

Theologiae Dogmaticae Compendium, I. Theologia generalis complectens tractatus quatuor (*Compendium of Dogmatic Theology, Vol. I: General Theology Including Four Treatises*)

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Tract. III, Thesis LV

388. *Thesis LV.* The infallibility of the ecclesiastical magisterium extends also to facts, which are called dogmatic, and to texts of human origin, which are customarily called dogmatic.*

Demonstration, Part I. There are three kinds of facts: some are *revealed*, such as the resurrection of Christ and the conversion of Paul, regarding which the Church is most certainly infallible; others are *not revealed*, merely historical, such as Pompey being defeated by Caesar, about which the Church is not concerned; and others, which are called *dogmatic facts*, which, although they are not revealed, are nevertheless so connected with revelation that they cannot be called into doubt without endangering revealed truth itself or dogma. Such are, for example, that the Holy Scripture which we now use is genuine; that the Councils of Nicaea, Ephesus, Trent, etc. were legitimate; that Pius IX, Leo XIII, etc. were legitimately elected and therefore are legitimate successors of Peter in the Roman episcopate. Indeed, if any of these were called into doubt, it would immediately follow that the definitions issued in councils would be uncertain, that the center of Catholic unity would be uncertain—in other words, it would result in the collapse of faith itself and the destruction of revelation. Concerning such facts, we contend that the judgment of the Church must be considered not only naturally and historically certain, but also supernaturally *infallible*. The reason seems quite clear from the very purpose of the authentic magisterium. For regarding these facts, doubts of greater or lesser gravity can arise, and there can be controversies and disagreements among the faithful. Since revealed truths are so intertwined with these facts that if the latter waver, the former cannot stand firm: the deposit of revelation and the unity of faith cannot be preserved intact unless the Church can judge these controversies and dogmatic facts themselves

with a judgment that is beyond all doubt and therefore infallible. Therefore, in judging these matters, she must be considered infallible.

389. Declaration part II. Similarly, texts or writings can be of three kinds: some are *inspired*, such as the books of Holy Scripture; others merely *profane* of human origin, which have no relation to faith, such as mathematical books; others, which are called *dogmatic* texts of human origin, namely writings composed by humans without divine inspiration, which deal with dogma. When it is established that the Church is infallible in judging such a text, even when condemning it in the sense intended by the author, the discussion is not about the author's sense *subjectively*, which exists in his mind, but about the *objective* sense, which the words express by force of context according to the rules of legitimate interpretation, and which is reasonably supposed to be intended by the author: for anyone is presumed to wish to signify what the words uttered by him signify. Here we are dealing with the *Jansenists*, who indeed freely concede that the Church is infallible in judging revealed truth and the error opposed to it: but with singular obstinacy deny that she is infallible when judging that *Jansenius* in his book 'Augustinus' teaches heretical doctrine, since this is not revealed, and the Church is infallible only concerning the deposit of revelation.

390. Demonstration of Part II. Our assertion, which to some appears certain as a matter of faith, undoubtedly expresses a *Catholic* doctrine. This is proven: 1. from the most true principle that the Church is infallible in declaring the authenticity of the Vulgate, in interpreting creeds and dogmatic canons of councils, and other monuments of divine tradition (n. 381). Yet the Vulgate translation, as well as the creeds and canons as such, are dogmatic texts of human origin. 2. The Church almost always teaches through dogmatic texts of human origin—through creeds, canons, and decrees that are not inspired. If, therefore, the Church were not infallible in understanding and judging such texts, she would scarcely ever teach infallibly, and it could happen that she might propose an erroneous decree. 3. Furthermore, the Church is infallible not only in judging revealed doctrine, but also in judging what conforms to it or contradicts it. But any heresy, whether spoken orally or committed to writing, can be reduced to a dogmatic text, for no heresy can be conceived that is not contained in some human proposition. Unless, therefore, the Church could judge infallibly about such texts, she could never pronounce an authentic judgment concerning any concrete heresy. Indeed, she might condemn a completely orthodox doctrine or approve a false one. 4. If what we defend is denied, there would be no end to controversies, as is abundantly evident from the very history of Jansenism. For heretics would always have the escape that some error was indeed condemned, but not the doctrine of this author or this book, etc., on the grounds that the Church did not understand it sufficiently. But Christ instituted an authentic and infallible magisterium precisely so that not only would the faithful be taught the true faith, but also that controversies subverting the unity of faith would be resolved and heresies extirpated. 5. From ecclesiastical history it is evident that **a.** the Church has condemned not only heresies but also heretics; and **b.** she has condemned them relying on their words spoken orally or committed to writing, and at the same time has condemned such heretical

writings; and indeed **c.** in such a way that she required full adherence¹ to her decrees and regarded those who refused to acquiesce to the sentence pronounced as promoters of heresies and excommunicated them. The Church has thus claimed for herself the right to decide on the heterodoxy or orthodoxy of dogmatic texts of human origin. But it would be most unjust to declare someone a heretic by an **irrevocable** sentence, which all the faithful must accept, because of his words or writings, if the Church could err in interpreting them. Therefore, the inference of the Jansenists is false when they conclude from the fact that something is not contained in divine revelation that the Church's judgment concerning it is not infallible.

391. Concerning the fuller *notion of infallibility* (n. 359), these points should be kept in mind: **1.** it does not proceed from some new revelation or inspiration of the Holy Spirit, but from His assistance, by which He does not permit the Church to err either in the use of means for investigating revealed truth or in proposing the same. Hence **2.** the sophism of the Jansenists is resolved, who, in order to show that the Church can err in judging dogmatic texts of human origin, argue thus: The Church in interpreting such texts uses human means, i.e., grammatical and hermeneutical rules, etc. But these means are subject to error. Therefore, the Church cannot infallibly attain truth through them. Setting aside the observation that from this argument it would also follow that the Church could err in explaining creeds, traditions, and the Scriptures themselves, we note: a careful distinction must be made between the means themselves and their use. For the attainment of truth depends primarily on the legitimate use of means; and the Holy Spirit assists the Church in using the means properly, as needed, to attain the truth. **3.** The prerogative of infallibility does not exclude human diligence and cooperation in investigating truth and rendering judgments, as is already proven by the first council of the

¹ Cf. for example the constitution of **Clement XI**, 'Vineam Domini' of July 14, 1705, in which he establishes: >That any occasion for error in the future may be thoroughly cut off, and that all children of the Catholic Church may learn to hear the Church herself not only by remaining silent (for even the impious keep silent in darkness), but also by internally obeying, which is the true obedience of an orthodox person, we decree, declare, establish, and ordain by this our constitution, which shall remain perpetually valid, that the obedience which is owed to the aforementioned apostolic constitutions is by no means satisfied by that respectful silence; but the condemned sense of the Jansenist book contained in the aforementioned five propositions... ought to be rejected and condemned as heretical not only with the mouth, but also with the heart, nor can the above-mentioned formula (of Alexander VII, by which they had been condemned and which was to be subscribed to) be lawfully subscribed to with any other mind, soul, or belief, so that those who think, hold, preach, teach by word or in writing, or assert otherwise or contrary to all or any of these things, are completely subject, by the same apostolic authority, to all and each of the censures and penalties as transgressors of the aforementioned apostolic constitutions.

apostles². For we read that the apostles and elders assembled and had much discussion, in order to settle the controversy whether the legal observances were still to be kept by the faithful.

392. The Utility of Councils. Therefore, **4.** ecumenical councils, although not absolutely necessary for the exercise of infallibility, are nevertheless very useful when it comes to either establishing Catholic doctrine, condemning heretics, or enacting decrees. For **a.** decrees that come forth from or are confirmed by such a distinguished and numerous assembly of pastors are more willingly accepted by the faithful and by those whose faith wavers, than those which are issued by a single individual or by an assembly of pastors dispersed throughout the world, since suspicions of fraud, ignorance, deception, self-interest, etc. are kept further at bay. Similarly, **b.** dissenting parties are more easily recalled to harmony in such synods; **c.** bishops more eagerly execute decrees which they themselves have established together with others; **d.** through mutual conference they instruct one another, are strengthened in faith, foster charity and unity, unite their forces in defeating heresies and extinguishing schisms, and by pooling their counsel better provide for the common good of the Church. However, **5.** it is never permissible to call into doubt the decrees of a certainly ecumenical council under the pretext that sufficient diligence was not employed in formulating them.

² For we read that the apostles and elders came together, and after great deliberation, settled the controversy as to whether the legal observances were still to be kept by the faithful.