

THEOLOGICAL TRENDS

THE PAPACY III

Papal Infallibility (b)

A SUSPICIOUS Anglican critic of the Anglican/Roman Catholic International Commission's Venice Statement on Authority in the Church, who smelt a rat in the Commission's agreement that the Church needed a universal primate, and that the Holy Spirit preserved General Councils from error in defining fundamental matters of faith, summed up his misgivings in the formula: primacy *plus* the infallibility of the Church *equals* papal infallibility: in his eyes, the ultimate *reductio ad absurdum*. In the present series of articles on the papacy we have so far dealt with the left-hand side of that equation. We now turn to the right, and consider the exercise of the Church's infallibility by the universal primate, the Bishop of Rome.

Current ecumenical dialogue

Although the infallibility of the pope has been the subject of two ecumenical dialogues, that of the Anglican/Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC) and the U.S. Lutheran/Roman Catholic Dialogue (LRCD), neither set of conversations has yet achieved agreement on the subject.¹ The ARCIC statement accepted that this point was one on which Anglicans and Roman Catholics were still at variance; the commission is devoting part of its 1979 meeting to the search for a greater area of common ground. The LRCD Common Statement, though affirming that through the guidance of the Spirit 'the gospel of Christ is transmitted within the body of believers, the people of God', and 'in a special way through preaching and the sacraments, through which Christ unites his people to himself', nevertheless must proceed to admit that 'our two communions have sought to assure this transmission of the gospel along different lines'.² The Common Statement has, however, a practical suggestion which may help to bridge this gap:

Has not the time come for our churches to take seriously the possibility of what we have come to call 'magisterial mutuality'? Should we not recognize the Spirit of Christ in each other's Church and acknowledge each other's Ministers as partners in proclaiming the gospel in the unity of truth and love? Should we not listen to each other in formula-

¹ The ARCIC statement is entitled *Authority in the Church* (SPCK/CTS, London, 1977). The LRCD document is published in the American journal *Theological Studies*, 39 (March 1979), pp 113-66.

² Para. 29, p 127.

ting teaching, share each other's concerns, and ultimately develop a more unified voice for christian witness in this world?³

The last fifteen years have seen a succession of new studies of papal infallibility. Such events as the encyclical *Humanae Vitae* of 1968, the centenary of the First Vatican Council in 1970, and the publication of ecumenical statements, have provided the stimulus for these researches. Several of the authors, even Catholics, have been hostile to the dogma, or at least have emphasized the limits of the pope's defining power. The justification of devoting so much space in this article to such negative or minimalizing treatments is twofold. The first reason is ecumenical: the enormous and pressing task of removing non-catholic prejudices against the doctrine will be greatly lightened, if it can be shown that some of these prejudices are based on a more extreme interpretation of the doctrine than is imposed as a matter of faith on Roman Catholics. To adapt the words of Mgr Garrett Sweeney, quoted in the first article of this series, papal infallibility can never become credible until its limits are defined.⁴ Secondly, until Catholics learn to discard exaggerated notions of papal infallibility, they will not appreciate its true value. Catholics have sometimes spoken of the doctrine as though it reduced the role of other members of the Church to that of echoing the *ipsissima verba* of papal teaching. The most notorious example was W. G. Ward, who hoped to be able to read new infallible definitions with the rest of the news in the London *Times* at breakfast every day. But what was said in the first of these articles about papal primacy applies also to papal infallibility: the function of the universal primate is to strengthen, not to weaken, the authority of the bishops, and to promote christian unity, not to diminish the responsibility of the rest of the Church. Paul VI's words, quoted there, apply equally in the present context.⁵

The need to define limits

Several of the recent studies of papal infallibility have been concerned with the history of the doctrine. The most authoritative of these historians is Yves Congar, who, in the course of his investigation of the medieval theology of the Church from the seventh to the eleventh centuries, gives the following summary of the understanding in this period of the authority of papal teaching:

. . . it is rather a matter of a religious quality which Rome owes to the fact that it is the place of the martyrdom and tomb of Peter and Paul. Peter is the faith. Paul is the preacher of the faith. There is a tendency to affirm that the Roman Church has never erred in faith.

³ Para. 55, pp 136-37.

⁴ His own words are: 'The Primacy can never become credible until its limits are defined'. (*Bishops and Writers* ed. A. Hastings [Wheatthampstead, 1977], p 193: quoted in *The Way* [July 1979], p 228.)

⁵ Allocution to the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, April 1967, quoted in Sweeney, *op. cit.*, pp 179-80.

It is taken as a model, being the Church of Peter who made the first, exemplary confession of Christ. One must . . . follow the faith and rule of Peter, i.e. the faith and rule of the Roman Church. . . . That does not amount to an admission of what we call loosely the infallibility of the pope, or, more exactly, the infallibility of the judgments which he can pronounce, in the last instance, as universal and supreme pastor. . . . Basically, the true magisterium is not so much that of an authority tied to a position of superiority; it is rather an authority of Tradition, of which the bishops are the protectors, and which the Church of Rome had the grace to preserve.⁶

There are points of comparison here with the theory of Cornelius Ernst, quoted in the first article of this series, that there was thought to be a 'sacramental' or 'ontological' identity of Peter with his successors.⁷ But whereas Ernst has in mind the identity of Peter with subsequent popes, Congar is thinking of the identity of Peter's faith with that of the Roman Church.

Forged foundations

One of the factors which led the Church to attribute primatial power to the pope and unique authority to his teaching was the influence of the pseudo-Isidorian decrees. These were forged or interpolated statements, attributed to early popes and councils, concocted in the middle of the ninth century in order to provide justification for the independence of bishops from lay control. To exalt the power of bishops, the forgers seem to have sought to weaken the power of metropolitans, which in turn involved them in emphasizing the power of popes. In the course of constructing a case for papal authority, these forged decrees 'attribute to the magisterium and disciplinary authority of the pope an autonomous character, which was not bound to the norm of tradition'.⁸

Until the Reformation, the authenticity of these documents was taken for granted. Döllinger, in his opposition to the infallibility decree at the time of the first Vatican Council, argued that it was the Isidorian forgeries which were responsible for the acceptance of papal infallibility by the twelfth-century canonists, and by the thirteenth-century dogmatic writers, including St Thomas Aquinas.⁹ Hans Küng, a modern opponent of the doctrine within the Church, follows a similar line.¹⁰

Sound foundations

One way of countering Döllinger's contention is to point out that the seeds of the doctrine were present long before these decrees were falsified, even

⁶ Y. Congar, *L'ecclésiologie du haut moyen âge* (Paris, 1968), pp 159-60.

⁷ *New Blackfriars* (April 1969), p 354; quoted in *The Way* (July 1979), p 227.

⁸ Y. Congar, *op. cit.*, p 230; cf pp 226-32.

⁹ See B. Tierney, *Origins of Papal Infallibility* (Leiden, 1972), p 10.

¹⁰ H. Küng, *Infallible? An Enquiry* (London, 1971), p 94.

though, as Congar maintains, the authority was held to reside primarily in the Roman Church rather than in the person of the pope. Indeed, the forged decrees would scarcely have been able to carry conviction if the powers they were claiming for Rome were altogether novel. The LRCO Common Statement sums up the early attitude as follows:

On the basis of the belief that Rome had never deviated from the truth, it came to be held that in the future Rome would be immune from error: the Roman church or the Roman bishop cannot err. While such a claim started appearing almost casually with Pope Gelasius (A.D. 492-96),¹¹ it did not imply that Rome could formulate 'new doctrine', since novelty was the mark of heresy. Reformulations when attempted by bishops, synods, or councils were intended to affirm what had been handed down. Reception by the Church at large was undoubtedly a major factor in establishing the authoritativeness of such statements.¹² Roman bishops from the fourth century regarded their 'confirmation' of conciliar actions as an indispensable sign of authoritative teaching. . . . With the growing practice of appealing to Rome, papal decisions came to be regarded in matters of faith as the last word, from which there could be no further appeal.¹³ Popes since Siricius (A.D. 384-99) appealed to the Petrine function of 'strengthening the brethren' (Lk 22, 32) and to 'solicitude for all the churches' (2 Cor 11, 28), in order to establish their teaching authority. The legal maxim that 'the first see is judged by no one', which appeared first in the sixth century, was later interpreted as ensuring the pope's highest teaching authority in matters of faith and morals.¹⁴

Another early piece of evidence which illustrates the doctrinal authority attributed to the Holy See is the profession of faith which Pope Hormisdas in A.D. 515 required of the Acacian heretics, who were seeking to end their schism.¹⁵

The first explicit formulations of papal infallibility

Another recent study of papal infallibility has attacked Döllinger's argument on a totally different front, though in doing so is far from intending to provide support for the Vatican I doctrine. It is Brian Tierney's contention that the doctrine did not grow from seeds sown in the patristic age, nor was it invented at the time of the pseudo-Isidorian decrees; rather it was created out of

¹¹ Cf Denzinger-Schönmetzer (DS) 347.

¹² See the section on reception, *infra*, pp 64-65.

¹³ 'The earliest instances are found in letters of Pope Zosimus (417-18) and Pope Boniface I (418-22)', LRCO. ¹⁴ LRCO, para. 20, pp 124-25.

¹⁵ DS 365; cf 363. The decree was quoted by Vatican I in the chapter preceding the definition of papal infallibility (DS 3066).

nothing in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries in defence of the franciscan statutes on poverty. The decision of one pope who approved of the statutes, it was argued, could not be overthrown by subsequent popes, because the original decision was infallible. Consequently, Tierney maintains, the doctrine of papal infallibility, far from being a means of affirming or extending papal power, was designed precisely in order to limit it. 'The doctrine of papal infallibility no longer serves anyone's convenience — least of all the pope's'.¹⁶

In expounding his case, Tierney refers to the researches of the benedictine historian P. de Vooght. It is de Vooght's finding that P. J. Olivi (d. 1298) 'is perhaps the first to have treated *ex professo* of the inerrancy of the Church, the Roman See and the Pope'.¹⁷ According to Olivi, the pope was the 'inerrant rule' (*regula inerrabilis*) of the general inerrancy (*inerrabilitas*) of the Church: he could not err 'pertinaciously', at least in the exercise of his magisterium, for the Church would not be immune from error if it could be joined with a head who was false or liable to error. The pope's freedom from error was thus derived from that of the Church, not *vice versa*. The first writer to describe this immunity from error by the term 'infallibility', de Vooght finds, was Guy Terreni (or Terrena, d. 1342), who, like Olivi, wrote in defence of the franciscan privileges.¹⁸ Terreni, however, insisted, as did other writers in the following century, that the pope, though infallible in his teaching, had no right to teach without consulting his advisers, whether they were bishops in council or a less formal body.

Council over pope?

Another historic debate to which modern writers have turned in the hope of finding in it a help to the understanding of papal infallibility is that concerning the status of the pope *vis-à-vis* a general council. The frequently unsatisfactory state of the papacy, and the existence of rival claimants to the papal throne, provide the background for the emergence in the twelfth to fourteenth centuries of the conciliar theory that general councils have an authority superior to that of popes, and that popes can be deposed for heresy. Much attention has been paid recently to the decree *Haec Sancta* of the Council of Constance (A.D. 1415), which appears to maintain that even a pope has to obey a general council in matters of faith. The Vatican I definitions clearly imply the rejection of this conciliarist position, and hence the invalidity of the Constance decree. Several recent catholic writers, however, such as Francis Oakley, have sought to establish its validity and universal application, and thus to show that the conciliarist position is orthodox, and consequently that the 1870 definition of papal infallibility has no binding force. Others, like J. Gill, the historian of the Council of Florence, have argued against the

¹⁶ Tierney, *op. cit.* (see note 9 above), p 281.

¹⁷ P. de Vooght, 'Enquête sur le mot "infaillibilité" durant la période scolastique', in *L'infaillibilité de l'église* (Chevtagne, 1962), pp 99-146. The quotation is from p 107.

¹⁸ Cf de Vooght, *op. cit.*, p 101.

validity of *Haec Sancta*, on the grounds that it was never given papal ratification. H. Jedin, on the other hand, is able to discount it, not because of invalidity, but because it was intended not as a general principle, but as an emergency solution for a Church divided in support of three rival popes.¹⁹

Counter-examples?

Opponents of the doctrine of papal infallibility, such as H. Küng, sometimes quote instances of popes, like Honorius, whose teaching was subsequently condemned by the Church.²⁰ However, it seems fair to reply that in none of these cases 'can it be shown that the errors, or alleged errors, would have met the requirements specified by Vatican I for an *ex cathedra* pronouncement, and hence these historical difficulties prove nothing against the truth of the teaching of that Council on infallibility'.²¹

Historical conclusions

What safe conclusions can be drawn from all these historical investigations?

(1) Although in the patristic period and middle ages the doctrine of papal infallibility was not taught precisely in its nineteenth-century form, and although for historical reasons medieval canonists were often more interested in the possibility of papal heresy than in the extent of papal inerrancy, the doctrine that popes were in some sense preserved from error in teaching the whole Church was commonly held in the middle ages, and in practice the pope's teaching authority was recognized.

(2) Too much should not be made of the point — although it is valid — that until about A.D. 1300 theologians and canonists preferred to speak of the purity of the doctrine of the Roman Church or of the Apostolic See, rather than that of its bishop. For what is meant by this Roman Church or See whose doctrine is eminently pure? Unless one is talking actually of human beings, the statement is meaningless. In that case, which human beings? The roman population of frenetic driving, *dolce vita* and poor Mass attendance? It seems more reasonable to suggest that the human being with the best claim to represent the Apostolic See or the Roman Church is its bishop. To assert the inerrancy of that See or Church is to assert the inerrancy of the pope.

(3) The belief in the inerrancy of the Roman See makes sense only when that inerrancy is seen as a consequence of, or a means to, the maintenance of the whole Church in fidelity to the Gospel.

(4) The inerrancy of the Bishop of Rome's teaching is not seen as a charism which he exercises alone; he is still required to consult other representative members of his See and of the universal Church.

¹⁹ Cf F. Oakley, *Council Over Pope?* (New York, 1969), p 111-18, where the views of Gill, Jedin and others are discussed. For an earlier account of scholarly opinion on the subject, see A. Franzen, 'The Council of Constance: Present State of the Problem', in *Concilium*, vol 7, no 1 (September 1965), pp 17-37. ²⁰ Cf H. Küng, *op. cit.*, pp 93-94.

²¹ 'Roman Catholic Reflections' appended to the LRCO Common Statement, para. 29, pp 147-48.

THE LIMITATIONS OF PAPAL INFALLIBILITY

Many recent writers have analysed the limits which the first Vatican Council set to papal infallibility. In the first article of this series we discussed the limits to papal *primacy* which are implied by the decree of 1870 — implied indeed so delicately that Monsignor Sweeney spoke of the ‘small print of Vatican I’.²² By contrast, the limits of papal *infallibility* are not hidden away in small print: they are printed, so to speak, in bold capitals. Their inclusion in fact represented a victory for the moderates over the Ultramontanes.

The wording of the definition makes it clear that the pope’s infallibility is limited in the following ways:²³

- (1) He is infallible only when he speaks *ex-cathedra*, that is:
 - (a) only when he speaks as ‘pastor and teacher of *all* Christians’. He is not infallible in his private theological opinions, nor even when he speaks as pastor and teacher of a limited number of Christians.
 - (b) only when he acts ‘by virtue of his supreme apostolic authority’. Since a hidden infallibility would be useless, the form of words or the circumstances must make it clear that the pope is engaging this supreme apostolic authority. (For this reason, Pope Paul VI’s condemnation of artificial contraception was not infallible, whether true or not.)
 - (c) only when he defines ‘a doctrine concerning faith or morals’;²⁴ that is, when he is declaring a doctrine to be an essential part of revelation. It is traditionally held that truths which are not themselves revealed but are necessarily connected with revealed truths can also be the objects of infallible definitions. However, the official interpreter of the decree at the Council, Mgr Gasser, whose interpretation formed the basis on which the bishops voted, would not go so far as to propose as a matter of faith that papal infallibility extended to these secondary truths, though he did propose it as theologically certain.²⁵
 - (d) Only when he defines such a doctrine ‘to be held by the whole Church’: that is, as a condition for membership²⁶ of it.

²² See note 4 above.

²³ DS 3074, quoted at length in the second article of this series. The meaning of the clauses in question and the discussion which preceded their adoption are accurately expounded by Gustave Thils, *L’Infaillibilité Pontificale* (Gembloux, 1969), esp pp 204-11. See also E. J. Yarnold and H. Chadwick, *Truth and Authority* (London, 1977), pp 27-29.

²⁴ There have been several studies recently discussing whether ‘faith and morals’ is the correct translation of ‘*res fidei et morum*’. Some argue that *fides* includes morals, and *mores* refers to matters of discipline. See Thils, *op. cit.*, pp 207-09; M. Bévenot, ‘“Faith and Morals” in the Councils of Trent and Vatican I’, in *Heythrop Journal*, 3 (1962), pp 15-30.

²⁵ Cf Thils, *op. cit.*, pp 244-46. The traditional view that the pope is infallible in canonizing saints would come under this heading. For canonization implies the declaration that a way of life exemplified by a particular holy person represents authentic christian perfection; and this can be a matter of essential christian faith.

(2) Infallibility is not the same as inspiration. Inspiration is positive divine assistance by which a biblical author is enlightened; infallibility is negative divine assistance by which the teacher is preserved from error.

(3) The pope's infallibility, though the Vatican II Decree on the Church was to speak of it as a 'charism',²⁶ is not a lasting gift, like a virtue or a skill. Virtues and skills are personal qualities (according to traditional philosophical terminology, 'habits'), which enable a person to act readily and regularly in a particular way. Infallibility, by contrast, is not a personal quality, either intellectual, moral or spiritual, of the Bishop of Rome, in the sense that his linguistic skills, his traits of character and his virtues are personal qualities. His infallibility is in a sense extrinsic to him; it is simply the divine promise of preservation from error on the extremely rare occasions when he speaks *ex cathedra*.²⁷ This was the explanation given by Gasser in the course of the same authoritative exposition of the decree.²⁸

In all these ways, the 1870 decree explicitly set limits to papal infallibility. That is not, of course, to say that the pontiff may not exercise magisterium beyond these limits; indeed, popes do so every day. But when he does go beyond these limits, however right he may be to do so, freedom from error is not guaranteed. There are also three further limitations which were not stated explicitly in the definition itself, but which seem to follow from it, and were given sympathetic consideration by the Fathers of Vatican I.

No separation from the Church

(4) The decree implies that papal infallibility is not a channel of divine guidance which is *separate* from the general infallibility of the Church, but is one of the ways in which that infallibility is realized: the pope 'enjoys that infallibility with which the divine Redeemer wished his Church to be endowed'. It seems to follow from this that the pope has the *duty* to consult the Church before defining doctrine.²⁹

However, the decree does not impose such consultation as a *necessary condition* for an exercise of infallibility. Gasser indeed declared that such a condition could not be imposed.³⁰ This decision was surely wise, for to have made consultation a condition of validity would have opened the door to endless disputes as to whether in any particular case consultation had been sufficient. Moreover, it would have appeared as a capitulation to the minority of gallican leanings, who wished to subject a pope's decisions to the judgment of the whole Church before they were granted definitive dogmatic status. In

²⁶ *Lumen Gentium*, 25. Cf the LRCO document, note 93, p 143.

²⁷ In the second article of this series, I proposed a fuller understanding of infallibility, namely God's fidelity to his promise to use the Church's teaching as the means of leading the faithful to knowledge and love of himself. I do not of course claim that this was the meaning of infallibility which the Fathers of Vatican I had in mind.

²⁸ Mansi, 52, 1213A; cf Thils, p 216.

²⁹ Mansi, 52, 1213D; cf Thils, p 226.

³⁰ Mansi, 52, 1216D; cf Thils, p 233.

order to reject the gallican position, the infallibility definition included the clause, 'the definitions of the aforementioned Roman Pontiff are irreformable of themselves, not because of the consent of the Church (*irreformabiles esse ex sese, non autem ex consensu Ecclesiae*)'. This form of words was chosen as a direct rebuttal of the fourth of the Gallican Articles of 1682, which stated that the pope's 'judgment is not irreformable unless the consent of the Church be given to it'.³¹

This clause, which was not in the original draft of the definition, might be misconceived in three ways. First, it might be thought to assert that a dogma, once defined, cannot be later restated or amplified in different terms. There is no sign, however, in the proceedings of the Council that the word 'irreformable' was intended to carry these implications. If that had been the intention, it is inconceivable that no one would have protested; and in any event there were obvious examples in history of the reformulation and amplification of previously defined dogmas. The First Council of Constantinople, for example, clarified the Nicene Creed. 'Irreformable' is simply a traditional term for expressing the permanent validity of a dogmatic definition. Secondly, the clause might be thought to imply that the pope has no need to consult the Church; what has been said above about consultation, however, shows this to be a misinterpretation. Thirdly, while it is clear that the Council is denying that the validity of a papal definition is constituted by the subsequent consent of the rest of the Church, it does not follow that this reception is of no importance. To this we must now turn.

Reception

(5) Although subsequent reception is not the constituent factor in an infallible definition, infallibility cannot be attributed to a definition which has failed to gain the subsequent approval of the Church. In other words, reception is a guarantee that the definition, *when it was made*, fulfilled the conditions of infallibility. Vatican II clarified this point.³² Congar, however, envisages the possibility that a valid definition might not achieve subsequent recognition. Just as reception does not constitute the juridical validity of the definition, non-reception would not signify necessarily that the decision was invalid or false, but rather that the decision has no 'vital force and does not contribute to edification'. Arguing both historically and theologically, he suggests that what reception adds is not juridical validity, but greater 'power' (would 'authority' be a better term?), because the faithful recognize in a decision 'the good of the Church which they too have the vocation and the grace to build up'.³³

³¹ DS 2284. For the interpretation of the Vatican I 'irreformability' clause, see Thils, pp 157-75.

³² *Lumen Gentium*, 25.

³³ Y. Congar, 'La "réception" comme réalité ecclésiologique', in *Revue des Sciences Philosophiques et Théologiques*, 56 (1972), pp 399 and 401.

Peter Chirico is a Catholic writer who ascribes a fuller role to the process of reception. In accordance with his theory, summarized in the second article of this series, that infallibility belongs to universal *meanings*, not statements, he argues that the pope is infallible when his understanding and pronouncements reflect the universal meanings of the Church. According to Chirico, the conditions necessary for the pope to achieve this conformity with the Church's meanings are not 'external' and 'legal', as has generally been assumed, but 'internal' and 'ontic'. 'They refer to a state of being that the pope must achieve in order that the understanding he reaches and the proclamations which flow from that understanding will be of their very nature infallible'.³⁴ These conditions, however, are not realized only in the person of the pope: 'the conditions sketched out by the council are simply conditions which, by the very nature of things, any person must realize if he is to achieve infallibility in ecclesial matters'.³⁵ However, no one, not even a pope, can be certain that he has fulfilled these conditions.³⁶ Hence the subsequent reception by the Church of a definition acquires great importance.³⁷

Chirico's theory has ecumenical attractions, as it would remove the need for non-Catholics to commit themselves in advance to whatever dogma the pope might define. The theory, however, consists of two parts, the second of which seems more acceptable than the first. (a) The doctrine of infallibility is about the *subjective* conditions necessary for a pope (or any Christian) to interpret the infallible mind of the Church. Whatever one may say of this as an abstract theory, I cannot see how it can stand as an explanation of the mind of the bishops of Vatican I, who evidently thought that they were saying something unique about the pope, and that they were laying down legal, not internal, criteria. (b) The acceptance by the Church of a teaching is necessary in order that it may be known that the pope has spoken infallibly. This second part of Chirico's thesis is compatible with Congar's account given above, though Chirico's 'internal' theory of infallibility makes the need for reception by the Church all the greater.

Conformity with Scripture

(6) The final unexpressed limitation is that an infallible definition must be in conformity with scripture. This follows from the fact that the Church in defining does not reveal new truths, but safeguards and interprets the deposit of revelation, which was completed at the close of the apostolic age. In the words of Gasser, '... the pope in his *ex cathedra* definitions has the same sources as the Church, namely scripture and tradition'.³⁸

Consequently, Austin Farrer misunderstood the Vatican I doctrine when he criticized it on the grounds that it set up an 'infallible fact-factory'. In his

³⁴ P. Chirico, S.S., *Infallibility: the Crossroads of Doctrine* (London, 1977), p 233.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p 222.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p 232.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p 241.

³⁸ Mansi, 52, 1216D; cf Thils, p 233.

defence, however, it could be pleaded that he meant that the actual exercise of infallibility in the Marian definitions gave the *impression* of the papacy as a fact-factory.³⁹ But the impression is a false one. The dogmas must be interpreted within the limits of infallibility; they *cannot* mean more than is contained within the deposit of revelation. This is the reason which justifies some modern theologians in treating these Marian definitions as doctrines concerning the Incarnation and the salvation of humanity, of which Mary is the archetype.

THE PURPOSE OF PAPAL INFALLIBILITY

Nowadays the number of papal pronouncements for which theologians claim infallibility is very few. Most in fact would probably allow only two in the last two centuries, namely the dogmas of the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption. It is also generally agreed that one must guard against 'creeping infallibility': that is, the tendency to treat papal statements (such as allocutions and encyclicals, which are not infallible) as if they were. But what then is the point of insisting on a papal prerogative which is so very rarely exercised? What would the Church lose if popes were not infallible?⁴⁰ One explanation is offered by a commentary on the ARCIC Agreed Statement on Authority in the Church. Papal *ex cathedra* pronouncements are 'the extreme and uncommon instance of a much wider authority that is attributed to him'.⁴¹

To appreciate the value of papal infallibility, Thils believes that 'one needs to detach oneself from the framework of our present-day ecclesiastical situation, shaped as it is by a rigorous centralization, and imagine another age characterized by diversity of doctrines and the variety of ideas'.⁴² Catholics should not be ashamed or apologetic about the doctrine. It is a gift from the Holy Spirit to the Church, and must therefore be a help, not an obstacle, to the unity which is God's will for his Church.

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³⁹ A. M. Farrer, writing in *Infallibility in the Church, an Anglican-Catholic Dialogue*, ed. M. D. Goulder (London, 1968).

⁴⁰ Cf *La Civiltà Cattolica*, VII, vol 3 (1868), pp 529-30; and Thils, p 254.

⁴¹ Yarnold and Chadwick (see note 23), pp 31-32.

⁴² Thils, p 255.