

**SATIS COGNITUM**  
*ENCYCLICAL OF POPE LEO XIII*  
*ON THE UNITY OF THE CHURCH*

To Our Venerable Brethren, the Patriarchs, Primates, Archbishops, Bishops, and other Ordinaries in Peace and Communion with the Apostolic See.

Venerable Brethren, Health, and Benediction.

1. It is sufficiently well known unto you that no small share of Our thoughts and of Our care is devoted to Our endeavour to bring back to the fold, placed under the guardianship of Jesus Christ, the Chief Pastor of souls, sheep that have strayed. Bent upon this, We have thought it most conducive to this salutary end and purpose to describe the exemplar and, as it were, the lineaments of the Church. Amongst these the most worthy of Our chief consideration is Unity. This the Divine Author impressed on it as a lasting sign of truth and of unconquerable strength. The essential beauty and comeliness of the Church ought greatly to influence the minds of those who consider it. Nor is it improbable that ignorance may be dispelled by the consideration; that false ideas and prejudices may be dissipated from the minds chiefly of those who find themselves in error without fault of theirs; and that even a love for the Church may be stirred up in the souls of men, like unto that charity wherewith Christ loved and united himself to that spouse redeemed by His precious blood. "Christ loved the Church, and delivered Himself up for it" (Eph. v., 25).

If those about to come back to their most loving Mother (not yet fully known, or culpably abandoned) should perceive that their return involves, not indeed the shedding of their blood (at which price nevertheless the Church was bought by Jesus Christ), but some lesser trouble and labour, let them clearly understand that this burden has been laid on them not by the will of man but by the will and command of God. They may thus, by the help of heavenly grace, realize and feel the truth of the divine saying, "My yoke is sweet and my burden light" (Matt. xi., 30).

Wherefore, having put all Our hope in the "Father of lights," from whom "cometh every best gift and every perfect gift" (Ep. James i., 17)—from Him, namely, who alone "gives the increase" (I Cor. iii., 6)—We earnestly pray that He will graciously grant Us the power of bringing conviction home to the minds of men.

**Human Co-operation**

2. Although God can do by His own power all that is effected by created natures, nevertheless in the counsels of His loving Providence He has preferred to help men by the instrumentality of men. And, as in the natural order He does not usually give full perfection except by means of man's work and action, so also He makes use of human aid for that which lies beyond the limits of nature, that is to say, for the sanctification and salvation of souls. But it is obvious that nothing can be communicated amongst men save by means of external things which the senses can perceive. For this reason the Son of God assumed human nature—"who being in the form of God...emptied himself,

taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of man" (Philipp. ii., 6,7)—and thus living on earth He taught his doctrine and gave His laws, conversing with men.

### **The Church Always Visible**

3. And, since it was necessary that His divine mission should be perpetuated to the end of time, He took to Himself Disciples, trained by himself, and made them partakers of His own authority. And, when He had invoked upon them from Heaven the Spirit of Truth, He bade them go through the whole world and faithfully preach to all nations, what He had taught and what He had commanded, so that by the profession of His doctrine, and the observance of His laws, the human race might attain to holiness on earth and never-ending happiness in Heaven. In this wise, and on this principle, the Church was begotten. If we consider the chief end of His Church and the proximate efficient causes of salvation, it is undoubtedly spiritual; but in regard to those who constitute it, and to the things which lead to these spiritual gifts, it is external and necessarily visible. The Apostles received a mission to teach by visible and audible signs, and they discharged their mission only by words and acts which certainly appealed to the senses. So that their voices falling upon the ears of those who heard them begot faith in souls—"Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the words of Christ" (Rom. x., 17). And faith itself - that is assent given to the first and supreme truth - though residing essentially in the intellect, must be manifested by outward profession—"For with the heart we believe unto justice, but with the mouth confession is made unto salvation" (Rom. x., 10). In the same way in man, nothing is more internal than heavenly grace which begets sanctity, but the ordinary and chief means of obtaining grace are external: that is to say, the sacraments which are administered by men specially chosen for that purpose, by means of certain ordinances.

Jesus Christ commanded His Apostles and their successors to the end of time to teach and rule the nations. He ordered the nations to accept their teaching and obey their authority. But his correlation of rights and duties in the Christian commonwealth not only could not have been made permanent, but could not even have been initiated except through the senses, which are of all things the messengers and interpreters.

For this reason the Church is so often called in Holy Writ a body, and even the body of Christ - "Now you are the body of Christ" (I Cor. xii., 27)—and precisely because it is a body is the Church visible: and because it is the body of Christ is it living and energizing, because by the infusion of His power Christ guards and sustains it, just as the vine gives nourishment and renders fruitful the branches united to it. And as in animals the vital principle is unseen and invisible, and is evidenced and manifested by the movements and action of the members, so the principle of supernatural life in the Church is clearly shown in that which is done by it.

From this it follows that those who arbitrarily conjure up and picture to themselves a hidden and invisible Church are in grievous and pernicious error: as also are those who regard the Church as a human institution which claims a certain obedience in discipline and external duties, but which is without the perennial communication of the gifts of divine grace, and without all that which testifies by constant and undoubted signs to the existence of that life which is drawn from God. It is assuredly as impossible that the Church of Jesus Christ can be the one or the other, as that man should be a body alone or a soul alone. The connection and union of both elements is as absolutely necessary to the true Church as the intimate union of the soul and body is to human nature. The Church is not something dead: it is the body of Christ endowed with supernatural life. As Christ, the Head and Exemplar, is not wholly in His visible human nature, which Photinians and Nestorians assert, nor wholly in the invisible divine nature, as the Monophysites hold, but is one, from and in both natures, visible and invisible; so the mystical body of Christ is the true Church, only because its visible parts draw life and power from the supernatural gifts and other things whence spring their very nature and essence. But since the Church is such by divine will and constitution, such it must uniformly remain to the end of time. If it did not, then it would not have been founded as perpetual, and the end set before it would have been limited to some certain place and to some certain period of time; both of

which are contrary to the truth. The union consequently of visible and invisible elements because it harmonizes with the natural order and by God's will belongs to the very essence of the Church, must necessarily remain so long as the Church itself shall endure. Wherefore Chrysostom writes: "Secede not from the Church: for nothing is stronger than the Church. Thy hope is the Church; thy salvation is the Church; thy refuge is the Church. It is higher than the heavens and wider than the earth. It never grows old, but is ever full of vigour. Wherefore Holy Writ pointing to its strength and stability calls it a mountain" (*Hom. De capto Eutropio*, n. 6).

Also Augustine says: "Unbelievers think that the Christian religion will last for a certain period in the world and will then disappear. But it will remain as long as the sun - as long as the sun rises and sets: that is, as long as the ages of time shall roll, the Church of God - the true body of Christ on earth—will not disappear" (In Psalm. lxx., n. 8). And in another place: "The Church will totter if its foundation shakes; but how can Christ be moved?...Christ remaining immovable, it (the Church), shall never be shaken. Where are they that say that the Church has disappeared from the world, when it cannot even be shaken?" (*Enarratio in Psalm. ciii.*, sermo ii., n. 5).

He who seeks the truth must be guided by these fundamental principles. That is to say, that Christ the Lord instituted and formed the Church: wherefore when we are asked what its nature is, the main thing is to see what Christ wished and what in fact He did. Judged by such a criterion it is the unity of the Church which must be principally considered; and of this, for the general good, it has seemed useful to speak in this Encyclical.

### **How Christ Made His Church**

4. It is so evident from the clear and frequent testimonies of Holy Writ that the true Church of Jesus Christ is one, that no Christian can dare to deny it. But in judging and determining the nature of this unity many have erred in various ways. Not the foundation of the Church alone, but its whole constitution, belongs to the class of things effected by Christ's free choice. For this reason the entire case must be judged by what was actually done. We must consequently investigate not how the Church may possibly be one, but how He, who founded it, willed that it should be one.

But when we consider what was actually done we find that Jesus Christ did not, in point of fact, institute a Church to embrace several communities similar in nature, but in themselves distinct, and lacking those bonds which render the Church unique and indivisible after that manner in which in the symbol of our faith we profess: "I believe in one Church."

"The Church in respect of its unity belongs to the category of things indivisible by nature, though heretics try to *divide* it into many parts...We say, therefore, that the Catholic Church is unique in its essence, in its doctrine, in its origin, and in its excellence...Furthermore, the eminence of the Church arises from its unity, as the principle of its constitution—a unity surpassing all else, and having nothing like unto it or equal to it" (S. Clemens Alexandrinus, *Stromatum* lib. viii., c. 17). For this reason Christ, speaking of the mystical edifice, mentions only one Church, which he calls His own—"I will build my church;" any other Church except this one, since it has not been founded by Christ, cannot be the true Church. This becomes even more evident when the purpose of the Divine Founder is considered. For what did Christ, the Lord, ask? What did He wish in regard to the Church founded, or about to be founded? This: to transmit to it the same mission and the same mandate which He had received from the Father, that they should be perpetuated. This He clearly resolved to do: this He actually did. "As the Father hath sent me, I also send you" (John xx., 21). "As Thou hast sent Me into the world I also have sent them into the world" (John xvii., 18).

But the mission of Christ is to save that which had perished: that is to say, not some nations or peoples, but the whole human race, without distinction of time or place. "The Son of Man came that the world might be saved by Him" (John iii., 17). "For there is no other name under Heaven given to men whereby we must be saved" (Acts iv., 12). The Church, therefore, is bound to communicate without stint to all men, and to transmit through all ages, the salvation effected by Jesus Christ, and the blessings flowing there from. Wherefore, by the will of its Founder, it is necessary that this

Church should be one in all lands and at all times. to justify the existence of more than one Church it would be necessary to go outside this world, and to create a new and unheard—of race of men.

That the one Church should embrace all men everywhere and at all times was seen and foretold by Isaiah, when looking into the future he saw the appearance of a mountain conspicuous by its all surpassing altitude, which set forth the image of "The House of the Lord"—that is, of the Church, "And in the last days the mountain of the House of the Lord shall be prepared on the top of the mountains" (Isa. ii., 2).

But this mountain which towers over all other mountains is one; and the House of the Lord to which all nations shall come to seek the rule of living is also one. "And all nations shall flow into it. And many people shall go, and say: Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, and to the House of the God of Jacob, and He will teach us His ways, and we will walk in His paths" (*Ibid.*, ii., 2-3).

Explaining this passage, Optatus of Milevis says: "It is written in the prophet Isaiah: 'from Sion the law shall go forth and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.' For it is not on Mount Sion that Isaiah sees the valley, but on the holy mountain, that is, the Church, which has raised itself conspicuously throughout the entire Roman world under the whole heavens...The Church is, therefore, the spiritual Sion in which Christ has been constituted King by God the Father, and which exists throughout the entire earth, on which there is but one Catholic Church" (*De Schism. Donatist.*, lib. iii., n. 2). And Augustine says: "What can be so manifest as a mountain, or so well known? There are, it is true, mountains which are unknown because they are situated in some remote part of the earth...But this mountain is not unknown; for it has filled the whole face of the world, and about this it is said that it is prepared on the summit of the mountains" (In *Ep. Joan.*, tract i., n. 13).

### **Christ the Head of the Church**

5. Furthermore, the Son of God decreed that the Church should be His mystical body, with which He should be united as the Head, after the manner of the human body which He assumed, to which the natural head is physiologically united. As He took to Himself a mortal body, which He gave to suffering and death in order to pay the price of man's redemption, so also He has one mystical body in which and through which He renders men partakers of holiness and of eternal salvation. God "hath made Him (Christ) head over all the Church, which is His body" (Eph. i., 22-23). Scattered and separated members cannot possibly cohere with the head so as to make one body. But St. Paul says: "All members of the body, whereas they are many, yet are one body, so also is Christ" (I Cor. xii., 12). Wherefore this mystical body, he declares, is "compact and fitly jointed together. The head, Christ: from whom the whole body, being compacted and fitly jointed together, by what every joint supplieth according to the operation in the measure of every part" (Eph. iv., 15-16). And so dispersed members, separated one from the other, cannot be united with one and the same head. "There is one God, and one Christ; and His Church is one and the faith is one; and one the people, joined together in the solid unity of the body in the bond of concord. This unity cannot be broken, nor the one body divided by the separation of its constituent parts" (S. Cyprianus, *De Cath. Eccl. Unitate*, n. 23). And to set forth more clearly the unity of the Church, he makes use of the illustration of a living body, the members of which cannot possibly live unless united to the head and drawing from it their vital force. Separated from the head they must of necessity die. "The Church," he says, "cannot be divided into parts by the separation and cutting asunder of its members. What is cut away from the mother cannot live or breathe apart" (*Ibid.*). What similarity is there between a dead and a living body? "For no man ever hated his own flesh, but nourisheth and cherisheth it, as also Christ doth the Church: because we are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones" (Eph. v., 29-30).

Another head like to Christ must be invented—that is, another Christ—if besides the one Church, which is His body, men wish to set up another. "See what you must beware of—see what you must avoid—see what you must dread. It happens that, as in the human body, some member

may be cut off—a hand, a finger, a foot. Does the soul follow the amputated member? As long as it was in the body, it lived; separated, it forfeits its life. So the Christian is a Catholic as long as he lives in the body: cut off from it he becomes a heretic - the life of the spirit follows not the amputated member" (S. Augustinus, *Sermo cclxvii.*, n. 4).

The Church of Christ, therefore, is one and the same for ever; those who leave it depart from the will and command of Christ, the Lord - leaving the path of salvation they enter on that of perdition. "Whosoever is separated from the Church is united to an adulteress. He has cut himself off from the promises of the Church, and he who leaves the Church of Christ cannot arrive at the rewards of Christ....He who observes not this unity observes not the law of God, holds not the faith of the Father and the Son, clings not to life and salvation" (S. Cyprianus, *De Cath. Eccl. Unitate*, n. 6).

### Unity in Faith

6. But He, indeed, Who made this one Church, also gave it unity, that is, He made it such that all who are to belong to it must be united by the closest bonds, so as to form one society, one kingdom, one body—"one body and one spirit as you are called in one hope of your calling (Eph. iv., 4). Jesus Christ, when His death was nigh at hand, declared His will in this matter, and solemnly offered it up, thus addressing His Father: "Not for them only do I pray, but for them also who through their word shall believe in Me...that they also may be one in Us...that they may be made perfect in one" (John xvii., 20-21 23). Yea, He commanded that this unity should be so closely knit and so perfect amongst His followers that it might, in some measure, shadow forth the union between Himself and His Father: "I pray that they all may be one as Thou Father in Me and I in Thee" (*Ibid.* 21).

Agreement and union of minds is the necessary foundation of this perfect concord amongst men, from which concurrence of wills and similarity of action are the natural results. Wherefore, in His divine wisdom, He ordained in His Church *Unity of Faith*; a virtue which is the first of those bonds which unite man to God, and whence we receive the name of the faithful—"one Lord, one faith, one baptism" (Eph. iv., 5). That is, as there is one Lord and one baptism, so should all Christians, without exception, have but one faith. And so the Apostle St. Paul not merely begs, but entreats and implores Christians to be all of the same mind, and to avoid difference of opinions: "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 amongst you, and that you be perfect in the same mind and in the same judgment" (I Cor. i., 10). Such passages certainly need no interpreter; they speak clearly enough for themselves. Besides, all who profess Christianity allow that there can be but one faith. It is of the greatest importance and indeed of absolute necessity, as to which many are deceived, that the nature and character of this unity should be recognized. And, as We have already stated, this is not to be ascertained by conjecture, but by the certain knowledge of what was done, that is by seeking for and ascertaining what kind of unity in faith has been commanded by Jesus Christ.

### The Kind of Unity in Faith Commanded by Christ

7. The heavenly doctrine of Christ, although for the most part committed to writing by divine inspiration, could not unite the minds of men if left to the human intellect alone. It would, for this very reason, be subject to various and contradictory interpretations. This is so, not only because of the nature of the doctrine itself and of the mysteries it involves, but also because of the divergencies of the human mind and of the disturbing element of conflicting passions. From a variety of interpretations a variety of beliefs is necessarily begotten; hence come controversies, dissensions and wranglings such as have arisen in the past, even in the first ages of the Church. Irenaeus writes of heretics as follows: "Admitting the sacred Scriptures they distort the interpretations" (Lib. iii., cap. 12, n. 12). And Augustine: "Heresies have arisen, and certain perverse views ensnaring souls and precipitating them into the abyss only when the Scriptures, good in themselves, are not properly understood" (In *Evang. Joan.*, tract xviii., cap. 5, n. 1). Besides Holy Writ it was absolutely necessary to insure this

union of men's minds—to effect and preserve unity of ideas—that there should be another principle. This the wisdom of God requires: for He could not have willed that the faith should be one if He did not *provide* means sufficient for the preservation of this unity; and this Holy Writ clearly sets forth as We shall presently point out. Assuredly the infinite power of God is not bound by anything, all things obey it as so many passive instruments. In regard to this external principle, therefore, we must inquire which one of all the means in His power Christ did actually adopt. For this purpose it is necessary to recall in thought the institution of Christianity.

### **The Magisterium (or Teaching Authority) of the Church to be Perpetual**

8. We are mindful only of what is witnessed to by Holy Writ and what is otherwise well known. Christ proves His own divinity and the divine origin of His mission by miracles; He teaches the multitudes heavenly doctrine by word of mouth; and He absolutely commands that the assent of faith should be given to His teaching, promising eternal rewards to those who believe and eternal punishment to those who do not. "If I do not the works of my Father, believe Me not" (John x., 37). "If I had not done among them the works than no other man had done, they would not have sin" (*Ibid.* xv., 24). "But if I do (the works) though you will not believe Me, believe the works" (*Ibid.* x., 38). Whatsoever He commands, He commands by the same authority. He requires the assent of the mind to all truths without exception. It was thus the duty of all who heard Jesus Christ, if they wished for eternal salvation, not merely to accept His doctrine as a whole, but to assent with their entire mind to all and every point of it, since it is unlawful to withhold faith from God even in regard to one single point.

When about to ascend into heaven He sends His Apostles in virtue of the same power by which He had been sent from the Father; and he charges them to spread abroad and propagate His teaching. "All power is given to Me in Heaven and in earth. Going therefore teach all nations....teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you" (Matt. xxviii., 18-19-20). So that those obeying the Apostles might be saved, and those disobeying should perish. "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believed not shall be condemned" (Mark xvi., 16). But since it is obviously most in harmony with God's providence that no one should have confided to him a great and important mission unless he were furnished with the means of properly carrying it out, for this reason Christ promised that He would send the Spirit of Truth to His Disciples to remain with them for ever. "But if I go I will send Him (the Paraclete) to you....But when He, the Spirit of Truth is come, He will teach you all truth" (John xvi., 7-13). "And I will ask the Father, and He shall give you another Paraclete, that he may abide with you for ever, the Spirit of Truth" (*Ibid.* xiv., 16-17). "He shall give testimony of Me, and you shall give testimony" (*Ibid.* xv., 26-27). Hence He commands that the teaching of the Apostles should be religiously accepted and piously kept as if it were His own—"He who hears you hears Me, he who despises you despises Me" (Luke x., 16). Wherefore the Apostles are ambassadors of Christ as He is the ambassador of the Father. "As the Father sent Me so also I send you" (John xx., 21). Hence as the Apostles and Disciples were bound to obey Christ, so also those whom the Apostles taught were, by God's command, bound to obey them. And, therefore, it was no more allowable to repudiate one iota of the Apostles' teaching than it was to reject any point of the doctrine of Christ Himself.

Truly the voice of the Apostles, when the Holy Ghost had come down upon them, resounded throughout the world. Wherever they went they proclaimed themselves the ambassadors of Christ Himself. "By whom (Jesus Christ) we have received grace and Apostleship for obedience to the faith in all nations for His name" (Rom. i., 5). And God makes known their divine mission by numerous miracles. "But they going forth preached everywhere: the Lord working withal, and confirming the word with signs that followed" (Mark xvi., 20). But what is this word? That which comprehends all things, that which they had learnt from their Master; because they openly and publicly declare that they cannot help speaking of what they had seen and heard.

But, as we have already said, the Apostolic mission was not destined to die with the Apostles

themselves, or to come to an end in the course of time, since it was intended for the people at large and instituted for the salvation of the human race. For Christ commanded His Apostles to preach the "Gospel to every creature, to carry His name to nations and kings, and to be witnesses to him to the ends of the earth." He further promised to assist them in the fulfilment of their high mission, and that, not for a few years or centuries only, but for all time—"even to the consummation of the world." Upon which St. Jerome says: "He who promises to remain with His Disciples to the end of the world declares that they will be for ever victorious, and that He will never depart from those who believe in Him" (In Matt., lib. iv., cap. 28, v. 20). But how could all this be realized in the Apostles alone, placed as they were under the universal law of dissolution by death? It was consequently provided by God that the Magisterium instituted by Jesus Christ should not end with the life of the Apostles, but that it should be perpetuated. We see it in truth propagated, and, as it were, delivered from hand to hand. For the Apostles consecrated bishops, and each one appointed those who were to succeed them immediately "in the ministry of the word."

Nay more: they likewise required their successors to choose fitting men, to endow them with like authority, and to confide to them the office and mission of teaching. "Thou, therefore, my son, be strong in the grace which is in Christ Jesus: and the things which thou hast heard of me by many witnesses, the same command to faithful men, who shall be fit to teach others also" (2 Tim. ii., 1–2). Wherefore, as Christ was sent by God and the Apostles by Christ, so the Bishops and those who succeeded them were sent by the Apostles. "The Apostles were appointed by Christ to preach the Gospel to us. Jesus Christ was sent by God. Christ is therefore from God, and the Apostles from Christ, and both according to the will of God....Preaching therefore the word through the countries and cities, when they had proved in the Spirit the first-fruits of their teaching they appointed bishops and deacons for the faithful....They appointed them and then ordained them, so that when they themselves had passed away other tried men should carry on their ministry" (S. Clemens Rom. *Epist. I ad Corinth.* capp. 42, 44). On the one hand, therefore, it is necessary that the mission of teaching whatever Christ had taught should remain perpetual and immutable, and on the other that the duty of accepting and professing all their doctrine should likewise be perpetual and immutable. "Our Lord Jesus Christ, when in His Gospel He testifies that those who are not with Him are His enemies, does not designate any special form of heresy, but declares that all heretics who are not with Him and do not gather with Him, scatter His flock and are His adversaries: He that is not with Me is against Me, and he that gathereth not with Me scattereth" (S. Cyprianus, *Ep. Ixix., ad Magnum*, n. 1).

### **Every Revealed Truth, without Exception, Must be Accepted**

9. The Church, founded on these principles and mindful of her office, has done nothing with greater zeal and endeavour 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 point of doctrine different from her own. The Arians, the Montanists, the Novatians, the Quartodecimans, the Eutychians, did not certainly reject all Catholic doctrine: they abandoned only a tertian portion of it. Still who does not know that they were declared heretics and banished from the bosom of the Church? In like manner were condemned all authors of heretical tenets who followed them in subsequent ages. "There can be nothing more dangerous than those heretics who admit nearly the whole cycle of doctrine, and yet by one word, as with a drop of poison, infect the real and simple faith taught by our Lord and handed down by Apostolic tradition" (*Auctor Tract. de Fide Orthodoxa contra Arianos*).

The practice of the Church has always been the same, as is shown by the unanimous teaching of the Fathers, who were wont to hold as outside Catholic communion, and alien to the Church, whoever would recede in the least degree from any point of doctrine proposed by her authoritative Magisterium. Epiphanius, Augustine, Theodoret, drew up a long list of the heresies of their times. St. Augustine notes that other heresies may spring up, to a single one of which, should any one give his assent, he is by the very fact cut off from Catholic unity. "No one who merely disbelieves in all

(these heresies) can for that reason regard himself as a Catholic or call himself one. For there may be or may arise some other heresies, which are not set out in this work of ours, and, if any one holds to one single one of these he is not a Catholic" (S. Augustinus, *De Haeresibus*, n. 88).

The need of this divinely instituted means for the preservation of unity, about which we speak is urged by St. Paul in his epistle to the Ephesians. In this he first admonishes them to preserve with every care concord of minds: "Solicitous to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. iv., 3, et seq.). And as souls cannot be perfectly united in charity unless minds agree in faith, he wishes all to hold the same faith: "One Lord, one faith," and this so perfectly one as to prevent all danger of error: "that henceforth we be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine by the wickedness of men, by cunning craftiness, by which they lie in wait to deceive" (Eph. iv., 14): and this he teaches is to be observed, not for a time only—"but until we all meet in the unity of faith...unto the measure of the age of the fulness of Christ" (13). But, in what has Christ placed the primary principle, and the means of preserving this unity? In that—"He gave some Apostles and other some pastors and doctors, for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ" (11-12).

Wherefore, from the very earliest times the fathers and doctors of the Church have been accustomed to follow and, with one accord to defend this rule. Origen writes: "As often as the heretics allege the possession of the canonical scriptures, to which all Christians give unanimous assent, they seem to say: 'Behold the word of truth is in the houses.' But we should believe them not and abandon not the primary and ecclesiastical tradition. We should believe not otherwise than has been handed down by the tradition of the Church of God" (*Vetus Interpretatio Commentariorum* in Matt. n. 46). Irenaeus too says: "The doctrine of the Apostles is the true faith...which is known to us through the Episcopal succession...which has reached even unto our age by the very fact that the Scriptures have been zealously guarded and fully interpreted" (*Contra Haereses*, lib. iv., cap. 33, n. 8). And Tertullian: "It is therefore clear that all doctrine which agrees with that of the Apostolic churches—the matrices and original centres of the faith, must be looked upon as the truth, holding without hesitation that the Church received it from the Apostles, the Apostles from Christ and Christ from God...We are in communion with the Apostolic churches, and by the very fact that they agree amongst themselves we have a testimony of the truth" (*De Praescrip.*, cap. xxxi). And so Hilary: "Christ teaching from the ship signifies that those who are outside the Church can never grasp the divine teaching, for the ship typifies the Church where the word of life is deposited and preached. Those who are outside are like sterile and worthless sand: they cannot comprehend" (*Comment.* in Matt. xiii., n. 1). Rufinus praises Gregory of Nazianzum and Basil because "they studied the text of Holy Scripture alone, and took the interpretation of its meaning not from their own inner consciousness, but from the writings and on the authority of the ancients, who in their turn, as it is clear, took their rule for understanding the meaning from the Apostolic succession" (*Hist. Eccl.*, lib. ii., cap. 9).

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. 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 Trim.*, lib. i., cap. 2). In this wise, all cause for doubting being removed, can it be lawful for anyone to reject any one of those truths without by the very fact falling into heresy?—without separating himself from the Church?—without repudiating in one sweeping act the whole of Christian teaching? For such is the nature of faith that nothing can be more absurd than to accept some things and reject others. Faith, as the Church teaches, is "that supernatural virtue by which, through the help of God and through the assistance of His grace, we believe what he has revealed to be true, not on account of the intrinsic truth perceived by the natural light of reason, but because of the authority of God Himself, the Revealer, who can neither deceive



nor be deceived" (*Conc. Vat.*, Sess. iii., cap. 3). If then it be certain that anything is revealed by God, and this is not believed, then nothing whatever is believed by divine Faith: for what the Apostle St. James judges to be the effect of a moral delinquency, the same is to be said of an erroneous opinion in the matter of faith. "Whosoever shall offend in one point, is become guilty of all" (Ep. James ii., 10). Nay, it applies with greater force to an erroneous opinion. For it can be said with less truth that every law is violated by one who commits a single sin, since it may be that he only virtually despises the majesty of God the Legislator. But he who dissents even in one point from divinely revealed truth absolutely rejects all faith, since he thereby refuses to honour God as the supreme truth and the formal motive of faith. "In many things they are with me, in a few things not with me; but in those few things in which they are not with me the many things in which they are will not profit them" (S. Augustinus in Psal. liv., n. 19). And this indeed most deservedly; for they, who take from Christian doctrine what they please, lean on their own judgments, not on faith; and not "bringing into captivity every understanding unto the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor. x., 5), they more truly obey themselves than God. "You, who believe what you like, believe yourselves rather than the gospel" (S. Augustinus, lib. xvii., *Contra Faustum Manichaeum*, cap. 3).

For this reason the Fathers of the Vatican Council laid down nothing new, but followed divine revelation and the acknowledged and invariable teaching of the Church as to the very nature of faith, when they decreed as follows: "All those things are to be believed by divine and Catholic faith which are contained in the written or unwritten word of God, and which are proposed by the Church as divinely revealed, either by a solemn definition or in the exercise of its ordinary and universal Magisterium" (Sess. iii., cap. 3). Hence, as it is clear that God absolutely willed that there should be unity in His Church, and as it is evident what kind of unity He willed, and by means of what principle He ordained that this unity should be maintained, we may address the following words of St. Augustine to all who have not deliberately closed their minds to the truth: "When we see the great help of God, such manifest progress and such abundant fruit, shall we hesitate to take refuge in the bosom of that Church, which, as is evident to all, possesses the supreme authority of the Apostolic See through the Episcopal succession? In vain do heretics rage round it; they are condemned partly by the judgment of the people themselves, partly by the weight of councils, partly by the splendid evidence of miracles. To refuse to the Church the primacy is most impious and above measure arrogant. And if all learning, no matter how easy and common it may be, in order to be fully understood requires a teacher and master, what can be greater evidence of pride and rashness than to be unwilling to learn about the books of the divine mysteries from the proper interpreter, and to wish to condemn them unknown?" (*De Unitate Credendi*, cap. xvii., n. 35).

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 Saviour for ever. The Church alone offers to the human race that religion—that state of absolute perfection—which He wished, as it were, to be incorporated in it. And it alone supplies those means of salvation which accord with the ordinary counsels of Providence.

### **The Church a Divine Society**

10. But as this heavenly doctrine was never left to the arbitrary judgment of private individuals, but, in the beginning delivered by Jesus Christ, was afterwards committed by Him exclusively to the Magisterium already named, so the power of performing and administering the divine mysteries, together with the authority of ruling and governing, was not bestowed by God on all Christians indis-

criminally, but on certain chosen persons. For to the Apostles and their legitimate successors alone these words have reference: "Going into the whole world preach the Gospel." "Baptizing them." "Do this in commemoration of Me." "Whose sins you shall forgive they are forgiven them." And in like manner He ordered the Apostles only and those who should lawfully succeed them to feed—that is to govern with authority—all Christian souls. Whence it also follows that it is necessarily the duty of Christians to be subject and to obey. And these duties of the Apostolic office are, in general, all included in the words of St. Paul: "Let a man so account of us as of the ministers of Christ, and the dispensers of the mysteries of God" (I Cor. iv., 1).

Wherefore Jesus Christ bade all men, present and future, follow Him as their leader and Saviour; and this, not merely as individuals, but as forming a society, organized and united in mind. In this way a duly constituted society should exist, formed out of the divided multitude of peoples, one in faith, one in end, one in the participation of the means adapted to the attainment of the end, and one as subject to one and the same authority. To this end He established in the Church all principles which necessarily tend to make organized human societies, and through which they attain the perfection proper to each. That is, in it (the Church), all who wished to be the sons of God by adoption might attain to the perfection demanded by their high calling, and might obtain salvation. The Church, therefore, as we have said, is man's guide to whatever pertains to Heaven. This is the office appointed unto it by God: that it may watch over and may order all that concerns religion, and may, without let or hindrance, exercise, according to its judgment, its charge over Christianity. Wherefore they who pretend that the Church has any wish to interfere in Civil matters, or to infringe upon the rights of the State, know it not, or wickedly calumniate it.

God indeed even made the Church a society far more perfect than any other. For the end for which the Church exists is as much higher than the end of other societies as divine grace is above nature, as immortal blessings are above the transitory things on the earth. Therefore the Church is a society divine in its origin, supernatural in its end and in means proximately adapted to the attainment of that end; but it is a human community inasmuch as it is composed of men. For this reason we find it called in Holy Writ by names indicating a perfect society. It is spoken of as the House of God, the city placed upon the mountain to which all nations must come. But it is also the fold presided over by one Shepherd, and into which all Christ's sheep must betake themselves. Yea, it is called the kingdom which God has raised up and which will stand for ever. Finally it is the body of Christ—that is, of course, His mystical body, but a body living and duly organized and composed of many members; members indeed which have not all the same functions, but which, united one to the other, are kept bound together by the guidance and authority of the head.

Indeed no true and perfect human society can be conceived which is not governed by some supreme authority. Christ therefore must have given to His Church a supreme authority to which all Christians must render obedience. For this reason, as the unity of the faith is of necessity required for the unity of the church, inasmuch as it is the body of the faithful, so also for this same unity, inasmuch as the Church is a divinely constituted society, unity of government, which effects and involves unity of communion, is necessary *jure divino*. "The unity of the Church is manifested in the mutual connection or communication of its members, and likewise in the relation of all the members of the Church to one head" (St. Thomas, 2a 2ae, 9, xxxix., a. 1).

From this it is easy to see that men can fall away from the unity of the Church by schism, as well as by heresy. "We think that this difference exists between heresy and schism" (writes St. Jerome): "Heresy has no perfect dogmatic teaching, whereas schism, through some Episcopal dissent, also separates from the Church" (S. Hieronymus, *Comment. in Epist. ad Titum*, cap. iii., v. 10-11). In which judgment St. John Chrysostom concurs: "I say and protest (he writes) that it is as wrong to divide the Church as to fall into heresy" (Hom. xi., in *Epist. ad Ephes.*, n. 5). Wherefore as no heresy can ever be justifiable, so in like manner there can be no justification for schism. "There is nothing more grievous than the sacrilege of schism....there can be no just necessity for destroying the unity of the Church" (S. Augustinus, *Contra Epistolam Parmeniani*, lib. ii., cap. ii., n. 25).

**The Supreme Authority Founded by Christ**

11. The nature of this supreme authority, which all Christians are bound to obey, can be ascertained only by finding out what was the evident and positive will of Christ. Certainly Christ is a King for ever; and though invisible, He continues unto the end of time to govern and guard His church from Heaven. But since He willed that His kingdom should be visible He was obliged, when He ascended into Heaven, to designate a vice-gerent on earth. "Should anyone say that Christ is the one head and the one shepherd, the one spouse of the one Church, he does not give an adequate reply. It is clear, indeed, that Christ is the author of grace in the Sacraments of the Church; it is Christ Himself who baptizes; it is He who forgives sins; it is He who is the true priest who bathed Himself upon the altar of the cross, and it is by His power that His body is daily consecrated upon the altar; and still, because He was not to be visibly present to all the faithful, He made choice of ministers through whom the aforesaid Sacraments should be dispensed to the faithful as said above" (cap. 74). "For the same reason, therefore, because He was about to withdraw His visible presence from the Church, it was necessary that He should appoint someone in His place, to have the charge of the Universal Church. Hence before His Ascension He said to Peter: 'Feed my sheep'" (St. Thomas, *Contra Gentiles*, lib. iv., cap. 76).

Jesus Christ, therefore, appointed Peter to be that head of the Church; and He also determined that the authority instituted in perpetuity for the salvation of all should be inherited by His successors, in whom the same permanent authority of Peter himself should continue. And so He made that remarkable promise to Peter and to no one else: "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church" (Matt. xvi., 18). "To Peter the Lord spoke: to one, therefore, that He might establish unity upon one" (S. Pacianus ad Sempronium, *Ep.* iii., n. 11). "Without any prelude He mentions St. Peter's name and that of his father (Blessed art thou Simon, son of John) and He does not wish Him to be called any more Simon; claiming him for Himself according to His divine authority He aptly names him Peter, from *petra* the rock, since upon him He was about to found His Church" (S. Cyrillus Alexandrinus, *In Evang. Joan.*, lib. ii., in cap. i., v. 42).

**The Universal Jurisdiction of St. Peter**

12. From this text it is clear that by the will and command of God the Church rests upon St. Peter, just as a building rests on its foundation. Now the proper nature of a foundation is to be a principle of cohesion for the various parts of the building. It must be the necessary condition of stability and strength. Remove it and the whole building falls. It is consequently the office of St. Peter to support the Church, and to guard it in all its strength and indestructible unity. How could he fulfil this office without the power of commanding, forbidding, and judging, which is properly called jurisdiction? It is only by this power of jurisdiction that nations and commonwealths are held together. A primacy of honour and the shadowy right of giving advice and admonition, which is called direction, could never secure to any society of men unity or strength. The words—and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it—proclaim and establish the authority of which we speak. "What is the it?" (writes Origen). "Is it the rock upon which Christ builds the Church or the Church? The expression indeed is ambiguous, as if the rock and the Church were one and the same. I indeed think that this is so, and that neither against the rock upon which Christ builds His Church nor against the Church shall the gates of Hell prevail" (Origenes, *Comment. in Matt.*, tom. xii., n. ii). The meaning of this divine utterance is, that, notwithstanding the wiles and intrigues which they bring to bear against the Church, it can never be that the church committed to the care of Peter shall succumb or in any wise fail. "For the Church, as the edifice of Christ who has wisely built 'His house upon a rock,' cannot be conquered by the gates of Hell, which may prevail over any man who shall be off the rock and outside the Church, but shall be powerless against it" (*Ibid.*). Therefore God confided His Church to Peter so that he might safely guard it with his unconquerable power. He invested him, therefore, with the needful authority; since the right to rule is absolutely required by

him who has to guard human society really and effectively. This, furthermore, Christ gave: "To thee will I give the keys of the kingdom of Heaven." And He is clearly still speaking of the Church, which a short time before He had called His own, and which He declared He wished to build on Peter as a foundation. The Church is typified not only as an edifice but as a Kingdom, and every one knows that the keys constitute the usual sign of governing authority. Wherefore when Christ promised to give to Peter the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven, he promised to give him power and authority over the Church. "The Son committed to Peter the office of spreading the knowledge of His Father and Himself over the whole world. He who increased the Church in all the earth, and proclaimed it to be stronger than the heavens, gave to a mortal man all power in Heaven when He handed him the Keys" (S. Johannes Chrysostomus, *Hom. liv.*, in Matt. v., 2). In this same sense He says: "Whatsoever thou shall bind upon earth it shall be bound also in Heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth it shall be loosed also in Heaven." This metaphorical expression of binding and loosing indicates the power of making laws, of judging and of punishing; and the power is said to be of such amplitude and force that God will ratify whatever is decreed by it. Thus it is supreme and absolutely independent, so that, having no other power on earth as its superior, it embraces the whole Church and all things committed to the Church.

The promise is carried out when Christ the Lord after His Resurrection, having thrice asked Peter whether he loved Him more than the rest, lays on him the injunction: "Feed my lambs—feed my sheep." That is He confides to him, without exception, all those who were to belong to His fold. "The Lord does not hesitate. He interrogates, not to learn but to teach. When He was about to ascend into Heaven He left us, as it were, a vice-gerent of His love....and so because Peter alone of all others professes his love he is preferred to all—that being the most perfect he should govern the more perfect" (S. Ambrosius, *Exposit. in Evang. secundum Lucam*, lib. x., nn. 175–176).

These, then, are the duties of a shepherd: to place himself as leader at the head of his flock, to provide proper food for it, to ward off dangers, to guard against insidious foes, to defend it against violence: in a word to rule and govern it. Since therefore Peter has been placed as shepherd of the Christian flock he has received the power of governing all men for whose salvation Jesus Christ shed His blood. "Why has He shed His blood? To buy the sheep which He handed over to Peter and his successors" (S. Joannes Chrysostomus, *De Sacerdotio*, lib. ii).

And since all Christians must be closely united in the communion of one immutable faith, Christ the Lord, in virtue of His prayers, obtained for Peter that in the fulfilment of his office he should never fall away from the faith. "But I have asked for thee that thy faith fail not" (Luke xxii., 32), and He furthermore commanded him to impart light and strength to his brethren as often as the need should arise: "Confirm thy brethren" (*Ibid.*). He willed then that he whom He had designated as the foundation of the Church should be the defence of its faith. "Could not Christ who confided to him the Kingdom by His own authority have strengthened the faith of one whom He designated a rock to show the foundation of the Church?" (S. Ambrosius, *De Fide*, lib. iv., n. 56). For this reason Jesus Christ willed that Peter should participate in certain names, signs of great things which properly belong to Himself alone: in order that identity of titles should show identity of power. So He who is Himself "the chief corner-stone in whom all the building being framed together, groweth up in a holy temple in the Lord" (Eph. ii., 21), placed Peter as it were a stone to support the Church. "When he heard 'thou art a rock,' he was ennobled by the announcement. Although he is a rock, not as Christ is a rock, but as Peter is a rock. For Christ is by His very being an immovable rock; Peter only through this rock. Christ imparts His gifts, and is not exhausted....He is a priest, and makes priests. He is a rock, and constitutes a rock" (*Hom. de Poenitentia*, n. 4 in Appendice opp. S. Basilii). He who is the King of His Church, "Who bath the key of David, who openeth and no man shutteth, who shutteth and no man openeth (*Apoc. iii.*, 7), having delivered the keys to Peter declared him Prince of the Christian commonwealth. So, too, He, the Great Shepherd, who calls Himself "the Good Shepherd," constituted Peter the pastor "of His lambs and sheep. Feed My lambs, feed My Sheep." Wherefore Chrysostom says: "He was preeminent among the Apostles: He was the mouthpiece of the Apostles and the head of the Apostolic College...at the same time showing him that henceforth

he ought to have confidence, and as it were blotting out his denial, He commits to him the government of his brethren...He saith to him: 'If thou lovest Me, be over my brethren.' Finally He who confirms in "every good work and word" (2 Thess. ii., 16) commands Peter "to confirm his brethren" (*Hom. lxxviii., in Joan. xxi. 14*).

Rightly, therefore, does St. Leo the Great say: "From the whole world Peter alone is chosen to take the lead in calling all nations, to be the head of all the Apostles and of all the Fathers of the Church. So that, although in the people of God there are many priests and many pastors Peter should by right rule all of those over whom Christ Himself is the chief ruler" (*Sermo iv., cap. 2*). And so St. Gregory the great, writing to the Emperor Maurice Augustus, says: "It is evident to all who know the gospel that the charge of the whole Church was committed to St. Peter, the Apostle and Prince of all the Apostles, by the word of the Lord...Behold! he hath received the keys of the heavenly kingdom—the power of binding and loosing is conferred upon him: the care of the whole government of the Church is confided to him" (*Epist. lib. v., Epist. xx*).

### **The Roman Pontiffs Possess Supreme Power in the Church *Jure Divino***

13. It was necessary that a government of this kind, since it belongs to the constitution and formation of the Church, as its principal element—that is as the principle of unity and the foundation of lasting stability—should in no wise come to an end with St. Peter, but should pass to his successors from one to another. "There remains, therefore, the ordinance of truth, and St. Peter, persevering in the strength of the rock which he had received, hath not abandoned the government of the Church which had been confided to him" (S. Leo M. *sermo iii., cap. 3*). For this reason the Pontiffs who succeed Peter in the Roman Episcopate receive the supreme power in the church, *jure divino*. "We define" (declare the Fathers of the Council of Florence) "that the Holy and Apostolic See and the Roman Pontiff hold the primacy of the Church throughout the whole world: and that the same Roman Pontiff is the successor of St. Peter, the Prince of the Apostles, and the true Vicar of Christ, the head of the whole Church, and the father and teacher of all Christians; and that full power was given to him, in Blessed Peter, by our Lord Jesus Christ to feed, to rule, and to govern the universal Church, as is also contained in the acts of Œcumenical councils and in the sacred canons" (*Conc. Florentinum*). Similarly the Fourth Council of Lateran declares: "The Roman Church, as the mother and mistress of all the faithful, by the will of Christ obtains primacy of jurisdiction over all other Churches." These declarations were preceded by the consent of antiquity which ever acknowledged, without the slightest doubt or hesitation, the Bishops of Rome, and revered them, as the legitimate successors of St. Peter.

Who is unaware of the many and evident testimonies of the holy Fathers which exist to this effect? Most remarkable is that of St. Irenaeus who, referring to the Roman Church, says: "With this Church, on account of its preeminent authority, it is necessary that every Church should be in concord" (*Contra Haereses, lib. iii., cap. 3, n. 2*); and St. Cyprian also says of the Roman Church, that "it is the root and mother of the Catholic Church, the chair of Peter, and the principal Church whence sacerdotal unity has its source" (*Ep. xlvi., ad Cornelium, n. 3. and Ep. liac., ad eundem, n. 14*). He calls it the chair of Peter because it is occupied by the successor of Peter: he calls it the principal Church, on account of the primacy conferred on Peter himself and his legitimate successors; and the source of unity, because the Roman Church is the efficient cause of unity in the Christian commonwealth. For this reason Jerome addresses Damasus thus: "My words are spoken to the successor of the Fisherman, to the disciple of the Cross...I communicate with none save your Blessedness, that is with the chair of Peter. For this I know is the rock on which the Church is built" (*Ep. xv., ad Damasum, n. 2*). Union with the Roman See of Peter is to him always the public criterion of a Catholic. "I acknowledge everyone who is united with the See of Peter" (*Ep. xvi., ad Damasum, n. 2*). And for a like reason St. Augustine publicly attests that, "the primacy of the Apostolic chair always existed in the Roman Church" (*Ep. xliii., n. 7*); and he denies that anyone who dissents from the Roman faith can be a Catholic. "You are not to be looked upon as holding the true Catholic faith

if you do not teach that the faith of Rome is to be held" (*Sermo cxx.*, n. 13). So, too, St. Cyprian: "To be in communion with Cornelius is to be in communion with the Catholic Church" (*Ep.* lv., n. 1). In the same way Maximus the Abbot teaches that obedience to the Roman Pontiff is the proof of the true faith and of legitimate communion. Therefore if a man does not want to be, or to be called, a heretic, let him not strive to please this or that man...but let him hasten before all things to be in communion with the Roman See. If he be in communion with it, he should be acknowledged by all and everywhere as faithful and orthodox. He speaks in vain who tries to persuade me of the orthodoxy of those who, like himself, refuse obedience to his Holiness the Pope of the most holy Church of Rome: that is to the Apostolic See." The reason and motive of this he explains to be that "the Apostolic See has received and hath government, authority, and power of binding and loosing from the Incarnate Word Himself; and, according to all holy synods, sacred canons and decrees, in all things and through all things, in respect of all the holy churches of God throughout the whole world, since the Word in Heaven who rules the Heavenly powers binds and loosens there" (*Defloratio ex Epistola ad Petrum illustrem*).

Wherefore what was acknowledged and observed as Christian faith, not by one nation only nor in one age, but by the East and by the West, and through all ages, this Philip, the priest, the Pontifical legate at the Council of Ephesus, no voice being raised in dissent, recalls: "No one can doubt, yea, it is known unto all ages, that St. Peter, the Prince of the Apostles, the pillar of the faith and the ground of the Catholic Church, received the keys of the Kingdom from Our Lord Jesus Christ. That is: the power of forgiving and retaining sins was given to him who, up to the present time, lives and exercises judgment in the persons of his successors" (*Actio iii.*). The pronouncement of the Council of Chalcedon on the same matter is present to the minds of all: "Peter has spoken through Leo" (*Actio ii.*), to which the voice of the Third Council of Constantinople responds as an echo: "The chief Prince of the Apostles was fighting on our side: for we have had as our ally his follower and the successor to his see: and the paper and the ink were seen, and Peter spoke through Agatho" (*Actio xviii.*).

In the formula of Catholic faith drawn up and proposed by Hormisdas, which was subscribed at the beginning of the sixth century in the great Eighth Council by the Emperor Justinian, by Epiphanius, John and Menna, the Patriarchs, this same is declared with great weight and solemnity. "For the pronouncement of Our Lord Jesus Christ saying: 'Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church,' &c., cannot be passed over. What is said is proved by the result, because Catholic faith has always been preserved without stain in the Apostolic See" (*Post Epistolam*, xxvi., *ad omnes Episc. Hispan.*, n. 4). We have no wish to quote every available declaration; but it is well to recall the formula of faith which Michael Paleologus professed in the Second Council of Lyons: "The same holy Roman Church possesses the sovereign and plenary primacy and authority over the whole Catholic Church, which, truly and humbly, it acknowledges to have received together with the plenitude of power from the Lord Himself, in the person of St. Peter, the Prince or Head of the Apostles, of whom the Roman Pontiff is the successor. And as it is bound to defend the truth of faith beyond all others, so also if any question should arise concerning the faith it must be determined by its judgment" (*Actin iv.*).

### **Bishops Belong to the Essential Constitution of the Church**

14. But if the authority of Peter and his successors is plenary and supreme, it is not to be regarded as the sole authority. For He who made Peter the foundation of the Church also "chose, twelve, whom He called apostles" (Luke vi., 13); and just as it is necessary that the authority of Peter should be perpetuated in the Roman Pontiff, so, by the fact that the bishops succeed the Apostles, they inherit their ordinary power, and thus the episcopal order necessarily belongs to the essential constitution of the Church. Although they do not receive plenary, or universal, or supreme authority, they are not to be looked as vicars of the Roman Pontiffs; because they exercise a power really their own, and are most truly called the ordinary pastors of the peoples over whom they rule.

But since the successor of Peter is one, and those of the Apostles are many, it is necessary to

examine into the relations which exist between him and them according to the divine constitution of the Church. Above all things the need of union between the bishops and the successors of Peter is clear and undeniable. This bond once broken, Christians would be separated and scattered, and would in no wise form one body and one flock. "The safety of the Church depends on the dignity of the chief priest, to whom if an extraordinary and supreme power is not given, there are as many schisms to be expected in the Church as there are priests" (S. Hieronymus, *Dialog, contra Luciferianos*, n. 9). It is necessary, therefore, to bear this in mind, viz., that nothing was conferred on the apostles apart from Peter, but that several things were conferred upon Peter apart from the Apostles. St. John Chrysostom in explaining the words of Christ asks: "Why, passing over the others, does He speak to Peter about these things?" And he replies unhesitatingly and at once, "Because he was pre-eminent among the Apostles, the mouthpiece of the Disciples, and the head of the college" (*Hom. lxxxviii. in Joan.*, n. 1). He alone was designated as the foundation of the Church. To him He gave the power of binding and loosing; to him alone was given the power of feeding. On the other hand, whatever authority and office the Apostles received, they received in conjunction with Peter. "If the divine benignity willed anything to be in common between him and the other princes, whatever He did not deny to the others He gave only through him. So that whereas Peter alone received many things, He conferred nothing on any of the rest without Peter participating in it" (S. Leo M., *Sermo iv.*, cap. 2).

### **Bishops Separated from Peter and His Successors, Lose All Jurisdiction**

15. From this it must be clearly understood that Bishops are deprived of the right and power of ruling, if they deliberately secede from Peter and his successors; because, by this secession, they are separated from the foundation on which the whole edifice must rest. They are therefore outside the edifice itself; and for this very reason they are separated from the fold, whose leader is the Chief Pastor; they are exiled from the Kingdom, the keys of which were given by Christ to Peter alone.

These things enable us to see the heavenly ideal, and the divine exemplar, of the constitution of the Christian commonwealth, namely: When the Divine founder decreed that the Church should be one in faith, in government, and in communion, He chose Peter and his successors as the principle and centre, as it were, of this unity. Wherefore St. Cyprian says: "The following is a short and easy proof of the faith. The Lord saith to Peter: 'I say to thee thou art Peter'; on him alone He buildeth His Church; and although after His Resurrection He gives a similar power to all the Apostles and says: 'As the Father hath sent me,' &c., still in order to make the necessary unity clear, by His own authority He laid down the source of that unity as beginning from one" (*De Unit. Eccl.*, n. 4). And Optatus of Milevis says: "You cannot deny that you know that in the city of Rome the Episcopal chair was first conferred on Peter. In this Peter, the head of all the Apostles (hence his name Cephas), has sat; in which chair alone unity was to be preserved for all, lest any of the other apostles should claim anything as exclusively his own. So much so, that he who would place another chair against that one chair, would be a schismatic and a sinner" (*De Schism. Donat.*, lib. ii). Hence the teaching of Cyprian, that heresy and schism arise and are begotten from the fact that due obedience is refused to the supreme authority. "Heresies and schisms have no other origin than that obedience is refused to the priest of God, and that men lose sight of the fact that there is one judge in the place of Christ in this world" (*Epist. xii. ad Cornelium*, n. 5). No one, therefore, unless in communion with Peter can share in his authority, since it is absurd to imagine that he who is outside can command in the Church. Wherefore Optatus of Milevis blamed the Donatists for this reason: "Against which ages (of hell) we read that Peter received the saving keys, that is to say, our prince, to whom it was said by Christ: 'To thee will I give the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven, and the gates of Hell shall not conquer them.' Whence is it therefore that you strive to obtain for yourselves the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven—you who fight against the chair of Peter?" (*Lib. ii.*, n. 4-5).

But the Episcopal order is rightly judged to be in communion with Peter, as Christ commanded, if it be subject to and obeys Peter; otherwise it necessarily becomes a lawless and disorderly crowd. It is not sufficient for the due preservation of the unity of the faith that the head should merely have

been charged with the office of superintendent, or should have been invested solely with a power of direction. But it is absolutely necessary that he should have received real and sovereign authority which the whole community is bound to obey. What had the Son of God in view when he promised the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven to Peter alone? Biblical usage and the unanimous teaching of the Fathers clearly show that supreme authority is designated in the passage by the word keys. Nor is it lawful to interpret in a different sense what was given to Peter alone, and what was given to the other Apostles conjointly with him. If the power of binding, loosening, and feeding confers upon each and every one of the Bishops the successors of the Apostles a real authority to rule the people committed to him, certainly the same power must have the same effect in his case to whom the duty of feeding the lambs and sheep has been assigned by God. "Christ constituted [Peter] not only pastor, but pastor of pastors; Peter therefore feeds the lambs and feeds the sheep, feeds the children and feeds the mothers, governs the subjects and rules the prelates, because the lambs and the sheep form the whole of the Church" (S. Brunonis *Episcopi Signiensis Comment.* in Joan., part iii., cap. 21, n. 55). Hence those remarkable expressions of the ancients concerning St. Peter, which most clearly set forth the fact that he was placed in the highest degree of dignity and authority. They frequently call him "the Prince of the College of the Disciples; the Prince of the holy Apostles; the leader of that choir; the mouthpiece of all the Apostles; the head of that family; the ruler of the whole world; the first of the Apostles; the safeguard of the Church." In this sense St. Bernard writes as follows to Pope Eugenius: "Who art thou? The great priest—the high priest. Thou art the Prince of Bishops and the heir of the Apostles...Thou art he to whom the keys were given. There are, it is true, other gatekeepers of heaven and to pastors of flocks, but thou art so much the more glorious as thou hast inherited a different and more glorious name than all the rest. They have flocks consigned to them, one to each; to thee all the flocks are confided as one flock to one shepherd, and not alone the sheep, but the shepherds. You ask how I prove this? From the words of the Lord. To which—I do not say—of the Bishops, but even of the Apostles have all the sheep been so absolutely and unreservedly committed? If thou lovest me, Peter, feed my sheep. Which sheep? Of this or that country, or kingdom? My sheep, He says: to whom therefore is it not evident that he does not designate some, but all? We can make no exception where no distinction is made" (*De Consideratione*, lib. ii., cap. 8).

But it is opposed to the truth, and in evident contradiction with the divine constitution of the Church, to hold that while each Bishop is individually bound to obey the authority of the Roman Pontiffs, taken collectively the Bishops are not so bound. For it is the nature and object of a foundation to support the unity of the whole edifice and to give stability to it, rather than to each component part; and in the present case this is much more applicable, since Christ the Lord wished that by the strength and solidity of the foundation the gates of hell should be prevented from prevailing against the Church. All are agreed that the divine promise must be understood of the Church as a whole, and not of any certain portions of it. These can indeed be overcome by the assaults of the powers of hell, as in point of fact has befallen some of them. Moreover, he who is set over the whole flock must have authority, not only over the sheep dispersed throughout the Church, but also when they are assembled together. Do the sheep when they are all assembled together rule and guide the shepherd? Do the successors of the Apostles assembled together constitute the foundation on which the successor of St. Peter rests in order to derive therefrom strength and stability? Surely jurisdiction and authority belong to him in whose power have been placed the keys of the Kingdom taken collectively. And as the Bishops, each in his own district, command with real power not only individuals but the whole community, so the Roman pontiffs, whose jurisdiction extends to the whole Christian commonwealth, must have all its parts, even taken collectively, subject and obedient to their authority. Christ the Lord, as we have quite sufficiently shown, made Peter and his successors His vicars, to exercise for ever in the Church the power which He exercised during His mortal life. Can the Apostolic College be said to have been above its master in authority?

This power over the Episcopal College to which we refer, and which is clearly set forth in Holy Writ, has ever been acknowledged and attested by the Church, as is clear from the teaching of General Councils. "We read that the Roman Pontiff has pronounced judgments on the prelates of all the



churches; we do not read that anybody has pronounced sentence on him" (Hadrianus ii., in *Allocutione* iii., ad *Synodum Romanum* an. 869, Cf. *Actionem* vii., Conc. Constantinopolitani iv). The reason for which is stated thus: "there is no authority greater than that of the Apostolic See" (Nicholaus in *Epist.* lxxxvi. ad Michael. Imperat.) wherefore Gelasius on the decrees of Councils says: "That which the First See has not approved of cannot stand; but what it has thought well to decree has been received by the whole Church" (Epist. xxvi., ad Episcopos Dardaniae, n. 5). It has ever been unquestionably the office of the Roman Pontiffs to ratify or to reject the decrees of Councils. Leo the great rescinded the acts of the Conciliabulum of Ephesus. Damasus rejected those of Rimini, and Hadrian I. those of Constantinople. The 28th Canon of the Council of Chalcedon, by the very fact that it lacks the assent and approval of the Apostolic See, is admitted by all to be worthless. Rightly, therefore, has Leo X. laid down in the 5th council of Lateran "that the Roman Pontiff alone, as having authority over all Councils, has full jurisdiction and power to summon, to transfer, to dissolve Councils, as is clear, not only from the testimony of Holy Writ, from the teaching of the Fathers and of the Roman Pontiffs, and from the decrees of the sacred canons, but from the teaching of the very Councils themselves." Indeed, Holy Writ attests that the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven were given to Peter alone, and that the power of binding and loosening was granted to the Apostles and to Peter; but there is nothing to show that the Apostles received supreme power without Peter, and against Peter. Such power they certainly did not receive from Jesus Christ. Wherefore, in the decree of the Vatican Council as to the nature and authority of the primacy of the Roman Pontiff, no newly conceived opinion is set forth, but the venerable and constant belief of every age (Sess. iv., cap. 3).

Nor does it begot any confusion in the administration that Christians are bound to obey a twofold authority. We are prohibited in the first place by Divine Wisdom from entertaining any such thought, since this form of government was constituted by the counsel of God Himself. In the second place we must note that the due order of things and their mutual relations are disturbed if there be a twofold magistracy of the same rank set over a people, neither of which is amenable to the other. But the authority of the Roman Pontiff is supreme, universal, independent; that of the bishops limited, and dependent. "It is not congruous that two superiors with equal authority should be placed over the same flock; but that two, one of whom is higher than the other, should be placed over the same people is not incongruous. Thus the parish priest, the bishop, and the Pope, are placed immediately over the same people" (St. Thomas in iv *Sent.*, dist. xvii., a. 4, ad q. 4, ad 3). So the Roman Pontiffs, mindful of their duty, wish above all things, that the divine constitution of the Church should be preserved. Therefore, as they defend with all necessary care and vigilance their own authority, so they have always laboured, and will continue to labour, that the authority of the bishops may be upheld. Yea, they look up whatever honour or obedience is given to the bishops as paid to themselves. "My honour is the honour of the Universal Church. My honour is the strength and stability of my brethren. Then am I honoured when due honour is given to everyone" (S. Gregorius M. *Epistolarum*, lib viii., Ep. xxx., ad *Eulogium*).

### **Appeal to Sheep Not of the Fold**

16. In what has been said we have faithfully described the exemplar and form of the Church as divinely constituted. We have treated at length of its unity: we have explained sufficiently its nature, and pointed out the way in which the Divine Founder of the Church willed that it should be preserved. There is no reason to doubt that all those, who by Divine Grace and mercy have had the happiness to have been born, as it were, in the bosom of the Catholic Church, and to have lived in it, will listen to Our Apostolic Voice: "My sheep hear my voice" (John x., 27), and that they will derive from Our words fuller instruction and a more perfect disposition to keep united with their respective pastors, and through them with the Supreme Pastor, so that they may remain more securely within the one fold, and may derive therefrom a greater abundance of salutary fruit. But We, who, notwithstanding our unfitness for this great dignity and office, govern by virtue of the authority conferred on us by Jesus Christ, as we "look on Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith" (Heb.

xii., 2) feel Our heart fired by His charity. What Christ has said of Himself We may truly repeat of Ourselves: "Other sheep I have that are not of this fold: them also I must bring and they shall hear my voice" (John x., 16). Let all those, therefore, who detest the wide-spread irreligion of our times, and acknowledge and confess Jesus Christ to be the Son of God and the Saviour of the human race, but who have wandered away from the Spouse, listen to Our voice. Let them not refuse to obey Our paternal charity. Those who acknowledge Christ must acknowledge Him wholly and entirely. "The Head and the body are Christ wholly and entirely. The Head is the only-begotten son of God, the body is His Church; the bridegroom and the bride, two in one flesh. All who dissent from the Scriptures concerning Christ, although they may be found in all places in which the Church is found, are not in the Church; and again all those who agree with the Scriptures concerning the Head, and do not communicate in the unity of the Church, are not in the Church" (S. Augustinus, *Contra Donatistas Epistola, sive De Unit. Eccl.*, cap. iv., n. 7).

And with the same yearning Our soul goes out to those whom the foul breath of irreligion has not entirely corrupted, and who at least seek to have the true God, the Creator of Heaven and earth, as their Father. Let such as these take counsel with themselves, and realize that they can in no wise be counted among the children of God, unless they take Christ Jesus as their Brother, and at the same time the Church as their mother. We lovingly address to all the words of St. Augustine: "Let us love the Lord our God; let us love His Church; the Lord as our Father, the Church as our Mother. Let no one say, I go indeed to idols, I consult fortune-tellers and soothsayers; but I leave not the Church of God: I am a Catholic. Clinging to thy Mother, thou offendest thy Father. Another, too, says: 'Far be it from me; I do not consult fortune-telling, I seek not soothsaying, I seek not profane divinations, I go not to the worship of devils, I serve not stones: but I am on the side of Donatus.' What doth it profit thee not to offend the Father, who avenges an offence against the Mother? What doth it profit to confess the Lord, to honour God, to preach Him, to acknowledge His Son, and to confess that He sits on the right hand of the Father, if you blaspheme His Church? ...If you had a beneficent friend, whom you honoured daily—and even once calumniated his spouse, would you ever enter his house? Hold fast, therefore, O dearly beloved, hold fast altogether God as your Father, and the Church as your Mother" (*Enarratio in Psal. lxxxviii.*, *Sermo ii.*, n. 14).

Above all things, trusting in the mercy of God, who is able to move the hearts of men and to incline them as and when He pleases, We most earnestly commend to His loving kindness all those of whom We have spoken. As a pledge of Divine grace, and as a token of Our affection, We lovingly impart to you, in the Lord, Venerable Brethren, to your clergy and people, Our Apostolic Blessing.

Given at St. Peter's, Rome, the 29th day of June, in the year 1896, and the nineteenth of our Pontificate.

LEO XIII

© Copyright 1896 – Libreria Editrice Vaticana

# FIRST VATICAN COUNCIL (1869-1870)

## Session 4: 18 July 1870

First dogmatic constitution on the Church of Christ—

Pius, bishop, servant of the servants of God, with the approval of the Sacred Council, for an everlasting record.

1. The eternal shepherd and guardian of our souls<sup>1</sup>, in order to render permanent the saving work of redemption, determined to build a Church in which, as in the house of the living God, all the faithful should be linked by the bond of one faith and charity.

2. Therefore, before he was glorified, he besought his Father, not for the apostles only, but also for those who were to believe in him through their word, that they all might be one as the Son himself and the Father are one<sup>2</sup>.

3. So then, just as he sent apostles, whom he chose out of the world<sup>3</sup>, even as he had been sent by the Father<sup>4</sup>, in like manner it was his will that in his Church there should be shepherds and teachers until the end of time.

4. In order, then, that the episcopal office should be one and undivided and that, by the union of the clergy, the whole multitude of believers should be held together in the unity of faith and communion, he set blessed Peter over the rest of the apostles and instituted in him the permanent principle of both unities and their visible foundation.

5. Upon the strength of this foundation was to be built the eternal temple, and the Church whose topmost part reaches heaven was to rise upon the firmness of this foundation<sup>5</sup>.

6. And since the gates of hell trying, if they can, to overthrow the Church, make their assault with a hatred that increases day by day against its divinely laid foundation, we judge it necessary, with the approbation of the Sacred Council, and for the protection, defense and growth of the Catholic flock, to propound the doctrine concerning the 1. institution, 2. permanence and 3. nature of the sacred and apostolic primacy, upon which the strength and coherence of the whole Church depends.

7. This doctrine is to be believed and held by all the faithful in accordance with the ancient and unchanging faith of the whole Church.

8. Furthermore, we shall proscribe and condemn the contrary errors which are so harmful to the Lord's flock.

### Chapter 1

*On the institution of the apostolic primacy in blessed Peter*

1. We teach and declare that, according to the gospel evidence, a primacy of jurisdiction over the whole Church of God was immediately and directly promised to the blessed apostle Peter and conferred on him by Christ the Lord.

2. It was to Simon alone, to whom he had already said You shall be called Cephas<sup>6</sup>, that the Lord, after his confession, You are the Christ, the son of the living God, spoke these words:

Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jona. For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who

is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of the underworld shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven<sup>7</sup>.

3. And it was to Peter alone that Jesus, after his resurrection, confided the jurisdiction of Supreme Pastor and ruler of his whole fold, saying: Feed my lambs, feed my sheep<sup>8</sup>.

4. To this absolutely manifest teaching of the Sacred Scriptures, as it has always been understood by the Catholic Church, are clearly opposed the distorted opinions of those who misrepresent the form of government which Christ the lord established in his Church and deny that Peter, in preference to the rest of the apostles, taken singly or collectively, was endowed by Christ with a true and proper primacy of jurisdiction.

5. The same may be said of those who assert that this primacy was not conferred immediately and directly on blessed Peter himself, but rather on the Church, and that it was through the Church that it was transmitted to him in his capacity as her minister.

6. Therefore, if anyone says that blessed Peter the apostle was not appointed by Christ the lord as prince of all the apostles and visible head of the whole Church militant; or that it was a primacy of honor only and not one of true and proper jurisdiction that he directly and immediately received from our lord Jesus Christ himself: let him be anathema.

## Chapter 2.

### *On the permanence of the primacy of blessed Peter in the Roman pontiffs*

1. That which our lord Jesus Christ, the prince of shepherds and great shepherd of the sheep, established in the blessed apostle Peter, for the continual salvation and permanent benefit of the Church, must of necessity remain for ever, by Christ's authority, in the Church which, founded as it is upon a rock, will stand firm until the end of time<sup>9</sup>.

2. For no one can be in doubt, indeed it was known in every age that the holy and most blessed Peter, prince and head of the apostles, the pillar of faith and the foundation of the Catholic Church, received the keys of the kingdom from our lord Jesus Christ, the savior and redeemer of the human race, and that to this day and for ever he lives and presides and exercises judgment in his successors the bishops of the Holy Roman See, which he founded and consecrated with his blood<sup>10</sup>.

3. Therefore whoever succeeds to the chair of Peter obtains by the institution of Christ himself, the primacy of Peter over the whole Church. So what the truth has ordained stands firm, and blessed Peter perseveres in the rock-like strength he was granted, and does not abandon that guidance of the Church which he once received<sup>11</sup>.

4. For this reason it has always been necessary for every Church—that is to say the faithful throughout the world—to be in agreement with the Roman Church because of its more effective leadership. In consequence of being joined, as members to head, with that see, from which the rights of sacred communion flow to all, they will grow together into the structure of a single body<sup>12</sup>.

5. Therefore, if anyone says that it is not by the institution of Christ the lord himself (that is to say, by divine law) that blessed Peter should have perpetual successors in the primacy over the whole Church; or that the Roman Pontiff is not the successor of blessed Peter in this primacy: let him be anathema.

## Chapter 3.

### *On the power and character of the primacy of the Roman Pontiff*

1. And so, supported by the clear witness of Holy Scripture, and adhering to the manifest and explicit decrees both of our predecessors the Roman Pontiffs and of general councils, we promulgate anew the definition of the ecumenical Council of Florence<sup>13</sup>, which must be believed by all faithful Christians, namely that the Apostolic See and the Roman Pontiff hold a world-wide primacy, and that the Roman Pontiff is the successor of blessed Peter, the prince of the apostles, true vicar of

Christ, head of the whole Church and father and teacher of all Christian people.

To him, in blessed Peter, full power has been given by our lord Jesus Christ to tend, rule and govern the universal Church.

All this is to be found in the acts of the ecumenical councils and the sacred canons.

2. Wherefore we teach and declare that, by divine ordinance, the Roman Church possesses a pre-eminence of ordinary power over every other Church, and that this jurisdictional power of the Roman Pontiff is both episcopal and immediate. Both clergy and faithful, of whatever rite and dignity, both singly and collectively, are bound to submit to this power by the duty of hierarchical subordination and true obedience, and this not only in matters concerning faith and morals, but also in those which regard the discipline and government of the Church throughout the world.

3. In this way, by unity with the Roman Pontiff in communion and in profession of the same faith, the Church of Christ becomes one flock under one Supreme Shepherd<sup>14</sup>.

4. This is the teaching of the Catholic truth, and no one can depart from it without endangering his faith and salvation.

5. This power of the Supreme Pontiff by no means detracts from that ordinary and immediate power of episcopal jurisdiction, by which bishops, who have succeeded to the place of the apostles by appointment of the Holy Spirit, tend and govern individually the particular flocks which have been assigned to them. On the contrary, this power of theirs is asserted, supported and defended by the Supreme and Universal Pastor; for St. Gregory the Great says: "My honor is the honor of the whole Church. My honor is the steadfast strength of my brethren. Then do I receive true honor, when it is denied to none of those to whom honor is due."<sup>15</sup>

6. Furthermore, it follows from that supreme power which the Roman Pontiff has in governing the whole Church, that he has the right, in the performance of this office of his, to communicate freely with the pastors and flocks of the entire Church, so that they may be taught and guided by him in the way of salvation.

7. And therefore we condemn and reject the opinions of those who hold that this communication of the Supreme Head with pastors and flocks may be lawfully obstructed; or that it should be dependent on the civil power, which leads them to maintain that what is determined by the Apostolic See or by its authority concerning the government of the Church, has no force or effect unless it is confirmed by the agreement of the civil authority.

8. Since the Roman Pontiff, by the divine right of the apostolic primacy, governs the whole Church, we likewise teach and declare that he is the supreme judge of the faithful<sup>16</sup>, and that in all cases which fall under ecclesiastical jurisdiction recourse may be had to his judgment<sup>17</sup>. The sentence of the Apostolic See (than which there is no higher authority) is not subject to revision by anyone, nor may anyone lawfully pass judgment thereupon<sup>18</sup>. And so they stray from the genuine path of truth who maintain that it is lawful to appeal from the judgments of the Roman pontiffs to an ecumenical council as if this were an authority superior to the Roman Pontiff.

9. So, then, if anyone says that the Roman Pontiff has merely an office of supervision and guidance, and not the full and supreme power of jurisdiction over the whole Church, and this not only in matters of faith and morals, but also in those which concern the discipline and government of the Church dispersed throughout the whole world; or that he has only the principal part, but not the absolute fullness, of this supreme power; or that this power of his is not ordinary and immediate both over all and each of the Churches and over all and each of the pastors and faithful: let him be anathema.

#### **Chapter 4.**

##### *On the infallible teaching authority of the Roman Pontiff*

1. That apostolic primacy which the Roman Pontiff possesses as successor of Peter, the prince of the apostles, includes also the supreme power of teaching. This Holy See has always maintained this, the constant custom of the Church demonstrates it, and the ecumenical councils, particularly

those in which East and West met in the union of faith and charity, have declared it.

2. So the fathers of the fourth Council of Constantinople, following the footsteps of their predecessors, published this solemn profession of faith: The first condition of salvation is to maintain the rule of the true faith. And since that saying of our lord Jesus Christ, You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church<sup>19</sup>, cannot fail of its effect, the words spoken are confirmed by their consequences. For in the Apostolic See the Catholic religion has always been preserved unblemished, and sacred doctrine been held in honor. Since it is our earnest desire to be in no way separated from this faith and doctrine, we hope that we may deserve to remain in that one communion which the Apostolic See preaches, for in it is the whole and true strength of the Christian religion<sup>20</sup>.

What is more, with the approval of the second Council of Lyons, the Greeks made the following profession: "The Holy Roman Church possesses the supreme and full primacy and principality over the whole Catholic Church. She truly and humbly acknowledges that she received this from the Lord himself in blessed Peter, the prince and chief of the apostles, whose successor the Roman Pontiff is, together with the fullness of power. And since before all others she has the duty of defending the truth of the faith, so if any questions arise concerning the faith, it is by her judgment that they must be settled."<sup>21</sup> Then there is the definition of the Council of Florence: "The Roman Pontiff is the true vicar of Christ, the head of the whole Church and the father and teacher of all Christians; and to him was committed in blessed Peter, by our lord Jesus Christ, the full power of tending, ruling and governing the whole Church."<sup>22</sup>

3. To satisfy this pastoral office, our predecessors strove unwearingly that the saving teaching of Christ should be spread among all the peoples of the world; and with equal care they made sure that it should be kept pure and uncontaminated wherever it was received.

4. It was for this reason that the bishops of the whole world, sometimes individually, sometimes gathered in synods, according to the long established custom of the Churches and the pattern of ancient usage referred to this Apostolic See those dangers especially which arose in matters concerning the faith. This was to ensure that any damage suffered by the faith should be repaired in that place above all where the faith can know no failing<sup>23</sup>.

5. The Roman pontiffs, too, as the circumstances of the time or the state of affairs suggested, sometimes by summoning ecumenical councils or consulting the opinion of the Churches scattered throughout the world, sometimes by special synods, sometimes by taking advantage of other useful means afforded by divine providence, defined as doctrines to be held those things which, by God's help, they knew to be in keeping with Sacred Scripture and the apostolic traditions.

6. For the Holy Spirit was promised to the successors of Peter not so that they might, by his revelation, make known some new doctrine, but that, by his assistance, they might religiously guard and faithfully expound the revelation or deposit of faith transmitted by the apostles.

Indeed, their apostolic teaching was embraced by all the venerable fathers and revered and followed by all the holy orthodox doctors, for they knew very well that this See of St. Peter always remains unblemished by any error, in accordance with the divine promise of our Lord and Savior to the prince of his disciples: I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail; and when you have turned again, strengthen your brethren<sup>24</sup>.

7. This gift of truth and never-failing faith was therefore divinely conferred on Peter and his successors in this See so that they might discharge their exalted office for the salvation of all, and so that the whole flock of Christ might be kept away by them from the poisonous food of error and be nourished with the sustenance of heavenly doctrine. Thus the tendency to schism is removed and the whole Church is preserved in unity, and, resting on its foundation, can stand firm against the gates of hell.

8. But since in this very age when the salutary effectiveness of the apostolic office is most especially needed, not a few are to be found who disparage its authority, we judge it absolutely necessary to affirm solemnly the prerogative which the only-begotten Son of God was pleased to attach to the supreme pastoral office.

9. Therefore, faithfully adhering to the tradition received from the beginning of the Christian

faith, to the glory of God our savior, for the exaltation of the Catholic religion and for the salvation of the Christian people, with the approval of the Sacred Council, we teach and define as a divinely revealed dogma that when the Roman Pontiff speaks *ex cathedra*, that is, when, in the exercise of his office as shepherd and teacher of all Christians, in virtue of his supreme apostolic authority, he defines a doctrine concerning faith or morals to be held by the whole Church, he possesses, by the divine assistance promised to him in blessed Peter, that infallibility which the divine Redeemer willed his Church to enjoy in defining doctrine concerning faith or morals. Therefore, such definitions of the Roman Pontiff are of themselves, and not by the consent of the Church, irreformable.

So then, should anyone, which God forbid, have the temerity to reject this definition of ours: let him be anathema.

Given at Rome in public session, solemnly held in the Vatican Basilica in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and seventy, on the eighteenth day of July, in the twenty-fifth year of Our Pontificate.

In conformity with the original.

Joseph, Bishop of St. Polten Secretary to the Vatican Council

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> 1 Pt 2,25.

<sup>2</sup> Jn 17, 20-21.

<sup>3</sup> Jn 15, 19.

<sup>4</sup> Jn 20, 21.

<sup>5</sup> Leo 1, *Serm.* (Sermons), 4 (elsewhere 3), ch. 2 for the day of his birth (PL 54.150).

<sup>6</sup> Jn 1, 42.

<sup>7</sup> Mt 16, 16-19.

<sup>8</sup> Jn 21, 15-17.

<sup>9</sup> See Mt 7, 25; Lk 6, 48.

<sup>10</sup> From the speech of Philip, the Roman legate, at the 3rd session of the Council of Ephesus (D no. 112).

<sup>11</sup> Leo I, *Serm.* (Sermons), 3 (elsewhere 2), ch. 3 (PL 54.146).

<sup>12</sup> Irenaeus, *Adv. haeres.* (Against Heresies) 1113 (PG 7.849), Council of Aquilea (381), to be found among: Ambrose, *Epistolae* (Letters), 11 (PL 16.946).

<sup>13</sup> Council of Florence, session 6 (see above p. 528).

<sup>14</sup> See Jn 10, 16.

<sup>15</sup> Ep. *ad Eulog. Alexandrin.* (Letter to Eulogius of Alexandria), VIII 29 (30) (MGH, Ep. 2, 31 28-30, PL 77.933).

<sup>16</sup> Pius VI, Letter *Super soliditate* dated 28 Nov. 1786.

<sup>17</sup> From Michael Palaeologus's profession of faith which was read out at the second Council of Lyons (D no. 466).

<sup>18</sup> Nicholas I, Ep. *ad Michaelem imp.* (Letter to the emperor Michael) (PL 119.954).

<sup>19</sup> Mt 16, 18.

<sup>20</sup> From Pope Hormisdas's *formula* of the year 517 (D no. 171), see above p. 157 n. 1.

<sup>21</sup> From Michael Palaeologus's profession of faith which was read out at the second Council of Lyons (D no. 466).

<sup>22</sup> Council of Florence, session 6. S Bernard, *Ep.* (Letters) 190 (PL 182.1053).

<sup>23</sup> Bernard, Ep. (Letters) 190 (PL 182.1053).

<sup>24</sup> Lk 22, 32.

The translation found here is that which appears in *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils* ed. Norman Tanner. S.J. The numbering of the canons is however found in Tanner's text.

