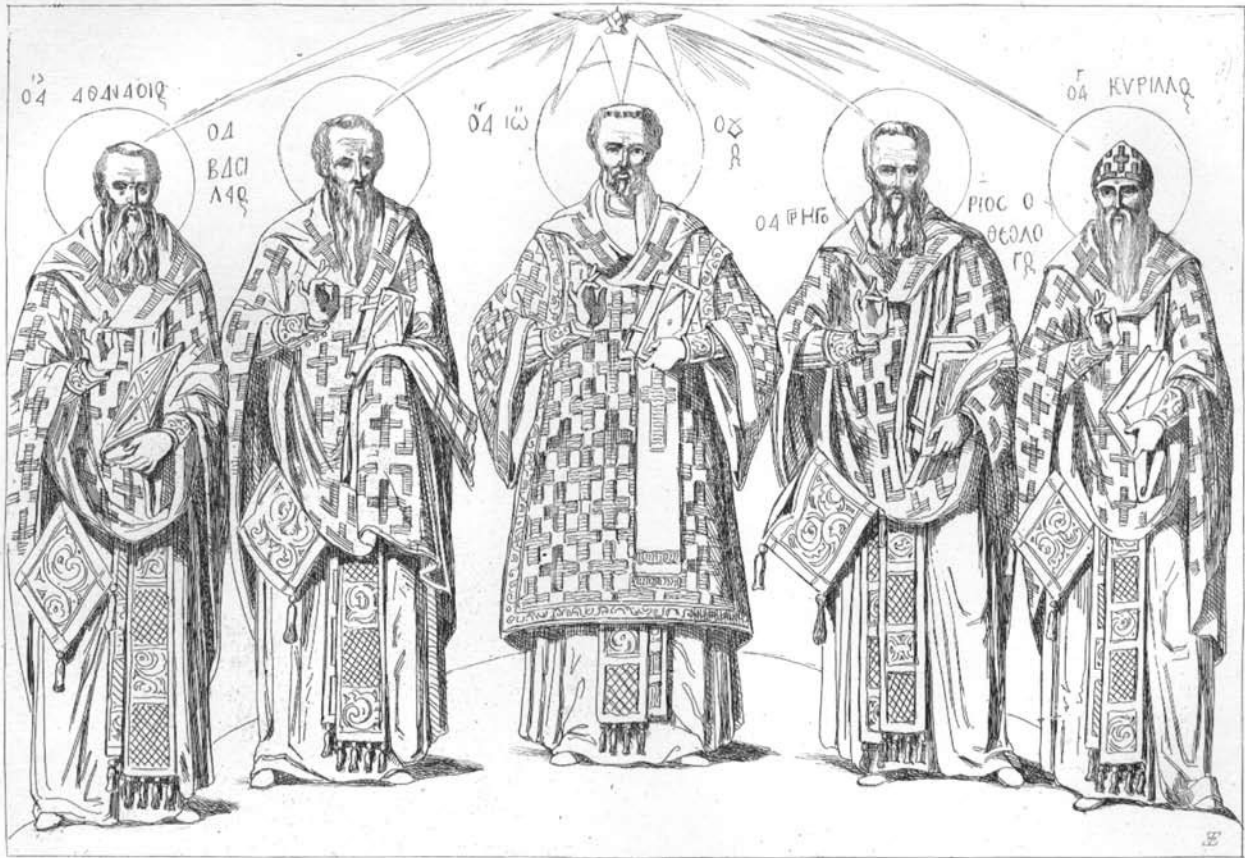


The Magisterium

He who hears you hears me, and he who rejects you rejects me, and he who rejects me rejects him who sent me. ~ Luke 10:16



Five Greek Fathers of the Church from the 4th and 5th centuries: St. Athanasius, St. Basil the Great, St. John Chrysostom, St. Gregory Nazianzen, and St. Cyril of Alexandria

BEFORE CHRIST LEFT THIS EARTH, he prepared his apostles with everything they would need to carry out their ministry. He gave them special insights into the Gospel that he did not give to the crowds (see Mt 11:1; Mk 4:34) and gave them the power to forgive sins (see Jn 20:22-23). When he commanded, “*Do this in remembrance of me*” (Lk 22:19), he gave them the power to re-enact the Last Supper and turn bread and wine into his Body and Blood. He gave them the power to govern when he said, speaking to Peter directly and the rest of the apostles united under him, “*I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in Heav-*

en, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in Heaven” (Mt 16:19). In short, Christ entrusted to them all the power they would need to teach, sanctify, and govern in his name. He also ensured that their ministry would not die with them through his gift to the Church of Holy Orders which could be conferred on the apostles’ successors and their successors after them and so forth forming one unbroken chain of succession up to our present pope and bishops. An example of this is found in St. Paul’s granting of

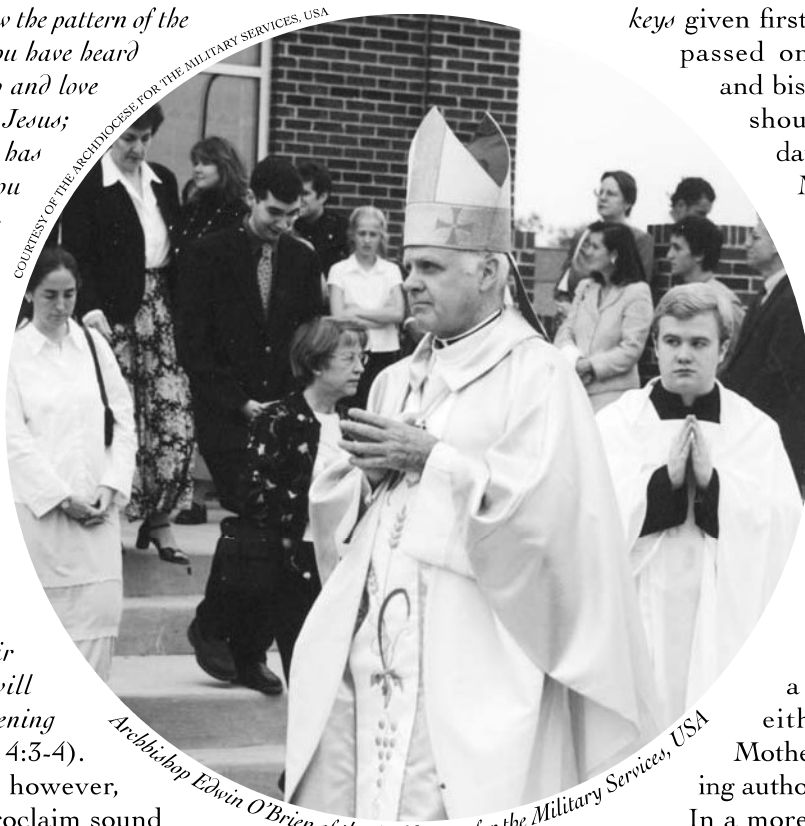
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his own authority to his disciples Sts. Timothy and Titus (see the First and Second Letters to Timothy and the Letter to Titus). In the Second Letter to Timothy, St. Paul instructs the young

bishop thus: *“Follow the pattern of the sound words which you have heard from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus; guard the truths that has been entrusted to you by the Holy Spirit who dwells within us”* (2 Tm 1:13-14). Later in the same letter, St. Paul prophesies that *“the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own likings, and will turn away from listening to the truth”* (2 Tm 4:3-4). Only the Church, however, is authorized to proclaim sound teaching that is the truth.

This power to teach authoritatively in the name of Christ refers to the teaching office of the Church, called the Magisterium. In addition to the duty of the Church to transmit those saving truths of God’s Revelation, it claims as a matter of right, entrusted to it by Christ himself, the authority to announce moral principles and to make judgments on human affairs when these judgments are necessary to safeguard the fundamental rights of the human person or to ensure the salvation of souls. This authority extends to teaching and interpretation of the natural law, since observance of the natural law, as well as of revealed law, is necessary to salvation. The office of the Magisterium is exercised ordinarily when a pope or bishop issues a letter or gives public teaching to instruct and help guide the faithful in matters of faith and morals.

Such pastoral help, whether from a pope, a single bishop, or bishops in council, while not infallible teachings, must still be accepted by the faithful at the level of religious assent as a sign of obedience to Christ’s Church and respect for the *power of the*



COURTESY OF THE ARCHDIOCESE FOR THE MILITARY SERVICES, USA

Archbishop Edwin O'Brien of the Archdiocese for the Military Services, USA

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guard the deposit of Revelation entrusted to her by Christ. The Magisterium serves the Word of God by guarding it from errors and authentically interpreting it for the Church’s faithful. In this way, it also serves the People of God and helps guide them into the splendor of truth.

(CCC 93-95, 888-892, 2032-2033, 2036, 2040)

keys given first to Peter and then passed on to future popes and bishops. This respect should be as sons and daughters toward our Mother the Church, a true filial spirit that joyfully receives the riches of its teaching, as well as the spiritual food of the Scriptures and the Eucharist. The Church is *Mater et Magistra* (“Mother and Teacher”). One cannot claim to be a Catholic and reject either the Church’s Motherhood or its teaching authority.

In a more solemn but much less frequent manner, the pope or bishops gathered in council can exercise the authority of the Magisterium in an extraordinary way, either when the pope issues definitive *ex cathedra* statements, as Pope Pius IX did when he promulgated the dogma of the Immaculate Conception (1854) or Pope Pius XII did with the dogma of the Assumption (1950), or when the body of bishops, together with the pope, promulgate definitive teachings at an ecumenical Church council. All of these extraordinary occasions produce documents that, because of their definitive manner, are infallible and must be assented to in faith.

It needs to be underscored that the authority of the Magisterium is for the good of the Church and its function is to preserve and