

ON THE INDEFECTIBILITY OF THE CHURCH

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This article presents the Catholic doctrine of the indefectibility of the Church.

1. A simple observation raises the question of “indefectibility.”

Many Catholics clearly see a rupture between the doctrine, the discipline and the liturgy of the Church as it existed before Vatican II and the reforms introduced by the Council. Can these reforms be ascribed to the Catholic Church? How would this be reconciled with the dogma of the indefectibility of the Church? Is it legitimate to refuse these changes? Is it legitimate to resist the authority of the Church?

The Church must indeed endure until the end of times with all its essential elements, according to the promise of Christ:

I say to thee: That thou art Peter; and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. (Mt. XVI, 18).

It is evident from the very words of Christ that the question of authority is intimately bound with the question of indefectibility, as we shall explain. Hence, St. Ambrose famously teaches:

Where Peter is, there is the Church; where the Church is, there is no death, but eternal life. (St. Ambrose, In Ps. XL. n. 30).

Our intention is therefore to present relevant points of doctrine concerning the Church’s indefectibility, and particularly different aspects of her infallibility in teaching, so as to be later able to contrast them with the *defection* of Vatican II, in order to draw the proper conclusions.

FIRST ARTICLE

THE INDEFECTIBILITY OF THE CHURCH

2. The definition of indefectibility.

The indefectibility of the Church is that quality of the Church by which she will remain identical until the end of times in all its nature and essential properties.

It is thus defined and presented by the Dominican theologian De Groot:

Indefectibility is the quality or property of the Church, given to her by Christ, *by which it will remain in that unchanged state until the end of time, just as Christ has founded it.* The definition includes: [1] the existence of the Church *never to be interrupted*; [2] *the identity of being*, in regard to all things which pertain to the essence of the Church; [3] *the perennial visibility* of the Church, since we have proven that visibility pertains to the essence of the Church. But what is not excluded is [1] the progress of men in believing, explaining, and scientifically declaring the law of Christ; [2] the changes of those things which the Savior in particular left to the Church to determine, such as certain times of fasting, etc. Indefectibility is called by some *perpetuity*.¹

For an explanation showing that the visible Church of Christ must indeed be indefectible, see St. Robert Bellarmine, *On the Church Militant*, Chapter XIII.

3. Indefectibility entails the continual existence of the four marks of the Church.

In nature, we often arrive at a knowledge

¹ De Groot O.P., *Summa Apologetica de Ecclesia Catholica*, Qu. VIII, Art. I, Ratisbonae, 1906.

of the essence of things through their properties. For example, if something presents all the properties of metal, we conclude that it is a piece of metal. If some animal presents all the properties and characteristics of a dog, we conclude that it is a dog. We do not need to be told that it is a dog, nor is there a label telling us that it is a dog, but we know that it is a dog because it shows the characteristics of a dog.

In the same way we are able to discern *substantial changes*, that is, that a thing is no longer what it was, when the *essential properties* have changed. If a piece of wood is burned and becomes ashes, we clearly see that it is no longer wood because it does not present anymore the characteristics proper to wood. When a living organism dies, it loses the characteristics of life, and we rightly conclude that it is no longer a living being (a bird, or a cat, for example).

In the same way, one can identify which is the true Church of Christ by analyzing its characteristics or properties. These have been reduced by the Fathers and Doctors of the Church to four essential marks: unity, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity. Hence do we profess in the Nicene Creed:

I believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.

The Church must always be endowed with these four marks, since the loss of any one of them would indicate a substantial change, that is, that it would no longer be the Church of Christ, just like the absence of an essential property of metal would indicate that an

object being analyzed is not, or is no longer, a piece of metal.

4. These four marks of the Church must be found in doctrine, discipline, and liturgy.

Any religion is characterized by a threefold aspect: it teaches a system of philosophy or belief (“doctrine”), it indicates a way of life (“discipline”), and it prescribes some form of worship of God (“liturgy”).

The Catholic Church has been given authority to teach the true religion revealed by God, and therefore has the authority of Christ in these three aspects, according to these solemn words of Christ, which end the Gospel of St. Matthew:

Going therefore, teach ye all nations [DOCTRINE]; baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost [LITURGY]. Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you [DISCIPLINE]: and behold I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world. (Mt. XXVIII, 19-20).

Thus the Church continues the threefold function of Christ, Prophet, King, and Priest, by the threefold power to teach, rule and sanctify, which are manifested again in the distinction made between the power of magisterium, of government (jurisdiction), and of holy orders.

In these three aspects of religion, therefore, must the Catholic Church always present the marks of the Church of Christ. She must be one, holy, Catholic and apostolic, in doctrine, in discipline, and in liturgy.

St. Paul (Eph. IV, 5) thus expressed that the mark of unity must be found in the Church:

One Lord, one faith, one baptism.

By these words He expressed unity of government (discipline), unity of faith (doctrine), and unity of sacraments (liturgy). These three aspects of religion (namely discipline, doctrine and liturgy), must be one, holy, Catholic and apostolic to be components of the true religion of Jesus Christ.

5. A substantial rupture in doctrine, discipline and liturgy, shows a substantial change of religion.

This is true because (1) these are the essential elements of a religion. Hence if they change substantially, then the religion itself has substantially changed. This is also true, because (2) such a rupture would contradict the four marks of the true Church of Christ. Let us prove this for each mark.

- (a) A substantial rupture of doctrine, discipline or liturgy would mean that in one or in all of these three essential elements (doctrine, discipline, liturgy) the Church would have lost her unity over time. Either the doctrine professed today would not be identical with the doctrine professed in the past; or the discipline would not be identical and one with that of the past; or the liturgy practiced today would not be identical and one with that of the past.² In any and all of these cases, a substantial change involves the loss of the mark of unity.

² Accidental variations in discipline and liturgy do not contradict this point, since they are still essentially the same, just like a man is substantially the same despite a lot of accidental changes over time, such as height, weight, place, etc.

- (b) Similarly a substantial rupture in doctrine, discipline and liturgy would contradict the mark of holiness of the Catholic Church. For if a doctrine of faith is changed, this change indicates that this doctrine was false, either before or after the change, or both. This means that, at some point, adherence to falsehood was given as a criterion for membership in the true Church. That adherence to falsehood and error be made a criterion of membership in the true Church is repugnant to the mark of holiness and cannot be accepted. Similarly, in discipline and liturgy, that which was intrinsically evil cannot become intrinsically good, and vice versa. But such would be the implication of a substantial change of discipline and liturgy, that is, not one made because of a change of external circumstances, but a change of judgment concerning the very nature of an action. Thus if the worship of false gods is intrinsically evil at one point of time, it was, it is and it will always be so.
- (c) A substantial rupture in either doctrine, discipline and liturgy, would also contradict the mark of catholicity, by which the Church embraces all peoples and nations in space and time. For the men of today would not share the same religion with the men of yesterday.
- (d) Lastly, it is manifest that a substantial rupture in doctrine, discipline or liturgy would contradict the mark of apostolicity, since it would be impossible to thus maintain that the same doctrine, discipline and

liturgy has been handed from the Apostles down to us today.

6. Our study will therefore pivot around these three essential elements: doctrine, discipline and liturgy.

In this article we shall endeavor to deepen our understanding of the indefectibility of the Church in these three fields, and show that by the assistance of the Holy Ghost and the presence of Christ promised to the Church until the end of times (Cf. Mt. XXVIII, 20), it is impossible for the Church to fail in teaching the true faith, in giving good and holy rules of discipline and morals, and in promulgating a sanctifying liturgy.

Pope Leo XIII taught this explicitly in his encyclical *Satis cognitum*:

It is then undoubtedly the office of the Church to guard Christian doctrine and to propagate it in its integrity and purity. But this is not all: the object for which the Church has been instituted is not wholly attained by the performance of this duty. For, since Jesus Christ delivered Himself up for the salvation of the human race, and to this end directed all His teaching and commands, so He ordered the Church to strive, by the truth of its doctrine, to sanctify and to save mankind. But faith alone cannot compass so great, excellent, and important an end. There must needs be also the fitting and devout worship of God, which is to be found chiefly in the divine Sacrifice and in the dispensation of the Sacraments, as well as salutary laws and discipline. All these must be found in the Church, since it continues the mission of the Savior forever.

Our study will therefore be divided in three parts, corresponding to these three essential

elements (doctrine, discipline, liturgy). For each part, we shall present how the indefectibility of the Church is manifested,

and we shall see in each part how the religion of Vatican II represents a substantial rupture.

SECOND ARTICLE

THE INDEFECTIBILITY OF THE CHURCH IN HER DOCTRINE

9. To ensure the Church's indefectibility of the Church in doctrine, Christ has endowed her with an infallible magisterium.

The magisterium of the Church is the right and the duty which she received from Christ to teach Christian truth with a supreme authority which all are bound to obey interiorly and exteriorly.³

Leo XIII taught this explicitly in his encyclical *Satis cognitum*, where he says:

Wherefore, as appears from what has been said, Christ instituted in the Church a living, authoritative and permanent Magisterium, which by His own power He strengthened, by the Spirit of truth He taught, and by miracles confirmed. He willed and ordered, under the gravest penalties, that its teachings should be received as if they were His own.

The power of magisterium of the Church is not a power to reveal new doctrines, but rather it is the power to safeguard the deposit of revelation (contained in Sacred Scripture and Tradition), to interpret it, to define it, to explain it. The Church can therefore infallibly judge that such or such a doctrine is contained in the deposit of revelation. She may also condemn a doctrine as contrary to it.

In the same encyclical *Satis cognitum*, Pope Leo XIII teaches:

As often, therefore, as it is declared on the authority of this teaching that this or that is contained in the deposit of divine revelation, it must be believed by every

³ Cf. De Groot, *op. cit.*, p.344.

one as true. If it could in any way be false, an evident contradiction follows; for then God Himself would be the author of error in man. "Lord, if we be in error, we are being deceived by Thee." (Richardus de S. Victore, *De Trin.*, l. I, c. 2)

10. The subject exercising this power of magisterium.

It is true that the magisterium of one residential⁴ bishop in his diocese is authoritative. But since it does not engage the indefectibility of the universal Church, and since appeal may be made from it to the higher authority of the ecumenical council or the pope, this magisterium is not infallible, and cannot really be said to be "the magisterium of the Church." When speaking about the Church's magisterium, therefore, we will henceforth be referring to the supreme magisterium of the Church, that from whom no appeal may be made, because it has been promulgated or confirmed by the supreme authority of the Church, which is the authority of the supreme pontiff, the pope.

We must distinguish the *pontifical magisterium*, which is the exercise of the power to teach by the Pope alone, from the *universal magisterium*, which is the power to teach, exercised by the entire *Ecclesia docens*

⁴ "Residential" bishops are also called "ordinaries" of dioceses. They are bishops to whom has been entrusted jurisdiction over a diocese. Therefore, not only do they have the sacramental powers of the episcopate, but they also have the Church's authority to rule, teach and sanctify the faithful in a determined diocese.

(“teaching Church”), namely by the bishops together with, and submitted to the pope.

In either case, the subject exercising the power to teach is the *Ecclesia docens* (the “teaching Church”), either only in its sovereign and independent principle (the pope) or in its entirety (the pope together with the residential bishops).

11. The modes of exercise of this magisterium.

The *ordinary* magisterium of the Church is the daily and continual teaching of the faith, which never ceases to transmit the deposit of revelation and to propose it to the belief of the faithful. Thus teaches Pope Pius XI:

The teaching authority of the Church, which in the divine wisdom was constituted on earth in order that revealed doctrines might remain intact for ever, and that they might be brought with ease and security to the knowledge of men, is daily exercised through the Roman Pontiff and the Bishops who are in communion with him.⁵

This daily magisterium is called *ordinary* because it is continual and uses ordinary means: encyclicals, decrees, discourses, catechisms, doctrine expressed by the very rites of sacred liturgy, etc. It is also exercised by the tacit approval of the teaching of theologians, of customs and practices, etc.

Since we have made the distinction between the magisterium as exercised by the pope alone and the magisterium exercised by the pope together with the bishops, we can therefore apply the notions of ordinary and extraordinary modes to these, and we therefore may distinguish:

⁵ Pius XI, *Mortalium animos*, 1928, n. 9.

- (1) The *extraordinary pontifical magisterium*, when the pope alone, exercising his supreme authority to the highest degree and with great solemnity makes a definition, such as the dogmatic definition of the Assumption, pronounced by Pope Pius XII on November 1st, 1950.
- (2) The *ordinary pontifical magisterium*, when the pope teaches the universal church by ordinary means such as encyclical letters, allocutions, discourses, etc.
- (3) The *extraordinary universal magisterium* of the bishops, which is to say: the *ecumenical councils*, when all the bishops of the world are solemnly gathered together by the authority of the Roman Pontiff, and as one moral body they judge questions of doctrine and discipline for the universal church.
- (4) The *universal ordinary magisterium* of the pope and the bishops, when they are dispersed in the whole world and they teach the church with authority, each bishop in his diocese, united together under the supreme authority of the Roman Pontiff.

12. The supreme magisterium of the Church is infallible, whether it be exercised in an ordinary or extraordinary manner, and whether it be exercised by the pope alone or by the entire *Ecclesia docens* (“teaching Church”).

This will be examined at greater length for specific cases which are relevant to our argumentation. Let it here suffice to repeat the teaching of Pope Leo XIII in *Satis cognitum*:

As often, therefore, as it is declared on the authority of this teaching that this or that is contained in the deposit of divine revelation, it must be believed by every one as true. If it could in any way be false, an evident contradiction follows; for then God Himself would be the author of error in man. “Lord, if we be in error, we are being deceived by Thee.” (Richardus de S. Victore, *De Trin.*, l. I, c. 2)

The 1870 Vatican Council teaches in very explicit terms as well:

By divine and Catholic faith, all those things must be believed which are contained in the written word of God and in tradition, and those which are proposed by the Church, **either in a solemn pronouncement or in her ordinary and universal teaching power**, to be believed as divinely revealed.⁶

13. The Church will always faithfully safeguard the deposit of divine revelation.

Before we examine specific cases of infallible magisterium, let us first remind our readers of a few very important notions, which could be reduced to this fundamental principle: **The Church will always faithfully safeguard the deposit of divine revelation, in virtue of Christ’s assistance and promises.**

Leo XIII in the same encyclical, *Satis cognitum*, briefly summarizes it:

The Church, founded on these principles and mindful of her office, has done nothing with greater zeal and endeavor than she has displayed in guarding the integrity of the faith. Hence she regarded as rebels and expelled from the ranks of her children all who held beliefs on any

⁶ Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Filius*, D. 1792. Emphasis added.

point of doctrine different from her own.

The 1870 Vatican Council speaks in explicit terms on this question, in the Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Filius*:

For, even as God wills all men to be saved, and to arrive at the knowledge of the truth, even as Christ came to save what had perished, and to gather together the children of God who had been dispersed, so the Church, constituted by God the mother and teacher of nations, knows its own office as debtor to all, and is ever ready and watchful to raise the fallen, to support those who are falling, to embrace those who return, to confirm the good and to carry them on to better things. Hence, it can never forbear from witnessing to and proclaiming the truth of God, which heals all things, knowing the words addressed to it: “My Spirit that is in thee, and my words that I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, from henceforth and forever.” (Isaias LIX,21).

Pope Pius XI, in his encyclical *Mortalium animos* (1928), utterly condemns the idea that the Church could lose her doctrine and qualifies it as *blasphemy*:

Jesus Christ sent His Apostles into the whole world in order that they might permeate all nations with the Gospel faith, and, lest they should err, He willed beforehand that they should be taught by the Holy Ghost. Has then this doctrine of the Apostles completely vanished away, or sometimes been obscured, in the Church, whose ruler and defense is God Himself? If our Redeemer plainly said that His Gospel was to continue not only during the times of the Apostles, but also till future ages, is it possible that the object of faith should in the process of

time become so obscure and uncertain, that it would be necessary today to tolerate opinions which are even incompatible one with another? If this were true, we should have to confess that the coming of the Holy Ghost on the Apostles, and the perpetual indwelling of the same Spirit in the Church, and the very preaching of Jesus Christ, have several centuries ago, lost all their efficacy and use, to affirm which would be blasphemy.

14. The Catholic notion of development of dogma.

While the modernists have argued that dogma evolves over time, in the sense that it can change meaning, or that new truths may be discovered by the Church or revealed by God, the Catholic doctrine holds that the Church safeguards the same deposit of divine revelation, and proposes it to the belief of the faithful in a manner which is more and more clear and explicit, but never contradictory.

The 1870 Vatican Council defined solemnly this doctrine, in the Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Filius*:

For the doctrine of the faith which God has revealed is put forward not as some philosophical discovery capable of being perfected by human intelligence, but as a divine deposit committed to the spouse of Christ to be faithfully protected and infallibly promulgated. Hence, too, that meaning of the sacred dogmas is ever to be maintained which has once been declared by holy mother Church, and there must never be any abandonment of this sense under the pretext or in the name of a more profound understanding.

In the 1907 Syllabus of errors of the modernists, *Lamentabili sane*, Pope St. Pius

X infallibly condemned the modernist notion of evolution of dogma, liturgy and discipline, presented in the following propositions:

43. The practice of administering Baptism to infants was a disciplinary evolution, which became one of the causes why the Sacrament was divided into two, namely, Baptism and Penance.

53. The organic constitution of the Church is not immutable. Like human society, Christian society is subject to a perpetual evolution.

54. Dogmas, Sacraments and hierarchy, both their notion and reality, are only interpretations and evolutions of the Christian intelligence which have increased and perfected by an external series of additions the little germ latent in the Gospel.

58. Truth is no more immutable than man himself, since it evolved with him, in him, and through him.

60. Christian Doctrine was originally Judaic. Through successive evolutions it became first Pauline, then Joannine, finally Hellenic and universal.

62. The chief articles of the Apostles' Creed did not have the same sense for the Christians of the first ages as they have for the Christians of our time.

64. Scientific progress demands that the concepts of Christian doctrine concerning God, creation, revelation, the Person of the Incarnate Word, and Redemption be re-adjusted.

15. Specific aspects to consider further.

In order to better understand the extent of the Church's indefectibility in teaching the faith, we shall briefly consider in the

following questions the infallibility of ecumenical councils, the infallibility of the Roman Pontiff, the infallibility of the universal ordinary magisterium, and the

value of the non-infallible magisterium. This will allow us to later observe that it causes a problem of contradiction with the new Vatican II religion.

THIRD ARTICLE
**THE INFALLIBILITY OF THE CHURCH'S
ECUMENICAL COUNCILS**

16. What is an ecumenical council?

An ecumenical⁷ council is a solemn meeting of the Catholic bishops convened from the whole world for the purpose of judging and legislating concerning ecclesiastical things under the Roman Pontiff. The power to convoke and preside over an ecumenical council belongs to the Pope. An ecumenical council needs to be confirmed by the Roman Pontiff in order to be binding on the Church. The second Council of Ephesus (449), for example, which was not confirmed by Pope Leo the Great, but on the contrary was rescinded by him, was never recognized as having any authority. The same thing is true of the Council of Basel (1439) whose members were excommunicated by Pope Eugenius IV. The Council of Basel was particularly wrong for having ratified a decree affirming the supremacy of the council over the pope, which had first been

⁷ The word “ecumenical” originally refers to the communion of the Church, and therefore a council is said to be ecumenical when it is a gathering of the universal Church. Protestants have begun to use this word to refer to a gathering of their different sects, which they consider to be all, in some way, part of the communion of the Church of Christ. Modernists have yet extended this meaning to some sort of communion of all religious experiences. Today, therefore, ecumenism refers to the doctrine and practice of gathering of different Churches and religions, to celebrate their common religious sense. Hence the word “ecumenical”, which first only referred to the pristine and perfect unity of the universal one true Church, now has also the meaning of its monstrous opposite, referring to the abominable participation in a pluralism of false religions.

issued by the Council of Constance (114-1418). This heretical decree had never been approved, and therefore never been considered to be part of the magisterium of the Church.

17. Thesis: The ecumenical councils are infallible.

We shall here briefly summarize the presentation of arguments brought forth by De Groot O.P. (*op. cit.*, qu. XIII, art. III).

18. Argument I.

An ecumenical council, confirmed by the authority of the Roman Pontiff, represents the supreme power of the teaching Church. But the teaching Church is infallible. Therefore the ecumenical council is infallible.

19. Argument II.

The Church cannot err in Faith. But if an ecumenical council were to err, the whole Church would be led into error. This is due to the fact that the sheep are bound to listen to their pastors, and to the fact that there is no appeal possible from the definitive judgment of an ecumenical council on matters of faith.

20. Argument III. From Tradition.

(1) The Fathers clearly teach that the decrees of ecumenical councils are put forth by the Holy Ghost. (2) The judgments of ecumenical councils have always been considered to be irreversible. (3) Those who did not follow the sentence of ecumenical councils were numbered among the heretics

and those to be excommunicated.

21. The teaching of an ecumenical council is presented under the form of chapters and canons.

In an ecumenical council both “chapters” (“*capita*”) and “canons” (“*canones*”) are proposed to the faithful. Traditionally, ecumenical councils present Catholic doctrine in a twofold manner. (a) They give a positive presentation and explanation of a doctrine, arranged in “chapters”; and (b) they also define doctrine in a negative way, by the fulmination of anathemas against opposed errors (these are called the “canons”). Both chapters and canons, however, are infallible, as we shall explain, and always have been considered so by the Fathers, doctors, and theologians.

22. What things pronounced by an ecumenical council must be held by faith?

This is a very important question in our evaluation of Vatican II. The traditional doctrine of theologians is quite clear on that subject, and it will suffice us to reproduce here the explanation given by De Groot (*loc. cit.*), over the next numbers.

23. Teachings imposed as a criterion of Catholicity must be regarded as infallible.

De Groot explains:

By faith those things must be held which the Fathers have decided by a judgment of faith. But judgments concerning faith, or definitions of faith, must be considered to be those, (1) if they are judged to be heretics who assert the contrary; (2) when the council prescribes the decrees with this formula: *Si quis hoc aut illud senserit, anathema sit* [“If anyone thinks

this or that, let him be anathema”]; (3) if anything is explicitly and properly declared that it must be firmly believed by the faithful, or that it must be accepted by a certain and firm decree, as a dogma of Catholic Faith, or with similar words, that something is contrary to the gospel or the doctrine of the Apostles. *Canus, lib. V, no. 5.* (4) If against those who should contradict the council, an excommunication is hurled *ipso facto* [automatically]. This fourth note should be understood in such a way that the doctrine so condemned must be held simply as *false*. Whether it is also heretical does not seem to be always evident, since it could happen that someone could be excommunicated *ipso facto* [automatically] who presumes to teach propositions which are branded not with the note of heresy, but with some other censure.

24. Infallible teaching is found both in the chapters and the canons.

De Groot explains:

A point of defined doctrine is expressed, especially in the conclusion, e.g., in the canons. But also, that doctrine which is proposed in any other way, e.g. in the chapters, must be considered defined, and as a matter of faith, whenever it is certain that the council authentically, and by irreformable judgment, wanted to define. So the Council of Trent, in session VI, in the *decree*, throughout the sixteen chapters, exposes the true and sound doctrine of justification. When it is finished, it goes on to the rest saying: *After this Catholic doctrine on justification, which whoso receiveth not faithfully and firmly cannot be justified, it hath seemed good to the holy Synod to subjoin these canons, that all may know not only what they ought to hold and*

follow, but also what to avoid and shun. Therefore, in the chapters, the Council has definitively taught the doctrine to be held and followed, as Catholic, and if someone should fail to receive this doctrine faithfully and firmly, he cannot be justified.

25. What is not infallibly proposed: discussions had during the Council, arguments brought forth in defense of the proposed doctrine, things said in passing.

De Groot explains:

Since nothing is considered to be defined beyond the intention of the defining person, (1) those things are not considered to be defined which are put forth in the *congregations*, or even in the *sessions* outside of the chapters and canons. For the Fathers do not wish to define in these things. (2) The arguments which in the very chapters and canons are said for the purpose of declaring or proving the doctrine, whether they are taken from Sacred Scripture and Tradition, or from any other source,

likewise those things which are said in passing outside of the doctrine to be defined (e.g., answers to an objection and similar things) are not to be believed as judgements of Catholic Faith and as obligatory *as such*. If, however, the Council, putting forth in the decrees or the canons arguments from Sacred Scripture or Tradition, declares that this or that text of sacred Scripture must be understood in such a sense, or that something is the true Tradition of the Church, a declaration of this type certainly pertains to faith. So the Council of Trent, in Sess. XIII, chapter 1, authentically interpreted the words by which the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist was instituted in the Last Supper. (3) Those things which are proposed as *obiter dicta* [said in passing], or in any other way which is not definitive, can nevertheless have great and solid authority. Finally, in all things, it must be considered what is the weight and property of the words.

FOURTH ARTICLE

THE INFALLIBILITY OF THE ROMAN PONTIFF

26. The decree of the 1870 Vatican Council.

After defining the primacy of the Roman Pontiff over the whole Church, the dogmatic constitution *Pastor Aeternus* defined as a dogma of Catholic faith the infallibility of the Roman Pontiff in the following terms:

And so We, adhering faithfully to the tradition received from the beginning of the Christian faith, to the glory of God, our Savior, the elevation of the Catholic religion and the salvation of Christian peoples, with the approbation of the sacred Council, teach and explain that the dogma has been divinely revealed: that the Roman Pontiff, when he speaks *ex cathedra*, that is, when carrying out the duty of the pastor and teacher of all Christians by virtue of his supreme apostolic authority he defines a doctrine of faith or morals to be held by the universal Church, through the divine assistance promised him in blessed Peter, operates with that infallibility with which the divine Redeemer wished that His church be instructed in defining doctrine on faith and morals; and so such definitions of the Roman Pontiff from himself, but not from the consensus of the Church, are unalterable.⁸

27. Explanation of the definition of papal infallibility.

Papal infallibility is a charism by which the Roman Pontiff, when he speaks *ex cathedra*, by virtue of divine assistance, cannot deviate in the definitions of faith or of manners.

By “Roman Pontiff”, we must understand

⁸ D. 1839.

not “the see of Rome,” nor “the series of pontiffs” which follow one another, as if one or the other could deviate as long as the whole series of Pontiffs did not deviate; but **each and every one of the legitimate successors of Saint Peter in the primacy**, as a public person and pastor of the universal Church.⁹

The Vatican Council attributes infallibility to the pope when he speaks *ex cathedra*, and it specifies four conditions for a pontifical teaching to be considered to be *ex cathedra*:

(1) It is a **definitive** statement, that is to say that the pope intends to forever decide a question. Thus a simple exhortation, or the indication of what seems more certain and

⁹ Supporters of the “Recognize and Resist” system often adhere to this erroneous idea of an infallibility “in the long run,” so to speak, meaning that the Church could universally be teaching falsehood and heresy for a time, but that truth would eventually prevail. This system thus reduces infallibility to *being eventually right*: to be considered infallible, a teaching would have to be consistently repeated for a long period of time. This error is shared by the heretic Hans Küng who was thus led to openly deny papal infallibility: “Infallibility, indeceivability in this radical sense, therefore means a *fundamental remaining of the Church in truth, which is not annulled by individual errors*” (Hans Küng, *Infallibility? An Inquiry*, Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1971, p. 181, original emphasis). Küng quotes Congar: “One part or another of the Church can err, even the bishops, even the pope; the Church can be storm-tossed: in the end she remains faithful” (*ibid.*, p.183). For a deeper analysis of this erroneous notion, see Bishop Donald Sanborn, *Response to Bishop Williamson*, in the supplement to the February 2014 MHTS Newsletter, available at mostholytrinityseminary.org.

more probable, is not an *ex cathedra* declaration.

(2) It is a statement of the pope **made as supreme pastor**, that is to say that he fulfills the office of universal Pastor and Doctor of all the faithful. Thus, what the Roman Pontiff says as a private doctor, when he gives his purely personal opinion on a given question, is not *ex cathedra* teaching, and in fact not even part of his Magisterium.

(3) It is a statement **about faith or morals**. The Vatican Council says that the infallibility of the pope is the same as that of the Church; therefore their objects are the same. Hence the Pope is infallible in all matters in which the Church is infallible, that is to say in all that concerns faith and morals.

(4) It is a doctrine **to be held by the universal Church**, that is to say that the pope must manifest the intention of binding all the faithful to an absolute and final assent. This obligation must be sufficiently manifest, but this manifestation is not limited to the use of solemn forms of documents such as a dogmatic bull.

28. This infallible magisterium is exercised both in an extraordinary and in an ordinary way.

The pope is certainly infallible when he solemnly defines a dogma, in the presence of hundreds of bishops and thousands of people, in the great splendor of papal ceremonies, as Pope Pius XII did when defining the dogma of Our Lady's Assumption (1950).

But such solemnity is not in itself required, and the pope is also infallible when defining the faith through ordinary means, such as the condemnation of modernism in St. Pius X's encyclical *Pascendi* (1907) and the

condemnation of birth control by Pius XI in the encyclical *Casti connubii* (1930).¹⁰

29. The theological justification of papal infallibility.

The theological justification for the charism of Pontifical infallibility is explained by Saint Thomas Aquinas, in the *Summa Theologica*, when he answers the question of whether to settle the creed belongs to the Supreme Pontiff. We reproduce here part of the commentary made by R.P. Thomas Pègues O.P.:

Here is the reason given by Saint Thomas. There should be only one and the same faith for the whole Church; this is the word of Saint Paul in his first epistle to the Corinthians: "I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no schisms among you." Now this unity, essential to the Church, can only be preserved if any question raised about the faith is decided by the one who presides over the whole Church, so that his sentence is binding on the whole Church.

¹⁰ The dominican theologian R.-M. Schultes gives the following list of infallible definitions and judgments of recent Popes: 1) by Pius IX: the dogmatic definition of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and the promulgation of the decrees of the Vatican Council; 2) by Leo XIII: the declaration of the invalidity of the anglican orders, and the condemnation of Americanism; 3) by saint Pius X: the condemnation of modernism as heretical in the encyclical *Pascendi dominici gregis*, the decree of the Holy Office *Lamentabili* which he has specially confirmed and made his own, and the formula of the Oath against modernism, in the Motu Proprio *Sacrum Antistitum*; 4) to this should be added all the solemn canonizations. (Cf. Schultes O.P., *De Ecclesia Catholica*, Paris 1931, pp. 643-644).

Therefore, and in the questions raised about the faith, every member of the Church is bound to accept the decision of the Supreme Pontiff, to make it his own. But, either this decision of the Supreme Pontiff will be in conformity with the truth, or it will be false. If it is wrong, the whole Church has been misled. Everyone in the Church will be forced to submit, in the name of God Himself, to a doctrinal decision that is wrong. Pastors and Doctors will be required to teach it, the faithful will be required to admit it... It is inadmissible: inadmissible, because the Church would cease to be the city of God, if, instead of the truth, one taught error there; inadmissible, because the only reason for which one adheres to a truth of faith, it is the authority or the divine veracity, veracity which obviously excludes any error.

It is therefore impossible that a doctrinal decision emanating from the head of the Church and binding all its members is contrary to the truth. It is absolutely necessary that it be true, that it conforms to divine thought, to the word of God. It must be done under pain of making God lie, under pain of destroying the Church.

A special assistance from God will therefore be required by virtue of which the Head of the Church, when he has to make a final judgment on a controversial point, will be kept safe from error and confirmed in the truth. faith. This is the word of Christ to Simon Peter, who was the head of the Church: "But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and thou, being once converted, confirm thy brethren." (Luke, XXII, 32).

This is the reason for the privilege of infallibility; this is the motive of absolute necessity on which it rests. The Church

would no longer be the society of the faithful, of those who live on the truth of God, if the head of this Church, to whom it is ultimately the responsibility of resolving all controversies concerning the truth or the word of God, could be wrong. The head of the Church, and because he is the head of the Church, must necessarily be infallible.¹¹

It is very clear that the argumentation of St. Thomas Aquinas is based on the supreme authority of the Roman Pontiff, of which there can be no appeal. This argument, which St. Thomas establishes about dogmas of the faith, is also applied by doctors and theologians to what is known as the secondary object of infallibility, and particularly to universal liturgy and discipline. Since the authority of the Pope is supreme, and since it is necessary for salvation to be submitted to the Roman Pontiff, it is impossible that a discipline or liturgical law promulgated to the universal Church be in any way harmful, as we see in greater detail below.

30. Catholic doctrine is, for the same reason, always safe to follow.

To some extent the same argument of St. Thomas can be applied to what is known as *Catholic doctrine*.

All universal and official teachings of the Church about faith and morals, even if not infallible because not yet definitive, belong to what is called *Catholic doctrine*. Hence the official doctrine of the Catholic Church, the *Catholic doctrine*, comprises both what is

¹¹ Rev. Fr. Thomas-M. Pègues O.P., *L'Autorité des Encycliques Pontificales d'après Saint Thomas*, published in the *Revue Thomiste*, November-December 1904.

defined, and therefore infallible, and what is taught with authority but without being definitive. This latter sort of teaching is usually referred to as *simply authentic magisterium*. The faithful must give a religious assent to this *Catholic doctrine*, both internally and externally.

Thus the Assumption of Our Lady is certainly part of *Catholic doctrine*, but it is also a dogma of faith defined by Pope Pius XII. The doctrine of guardian angels is certainly part of *Catholic doctrine*, it can even be said to be infallibly taught by the universal ordinary magisterium. Father Cartechini indicates as an example of something which would be part of *Catholic doctrine*, although perhaps not having been taught infallibly by the Church, is that the inspired authors of Sacred Scripture are truly secondary authors (while God is the primary author). In other words, they are not led by divine inspiration in a violent way, without awareness or consent to write what they are writing, but rather they are freely writing, under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost.

The 1870 Vatican Council, after a series of anathemas against many explicitly condemned errors, reminded Catholics of their duty to obey the decrees of the Holy See:

But, since it is not sufficient to shun heretical iniquity unless these errors also are shunned which come more or less close to it, we remind all of the duty of observing also the constitutions and decrees by which base opinions of this sort, which have are not enumerated

explicitly here, have been proscribed and prohibited by this Holy See.¹²

This doctrine is also taught by pope Pius IX:

It is not sufficient for learned Catholics to accept and revere the aforesaid dogmas of the Church, but it is also necessary to subject themselves to the decisions pertaining to doctrine which are issued by the Pontifical Congregations.¹³

Theologians¹⁴ explain that if someone learned in theology sees a serious reason to suspend assent, he must submit his doubt to the Holy See, and be ready to accept whatever decision is finally made on the matter. He is never allowed to publicly express dissent from any point of *Catholic doctrine*. In any case, even if there is no infallibility of truth in cases such as this, there is always nonetheless infallible safety, as we shall now explain.

On that account, it is only logical that there exists in this regard a special assistance of the Holy Ghost, by which the faithful may never find themselves in a situation where they are seriously bound to accept a doctrine which would contradict something already defined, or which would be sinful to adhere to. Hence, even if not making any new definition, the supreme magisterium of the Church will always infallibly uphold what has been already defined, and could never contradict it. To give an example, it is impossible for the pope (or all the bishops

¹² Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Filius*, D. 1820. This teaching has been inserted in the 1917 Code of Canon Law (canon 1324).

¹³ Letter *Tuas Libenter*, December 21st, 1863. D. 1684.

¹⁴ Cf. Dieckmann S.J., *De Ecclesia*, T. II., n. 779.

together with the pope) to teach with authority a doctrine openly denying the Assumption of Our Lady, which has been already defined as a dogma of Catholic faith.

This flows directly from St. Thomas Aquinas' argumentation, and from what we have explained about the indefectibility of the Church in her doctrine. Let us repeat the words of Pius XI, already quoted above:

Has then this doctrine of the Apostles completely vanished away, or sometimes been obscured, in the Church, whose ruler and defense is God Himself? If our Redeemer plainly said that His Gospel was to continue not only during the times of the Apostles, but also till future ages, is it possible that the object of faith should in the process of time become so obscure and uncertain, that it would be necessary today to tolerate opinions which are even incompatible one with another? If this were true, we should have to confess that the coming of the Holy Ghost on the Apostles, and the perpetual indwelling of the same Spirit in the Church, and the very preaching of Jesus Christ, have several centuries ago, lost all their efficacy and use, to affirm which would be blasphemy.¹⁵

31. The notion of *infallible safety*, according to Cardinal Franzelin.

According to Cardinal Franzelin,¹⁶ the

¹⁵ Pius XI, Encyclical *Mortalium animos*, 1928.

¹⁶ Johann Baptist Franzelin (1816-1886) was an Austrian Jesuit theologian, who quickly became one of the most prominent theology professors of Rome in the nineteenth century. He was deeply involved in the work of the 1870 Vatican Council, and he also was a member of many Roman Congregations. He published a number of works, among which his *De Divina Traditione et Scriptura (On Divine Tradition and Scripture)* is acknowledged by all as a classical

doctrinal decrees of the Sacred Congregations, and in particular those of the Holy Office, enjoy an infallible safety, when approved by the pope, in virtue of the assistance of the Holy Ghost. This safety ensures that the faithful may receive this teaching in all safety for the faith and morals. The faithful must actually accept this doctrinal teaching under pain of mortal sin, according to canonists and theologians.¹⁷ With greater reason will therefore any teaching emanating from the Roman Pontiff be, if not always infallibly true, at least infallibly safe, in accordance with Cardinal Franzelin's explanation. This notion of *infallible safety* has been embraced and

milestone in theology. To honor such a great defender of the faith, Pope Pius IX made him a cardinal in 1876. Cardinal Franzelin died in 1886, after a long life of unceasing work and asceticism.

¹⁷ "If in a given case the Church does not use its infallible authority, then the violation of canon 1324 constitutes a sin only against ecclesiastical obedience, but the sin is also in that case a grave sin." (Abbo & Hannan, *The Sacred Canons*, V. II, St Louis, 1952, p. 560). — "The specific malice of the fault committed in the case of lack of submission to such a pontifical teaching must be drawn from the following principles: a) There is always in itself a violation of a Church law which obliges gravely, in a matter falling immediately under its authority. — b) There is often, *per accidens*, sin against the virtue of faith, in the sense that by disobeying the pontifical magisterium, one exposes oneself to some more or less serious danger to the faith. — c) There can easily be a sin against charity as well, on account of the scandal given or of the spiritual damage caused in others by one's disobedience, according to one's position and influence." (E. Dublanchy, in *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique*, article *Infailibilité du Pape*, T. VII, 2e Part., Col. 1709-1714).

defended by his successors.¹⁸ Here is an excerpt from the Cardinal's explanation:

The Apostolic Holy See, to whom God has entrusted to keep the sacred deposit of revelation, and has committed the duty and care to govern the Church for the salvation of souls, can concerning theological opinions and those who are related to them, prescribe that one adopts them, or proscribe them as to be rejected. These decisions are not taken only with the intention to infallibly settle the truth by a definitive sentence; but outside of this case, they are taken by the necessity and the intention to provide simply or perhaps on account of some circumstances, *for the safety* of Catholic doctrine... In declarations of this kind, there is not *infallible truth* of doctrine, since in this hypothesis there was no will to settle it; but there is *infallible safety* of doctrine.¹⁹

What Cardinal Franzelin calls *infallible safety* is sometimes referred to as *negative infallibility*, meaning that it is infallibly certain that what pertains to Catholic doctrine is not contrary to faith or morals.

32. Pope Pius XI and Pope Pius XII clearly taught the obligation of Catholics to assent to the simply authentic magisterium, as the best way to protect their faith.

Pope Pius XI alludes to the obedience due to the doctrinal decrees of the Holy See (even

¹⁸ Among others, see: Billot, *De Ecclesia Christi*, T. I, Ed. 5^a, Romae, 1927, Th. XIX, pp.443 and ff.; Cartechini, *De Valore Notarum Theologicarum*, Romae, 1951, pp.72-73.; Choupin, *Valeur des Décisions Doctrinales et Disciplinaires du Saint-Siège*, 1928, p. 85.

¹⁹ Franzelin, *De Divina Traditione et Scriptura*, Ed. 3^a, Romae, 1882, Sec. I, Cap. II, Sch. I, Pr. VII, pp. 127-131.

non infallible ones) as “that assistance given by God with such liberal bounty” in order to “be kept **unharméd and free from error and moral corruption**” (emphasis added).²⁰ Pius XI continues:

For it is quite foreign to everyone bearing the name of a Christian to trust his own mental powers with such pride as to agree only with those things which he can examine from their inner nature, and to imagine that the Church, sent by God to teach and guide all nations, is not conversant with present affairs and circumstances; or even that they must obey only in those matters which she has decreed by solemn definition as though her other decisions might be presumed to be false or putting forward insufficient motive for truth and honesty. Quite to the contrary, a characteristic of all true followers of Christ, lettered or unlettered, is to permit themselves to be guided and led in all things that touch upon faith or morals by the Holy Church of God through its Supreme Pastor the Roman Pontiff, who is himself guided by Jesus Christ Our Lord.

Pope Pius XII mentions explicitly the necessity to profess the doctrine taught in

²⁰ Encyclical *Casti Connubii* (1930): “... for the same purpose he has constituted the Church the guardian and the teacher of the whole of the truth concerning religion and moral conduct; to her therefore should the faithful show obedience and subject their minds and hearts so as to be kept unharméd and free from error and moral corruption, and so that they shall not deprive themselves of that assistance given by God with such liberal bounty, they ought to show this due obedience not only when the Church defines something with solemn judgment, but also, in proper proportion, when by the constitutions and decrees of the Holy See, opinions are prescribed and condemned as dangerous or distorted.”

papal encyclicals:

Nor must it be thought that what is expounded in Encyclical Letters does not of itself demand consent, since in writing such Letters the popes do not exercise the supreme power of their teaching authority. For these matters are taught with the ordinary teaching authority, of which it is true to say: “He who heareth you, heareth me”; and generally what is expounded and inculcated in Encyclical Letters already for other reasons appertains to Catholic doctrine. But if the supreme pontiffs in their official documents purposely pass judgment on a matter up to that time under dispute, it is obvious that that matter, according to the mind and will of the pontiffs, cannot be any longer considered a question open to discussion among theologians.²¹

33. Conclusion.

The Roman Pontiff is infallible when teaching in his office of supreme pastor, about faith and morals, to the universal Church, and in a definitive way.

When he is not settling a question in a definitive manner, but merely giving doctrinal guidelines, as is usually the case in an encyclical, the Roman Pontiff does so in a way which is infallibly safe and which could never contradict past Church’s definitions. These doctrinal guidelines must be adhered to by religious assent, under pain of mortal sin.

²¹ Pius XII, Encyclical *Humani Generis* (1950).

FIFTH ARTICLE

THE INFALLIBILITY OF THE CHURCH'S UNIVERSAL ORDINARY MAGISTERIUM

34. Importance of this question.

The infallibility of the universal ordinary magisterium is the infallibility enjoyed by the universal Church in teaching the faith daily, and it is expressed in many ways, whether explicitly, by formal documents, or implicitly, in the daily approval of catechisms and seminary manuals, for example.

This notion of universal ordinary magisterium is very helpful in assessing the present crisis, since, if the solemn magisterium of the Church is exercised only occasionally, the universal ordinary magisterium is exercised daily, and the Church should therefore continually, every single day, enjoy infallibility in teaching the faith in this ordinary way, as we shall explain.

The Catholic doctrine on guardian angels is an example of a doctrine which has never been the object of a solemn definition, but which has been nonetheless taught by the Church in her universal teaching. Most of the moral teachings have never been the object of solemn definitions either, but the Church proposes these teachings infallibly and everywhere through catechisms, letters, sermons, and other ordinary means.

35. The teaching of the Church on this question.

The infallibility of the teaching Church in general was implicitly defined at the 1870 Vatican Council, which says:

The doctrine of faith...has been entrusted as a divine deposit to the Spouse of

Christ, to be faithfully guarded and infallibly interpreted.²²

The infallibility of the magisterium of bishops united with the Pope, whether in Council or outside Council, was explicitly defined at the Vatican Council, in the Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Filius*:

By divine and Catholic faith, all those things must be believed which are contained in the written word of God and in tradition, and those which are proposed by the Church, **either in a solemn pronouncement or in her ordinary and universal teaching power**, to be believed as divinely revealed. (emphasis added)²³

As regards the universal ordinary magisterium in particular, Pius IX teaches in the Apostolic Letter *Tuas Libenter*:

For, even if it were a matter concerning that subjection which is to be manifested by an act of divine faith, nevertheless, it would not have to be limited to those matters which have been defined by express decrees of the ecumenical Councils, or of the Roman Pontiffs and of this See, but would have to be extended also to those matters which are handed down as divinely revealed by the ordinary teaching power of the whole Church spread throughout the world, and therefore, by universal and common

²² D. 1800.

²³ D. 1792.

consent are held by Catholic theologians to belong to faith.²⁴

In this letter, Pope Pius IX is acknowledging and implicitly confirming the teaching of theologians on the nature of the universal ordinary magisterium. We shall therefore now present a brief overview of the common teaching of theologians on this question. The reader is welcome to consult the authors used for this presentation, among which are: Salaverri,²⁵ De Groot,²⁶ Franzelin,²⁷ Lépiciér,²⁸ Bainvel,²⁹ Billot,³⁰ Vacant,³¹ Journet.³²

36. Theological explanation.

The theological reason for this infallibility of the bishops united to the Pope is the fact that the residential bishops are the successors of the College of the Apostles, and therefore enjoy the same right and the same infallibility, which was absolutely and perpetually promised by the Christ to the Apostles and their successors, whether they are gathered in council, or scattered throughout the earth.

Bishops are infallible when these three conditions are present: (1) they are residential (i.e., diocesan) bishops, able to teach with authority; (2) there is a consensus

²⁴ D. 1683.

²⁵ Salaverri S.J., *De Ecclesia Christi*, 1962.

²⁶ De Groot O.P., *Summa Apologetica de Ecclesia Catholica*, 1906.

²⁷ Franzelin S.J., *De Divina Traditione et Scriptura*, 1882.

²⁸ Lépiciér O.S.M., *Tractatus De Ecclesia Christi*, 1935.

²⁹ Bainvel, *De Magisterio vivo et Traditione*, 1905.

³⁰ Billot S.J., *De Ecclesia Christi*, 1927.

³¹ Vacant, *Le Magistère Ordinaire de l'Eglise et ses organes*, 1887.

³² Journet, *L'Église du Verbe Incarné*, 1955.

of the bishops submissive to the Pope, with at least an implicit awareness of teaching the same doctrine as the Pope; (3) they teach a doctrine as to be definitely kept.

(1) We are speaking here of the diocesan bishops, at the head of a particular diocese, and therefore having the ordinary charge of shepherding a part of the faithful, with the power to teach, to sanctify and to govern. These bishops are in fact the successors of the Apostles.³³

(2) The bishops must teach a doctrine while being subject to the Supreme Pontiff, and being at least tacitly aware that they are teaching the same doctrine as the Supreme Pontiff. They meet this condition, for example, when they present a doctrine as being the teaching of the Church. They do so, and are infallible, when they do this as *a body*, and not as individuals: one bishop, although in communion with the other bishops of the Church, and submitted to the pope, is not by that fact alone infallible. Infallibility is given to the bishops when all teach together, as *the body* of the teaching Church, whose head is the pope.

(3) Lastly, the bishops teach a doctrine as having to be definitively held when, in the fullness of their authority, they demand, with regard to the doctrine which they teach, on the part of the faithful, an irrevocable assent.³⁴

³³ Excluded, therefore, are bishops having no jurisdiction, such as titular bishops, who certainly enjoy the fullness of the priesthood, from the point of view of orders, but without being pastors of the Church, from the point of view of jurisdiction, and therefore not part of the teaching Church. Excluded also are, for a greater reason, bishops separated from the Church by heresy or schism.

³⁴ If the first two conditions are met, but not this third condition, that is to say: if all the

37. Exercise of the universal ordinary magisterium.

Theologians agree that the exercise of the universal ordinary magisterium is very frequent. The bishops use the ordinary magisterium in order to keep, propose and declare to their faithful the doctrine of faith and morals necessary for their religious instruction. They thus exercise this magisterium when they prescribe symbols and professions of faith, when they condemn serious errors against the faith and morals that appear over the centuries, when they force the faithful to accept the definitions of the Councils and of the Sovereign Pontiffs, etc.

The theologian Vacant explains:

If the acts of the ordinary magisterium of the Church form a complex and varied whole, because of the multitude and the unequal authority of those who serve as its organs or instruments, this variety is more striking. when we consider the various ways in which these organs express themselves. Sometimes the Church speaks expressly, she presents to us her doctrine mixed or not with other elements; sometimes she acts or traces the path that her children must follow, and her acts become an implicit teaching; more often than not, she is silent and, by letting us speak and act in accordance with her previous teachings and the rules

bishops together impose a doctrine, without asking for an irrevocable assent, but rather providing a doctrinal norm on a certain question, the faithful are nevertheless bound to accept this teaching. As explained previously when speaking of the pontifical magisterium, if a doctrine is imposed universally, but not in a definitive way, it would still belong to *Catholic doctrine*, which is always safe to adhere to, and which is obligatory.

she laid down, she exercises a tacit magisterium which confirms the acts of her express magisterium and of her implicit magisterium.³⁵

³⁵ J.-M.-A. Vacant, *Le Magistère Ordinaire de l'Église et ses organes*, Editions Saint-Rémi, Cadillac 2014, from the 1887 edition, p. 20.

SEVENTH ARTICLE

THE INDEFECTIBILITY OF THE CHURCH IN HER DISCIPLINE

38. Discipline and indefectibility.

The Church has received not only the command to instruct the faithful and to administer the sacraments, but also to rule the faithful, and enforce the law of God:

Going therefore, teach ye all nations;
baptizing them in the name of the Father,
and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.
Teaching them to observe all things
whatsoever I have commanded you.³⁶

As a consequence the Church is assisted by the Holy Ghost not only when teaching the faith, but also when enforcing disciplines on the faithful, so as to lead them to heaven. We can therefore speak of a certain “infallibility” of discipline, not in the sense that a practical law (such as the law of the eucharistic fast) is made into a dogma, and is necessarily revealed by God, but rather in the sense that the universal laws of the Church are in conformity with faith and morals, and are holy and sanctifying, and lead the faithful to heaven.

The Church would defect and would fail in the mission entrusted to her by Christ Himself if she were to impose universally a law which would be harmful or offensive to the faith and good morals of the faithful. We have already quoted above the teaching of Pope Leo XIII, explaining this point in his encyclical *Satis cognitum*:

For, since Jesus Christ delivered Himself up for the salvation of the human race, and to this end directed all His teaching and commands, so He ordered the Church

to strive, by the truth of its doctrine, to sanctify and to save mankind. But faith alone cannot compass so great, excellent, and important an end. **There must needs be also the fitting and devout worship of God, which is to be found chiefly in the divine Sacrifice and in the dispensation of the Sacraments, as well as salutary laws and discipline. All these must be found in the Church, since it continues the mission of the Savior forever.** (Emphasis added).

39. Clarifications on the notion of infallibility of discipline.

The universal discipline of the Church includes both Canon Law and the liturgy. Theologians agree that particular decrees which would be issued for one or a few particular Churches would not be necessarily infallible. We are therefore here only considering universal decrees, issued by the authority of the Supreme Pontiff or an Ecumenical Council or all the bishops dispersed throughout the world and united to the Pope, for the entire Church.

It is also important to properly understand what kind of infallibility can be had in the universal discipline. The Dominican theologian De Groot explains:

The purpose of the disciplinary laws is the holiness and order of the Church. From this it is clear that (a) laws which are merely disciplinary can be changed according to the necessity of times and places, but the Church cannot in a law of universal discipline, however much it is changed, prescribe or forbid something which is contrary to faith and morals. (b)

³⁶ Mt. XXVIII, 19-20.

Since the proportion of the laws to the circumstances, is a question of prudence, infallibility does not seem *per se* to demand that all the laws of the Church attain the highest degree of prudence. Therefore, passing over the question whether that which is established in the general discipline be optimum, **we assert that nothing can creep into the general discipline of the Church which is contrary to faith and morals.**³⁷

40. Teaching of the Church on this question.

The Church's magisterium expressed itself numerous times on the infallibility of the Church's universal laws and disciplines. Gregory XVI said in the encyclical *Quo Graviora* of 1833:

The Church is the pillar and foundation of truth – all of which truth is taught by the Holy Spirit. Should the Church be able to order, yield to, or permit those things which tend toward the destruction of souls and the disgrace and detriment of the sacrament instituted by Christ?

The same Pontiff declared in the encyclical *Mirari Vos* of 1832:

Furthermore, the discipline sanctioned by the Church must never be rejected or be branded as contrary to certain principles of natural law. It must never be called crippled, or imperfect or subject to civil authority. In this discipline the administration of sacred rites, standards of morality, and the reckoning of the rights of the Church and her ministers are embraced. To use the words of the fathers of Trent, it is certain that the Church “was instructed by Jesus Christ and His Apostles and that all truth was

³⁷ De Groot, *op. cit.*, p. 330. Emphasis added.

daily taught in it by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost.” Therefore, it is obviously absurd and injurious to propose a certain “restoration and regeneration” for her as though necessary for her safety and growth, as if she could be considered subject to defect or obscurity or other misfortune.

Pope Pius VI in the bull *Auctorem Fidei* condemned as...

false, rash, scandalous, dangerous, offensive to pious ears, injurious to the Church and to the Spirit of God by whom it is guided, at least erroneous

the proposition according to which...

the Church which is ruled by the Spirit of God could have established discipline which is not only useless and burdensome for Christian liberty to endure, but which is even dangerous and harmful.³⁸

In his letter *Testem benevolentiae* (1899) Leo XIII recalled this condemnation and repeated that the Church is the judge of lawful discipline, and that in this office she is guided by the Holy Ghost and will therefore never fail:

In this matter (of discipline and rule of life) the Church must be the judge, not private men who are often deceived by the appearance of right. In this, all who wish to escape the blame of our predecessor, Pius VI, must concur. He condemned as injurious to the Church and the spirit of God who guides her the doctrine contained in proposition LXXVIII of the Synod of Pistoia, “that the discipline made and approved by the Church should be submitted to

³⁸ D. 1578.

examination, as if the Church could frame a code of laws useless or heavier than human liberty can bear.”

41. The unanimous teaching of doctors and theologians is that the universal discipline of the Church can never be harmful to faith and morals.

Saint Augustine, speaking of the things “that the Church does in the whole world” said that “to discuss whether things ought to be done that way would be of the most insolent insanity.”³⁹

All Catholic theologians affirm, furthermore, that it is at least theologically certain that the Church cannot err in matters of universal discipline, meaning that the Church cannot prescribe, nor even permit, something sinful. The discussions of the assembly of the 1870 Vatican Council show that everyone agreed that it was at least theologically certain, but the assembly did not want to decide whether that would be of faith or not. The famous Dominican theologian John of Saint Thomas, for example, calls a heresy the idea according to which the Church could in her universal discipline prescribe or permit anything harmful, against good morals, or against divine or natural law.

Cardinal Billot summarizes thus the Catholic doctrine on this question:

The legislative power of the Church has as its object not only matters of faith and morals, but also matters of discipline. In matters of faith and morals, an obligation of ecclesiastical law is added to an obligation of divine law; whereas in matters of discipline the obligation is entirely of ecclesiastical law. However

infallibility is always attached to the exercise of the supreme legislative power, inasmuch as, in virtue of the assistance of God, the Church may never impose a discipline which would be opposed to the rules of faith and the holiness of the Gospel.⁴⁰

³⁹ Letter 54, n.6.

⁴⁰ Cardinal Louis Billot S.J., *Tractatus De Ecclesia Christi*, T. I., Ed. 5a, Thesis XXII, Romae, 1927

EIGHTH ARTICLE

THE INDEFECTIBILITY OF THE CHURCH IN HER LITURGY

42. What we have said above about discipline also applies to liturgy.

This infallibility of discipline is specially found in the sacred liturgy. Cardinal Lépicier explains that liturgy, by its very nature, is an expression of dogma and of the Church's faith.⁴¹ External religious acts are indeed expressions of internal dispositions. But the Church is infallible in the definition of dogma. Therefore it is necessary that she be also infallible in establishing liturgical laws. This entails that the Church's liturgy is always an apt means to lift the soul to God, giving Him worthy homage, and sanctifying the soul.

Thus it would be a blasphemy to say that the Church could promulgate an evil or in some way deficient rite of the mass, or a "mass of Luther", or again a "bastard mass"⁴², as has been heard.

⁴¹ Cardinal Lépicier, *Tractatus De Ecclesia Christi*, Rome, 1935, p. 127.

⁴² Abp. Lefebvre, in his homily of August 29th, 1976, in Lille, said the following: "It is precisely because this union, desired by liberals, between the Church and the Revolution and the subversion, is an adulterous union, that only bastards can come from this adulterous union! And who are these bastards? These are our rites; the rite of the New Mass is a bastard rite! The sacraments are bastard sacraments: we do not know anymore if these sacraments give grace or not." (Quoted in French in *Écône, chaire de vérité*, Iris, 2015, pp. 997-998: "C'est précisément parce que cette union voulue par les libéraux, entre l'Église et la Révolution et la subversion, est une union adultère, que de cette union adultère ne peuvent venir que des bâtards! Et qui sont ces bâtards? Ce sont nos rites, le rit de la nouvelle messe est un rit bâtard! Les sacrements sont des sacrements bâtards: nous ne savons plus si ces sacrements donnent la grâce ou ne la donnent pas.").

Doctors and theologians are all in agreement in this regard, for the same reason as the preceding question. It is impossible that the Church, in her universal liturgy, would express, by words or by gestures, anything contrary to the faith (for example, some base action which would amount to a denial of the Real Presence of Christ in the Holy Eucharist) or anything contrary to morals (many pagan rituals contain impure behaviors).

43. Definitions of the Council of Trent.

On this subject, the Council of Trent, session XXII, canon 7, declares:

If anyone says that the ceremonies, vestments, and outward signs, which the Catholic Church uses in the celebration of Masses, are incentives to impiety rather than the services of piety: let him be anathema.⁴³

The Council of Trent has also defined against the protestants that the Canon of the Mass contains no error:

If anyone says that the canon of the Mass contains errors, and should therefore be abrogated: let him be anathema.⁴⁴

This obviously entails that the rites given by the Church for the administration of the other sacraments are also valid, since the sacraments were instituted by Christ and

⁴³ D. 954.

⁴⁴ D. 953.

entrusted to the Church to be faithfully kept and administered until the end of times.⁴⁵

We have already presented above the teaching of Gregory XVI, who said in the encyclical *Quo Graviora* of 1833:

The Church is the pillar and foundation of truth – all of which truth is taught by the Holy Spirit. Should the church be able to order, yield to, or permit those things which tend toward the destruction of souls and the disgrace and detriment of the sacrament instituted by Christ?

The Church, the only means of salvation, is assisted by the Holy Ghost to faithfully accomplish her mission to teach, to rule and to sanctify the faithful. To say that the Church has promulgated to the whole world an evil rite of celebration of the Mass is fundamentally to destroy the mark of holiness of the Catholic Church, and to find deficiencies in the assistance of the Holy Ghost.⁴⁶

44. Canonizations of saints are infallible.

The infallibility of the Church in the canonizations of saints is a corollary of the previous point. Indeed, through the canonization of saints, the Church implicitly presents to the faithful a rule of morals, since

⁴⁵ It goes without saying that doubting or denying the validity of a universal rite of the Church is a blasphemy, and logically leads one to deny the Church's indefectibility.

⁴⁶ Compare that with Abp. Lefebvre: "We absolutely do not accept this. To say that the New Mass is good? No! The New Mass is no good!" (Quoted in French in *La messe de toujours*, Clovis, 2006, p. 379: "Nous n'acceptons absolument pas cela. Dire que la nouvelle messe est bonne, non! La messe nouvelle n'est pas bonne!").

it proposes the canonized person as an example to imitate.

The Dominican theologian De Groot defines canonization as *the ultimate and definitive sentence, by which the Church declares that someone has led a holy life and has been received into heaven, and proposes him to all the faithful for veneration and invocation.*⁴⁷

Therefore, a canonization establishes three things: (1) that the canonized person was of eminent sanctity of morals; (2) that this person entered heaven; (3) that this person must be venerated and invoked by all the faithful.

It is an absolutely definitive sentence, and therefore we are not talking here about beatification, which, not being a definitive sentence, does not pertain to faith, either divine or ecclesiastical, although it would be rash to challenge a beatification.⁴⁸

St. Thomas Aquinas says that canonization is a kind of profession of faith, and is therefore connected to faith itself. It is thus subject to the special and supernatural providence, by which Christ has promised to be always with his Church.

Saint Thomas explains:

The honor which we pay to the saints is a kind of profession of faith, by which we believe in the glory of the saints.⁴⁹

The Church cannot err in determining things which pertain to the profession of faith, and she is therefore infallible in the canonization of saints. Moreover, if it were otherwise, the entire veneration of saints

⁴⁷ De Groot, *op. cit.*, p. 334.

⁴⁸ Cf. Lépiciér, *op. cit.*, pp. 131-132.

⁴⁹ *Quodl. IX*, art. 16, quoted by De Groot, *loc. cit.*

would be called into question, since no authority outside the Church could determine whether or not a saint was properly canonized. For all these reasons, Cardinal Lépiciér explains:

Things being so, to affirm that the Church can err in the canonization of saints is not only erroneous, rash, scandalous and impious, but even formally heretical. Firstly, certainly it is erroneous, since it opposes the common sense of the faithful; secondly, it is rash, since it is contrary to the general sentence of theologians; thirdly, it is scandalous, since it insinuates into the minds of the faithful that a canonized man may be tormented in hell; fourthly, it is impious, since it attacks religion and the worship due to the saints. But we said, fifthly, that it is formally heretical, since it opposes the certitude of revelation.⁵⁰

Cardinal Lépiciér therefore considers that denying the infallibility of the canonizations of saints is heretical, and he specifies further that this goes against ecclesiastical faith, since it logically amounts to denying the assistance of the Holy Ghost promised to the Church.

45. The teaching of Pius XI and Pius XII is very clear: Solemn canonizations of saints are infallible *ex cathedra* definitions.

Father Salaverri affirms that the infallibility of canonizations can be considered as now implicitly defined, since Popes Pius XI and Pius XII explicitly affirmed it on multiple occasions in the *Decretal Letters* of canonizations.

⁵⁰ *Op. cit.*, p. 130.

In 1933, Pope Pius XI affirmed, regarding the canonization of Saint André-Hubert Fournet:

As supreme Master of the Catholic Church, We have uttered with these words an infallible sentence.⁵¹

In 1934, the Decretal Letters of the canonization of Saint Marie-Michelle of the Blessed Sacrament stated:

As supreme universal Master of the Church of Christ, We solemnly pronounced from the chair of Saint Peter, an infallible sentence by these words...

Notice that the Supreme Pontiff explicitly says that he pronounced a sentence “*ex cathedra*”, *from the chair of Saint Peter*. These are the actual words he uses in Latin: *ex cathedra*.⁵² This expression, *ex cathedra*, is the same expression used by the 1870 Vatican Council to designate infallible decisions of the Roman Pontiff.⁵³

⁵¹ “Infallibilem Nos, uti catholicae Ecclesiae supremus Magister, sententiam in haec verba protulimus: *Ad honorem Sanctae et individuae Trinitatis, etc.*” (Pius XI, *Litterae Decretales*, AAS 1933, p. 426).

⁵² “Nos, ex cathedra Divi Petri, uti supremus universalis Christi Ecclesiae Magister, infallibilem hisce verbis sententiam sollemniter pronunciamus: *Ad honorem Sanctae et individuae Trinitatis, etc.*” (Pius XI, *Litterae Decretales*, AAS 1934, p. 540).

⁵³ “And so We... teach and explain that the dogma has been divinely revealed: that the Roman Pontiff, when he speaks *ex cathedra*... operates with that infallibility with which the divine Redeemer wished that His church be instructed in defining doctrine on faith and morals; and so such definitions of the Roman Pontiff from himself, but not from the consensus of the Church, are unalterable.” D. 1839.

The Acts of Pope Pius XII also indicate, in several instances,⁵⁴ that in the canonizations of saints he was pronouncing an infallible *ex cathedra* decision.

And it is not necessary for the Sovereign Pontiff to *declare* that he is indeed making an infallible pronouncement in order that a given canonization be *in fact* infallible. The Acts of Pope Pius XII render this point very clear. The canonization of Saint John de Britto, Saint Bernardine Realino, and Saint Joseph Cafasso, pronounced on June 22nd, 1947, appears for the first time in the Acta Apostolicae Sedis in 1947, in a rather descriptive way:

⁵⁴ Canonization of St. Gemma Galgani and of St. Marie of Saint Euphrasie Pelletier: “Nos, universalis catholicae Ecclesiae Magister, *ex cathedra una super Petrum Domini voce fundata*, falli nesciam hanc sententiam sollemniter hisce pronunciamus verbis: *Ad honorem Sanctae et Individuae Trinitatis, etc.*” (Pius XII, AAS 1941, pp. 105-106). Canonization of St. Nicolas of Flüe: “*Ipse sedens in Cathedra mitramque gestans, de plenitudine Apostolici ministerii solemniter sic pronunciat: Ad honorem Sanctae et Individuae Trinitatis, etc.*” (Pius XII, AAS 1947, pp. 209-210). Canonization of St. Michel Garicoits and of St. Elisabeth Bichier des Ages: “E caelo superna lux Pontificem Maximum collustrat, qui iam inerrantem sententiam suam laturus est. Caelicolis hisce, quos Petrus, in Pio vivens, loquens, decernens, sanctitudinis infula mox est decoraturus, nos nostraque omnia supplicii prece concedamus.” (Pius XII, AAS 1947, pp. 281-282). Canonization of St. Louis-Marie Grignon de Montfort: “*Tum Beatissimus Pater, in Cathedra sedens, sic definit: Ad honorem Sanctae et Individuae Trinitatis, etc.*” (Pius XII, AAS 1947, pp. 329-330). Canonization of St. Catherine Labouré: “*Tum Beatissimus Pater, in Cathedra sedens, sic solemniter pronunciat: Ad honorem Sanctae et Individuae Trinitatis, etc.*” (Pius XII, AAS 1947, pp. 377-378).

Then the Most Holy Father, being seated, solemnly pronounced, from the chair (*ex cathedra*) of St. Peter: For the honor of the Holy and Indivisible Trinity, etc.⁵⁵

The Holy Father does not say here that he is infallible, although this is evident. But, two years later, remembering this event, Pius XII explicitly affirms that he was then infallible:

...being seated on the Chair, fulfilling the **infallible** magisterium of Peter, we have solemnly pronounced... (emphasis added)⁵⁶

According to the teaching of both Popes Pius XI and Pius XII, canonizations are therefore solemn and infallible *ex cathedra* definitions.⁵⁷ The infallibility of canonizations can no longer be questioned. We should therefore not be surprised if theologians conclude that questioning a canonization is a serious mortal sin against the faith.

On the other hand, the infallibility of canonizations does not depend on the canonical inquiry that precedes it, nor on the value of the testimonies given, as any good

⁵⁵ “*Tum vero Ssmus Dnus Noster, sedens, ex Cathedra Divi Petri solemniter pronunciat: Ad honorem Sanctae et Individuae Trinitatis, etc.*” (Pius XII, AAS 1947, pp. 249-250).

⁵⁶ “*Nos autem, Paracliti Spiritus lumine una cum adstantibus prius implorato, ut ab Eo menti Nostrae superni luminis copia magis magisque affulgeret, in Cathedra sedentes, inerranti Petri magisterio fungentes, solemniter pronunciamus: Ad honorem Sanctae et individuae Trinitatis, etc.*” (Pius XII, AAS 1949, pp. 137-138).

⁵⁷ One could probably find equivalent teaching in the acts of other Roman Pontiffs. Cardinal Lépicier indicates for example that such was the teaching of Pope Clement VII, in the canonization of Saint Antoninus of Florence: “ait: *Deum non passurum fore militantem Ecclesiam suam errare, scilicet in eadem canonizatione decernenda*” (Lépicier, *op. cit.*, p. 130).

textbook of ecclesiology indicates.⁵⁸ The assistance of the Holy Ghost is such that it prevents the final judgment of the Church from being false. For the faithful, the definitive sentence of the Church is a guarantee, and they are not asked to verify that the Sacred Congregation of Rites has done its work well; which, in addition to being absurd, is clearly impossible.

St. Robert Bellarmine⁵⁹ thus summarizes the teaching of theologians on this question:

If anyone would ask, however, whether the pope could err if he should rashly define something, then without a doubt the aforesaid authors would all respond that it cannot happen that the pope would rashly define something, for God has promised the end, and without a doubt he promised also the means which are necessary to obtain that end. It would be of little benefit to know that the pope was not going to err when he rashly defined something unless we also knew that the Providence of God would not permit him to define something rashly.

⁵⁸ See for example De Groot (op. cit., p. 339), Lépiciér (op. cit., pp. 129-130).

⁵⁹ St. Robert Bellarmine, *De Romano Pontifice*, L. IV, C. II.

NINTH ARTICLE

CONCLUSION

46. The dogma of indefectibility of the Church means that the Church cannot undergo a substantial change in doctrine, discipline, and liturgy.

This is true because (1) these are the essential elements of a religion. Hence if they change substantially, then the religion itself has substantially changed. This is also true, because (2) such a rupture would contradict the four marks of the true Church of Christ, as we have explained.

The indefectibility promised by Christ to the Church provides therefore the Church with an infallibility of doctrine, discipline and liturgy.

47. The Church is infallible in her doctrine.

The Church is infallible in defining faith and morals, whether this definition be accomplished by the Pope alone, or by the Pope together with the bishops of the world, gathered in an ecumenical council. In addition, the universal ordinary magisterium of the pope and the bishops teaching the faithful on a daily basis in the entire world is also infallible.

The 1870 Vatican Council teaches in very explicit terms:

By divine and Catholic faith, all those things must be believed which are contained in the written word of God and in tradition, and those which are proposed by the Church, **either in a solemn pronouncement or in her ordinary and universal teaching power,**

to be believed as divinely revealed.⁶⁰

48. The Church is infallible in liturgy and discipline, meaning that the Church could never enforce, or even permit, in the universal Church, anything contrary to faith and morals.

This a necessary corollary of the Church's infallibility in her doctrine, demanded by her very mission to save souls. If the Church were not protected and assisted when issuing laws and rites, how could she be an infallible means of salvation?

Pope Leo XIII makes this point in his encyclical *Satis cognitum*:

For, since Jesus Christ delivered Himself up for the salvation of the human race, and to this end directed all His teaching and commands, so He ordered the Church to strive, by the truth of its doctrine, to sanctify and to save mankind. But faith alone cannot compass so great, excellent, and important an end. **There must needs be also the fitting and devout worship of God, which is to be found chiefly in the divine Sacrifice and in the dispensation of the Sacraments, as well as salutary laws and discipline. All these must be found in the Church, since it continues the mission of the Savior forever.** (Emphasis added).

49. All can be summarized in one principle: The Church was instituted by Christ as the unique means of salvation.

The Catholic Church has been given authority to teach the true religion revealed

⁶⁰ Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Filius*, D. 1792. Emphasis added.

by God, and therefore has the authority of Christ in these three aspects, according to these solemn words of Christ, which end the Gospel of St. Matthew:

Going therefore, teach ye all nations;
baptizing them in the name of the Father,
and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.
Teaching them to observe all things
whatsoever I have commanded you: and
behold I am with you all days, even to the
consummation of the world.⁶¹

It follows from this fact that the Church is the unique means of salvation given to us. The Church is not an obstacle to our salvation. The Church is not a cross, a burden, which makes our salvation and sanctification more difficult, as if she could spread or even tolerate errors and evil laws. No, on the contrary, the Church is for us a refuge in this valley of tears, just like the ark of Noe was a refuge in the flood. There we find true doctrine; there we find sanctifying precepts; there we find holy things; there we find salvation.

Consequently, the faithful may always accept the teachings, disciplines and liturgy of the universal Church in perfectly good conscience, knowing that these things are protected from error both in faith and in morals by the promises of Christ.

Hence, St. Ambrose famously teaches:

Where Peter is, there is the Church;
where the Church is, there is no death,
but eternal life.

⁶¹ Mt. XXVIII, 19-20.