



## ‘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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As we continue reading Pope Leo XIII’s encyclical letter *Sapientiae Christianae*, we are brought to what is perceived in our time to be a very controversial matter. The obedience that is due to the Pope. The pontificate of Pope Francis seems to be causing confusion amongst Catholics and dividing opinion. In the previous article, Pope Leo XIII stressed the importance of unity in the Catholic Church and he continues this theme examining how that unity is to be maintained.

“Now, as the Apostle Paul urges, this unanimity ought to be perfect. Christian faith reposes not on human but on divine authority, for what God has revealed “we believe not on account of the intrinsic evidence of the truth perceived by the natural light of our reason, but on account of the authority of God revealing, who cannot be deceived nor Himself deceive. (Constitution Dei Filius, cap. 3) It follows as a consequence that whatever things are manifestly revealed by God we must receive with a similar and equal assent. To refuse to believe any one of them is equivalent to rejecting them all, for those at once destroy the very groundwork of faith who deny that God has spoken to men, or who bring into doubt His infinite truth and wisdom.” (Sapientiae Christianae 22)

All men are called to believe what God has revealed because what God reveals must be true. However, man’s nature is fallen and man tends to make excuses to justify the sinful behaviours which he does not want to refrain from. We see this in the book of Genesis where God calls out to the man after he has eaten of the forbidden fruit.

“And the Lord God called Adam, and said to him: Where art thou? And he said: I heard thy voice in paradise; and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself.

And he said to him: And who has told thee that thou was naked, but that thou has eaten of the tree whereof I commanded thee that thou should not eat?

And Adam said: The woman, whom thou gave me to be my companion, gave me of the tree, and I did eat.



The Expulsion of Adam & Eve - Francesco Curradi (1570 - 1661)

And the Lord God said to the woman: Why has thou done this? And she answered: The serpent deceived me, and I did eat.” (Genesis 3:9-13)

Adam blames the woman and the woman blames the serpent. Adam and Eve disobeyed God by a conscious act of their individual free will. Adam and Eve had perfect integrity. They did not suffer from concupiscence and were therefore fully culpable for their sin. Their now fallen nature seeks to deflect from this culpability by falsely attributing the cause of their sin to another. But God cannot be deceived, He knows exactly what has happened. God has perfect knowledge and, because He knew from eternity that Adam and Eve would sin, He had already determined the course of events for mankind - from the Incarnation of Christ in the womb of the Virgin Mary, to the founding of the Catholic Church.

Pope Leo XIII now begins to deal with this tendency of man to justify his own errors and sins. How are we to avoid error and how are we to know what is sinful?

“To determine, however, which are the doctrines divinely revealed belongs to the teaching Church, to whom God has entrusted the safekeeping and interpretation of His utterances. But the supreme teacher in the Church is the Roman Pontiff. Union of minds, therefore, requires, together with a perfect

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accord in the one faith, complete submission and obedience of will to the Church and to the Roman Pontiff, as to God Himself. This obedience should, however, be perfect, because it is enjoined by faith itself, and has this in common with faith, that it cannot be given in shreds; nay, were it not absolute and perfect in every particular, it might wear the name of obedience, but its essence would disappear.

Christian usage attaches such value to this perfection of obedience that it has been, and will ever be, accounted the distinguishing mark by which we are able to recognize Catholics. Admirably does the following passage from St. Thomas Aquinas set before us the right view:

“The formal object of faith is primary truth, as it is shown forth in the holy Scriptures, and in the teaching of the Church, which proceeds from the fountain head of truth. It follows, therefore, that he who does not adhere, as to an infallible divine rule, to the teaching of the Church, which proceeds from the primary truth manifested in the holy Scriptures, possesses not the habit of faith; but matters of faith he holds otherwise than true faith. Now, it is evident that he who clings to the doctrines of the Church as to an infallible rule yields his assent to everything the Church teaches; but otherwise, if with reference to what the Church teaches he holds what he likes but does not hold what he does not like, he adheres not to the teaching of the Church as to an infallible rule, but to his own will.”(Summa theologiae, IIa-IIae, q. v, art. 3. ) **(Sapientiae Christianae 22)**

We live in a time of great confusion which is partly caused by the fact that many people no longer possess the ability to think logically. They have not been taught how the process of logic works. The principle of non-contradiction has been turned on its head and many publicly profess to believe contradictory propositions. This leads to a lack of understanding of ‘nuance’ in certain matters.

With regard to the Papacy, many fail to distinguish between ‘perfect obedience’ and ‘absolute obedience’. Those who fail to make this distinction tend to believe that Catholics are always bound to obey the Pope in every matter and they tend to exaggerate what constitutes Papal infallibility. This might not cause too much harm if one lives under the rule of a Saintly Pope, but it could lead to grave harm in the time of a less than saintly Pope. In saying this, I do not intend to make any judgement of Pope Francis, I am simply pointing out a dangerous mode of thinking and behaving that is based on error and that can have grave consequences for our faith.

St Thomas More gives a great example of this distinction. As a Catholic, he was bound to perfect obedience to his king and yet, he disobeyed the king whilst maintaining perfect obedience to him. His simple explanation was, “I die the King’s good servant, and God’s first.”

The apostles gave us a similar example when they were brought before the Sanhedrin for preaching in the name of Jesus.

“And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest asked them,

Saying: Commanding we commanded you, that you should not teach in this name; and behold, you have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and you have a mind to bring the blood of this man upon us.

But Peter and the apostles answering, said: We ought to obey God, rather than men. The God of our fathers has raised up Jesus, whom you put to death, hanging him upon a tree. Him has God exalted with His right hand, to be Prince and Saviour, to give repentance to Israel, and remission of sins. And we are witnesses of these things and the Holy Ghost, whom God has given to all that obey Him.” (Acts 5:27-32)

As St Thomas Aquinas notes in the quotation used by Pope Leo XIII, “The formal object of faith is primary truth, as it is shown forth in the holy Scriptures, and in the teaching of the Church, which proceeds from the fountain head of truth.”

Whatever the Catholic Church defines as a truth to be held definitively, cannot change. Once defined, all are bound to yield assent. Anyone who seeks to contradict a known truth either directly or to subvert it through the use of subtleties, must be resisted just as St Thomas More resisted those who tried to force or cajole him into accepting the King’s adultery. The apostles resisted those who commanded them to remain silent about Christ. St Paul explained this to the Galatians.

“I wonder that you are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ, unto another gospel. Which is not another, only there are some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ.

But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach a gospel to you besides that which we have preached to you, let him be anathema. As we said before, so now I say again: If any one preach to you a gospel, besides that which you have received, let him be anathema. (Galatians 1:6-9)

This is the basis for understanding our duty of obedience to the Pope. Absolute obedience should only be given to God. Those who act for and on behalf of God within the Catholic Church are prone to error because they are fallen men and so we must



Saint Thomas More  
Hans Holbein the Younger  
(1497/8–1543)

be careful, realising that the devil will try to seduce even the holiest of men in order to lead others astray.

Our Lord warns us of this very danger in chapter 24 of St Matthews Gospel.

“For there shall arise false Christs and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders, insomuch as to deceive (if possible) even the elect.” (Matthew 24:24)

Pope Leo XIII continues:

“The faith of the whole Church should be one, according to the precept: “Let all speak the same thing, and let there be no schisms among you”; (1 Corinthians 1:10) and this cannot be observed save on condition that questions which arise touching faith should be determined by him who presides over the whole Church, whose sentence must consequently be accepted without wavering. And hence to the sole authority of the supreme Pontiff does it pertain to publish a new revision of the symbol, as also to decree all other matters that concern the universal Church.” (Summa theologiae, IIa-IIae, q. i, arc. 10.) (Sapientiae Christianae 23)

In the above quotation St Thomas points to one of the duties of the Pope. He is to determine “questions which arise touching the faith”. One of the ways in which such matters have been determined by Popes in the past has been by way of ‘dubia’ which were presented for the Pope to answer. This leads us to one of the principle controversies during the pontificate of Pope Francis, the post-synodal apostolic exhortation Amoris Laetitia. What are Catholics to make of this controversy in light of our duty of obedience to the Pope?

Let us recap by looking at the first of the dubia submitted by Cardinals Burke, Cafarra, Brandmuller and Meisner in response to Amoris Laetitia.

“**Dubium One:** It is asked whether, following the affirmations of “Amoris Laetitia” (nn. 300-305), it has now become possible to grant absolution in the Sacrament of Penance and thus to admit to Holy Communion a person who, while bound by a valid marital bond, lives together with a different person “more uxorio” (in a marital way) without fulfilling the conditions provided for by “Familiaris Consortio” n. 84 and subsequently reaffirmed by “Reconciliatio et Paenitentia” n. 34 and “Sacramentum Caritatis” n. 29. Can the expression “in certain cases” found in note 351 (n. 305) of the exhortation “Amoris Laetitia” be applied to divorced persons who are in a new union and who continue to live “more uxorio”?”

This question was asked in good faith in order to reaffirm the official position of the Catholic Church and its teaching regarding the sinfulness of adultery. Certain bishops and priests are publicly stating that, in some cases, it is permissible for those living in unrepentant adulterous relationships to receive Holy



“Go, and now sin no more” (John 8:11)

The Woman Taken in Adultery

Edward Henry Corbould (1815-1905)

Communion. Amoris Laetitia seemed to confirm their thinking and thus the need for clarification.

Fr Thomas Reese S.J. is one of those priests causing confusion. Here’s an example of what he said at the time the dubia were issued.

“Francis would be sympathetic to the woman who put her husband through law school waiting tables but then got dumped for a pretty, younger associate. She is now married to a loving plumber who is a good father to the children from both marriages. Telling her to abandon her new husband or live as brother and sister is not only absurd, it is unjust.” (Fr Thomas Reese - Four cardinals do not make a schism - National Catholic Reporter, December 9, 2016)

The irony here is that Our Lord issued just such a command to the woman that was brought to him for committing adultery. “Go, and now sin no more.” (John 8:11) Fr Reese, by an implication probably unintended, is saying that Our Lord was both absurd and unjust to make such demands of the woman. Of course those who oppose Catholic Church teaching on these matters never address the sinful nature of the behaviour in question. Instead they create and use emotive scenarios, such as the abandoned spouse, to justify the sinful behaviour that follows. Notice how Fr Reese speaks of a second ‘marriage’ and of a second ‘husband’ even though he is referring to an adulterous and objectively sinful relationship. There is neither a second marriage nor a second husband in the story Fr Reese uses to justify an ongoing adulterous and therefore sinful relationship.

At the time of these dubia, there was talk of a formal correction of the Pope if necessary. From the point of view of the four Cardinals there were two possible responses to the dubia. In the first case, Pope Francis would answer the dubia and re-affirm the constant teachings of the Catholic Church and the matter would be closed. In the second case, Pope Francis would contradict Catholic Church teaching and he would have to be formally corrected. Pope Francis did not choose either option. Instead, rather than answering the questions posed to him on matters of faith, he

chose to remain silent and to ignore the questions. In behaving as he did, Pope Francis failed to carry out one of his duties as Pontiff.

Without trying to speculate about the motives of Pope Francis in behaving as he did, we can say that his actions did nothing to aid the unity that is required of Catholics. His silence fostered division in the Church by allowing erroneous opinions to proliferate throughout the Catholic world. Here's Pope Leo XIII again.

“In defining the limits of the obedience owed to the pastors of souls, but most of all to the authority of the Roman Pontiff, it must not be supposed that it is only to be yielded in relation to dogmas of which the obstinate denial cannot be disjoined from the crime of heresy. Nay, further, it is not enough sincerely and firmly to assent to doctrines which, though not defined by any solemn pronouncement of the Church, are by her proposed to belief, as divinely revealed, in her common and universal teaching, and which the Vatican Council declared are to be believed “with Catholic and divine faith.”(Constitution de fide catholica, cap. 3)

But this likewise must be reckoned amongst the duties of Christians, that they allow themselves to be ruled and directed by the authority and leadership of bishops, and, above all, of the apostolic see. And how fitting it is that this should be so any one can easily perceive. For the things contained in the divine oracles have reference to God in part, and in part to man, and to whatever is necessary for the attainment of his eternal salvation.

Now, both these, that is to say, what we are bound to believe and what we are obliged to do, are laid down, as we have stated, by the Church using her divine right, and in the Church by the supreme Pontiff. Wherefore it belongs to the Pope to judge authoritatively what things the sacred oracles contain, as well as what doctrines are in harmony, and what in disagreement, with them; and also, for the same reason, to show forth what things are to be accepted as right, and what to be rejected as worthless; what it is necessary to do and what to avoid doing, in order to attain eternal salvation. For, otherwise, there would be no sure interpreter of the commands of God, nor would there be any safe guide showing man the way he should live.” (**Sapientiae Christianae 24**)

For some, the above quotation can present difficulties during the current pontificate, but we should not allow such difficulties to arise. We are told in the very first sentence of *Sapientiae Christianae 24* that there are indeed limits to the obedience owed to the Pope. Our first obedience is to God, and then to the teachings of the Catholic Church which was founded by Jesus Christ. The Pope is not his own master. In his teachings and in his conduct he is bound by the revelation of God and by the dogmatic teachings of the Catholic Church which have preceded him.

One of the problems for Catholics today is that, for whatever reason, Pope Francis is not correcting

public errors and is not clearly guiding Catholics in “what things are to be accepted as right, and what to be rejected as worthless; what it is necessary to do and what to avoid doing, in order to attain eternal salvation.”

As Catholics, however, we have no excuse for failing to have a correct knowledge and understanding of Catholic Church teaching. The Catholic Church has been teaching men how to live for more than two thousand years. She has weathered many storms in the past. In the fourth century the Catholic church was plagued by the heresy of Arianism. St Athanasius was exiled and at one point was condemned by Pope Liberius. But St Athanasius held firm to the Catholic faith despite the unjust punishments imposed on him.

Pope Saint Pius X issued his encyclical on the doctrine of the modernists, *Pascendi Dominici Gregis*, in 1907. In the opening paragraph he outlines some of the duties of the Pope.

“One of the primary obligations assigned by Christ to the office divinely committed to Us of feeding the Lord’s flock is that of guarding with the greatest vigilance the deposit of the faith delivered to the saints, rejecting the profane novelties of words and the gainsaying of knowledge falsely so called. There has never been a time when this watchfulness of the supreme pastor was not necessary to the Catholic body, for owing to the efforts of the enemy of the human race, there have never been lacking “men speaking perverse things,” “vain talkers and seducers,” “erring and driving into error.” It must, however, be confessed that these latter days have witnessed a notable increase in the number of the enemies of the Cross of Christ, who, by arts entirely new and full of deceit, are striving to destroy the vital energy of the Church, and, as far as in them lies, utterly to subvert the very Kingdom of Christ.” (**Pascendi Dominici Gregis 1**)

In matters such as those mentioned in this article, Catholics must not commit the error of judging the Pope. That is for God. We must pray for Pope Francis that he will fulfil his duties as Pope to the best of his ability and we must pray for his salvation. We must not allow ourselves to get distracted by controversies which have no real bearing on how we ought to live out our Catholic faith. Rather we must continue to focus our energies on becoming as Holy as God intends us to be. We are called to become saints.



Detail of the Maestà altarpiece, by Duccio di Buoninsegna depicting Our Lady with the child Jesus surrounded by Saints.