

THE THEORY OF THE PAPACY.

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THE Roman Empire fell to pieces before the incursions of the barbarians. The Church survived the fierce storms that raged during the fifth century. Institutions decayed and the State was ready to perish. The Church felt the necessity for strengthening every bond of outward union—if even she were to survive. Truth is one, it was asserted, and as it must bind into one body all who hold it, so it is only by continuing in that body that its members can preserve it. There is one Flock and one Shepherd. From this position the transition to the view that the Pope is the Shepherd is an easy one. Then comes the next step. The Shepherd must be not able to commit a single mistake. To Christians it must seem not a little strange to be told that there is anyone infallible. For if there is such a guide, what need is there of a Bible? It is certainly, under the circumstances, superfluous. What, for instance, becomes of such a promise as that which tells us that when the Holy Spirit shall come, He shall guide you into all truth? Plainly, His function is also superfluous, for there is another revealer who aspires to lead us into the truth. Even granting that there is anyone who has grasped all the truth, there is the further difficulty that ordinary mortals cannot understand the truth presented to them in such an encyclopædic fashion. In his famous story, Lessing imagined that he was offered the choice between truth and the pursuit of truth. "If God held all truth," said Lessing in memorable words, "in His right hand, and in His left nothing but an ever-restless striving after truth, though with the condition of for ever and ever erring, and should say to me, 'Choose!' I would bow reverently to His left hand, and say, 'Father, give! Pure truth is for Thee alone!'"

Anyone who has worked at first-hand in any field of knowledge is well aware that it is only through the struggle for truth that truth becomes comprehended. Take a case in point. It is perfectly possible for a skilled metaphysician to present to his class the main results of the creative thought of Kant. It can be put in a series of propositions. Does any man think, for the thousandth part of a second, that this series of propositions is what Kant has done for men? Of course not. We all know quite well that if we want to understand Kant we must grapple with such of his books as "The Critique of Pure Reason." As we read it, as we ponder it, it gradually becomes our own because it is by the pursuit of truth that we can in any wise take hold of it. An infallible Church or an infallible Pope would constitute one of the gravest menaces to which truth has ever been exposed. If either could decisively settle Pilate's question, then the intellectual travail of

our life is finished. It seems to us that behind the conception of infallibility there lies concealed the old Greek notion that there was once, in the island of Atlantis, or elsewhere, a condition of the human mind when truth had been completely attained. The most that men can do now, according to the Greeks, is to regain some of the old knowledge they once completely possessed. Seneca saw the folly of this idea, though it was reserved for the scientist to dispose of it altogether. There is new knowledge which none of our forefathers had ever heard of. This is as true a statement in the world of theology as it is in the world of science.

Patristic evidence lends no support to the dogma of papal infallibility. The Fathers read their Bible with diligence, and, as the outcome of their reading, they were convinced that there was no external authority which could protect them from all error. In truth, any infallible guide presupposes also a people who cannot possibly make a mistake in understanding any message he gives. This is a point that is sometimes overlooked, yet it is an important point. Besides, if we profess faith in the infallibility of the Church or anyone else, we are in reality professing faith in our own infallibility. Take a case. If we are asked to join the Church of Rome on the ground that it is the true Church, it is obvious that our reason must balance the arguments for and against such a course. If we can trust our reason to make such a momentous decision as deciding on the infallibility of the Pope, surely we can trust our reason to arrive at any decision. So long as man lives, he must continue in the everlasting search for truth. It is at once his glory and his torment. No one, however, who cares whole-heartedly for the truth can wish it were otherwise. In a striking aphorism S. T. Coleridge put the matter: "He who begins by loving Christianity better than Truth, will proceed by loving his own sect or Church better than Christianity, and end in loving himself better than all." If ever there was an illustration of this aphorism, it is in the Roman Catholic Church. For she began by loving Christianity better than truth, and to-day she loves the papacy more than either truth or Christianity. The Pope claims an absolute monarchy within the Church upon earth. What, then, becomes of the Headship of Christ? Is He not practically deposed from His place? As the late H. D. Traill put it: "The Pope seems to claim to be the Vicar of Christ in the sense that a man is said to be the vicar of his own curate."

In the quest of truth many a man is tempted to fall back on the a priori idea of what manner of revelation God ought to have made. Men, he argues, seek for truth, and seek for a certainty of truth. Therefore there must be, argues men like Möhler, a sure guide to the most valuable of all truths, the truth of religion. Though Bishop Butler published his "Analogy" more than a century and a half ago, it is not a whit out of date. "As we are in no sort judges beforehand," he wisely tells us, "by what laws or rules, or in what degree or by what means it were to have been expected that God would naturally instruct us; so upon supposition of His

affording us light and instruction by revelation, additional to what He has afforded us by reason and experience, we are in no sort judges by what methods, and in what proportion it were to be expected that this supernatural light and instruction would be afforded us." History points to case after case where this mistake has been committed. The Jews were certain "by what methods" the Messiah would come to them. He would come as a great conqueror, they were persuaded, and the result was that when He actually arrived they were so blinded by preconceived ideas that they could not see Him. Roman Catholicism is certain "by what methods" God would reveal His purpose to mankind. If He gave us a revelation recorded in a book, He would undoubtedly grant us an authorized interpreter of it. How truth would have suffered if He had done so!

Not the least remarkable circumstance in the declaration of the infallibility of the Pope is that it was not officially certified to exist till the year 1870. Through countless heresies, we are asked to believe, the Church was able to exist, and only when she reached comparatively calm waters was an infallible pilot vouchsafed to her. We are so forcibly reminded of Samuel Johnson's letter to Lord Chesterfield that we quote part of it: "Is not a Patron, my lord, one who looks with unconcern on a man struggling for life in the water, and, when he has reached ground, encumbers him with help? The notice which you have been pleased to take of my labours, had it been early, had been kind; but it has been delayed till I am indifferent, and cannot enjoy it; till I am solitary and cannot impart it; till I am known, and do not want it."

It seems to us that the doctrine of infallibility did not give one act of assistance to the Church when she sorely needed it. This doctrine viewed her "with unconcern" when she was "struggling for life in the water" of heresy after heresy. For almost nineteen centuries there was an infallible guide, and the world was unconscious of it! No creed and no catechism (and creeds and catechisms were meant for the rank and file of the Church) ever give the remotest hint of it. Certainly, of all the mistakes the Church has committed, this is second to none. The hiding of this infallible knowledge was all the more criminal when we realize how much it was wanted. For the first six centuries of the existence of the Church were stained by many heresies. Nor were these heresies slight in their effects. As Carlyle first read, for instance, the views of the Arians, he scoffed at them as quarrels about a diphthong. He came later to see that the whole future of Christianity was involved in rejecting Arianism. We are asked to think it credible that the Roman bishops were able to solve such controversies which grievously hindered the growth of the Church, yet they refused for four centuries a decision. The Bull, "Unam Sanctam," of Boniface VIII, in 1303 is perhaps the first formally addressed to the whole Church. Either the bishops were able to solve these controversies or they were not. If they were able, is there any valid reason why they did not use their powers? The Fathers

never dreamt that they possessed infallible powers. It is significant that the Fathers never derive a single article of belief solely from tradition. For them the Word of God is sufficient. If the Church possessed authoritative traditions, they have not heard of them. We are forced to conclude that either there was no organ of the Church in possession of infallible knowledge or that the Church and the organ itself gravely erred in not providing the faithful with such assured knowledge. If the latter were the case, she and he shared their heresies.

The State remained incoherent : the Church became coherent. The power of the coherent Church grew at the expense of the incoherent State. This tendency received no little support from the False Decretals, forged about 850 by a Frankish clerk assuming the name of Isidorus Mercator, and from the Constantine forgery. The temporal power grew buttressed upon the forged Donation of Constantine. The spiritual power grew buttressed upon the forged decretals of Isidore. On this rock or on this sand a lofty papal edifice was built. It is strange that it does not seem to the forgers that there was an easy way out of the difficulty in augmenting the authority of the Papacy. Why not declare it infallible ? Such an idea, however, never crosses their minds.

If the Pope were infallible in 1870, he was at all times and in all places infallible when he speaks *ex cathedra*. Innocent I wrote to the Council of Milevis and Gelasius wrote to the Bishops of Picenum, laying down that infants must receive communion, as those who die without it go straight to Hell. A thousand years later the Council of Trent meets in the sixteenth century, and anathematises this very doctrine. Yet Gelasius teaches that " this it is against which the Apostolic See is greatly on its guard, that the glorious confession of the Apostle . . . should not be defiled by the least error or contagion. For if . . . such a misfortune should occur, how could we venture to resist any error, or how should we be able to correct the wandering ? " Precisely so ; but what if he leads the wandering even more astray ?

The divergence of Papal teaching from the Bible rendered the orthodox Church of the East suspicious. Inevitably, it never liked the claims of Rome to primacy. In 1054 there was a breach between the Church of Old Rome and that of New Rome. There were dogmatic divergencies on such points as the double Procession of the Holy Ghost. All these divergencies were the occasion of the schism. The cause of the breach in the unity of the Church was the overweening claims of the Pope. In the eleventh century the barrier in the way of the unity of the Church is the theory of papal supremacy. In the twentieth century the barrier in the way of the unity of the Church is the theory of papal infallibility. There is nothing else of such outstanding importance.

The schism between the Eastern Church and the Western was to be followed by a schism within the ranks of the Western Church herself. In 1305 the Popes transferred their residence from Rome to Avignon, and there they remained for seventy years. It meant

in effect that the policy of the papal court was subordinated to that of France, for we must not forget that the Donation of Constantine had turned the Pope into the head of a State as well as of a Church. Not only was the Pope's policy controlled by France, giving in effect two heads to the Papal States, but there were also rival Popes, giving in effect two heads to the Church of Rome. The period of the rival Popes began in 1378 and lasted to 1417. When two Popes were canonically elected, which was the true one? The Church did not settle this question in the fourteenth century, and it is not settled to-day. For the Church of Rome has never dared officially to say which Pope was the true one. In fact, the more we work at mediæval history, the more we are convinced that Rome is the mother, not of certainty, but of uncertainty.

The Gallican Church signified its protest against the growing claims of the Pope in the articles of 1682, which place the authority of the Council of Constance above that of the Pope, and refuses to call the decisions of the Pope infallible. Still, the hankering after authority persists, and found its climax in the acceptance of the doctrine of the infallibility of the Pope by the Vatican Council of 1870. Döllinger deliberately rejected the new decree, and his reasons were: "As a Christian, as a theologian, as an historian, as a citizen, I cannot accept this doctrine."

There is one supreme test of belief, and that is acting. Does the Pope actually issue decrees that are formally infallible? In 1888, Leo XIII, one of the greatest of all Popes, issues the Encyclical *De libertate humana*, and in it occurs his views on liberty. Leo XIII sadly laments that the Church has had to acquiesce in "certain modern liberties," but he hopes that "when times change for the better" she will once more be in a position to use her liberty. The teaching of this Encyclical on toleration is unmistakable: "As to what concerns toleration, it is wonderful how far removed are those who profess Liberalism from the equity and prudence of the Church." Is this Encyclical infallible? Not at all.

W. G. Ward used to long for the day when Infallibility should be declared a dogma of the Church, and he hoped when that day arrived he should have each morning with his roll of bread a fresh decree. Such hopes have been sadly disappointed. With questions of doubt and difficulty pressing on all sides, the following lamentable fact emerges. Since 1870 the Pope has not issued a single infallible decree. We have received no light or leading on the controversies of the past, and we have received no light or leading on the controversies of the present. In fact, we almost come to the laughing view of Benedict XIV when he declared: "If it is true that all justice and all truth lie hidden in the shrine of my breast, yet I have never been able to find the key of it." The Sphinx through the centuries has not been more silent than the infallible Pope for the last half century.