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## Who Speaks for the Church?

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educate their members in the tenets of national civil religion? I do not see any reason to think so.”

Yes, there was religious opposition to the war in Iraq, again based on revulsion at civilian suffering and widespread destruction. “However, that still does not provide ethical guidance,” Nutt worries. When he asks his students what they would do if called to fight in a war, “they are rarely pre-

pared to consider the morality of war in any philosophical or theological way.” Shouldn’t that bother religious leaders?

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THOMAS P. RAUSCH

## WHO SPEAKS FOR THE CHURCH?

### WHEN THE MAGISTERIUM INTERVENES

#### The Magisterium and Theologians in Today’s Church

Richard R. Gaillardetz (ed.)  
Liturgical Press. 295p \$29.95.

The result of the work of a three-year “interest group” that brought together a remarkable number of theologians at the 2009, 2010 and 2011 conventions of the Catholic Theological Society of America, Richard Gaillardetz’s book is an effort to address what he calls the “pronounced magisterial activism” that began under Pope John Paul II and continues with Pope Benedict XVI. He shows in the Introduction that the contemporary magisterium is largely a product of the 19th century. The church of the Middle Ages recognized various modes of teaching authority and a diversity of voices. Theological faculties of the great universities like Paris and Bologna generally arbitrated theological disputes. Aquinas spoke of two *magisteria*, one of degreed scholars, the other the pastoral teaching office of the bishops. Popes and bishops for centuries played a relatively minor role.

Confronted with an Enlightenment driven protest against religious authority and particularly after the

French Revolution, the 19th century papacy began to speak out against what it saw as state interference in the affairs of the church. Pope Pius XI’s “Syllabus of Errors” (1864), rejecting religious liberty and freedom of conscience, is only one example. At the same time, the term *magisterium* began to be used exclusively of the hierarchy. Pope Leo XIII and Pope Pius X went a stage further when they began to offer extended theological treatments on contemporary issues, while Pius XII in “*Humani Generis*” (1950) limited the task of theologians to explicating what was proclaimed by pope and bishops.

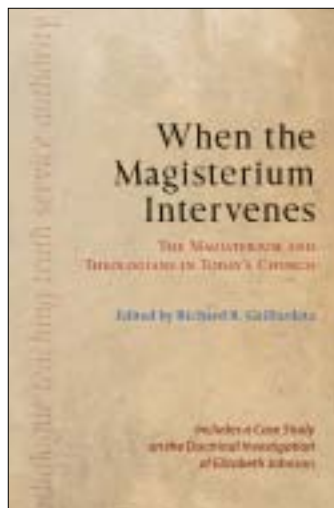
The result was a process that would transform the papacy from a court of last appeal to a doctrinal watchdog. Under Pope John Paul II the authority of the magisterium was further extended and the role of theologians further limited.

The chapters that follow illustrate these developments. Bradford Hinze reviews a decade of the Vatican’s disciplining of theologians. A partial list of

public cases includes 14 scholars, though many others have been investigated or disciplined, particularly those who have written about homosexuality or the ordination of women. Since 1995 four Jesuits have received notifications from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and 18 Dominicans have been investigated. At least another 11 theologians have been censured or criticized by bishops’ conferences. James Coriden traces from a canonical perspective the development of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops (now the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops) document *Doctrinal Responsibilities* (1989), crafted to deal with doctrinal disputes between bishops and theologians. He suggests the need for simpler procedures and a new joint committee to deal with disputes at both local and national levels.

Colleen Mallon reviews the efforts of religious women to renew their lives following the Second Vatican Council in light of two Vatican inquiries into women religious in the United States, including the current investigation of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious. She asks pointedly if episcopal structures have undergone a similar renewal and redesign, noting that structural reform of the Roman Curia has yet to take place.

Building on Vatican II, Ormond Rush develops the idea that the church’s prophetic or teaching office involves the *sensus fidelium*, the work of theologians and the magisterium, each charisms of the Spirit. While only the magisterium has final authority, it is dependent on the whole church as the primary recipient of revelation.



Gerard Mannion uses Charles Taylor's concept of "social imaginary" to illustrate how a particular but narrow understanding of teaching authority has been identified with the word *magisterium*, at the expense of a more historically conscious theology and other charisms within the church. Two final essays interpret differently the effects of contemporary electronic media on magisterial authority. Anthony Godzieba argues that digital immediacy results in the pope being perceived as a kind of chief executive officer, bishops like corporate vice-presidents and theologians as writers for the corporate newsletter, short-circuiting the more complicated process of discernment, appropriation and doctrinal development, and contributing to a further centralization of authority.

Taking a different perspective, Vincent Miller suggests that digital immediacy also erodes magisterial authority by allowing ever smaller, cyberspace communities with specialized agendas to flourish, diminishing the ability of religious communities to maintain their complex identities. The result is a kind of sectarianism, with high levels of emotion and low levels of religious literacy.

The final part of the book presents as a case study the controversy between Elizabeth Johnson, C.S.J., and the U.S.C.C.B. Committee on Doctrine over her book *Quest for the Living God: Mapping Frontiers in Theology*. The committee asserted that Johnson's book "contains misrepresentations, ambiguities, and errors" in regard to authentic Catholic faith. In her response, unfailingly polite, Johnson argues at length that the committee misunderstood and consistently misrepresented her positions, regretting that it did not invite her into a conversation on disputed points before issuing its statement. In a second statement after a response from the committee, Johnson noted some

corrections and less vituperative rhetoric, but little movement in understanding.

In his concluding reflections on the ecclesiological issues raised by the Johnson case, Gaillardetz underlines the fundamentally conservative, pastoral task of the bishops in regard to new formulations of the faith, but asks with Johnson if the committee is equating revelation with doctrine, contrary to the more personalist and Trinitarian approach of Vatican II. He finds problematic the current magisterial tendency to rush to doctrinal judgment and the failure of the

committee to approach Johnson privately.

Most of all, Gaillardetz argues that if the church's teaching ministry is to be an expression of the church's essential nature as a communion, then it must act as a true *communio* and not as autonomous authority figures. At a time of considerable disagreement over how the church's teaching authority is being exercised, this is a truly important book.

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DENNIS M. LEDER

## A DEATH FORETOLD

### OBLIVION

#### A Memoir

By Hector Abad Farrar, Straus and Giroux. 272p \$26

Our parents occupy our lives "in a place that precedes thought." Something subjective and tribal joins us while we live and allows for objectivity only after a parent's death.

As children we hope for lasting happiness, but a premonition of our parents' mortality teaches us that joy is always precariously balanced. When the external forces of violence, ideological struggles and dangerous governments define a society's structures, happiness becomes all the more ephemeral and death an "impalpable ghostly presence."

Love and death in an era of political turmoil are the motives behind Hector Abad's memoir, *Oblivion*. The title comes from a sonnet by the Argentine poet Jorge Luis Borges: "Already we are the oblivion we shall be..." The author notes the irony that this favorite poem of his father's was found in his pocket the day Colombian mer-

cenaries shot and killed him on a street in Medellín. Also in the pocket was the death list on which his father's name appeared.

Hector Abad Gómez, doctor, loving parent, humanist and "ideological hybrid," was 67 years old when he was murdered. During the last years of his life (1982-87), he chaired a committee for the defense of human rights and wrote endlessly to government officials, generals in the military, even death squad leaders, condemning torture and murder, listing full names and concrete cases. His was a death foretold in Colombia during those volatile decades, as he launched a crusade against the plague of political violence.

As a doctor, this jovial parent was more an academic than a clinician. His defense of human rights and commitment to preventive medicine caused

conflict with colleagues, who saw little value in a doctor's passion for clean water and latrines. Even though he opened the department of preventive medicine at the University of Antioquia in Medellín and founded the National School of Public Health, his sense of social justice and rejection of ideological extremes confounded and angered adherents on both sides of the political spectrum.

An activist and esteemed university professor might be shielded by his public profile, but political hatred has no scruple when it comes to exterminating intelligence. The bald, friendly "madman" with a resounding voice that delivered his public denunciations was a disturbance to the state and its cohorts. His death sentence for condemning barbarity was almost assured, even if postponed for a time.

While it is not surprising that death is a prevalent theme in Hector Abad's memoir, love provides an equally strong counterbalance. His father's presence in family life generated trust, tolerance and a spirit of happiness. Both mother and father inherited a somewhat "dark Catholicism" mixed with confidence in human reason. His mother maintained a proportion of the mystic, while his father's humanism emphasized reason more than faith. But the father could be brought to tears by poetry, and his mother's gift for business not only kept the economy of the family stable, but also added a touch of materialism to her devotion. In short, contradictory beliefs somehow contributed to domestic harmony.

Abad recounts the details of life in a household of 10 women, recalling with affection the attention given him by his father, while brilliant and witty



