

The Church of Christ: An Apologetic and Dogmatic Treatise

by Fr. Edward Sylvester Berry), 1926

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Part II, Chapter XV, Article II SECONDARY EXTENT OF INFALLIBILITY

Since the Church is endowed with infallible authority for the express purpose of preserving intact the deposit of revealed truth and for expounding it without error, she must also be infallible in judging of doctrines and facts so intimately bound up with revealed truths that they cannot be denied or questioned without endangering revealed truth itself. Such doctrines and fact constitute the secondary object or extent of infallibility. They fall within the province of infallibility only in so far as they are connected with revealed truth. This secondary or indirect extent of infallibility includes especially (a) theological conclusions, (b) truths of the natural order, (c) dogmatic facts, and (d) general disciplinary matters.

a) THEOLOGICAL CONCLUSIONS

A theological conclusion is a proposition logically deduced from premises, one of which is a revealed truth, the other a truth known by reason, e. g., Christ is true man (revealed truth); but man is composed of body and soul (truth known by reason); therefore, Christ has a human body and a human soul (theological conclusion). The infallible authority of the Church necessarily extends to such conclusions, for otherwise the deposit of faith could not be preserved intact. “If the Church were infallible in revealed truths, but not in matters inseparably connected with them, she would be like a commander ordered to defend a city without authority to make fortifications or to destroy the machinery of war prepared by the enemy.”¹

b) NATURAL TRUTHS

Faith necessarily presupposes many truths of the purely natural order; such, for example, as the spirituality of the soul, the possibility of revelation and miracles, and also the possibility of attaining certain knowledge through human testimony. “There are also truths and conceptions, and even terms of such nature that revealed truths cannot be set forth

¹ {org. 1} Van Noort, “De Ecclesia Christi,” n. 88.

and properly explained without them. Such, for instance, are the notions of substance, person, transubstantiation.”² The Church must have infallible authority in regard to all such natural truths, in so far as they are connected with revealed truth, because without such authority she could not preserve and expound revelation with infallible security.

c) DOGMATIC FACTS.

A dogmatic fact is one that has not been revealed, yet is so intimately connected with a doctrine of faith that without certain knowledge of the fact there can be no certain knowledge of the doctrine. For example, was the Vatican Council truly ecumenical? Was Pius IX a legitimate pope? Was the election of Pius XI valid? Such questions must be decided with certainty before decrees issued by any council or pope can be accepted as infallibly true or binding on the Church. It is evident, then, that the Church must be infallible in judging of such facts, and since the Church is infallible in believing as well as in teaching, it follows that the practically unanimous consent of the bishops and faithful in accepting a council as ecumenical, or a Roman Pontiff as legitimately elected, gives absolute and infallible certainty of the fact.

²{org. 2} Dorsch, “De Ecclesia Christi,” p. 333.