

Chapter Seventeen

The Infallibility of the Pope

Infallibility¹

NOUN

the quality of being infallible; the inability to be wrong:

"his judgment became impaired by faith in his own infallibility."

(in the Roman Catholic church) the doctrine that in specified circumstances the Pope is incapable of error in pronouncing dogma.

The Vatican Council of 1870 met in Rome and defined the doctrine of the infallibility of the Pope as follows:

“...We teach and define that it is a dogma divinely revealed that the Roman Pontiff when he speaks *Ex Cathedra*, that is, when in discharge of the office of pastor and doctor of all Christians, by virtue of his Apostolic authority, he defines a doctrine regarding faith and morals to be held by the universal Church, by the

divine assistance promised him in blessed Peter, is possessed of that **infallibility** with which the divine Redeemer willed that His Church should be endowed for defining doctrines regarding faith and morals and that therefore such definitions of the Roman Pontiff of themselves – are not by virtue of the consent of the Church – are **irreformable**. But if anyone – which may God forbid! - presume to contradict this our definition; let him be anathema.”

So there we have the official definition. Whatever the Pope determines regarding anything pertaining to faith or morals is absolute, guaranteed true, not open to discussion or debate, forced upon the Church with or without their consent, and, most importantly, irreformable. With this last word “irreformable” the Roman church has literally painted itself into a corner. If the Pope speaks for the church, can’t be wrong, and can’t change his mind, then, by definition, the Church can never repent, even if shown error.

I remember as a young man that the Roman Catholic church taught that eating meat on Friday was a mortal sin. It was a serious restriction that our family followed scrupulously. Then in 1966, that changed; Vatican II changed the rules. This was troubling to me and others. How can the church “change”? What did this mean for other teachings that were supposed

to be absolute and unchangeable? What happened to all those poor departed souls who went to hell on a meat rap? Were they retroactively pardoned? The whole authority structure began to appear rather shaky. I would later learn that I was not alone in my uncertainty about the “sure foundation” of the Catholic faith. A few small pebbles of “change” started a landslide in the minds of many.

I left the Catholic church in the early 70s, not because of any single issue, but due to a growing awareness and understanding of the Catholic church's arrogance, domineering attitude towards dissent, abusive control of its members, questionable theological assumptions and conclusions, links to pagan practices and outright dishonest and deceptive claims. My rejection, at this point, was not based on any solid Scriptural background. As a typical Catholic, I was Biblically ignorant. My grounding in Biblical understanding came later. I simply held up the claims of the Roman Catholic church in the light of logic, fairness, and the examination of the fruit of their teachings. They clearly failed the test. My quest for truth continued in my pursuit of learning through the various schools of Protestantism which is the topic of later chapters.

1. As defined in www.dictionary.com