

The Papal System – XXV. Papal Infallibility And The Council of 1870



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OF all the vain delusions ever darting through the disordered minds of lunatics, or the sober intellects of wise men, nothing quite equals the insane doctrine of papal infallibility. Its promulgation in the nineteenth century is a miracle, an event as much beyond the laws of mind, of common sense, as the resurrection of Lazarus, when four days dead, was an occurrence beyond the laws of nature.

What is the Infallibility of the Pope?

Archbishop Manning quotes with approval the definition of infallibility given by Liguori:

"When the pope speaks as universal doctor, *ex cathedra* (from the seat), that is, by the supreme authority to teach the Church, delivered to Peter, in deciding controversies of faith and morals, *he is altogether infallible.*"

Perhaps a more distinct definition of the dogma is given by Bishop Cornelio Musso, of Bitonto, in a sermon preached in Rome, in which he says: "What the pope utters we must receive as though spoken by God himself. In divine things we hold him to be God; in matters of faith I had rather believe one pope than a thousand Augustines, Jeromes, or Gregories."

This is precisely what is meant by the infallibility of the pope, though it is not commonly so frankly expressed. To err is human, is an attribute of all humanity, but in the concerns of faith and morals his Holiness does not err, therefore, in these relations he is God.

The Absurdity of Infallibility in the light of Biography.

Pope John XII., a youthful pontiff, reigned A.D. 956; he perjured himself,

And when the Emperor sent ambassadors to inquire into his treachery, the Romans informed them that he carried on a criminal intimacy with Rainera, a soldier's widow, and that he presented her with crosses and chalices belonging to St. Peter's, and the government of several cities; that he protected another lady, named Stephanie, who lately died in childbirth; that he lived in the Lateran palace with a sister of Stephanie, one of his father's ladies; that women were afraid to visit the tombs of the apostles at Rome; and that within a few days he had employed violence to married women, widows, and virgins. This was the character of infallible John, who could not err in morals.

Benedict IX. became pope at eighteen, in A.D. 1033, A faction in Rome, unable to bear the daily rapines, murders and abominations of the young pope, compelled him to leave that city. And that he might indulge in debauchery with less shame, he sold the popedom to John, who succeeded him as Victor II. This young monster was infallible. Innocent VIII. became Pope of Rome A.D. 1484. Of his infallible power to decide on questions of morals we may learn from the fact, that he was the father of teen children without the benedictions of matrimony.

Alexander VI. became pope A.D. 1492. He was the most untruthful and treacherous man in public or private life, in the priesthood or in the penitentiary, Europe supported. He was cruel beyond almost any other assassin of his own or other times; he was the most licentious and foul creature whose deeds history records and stigmatizes. Incest, poisonings, odious uncleanness, and murders were the blessings Alexander gave as his papal benediction to his friends. His name "Borgia," in whose infamy his son Caesar and his daughter Lucretia shared, is now in every land the favorite designation of the most deadly poisoner; and that because of *infallible* Alexander and his precious children.

There have been good and kind men popes of Rome; but there have been many of another sort; men whose company would be an insult to Judas, and whose infallibility in faith and morals is too ridiculous to be discussed.

Catholics as a Church never received the Doctrine till 1870.

Many of the leading men in the Church of Rome have utterly repudiated papal infallibility. The learned Catholic, Du Pin, speaking of the fourth century, says: "The Church of Rome, founded by St. Peter and St. Paul, was considered as the first, and its bishop as the first amongst all the bishops of the world; yet they did *not believe him to be infallible*; and though they frequently consulted him, and his advice was of great consequence, yet they did not receive it blindfold and implicitly, every bishop imagining himself to have a right to judge in ecclesiastical matters." The Bishop of Rome could give no laws to other prelates, he could offer advice. Every ancient bishop had the same authority over his flock, which the pope had over his.

Constance and Papal Infallibility.

The Synod of Constance assembled in A.D. 1414; and among its decrees is this memorable one:

"Every lawfully convoked Ecumenical Council representing the the Church, derives its authority immediately from Christ, and every one, the pope included, is subject to it in matters of faith, in the healing of schism, and in the reformation of the Church." This decree was passed unanimously. And to show the meaning of the decree and the infallibility of the pontiff, Pope John XXIII., a very base man, was deposed by the council, and Martin V. elected his successor. So far from being infallible, the Pope was subject to the council in faith and morals, in office and in punishment.

According to Archbishop Manning, in the late Vatican Council, eighty bishops spoke on the general question of which papal infallibility was the main point, and *nearly forty* of these were what the newspapers termed the opposition. "The proportion of the opposition to the council," says he, "*was not more than one sixth.*" If this statement is true, it shows that about one hundred and fifteen bishops did not believe in the new dogma.

Infallibility was the darling scheme of the sovereign pontiff; for years he and his instruments, in every quarter of the world, had been advocating it, by flatteries, promotions, and frowns. His influence with clergy and laity was immense. The council is held under his own eye in Rome, where threatenings, favors, and crafty persuasions, and the perils of excommunication can play such a mighty part. Besides, only the few have sufficient independence to come out against power; and in the face of danger. From these facts it is reasonable to suppose that the council held elsewhere would have shown a majority against infallibility. But on the archbishop's own admission one-sixth of the council were against it. And these we may add, were among the ablest men in the Catholic Church.

The majority at the end of the eighty speeches closed the general discussion; the archbishop feels that this was a step to be excused, and he says: "Most reasonably the council closed the general discussion." Evidently the opposition were powerful and troublesome, and the archbishop might have had a different opinion of the reasonableness of ending the general discussion if he had not been the most active instrument of the aged pontiff and his Jesuitical advisers in the Council of 1870. One hundred and fifty bishops petitioned the president to have the debate ended; the question was put to the vote, and carried by an overwhelming majority."

Then speeches might be made on each one of the five parts of the decree; and upon the last, one hundred and twenty inscribed their names to speak, but when fifty of them were heard the discussion terminated, The archbishop says it was from "sheer exhaustion." Perhaps it was. Those who do not like addresses are easily wearied with them; no doubt the pope and his friends would rather have had the decree ratified by the synod without an opposition speech. But it would be a greater miracle than the infallibility of Rodrigo Borgia, the patron saint of the poisoners, to discover seventy men so anxious to speak on a question, that they record their names and wishes in the proper place; and then, without uttering a word, these ready men, from sheer exhaustion in hearing others, bury their kindled and flashing light.

In measuring the opposition, we are attracted by the archbishop's words: "In a period of nine months the cardinal president was compelled to recall the

speakers to order perhaps twelve or fourteen times." Bishops are commonly grave men, not inclined to violent outbursts of anger in clerical convocations. It is not to be presumed that the cardinal president would call his own section of the council to order, unless indeed there was unusual need for it. Those called to order were the determined men, whom neither frowns nor favors could silence. The cause must have been very dear to a bishop when, before hundreds of his brethren, he would place himself in a position to be publicly rebuked.

Perhaps the archbishop observed every instance of violated propriety, and carefully noted it down. He admits that the ruling of the president was occasionally greeted with "audible murmurs of dissent: that now and then a comment may have been made aloud; and that in a very few instances expressions of strong disapproval, and of exhausted patience at length escaped."

But without doubting the archbishop's veracity, and remembering that he, as the ablest prelate of the pope, is showing the most flattering view of the case, we are driven to the conclusion that infallibility was not a pleasant dose in the Vatican Council. Elsewhere he admits that it was a "Doctrine which for centuries had divided both pastors and people, the defining of which (by a council) was contested by a numerous and organized opposition." Infallibility in the pope, as a church doctrine, is the latest novelty in the papal system, and one against which many of the sons of Rome protested most loudly.

The Doctrine has been often proved False.

The Sixth General Council, which met at Constantinople, A.D. 680, in its 17th action condemned Pope Honorius as a heretic: "They all exclaimed anathema to the heretic Honorius!" Archbishop Manning attempts to defend Honorius, by asserting that his case is doubtful; that Honorius defined no doctrine; that he prohibited the making of any new definition; that his fault precisely was in this omission of apostolic authority, and that his two epistles are entirely orthodox. Let us suppose that these assertions are true; then the Sixth General Council, led by the Holy Spirit, as Catholics suppose, made a false decree about Honorius. If that is admitted, it follows that we have no evidence, that Catholics have none, to prove that the Vatican Council has not made a false decree about the infallibility of Pius IX. The Sixth Council surely condemned Honorius as a heretic. If its judgment was just, no pope is infallible. If that council was mistaken, so may the Vatican Council of last year have been mistaken; and therefore that council gives no proof by its decree of the pope's infallibility. Nor is its decision, or the vote of any other council competent testimony to prove the truth of any doctrine, The archbishop may take either conclusion.

Vigilius, Bishop of Rome, in the sixth century, according to Du Pin, was not popular with his people because he was a usurper, being the cause of the death of their lawful bishop; they charged him with killing his secretary with a blow of his fist, and with whipping the son of his sister till he died. This precious pope showed his infallibility in matters of faith by opposing first, "the condemnation of the Three Chapters, which was resolved

upon in the Fifth Council; he suffered himself to be banished rather than subscribe to it; but guided by his own caprice or interest, he quickly condemned them, after an authentic manner, that he might return into Italy." It would take the shrewdest follower of the hero of Pampeluna to show that Vigilus was infallible. And as the destruction of one link in the cable sends the ship from her anchor, so the existence of one pope like Honorius or Vigilus shows the utter untruthfulness of infallibility in matters of faith or morals.

THE GREAT VATICAN COUNCIL OF 1870.

This body assembled in Rome, representing thirty nations. It was composed at first of 767 bishops. The synod received a printed paper containing the subject under discussion, a copy of which was given to every bishop; eight or ten days were allowed for suggestions in writing upon the printed topic; these observations were handed to a committee of twenty-four, who incorporated them in the Schema, or not, according to their pleasure. The text so amended, if the twenty-four changed it, or in its original form, was then proposed for general examination and debate. Every bishop might speak till the president called him to order. The previous question might be called for by the petition of ten fathers.

The first constitution, "On Faith," received the votes of 664 bishops. The second, involving Infallibility, was put to the vote on the 13th of July, and eighty-eight votes were cast against it. On the 18th of July, 1870, it was put on its final passage, and only two bishops recorded their disapprobation of the measure. The Schema is entitled

First dogmatic Constitution on the Church of Christ.

The first chapter declares the primacy of the Church to be Peter's.

The second asserts that this primacy is perpetuated in the Roman Pontiffs.

The third makes it to mean that the pope is teacher and master of all Christians.

The fourth is on the infallible teaching of the pontiff. The only portion of the chapter of any consequence is at the end of it, where it proclaims

THE INFALLIBILITY OF THE POPE.

"We therefore, faithfully adhering to the tradition received from the beginning of the Christian faith, for the glory of God our Saviour, the exaltation of the Catholic religion, and the salvation of Christian people, the sacred council giving its sanction, teach and define, that it is a dogma divinely revealed, that the Pope of Rome, when he speaks *ex cathedra*, that is, when discharging the duty of pastor and teacher of all Christians, he defines a doctrine, by his supreme apostolical authority, either about faith or morals to be held by the universal Church, by the divine assistance, promised him in blessed Peter, is possessed of that infallibility, by which the divine Redeemer wished his Church to be instructed in defining doctrines about faith or morals:

therefore definitions of the Roman Pontiff of this description are of themselves irreformable, and not from the consent of the Church.

“But if any one shall presume to contradict this definition of ours, which may God avert; let him be accursed.

“Given at Rome in public session solemnly held in the Vatican Basilica, in the eighteen hundred and seventieth year of our Lord’s incarnation, on the eighteenth day of July in the twenty-fifth year of our Pontificate.

In conformity with the original.

Joseph, Bishop of S. Polten,
Secretary of the Vatican Council.”

What will this Dogma accomplish ?

If it carries out the intentions of its friends it will coerce the minds of men “into subjection to every papal pronouncement in matters of religion, morals, politics, and social science.” And if the doctrine is fully received, it can have no other result. It is designed as far as possible to repeal the decree of the Father investing Jesus Christ with all power in heaven and upon *earth*, and to confer the terrestrial empire of Immanuel upon his Holiness. What human beliefs and actions cannot be easily ranged under the categories of “faith and morals?” It might be easily said that certain political opinions are immoral, that certain occupations, or some methods of conducting all transactions are immoral. Morality, or its opposite, like breathing and the life of a human body, is inseparable from every sane action of human existence. This decree, investing the pope with what he never had, and with what the council approving of it, never saw in him, and with what it did not possess to bestow on him or on any one else, **really gave the pope authority to enter the souls of all under his dominion and regulate their beliefs; and to interfere in the whole transactions of life whenever he was so disposed and could compel obedience, under the pretense that the interest of morals demanded it.**

It abolished the authority of the ancient fathers, and the claims of all other competitors of primitive or of modern times for the empire of conscience; and it handed over the soul in chains to the infallible old man, tottering on the verge of eternity, on the banks of the Tiber. It has annihilated the legislative power of the Catholic Church. Hitherto, in councils, Romish bishops were the supreme legislature of their Church; led in all their decisions, as they imagined, by the Spirit, they made canons and laws for popes and nations which pontifical authority could not change. Now the pope is infallible, and there will be no farther need to call them from the ends of the earth for canon and decree making. Other motives will bring them together, if they ever assemble again, than demands for sacred legislation.

The pope is infallible only when, as the pastor and teacher of Christians, he speaks *ex cathedra*, that is, when he addresses some bull to the faithful. And

every such document in the past, as well as all similar missives in the future, must be regarded as infallible.

Paul IV. issued *ex cathedra* the bull *cum ex apostolatus officio*, in which he asserts that as God's representative on earth he has full authority over nations and kingdoms; that he judges all and can be judged by none; that all princes, monarchs and bishops, as soon as they fall into heresy, are irrevocably deposed and incur sentence of death; that none may venture to give any aid to a heretical prince, even the mere services of common humanity; any monarch who renders such help forfeits his dominions and property. This bull was issued in A.D. 1558; it was subscribed by the cardinals, and afterwards confirmed and renewed by Pius V. That is an infallible document now. **The pope has authority over all nations and kings; monarchs are worthy of death for adopting Protestantism; and those who assist them are condemned to lose everything!**

The popes never relinquish anything, Their coral rocks always grow. The claims of their infallibility would lead them, had they the power, to dethrone modern kings; to burn the successors of John Huss and Jerome of Prague; to dig up and consign to the flames the bones of our modern Wycliffes; to cast, the Bible into the fire; to destroy the liberty of the press; the freedom of conscience, the worship of Protestants, and every other obstacle to the triumph of priestly despotism. Infallibility means an unparalleled *mental, moral, material and universal tyranny*—a despotism only limited by the rising manhood of Catholic laymen, and the invincible power of that heaven-armed gospel destined to bathe the world in floods of glory, and cleanse it from all apostasy and paganism.

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