

Apologetics Series n. 30:

The Attributes of the Church

1. Introduction to the Attributes
2. Study of the Attributes
3. Applications

I. Introduction to the Attributes

1. What is meant by the attributes
2. Role of the attributes as invisible qualities
3. Utility of studying the attributes

I. MEANING OF « ATTRIBUTES OF THE CHURCH »

1. Attributes in general
2. Attributes of the Church (broad meaning)
3. Attributes of the Church (strict meaning, invisible)
4. Confirmatory text and enumeration of attributes

I. Meaning of « Attribute » in General

An attribute is anything that can be *attributed* to something, or said to belong to it as an essential property.

For example, students of chemistry learn that water has certain attributes or properties which make it uniquely capable of sustaining life: high cohesive and adhesive forces (resulting in high surface tension and capillary action); high specific heat and high heat of vaporization; the power to dissolve many other substances; and so on.

Even in this broad sense, the term « attribute » rules out accidental qualities.

For example, to be hot or cold, clean or dirty is not an attribute of water, since these qualities vary.

Some attributes are predicated, not only essentially, but also exclusively of their subject.

For example, divisibility is an *exclusive* attribute of even numbers. All even numbers are divisible, and *only* even numbers.

2. Broad meaning of « Attributes of the Church »

When we speak of attributes of the Church, we mean, in a broad sense, anything that can be attributed to the Church, or said to belong to her, as an essential property.

Most of the Church's attributes belong *exclusively* to her (for example, the four marks); however, some attributes such as visibility are indeed essential but not exclusive (since many other realities are visible besides the Church).

Since the marks of the Church have a special value of their own as apologetic arguments, they are usually treated separately from the other attributes, or essential properties, of the Church.

Thus, the word « attribute » comes to mean any essential property of the Church which is not one of the four marks used in apologetics.

3. Strict meaning the Attributes of the Church

Still, having made this precision, we can distinguish between attributes in a strict sense and in a broad sense.

- In the *broad sense*, an attribute is any essential property of the Church which is not one of the four marks. This includes the visibility of the Church, her unicity, etc.
- In the *strict sense*, an attribute is an essential property of the Church which belongs to her internal constitution and, as such, is *invisible and known directly by faith alone*, even if apologetics can establish the reasonableness of believing in it.

For example, the *authority* of the Church: the fact that the Pope and bishops of the Church, as successors of St. Peter and the Apostles, truly govern the flock in Christ's name. — The fact itself on an external, visible, historically demonstrable succession of Popes belongs to the mark of apostolicity and can be known by human reason alone, without the light of faith; but the truth that this succession of rulers serves to transmit a divinely established power of government is a truth of faith that depends on our acceptance of the word of Christ, « He who hears you, hears Me; » and, « Whatsoever you shall bind on earth, shall be bound in heaven... »

- These internal, invisible properties are usually listed as authority, infallibility, and indefectibility.

4. Confirmation

We find this distinction and enumeration of the attributes of the Church given in the Baltimore Catechism n. 3, q. 517f.

- The answer to q. 521 explains: « Both marks and attributes are necessary in the Church, for the marks teach us its external or visible qualities, while the attributes teach us its internal or invisible qualities. It is easier to discover the marks than the attributes; for it is easier to see that the Church is one than that it is infallible. »
- Q. 522 A. The attributes of the Church are three: authority, infallibility, and indefectibility.
- Q. 525 A. By the authority of the Church I mean the right and power which the Pope and the Bishops, as the successors of the Apostles, have to teach and to govern the faithful.
- Q. 526 A. By the infallibility of the Church I mean that the Church can not err when it teaches a doctrine of faith or morals.

- Q. 543 A. By the indefectibility of the Church I mean that the Church, as Christ founded it, will last till the end of time.

2. ROLE OF THE ATTRIBUTES AS INVISIBLE QUALITIES

1. The Church: visible in her body, and invisible in her soul
2. The marks: visible in their effects on the body, and invisible in their root
3. Relation between the attributes and the marks

1. In what sense the Church is visible

To better understand the role of the attributes and how they are distinguished from the marks of the Church, we first have to understand in what sense the Church is visible.

If not a truth of faith, it is at least theologically certain that the Church is visible.

- This is proved by certain Old Testament prophecies, where the Church is depicted, for example, as a mountain built upon the mountains, visible to all: Is. 2:2-3: « And in the last days the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be prepared on the top of mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills, and all nations shall flow unto 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: for the law shall come forth from Sion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. »
- It is also proved by reason from the parables of our Lord about the kingdom of heaven which includes a mixture of the bad and good here below (it's therefore not a purely spiritual kingdom); from the fact that he established human authorities (the apostles and their successors) to govern in his place (which would be impossible if the members of the Church could not recognize each other); and from the fact that all are obliged to belong to the one true Church as the sole ark of salvation (but this would be impossible if the Church were invisible).

However, to say that the Church is visible does not mean that all aspects of the Church are visible.

- If we consider the Church in her *essence*, the Catechism of Pope Pius X distinguishes between the body of the Church and her soul.
 - 164. The Body of the Church consists in her external and visible aspect, that is, in the association of her members, in her worship, in her teaching-power and in her external rule and government.
 - 163. The Soul of the Church consists in her internal and spiritual endowments, that is, faith, hope, charity, the gifts of grace and of the Holy Ghost, together with all the heavenly treasures which are hers through the merits of our Redeemer, Jesus Christ, and of the Saints.
 - (It's true that many theologians dislike this use of the term « soul » and prefer to say that the Holy Ghost himself is the soul of the Church; but setting aside this controversy, all acknowledge that there is a twofold aspect to the Church: one external and visible, the other internal and invisible).
- If we consider the Church in her *properties*, we can also distinguish between the visible and the invisible elements.
 - Cardinal Journet writes in *The Church of the Word Incarnate* : « The soul of the Church is altogether invisible, mysterious, an object of faith alone, yet this soul by vivifying the social body of the Church, transforms it, illuminates it, lifts it above all other social organisms so as to make it a permanent social miracle. Equally the properties of the Church (which have their roots in her soul) are in their *principle* invisible and mysterious; but in the measure in which they are imparted to her body they begin visibly to appear as observable objects, and to become so many divine

signs or *marks*. Unity, sanctity, catholicity, apostolicity are properties which under one aspect remain invisible and mysterious; but, being reflected in the body of the Church, they become visible and present themselves as *miracles*. When these properties are treated from an apologetic standpoint we are led to abstract from their mysterious roots and to consider only their visible manifestation in the body of the Church and their miraculous nature. Then it is that in all strictness, they may be called signs, marks or notes of the true Church. »

2. In what sense the marks are visible

So, in fact, even if we consider the marks themselves of the Church, we find that they have a twofold aspect: their external manifestation in the body of the Church is visible and perceptible to natural reason, and constitutes the basis of an apologetical argument; but their root cause, being the divine constitution of the Church and the supernatural gifts that vivify it, is invisible, like any other supernatural mystery.

- The unity of the Church is *manifested* in the external, public profession of the same creed; in the use of the same religious ceremonies (the Mass and the sacraments); and in submission to the same religious authorities (the Pope and bishops). Considering the scope of the Church (spread throughout the world and transcending all national, cultural and ethnical differences), this perfect cohesion is a moral miracle, the *fact* of which is accessible to human reason, but the *cause* of which is a supernatural mystery (it proceeds from the Holy Ghost, who is the external principle of unity; and from the virtues of faith and charity possessed by the members of the Church, which are the internal principles of unity).
- The sanctity of the Church, on the part of her members, is *manifested* in the miracles worked by her saints, whereas their sanctity itself, or close union with

God, is of itself invisible. Likewise, the virtues of charity, of fortitude, of purity that animated the martyrs, virgins and confessors of the Church are invisible and supernatural (whereas martyrdom and virginity are of themselves external acts or states accessible to human reason); etc.

3. Relation between the attributes and the marks

What are listed as attributes of the Church—authority, infallibility, indefectibility—are inseparably linked to the marks.

- Indefectibility, like visibility, is a general condition for all of the four marks; for, if the Church had suffered a substantial alteration, she would no longer possess her four marks. Indefectibility is also particularly tied to the mark of apostolicity which requires a perfect continuity between the Church founded by the Apostles and the Church of today.
 - Indefectibility of fact (i.e., that the Church has *de facto* undergone no substantial alteration) belongs to the mark of apostolicity, whereas indefectibility of right (i.e., that the Church, thanks to the invisible assistance of the Holy Ghost, simply cannot and never will defect) is an attribute in the strict sense, that is, an invisible property known by faith.
- Apostolicity of government, or the visible fact of uninterrupted succession in the same office, is a necessary condition for the Church of today to possess the same authority (invisible attribute) that she received from her founder, Jesus Christ.
- Both authority and infallibility are necessary to maintain the unity and sanctity of the Church.
 - If there were no authority to conserve unity of belief and praxis, the Church would split into a thousand sects as in Protestantism, and acts of virtue could not be commanded of her subject under threat of penalties.

- If her doctrinal authority were not infallible, unity of belief would degenerate into a multiplicity of opinions, and the Church's members would be led into errors prejudicial to their sanctification.

The Baltimore Catechism summarizes the above as follows: Q. 520. The Church cannot have the four marks without the three attributes, because the three attributes necessarily come with the marks and without them the marks could not exist.

3. UTILITY OF STUDYING THE ATTRIBUTES

1. For better understanding the Church and her marks
2. For refuting Protestant objections (distorting the nature of the attributes)
3. For refuting Sedevacantist objections (attempting to apply the attributes to the official Church as negative marks)

The attributes of the Church are useful to study for three reasons:

1. First, because they shed light on the nature of the Church and of her marks.
 - a. The marks of the Church make known the identity of the true Church of Christ, distinguishing her from counterfeit churches, and prove that she possesses the other attributes assigned to her; but a study of the attributes serves in turn to better illustrate the causes or roots from which the marks arise.
 - b. This kind of oblique circle, where premises lead to certain conclusions, and then a study of the conclusions sheds light on the premises, is common in theology. For instances, the Old Testament demonstrates the divine origin of the New Testament (through the fulfillment of its prophecies), but then the New Testament in turn sheds abundant light on the meaning of the Old Testament.

2. Secondly, because the attributes are often misunderstood, leading to false accusations against the Church (e.g., people confuse infallibility with inspiration or even with impeccability). — This is often the case with Protestants.
3. Thirdly, because the attributes do serve as negative notes, i.e., where it can be demonstrated that a certain church lacks one of the attributes, by that fact it is known to be a false church. Thus, certain objections may be presented against the true Church in the form that one or more of these attributes are lacking, i.e., the Catholic Church has erred; the Catholic Church has defected; etc. — Sedevacantists attack the official Church in this way, saying, for example, that the Church is infallible; but the official hierarchy teaches error; therefore, the official hierarchy constitutes a false church.

II. Study of the Attributes

1. Preliminary remarks on the Church herself
2. The attributes one by one

I. PRELIMINARY REMARKS ON THE CHURCH HERSELF

1. The four causes of the Church
2. Relations of the marks to the causes

i. The four causes of the Church

The Church herself, as any society, has four causes (borrowing the terminology of Aristotle): a formal cause, a material cause, an efficient cause and a final cause.

1. Material cause — what the thing is made of: for any society, its members. — For the Church, the baptized who do not place any obstacle to their incorporation.
2. Final cause — what the thing exists for: depends on the nature of the society in question (domestic society exists for the procreation and education of children;

civil society exists to secure the temporal common good, that is, the material and social conditions necessary to human flourishing: not just life, liberty and property, but also moral, intellectual and artistic progress). — For the Church, the *proximate* final cause is the sanctification of souls; the *remote* final cause is their eternal salvation.

3. Efficient cause — what brings the society into existence (the founder, an extrinsic efficient cause) and moves it towards the attainment of its end (authority, an intrinsic efficient cause). — The Church is founded by Jesus Christ and governed by the Pope and bishops as successors of St. Peter and the Apostles.
4. Formal cause — what defines a thing and makes it to be the one thing that it is. Human societies are not physical entities like animals, vegetables or minerals. Their unity is not a physical unity (in the order of being) but a moral unity (in the order of operation). A society is one because the activity of its members is one with a unity of order. That is, the activity of each individual member is coordinated with the activity of the other members so that they all proceed from the same source (the directives of legitimate authority) and tend to the same goal (the final cause or common good of the society in question). The formal cause of any society is the social order by which all its members (the material cause) are subject to the same authority (the efficient cause) for the accomplishment of actions that promote the common good (the final cause) of that society. — The formal cause of the Church is the social order that unites all its members, the baptized, in the profession of one faith, one manner of worship (the Mass and sacraments) and one obedience.

2. Relation of the marks to the causes

The four marks of the Church are related to the four causes as follows:

1. The mark of unity relates to the formal cause of the Church. Something is one for the same reason that it is. (If something *is*, but it isn't *one*, then you can't say *it is*; you should say *they are*.) The triple bond of faith, worship and obedience at once unites the Church and makes her what she is.
2. The mark of catholicity relates to the material cause of the Church, that is, her members. The Church transcends all that otherwise tends to divide her members; she is found in all nations, despite differences of language, culture and so on.
3. The mark of apostolicity relates to the efficient cause of the Church, that is, her governing authority. It is precisely the unbroken transmission of this authority, always operating for the same ends (to teach, govern and sanctify) that ties the Church of today to the Church of the apostles.
4. The mark of holiness relates to the final cause of the Church, which is the sanctification of her members, making of them a communion of saints.

2. EACH ATTRIBUTE IN PARTICULAR

1. Unicity
2. Necessity for salvation
3. Visibility
4. Authority
5. Infallibility
6. Indefectibility

The Church of Christ is unique; necessary to salvation; visible; authoritative; infallible; and indefectible.

I. Unicity

A. Meaning — Unicity differs from unity. Unity is the absence of division within a thing. Unicity is the absence of multiplication of the same thing, that is, the thing exists alone without any duplicates. For example, when we affirm that there is only one God, we

affirm his unicity. Or again, for this solar system there is only one sun. But for America there is not only one MacDonal'd's; there are many of them.

B. Proof — There is only one Church: this is clear from the words of Christ: « Upon this rock I will build my Church » (not churches); « other sheep I have that are not of this fold: them also I must bring. And they shall hear my voice: And there shall be one fold and one shepherd. » — From the Canticle of Canticles: « One is my dove, my perfect one is but one. » — « If thy brother shall offend against thee, go, and rebuke him between thee and him alone... And if he will not hear thee, take with thee one or two more... And if he will not hear them: tell the church. And if he will not hear the church, let him be to thee as the heathen and publican. » — The Church is prefigured in the ark of Noe; in the Chosen People; etc.

C. Application — There is no one and unique Protestant Church (or Orthodox Church). It would be more accurate for them to say « the churches. » Nevertheless, they are accustomed to speak of « the Church » as if they had in mind something one. Their Church (the Church spoken of by the ecumenical movement) has a unity of abstraction, achieved by finding the lowest common denominator (a vague belief in Christ uniting all Christian confessions, or perhaps an invisible association of the just or the predestined) and abstracting away all differences. Such a unity (and unicity) is more negative than positive, more imagined than real, and comes at the price of forfeiting the other attributes of the Church (authority).

2. Necessity for salvation

Meaning — The Church is a necessary means of salvation, either in fact or in desire (just as baptism is necessary for salvation either in fact or in desire).

Proof — Jesus Christ did not establish the Church as something optional; the Apostles are told to make disciples of all nations (which implies a corresponding obligation on

the part of all men to become disciples); « He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved: but he that believeth not shall he condemned. » The dogma *Extra Ecclesiam Nulla Salus* is taught by all the Church Fathers.

3. **Visibility**

Meaning — The Church is visible. Theologians distinguish between *material* visibility (that is, the Church can be recognized as a definite society; she owns property; she enters into treaties with governments; her members are identifiable as such—there is no secrecy as in freemasonry and other occult societies) and *formal* visibility (that is, this same Church is recognizable, not only as one church or society among many, but precisely as the only true Church, the same Church that was founded by Christ). The Church is formally visible thanks to her four marks which, as moral miracles accessible to natural reason, make her divine character credible. Nevertheless, this visibility is *inadequate* or incomplete because the Church in her deepest essence (including her invisible attributes) is a supernatural mystery known to faith alone: *credo in sanctam ecclesiam catholicam*. The Church is visible somewhat you or I are visible (only in the body, but the movement of the body reveals the presence of the soul) or as Christ incarnate is visible (his divinity, itself invisible, is known through the works of his humanity). — Conclusion: the Church is formally but inadequately visible.

Proof — The proof has already been given above (Old Testament prophecies, arguments of reason).

Applications — Protestants have historically rejected the visibility of the Church, and before them, John Wycliff, a precursor of the Reformation; because they wanted to make the Church an invisible assembly of the just or of the predestined.

Wycliff wrote: « No one is a civil master, no one a prelate, no one a bishop, as long as he is in mortal sin; » and, « If a bishop or priest is living in mortal sin, he does not ordain, nor consecrate, nor perform, nor baptize » (cf. Dz. 595 & 584).

As soon as authority becomes dependent on invisible criteria (such as predestination or the possession of charity), it becomes impossible to know who has authority or not. Authority practically ceases to exist. As the Catechism of the Council of Trent says, « Who they are that compose this class (the just or the predestined) we also may remotely conjecture, but we can by no means pronounce with certainty. Hence Christ the Saviour does not speak of this portion of His Church when He refers us to the Church and commands us to hear and to obey her. As this part of the Church is unknown, how could we ascertain with certainty whose decision to recur to, whose authority to obey? »

Thus, the visibility of the Church is a necessary precondition for the attribute of authority to be relevant; as well as the other attributes, such as infallibility and indefectibility. If the Church were invisible, we would be commanded in vain to belong to her, to submit ourselves to her authority, to trust that she will survive intact until the end of time.

This is also why authority in the Church cannot be lost by reason of occult heresy (an internal or even an external but ambiguous denial of the faith) any more than it can be lost by reason of mortal sin; both would equally tend to destroy the visibility of the Church and render authority impotent (since one could always allege that the person in authority has said something heretical). Bellarmine writes: « It is certain (whatever one or another may think) that an occult heretic, if he be a bishop or even the supreme Pontiff, does not lose his jurisdiction...until either he publicly separates himself from the Church, or, being convicted of heresy, is unwillingly separated » (De Ecclesia Militante, bk. 3, ch. 10).

Sedevacantism tends to undermine the Church's visibility in a more subtle way, by teaching that there is a kind of heresy which is sufficiently manifest to deprive a person of his office in the Church but not sufficiently manifest for this loss of office to be recognized by all; leading to a situation where almost everyone in the Church acknowledges and obeys an antipope (and even an anti-hierarchy).

4. Authority

Meaning — « Authority is the power which one person has over another so as to be able to justly exact obedience... By the authority of the Church, I mean the right and power which the Pope and the Bishops, as the successors of the Apostles, have to teach and to govern the faithful » (Baltimore Catechism Qq. 523 & 525).

This uninterrupted transmission of authority from the Apostles to the Pope and bishops of the Church, insofar as it is externalized and historically verifiable, constitutes the mark of Apostolicity.

Theologians generally distinguish between material and formal apostolicity. Material apostolicity means either the valid transmission of Holy Orders (the power of the priesthood and episcopate, which ultimately descend from the Apostles) or else the mere fact of a material succession of bishops in the same See (abstracting from whether they continue to profess the Catholic faith and submit themselves to the authority of the Pope). A heretical or schismatic bishop may indeed receive the power of orders from his predecessor, but he does not receive any authority to rule the flock of Christ, since this authority is communicated only to those who remain in communion with the supreme shepherd, the bishop of Rome.

The exact manner in which episcopal authority is transmitted has been debated among theologians, some affirming that it is received directly from God, and others rightly arguing that it comes from the Pope. This latter opinion was solemnly confirmed by

Pope Pius XII on various occasions. The conciliar document *Lumen Gentium* reverted to the other opinion that had been condemned by Pius XII because it served the purpose of modernist theologians who wanted to undermine papal primacy in favor of a collegiate form of government. This teaching of the « pastoral » council is not binding and should be rejected.

Proof — « He that hears you, hears me, » etc.

Note — The Baltimore Catechism lists authority as an attribute of the Church because, like the other two listed (infallibility and indefectibility), it is an essential and *exclusive* property. The power of holy orders, on the other hand, is indeed an invisible property that is essential to the Church, but it is omitted from the list of attributes because it not predicated of her *exclusively*, since valid orders are found outside of the Church, although this happens accidentally and contrary to the intention of her founder.

5. Infallibility

Meaning — « By the infallibility of the Church I mean that the Church can not err when it teaches a doctrine of faith or morals, » by which is meant, « the revealed teaching that refers to whatever we must believe and do in order to be saved » (Baltimore Catechism, 526-7).

Infallibility is a negative charism.

- It is a charism, that is, a gift which is given, not primarily for one's personal sanctification, but for the common good of the Church. (Other charisms include prophecy, the gift of miracles, and even ordinary powers such as those of Holy Orders.) — Someone who is holy may commit errors, and the mere fact that someone is preserved from error by the charism of infallibility does not mean that he is holy.

- It is a negative charism, that is, a mere preservation from committing errors in the transmission of the faith.

Infallibility is to be distinguished from inspiration, inerrancy and impeccability.

- Inspiration is a positive charism by which a prophet or sacred author speaks or writes what God puts into his mind, so that his words are really the word of God himself. Inspiration makes the human subject into a channel for divine revelation.
- Inerrancy is a quality of the inspired word of God by which all error is excluded from each and every part of the inspired text. Inerrancy therefore accompanies inspiration and applies equally without distinction to the entire content of the inspired text.
- Infallibility is not a positive charism like inspiration, but negative. An infallible statement does not reveal any new truth, but has for its object the clear affirmation of a truth already revealed by God but subsequently muddled or called into question by men. The affirmation itself is the work of a human author, and God simply prevents the human author from erring in the affirmation he makes.
- Infallibility differs from inerrancy because it is not predicated of inspired texts (the word of God), but of texts whose author is human; and because infallibility does not apply without distinction to all parts of a text. Rather, as theologians explain, not every assertion of a conciliar document or papal pronouncement is infallible, but only the precise points which are solemnly defined; everything else, including the theological reasons that are adduced, is of itself fallible.
- Finally, infallibility is not impeccability or sinlessness, which is a personal prerogative given for the individual's benefit, as in the case of the Blessed Virgin Mary. As the Baltimore Catechism explains, « The Pope can commit sin and he

must seek forgiveness in the Sacrament of Penance as others do. Infallibility does not prevent him from sinning, but from teaching falsehood when he speaks *ex-cathedra* » (Q. 533).

Proof — The Church is infallible, 1) because Our Lord has promised it; 2) because infallibility is necessary to maintain the unity of the Faith; and 3) because the Church has always claimed to be infallible.

1. Christ has promised it: « I have yet many things to say to you: but you cannot bear them now. But when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will teach you all truth » (John 16:12-13). « The Paraclete, the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring all things to your mind, whatsoever I shall have said to you » (John 14:26). — « And behold I am with you all days, even to the end of the world. » — According to St. Paul, the Church of the living God is « the pillar and ground of the truth » (1 Tim. 3:15).
2. Necessity for the unity of the faith:
 - a. The faith of the Church must be firm and undivided. « And he gave some apostles, and some prophets, and other some evangelists, and other some pastors and doctors... Until we all meet into the unity of faith... That henceforth we be no more children tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine » (Eph. 4:11-14). « For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea, which is moved and carried about by the wind » (James 1:6).
 - b. But, if the Church were not infallible our faith could not be firm. In fact, we would not be believing God's word, but our own private interpretation of God's word, which is fallible. It would be *our opinion* that Scripture is inspired; *our opinion* that this or that book belongs to the canon of Sacred Scripture; *our opinion* that the meaning of this or that passage is what we think it to be. This is the logical outcome of Protestantism, which rejects the existence of an

infallible teaching authority. And it extends to the most basic doctrines: the Holy Trinity; the divinity of Jesus Christ; etc.

- c. Secondly, if the Church were not infallible our faith could not be one; the Church would be divided into factions, and there would be no way of definitively resolving disputes. Having a central authority helps, but if that authority is unable to resolve the dispute infallibly, the opposing faction, whose opinion has been condemned, can always nurse the hope of returning to favor and eventually being vindicated. Thus, even when divisions are removed by an act of authority the victory is often more apparent than real. But infallibility ensures that the decision concerning faith or morals is irrevocable and thus the unity achieved by the decision is lasting.

To better understand this necessity:

1. Faith has as its direct object God himself, the authority of God revealing. « We... give thanks to God without ceasing: because, that when you had received of us the word of the hearing of God, you received it not as the word of men, but (as it is indeed) the word of God, who worketh in you that have believed » (1 Thes. 2:13).
2. But, God does not reveal himself directly to each individual man. St. Peter: « God raised [Jesus] up the third day and gave him to be made manifest, not to all the people, but to witnesses preordained by God » (Act 10:41).
3. So, faith has for its object God's word, but God's word brought to us through the mediation of a human messenger. « How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace... » (Rom. 10:15).
4. How can a human being mediate divine revelation in such a way that it is not diluted or polluted? There has to be a divine guarantee of the perfect accuracy or fidelity of the transmission; otherwise, one cannot give the absolute assent of divine faith to the doctrine that is transmitted. At most, one could give it a

human faith, which is only certain in the measure that the person transmitting the message is truly reliable. Without a divine guarantee of faithful transmission, one does not have an absolute certainty that the message is an accurate reflection of God's own word.

5. There are two ways that the Holy Ghost ensures this transmission: for the one who reveals a new truth in God's name, there is *divine inspiration*, by which he becomes a faithful instrument for the positive revelation of something not hitherto known. For the one whose office is merely to safeguard, explain and faithfully transmit the deposit of divine revelation, there is a negative charism of *infallibility*, which prevents human frailty from distorting, advertently or not, the divinely revealed message. It is only thanks to these two charisms of inspiration and infallibility that men are able to mediate the content of divine faith.

3) The Church has always claimed infallibility: St. Peter and the Apostles, that is obvious (cf. the letter of the Council of Jerusalem: « For it hath seemed good to the Holy Ghost and to us... »); but also the subsequent Popes and Councils of the Church (for another episode...)

The subject of infallibility — Baltimore Catechism n. 530: « The Church teaches infallibly when it speaks through the Pope and Bishops united in general council, or through the Pope alone when he proclaims to all the faithful a doctrine of faith or morals. »

The conditions of infallibility — « Q. 531. What is necessary that the Pope may speak infallibly or ex-cathedra? A. That the Pope may speak infallibly, or ex-cathedra, (1) He must speak on a subject of faith or morals; (2) He must speak as the Vicar of Christ and to the whole Church; (3) He must indicate by certain words, such as, we define, we proclaim, &c., that he intends to speak infallibly.

« Q. 532. Is the Pope infallible in everything he says and does?

A. The Pope is not infallible in everything he says and does, because the Holy Ghost was not promised to make him infallible in everything, but only in matters of faith and morals for the whole Church. Nevertheless, the Pope's opinion on any subject deserves our greatest respect on account of his learning, experience and dignity. »

The object of infallibility — The *primary* object of infallibility is the deposit of faith, that is, revealed truths of faith and morals. However, there is a *secondary* object of infallibility, which are those truths which on account of their close connection with revealed doctrine must be defended in order to safeguard the deposit of faith itself. These include dogmatic facts, such as the legitimacy of a certain pope or Council, and theological conclusions, that is, certain truths whose demonstration depends both on a truth of faith and on a truth of natural reason.

In addition to dogmatic facts and theological conclusions, other things are often held to belong to the secondary object of the Church's infallibility, such as universal disciplinary and liturgical laws, the canonization of saints, and the definitive approval of religious congregations.

However, all that has been defined and all that is usually taught in catechisms is the Church's infallibility in regard to its direct object, revealed doctrines of faith and morals. The difficulties that arise regarding the secondary object of infallibility are therefore not as pressing from the apologetic perspective, since often there is disagreement among theologians as to whether and to what extent the Church is infallible in this or that domain; hence, Catholics are not always obliged to prove that the Church was in the right concerning this or that matter which is only indirectly connected to revealed truth.

6. Indefectibility

« Q. 543. What do you mean by the indefectibility of the Church?

A. By the indefectibility of the Church I mean that the Church, as Christ founded it, will last till the end of time. » In other words, the Church will never be destroyed, nor substantially altered, nor replaced by something more perfect.

- Upon this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.
- Behold I am with you all days even to the consummation of the world.
- Never to be replaced by something more perfect: « For by one oblation he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified... Having therefore, brethren, a confidence in the entering into the holies by the blood of Christ » (Heb. 10).

III. Applications (Objections & Answers)

VISIBILITY

1. The Church is a supernatural mystery that we believe in; therefore, it is not visible. — Answer: all this proves is that the Church is not *adequately* or exhaustively visible; but the invisible elements (the powers of orders and jurisdiction, the assistance of the Holy Ghost, the gifts of sanctifying grace and the virtues) are tied to and manifest themselves through the visible elements (the social action of the Church's members), as the soul manifests itself in the vital movement of the body.

2. The official Church is not Catholic, but the visible Church is the official Church. Therefore, the visible Church is not Catholic. Consequently, the Catholic Church is not visible. — Answer: there is an ambiguity in the expression « official Church ». This can mean quite simply the occupants of the papacy and episcopal offices, who happen to abuse their power. Insofar as they are truly occupants who in principle profess the Catholic faith and teach and govern the flock in Christ's name, they do constitute the

hierarchy of the visible Church and must be considered Catholic. Insofar as in practice they abuse their power and apply it to ends other than those for which the Church exists (e.g., to teach a secular religion), they do not act as Catholics and precisely in that measure they do not represent the visible Church.

INDEFECTIBILITY

Since the time of Vatican II, the Church authorities have taught grave errors already condemned by the Magisterium. This means that the Church has defected. — This defection concerns certain of the Church's members, some of whom have erred in good faith, others knowingly; some of whom have embraced heresy, while others have only committed theological errors or errors close to heresy. This is sufficient to constitute a grave crisis, but it is not proof that the Church has defected, especially because the acts by which error is taught do not fulfill the conditions for infallibility; and what is not infallible, is subject to error.

While there are indeed certain errors that are taught (e.g., religious liberty), they are not taught as truths of faith handed down from the apostles, but at most as the fruit of modern reflection on the faith (or quite simply on the dignity of man). They are professed more as human opinions than as dogmas to be believed under peril of losing one's salvation.

Even more than the positive spreading of errors, the crisis in the Church consists in a kind of paralysis of the intellect and will by which the hierarchy is prevented from teaching the faith in its integrity. The resulting privation does not immediately touch the being itself of the Church, but only her action, even if, in the long run, such inactivity would tend to put her very being in danger.

Secondly, at La Salette the Blessed Virgin declared to Mélanie Calvat that « Rome will lose the faith and become the seat of the Antichrist. » Which means that the Church

will defect. — This is a private revelation. Rome cannot lose the faith as such, but errors can become widespread.

Thirdly, since the time of Vatican II there has emerged what Abp. Lefebvre did not hesitate to call « a new Church, a liberal Church, a reformed Church, similar to the reformed Church of Luther, » a « modernist » and « conciliar Church. » Now, there is only one Church; any other « Church » could only be a schismatic or heretical sect. Since the one Church has become liberal and modernist, she is no longer Catholic and has defected. — The Catholic Church of today is called conciliar, liberal and modernist not as essential properties flowing from her nature, but as accidental properties that can be predicated of her, not as such, but in respect to some of her members who are corrupted or who have even infiltrated her expressly to try to bring about her downfall.

St. Bede: « It not rarely occurs that the Church is not only afflicted, but even defiled (*foedata*) by the pressure of the heathens, so that her Redeemer seems—if it were possible—to have entirely abandoned her for a time » (Commentary on the Gospel of St. Mark, ch. 6).