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## WHAT INFALLIBILITY IS.

### A DOCTRINE OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH CLEARLY DEFINED.

#### The Necessity of an Infallible Teacher Demonstrated—In the Catholic Church Only is this Teacher to be Found—Objections to Infallibility Answered.

The Rev. Father Coupe, S. J., professor of philosophy at Stonyhurst, one Sunday evening recently delivered an able lecture at St. Wilfrid's church, Preston, England, on "Infallibility a Necessary Condition of Faith." Taking as his text, "Without faith it is 6." he said:

Faith is necessary to salvation. Other impossible to please God." (Heb. xi. truths of Christianity may have been obscurely expressed; but about this fundamental doctrine God has left no room for shadow or suspicion of doubt. With terrible clearness Our Lord said: "He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved; he that believeth not shall be condemned," or as the Anglican version reads, "he shall be damned." (Mark, xvi., 16. Faith is absolutely necessary for salvation. St. Paul says in language not to be mistaken: "Without faith it is impossible to please God." Faith is the first direct step to God, for again the same Apostle tells us: "He that approaches to God must believe" that God exists and is a rewarder of such as diligently seek Him."

Faith, then is an essential condition of salvation. Other essential conditions, of course there are—hope, for example, and charity—but the most fundamental is faith. With faith it is possible indeed for a man to be lost, for even "the devils believe and tremble." (James, ii., 19); but without faith it is quite impossible for a man to be saved. A man may be anything you like, a scientist, or orator, a philanthropist, a philosopher, generous, cultured, rich, influential—everything—in a word, that the world admires and esteems; but, without faith one thing assuredly he is not. He is not a Christian. The life of such a man may be a brilliant success, as this present world measures success. But from the standpoint of the future world that man's life is a dismal failure. The world would perhaps canonize him, but God will certainly condemn him. Christ has pledged His word that for such a man there is no salvation. "He that believeth not shall be damned."

What, then, is Faith? Faith, in the general, is the acceptance of a statement solely on the authority of the person who makes it. Hence faith may be either human or divine. When our informant is man, our faith is human. When our informant is God, our faith is divine. Now divine faith is defined by Pope Leo XIII's late Encyclical on the Unity of the church thus: "Faith 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."

Divine faith, therefore, requires the mental assent to be unconditional, unhesitating, unreserved, without suspicion of doubt, absolutely certain. Without absolute certainty you may have a notion, or a view, or a persuasion, or an opinion, or a private judgment, or an inclination to believe, or a willingness to believe; but divine faith you have not. Why not? Because the one motive of faith, the sole reason moving you to believe, is God's word. The cause of divine faith is not human authority, not the teaching of any church, not the consensus of the learned, not the evidence of your senses, not the natural light of reason; but the cause is, God's word, and God's word alone. Now God's authority, the divine word, excludes not only error but the bare possibility of error. To doubt, therefore, even the smallest point of God's revelation, to waver in your belief, to distrust the divine word, is a deadly insult to God. And the reason is clear. For God, the Revealer, can neither deceive nor be deceived. His knowledge is infinite. His veracity is infinite. He is truth itself and cannot deceive. He is truth itself and cannot be deceived.

God's revealed word, then, is the sole motive of divine faith. But what is the object of divine faith? What are the things which for salvation we must believe? Can we count them?

Can we give a list or catalogue of them? Certainly we can. Here again Christ has supplied an answer clear as the noonday sun. He says to His Apostles and to their successors, the bishops and priests of His church (Mt. xxviii., 19-20): "Going . . . teach ye all nations, . . . teaching them to observe"—What?—"teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you. He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved; he that believeth not shall be damned." Hence, as the Encyclical lays down, each and every revealed truth you must accept. You may not exercise your private judgment on the doctrines of Christ; you may not pick and choose as you like; you may not take and leave as you list. Either you are wholly with Christ or wholly against him. "He that is not with Me is against Me; and he that gathereth not with Me, scattereth." (Matt. xii., 30) To doubt the smallest point of the Christian faith is to become a schismatic or a heretic. To call in question one single item of divine revelation is to banish yourself from the bosom of the church. If you hold all other doctrines, but deny Christ's God-head, you are an Arian and a heretic. If you deny the two-fold Nature in Christ, you are a Eutychian and a heretic. And, in like manner, denial of the Trinity makes you a Unitarian and a heretic. Denial of the validity of infant baptism makes you a Baptist and a heretic. Denial of the sufficiency of grace for all men makes you a Calvinist and a heretic. And, finally, though you should profess every jot and tittle of the Catholic faith, except Papal Infallibility, you are a Protestant and a heretic. The first condition, therefore, and the supremely necessary condition for salvation is that you believe, with unflinching certainty, each and every doctrine that God has revealed, and because He has revealed it. "He that believeth not shall be damned." (Mk., xvii., 16.)

Now, are all these revealed truths easy to understand? Are they all within the easy comprehension of the young and the illiterate? Just the reverse. The fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith are utterly beyond the created intellect. They completely baffle the mind of man. They are mysteries. They soar so high above man's mental ken that his natural reason could never, by itself, have argued even to their existence. What heights of sublime metaphysics, too lofty for human eye to scan, rise majestic out of the subtle mystery of the ever peaceful Trinity! What abysses of profound philosophy, too deep for human plummet to fathom, open out to view in the glorious mystery of the Hypostatic Union of the two Natures of Christ under one Divine Personality. In the Holy Sacrament of the Altar, in the dogma of Transubstantiation, in the change of the substance of bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, what stupendous problems dazzle and bewilder the feeble mind of man! Yes, other sciences we can master; but one science there is which created intellect can never sound, which finite mind can never exhaust—the science of Divine Theology, the science of the doctrines taught by Jesus Christ.

How, then, is a man to know what these difficult doctrines are and in what sense they must be understood? Belief in them is necessary for salvation; yet how can we believe them unless we know them? It is evident, therefore, that God Who under pain of eternal damnation exacts belief in these dogmas must have put it within the reach of all, within the easy reach of all, to find out what these dogmas are, and how they must be understood. And this easy method—whatever it be—must be easy for all; easy for the ignorant as well as for the learned, for the poor as well as for the rich, for the child as well as for the adult, for the savage as well as for the civilized man. That God must have provided such an easy way for all is evident, and needs no proof. To question it would be to insult God's goodness.

Moreover, this Divine Teacher, this authority appointed by God to interpret His revelations to all, must be trustworthy beyond the slightest change of error. Such authority must be infallible. Who can doubt this assertion? What man in his senses would challenge it? For if not infallible, such authority might err, and its decision would thus beget, not certainty, but doubt. It might err, and thus its teachings might lead me, not to heaven, but to hell. If this God-appointed teacher were not infallible, God would have exacted from me under pain of eternal damnation, belief without doubt in a teacher who could cause nothing but doubt. If this God-appointed guide were not infallible, God would have exacted from me, under penalty of everlasting fire, implicit trust in a guide whom my rea-

son—my God-given reason—showed me to be utterly unworthy of trust. And, in that case, no power in heaven or on earth should ever induce me to believe. In that case, God would have contradicted Himself and so would have ceased to be God.

So far I have led you, step by step, along a straight and well-trodden path,—a path travelled by every Christian—Catholic or non-Catholic, for all Christians, all who believe in the Bible, are agreed—first, that faith is necessary for salvation; secondly, that faith by its very definition, implies full certainty of all that God has revealed; thirdly, that the fundamental doctrines of Christianity are beyond man's reason; and fourthly, that God has left somewhere in the world an authority competent to inform infallibly even the savage, even the child, what doctrines, to avoid hell and attain heaven, he must believe, and in what sense he must believe them.

We come now to the crucial question, as to what this infallible authority is, and where it is to be found. And at this point, alas, from the well-defined high road, there run off by-paths that lead into bogs and quagmires. Here, alas, we Catholics have to part company with our Protestant brethren. We keep to the plain road which God has laid down for us. They prefer paths of their own making.

Where, then, is this infallible teacher to be found? On the answer to this burning question hinges the whole religious controversy of the day. On the answer to this question hangs the spiritual ruin or salvation of millions. It was to answer this question that the Holy Father, Pope Leo XIII., penned for England his famous Encyclical on "Unity." And it is to elucidate this question that the present course of lectures is directed.

Who, then, is this infallible authority, appointed by God to teach us what doctrines necessary for salvation we are to hold and believe? For the Protestant, this infallible teacher is the Bible interpreted by fallible private judgment. For the Catholic, this infallible teacher is the Bible and tradition interpreted by the infallible voice of the Pope, the Bishop of Rome, the Supreme Pontiff, the successor of St. Peter, Christ's Vicar upon earth.

The essential point at issue, therefore, between Catholic and Protestant lies in a nutshell. Both are agreed that in the Church of God there is an infallible authority to decide doctrinal controversies. Both are agreed that the Bible needs a living voice for its interpretation. But the Protestant holds that living interpreter to be the infallible private judgment of the individual. The Catholic holds that living interpreter to be the infallible Pope of Rome. Which, then, is right, Catholic or Protestant? Which is the final court of appeal, private judgment or Papal Infallibility? This is the momentous question now awaiting an answer.

In a subsequent lecture I shall demonstrate that the Bible, as interpreted by private judgment is not an infallible rule of Faith; that it never can be; and that it was never intended to be. In a subsequent lecture I shall demonstrate that the infallible voice of the Roman Pontiff interpreting Scripture and Tradition is, and was intended by Christ to be, the one unerring guide, teaching with absolute certainty what the Christian, for salvation, must of necessity hold and believe.

During the remainder of this lecture I shall confine myself to the explanation of what is meant by Papal Infallibility—what it is, and especially what it is not.

The dogma of Papal Infallibility means this, that the Pope of Rome, by virtue of a special supernatural assistance of the Holy Spirit, promised to St. Peter and his successors, is not liable to error when, as Supreme Teacher of the Universal Church, he defines a doctrine concerning faith or morals to be held by the whole body of the faithful.

You see, then, what the conditions essential to an infallible decision are. There are many scientific limitations. First, as regards the persons defining, it must be the Pope, not in his private capacity, not merely in his official character, but as supreme teacher. Secondly, as regards the matter defined, it must concern faith or morals. Thirdly, as regards the form of the definition, the judgment must be delivered with the manifest intention of commanding intellectual assent. Fourthly, as regards the persons for whom the definition is given, they must be the whole body of the faithful, the Church Universal.

Now I dare say some one here is smiling in his own soul and whispering to himself: "This Jesuit is a

mighty cunning fellow. He is plausible enough while he keeps to the abstract, the vague, the unpractical, the philosophical. But I think I could pose him with one or two practical difficulties." Wait a bit, my friend—I shall be practical enough before I have done—I think I know what your difficulties are. From reading many non-Catholic books, and discussing the question with many non-Catholic friends I think I may claim to be pretty well acquainted with non-Catholic objections to Infallibility.

Here is one of them. Suppose during your summer holidays you were to travel to Rome and were to ask the Pope's opinion, let us say, about South African politics, or about Bimetallism, or about Sunday Closing, or about the Income Tax, or the Death Dues, or the Preston Docks, or the relative merits of English and Australian mutton, or whether a certain well-advertised patent medicine really is worth a guinea a box, would not the Pope's answer (you ask), on these points, if he gave an answer, be infallible? Most assuredly not. The Pope knows less about many of these things than you do. The Pope is only infallible when, among other conditions, he treats of faith or morals; and the points you have touched on concern neither faith nor morals.

Here is a second and very common Protestant difficulty. Suppose, during this same tour to Rome, you heard the Pope preach in St. Peter's on some question relating to faith or morals. And you did not agree with the preacher's view; and you wrote to him to say so. And the Holy Father condescended to reply to you in a private letter. You ask again: "Would not such a sermon and such letter have to be considered infallible? Not a bit of it. The Pope in his private capacity, even when treating of faith and morals, is no more infallible than you are. It is only when the Pope speaks as Pope, that is, "ex cathedra," officially, judicially, as interpreter of God's revelation, as Vicar of Christ, as addressing the Universal church—it is only then that he speaks infallibly.

Here is a third and equally common objection. How can the Pope, it is asked, be infallible since he is a poor, weak man like ourselves? To claim that the Pope is free from the possibility of error—is it not to arrogate to a creature a prerogative of the Creator alone? Is it not to give a man what belongs only to God?

Well, this argument proves a little too much. The objector must first solve his own difficulty before he can urge it against us. For you admit that St. Peter was infallible; yet was not he a poor weak man like ourselves? You admit that St. Paul was infallible; yet was not he a weak man like ourselves? You admit that all the Apostles were infallible; yet were they not they all poor, weak men like ourselves. Yet if infallibility was a reasonable gift to the Vicar of Christ in the first century, why is it not also a reasonable gift to the Vicar of Christ in the Nineteenth century?

This objection would perhaps be sound if infallibility were defined as a natural gift belonging to the Pope, not as Pope, but as man. But the gift of infallibility is supernatural, bestowed by Christ on Peter and his successors only as Vicars of Christ and only as visible Heads of the Church of Christ.

And now for a fourth objection, the commonest and best known, and pardon me if I add, the most absurd of all. Non-Catholics ask how the Pope can be infallible since all men are liable to sin. It is difficult not to laugh at such a question, yet I have again and again read this argument in non-Catholic circles. The objection of course confuses infallibility with impeccability. Infallibility, that is, freedom from liability to teach error, is confounded with impeccability, that is, freedom from liability to practise error. John the Baptist, who while yet unborn God confirmed in grace, was impeccable but not infallible. The Roman Pontiff is infallible but not impeccable. The two gifts are as different as water is different from wine, or as fire from snow, or as the North Pole from the South. The two gifts are different both in meaning and in purpose. Infallibility is for the benefit of the church. Impeccability is for the benefit of the individual. Infallibility is an official gift. Impeccability is a private gift. Among the 258 Popes who have sat in Peter's chair, most have been holy men, many have been glorious saints; but a few—a very few—you can count them on the fingers of one hand—have been, alas, a scandal to the church and a stumbling block to the faithful. But how did their evil life touch the question of their infallibility? Infallibility excludes error in the interpretation of

the law. Impeccability excludes error in the observance of the law. You might as well argue that Judas the Apostate had no supernatural gifts because he was a traitor to God. You might as well argue that David the inspired Psalmist had no supernatural gifts because he was an assassin and an adulterer. Must a barrister be a bad interpreter of the law if he sometimes fails to observe the law? Must a barrister be a bad interpreter of the law if he fails to sometimes observe the law? Must a lawyer be a bad lawyer if he be convicted of assault and battery? The fact is that infallibility in no sense depends on the Pope's personal qualities, but on the promise and assistance of God who can choose the foolish things of the world to confound the wise and weak things of the world to confound the strong. And thus Our Lord warned His followers to distinguish between the official acts and the personal unworthiness of His ministers when He said: "The Scribes and Pharisees sit in the chair of Moses. All things, therefore, whatsoever they shall say to you, observe and do; but according to their works do ye not." (Mt. xxiii., 2). Their "ex-cathedra" decisions were good and so commanded obedience, their personal lives were bad and so called for reprobation.

Lastly, it is objected that Papal Infallibility is a new doctrine; that it was only defined by the Vatican Council in 1871; and that it is, therefore, an addition to "the faith once delivered to the saints." (St. Jude, i., 3.)

To this I reply that once again the objection proves too much. Once again the objector must solve his own difficulty before he can urge it against us. The Divinity of Christ was not defined until the Council of Nice in 325. Was that doctrine therefore new? The oneness of person in Christ was not defined until the Council of Ephesus in 431. Was that doctrine, therefore, new? The immortality of the human soul was not defined until the Fifth Council of Lateran in 512. Was that doctrine, therefore, new? The dogma of a personal God was not defined until the Vatican Council in 1870. Was that doctrine, therefore, new? If the definition of Infallibility by the Vatican Council proved Infallibility to be new, then the definition of those other dogmas proved them also to be new. And, on the other hand, if definition did not make those dogmas new, neither did it make Infallibility new.

A smattering of theology is enough to reveal the absurdity of this oft-repeated objection. For it is the common teaching of the Catholic church that neither Pope nor Council can, by even so much as one jot or tittle, add to or take from "the faith once delivered to the saints."

The office of the Infallible Church is that of Witness, Guardian and Interpreter of Divine Revelation; and nothing more. The Vatican Council (Constit. dogmat. prima de Eccles. cap. 4) declared the sole purpose of Infallibility to be the faithful discharge of this three-fold trust. The Deposit of faith is fixed and immutable. No new truth of revelation has been given us since the death of St. John the Evangelist. Hence every doctrine since defined was always of divine faith and had from the beginning to be at least implicitly believed. Every time a primitive Christian in the first ages of the church said: "I believe all that God has revealed," he implicitly believed every dogma which has since been defined, Infallibility among the rest. But an ex-cathedra definition proposes the doctrine for our explicit belief, since it sets the truth before our minds in clear and express terms. After the definition the dogma defined is not only of Divine but also of Catholic faith.

Consequently the Vatican Council in defining Infallibility did not create this truth but merely proclaimed Infallibility to be a truth revealed by Christ.

The Vatican Council in its definition of Papal Infallibility no more created a new truth than Sir Isaac Newton in his enunciation of the law of gravitation created a new truth. The definition of any doctrine by Pope or Council is no more a new doctrine than the decision on a point of law by a Supreme Court of Judicature is a new law; the latter interprets an existing Act of Parliament; the former interprets an existing revelation.

And now, in conclusion, let us test the rival theories of infallibility and private judgment by an appeal to the facts. Faith is necessary for salvation, and certainty is necessary for faith. Have Protestants this certainty? Will any Protestant say he is certain of the views he happens to hold in religion? One Protestant affirms the Trinity in Unity; another denies it.

(Continued on page 8).