

INFALLIBILITY

1. I am doubtful whether this is a category which can properly be applied to Divine Revelation or to any agents or reagents who are concerned with it on the human side. Divine Revelation can most properly be described as a Divine self-disclosure involving in normal circumstances human agents and is therefore more correctly approached under personalist than propositional categories though obviously propositions are inevitably involved. On the side of the human reagent it hardly appears, whether in the Bible or in General Council or in the Papacy, as if infallibility, however sparingly diagnosed or carefully defined, is an attribute even of God-aided humanity. It appears to be a category mistake unless it is taken either as an ideal limit for Christian Truth, or an honorific qualifier what is regarded as specially authoritative in Christian doctrine. Even so it is not happily chosen. Revelation can be described as authoritative, as compelling or convincing ; it seems inappropriate to describe it as infallible.

2. Since Revelation is transmitted through human agencies it must be described not simply as God's self-Revelation but as God's Revelation through man. This inevitably introduces a limiting and conditioning factor which is the price paid for a Revelation of God to creatures within history. Revelation can still be authoritative but the rubrication of infallibility is not a natural description even of a supernatural reality which is transmitted under these conditions. It is so with the Bible where we have come to realise more fully in the past hundred years the truth of the passage 'Holy men of old spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit' of which both halves must of course be emphasized but the correlation with infallibility seems hard either to make or apply. Similarly it would be hard to deny that one expression (some would say 'the expression') of the Church's doctrinal authority is expressed through General Councils but here again the existence of historical, theological and even philosophical contexts must be fully recognised. The state of the question at a given period, the balance of forces in the Church at the time and the philosophical terms and forms available and employed must be given due weight. Few would deny the authority of the General Councils particularly in the great formative period of the Church when Catholic togetherness in consultation was a

reality, but infallibility once again appears to be the wrong term to apply. The Anglican Article states roundly that 'General Councils may err' and many would still maintain that infallibility is the wrong term to use to express their authority.

3. Papal Infallibility raises a particular instance to which these general principles are applicable. It is not clear that this is expressly promised or implicit in Scripture. The promise that the Spirit will guide the Church into all truth does not state or imply one particular rubrication of Christian Truth. Its reliability, compelling or convincing nature, above all its divine origination and authority can be described without recourse to the concept of infallibility. The promise that the gates of Hades shall not prevail against the Church seems to have more to do with its indefectibility or permanence and ultimate triumph in and with Christ than with infallibility strictly taken. The variations in the Patristic exegesis of this verse may be noted. Nor do the other special promises to St. Peter recorded in the Gospels point plainly in this direction. The restoration to the apostolic office in John xxi if it is compared with the Synoptic account of his denial is significant here. A similar context is strongly suggested in Luke xxii, 32 'When thou art converted strengthen thy brethren' which plainly has St. Peter's impending denial in mind. The same Greek verb is used by St. Paul in Romans 1, 11 and of Timothy in 1 Thessalonians 3,2 and combined with an intensive preposition in Acts 14, 22; 15, 32 and 15, 41. These facts do not suggest a Petrine peculiar demonstrable from Scripture.

Nor again does it appear to fall under the Vincentian Canon of Catholicity (*Quod semper, quod ubique quod ab omnibus*). It might be argued that this can successfully be handled under the principle of the development of doctrine. St. Cyprian has no inkling of a special prerogative here in his controversy with Pope Stephen. The East turns a blind eye to the Roman signals except when Papal support is particularly required and when the diplomatic language appropriate to the occasion is employed. The Chalcedonian Fathers acclaim 'Peter has spoken through Leo' but that did not preclude them from moving towards a settlement of the christological question on lines other than those which Pope Leo was known to favour. If Papal Infallibility on whatever terms was current at the period then

it seems as if there is a missing dimension in the development of doctrine as matters actually worked out. Granted the principle of development of doctrine it is strange that a doctrine which is not so much one of a galaxy of doctrines but a fundamental ground for all doctrine (potentially if not actually) was so late in making its appearance.

4. The context and limits of the dogma of Papal Infallibility are familiar enough. Vatican I was primarily anti-Gallican and anti-liberal in context. The Ultramontanes (including W. G. Ward outside the Council and Cardinal Manning within it) were anxious for a maximalist definition; indeed the last minute addition of non ex consensu ecclesiae to the positive ex sese is said to have emanated from Manning. Absolute infallibility belongs only to God and what is predicated of the **P**ope is a relative infallibility. It is related to his magisterium, his role as the **g**uide of the faithful and judge in controversies. It extends only to the spheres of faith and morals and then only when he speaks ex cathedra. Vatican II reaffirmed the dogma but set it in the context of collegiality and views it rather as a function of the infallibility of the Church. The general drift of Vatican II is clearly not at all in the direction of the non ex consensu ecclesiae. The phrase remains but the new context tends to neutralise it.

Obviously faith and morals are wise and meaningful restrictions but their precise limits remain unclear. Thus the incident in Galatians ii (where of course no ex cathedra pronouncement is concerned) is usually interpreted as a **m**atter of discipline but like all cases of apartheid it involves matters of faith and morals as well. The Pauline letters indicate this clearly enough. The limits of ex cathedra pronouncements are not altogether clear to non-Catholics although presumably an express statement to this effect is of the essence. It is, I believe, tenable (?official) Roman Catholic teaching that two/three infallible pronouncements have been made - the Dogma of the Immaculate Conception, the Dogma of Papal Infallibility and the Dogma of the Assumption. Are the attendant circumstances of all three precisely the same and does it matter if they are not? The first antedated the definition of the Dogma, the second was attended by a Council (Vatican I), the third (so far as I know) was not attended by a Council. It is certain that Vatican II did not add to ex cathedra decisions. However strange

the content of all three dogmas may be to many non-Catholics? It is recognised that none of them were innovations and that in at least two of the cases far less was included in the definition than many wished. What sometimes puzzles a non-Catholic is the status of other doctrines such as those of the Trinity and the Incarnation which have not been the subjects of ex cathedra pronouncements (though obviously and historically with Papal concurrence) and which appear to him more basic and fundamental than the dogmas actually promulgated by this ex cathedra means. Is the doctrine intended to define one particular means of establishing Christian Truth or does it add a dimension to Christian Truth or a particular cachet to dogmas established by this means? In other words what (if anything) was lost by the centuries before the definition or what has been gained by the century after its promulgation by way of the truth claim of Christian doctrine? If the criterion is formal it might be expected that earlier and more basic doctrines would be so rubricated, if it is material, then many non-Catholics find the doctrines so pronounced at least marginal and peripheral. And assurances of what is excluded by the non ex consensu ecclesiae would be welcome in view at least of the contrary slanting of Vatican II.

5. A practical difficulty (though not arising from the contemporary application of the dogma) may be pointed. We have already seen the thrust at Vatican I for a maximalist instead of a minimalist interpretation. Does this still exist and what is its strength in practice? It is appreciated that Papal Encyclicals are invested with a high degree of authority but are not technically infallible. But what of Apostolicae Curiae which touches Anglicans rarely but which is described as 'theologically irreformable'? Francis Clark in his book on Anglican Orders and the Defect of Intention writes of the exercise of the practical infallibility of the Pope. What does this mean and how is it related to infallibility as formally defined? Some non-Catholics may fear what may be called without offence 'creeping infallibility'. Is this fear real and how is it handled in practice?

6. The dogma of Papal Infallibility remains therefore a considerable difficulty on the Anglican side.

(i) For many the whole concept of infallibility in whatever context it is found and however it is channelled appears to be a category mistake or an

inappropriate use of terms.

(ii) For many the Scriptural and Patristic evidence adduced in its support is not conclusive.

(iii) The value of the doctrines which have been defined by this means seem to be marginal or questionable.

(iv) While the new context of Vatican II seems to provide a more acceptable interpretation than that provided by Vatican I it is difficult to see how it could be rephrased in a way which would allow both Roman Catholics and Anglicans to accept it with integrity. Obviously however neither side is thinking about it the whole time either positively or negatively.

(v) I can only think of one olive branch which may be a complete will of the wisp. This Anglican is quite used to living in a situation in which he lives quite happily in the same household of faith with those who disagree with him and with whom he disagrees. He would not find it impossible to be in communion with those who held the dogma or the dogmas defined by its means provided that they were not required of him either in practice or de fide. Anglican charity or Anglican indifference? Possibly both. After all St. Cyprian in a pre-Reformation and pre-Vatican I situation did write salvo jure communionis diversa sentire.

H. E. W. Turner