

THE
INFALLIBILITY OF THE CHURCH

A COURSE OF LECTURES

DELIVERED IN THE
Divinity School of the University of Dublin

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A Historical Introduction to the Study of the Books of the New Testament

SECOND EDITION

LONDON

JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE STREET .

1890

LECTURE XI.

DOES THE CHURCH OF ROME BELIEVE IN HER OWN INFALLIBILITY?

I HAVE, in previous Lectures, sufficiently discussed the abstract question, whether God has provided for us any infallible guidance; and I consider that I have shown that there is not the least reason to think that with respect to religious truth God has dealt with us in a manner contrary to all His other dealings with us, by giving us such secure, never-failing means of arriving at knowledge as shall relieve us from the trouble of search and inquiry, and shall make error impossible. I propose now to lay before you such evidence as will show that, whether there be anywhere an infallible Church or not, the Church of Rome certainly is not.

You may, perhaps, think that this is a little waste of time; for, if no Church be infallible, it follows at once that the Church of Rome is not. It is true that, in the present controversy, I constantly feel tempted to give points to our opponents. In the attempt to establish their case, they make so many false assumptions, that, if we make them a present of one, they are under no less difficulty when they come to the next step in the argument. But it is not as a mere matter of generosity that I refrain from pressing to the utmost the victory we have gained on the abstract question. Men are not influenced by mere logic, they will easily believe what they wish to believe, whether there be logical proof of it or not.

Accordingly, you will seldom find in Romish books of controversy any of that discussion which has occupied us so long, and which really concerns the fundamental point in the controversy. It would be so very pleasant to have a guide able to save us all trouble and risk, and to whom we might implicitly commit ourselves, that Romish advocates generally spare themselves the pains of proving that such a guide exists, and prefer to take that for granted as a thing self-evident. The older books on controversy, assuming that there was somewhere an infallible Church, and that the only question was where she was to be found, occupied much space in telling of marks or *notes* by which the true Church could be distinguished from false pretenders. On this much discussion on the 'notes of the Church' ensued, it being easy to show that several of the notes enumerated by Bellarmine are possessed by bodies which no one can imagine to be the true Church, while it is extremely disputable whether the Church of Rome possesses those notes to which we should be willing to attribute most value. But in the actual history of perversions to Romanism this part of the discussion has usually been skipped; and thus the proof has been simplified into. There is an infallible Church somewhere, and no Church but that of Rome can claim the attribute.'

Now, although of the two propositions 'The Church of Rome is infallible'; 'Other Churches are not' the former is the one we deny, while we admit the

latter—Romish advocates seldom offer any proof of the former, and spend all their declamation on the latter. They tell of errors committed by other communions, of theological problems wrongly solved, or of which no certain solution can be given, in the hope that the hearer, perplexed by so much uncertainty, may gladly accept offered guidance without scrutinizing its claims too minutely. It is so natural to wish to have an infallible guide, that men are found well disposed to give credence to the agreeable intelligence that such a guide exists.

Now, to persons in this frame of mind, it is not enough to show that there is no reason to think that God has provided such a guide. The possibility still remains that He *may* have done so. We all believe in a miraculous revelation, through which God has done something for His creatures over and above His ordinary course of dealing with them. Shall we put limits on His bounty, or deny the possibility that He may have made the way to religious truth as secure as the most exacting can demand?

It is necessary, therefore, to quit the region of abstract discussion. But it is always unsafe to neglect to compare a theory with facts. When we attempt to decide on God's dealings by our own notions of the fitness of things, and venture to pronounce beforehand what sort of supernatural guidance He would provide for us, the most sanguine theorist has no right to imagine that he can get beyond a probable conclusion; and he is bound to examine whether, in point of fact, God *has* provided such guidance. The line taken by Romish advocates reminds me of what Cervantes tells of the course taken by Don Quixote in the manufacture of his helmet. The good knight, having constructed one which he thought admirable, proceeded to test its strength; and in a moment, by one stroke of his sword, demolished the labour of a week. So he made a new one; but as it would be very unpleasant to have one of not sufficient strength, he this time satisfied himself by pronouncing his workmanship to be strong enough, without trying any imprudent experiments with his sword. I feel it, therefore, to be not enough that Romish advocates should tell us of the failures of others, if they do not submit to some examination what they offer as superior; and I am persuaded, as I have said, that the true result of such an examination is that, whether or not there be anywhere an infallible Church, the Church of Rome certainly is not.

But it may be asked, How is it possible to give proof that the Church of Rome has erred, as long as the question of her possible infallibility is left open? If we pronounce any decision of hers to be erroneous, we may be told that it is she who is in the right, and that we are wrong. To recur to an illustration which I formerly employed: we engage a professional guide to conduct us over a pass we have never crossed before, and how can we be able before the journey is ended to convict him of leading us wrong? The path he takes may, to our eyes, be unpromising and quite unlike what we should ourselves have chosen; but if we hesitate, he can smile at our opposing our ignorance to his superior knowledge, and can assure us that at our journey's end we shall find

him to have been in the right. Yet it might happen in such a case that even before the journey was over we should have good reason to conclude that our guide did not understand his business. Suppose that whenever we came to a place where two paths diverged, the guide hung back, and, as long as we were hesitating, carefully abstained from giving any hint of his opinion as to which was the right one; but when we had made our choice, and had struck into one of the paths, then overtook us, and assured us we were all right, should we not have a right to suspect him of ignorance of his business, and think that but for the honour and glory of the thing, we might as well have had no guide at all? Suppose, too, that after we had taken a path under the encouragement and, as we believed, with the full approbation of our guide, we found ourselves stopped by an impassable morass, should we think it a satisfactory explanation to be told by our guide, as we were retracing our steps, that approbation of this unlucky path had been expressed by him merely conversationally, in his private, not his professional, capacity?

I think it admits of historical proof that the Church of Rome has shrunk with the greatest timidity from exercising this gift of infallibility on any question which had not already settled itself without her help, and that on several occasions, where the Pope has ventured to make decisions, these decisions are now known to have been wrong, and the case has to be met by pitiable evasions. The Pope was not speaking *ex cathedra*; that is to say, he had guided the Church wrong only in his private, not his professional, capacity.

Let us examine, then, by the evidence of facts, whether the Church of Rome believes her own claim to infallibility. Acting is the test of belief. If a quack claimed to have a universal medicine, warranted to cure all diseases, we should not need to inquire into the proofs of its virtues if we saw his own children languishing in sickness, and found that he never tried his medicine on them. If an alchemist asserted that he possessed the philosopher's stone, and could turn the baser metals into gold, his pretensions would be disposed of if we saw his own family starving, and that he made no attempt to make any gold to relieve them. So when we find in the bosom of the Church of Rome disputes and perplexities, as in other Churches; that the infallible authority is not invoked to solve them; that its interference is late and vacillating, and sometimes erroneous, have we not a right to conclude that the Church of Rome herself does not believe in the infallibility which she claims?*

But really, I must first say a few words on the question, Does she claim it? Some of you may chance to have met a book by a Mr. Seymour, called *Mornings with the Jesuits*, in which the author gives his own report of conferences which he held with the Jesuit Fathers at Rome, who unsuccessfully attempted his conversion. On one occasion they used the syllogism, A Church which

* In this and in the following Lecture I have made considerable use of a tract by Dr. Maurice, reprinted in 'Gibson's Preservative': *Doubts concerning Roman Infallibility: (1) whether the Church of Rome believe it*. In writing the Lecture I used Dr. Maurice's tract in the form in which it was modernized by the late Dr. Todd. (*Irish Ecclesiastical Journal*, December, 1851.)

does not claim infallibility can not be a true Church: the Church of England does not claim infallibility, therefore cannot be a true Church. They expected him, of course, to deny the major, and were prepared to carry on the controversy accordingly; but Mr. Seymour handed them back their syllogism with the word 'England' erased, and 'Rome' substituted. He asked them for proof that the Church of Rome ever claimed infallibility. Of course I allow,' he said, 'that individual theologians ascribe to her this attribute, but prove to me that she has ever ascribed it to herself in any authoritative document.'* I own I was not without suspicion that Mr. Seymour had dressed up his tale a little when he described the consternation and perplexity into which the Jesuits were thrown by his assertion that the Trent decrees contained no claim to infallibility. But it so happened that in the course of events the Jesuits were expelled from Rome, and one of Mr. Seymour's two antagonists came to England, where Mr. Capes made his acquaintance. He describes him as a most fair-minded and honest man, and an excellent specimen of a well-instructed Jesuit, as might have been expected from his having been chosen to argue with a controversial English clergyman on a visit to Rome. And he told Mr. Capes that it was quite true that he had never taken notice of the absence of the claim from the Trent decrees until it was pointed out to him in this discussion. Mr. Ffoulkes also, another who, like Mr. Capes, made the journey to Rome and back, states that he was never asked to accept this doctrine when he joined the Church of Rome, and that if he had been asked he would perhaps not have joined her. All he was required to admit was the supremacy of the Roman See, '*Sanctam Catholicam et Apostolicam Romanam ecclesiam omnium ecclesiarum matrem et magistram agnosco.*' I will not anticipate discussions that may hereafter come before us, by examining what exactly these words mean, or whether anything else in a formal document of the Roman Church amounts to a claim of infallibility. For practically the Church of Rome at the present day certainly does claim infallibility. The arrogance of her language admits of no other interpretation. And therefore I do not class this question with the others I am about to bring under your notice, in which the Roman trumpet gives an uncertain sound. If the doctrine of Infallibility were much insisted on in sermons by Roman Catholic preachers, but if their controversialists shrank from defending it against Protestants; if they treated it as one of those things not *de fide*, which were asserted by vehement and hot-headed theologians, but which the calm voice of the Church had abstained from pronouncing on, *then* we might taunt the professed guide with being unable to tell us the extent of his powers; but at present it is quite unjust to accuse him of any modest reticence as to the extent of his prerogatives. We must rather make a different use of the absence of any definition of this cardinal doctrine. It shows that the practice came first, the theory came afterwards if indeed it can even yet be

* The absence of the claim from the creed of Pope Pius IV. was noticed also by Dr. Newman. (*Prophetic Office of the Church*, p. 61.)

said to be quite come. Arrogant Pontiffs presumed to act as if they were infallible, and the necessity of justifying their conduct demands a theory that they really are so; but the lateness of the theory, which even yet is not included in the formula that converts must prescribe, is proof enough that from the beginning it was not so.

I may, however, say a few words now, though I shall have to speak more fully on the subject by-and-by, about the disputes which have raged within the Roman communion for centuries, and which were only in our own time cleared up, and then only partially, as to the organ of the Church's infallibility. Does the gift reside in the Church diffusive, or only in its head, or in a general council, or in Pope and council together? The existence of controversy on such a subject is in itself demonstration of the unreality of the gift. If Christ had appointed an infallible tribunal, His Church would have resorted to it from the first; the tradition where it was to be found could never have been lost, nor could this have given rise to one of the most angry controversies in the Church. To recur to our old illustration: suppose we boasted that Dublin was not as other cities, where the cure of diseases was precarious; that *we* had an infallible authority, whence we could learn, without risk of error, the certain cure of every disease. Suppose that an invalid stranger, attracted to our city by our vaunts, inquired on his arrival whom he was to consult? 'The President of the College of Physicians,' says one; 'it is he who possesses the wonderful gift.' 'Nay, says a second; 'he may make mistakes; it is in the council of the College that the gift resides.' 'Not so,' says a third; 'either separately may go wrong; but if you can get both to agree, you are sure of being rightly advised.' 'No,' cries a fourth; 'president or council may blunder separately or together; the gift belongs to the whole medical profession of Dublin: it is true, they wrangle at times among themselves, but they always manage to settle their disputes at last, and whatever remedies they unanimously adopt in the end are certain to be effectual.' Surely, when the stranger heard this disagreement, he would conclude without further inquiry, that he had been taken in by lying tales; that we were, in truth, no better off in respect of medical science than other cities, and that he might just as well travel back to his own physicians.

Accordingly, it was this disagreement as to the organ of infallibility which was the last stumbling-block to Dr. Newman on his journey to Rome. In the last book of his Anglican days, published not so very long before his formal surrender, in language which, in spite of its show of hostility, plainly betrays the attraction that Rome was exercising over him, he says: 'This inconsistency in the Romish system one might almost call providential. Nothing could be better adapted than it is to defeat the devices of human wisdom, and to show to thoughtful inquirers the hollowness of even the most specious counterfeit of Divine truth. The theologians of Rome have been able dexterously to smooth over a thousand inconsistencies, and to array the heterogeneous precedents of centuries in the semblance of design and harmony. But they cannot complete the system in its most important and essential point. They can determine in

theory the nature, degree, extent, and object of the infallibility which they claim, but they cannot agree among themselves where it resides. As in the building of Babel, the Lord has confounded their language, and the structure remains half finished, a monument at once of human daring and its failure.' (*Prophetical Office of the Church*, p.180.)

But you may ask, Is not the controversy over now? Did not the Pope, at the Vatican Council of 1870, bear witness to himself, and declare that every theory was wrong which made the organ of infallibility other than himself? But what time of day is this to find the answer to a question so fundamental? Can we believe that Christ before He left this earth provided His Church with an infallible guide to truth, and that it took her more than 1800 years before she could find out who that guide was? It seems almost labour wasted to proceed with the proofs I was about to lay before you, of the neglect or inability of the infallible judge of controversies to settle controversies, when it took him so long to settle that controversy in which his own privileges were so vitally concerned.

Let me trace, however, something of the history of that other dispute which, after it had raged for centuries, Pius IX. undertook to settle; the question about the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary. In a future lecture, either this Term or the next, I mean to give you an explanation of this doctrine, which will make you acquainted with some of the most thorny speculations of scholastic theology. What I am at present concerned with is only the history of the doctrine, taken as a specimen history of a dispute within the Church of Rome. The history of a dispute is the best evidence as to what authority for settling disputes the disputants believe in.

When I speak of authority for settling disputes, it is well to remind you of a little ambiguity about this word authority. We might mean the authority of superior knowledge, or merely of official position. Any judge may have authority to decide a question of law, in the sense that his decision will bind the parties, and that they must submit to it; but there are some judges who, on account of their knowledge and ability, rank as legal authorities, and have set precedents from which their successors differ with reluctance; while, in this sense of the word, other judges are of no authority at all. Now everyone will grant to the Pope the authority of official position. He has power to declare the doctrine of his Church, to depose any ecclesiastic who rejects his decision, or even to excommunicate any lay person who opposes himself to it. But we might say as much for the Synod of the Church of Ireland. It, too, can declare the doctrine of that Church, and can make the acceptance of that doctrine a condition of clerical or lay communion. But now there is this difference between these two kinds of authority, that the interference of the authority of confessed superior knowledge is welcomed and willingly submitted to, while it is often just the reverse with the other kind of authority. If two of you were disputing on a subject of which you had little knowledge; suppose, for instance, that you knew nothing of anatomy, and that you had a difference of

opinion how many ribs a man has; if a skilled anatomist were present, you would dispute no longer, but ask him; and then the dispute would be at an end. There has been long and warm controversy as to the authorship of the letters of Junius. Suppose a sealed volume was discovered, to which the author had committed his secret, people would not refuse to break the seal because they had misgivings whether their own theory were the true one. All parties would say, let us know the truth; and when the truth was known the controversy would be at an end.

It is quite the reverse when the interference is on the part of the authority, not of knowledge, but of official position. Then those who are likely to get the worst deprecate interference; they threaten not to submit to the decision, and the fear of such a refusal of submission is apt to inspire great caution in the authority whose interference might be solicited. If it were proposed that the General Synod should make a new decision of doctrine condemning the views now held by some members of the Church, I can tell from experience what would be likely to occur. Those who felt themselves to be in a minority would struggle that the Synod should abstain from making any decision on the question; they would threaten to leave the Church if their views were condemned; and then a number of cautious moderate men, thinking the evils of a schism greater than those of the toleration of opinions from which they themselves dissented, would join the minority in preventing any decision from being pronounced.

Remember this distinction, for it will serve as a test guide in your study of history. If you are fully persuaded that a man on any subject knows a great deal more than yourself, you do not want to stop his mouth. The more he speaks the better you are pleased, and you willingly give up your own previous opinion when he tells you it is wrong. It is quite different when a man who is your superior in authority wants to interfere with your opinions on a subject which you believe he knows no more of than yourself. Then you want him to hold his tongue. If he does speak, you, perhaps, refuse to listen to him, and if he sees that you are likely not to be afraid to make your dissent public, then, if he wants his authority to be respected, he will probably have the good sense to discover that to hold his tongue is the most discreet course. You may test in this way whether the Church of Rome believes in her own infallibility. Do the members of that Church show that they believe they have got an infallible guide, who on things of faith knows much better than themselves; and do they accordingly, when they have a theological problem, meekly come to him to be told the solution of it, or do they work out the problem for themselves, and merely invoke the higher authority to reduce their opponents to submission? And does the higher authority himself speak with the confidence of superior knowledge, or rather, with the caution of one who knows that his subjects would not believe him if he pronounced their opinions to be wrong, and who must take care not to strain his authority too far, lest he should cause a revolt? Examine the history of any dispute in the Roman communion, and you will

find that the heads of the Roman Church act exactly as the leading members of the Synod of the Church of Ireland would act in a like case, neither showing any belief in their own infallibility themselves, nor any expectation that their followers would believe it; proscribing only such opinions as had become offensive to the great majority of their body, but restrained by a wholesome fear of schism from straining their authority too far.

I take, as I have said, the history of the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception as a typical case. From the beginning of the fourteenth century vehement disputes on this subject had been carried on, the leading parts being taken by two powerful Orders; the Dominicans, following their great doctor, Thomas Aquinas, holding that, though cleansed from original sin before her birth, Mary had been conceived in sin like others; the Franciscans, after their great teacher, Scotus, exempting her from the stain by a special act of God's power. The Dominicans went so far as to accuse the assertors of the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of heresy, and even charged with mortal sin those who attended the Office of the Immaculate Conception, although that Office had been authorized by papal sanction; and they charged with sin also those who listened to the sermons in which the doctrine was preached. The annual recurrence of the Feast of the Conception was a signal for the renewal of hostilities, and gave birth every year to scenes of the most scandalous kind. All this time private Christians, puzzled by the most opposite statements of learned men on both sides, must have looked eagerly to the infallible guide, in hopes to learn from him the true doctrine which they were to believe. But the judge was silent. He trimmed and wavered between both parties, and sought to make peace between them, without giving a triumph to either. The strongest step was taken by Sixtus IV., who, though himself a Franciscan, did not venture to declare that the doctrine taught by his own school was true; but who, in 1483, published a brief, in which he condemned those who said that it was a heresy, or that it could not be taught without mortal sin. Would the most ignorant layman have acted differently, if he had the misfortune to be governor of a body divided into two powerful parties, and were called on to pronounce a decision between them on a subject he knew nothing about? What better could he do than postpone his decision *sine die*, and meanwhile condemn the extreme of either party if they used insulting language toward the other?

At length came the Council of Trent, in the course of which it became necessary to draw up an Article on original sin. It seemed then hardly possible to evade the question; for either it must be stated generally that all men are subject to this infection, and then the matter would be decided in favour of the Dominicans; or else the desire of the Franciscans should be complied with, that special mention should be made of the Virgin Mary, exempting her from the plague spot of the human race. On this, naturally, a violent dispute arose. When the dispute was made known at Rome, instead of embracing the opportunity of declaring by infallible authority the true doctrine on this subject, orders were given to the Papal Legates at Trent to reconcile the contending par-

ties as far as possible, without giving a triumph to either. The directions were, not to meddle with this matter, which might cause a schism among Catholics; to endeavour to maintain peace between the opposing parties, and to seek some means of giving them equal satisfaction; above all, to observe strictly the brief of Pope Sixtus IV., which forbade preachers to charge the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception with heresy. And in accordance with these instructions the decree of the Council was drawn up. The controversy was named; it was declared that the Council left the matter undetermined, and renewed the brief of Sixtus IV.

This course was, no doubt, under the circumstances, eminently wise and prudent; for it had become plain that, whatever else the parties disagreed in, they agreed in this, that each preferred no decision at all rather than a decision adverse to his own views. But is it not most clearly proved that the Pope did not believe in his own pretence to infallibility, else why not take the opportunity of settling, by the joint authority of Pope and Council an authority which, in theory, all owned to be infallible a dispute which had so long convulsed the Church? But to meddle in the matter—that is to say, to decide the question one way or other might cause a schism among Catholics; in other words these ‘Catholics,’ whatever they might pretend, did not really believe in the infallibility of the Pope and the Council. Nay, I am putting the matter too weakly; for we do not set up our own opinion against that of an expert on any subject, even though we know that he is far from claiming infallibility; but these ‘Catholics’ must really have thought that Pope and Council knew no better than themselves. Why should there be danger of a schism after the truth had been ascertained *by* infallible authority? Surely, no person could be mad enough to separate himself from the Church of Christ in consequence of a decision which he believed to be infallibly true, and to have emanated from a divinely-promised and infallible guidance. The only way of accounting for the conduct of the Pope and of the Council on this occasion is, that neither one nor other believed in the pretence of infallibility. For, as I said, acting is the test of faith; and here the Pope acts as any prudent, well-advised sovereign would act under similar circumstances, endeavouring to avoid a decision that must irritate one party or other, and trying to conciliate both as well as he could. Although he speaks loudly and boldly before the world of his infallible authority, and of the great blessing of being in a Church which possesses an infallible tribunal for settling all disputes, yet he acts as one who was fully aware that there was no such tribunal, and as knowing also that his ‘Catholics’ believed nothing of the sort, and would run into schism rather than submit to the pretended authority of his infallibility, if it happened to run counter to their own private opinions. It is impossible to have clearer proof than this that the Roman communion does not practically believe in its own claim to infallibility. The guide will not venture to strike into one of two doubtful paths until those whom he is conducting have already made their choice, and that because he

knows that, though professing to believe in his infallible wisdom, they will not follow him if he should happen not to take the path which they prefer.

There remained, however, one way of accounting for the silence of the Pope and the Council which might save their infallibility; namely, that this particular subject was one on which it had pleased God to make no revelation, and therefore that in the judgment of Pope and Council either view might be innocently held. This view was naturally taken by the Roman Catholics of the last generation. Bishop Milner, for instance, says 'The Church does not decide the controversy concerning the Conception of the Blessed Virgin, and several other disputed points, because she sees nothing clear and certain concerning them either in the written or unwritten Word, and therefore leaves her children to form their own opinions concerning them.' But Pius IX. made it impossible any longer to give this explanation of the silence of his predecessors.

In process of time the whole controversy died away. Franciscans and Dominicans ceased to accuse each other of heresy or mortal sin, and so then was the time that the infallible tribunal ventured to speak; and in my own time (8th December, 1854) the Pope proclaimed that the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception was true, and moreover that the Church had always held it. Certainly in this case the Church carried the '*disciplina arcani*' to an immoderate extreme, since neither Bellarmine nor Milner, nor many other Roman Catholic divines whom I could name, were aware that the Church had any tradition on the subject. But if she had, how are we to excuse Pope Sixtus, or the Council of Trent, who, instead of making known the tradition at the time when the knowledge of it would have done good in healing the violent dissensions which raged between members of the Church, kept silence until people had ceased to feel much interest in the controversy?

And even then there were those who said it was too soon for the Pope to speak. The Pope did not make his decree without first taking advice, and you will find in the Library the answers he got from the bishops of Christendom. Among these, both some of the most eminent of the French bishops, and our Irish professors at Maynooth, declared, not by any means their disbelief in the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, but their opinion of the inexpediency of defining it by authority. As I have already said, when the interference is not that of superior knowledge, but only that of higher authority, cautious men will consider not only the truth of what they are asked to affirm, but also the prudence of enforcing conformity to it; and so at our own Synod many have voted against putting forth as the doctrine of the Church what they themselves believed to be true. In this case, those who pronounced the decision of the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception to be inopportune, did not say in their own names that it was an addition to the ancient faith of the Church; but they said that Anglican divines would be sure to say so, and would accuse the Roman Church of having broken with her ancient rule, and of now teaching something which had not been taught, '*semper, ubique et ab omnibus.*' Thus an obstacle would be placed in the way of their conversion, and quite gratuitously, since

there was at the time no controversy on the subject which there was any need of appeasing.

However much we may believe in the sincerity of those who on this occasion declared that they did not deny the truth of the doctrine, but only the opportuneness of declaring it, it is hard to believe equally in the sincerity of those who some years later raised the question of opportuneness, when it was proposed to define the dogma of the Pope's personal infallibility. Actually to deny a doctrine which an influential Pontiff showed it was his most anxious desire to have affirmed would be too invidious, and so the lower ground was taken by a great majority; and they fought a half-hearted battle, disputing not the truth of the doctrine, but only the expedience of declaring it. I must say that, to my mind, all this controversy about opportunism shows distrust in the infallibility of their guide. It is always opportune to learn something you did not know before, if you have got hold of a person competent to inform you. What is inopportune is that a man should propound his views without necessity to an audience disinclined to receive them; and the fact that Pope and Councils very often have found it inopportune to make dogmatic definitions is proof enough how little their own Church believed in their power to do so.

I could give other illustrations in plenty of the wise timidity of the infallible authority in declining to solve disputed questions. For instance, at Trent there was another question left unsettled besides that about the Immaculate Conception. A question arose whether bishops have their jurisdiction directly by divine right, or whether they only derive it from the Pope; but after hot disputes it was found expedient to drop the controversy. You will find in Burnet's Commentary on the seventeenth Article a notice of another controversy, which the Pope neglected to determine, though asked to do so. I refer to controversies between the Dominicans and the Jesuits at the very end of the sixteenth century. The matter in dispute belonged to the class of subjects debated between Calvinists and Arminians. The Jesuits, who took what we may call the Arminian side, were accused of Pelagianism by the Dominicans, who followed the Augustinian teaching of their great doctor, Thomas Aquinas. In 1594 the Pope undertook the decision of the question. Here we have the very case to meet, which one might suppose the gift of infallibility had been conferred: hot controversy in the Church terminated by a resort of both parties to the infallible authority for guidance. Of course it was not to be expected that the Pope should determine so great a question hastily. He appointed committees of theologians to examine the arguments on both sides, known as the celebrated congregations *de auxiliis*, the subject of their inquiries being the help of divine grace bestowed by God on man. I will not weary you with the history of the delays of the investigation: suffice it to say, that after going on some twenty years no result was arrived at. And, politically, this was the wisest course. For if a decision were made, it must of necessity give offence to one or other of two powerful parties supported, the one by the King of Spain, the other by the King of France; and there was quite a possibility that the rejected party might

refuse to submit, and even pronounce the Pope himself heretical.* But would there be any such danger if the parties to the dispute believed in the Pope's infallibility, or if he believed in it himself? If Christ Himself appeared upon earth, we should be glad to obtain from Him an authoritative solution of any of our religious controversies, and we should not dream of stopping His mouth lest his decision should be opposed to our prepossessions. So, though these men profess to believe that the Pope, as a guide to truth, fills the place of Christ on earth, their conduct proves that they do not believe what they say. And the Pope's own conduct shows that he felt himself not in the position of a judge authorized to pronounce a decision to which all parties must submit, but only in that of the common friend of two angry disputants, in favour of neither of whom he dare plainly declare himself on pain of losing the friendship of the other.

In other words, every time the Pope has thought of making a dogmatic decision, he has had to make a prudential calculation of the danger of provoking a schism; and on the occasion of his last definition a schism, as you know, was

* ³ It is worth while to add a few words as to the part taken in this controversy by the great Jesuit, Bellarmine. The controversy arose out of the publication by a Jesuit Professor, Molina, of a book which the Dominicans accused of semi-Pelagianism, and the authoritative condemnation of which they were anxious to obtain. Now, though Bellarmine and other leading Jesuits were unwilling to commit themselves to an approval of all Molina's doctrine, they considered that the condemnation of his book would be a great slur on their Order; and though the condemnation appeared more than once to be on the point of issuing, the Jesuits exercised obstruction so vigorously, that their opposition was in the end successful. It is amusing to read in Cardinal Bellarmine's autobiography how he bullied the poor Pope, Clement VIII., whose own opinion was adverse to Molina. 'You are no theologian,' he said, 'and you must not think that by your own study you can come to understand so very obscure a question.' 'I mean to decide the question,' said the Pope. 'Your Holiness will not decide it,' retorted the Cardinal. There is extant a letter, written after the Congregation appointed by the Pope to examine the matter had reported adversely to Molina, and when he was supposed to be about to act on that report, in which Bellarmine urges that the Pope should not act without first calling a council of Bishops, or at least summoning learned men from the Universities. If he acted otherwise, though men would be bound to obey his decree, there would be great murmuring and complaints on the part of the Church and the Universities that they had not been properly consulted. That the Pope should attempt to study the question for himself was a very tedious and unsatisfactory method, and not that which had been followed by his predecessors. Did Leo X. trouble himself with study when he condemned the Lutheran heretics? He just confirmed the conclusions arrived at by the Catholic Universities of Cologne and Louvain. Paul IV., Julius III., Pius IV., were no students; yet, with the help of the Council of Trent, they declared most important truths. See, on the other hand, what scrapes John XXII. got into when he endeavoured to promulgate the views concerning the Beatific Vision, to which his own study had led him. See into what danger Sixtus V. brought himself and the whole Church one of the greatest dangers the Church was ever in when he attempted to correct the Bible according to his own knowledge. And the Pope must be careful not to give occasion to anyone to think that he had made up his own mind before the question had been scientifically investigated. Why he had said things to Bellarmine himself, which had made him resolve to withdraw, and treat no more of the question. If such a one as he lost courage, who had been studying these subjects for thirty years, what would others do? (*Selbstbiographie des Cardinals Bellarmin*. Bonn 1887, p. 260.) There could not be a better illustration how ill the authority of official position fares when it comes into collision with the authority of superior knowledge.

actually made. But fear on his part of secession shows mutual want of faith in Roman pretensions. For who would punish himself by seceding from the only authorized channel of divine communications? Who would refuse to believe anything if it was declared to him by God Himself, or by one who, he was quite sure, had authority to speak in God's name? Lord Bacon tells a story of a wise old man who got a great reputation for his success in settling disputes. When privately asked by a friend to explain the secret of his success, he told him it was because he made it a rule to himself never to interfere until the parties had completely talked themselves out, and were glad to get peace on any terms. That was just the way in which the Pope settled the controversy about the Immaculate Conception, by carefully holding his tongue until the dispute was practically over.