITH THE JEWS "THE GIFTS AND THE CALLING OF GOD ARE IRREVOCABLE" (Rom 11:29) A REFLECTION ON THEOLOGICAL QUESTIONS PERTAINING TO CATHOLIC–JEWISH RELATIONS ON THE OCCASION OF THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF "NOSTRA AETATE"

... This document presents Catholic reflections on these questions, placing them in a theological context, in order that their significance may be deepened for members of both faith traditions. **The text is not a magisterial document or doctrinal teaching of the Catholic Church**, but is a reflection prepared by the Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews on current theological questions that have developed since the Second Vatican Council. It is intended to be a starting point for further theological thought with a view to enriching and intensifying the theological dimension of Jewish–Catholic dialogue. ...

### Example 6: Restriction on the Traditional Latin Mass (Church Discipline)

APOSTOLIC LETTER **TRADITIONIS CUSTODES** ISSUED "MOTU PROPRIO" BY **FRANCIS** On the Use of the Roman Liturgy Prior to the Reform of 1970

In line with the initiative of my Venerable Predecessor Benedict XVI to invite the bishops to assess the application of the Motu Proprio Summorum Pontificum three years after its publication, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith carried out a detailed consultation of the bishops in 2020. The results have been carefully considered in the light of experience that has matured during these years. At this time, [having considered the wishes expressed by the episcopate and having heard the opinion of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith](#), I now desire, with this Apostolic Letter, to press on ever more in the constant search for ecclesial communion.

### A Few More Examples of Magisterial Teaching

**Dogma:** (Assent of Faith that this teaching is revealed by God.)

- The articles of the creed.
- The Christological dogmas.
- The Marian dogmas.
- Christ's institution of the sacraments and their efficacy to impart grace.
- The Real Presence.
- The sacrificial nature of the Mass.
- The divine foundation of the Church.
- The primacy and infallibility of the Roman Pontiff.
- The existence of original sin.
- The immortality of the human soul.
- The immediate recompense after death.
- The inerrancy of Holy Scripture.
- The grave immorality of murder.

**Definitive Doctrine:** (The believer "accepts and holds" these teachings to be true.)

- The legitimacy of the election of a pope.
- The recognition of an ecumenical council.
- The perpetual virginity of the Blessed Mother.
- The canonizations of saints.
- The invalidity of Anglican (Protestant) orders.
- The primacy and infallibility of the Roman Pontiff
- The moral teachings on the illicitness of prostitution and fornication.
- A male-only priesthood.

**Into murkier waters:**

**Authoritative Doctrine:** (The believer assimilates the teaching while recognizing the remote possibility of error.)

- Targeting of civilians during war.
- New medical technologies.
- New reproductive technologies.
- Treatment of prisoners (torture).

**Prudential Judgments and Church Disciplines** (Obedience, even when questioning the wisdom of the law.)

- Forbidding the use of nuclear weapons.
- Regulation of immigration and border control.\*
- Celibate priesthood.
- Climate change.
- Laws on fasting and abstinence (no meat on Fridays in Lent).

**\* Catechism of the Catholic Church on Immigration**

2241 The more prosperous nations are **obliged, to the extent they are able**, to welcome the foreigner in search of the security and the means of livelihood which he cannot find in his country of origin. Public authorities should see to it that the natural right is respected that places a guest under the protection of those who receive him. **Political authorities, for the sake of the common good for which they are responsible, may make the exercise of the right to immigrate subject to various juridical conditions, especially with regard to the immigrants' duties toward their country of adoption. Immigrants are obliged to respect with gratitude the material and spiritual heritage of the country that receives them, to obey its laws and to assist in carrying civic burdens.**

*Catechism of the Catholic Church* (pp. 798-799), United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

**Conclusions: Concrete Applications of Church Teaching, Prudential Judgments, Admonitions, and Church Discipline** (Taken from: Richard R. Gaillardetz, *By What Authority?* Liturgical Press)

Finally, **the particular response that a believer owes to concrete applications of church teaching, prudential admonitions, and church discipline could vary considerably.** The American bishops recognized that, at the level of concrete applications of church teaching, it was possible for a Catholic to disagree with such applications in good conscience. Although the opinion of the bishops on such matters must be taken seriously, a Catholic does not have to agree, for example, with the bishops' specific policy proposals for improving the plight of the poor or with Pope Francis's specific policy proposals for how best to respond to global climate change. **The Catholic does have to accept the church's teaching that every baptized Christian bears responsibility for the welfare of the poor and every Catholic does need to accept what Pope Francis has taught about our fundamental obligation to care for "our common home."**

**When matters turn to church discipline ... we are called to accept the discipline of the church as the here-and-now way in which our community of faith seeks to organize its concrete life. One can do so even while questioning some of these disciplinary practices.** To take an example from the civil order, I can think the speed limit for the streets in my neighborhood is too low but still obey the law. ... There are times, however, when matters are not quite so simple. First, we can never follow a law when doing so would lead us to sin. Second, we must remember that church law does not exist for its own sake. ... church law exists to maintain church order, assist individual members in the call to holiness, and further the mission of the church. When the application of the law in a given instance does not demonstrably further these goals, it may yield to alternative actions that do further these goals. ...

More recently, Pope Francis proposed specific policy assessments and prescriptions in his encyclical on the environment and global climate change, *Laudato Si* (LS), ranking fossil fuel sources according to the degree of damage they cause and the consequent urgency of replacing them (LS 165) and insisting that market-based approaches such as carbon credits were inadequate solutions to climate change (LS 171). Prudential policy judgments of this kind, regarding the concrete application of church teaching, according to the American bishops, must be given **"serious attention and consideration by Catholics as they determine whether their moral judgments are consistent with the Gospel."** Nevertheless, they admitted that Catholics might legitimately differ with the bishops (and even the pope) regarding these moral applications and prudential judgments. This fourth category also includes disciplinary rules varying from the determination of the number of holy days of obligation to the current requirement of celibacy for diocesan priests.