Doctrines, Dogmas, and Disciplines

“It is this Magisterium's task to preserve God's people from deviations and defections and to guarantee them the objective possibility of professing the true faith without error.”

CCC #890
What is the Magisterium

- The teaching authority of the Church
  - Pope
  - Bishops in communion with the pope
  - Theologians as advisors
- Role
  - To instruct the People of God in the truth God revealed
- The Magisterium presents this truth in different forms
  - Doctrines, Dogmas and Disciplines
What is Doctrine

- Doctrine - Any teaching of the Magisterium on faith or morals for the whole Church to believe
- All Dogmas are Doctrines
- Not all Doctrines are Dogmas
What is Dogma

- a) A truth formally **revealed** by God  
  b) which has been **proposed** by the Teaching Authority of the Church to be believed as such

- Revelation
  - Truth communicated to man by God through extraordinary means
  - Scripture and Tradition
Infallibility

• “But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth” John 16:13

• I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven” Matthew 16:19

• “Yet this Magisterium is not superior to the Word of God, but is its servant. It teaches only what has been handed on to it” Catechism of the Catholic Church #86
Infallibility

- Deals with Faith or Morals
- Defined infallibly
  1. Pope (“from the chair”)
  2. Pope and Bishops together
- Taught infallibly
  3. Bishops
Extraordinary Papal Magisterium

- An *Ex cathedra* ("from the chair") statement is when the Pope:
  - Acts as the successor of St. Peter
  - and promulgates on faith or morals
  - for the whole Church to hold as true
- It is mostly agreed that there have only been 2 *Ex cathedra* statements
  - **Immaculate Conception** (that Mary was conceived without original sin)
  - **Assumption** (that Mary was assumed body and soul into heaven)
Immaculate Conception Dogma

"We declare, pronounce, and define that the doctrine which holds that the most Blessed Virgin Mary, in the first instance of her conception, by a singular grace and privilege granted by Almighty God, in view of the merits of Jesus Christ, the Savior of the human race, was preserved free from all stain of original sin, is a doctrine revealed by God and therefore to be believed firmly and constantly by all the faithful."
Extraordinary Episcopal Magisterium

- Ecumenical Council - when bishops from around the world get together with the pope and make decrees which all Catholics must hold to be true
- All 21 ecumenical councils have defined infallibly
  - The Council of Ephesus infallibly defined that Mary is the Mother of God
Ordinary Universal Episcopal Magisterium

- Infallibly taught
  - When all bishops throughout the world, at any one particular time in history
  - agree on some matter of faith or morals
  - teach it definitively

- “Therefore, by the authority which one Christ conferred upon Peter and his successors, and in communion with the bishops of the Catholic Church, I confirm that the direct and voluntary killing of an innocent human being is always gravely immoral”

Evangelium Vitae
Why not define everything?

- With regards to teaching on morality
  - Morals can be known by all men through their use of reason and the “natural law” written on their hearts
  - The teachings on morality is true for everyone
  - Thus if the Church defined all moral teachings then anyone outside the Church might think these teachings are for Catholics only
Why not define everything?

- With regards to schisms
  - There must be breathing room for those areas that the Church hasn’t come to a fuller understanding of and does not articulate well
  - Hastily defining infallibly the Church’s position on a new subject may result in people causing a schism because they do not understand the new position and think the it is wrong
Why not define everything?

- With regards to ecumenical reasons
  - Ecumenism - Dialogue between faiths
  - Unnecessarily defining teachings could end up having the result of pushing people away from the Church
  - The Eastern Orthodox Church is as close to Catholic as you can get, but they reject the notion that the Pope can be infallible
  - Thus, making *ex cathedra* statements willy nilly would likely deter the Orthodox from coming back into communion with the Church
Why not define everything?

• “But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth” John 16:13
• The Church is on a journey
• The Church has the truth
• The Church needs to grow
What are Disciplines

- Disciplines- the laws prescribed by the Church to aid the Faithfull in living the Faith
- Can change with time and place
  - Pope
    - Bishop Conferences (USCCB)
- Dispensations- the suspension of a discipline
  - Pope
    - Bishops
      - Priests
Discipline

- “[W]e emphasize that our people are henceforth free from the obligation traditionally binding under pain of sin in what pertains to Friday abstinence, except as noted above for Lent” USCCB 1966
  - The Church prescribed not eating meat every Friday
  - The Church no longer prescribes not eating meat every Friday
  - But, the Church still prescribes a penance every Friday
    - The USCCB suggests not eating meat but other penances are permitted
Discipline

- Celibacy of priests
- Not eating an hour before Communion
- Abstinence from meat on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday
- Holy days of obligation
- Receiving Communion
The faithful believe what the Church teaches out of love for God, and out of faith that the teaching of the Church is God's teaching and out of hope for an eternal life with God.

The faithful give reverent obedience to the Church and her teachings while still recognizing the possible error in these non-infallible matters.
Faithful Dissent

3 criteria

- Dissent must be on non-infallible teaching
- The Dissenter must remain faithful to infallible teachings and generally faithful to non-infallible teachings
- The basis for the dissent must come from a teaching of the Magisterium that is more fundamental