

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

V.

MILNER'S AXIOMS.

PART I.

IT follows from the discussions in the last lectures that we have a perfect right to put out of court all Roman Catholic attempts to prove the infallibility of their Church, as being attempts to build a fabric without any foundation: for it is, in the nature of things, impossible for a fallible man to have infallible certainty that he has discovered someone able to guide him without possibility of error. But I should be sorry to seem to want to get rid of the Roman Catholic arguments by any logical *tour de force*, or in any way to evade meeting them fairly and fully.

I do not think their case can be stated in a more taking way than it was done in a book now rather old, but which was at one time relied on as far and away the most effective book of Roman Catholic controversy, and which has still much circulation and popularity; I mean Milner's *End of Religious Controversy*. Milner begins by laying down three maxims, the truth of which, he says, no rational Christian will dispute. First, our Divine Master Christ, in establishing a religion here on earth, to which all the nations of the earth were invited, left some rule or method by which those persons who sincerely seek for it may certainly find it. Secondly, this rule or method must be secure and never failing, so as not to be ever liable to lead a rational, sincere inquirer into error, impiety, or immorality of any kind. Thirdly, this rule or method must be universal, adapted to the abilities and other circumstances of all those persons for whom the religion itself was intended, namely, the great bulk of mankind.

Milner applies these maxims to discover a rule of faith. He first considers and rejects two fallacious rules, as not satisfying the prescribed conditions, and then arrives at what he conceives to be the only satisfactory rule—the teaching of his Church. The first rule which he pronounces fallacious is ‘a supposed private interpretation, or an immediate light or motion of God’s Spirit communicated to the individual.’ This rule he takes to be that of the Quakers, the Moravians, and some classes of Methodists. Milner has no difficulty in tracing the working of this rule, and showing that it does not give the security which his maxims demand. He begins with the Montanists, who claimed to have been recipients of a new outpouring of the Holy Spirit; and, touching briefly on other heretics who made similar pretensions, gives a long account of the excesses and impieties committed by John of Leyden and his followers, the Anabaptists, all committed under a full conviction of the uncontrollable inspiration of their perpetrators. Then he goes on to tell of their imitators in England, who called themselves the ‘Family of Love’; of the extravagances of the early Quakers; of the Antinomian doctrines taught

by some of the Methodists, who professed to have received them by immediate inspiration; and he concludes that to make an immediate personal revelation a rule of faith and conduct is to adopt a rule which has led very many well-meaning persons into error and impiety.

I do not disagree with this conclusion; but Milner evidently had not reflected that this rule, which he so clearly shows to be fallacious, is the rule on which his own religion depends. I made it plain on the last day that no external authority can give us absolute freedom from error, unless we can manage in some way to secure from risk of error the process which induces us to rely on that external authority. We examined Newman's attempt to justify that process by a study of the laws which govern human assent, and we found it to be a failure; and I told you then that this speculation of Newman's appears to be little relied on now by Roman Catholics. In fact, it is so certain that none of the natural processes of the human mind is absolutely free from risk of error, that it is plain that no study of these processes can give Roman Catholics the security which they demand. So they solve the difficulty by a *deus ex machina*. They are not naturally infallible, but God has made them so. It is by a supernatural gift of faith that they accept the Church's teaching, and have a divinely inspired certainty that they are in the right. Well, now, it is evident that if this be the ground of belief, those who think that they are relying on the Church's infallibility are in reality relying on their own. The whole basis of their system crumbles from under them if it is possible that this supposed supernatural gift of faith can deceive them. At the Vatican Council of 1870, which may be principally known to you by its decree concerning the Infallibility of the Pope, which will afterwards come under our consideration, the more fundamental doctrines concerning God and Reason and Faith and Revelation had been previously discussed; and it was decreed that, though the assent of faith is not a blind motion of the mind, yet that no one can give to the preaching of the Gospel that assent which is necessary to salvation without the illumination and inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The Council proceeds to anathematize the assertion that it is only living faith that worketh by love which is the gift of God. In other words it is not only what Protestants commonly understand by faith which is the gift of God; but mere belief, even though it does not work by love, is a supernatural gift; and an act of such faith is declared to be a work pertaining to salvation, in which man yields free obedience to God, by consenting to and co-operating with His grace, which it was in man's power to resist. Finally, those are anathematized who say that Catholics have any just cause to call in doubt the faith which they have received under the teaching of the Church, by suspending their assent until they have got a scientific demonstration of the credibility and truth of their faith. This is no mere point of scientific theory. The real check which prevents Roman Catholics from putting to themselves the question, 'Is there not a lie in my right hand?' is the fear lest they should trifle with a supernaturally-communicated gift of faith.

It is evident that if a man tells you, 'I know that I am right, and you are wrong, because I have a divinely-inspired certainty that I am in the right in my opinion,' such a claim does not admit of being met with direct disproof, though it has been sometimes met with the mocking answer, 'Your claim to a supernatural gift of faith means that your doctrines are such, that it requires a miracle to make a man believe them.' We can, however, point out that the claim to have been taught by God's Spirit is made, and certainly on quite as good grounds, by others, who say that they have been led by Him to conclusions quite opposite to the Roman Catholic. And certainly it is quite superfluous to seek a supernatural origin for the feelings of rest, peace, freedom from doubt, which men say they find in the bosom of the Roman Church. These feelings may be obtained by anyone in a perfectly natural way, on the easy terms of resolute abstinence from investigation. But it is, in any case, important to point out that the whole foundation of a Roman Catholic's confidence is just that rule of faith which Milner has taken such pains to prove to be fallacious. When a Romanist claims to have been taught by a supernatural gift of faith to trust his Church, and when a Protestant claims, equally under the guidance of God's Spirit, to have learned that she is unworthy of confidence, and when neither can prove, by miracles or any other decisive test, the superiority of the spiritual guidance which he professes to have himself received, what remains but to own that no certainty can be got from trusting to such supposed supernatural guidance, unless this illumination at the same time so enlighten the understanding as to enable it to give reasons for its faith which other men can perceive to be satisfactory?

The second rule of faith which Milner undertakes to show to be fallacious is the Bible: at least if each man is allowed to interpret it for himself. I think that most of the controversial victories that Roman Catholics win are owing to their being often wrongly met on the point now under discussion. When a Roman Catholic says, 'It is incredible that Christ should have left His people without an infallible guide, who shall secure them from all risk of error; and no such guide can be found but the Church of Rome,' it is very common for a Protestant to reply, 'Nay, we have such a guide in the Bible.' But it is well that you should be prepared for the turn the discussion is then likely to take. In the first place, observe, it is one question whether the Bible is infallible; another whether it is, in the sense of Milner's requirements, an infallible *guide*. But even the first point the Roman advocates will not allow you to take for granted. I own that it is with a very bad grace they here assume the attitude of unbelievers; for, whoever denies the infallibility of Scripture, they have no right to do so. If the Church be infallible, the Bible is so too; for there is no article of Church doctrine held more strongly, or taught with greater unanimity, by the Church of all times, than the inerrancy of Scripture. Accordingly, in the discussions of the first Reformers, the Bible was common ground to both parties, and the Reformers' proof that part of the teaching of the Church of Rome was erroneous consisted in showing that

it was opposed to the Bible. But now the line taken by the Romanist advocate is to say, 'No matter what *we* believe about the Bible, what right have you, on your principles, to believe the same thing?

Some of Milner's arguments are weak enough, and need not detain us long. For instance, he says that, 'If our Lord had intended His people to learn His religion from a book, He would have written it Himself, or, at least, have commanded His Apostles to write it; and there is no evidence that He did any such thing'—an argument pointless against us, who believe, as he does himself, that the Scriptures were written by inspiration of God's Holy Spirit, and that the Three Persons of the Trinity are One. And the argument admits of a cruel retort. If Christ intended that His people should learn their religion from the Pope, He would have told them to obey the Pope, and listen to his instructions, or, at least, He would have commissioned His Apostles to do so; but in all the recorded words of either our Lord or His Apostles, and in all their surviving letters, there is not a word about the Pope, from one end to the other. But, dismissing this and some other manifestly weak arguments, the Romanist advocate asks the Protestant: 'If the Scriptures are your sole rule of faith, how do you learn what are the Scriptures? Where do you find a text of Scripture to give you information on this point? If you say you receive certain books because they were written by Apostles, is that a ground for accepting them as infallible? The Apostles were fallible as men: how do you know they were infallible as writers? And, in any case, you receive the Gospels of Mark and Luke, who were not Apostles, and you reject the Epistle of Barnabas, who was. Then, how do you know that the text has been preserved rightly? 'Even the biblical criticism of Milner's day afforded him some instances of doubtful readings, as, for instance, the text of the Three Heavenly Witnesses, and the fact that, in the Prayer Book version of the fourteenth Psalm, there are some verses not to be found in the Bible. But if the Bible is a secure guide to anyone it is not so to the unlearned. If they can even read, they only know the Bible in a translation; and Milner asks them, 'How do you know that the English version which you use is a correct translation?' Of course the recent publication of the Revised New Testament would supply a Roman Catholic controversialist with instances enough where he could maintain that it had been now proved that readings or translations hitherto in use among us were erroneous. Having in this way tried to show that there was too much uncertainty about the Bible to allow it to serve the office of a sure guide, Milner goes on to say, even if the book itself is infallible, it is not so as a guide that is to say, it does not ensure those who follow its guidance from risk of error. This appears from the great differences of opinion between persons who all profess to have taken their religion from the Bible, and whom we cannot in charity believe to have been insincere in their profession of having honestly tried to follow its guidance. These persons who disagree among themselves cannot all be right. It is plain, therefore, that the Bible, if there be no authorised interpreter, does not

suffice as a guide, in following which there is no danger of going wrong. Well, I think that, without discussing the other difficulties raised by Milner, the last argument, founded on the different results arrived at by students the Scriptures, is enough to establish his case that the Bible as a guide does not fulfil the conditions which his axioms impose.

Having set aside these two fallacious rules, Milner propounds what he asserts to be the true rule, namely, to the written Word of God to add the unwritten: that is to say, to Scripture to add tradition, and to both to add the Church as an authorized interpreter of the true meaning of the Word of God. Milner abstains from applying to this rule the same searching criticism he had applied to the two others, apparently satisfied with the argument that as the other two rules were wrong, this must be the right one; but if I could go fully into the discussion, it would easily appear that this rule fails as completely as the two others to satisfy the prescribed conditions. One of Milner's conditions, you will remember, is, 'This rule must be secure, never-failing, by which those persons who sincerely seek for Christ's religion shall certainly find it.' Well, in the first place, in spite of this rule, more than half of the seekers (and it would be uncharitable to think that the bulk of them are not sincere) have not found it. A guide is useless if those who want his services cannot make him out. Imagine that a gentleman, who lived in the country at a distance from a railway station, gave an entertainment to his friends. It would be natural that he should make provision that, on their arrival at the station, they should be enabled to find his house. But when they arrive they find a number of competing Carmen, all professing to be able to conduct them safely; but, as things turn out, half of them are taken wandering over the country, and never reach the house at all. The entertainer tells the disappointed guests, 'It was all your own fault: I had a servant at the station, and you ought to have known him.' But whosoever fault it was, the actual result shows that the measures he took for their guidance were neither certain nor never-failing.

Again, the Bible is said to be inadequate as a rule, because there are so many differences of opinion between those who profess to follow its guidance. Are there no differences between those who profess to follow the guidance of the Church of Rome? It would lead me too far if I were to speak in detail of the internal dissension in the Roman communion. One case, however, is striking enough to be brought before you. Bossuet is the writer who may be said to have made his own the argument against Protestantism derived from the disagreements of its several sects. His work, called *The Variations of the Protestant Churches*, published at the end of the seventeenth century, was the most popular book of controversy of his day, and was esteemed by Roman Catholics as a triumphant success. In this he infers that the Protestant Churches have not the guidance of the Holy Spirit, from the differences that exist between various Churches, or between the teaching of the same Church at one time and another.

Many of the differences which Bossuet enumerates relate to very minute points which cannot be regarded as essential to salvation, and on which Christians might be well content to differ. But, indeed, a Protestant seldom feels himself much affected by the argument from variations, which he feels to be equally pointless whether he be disposed to make common cause with non-Episcopal sects or the reverse. In the former case he would say, 'My differences with the orthodox Protestant sects relate merely to unimportant questions of discipline, and so forth; but on all really vital questions we are thoroughly agreed. And Roman Catholics themselves admit that union in essential matters is compatible with difference of opinion on points which superior authority has left open.' But, on the other hand, there is quite as good an answer for one who disowns the Dissenting sects altogether. He may say, 'What is it to me what is held by those people whom you class with me under the common name of Protestant? I have nothing to say to them any more than you have. If it is an argument against me that Baptists and Quakers disagree with me, they do not agree any more with you.' In fact there is nothing to prevent any sect from placing itself on one side, and all the rest of the world on the other, and contending that those who disagree with that sect show they are wrong by their disagreements among themselves. For instance, I do not see why this Roman Catholic argument might not be used by a member of the Established Church of England. He might say, 'Dissenters plainly show that they are wrong by their differences among themselves. Protestant Dissenters accuse us of believing too much, and Roman Catholic Dissenters accuse us of believing too little. When such opposite charges are brought, it is plain we must be just right.' The fact is, what the existence of variations of belief among Christians really proves is, that our Master Christ has not done what Roman Catholic theory requires He should have done, namely, provided His people with means of such full and certain information on all points on which controversy can be raised, that there shall be no room for difference of opinion among them. But it is ridiculous to build on these variations an argument for the superiority of one sect over another.

But my purpose in now mentioning the subject is to tell how Bossuet, whose name is specially connected with the argument from the variations of Protestantism, has himself become the most signal instance of the variations of Romanism. Bossuet was, in his time, 'the Eagle of Beaux': the terror of Protestant sectaries, the most trusted champion of his Church. But he fought for her not only against the Protestants, but against the theory of Infallibility, then called Ultramontane, because held on the other side of the mountains, but rejected by the Gallican Church. In another lecture I shall speak more at length of the principles of Gallicanism and of its history. Suffice it here to mention that one of its fundamental doctrines was, that the doctrinal decisions of the Pope were not to be regarded as final; that they might be reviewed and corrected, or even rejected, by a General Council or by the Church at large. A formal treatise of Bossuet in proof of this principle was a

storehouse of arguments, largely drawn on in the controversies of the years 1869-70. But this principle of his was condemned with an anathema at the Vatican Council of the latter year.

Now observe, this was not a difference of opinion on a minor point—some point on which the guide had given no instruction, and with respect to which, therefore, his followers were free to take their own course. The question here at issue was the vital one—who the guide was that was to be followed. A man does not follow another as his guide, though he may be walking along the same road, if he takes that road only because he himself thinks the road to be the right one. And so, though on a number of questions Bossuet might side against the Protestants and with the Pope of his day, it is plain that he was not, on principle, following the Pope's guidance: consequently, Bossuet is treated by the predominant Roman Catholic School of the present day as no better than a Protestant. Just as he himself had argued that outside the Roman Church there was no truth or consistency, and that Protestantism was but an inconsistent compromise with infidelity, so Cardinal Manning says nearly the same things of that theory of Gallicanism of which Bossuet was the ablest defender. 'It was exactly the same heresy,' Manning declares, 'which in England took the form of the Reformation, and in France that of Gallicanism.' Dr. Brownson's *Review*, the chief organ of American Romanism, treated Bossuet's opinions with even less ceremony. It said, 'Gallicanism was always a heresy. The Gallicans are as much alien from the Church or Commonwealth of Christ as are Arians, Lutherans, Calvinists, Anabaptists, Methodists, spiritists, or Devil-worshippers.'

Could the irony of events give a more singular refutation than this? A man writes a book to prove that Protestantism is false because Protestants disagree among themselves, and Romanism is true because its doctrines are always the same, and its children never disagree; and in a few years he is himself classed with Devil-worshippers by the most accredited authorities of the religion which he defends, and whose doctrines he supposes himself, and is supposed by everyone else at the time, most thoroughly to understand. For all we can tell, the Romanist champions of the present day may be in no better case. Can Cardinal Manning be secure that, as the development of Roman doctrine proceeds, he may not be left stranded outside the limits of orthodoxy, and be classed with Devil-worshippers by the Romanist champions of the next century?

We seem now to have arrived at a most uncomfortable conclusion. We have agreed that Christ must have given His people some rule, and we have tried all the rules that have been proposed, and found that all must be pronounced, on Milner's principles, fallacious. We are forced, then, to try back on Milner's axioms, and see whether we were not over-hasty in admitting them. You will find on examination that Milner's argument, in substance, reduces itself to this: There is an infallible guide somewhere—no one claims to be that guide but the Church of Rome, therefore it must be she. When you

ask, How do you know that there is an infallible guide somewhere? he answers, That is a proposition of which no rational Christian can doubt. I have already shown you how easy it is to make an argument in favour of a false opinion, by proving laboriously any true propositions it may be convenient to you to make use of; but getting quickly over the false propositions that are introduced, and treating them as self-evident principles which no rational person can dispute. I have already expressed my opinion that if you concede Milner his axioms, and then try to take your stand on the Bible as a guide which satisfies the conditions which these axioms impose, you will certainly be defeated. But, in real truth, Milner might have spared himself the trouble of writing the rest of his book, when he begins by taking for granted that God has provided us with an infallible guide, or, to use his own words, ‘with a never-failing rule, which is never liable to lead a sincere inquirer into error of any kind.’ Observe the monstrous character of the claim. We are to be supernaturally guarded not merely against deadly error, but against error of any kind. But, in truth, this monstrous claim is absolutely necessary in order to make out Milner’s case; for we should not want the help of the Church of Rome if we might be content in matters of religion with that homely kind of certainty which is all that God gives us for the conduct of the most important affairs of life: aim assurance that may well be called certainty as to substantial matters, shading off to high probability when we descend to the leading details, and leaving room for doubt and difference of opinion when we come down to subordinate details. I do not see how any Roman Catholic can seriously defend Milner’s axiom unless he first mend it by claiming supernatural protection, not against error of any kind, but only against error inconsistent with holding the truths necessary to salvation. I shall not quarrel with any one for holding that if God required men to believe certain doctrines on pain of damnation, He would propound these truths so plainly that no one should be able to mistake them. This is a maxim of which I have already taken the benefit against the Church of Rome. For, while it is said that Christians are bound, under pain of damnation, to submit to the Church of Rome, that doctrine has been taught so obscurely that more than half the Christian world has not been able to find it out. But *we* say that the revelation God has given us is, in essential matters, easy to be understood. Roman Catholics dwell much on the difficulty of understanding the Scriptures, and quote St. Peter’s saying, that the Scriptures contain many things difficult and ‘hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest to their own destruction.’ But *we* say that the obscurities of Scripture do not hide those vital points, the knowledge of which is necessary to salvation; and we have the authority of many ancient Fathers to support us in so thinking. Chrysostom, for instance, says, ‘all things are plain and simple in the Holy Scriptures; all things necessary are evident.’* ‘The Apostles and Prophets have made all

* *In 2 Thess.*, Hom. III., vol. xi., p. 528.

things proceeding from them plain and evident to all; in order that each person, even by himself, may be able to learn what is said from the mere reading of it.’* He gives this as a reason why God chose men in humble station to be the writers of books of Scripture. ‘In like manner,’ says St. Augustine, ‘God hath made the Scriptures to stoop to the capacities of babes and sucklings.’† ‘Scarcely anything is drawn out from the more obscure places of Scripture which is not most plainly spoken elsewhere.’‡ Accordingly, when any of the early Fathers has occasion to make an enumeration of the truths which Christians ought to know, he usually contents himself with a summary of doctrines nearly identical with that contained in the Apostles’ Creed, all the Articles of which contain truths that lie on the very surface of Scripture, and do not require any laborious investigation of texts in order to arrive at them.

But, for thus holding that the list of truths necessary to be known in order to salvation is short and simple, we have the authority of the Roman Church herself. No one is so unreasonable as to expect ordinary members of the Church to be acquainted with all the decisions of Popes and Councils, in the correctness of which they are nevertheless obliged to believe. Take only one Council—the Council of Trent. Has any Roman Catholic that is not a professed theologian, studied its decrees? If an unlearned Roman Catholic were asked to explain the doctrines of Justification and Original Sin, steering clear of Lutheranism on the one hand and of Pelagianism on the other, taking care not to give any countenance to the Jansenists, but also taking care not to fall foul of St. Augustine, we may be sure that if he was mad enough to undertake the task, he would not go far in his statement without finding himself involved in some of the anathemas of which that Council was so liberal. There are, on a rough calculation, one hundred and fifty doctrines condemned by it, with a formal anathema. An anathema is, in fact, the way by which the Council indicates that the doctrine which it propounds is ‘*de fide*.’

But an unlearned person is not expected even to understand the terms in which the doctrine is conveyed. Dr. Newman has been so good as to furnish me with an example. ‘What sense,’ he asks, ‘can a child or a peasant, nay, or any ordinary Catholic, put upon the Tridentine Canons, even in translation, such as “Si quis dixerit homines, sine Christi justitia per quam nobis meruit justificari, nunc per eam ipsam formaliter justos esse, anathema sit.” Yet these doctrinal enunciation, he adds, are *de fide*. Peasants are bound to believe them as well as controversialists, and to believe them as truly as they believe our Lord to be God.§ I do not know that the canons of the Council held since Newman’s book was written are more intelligible to the unlearned; for example, ‘Si quis dixerit deum esse ens universale seu indefinitum quod sese

* Hom. III. *de La.*, vol. i., p. 379

† Enarr. in *Psalm*. viii. 8, vol. iv., p. 42

‡ *De Doct. Chr.* ii. 8, vol. iii., p. 22.

§ *Grammar of Assent*, [lecture 4.]

determinando constituat rerum universitatem in genera species et individua distinctam, anathema sit.’ Of these, and such like propositions, which an unlearned Roman Catholic is bound to believe, he is not in the least expected to know even the meaning. The decisions of councils are intended for the instruction of those who make theology their study, and not for that of ordinary members of the flock. While the Church does her duty in providing scientific theologians with a guide to any of the by-paths of theology they may be tempted to explore, she does not invite the unlearned to enter into these mazes; and the great doctrines of the Gospel constitute the broad highway of salvation, plain, easy to be found, and in which the least learned member of the Church can walk without fear of error. According to Roman Catholic teaching, an individual member of the Church is forbidden to *reject* any doctrine taught by the Church; but he is not bound to know all that she teaches. He must believe that she teaches true doctrines, but he need not know what these doctrines are. The list of doctrines which he is bound to *know*, as well as to *believe*, is (as we shall presently see) a very short one.

The distinction which I have just stated is sometimes expressed as a distinction between explicit and implicit belief. When you accept any truth, you take it with all its consequences, though you may never have drawn them out, and do not know all that is involved in the assent you have given. When you believe that the Church cannot err, in that belief is involved, as a necessary consequence, belief in all that the Church has taught, or may at any time teach, however ignorant of her actual teaching you may be. Now though, according to Roman theory, faith in the Church’s teaching is necessary to salvation, that faith need not be explicit. Implicit faith is when a person is persuaded that the teaching of the Church is all true, though he imperfectly knows what that teaching is; explicit faith, when he, besides, has an intelligent knowledge of the doctrines in which he believes. The best illustration of implicit faith is afforded by the story of *Fides Carbonarii*. The story, in some shape, you have probably heard; but you may as well hear it in its original form as told by Cardinal Hosius.* The Cardinal is proving that if you trust only in Scripture you must be worsted in every conflict with the devil, who can argue out of it much better than you; and he tells a story of a poor collier who when asked by a learned man what he believed, repeated the Creed, and, when asked what more he believed, answered, ‘I believe what the Church believes.’ ‘And what does the Church believe?’ ‘The Church believes what I believe.’ ‘And what do the Church and you both believe?’ ‘The Church and I believe the same thing.’ The learned man was disposed to smile at the collier’s simplicity. But some time after, when he was on his death-bed, Satan tempted him with assaults on his faith, to parry which all his learning was in vain, and, every time the Evil One questioned him how he believed, he was glad to reply, ‘ut carbonarius.’

* *Confutatio Brentii*, lib. iii., *De Auctor. Sac. Scrip.*

Such faith as this is held to be sufficient for salvation. It is enough if the individual humbly receives all that is pro pounded to him on God's authority, and does not, in the pride of his reason, reject truths that he knows to be part of Divine revelation; and he is not to be blamed if he does not explicitly hold doctrines which he has never been properly in formed were part of God's revelation through the Church. Nay, he may hold two opposite doctrines, the one explicitly, the other implicitly. He may have formed his own opinion on a point of doctrine, without being aware that his view had been condemned by the Church, and he may be, at the same time, fully desirous to believe all that the Church teaches. In this case, it is held, his implicit true faith will save him, notwithstanding his explicit false faith; or, as the distinction is otherwise expressed, though he hold *material* heresy, he is not *formally* heretical. It is in this way that the early Fathers are defended when their language is directly opposed to decisions since made by Rome. Cyprian may oppose the supremacy of the Roman See; Chrysostom may use language directly opposed to Transubstantiation; elsewhere he may

. But these Fathers are held to be excused, because in their time the Church had not spoken distinctly. They would, no doubt, have spoken as she does now, if they had been privileged to hear her voice expressed on the questions referred to. In will they agreed with the Church, and would have been pained to dissent from her, though their actual expressions are directly opposed to her doctrine.

I cannot help remarking, in passing, how this theory represents the Church, not as helping men on their heavenly way, but as making the way of salvation more difficult. Every interposition of her authority closes up some way to heaven which had been open before. A couple of hundred years ago a Roman Catholic might believe, without hazard of salvation, that the Virgin Mary either was or was not conceived without sin. Leading men were arrayed on both sides. But since Pius IX., in 1854, promulgated the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, no one can call it in question, on peril of forfeiting his salvation. So, in like manner, of the dogma of the Pope's personal infallibility, and a host of other questions. Now, we could understand the Church's office, if the case was this, that a knowledge of certain doctrines being necessary to salvation, the Church was appointed to publish these doctrines so plainly that none could mistake them. But the case is just the reverse. The guidance of the Church is represented as needed, not for the publication of truths in themselves necessary to be known, but for the solution of problems raised by speculative theologians, with respect to which it might have been free to men to hold either view if the Church had but held her peace. Suppose that we were starting on a mountain expedition, and that a professed guide beset us with clamorous representations of the absolute necessity of engaging his services. There was a multitude of misleading paths, there were precipices, snowdrifts, concealed crevasses: it was certain death to venture over the pass without a guide. Suppose that when, on these

representations, we had engaged his services, he told us that we had nothing to do but follow the great, broad path before us; that there were, indeed, many intricate side-paths, but that into these we need not enter; the only essential point being that we should be persuaded that he could guide us safely through them. In such a case, I think we should feel that we had been swindled out of our fee on false pretences, and that, instead of our absolutely wanting a guide, the truth was that it was the guide who absolutely wanted us. And our faith in the guide would be a little tried if, when we came to a place where two paths diverged, and asked him which we were to follow, he replied, that if he had not been there to direct us, we might have safely taken either way, as many had already got safe to their journey's end by both roads; but that now we had heard him direct us to take one path, we should certainly come to grief if we took the other.

You may naturally inquire what is the actual practice of the Church of Rome, with regard to insisting on an actual knowledge of certain truths, in addition to the general knowledge that the Church is able to teach rightly concerning them. It is clear that lay people are not to be sent off to explore the huge folios which contain the decrees of councils. What is it that for their soul's health they are obliged to know? A popular little manual circulated by thousands, and called, *What every Christian must know*, enables us to answer this question. It tells us that every Christian must know the four great truths of faith, namely 'I. There is one God. II. In that God there are Three Persons. III. Jesus became man and died for us. IV. God will reward the good in heaven, and punish the wicked in hell.' This list of necessary truths is not long, but some Roman Catholics have contended that it might be shortened; pointing out that since men were undoubtedly saved before Christ's coming without any explicit faith in the Incarnation or in the doctrine of the Trinity, an explicit faith in these doctrines cannot be held to be necessary to salvation.* Nor does such faith seem to be demanded in a certain papal attempt to define the minimum of necessary knowledge. Pope Innocent IV., in his Commentary on the Decretals, lays down that it is enough for the laity to attend to good works; and for the rest, to believe implicitly what the Church believes. Those who have the cure of souls must distinctly know the articles of the Creeds. Bishops ought to know more, being bound to give a reason to everyone who asks it. For the lower clergy, who have neither leisure for study nor money to bear its expense, it will be enough if they learn as much as the laity and a little more. For instance, as being constantly employed in attendance on the altar, they ought to, know that the Body of Christ is made in the Sacrament of the Altar. And if they have the means of paying teachers, it would be a sin if they did not acquire more ex-

* This view is taken by Gury, *Compendium of Moral Theology*, i. 124, quoted by Little-dale, *Plain Reasons*, p. 75.

plicit knowledge than the laity.*

Although, in the first editions of Father Furniss's little manual, which I have already mentioned, only the four great truths of faith are declared to be necessary to be known; the later editions add the doctrine of the Sacraments, namely—'Baptism takes away original sin; Confession takes away actual sin; and the Blessed Sacrament is the body and blood of Christ.' But take this list of necessary truths at the longest, and it certainly has the merit of brevity. And we may think it strange that a modern writer has succeeded in doing what the writers of the New Testament tried to do, and are said to have failed in. It was certainly the object of the New Testament writers to declare the truths necessary to salvation. St. John (xx. 31) tells us his object in writing—These are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the son of God; and that believing ye might have life through His name.' Yet we are required to believe that these apostles and evangelists, who wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, performed their task so badly, that one who should have recourse to their pages for guidance is more likely than not to go astray, and is likely to find nothing but perplexity and error. Strange, indeed, that inspired writers should fail in their task: stranger still, that writers who claim no miraculous assistance should be able to accomplish it in half-a-dozen lines. But the main point is, that if the list of necessary truths is so short, the necessity for an infallible guide disappears. The four great truths of faith, just enumerated [in the previous paragraph], are held as strongly by Protestants, who dispense with the guidance of the Church of Rome, as by those who follow it.

The great argument by which men are persuaded to believe that there is at least somewhere or another an infallible guide is, that it is incredible that God should leave us with out sure guidance when our eternal salvation is at stake. It is thought that, if it is once conceded that an infallible guide exists somewhere, the case of Rome will be established by the absence of competition from anyone making a similar claim. Now, we saw that Milner's axiom was altogether extravagant. He demanded that God should miraculously secure men from error of *any kind*. Surely, it cannot be required that we should be given certain knowledge on all possible subjects. All that with any plausibility can be demanded is, that we should be guarded against error *destructive of salvation*. But now it is evident that infallible guidance cannot be asserted to be necessary, except in cases where explicit knowledge is necessary. If our readiness to believe all that God has revealed, *without knowing it*, is enough for our salvation, there is an end to the pretence that it was necessary to the salvation of the world that God should provide means to make men infallibly *know* the truth. Here is a specimen of what Roman Catholics call an act of faith: 'O my God, because Thou art true, and hast revealed it, I believe that Thou art One God; I believe that in Thy Godhead there are

* Innocent IV., *Comm. in Liliurum Primum Decretalium.*, lib. I., cap. i., sects. 2, 3, 6.

Three Persons; I believe that Thy Son Jesus became man, and died for us; I believe that Thou wilt reward the good in heaven, and punish the wicked in hell; I believe all that the Catholic Church teaches; and in this belief I will live and die.' In other words, this act of faith is a profession of explicit belief in the four great truths of faith, and of implicit belief in all the teaching of the Church. Now, substitute the word 'Bible' for the word 'church,' and a Protestant is ready to make the same profession. He will declare his belief in the four truths already enumerated, and in all that the Bible teaches. If a Roman Catholic may be saved who actually contradicts the teaching of his Church, because he did not intentionally oppose himself to her, why may not a Protestant be saved, in like manner, who is sincerely and earnestly desirous to believe all that God has revealed in the Scripture, and who has learned from the Scripture those four great truths of faith, and many other truths which make wise unto salvation, even if there be some points on which he has wrongly interpreted the teaching of Scripture? Have we not as good a right in this case as in the other to say that his mistaken belief will not be fatal to one who, notwithstanding his error, is of an humble, teachable disposition, and who does not wilfully reject anything that he knows God to have revealed? In fact, if it were even true that a belief in Roman Infallibility is necessary to salvation, a Protestant would be safe. For, since he believes implicitly everything that God has revealed, if God has revealed Roman Infallibility, he believes that too. Thus the argument for the necessity of an infallible guide has no plausibility, unless, with regard to the absolute necessity to salvation of an explicit belief, we hold a theory far more rigid than even the Church of Rome has ventured to propound.

There is, however, something more to be said before we can part with the discussion of Milner's axioms.