

**WHEN DOES THE CHURCH
SPEAK INFALLIBLY? OR, THE
NATURE AND SCOPE OF THE
CHURCH'S TEACHING OFFICE**

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When Does the Church Speak Infallibly? Or, the Nature and Scope of the Church's Teaching Office by Thomas Francis Knox

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THOMAS FRANCIS KNOX

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TEACHING OFFICE.

BY

THOMAS FRANCIS KNOX,

OF THE LONDON ORATORY.

"The Church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth,"—1 Tim. iii. 15.

SECOND EDITION, ENLARGED.



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PREFACE.

THE following pages are addressed to Catholics who, as such, necessarily believe that Christ has provided us in the Church with an infallible teacher. The fact, therefore, of the Church's infallibility as teacher is assumed as the starting-point. But, taking this for granted, various questions, speculative and practical, of the deepest importance naturally suggest themselves, and they must be answered if the Church's teaching office is to become an actual and living reality. Thus, if her teaching is to be of any practical avail to us, we must know what are the organs by which she teaches infallibly, what are the subjects about which her teaching is infallible, what is the mode of her teaching, and what the obligation in conscience that it lays upon us. These are questions which press for an answer. And upon the answer given to them the whole tone of a man's bearing towards the Church and secular science will depend. It seemed, therefore, that a short and connected statement of the Church's teaching on these points would not be useless, especially at the present time, when attention has been more or less directed to this subject. It was under this impression that the following tract was written. It has

no pretensions to be a theological and scientific treatise. But the sole object aimed at has been to present to ordinary readers a brief and simple account of the nature of the Church's office as our infallible teacher, according to her own view of it, and the received doctrine of approved theologians.

THE ORATORY, LONDON,
Trinity Sunday, 1867.

PREFACE TO SECOND EDITION.

THE first edition of this little work was published in the form of a pamphlet. The favourable reception which it has met with, both at home and on the Continent, especially in Italy, where it has lately appeared in an Italian translation, has induced the author to republish it in a more permanent shape. He has added a considerable amount of new matter, and has entirely rewritten the section which treats of the personal infallibility of the Sovereign Pontiff. At the same time he has been careful not to depart from the original design of the work, which was to furnish laymen with a clear and succinct account, free from scholastic terms and disquisitions, of what the Church teaches with regard to her own infallibility.

THE ORATORY, LONDON,
Feast of S. Athanasius, 1870.

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WHEN DOES THE CHURCH SPEAK INFALLIBLY ?

THERE is in every man a natural and instinctive craving after truth, which falsehood as such cannot satisfy. And yet, though truth is the object of the reason, so that nothing but what presents itself as truth can determine an intellectual assent, we are ever prone to mistake the counterfeit for the reality and to content the longings of our souls with cunningly-disguised falsehoods. To err is human, intellectually as well as morally.

Such was not man's state at his creation. By the gift of original justice our first parents in Paradise were incapable of forming an erroneous judgment. Though there were many things of which Adam was ignorant, he knew with absolute certainty the limits of his ignorance, and whatever he did know he knew infallibly. "It was impossible," says S. Thomas, "while the state of innocence lasted, for the understanding of the first man to acquiesce in anything false as true." (Sum. 1 qu. 94, art. 4.)

This blessed privilege of immunity from error, which, according to God's intention, would have been the inheritance of all Adam's race, was lost irrecoverably by the Fall. Man sinned in Adam, and, as a punishment of this