

THE
INFALLIBILITY OF THE CHURCH

A COURSE OF LECTURES

DELIVERED IN THE
Divinity School of the University of Dublin

BY
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PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION.

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THIS volume, like that already published under the title of 'An Introduction to the New Testament,' contains lectures delivered in the ordinary course of instruction to my class in the Divinity School of the Dublin University. The character of the audience addressed in such lectures renders necessary a mode of treatment different from that which would be suitable in a work originally intended for publication. A lecture does not aim at that completeness which is demanded by the purchaser of a book, who expects to find in it all the information he needs on the subject with which it deals, and who objects to be sent to look for it elsewhere. The teacher of a class of intelligent young men cannot but feel that the knowledge which he can hope to communicate to them directly is insignificant in comparison with what they will acquire by their own reading, if he can only interest them in the study. He has no wish to save them the trouble of reading books, but thinks it would be waste of time to spend much in telling them what they are likely to read for themselves elsewhere. It is not his duty to write a new book for their use if he can refer them to sources whence the same information can be satisfactorily obtained. And he naturally adopts a colloquial style as best adapted for retaining the attention of the hearers of a long *viva voce* lecture.

On account of the differences I have indicated, I had not thought my lectures suitable for publication in their actual form, though I at times entertained intentions of writing theological works for which these lectures might supply materials. But time went on without my finding or making leisure to carry any of my contemplated projects into execution; until, three or four years ago, I found reason to consider the possibility that if I were to die, leaving lectures behind me, the pious zeal of some of my friends might cause them to be published posthumously. I felt that if any of my lectures were to be printed, I should much prefer that it were done before they were quite out of date, and while they could have the benefit of my own revision. So I determined to try the experiment of printing some of them; and I selected those on the New Testament, as being on the subject most likely to be generally interesting. Having found by experience that there was no likelihood of my casting my lectures into any different form, I sent them to be printed just as they were, though in the course of their passing through the press, I found so many points omitted, or imperfectly treated, that I was led to make additions which considerably increased the bulk of the volume.

The favourable reception which that volume has met with has encouraged me to print another series of lectures. For the reasons stated in the Introductory Lecture, I do not expect the subject to be so generally interesting as that of the former volume; and yet I have in the same lecture, given reasons

for considering the investigation to be one that ought not to be neglected. But I frankly confess that I have had more pleasure in that part of my professorial work which engaged me in the defence of truths held in common by all who love our Blessed Lord, than when it was my duty to discuss points on which Christians differ among themselves. It has, however, been a pleasant thought to me, that in the present series of lectures I was doing what in me lay to remove what is now the greatest obstacle to the union of Christians. There is, I think, abundant evidence that at the present day the pressure of the conflict with unbelief is drawing Christians closer together. When we regard the state of mutual feeling between members of the Anglican Church on the one hand, and on the other the Greek Church, or the German Old Catholics, or the Scotch Presbyterians, or the Scandinavian Churches, I think we can discern in all cases a growing sense that there are things in which we all agree, more important than the things on which we differ. And the prospect is not altogether unhopeful that, by further discussions and mutual explanations, such an approximation of opinion might be arrived at that there would be at least no bar to intercommunion. But as the Roman Church is at present disposed, there can be no union with her except on the terms of absolute submission; that submission, moreover, involving an acknowledgment that we from our hearts believe things to be true which we have good reasons for knowing to be false. The nature of the claims of Rome clearly shuts out that possibility of reconciliation in her case which may be hoped for in other cases from retractations or mutual explanations; so that, by every effort to bring about the withdrawal of these claims, we are doing something to remove the main obstacle to the reunion of Christendom.

I am not so silly as to imagine that any perceptible effect can follow from adding one to the many demonstrations that have been given that the claims of which I speak are unfounded. But no false opinion can resist for ever the continual dropping of repeated disproofs. We may point out instance after instance in which papal authority has been given to decisions now known to be erroneous, and in each case some ingenious attempt may be made to show that the attribute of infallibility did not attach to the erroneous decision; but sooner or later men must awake to see that the result of all this special pleading is that, whereas they expected to find a guide who would always lead them right, they have got instead a guide who can find some plausible excuse to make every time he leads them wrong. I do not think it absolutely impossible that, under the pressure of historical disproof, some such modification of the theory of Roman Infallibility may eventually be made as will amount to a practical withdrawal of it. The theory of Development, which has now found extensive acceptance in the Roman Communion, involves the belief that the Church of the present day is, in some respects, wiser than the Church of earlier times. When that theory has been itself a little further developed,

it may be found to give the Church the right to review the decisions of earlier times, and to abandon claims formerly made, but which experience has shown to be untenable.

In the present series of lectures I have not entered into the details of the controversy with Roman Catholics. I was able to refer my class to many good books which have been written on the subject. But arguments are useless if addressed to those who profess to be above argument. As the controversy is conducted at the present day, everything turns on the power claimed for the Pope of determining and declaring without any attempt to produce evidence, what are or are not Apostolic traditions. There really is but one question to be settled: Are we bound to receive undoubtingly the Pope's unproved assertions, without any attempt to test by argument whether they are true or not? He may declare in words that he has no commission to make revelation of new doctrine, but only to hand down faithfully the revelation made through the Apostles; but what does that avail if we are bound to take his word whether a doctrine be new or not? He may propound a doctrine such as that of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin, which it is certain that the Church for centuries never regarded as part of the revelation made through the Apostles, and it is held that we are bound not only to believe that doctrine to be true, but also to believe, *on* the Pope's authority, that it is old.

These lectures were not written for Roman Catholics; and I do not expect them to fall into the hands of any, except of those who deal in controversy, and who, perhaps, may take up the volume in order to see if it contains anything that needs to be answered. If any such there should be, I beg of them to remember that they are overhearing what members of another communion say when they are quite by themselves, and, therefore, that they must not be offended if they meet the proverbial fate of listeners in hearing some things not complimentary. If they should think that I have not done justice to their side of the question in the view I have presented of it, I earnestly request them to believe that my error has been involuntary; that it has been my desire to know and to report fairly the strongest arguments that can be used in defence of the Roman claims; and that if there be stronger than those which I have attempted to answer, my omission arises either from ignorance of them, or because the constitution of my intellect is such that I could see no force in them.

With regard to the manner in which I have expressed myself, it is possible they may object to my habitual use of the term Romanists to denote the members of their Church. In the older Church of England books of controversy the word commonly used was 'Papists,' and the religion was called 'Popery.' In modern times the word Papist is supposed to be offensive, though I do not know why men should be ashamed of being called after the Pope, who give

him now even a more prominent place in their religious system than he held three hundred years ago. I have, however, avoided using a term which, whether rightly or wrongly, is imagined to be offensive, though I suspect that the real reason for objecting to it is a desire to be known by no other name than 'Catholics.' Protestants who know nothing of theology are apt freely to concede the appellation, having no other idea connected with it than that it is the name of a sect; but those who know better feel that it is a degradation of a noble word to limit it in such a way. And, in truth, if it is possible to convey insult by a title, what is really insulting is that one section of Christians should appropriate to themselves the title 'Catholic' as their exclusive right, and thus, by implication, deny it to others. This is so obvious that they do not now insist on being called Catholics pure and simple, and are satisfied if other people will speak of them as Roman Catholics. It is a compromise which I am willing to accept in my intercourse with persons of that religion; but I observe that when they are by themselves they always drop the 'Roman,' and call themselves 'Catholics.' So they have no cause to be offended if, when we are by ourselves, we drop the 'Catholic' and call them 'Roman.'

We may fairly object to an inconvenient periphrasis. If we must not speak of members of the Roman Church without tacking Catholic to their name, must we not also, if we claim an equal right in the title, add it to our own name? While, however, we could describe our brethren in England as Anglo-Catholic, how are those of us who live in Ireland or Scotland or America to call ourselves? If any sect—say the Unitarian—were to claim the exclusive title of Christians, and when this were refused them, should insist, at least, in being known, not as Unitarians, but as Unitarian Christians, would not that be felt to be the old claim in disguise, since it would be inconvenient to us to be obliged to make a similar addition to our own name? What I should understand by a Roman Catholic would be a member of the Catholic Church whose home was Rome. A member of the Catholic Church who lived in England would, of necessity, be an Anglo-Catholic. If he wanted there to be a Roman Catholic, he would be no Catholic at all, but a schismatic. To speak honestly, of all the sects into which Christendom is divided, none appears to me less entitled to the name Catholic than the Roman. Firmilian, long ago, thus addressed a former bishop of Rome (and this great bishop Firmilian must be regarded as expressing the sentiments not only of the Eastern Church of the third century, but also of St. Cyprian, to whose translation, no doubt, we owe our knowledge of this letter): 'How great is the sin of which you have incurred the guilt in cutting yourself off from so many Christian flocks. For, do not deceive yourself, it is yourself you have cut off: since he is the real schismatic who makes himself an apostate from the communion of ecclesiastical unity. While you think that you can cut off all from your communion, it is yourself whom you cut off from communion *with* all,'

At the present day the bishop of Rome has broken communion with more than half of Christendom, merely because it will not yield him an obedience to which he has no just right. To me he appears to have as little claim to the title Catholic as had the Donatists of old, who, no matter how many bishops they had in their adherence, were rightly deemed schismatics, because they had unjustly broken communion with the rest of the Christian world.

I might, however, have conquered my objection to the name Roman Catholic, if it were not that it seems to draw with it the word Romancatholicism, one of some abominable words that have been introduced in our generation. To me, 'Catholic' and '-ism' represent ideas which absolutely refuse to coalesce. Roman Catholics hold many doctrines which I believe to be true and Catholic; but what is meant by Romancatholicism is that part of the belief of Roman Catholics which is not Catholic, and is not true.

The majority of the lectures in this volume were written about the year 1870; and as they were not intended for publication, they contained no references to authorities. This has caused me some inconvenience, as, since the time these lectures were written, my reading has taken other directions. I have, however, been able to supply references to the ancient authorities cited; but I have not thought it worth while to give the labour necessary to recall what use I have made of the literature current at the time the lectures were written.

I have to acknowledge the assistance given me by my friends, Dr. Gwynn and Dr. Quarry, who have been kind enough to read the proofs of this volume; and I have to thank the Rev. W. K. Ormsby for help given me in the preparation of the Index.