

The Infallible* Pope.*

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Is there any individual Christian, or any Christian institution, which in spite of the teaching of our Lord, lays claim to this divine attribute of being free from error? You all know very well, for it has been brought before you lately in an unusual manner, that such an individual Christian and such a society exist. The Church of Rome, by far the largest body of Christendom, teaches that in the person of the Pope she is infallible, and cannot err in matters of faith and morals. The Romanists have not always agreed on this subject. Some of them have contended that the Pope is infallible; others that Councils are infallible; others that infallibility belongs to Councils with the Pope at their head; others that infallibility is to be found only in the Church at large. These questions do not greatly concern ourselves, who agree with our own Church that no body of fallible men can by a mere sum of addition become infallible. But as the matter has lately been placed before us by the estimable Bishop of Rome itself, it is my duty to bring before you the doctrines of the Church on the subject. The infallibility of the Bishop of Rome was for many centuries an object of traditional opinion; but it was first promulgated as an article of the faith at the Council of the Vatican held under Mastei Ferretti, Bishop of Rome, Pope Pius IX, in 1870.

The facts of history which cry aloud against this extraordinary dogma are numerous and notorious. Many Popes have fallen into heresy. Many Popes have contradicted themselves and each other in their public teaching. Many Popes have exhibited all the works of the flesh and none of the works of the Spirit.

Pope Liberius publicly assented to the Arian heresy, denied the Divinity of our Lord, and cursed Athanasius, the illustrious defender of the faith. Pope Honorius was condemned as a heretic by the sixth, seventh, and eighth General Councils, as well as by Pope Leo II. His successors for three centuries were obliged to profess assent to this condemnation, which was also inserted in the Roman Breviary up to the end of the sixteenth century.

Pope Vigilius, A.D., 540, first approved of certain writings, then condemned them, afterwards defended them, and when excommunicated by the fifth General Council again condemned them. Pope Celestine III. declared that the tie of marriage was dissolved if either party became a heretic. Pope Innocent III., disregarding the infallibility of his predecessor, annulled this decision; and Pope Hadrian VI. styled the infallible Celestine a heretic for giving it.

Listen to Pope Gregory the Great condemning such presumption in a rival Bishop. Writing to the Emperor Maurice of such a claim made by John, Patriarch of Constantinople, before infallibility or universal bishopric was claimed for the Bishop of Rome, he calls him the Prince of Pride, Lucifer's Successor, the Fore-runner of Antichrist. Look at Clement VI. ordering King Dandalus to be tied by the neck with a chain, and to lie flat down before his table, there to gnaw bones like a dog. Look at Pope Alexander III. proudly and contemptuously trampling the Emperor Frederick under his feet, applying to himself the verse of the Psalm, "Thou shalt go upon the lion and the adder; the young lion and the adder shalt thou tread under thy feet." Look at Pope Pascal II. arming and animating the son against the father, causing him to be taken and cruelly fished to death. Look at Pope Boniface VIII., who is described as coming into his popedom like a fox, reigning like a lion and dying like a dog. Look at Pope Hildebrand making the Emperor Henry, with his wife and his young child, stand at the gates of the city in the rough winter, barefooted and barelegged, only clothed in thin garments, eating nothing from morning till night, and that for the space of three days. Look at Pope Julius II. wilfully casting St. Peter's keys into the river Tiber; Pope Urban V. causing five Cardinals to be put into sacks and cruelly drowned; Pope Sergius III. persecuting the dead body of his infallible predecessor Formosus, when it had been buried eight years; or Pope

John XIV., who, having his enemy delivered into his hands, caused him first to be stripped stark-naked, his beard to be shaven, and to be hanged up a whole day by the hair, then to be set on an ass with his face backward toward the tail, to be carried round the city in despite, to be miserably beaten with rods, last of all to be thrust out of his country and to be banished for ever. Look at Pope Leo X. striking a medal and returning thanks in triumph at St. Peter's for the awful massacre of St. Bartholomew, which lasted for eight days and nights in every town and quarter of France, and which shed the best and most Christian blood of that unhappy country. Look at Pope Paul IV. authorizing the burning of the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Bishops of London, Worcester, Gloucester and St. David's and 250 of the truest and noblest Christians in England in the days of that bigoted daughter of an infallible Church who has so justly earned her terrible and everlasting sobriquet.

I do not criticise these mistakes and crimes of poor, erring mortals, especially when they acted as temporal princes in the frightful times of the dark ages, when the Word of God was bound. But I am sure I am expressing an objection, which you all feel in the strongest possible degree, when I refuse to such persons with all my heart and soul and mind and strength the impious title of infallible, the impious claim to be free from error in matters of faith and morals.

We are asked to pray for the reunion of Christendom and we are all eager so to pray. But it must be for a Christendom reformed and purified and humbled after God's own Word. Our ancestors, the Reformers, who had just escaped from the long tyranny of Romish superstition and despotism which had lasted for so many centuries, could not help using language less soft and gentle than that which we should now employ. Still, as a matter of history, if we wish to realize what effect the infallible Church of Rome had exerted upon this country we must listen to it with attention and patience. We need not agree with it, but there it is, solemnly proclaimed by those who had a vital and mortal experience of those days of escape. After enumerating some of such instances of infallibility which I have already mentioned and others also, the authorised homily of the Church of England for Whit Sunday proceeds: "Such were all the Popes and Prelates of Rome for the most part, as doth well appear in the story of their lives; and therefore they are worthily accounted among the number of false prophets and false Christ's which deceived the world a long while. The Lord of heaven and earth defend us from their tyranny and pride, that they never enter into His vineyard again, to the disturbance of His poor silly flock, but that they may be utterly confounded and put to flight in all parts of the world; and He of His great mercy so work in all men's hearts, by the mighty power of the Holy Ghost, that the comfortable Gospel of His Son Christ may be truly preached, truly received, and truly followed in all places, to the beating down of sin, death, the Pope, the Devil, and all the kingdom of Antichrist; that like scattered and dispersed sheep, being at length gathered into one fold, we may in the end rest all together in the bosom of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, there to be partakers of eternal and everlasting life, through the merits and death of Jesus Christ our Saviour."

We may be simple and plain men, but we can see the difference between the teaching of our Lord and His Apostles and the characteristic developments of Roman Christianity. We can pray with all our hearts that Rome may disavow her doctrine of Transubstantiation, her unscriptural Sacraments, her Purgatory, her exaltation of human tradition, her mechanical dogma of validity through the priest's intention, her contradiction of Scripture in her propitiatory sacrifice of the Mass, her invocation of saints, her worship of images and relics, her supremacy of the Bishop of Rome, over the whole of Christendom, her mercenary indulgences, her deification of the Virgin in the dogma of her Immaculate Conception. And before she proceeds to the reform of any of this melancholy catalogue let us ask that she may, by the help of the Holy Spirit, make the gallant struggle and take the preliminary step of abandoning her own and her Pope's infallibility. For this we, who desire reunion must ceaselessly pray.