



‘Legio Sanctae Familiae’ The Legion of the Holy Family

Under the Patronage of
The Sacred Heart of Jesus
The Immaculate Heart of Mary
The Most Chaste Heart of St Joseph



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In the previous article in this series, we looked at some of the ways in which Ireland has fallen away from the Catholic faith and particularly at how very young children are now being targeted for corruption by those who are working against the Catholic Church. Pope Leo XIII, in his encyclical letter *Sapientiae Christianae*, tells us that we cannot recoil before the enemies of our Catholic faith as this would show lack of character.

“To recoil before an enemy, or to keep silence when from all sides such clamours are raised against truth, is the part of a man either devoid of character or who entertains doubt as to the truth of what he professes to believe. In both cases such mode of behaving is base and is insulting to God, and both are incompatible with the salvation of mankind.” (*Sapientiae Christianae* 14)

In *Sapientiae Christianae*, Pope Leo XIII continues to examine our duties as Catholics and he now begins to look at the position and structure of the Catholic Church. It is difficult to write about this in our times because of the great confusion that currently exists amongst Catholics. Many in the hierarchy are openly questioning and publicly challenging matters of settled Catholic doctrine. The current Pope does not publicly correct some of those who publicly promote heretical opinions with regards to certain matters.

For example, in September 2022, some Flemish bishops introduced blessings for homosexual unions, and on March 10th, 2023, the German bishops’ synodal path also voted for the blessing of same-sex unions. This is contrary to Catholic Church teaching. At least two thirds of the German bishops voted in favour of the proposal. The heretical actions of these bishops have not been publicly corrected or specifically condemned by Pope Francis.

This leads some Catholics into the false hope that Catholic Church teaching on human sexuality is about to be ‘modernised’. These Catholics fail to understand the infallible nature of Catholic Church teaching and they fail to understand the nature of and the limits to, papal infallibility. This in turn can put Catholics in danger of falling away from the Catholic faith.



Pope Pius IX with King Francis II of the Two Sicilies

Some may accept the heretical opinions. Others may reject the concept of papal authority through a misunderstanding of the exact nature of papal infallibility. Yet others may erroneously accept everything the current Pope says and does as being part of the infallible magisterium of the Catholic Church.

It might be tempting to ignore or to skip this particular part of *Sapientiae Christianae* because of these difficulties, but that would not serve any good purpose. As Catholics we have nothing to fear from the truth.

Pope Leo XIII was writing at a difficult time for the Catholic Church. This is when the Pope was known as ‘the prisoner in the Vatican’. In September 1870, Rome was captured by the armed forces of the Kingdom of Italy and the last territories of the Papal States were conquered. The Pope lost most of his temporal power. Pope Pius IX and subsequent Popes refused to sign any agreements which made them subjects of the Italian Kingdom. They remained within the Leonine walls of the Vatican and this stalemate remained until the Lateran Treaty was signed in 1929, which established the Vatican City as a state with powers of self governance.

During the wars for the reunification of Italy, the territory of the Papal States was being increasingly captured. Pope Pius IX, seeing the dangers to the

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Catholic Church and the Papacy, decided in 1868 to call the first Vatican Council by issuing the Apostolic letter *Aeternis Patris*, on the 29th June of that year. He gives his reasons for this as follows.

“Because of the mass of so many calamities from which Our heart is oppressed, the supreme pastoral office entrusted to Us by divine disposition demands that We use, as much as possible, all Our strength to repair the ruins of the Church, to procure the health of all the Lord’s flock, to repress the pernicious impulses and efforts of those who do everything in their power to destroy, if ever possible, the Church and civil society itself from their foundations.

Indeed, with God’s help, from the very beginning of our pontificate, we have never failed in our consistorial allocutions and apostolic letters to raise our voice and to defend with every commitment and constancy the cause of God and his holy Church entrusted to Us by Jesus Christ, to uphold the rights of justice and truth, to discover the snares of the enemies, to condemn errors and false doctrines, to proscribe the sects of impiety, and to watch and provide for the universal flock of the Lord.” (**Aeterni Patris - 1868**)

Pope Pius IX also outlined the purpose of the council.

“The Venerable Brothers, kindled by a singular love for the Catholic Church, notable for their outstanding piety and reverence towards Us and towards this Apostolic See, solicitous for the salvation of souls and outstanding in wisdom, doctrine and erudition, and together with Us saddened by the very sad condition of both sacred and civil things, they have longed for nothing more fervently than to communicate and compare their advice with Us in order to bring healthy remedies to so many calamities.” (**Aeterni Patris - 1868**)

The first Vatican council approved two constitutions before it was interrupted by the Franco-Prussian war. The Dogmatic Constitution On The Catholic Faith and The First Dogmatic Constitution on the Church of Christ. It is the latter which dogmatically defined Papal infallibility.

There were controversies surrounding the proposed definition of Papal infallibility and one notable opponent of such a binding declaration was Saint John Henry Cardinal Newman. Saint Newman accepted Papal infallibility but he was concerned that a specific definition might lead to some unintended consequences. Subsequent to the declaration he wrote in support of Papal infallibility. After outlining the Lord’s great command to teach all nations he says.

“For, if the Church, initiated in the Apostles and continued in their successors, has been set up for the direct object of protecting, preserving, and declaring the Revelation, and that, by means of the Guardianship and Providence of its Divine Author, we are led on to perceive that, in asserting this, we are in other words asserting, that, so far as the message entrusted to it is concerned, the Church is infallible; for what is meant by infallibility in teaching but that the teacher in his teaching is secured from error? and how can fallible man be thus secured except by a supernatural

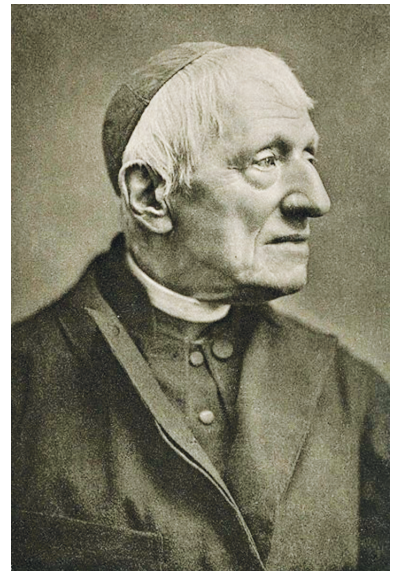
infallible guidance? And what can have been the object of the words, “I am with you all along to the end,” but to give thereby an answer by anticipation to the spontaneous, silent alarm of the feeble company of fishermen and labourers, to whom they were addressed, on their finding themselves laden with superhuman duties and responsibilities?

Such then being, in its simple outline, the infallibility of the Church, such too will be the Pope’s infallibility, as the Vatican Fathers have defined it. And if we find that by means of this outline we are able to fill out in all important respects the idea of a Council’s infallibility, we shall thereby be ascertaining in detail what has been defined in 1870 about the infallibility of the Pope.” (The True Notion of Papal Infallibility - Cardinal Newman)

I don’t want to get bogged down in all of the details concerning the limitations of papal infallibility, but let me give an example based on the title of some musings a friend of mine wrote called ‘The Scope of the Pope’. Let us take three consecutive Popes. Popes 1 through 3. Each of them makes an infallible and therefore binding declaration. Declarations 1 to 3. Pope 3 dies and Pope 4 is elected. Pope 4 cannot make any binding declarations which would contradict the three binding declarations already in existence. The ‘scope’ of Pope 4 therefore, is limited by the binding declarations that have preceded him. This is a simplistic way of saying that there are indeed limits to Papal infallibility. The Pope is not God and cannot declare any new teaching or contradict any teaching which is already binding on Catholics.

One of the dangers that arise from this is that, were a Pope to seem to be veering close to contradicting any matter of settled doctrine, it could, in the minds of some, call into question the Catholic Church’s claim to infallibility and thus the infallibility of the Pope. Such a situation could also call into question the validity of the man sitting on the Chair of St Peter. For some, we are in just such a situation today, and this adds to the confusion.

We have a duty to pray for the Pope. Lay Catholics are not in a position to decide questions concerning the validity of the Pope. We do not have the authority to decide such a question, nor do we have the necessary knowledge. If a situation has arisen where there is confusion concerning the papacy, it is more important, to make sure that we are fully conversant with the infallible Catholic Church teachings that pertain to our state in life so that, if the master were to return, He would find us at our work and not disputing over matters outside of our control and outside of our remit as Catholics.



Saint John Henry Cardinal Newman

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“Who, think thou, is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord has appointed over his family, to give them meat in season? Blessed is that servant, whom when his lord shall come he shall find so doing. Amen I say to you, he shall place him over all his goods.” (Matthew 24:45-47)

The known teachings of the Catholic Church are sufficiently clear for any man to be able to live a Holy life and to attain salvation. It seems to me that a lot of the current controversies are designed by the enemies of the Catholic Church, both human and spiritual, to lead people astray either from following the false teachings or by coming to reject what the Catholic Church actually is.

The Catholic Church is indefectible and a sure guide to our salvation. Our Lord warns us about the coming of false prophets who will lead many astray and he specifically tells us to, “Take heed that no man seduce you” (Matthew 24:4)

In *Sapientiae Christianae*, Pope Leo XIII is writing just 20 years after the ending of the first Vatican Council at a time when the political and material situation of the Vatican is still very precarious. This is in a world where war is still being waged on many fronts throughout Europe, and where the position of the Catholic Church from the material perspective, is very insecure. Catholics need to be aware of their duties when faced with such threats.

“The chief elements of this duty consist in professing openly and unflinchingly the Catholic doctrine, and in propagating it to the utmost of our power. For, as is often said, with the greatest truth, there is nothing so hurtful to Christian wisdom as that it should not be known, since it possesses, when loyally received, inherent power to drive away error.

So soon as Catholic truth is apprehended by a simple and unprejudiced soul, reason yields assent. Now, faith, as a virtue, is a great boon of divine grace and goodness; nevertheless, the objects themselves to which faith is to be applied are scarcely known in any other way than through the hearing.

“How shall they believe Him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? Faith then cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.” (Romans 10:14, 17)

Since, then, faith is necessary for salvation, it follows that the word of Christ must be preached. The office, indeed, of preaching, that is, of teaching, lies by divine right in the province of the pastors, namely, of the bishops whom “the Holy Spirit has placed to rule the Church of God.” (Acts 20:28) It belongs, above all, to the Roman Pontiff, vicar of Jesus Christ, established as head of the universal Church, teacher of all that pertains to morals and faith. (**Sapientiae Christianae 15**)



As Catholics we have a duty to openly profess our Catholic faith especially in times where it is under attack. Internal squabbling about matters of settled doctrine or about the legitimacy of the current Pope tend to distract from that duty at best, and at worst such ‘murmurings’, as St Benedict calls them in his Rule, could lead people away from the Catholic Church and salvation.

“No one, however, must entertain the notion that private individuals are prevented from taking some active part in this duty of teaching, especially those on whom God has bestowed gifts of mind with the strong wish of rendering themselves useful. These, so often as circumstances demand, may take upon themselves, not, indeed, the office of the pastor, but the task of communicating to others what they have themselves received, becoming, as it were, living echoes of their masters in the faith.

Such co-operation on the part of the laity has seemed to the Fathers of the Vatican Council so opportune and fruitful of good that they thought well to invite it. ‘All faithful Christians, but those chiefly who are in a prominent position, or engaged in teaching, we entreat, by the compassion of Jesus Christ, and enjoy by the authority of the same God and Saviour, that they bring aid to ward off and eliminate these errors from holy Church, and contribute their zealous help in spreading abroad the light of undefiled faith.’ (Dei Filius- Vatican 1)

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Let each one, therefore, bear in mind that he both can and should, so far as may be, preach the Catholic faith by the authority of his example, and by open and constant profession of the obligations it imposes. In respect, consequently, to the duties that bind us to God and the Church, it should be borne earnestly in mind that in propagating Christian truth and warding off errors the zeal of the laity should, as far as possible, be brought actively into play.” (**Sapientiae Christianae 16**)

However, lay Catholics are not successors to the Apostles and we cannot speak solely on our own authority.

“The faithful would not, however, so completely and advantageously satisfy these duties as is fitting they should were they to enter the field as isolated champions of the faith. Jesus Christ, indeed, has clearly intimated that the hostility and hatred of men, which He first and foremost experienced, would be shown in like degree toward the work founded by Him, so that many would be barred from profiting by the salvation for which all are indebted to His loving kindness. Wherefore, He willed not only to train disciples in His doctrine, but to unite them into one society, and closely conjoin them in one body, ‘which is the Church,’ (Colossians 1:24) whereof He would be the head.

The life of Jesus Christ pervades, therefore, the entire framework of this body, cherishes and nourishes its every member, uniting each with each, and making all work together to the same end, albeit the action of each be not the same. (Romans 12:4-5) Hence it follows that not only is the Church a perfect society far excelling every other, but it is enjoined by her Founder that for the salvation of mankind she is to contend ‘as an army drawn up in battle array.’ (Song of Solomon 6:9)

The organization and constitution of Christian society can in no wise be changed, neither can any one of its members live as he may choose, nor elect that mode of fighting which best pleases him. For, in effect, he scatters and gathers not who gathers not with the Church and with Jesus Christ, and all who fight not jointly with him and with the Church are in very truth contending against God.” (1 Corinthians 1:10) (**Sapientiae Christianae 17**)

Catholics should think carefully on this last statement. The organisation and constitution of both the Catholic Church and of Catholic society have been ordained by Jesus Christ. In times of uncertainty and where the Catholic faith is under attack, we have a grave duty to be careful in our words and in our actions so that we do not disturb the minds of the faithful and inadvertently end up scattering instead of gathering with Jesus Christ.

Pope Leo XIII next speaks of the unity of the Catholic Church which is feared by her enemies. This is the primary reason why the devil and his agents seek to sow division in the minds of Catholics. They divide

so as to conquer. We must not become accomplices in that division.

“Every kingdom divided against itself shall be made desolate: and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand.” (Matthew 12:245)

“To bring about such a union of minds and uniformity of action - not without reason so greatly feared by the enemies of Catholicism - the main point is that a perfect harmony of opinion should prevail; in which intent we find Paul the Apostle exhorting the Corinthians with earnest zeal and solemn weight of words: “Now 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: but that you be perfectly in the same mind, and in the same judgment.”(1 Corinthians 1:10)

The wisdom of this precept is readily apprehended. In truth, thought is the principle of action, and hence there cannot exist agreement of will, or similarity of action, if people all think differently one from the other.

In the case of those who profess to take reason as their sole guide, there would hardly be found, if, indeed, there ever could be found, unity of doctrine. Indeed, the art of knowing things as they really are is exceedingly difficult; moreover, the mind of man is by nature feeble and drawn this way and that by a variety of opinions, and not seldom led astray by impressions coming from without; and, furthermore, the influence of the passions often times takes away, or certainly at least diminishes, the capacity for grasping the truth. On this account, in controlling State affairs means are often used to keep those together by force who cannot agree in their way of thinking.

It happens far otherwise with Christians; they receive their rule of faith from the Church, by whose authority and under whose guidance they are conscious that they have beyond question attained to truth. Consequently, as the Church is one, because Jesus Christ is one, so throughout the whole Christian world there is, and ought to be, but one doctrine: “One Lord, one faith;”(Ephesians 4:5) “but having the same spirit of faith,”(2 Corinthians 4:13) they possess the saving principle whence proceed spontaneously one and the same will in all, and one and the same tenor of action.” (**Sapientiae Christianae 18-21**)

