

## NEWMAN ON INFALLIBILITY

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JOHN HENRY NEWMAN ran the gamut of practically all the positions on infallibility that are compatible with a sincere acceptance of a once-for-all revelation of God in Christ. In his Anglican days he attacked infallibility as the fundamental flaw of the Roman Catholic system. In his *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, composed as he was transferring to the Roman allegiance, he answered his previous objections and argued for the necessity of an infallible teaching authority. In his *Apologia pro vita sua*, as a seasoned Catholic, he stoutly defended the principle of infallibility, with applications to the dogmatic teachings of Trent and the papal definition of the Immaculate Conception. But during Vatican Council I he nervously expressed his opposition to the proposed definition of papal infallibility. When the dogma was defined in 1870, he initially hesitated as to whether it was binding on Catholics. Soon, however, he overcame his doubts and became a leading apologist for the definition. At that stage he confined the dogma within narrow limits, glorying in his own minimalism. Several years later, in a new introduction to his original Anglican attack on infallibility, he maintained a surprisingly broad theory, extending the pope's infallibility to matters not contained in the original deposit of revelation. In view of all these variations, theologians of almost every stripe can find support for their positions somewhere in the Newman corpus.

In trying to present Newman's teaching on infallibility, one must take account of this complex history. One must consider not only the date but also the exact circumstances of each writing and its intended audience. Newman was frequently writing as a controversialist or as a spiritual director. Sometimes he was writing against the Catholic Church, sometimes against liberals and Protestants who denied infallibility altogether, sometimes against extreme ultramontanists who recognized no safeguards. Many of Newman's most interesting observations on infallibility are found in personal diaries or in private correspondence. In some cases he was tentatively exploring positions that he did not definitively accept. In other cases he was attempting to comfort anxious Catholics or prospective converts who were troubled by the extravagances of militant infallibilists.

A number of authors have surveyed Newman's views on infallibility in

more or less chronological order.<sup>1</sup> Instead of going over the same ground again, I shall here attempt a more systematic synthesis of Newman's thought on the main issues. My order will therefore be topical rather than chronological, although I cannot avoid all reference to the times and circumstances in which Newman was writing. On points where he reversed himself, I shall indicate the main arguments he gave for and against the alternative positions.

#### THE CASE AGAINST INFALLIBILITY

Throughout Newman's long career he constantly maintained that Roman Catholicism has as its "main tenet" and its "fundamental dogma" that the Church is the infallible organ of truth.<sup>2</sup> This he believed already in his Anglican days; and as a Roman Catholic he continued to assert it. As an Anglican he was convinced that infallibility was the root cause of all the Roman corruptions. The question of infallibility, he held, was the underlying source of the differences between the Roman Church and the Church of England.<sup>3</sup>

In attributing this central importance to infallibility, Newman had to face the difficulty that the Catholic Church made no official pronouncement about infallibility until 1870, long after he had developed his main positions. Even in 1870 Vatican Council I contented itself with ascribing to the pope that infallibility "with which the divine Redeemer had been pleased to endow his Church" (DS 3074)—without specifying the nature of the Church's infallibility. Previous popes and councils had at times peremptorily taught certain particular doctrines, such as the Trinity, the divinity of Christ, the sacraments, grace, and eternal life, but they had not spoken about the divine assistance that enabled the Church to require faith in its word. The particular contents of faith for the Roman Catholic and for the Anglican were in Newman's view very similar. But the two churches proposed different motives for accepting the contents.

Three main positions could in fact be distinguished. The Protestant believed on the basis of Scripture, the Anglican on the basis of antiquity,

<sup>1</sup> E.g., Gary Lease, *Witness to the Faith: Cardinal Newman on the Teaching Authority of the Church* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University, 1971); Edward Jeremy Miller, *John Henry Newman on the Idea of Church* (Shepherdstown, W.Va.: Patmos, 1987); and Paul Misner, *Papacy and Development: Newman and the Primacy of the Pope* (Leiden: Brill, 1976). Important articles on Newman's views regarding infallibility have been authored by Charles Stephen Dessain, Joseph Clifford Fenton, J. Derek Holmes, Jean Sterns, and Roderick Strange.

<sup>2</sup> *The Via Media of the Anglican Church* 1 (New York: Longmans, Green, 1911) 84; *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent*, ed. Ian T. Ker (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985) 102.

<sup>3</sup> *Via Media* 1:105.

and the Catholic on the basis of infallible church teaching. The Protestant and the Anglican could scarcely be expected to affirm infallibility, for the very concept was a late development, one that took shape as the Church reflected on the warrants by which it could claim to teach in the name of God.<sup>4</sup>

Newman consistently rejected the Protestant view that the Bible was a sufficient guide in all matters of faith. To him it seemed evident that the inspired volume was neither intended nor suited to serve that purpose.<sup>5</sup> As an Anglican and later as a Roman Catholic Newman held that the authoritative decisions of the early Church, especially in its ecumenical councils, were essential to prevent the faithful from falling into heresies such as Gnosticism, Arianism, Nestorianism, and Eutychianism, or their modern equivalents.<sup>6</sup>

As an Anglican Newman argued for what he called a *via media* between the errors of Protestantism and those of Roman Catholicism. The Protestants, relying on the Bible alone, believed too little, and the little that they still believed was continually being eroded by rationalist criticism. The Roman Catholics, on the other hand, believed too much. Not content with the creed as established by the ancient councils, they continually added to the contents of faith, imposing modern accretions as if they demanded the same adherence as the central dogmas.

The issue between Anglicans and Roman Catholics could be described in terms of the alternatives of antiquity and infallibility. Newman's early arguments for antiquity were developed in terms of what he regarded as the weaknesses of infallibilism. Infallibility, as he saw it, began as a kind of legal fiction, like "The king can do no wrong." Wishing to be rid of doubt in matters of religion, Catholics readily accepted the symbol of an infallible Church as a vivid expression of the mission of the Church to be the divinely appointed keeper and teacher of truth. The doctrine appealed to the imagination, not to the intellect. Somewhat like the precept of Jesus to "turn the other cheek," infallibility functioned as a symbol, extravagant in theory but serviceable in practice, inasmuch as it surrounded popes and bishops with a certain aura of divinity.<sup>7</sup>

Trouble arose, according to the early Newman, when the symbol was taken for the reality. Trapped by their own arguments for infallibility as

<sup>4</sup> Letter to Isy Froude of July 28, 1875, in *Letters and Diaries of John Henry Newman* 27 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1975) 337-38; henceforth *LD*.

<sup>5</sup> *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (ed. of 1878, reprinted London: Longmans, Green, 1906) chap. II, sect. 2, no. 12. Future references will be according to numbers of the chapter, section, and subsection.

<sup>6</sup> *Via Media* 1:191-92. See also *Apologia pro vita sua*, ed. Martin J. Svaglic (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1982) 226.

<sup>7</sup> *Via Media* 1:116-17, 143-44.

the basis of faith, Catholics began to seek for infallible grounds for every belief, and to doubt whatever could not be infallibly certified. Eliminating the dimension of mystery, they attempted to translate the full content of faith into precise dogmatic formulations. The Roman Church was under pressure to produce a complete system of dogma and to claim for itself the omniscience that belonged to God alone. Focusing on the formal element of certification, Catholics paid too little heed to the contents of the gospel. They were inclined to put all dogmas on the same level, and to overlook what, in the language of Vatican Council II, would come to be called the "hierarchy of truths."<sup>8</sup> Thus the doctrine of infallibility, according to Newman the Anglican, had many deleterious effects.<sup>9</sup>

Anglicans, with their rule of antiquity, stood by the creeds and dogmas of the early centuries. While acknowledging the Church's capacity to recognize pure expressions of Christian faith, they did not look on any particular organ of the Church as immune from error. As an Anglican Newman admitted that the undivided Church of the first centuries, down to the schism between East and West, possessed a certain gift of infallibility. But that gift could not operate except where the Church as a whole could reach a common judgment. In the divided Church of later times no single part had the right to impose its particular doctrines on the others. All should be content to adhere to the ancient rule of faith, and to the extent that they did so their faith was indefectible. Indefectibility in the essentials of the faith was, in Newman's estimation, common to all branches of the Church Catholic—the Orthodox, the Roman, and the Anglican. Somewhat like Hans Küng in our own day, Newman in his Anglican days regarded indefectibility as a suitable substitute for the infallibility that he rejected.<sup>10</sup>

#### CONVERSION TO INFALLIBILITY

The *via media* was for Newman an unstable compromise. Excogitated by himself, the theory hardly existed except on paper. It depended upon two contestable assumptions: first, that there was a manifest difference between essentials and nonessentials, and second, that there was a sharp break in the pattern of teaching between the patristic age and later periods. As Newman continued to reflect on the subject, he found fault with both assumptions.

The crucial moment, as he describes it in his *Apologia*, came toward the year 1839, when he made a serious study of the Monophysite heresy.

<sup>8</sup> Vatican II, *Unitatis redintegratio* 11.   <sup>9</sup> *Via Media* 1:85–105.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* 1:189–213; cf. Hans Küng, *Infallible? An Inquiry* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1971). Newman, insisting as he did on the inviolability of dogma, would not have subscribed to Küng's conception of indefectibility as a "fundamental remaining of the Church in truth, which is not annulled by individual errors" (181).

At the Council of Chalcedon, under the insistent leadership of Pope Leo, the great Church anathematized that error. As an Anglican Newman had to ask himself on what ground he could approve this decision in the fifth century while denying the right of the great Church, in the 16th century, to condemn the Protestant positions. In each case substantive issues of the faith were at stake; the living Church was expelling from its body a foreign and unassimilable element. Reflecting on his feelings in 1839, Newman later wrote:

It was difficult to make out how the Eutychians or Monophysites were heretics, unless Protestants and Anglicans were heretics also; difficult to find arguments against the Tridentine Fathers, which did not tell against the Fathers of Chalcedon; difficult to condemn the Popes of the sixteenth century, without condemning the Popes of the fifth.<sup>11</sup>

The phrase which for him summed up the matter was one formulated by Augustine against the Donatists, "Securus judicat orbis terrarum." Here was a simpler rule than that of antiquity. The existing Church, and not simply the prior Church, was the oracle of truth. The same rule could apply for modern times and ancient. With that realization the *via media* was in Newman's judgment pulverized. He felt bound to profess infallibility and in so doing to accept Roman Catholicism. For infallibility was, as we have seen, the distinctive trait of the Roman Church. No other church in the modern world dared to claim the gift of infallibility.<sup>12</sup> If infallibility was true, the Church of Rome was the true Church.

After setting forth his arguments for infallibility somewhat tentatively in his exploratory *Essay on Development*, Newman affirmed the doctrine more confidently but always cautiously in his Roman Catholic writings such as the *Apologia* and the *Letter to the Duke of Norfolk*. Throughout his career he consistently held that the doctrine could not be directly proved either from Scripture or from church history. Several passages from Scripture did seem to intimate the infallibility of the Church. In Mt 28:20 the Lord promised to remain with the apostles in their teaching mission until the consummation of the world. 1 Tim 3:15, moreover, referred to the Church as "the pillar and the ground of truth." But these and similar texts did not directly testify to the Church's infallibility, which could be found in the texts only when they were read in the light of a cumulative tradition. For Newman this reservation did not weaken the argument; it simply confirmed his conviction that Scripture was not in an adequate sense its own interpreter.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>11</sup> *Apologia* 108-9.

<sup>12</sup> *Via Media* 1:117; *Development* II.2.12.

<sup>13</sup> *Development* II.2.12. See also *Letter to the Duke of Norfolk*, in *Newman and Gladstone: The Vatican Decrees* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1962) 184-85.

As for history, Newman conceded that infallibility was in principle open to historical falsification. The "hypothesis" of infallibility, as he sometimes called it, would at once be shattered if "the Church itself, acting through Pope or Council as the oracle of heaven," could be shown to have ever "contradicted her own enunciations."<sup>14</sup> In his *Essay on Development* he combed through a mass of data to satisfy himself that this was not the case. In later writings he admitted some obscurity about certain historical examples, such as the letter of Pope Honorius to Patriarch Sergius, in which the pope had failed to reject a doctrine about the person of Christ that would later be condemned as heretical. To Newman it seemed clear that the pope at that time was not making an ex-cathedra pronouncement; he was not teaching the universal Church from the Chair of Peter what must be believed; and hence infallibility was not at issue.<sup>15</sup>

Newman's general principle regarding history was similar to that regarding Scripture. The dogmas of the Church need not be directly verifiable from the data. Authors such as Döllinger, according to Newman, "seem to expect from History more than History can furnish."<sup>16</sup> "For myself," he continued,

I would simply confess that no doctrine of the Church can be rigorously proved by historical evidence; but at the same time that no doctrine can be simply disproved by it. Historical evidence reaches a certain way, more or less, towards a proof of the Catholic doctrines; often nearly the whole way; sometimes it goes only so far as to point in their direction; sometimes there is only an absence of evidence for a conclusion contrary to them; nay, sometimes there is an apparent leaning of the evidence toward a contrary conclusion, which has to be explained;—in all cases there is a margin left for the exercise of faith in the word of the Church.<sup>17</sup>

Newman's positive argument for infallibility, like that of Karl Rahner in our own century, proceeded a priori, on the basis of antecedent probabilities.<sup>18</sup> Revelation, he asserted, comes to us with a profession of infallibility; otherwise it would not be the word of God. But God would not give a historical revelation addressed to humanity as a whole unless He intended it to remain accessible. Unless it were guarded by a divinely equipped authority, believers would be thrown back on their own resources to ascertain and interpret what had been originally given.<sup>19</sup> In

<sup>14</sup> *Development* III.2.12.    <sup>15</sup> *Norfolk* 179.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.* 176.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.* 177.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Rahner, "A Critique of Hans Küng," *Homiletic and Pastoral Review* 71 (May 1971) 10–26, esp. 21.

<sup>19</sup> *Development* II.2.1–14, esp. 7.

summary, then, "If Christianity is both social and dogmatic, and intended for all ages, it must humanly speaking have an infallible expounder."<sup>20</sup>

Under the guidance of the Anglican theologian Joseph Butler, Newman sought to confirm his argument by analogies between the natural and supernatural orders.<sup>21</sup> Creation, Newman argued, would be meaningless without divine conservation, for in the absence of the latter the world would lapse back into nothingness. So too with revelation: it would recede into the ambiguities of natural knowledge unless there were a supernatural authority to maintain it in its purity and integrity. Just as creation implied conservation, so revelation entailed infallibility.<sup>22</sup>

A further argument for infallibility came from Newman's theory of development. He was convinced that Christianity had come into the world as a vague global idea, and only gradually found apt expression for itself in dogmatic propositions. Yet the propositions were necessary for revelation to maintain itself once certain questions and objections had been raised. For example, the doctrine of Nicaea on the divinity of Christ was a necessary response to the Arian heresy. The movement from idea to dogma, however, did not carry with it its own assurance. Hence the seal of an infallible authority was required.<sup>23</sup>

Still another ground for affirming infallibility arose out of Newman's fear of liberalism. Looking around the world of his day, he was convinced that liberalism in religion was opening a path to infidelity. Freedom of thought, he believed, was prone to suicidal excesses. The Bible could not stem this tide, for the dead letter could not "make a stand against the wild living intellect of man."<sup>24</sup> The only suitable antagonist would be a living force as vigorous as infidelity itself—one that could decisively smite and anathematize error. Without such an authority Christianity would in the course of time be reduced to the level of natural religion.

The most serious objection for Newman in his Catholic period was the fear that reliance on infallible authority would suppress the free and legitimate exercise of reason. In the *Apologia* and elsewhere he argued at length that, far from suppressing reason, infallibility stimulated it. Every exercise of infallibility on the part of a pope or council was preceded by a long theological discussion, extending in some cases over as much as five centuries, and was followed by debate about the precise meaning, grounds, and implications of what had been defined. There was therefore no need to choose between reason and infallible authority. The history of the Church presented "a continuous picture of Authority and Private

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. II.2.13.

<sup>21</sup> Even as a Catholic Newman continued to draw from the classic work of Joseph Butler, *The Analogy of Religion, Natural and Revealed, to the Constitution and Course of Nature* (1732).

<sup>22</sup> *Development* II.2.10.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. II.2.5.

<sup>24</sup> *Apologia* 219.

Judgment alternatively advancing and retreating as the ebb and flow of the tide," neither eliminating the other but on the contrary drawing strength from interaction with its own counterpart.<sup>25</sup> The vitality of theological speculation made it both possible and necessary for the bishops and the Holy See to discriminate accurately between truth and error. The pronouncements themselves gave rise to new studies, thus fueling the progress of theology.

Although he was deeply convinced of the need for an infallible authority, Newman never fell into the error he had previously ascribed to Catholics—that of holding that nothing could be certain unless sealed by an authoritative pronouncement. In his *Grammar of Assent* he pointed out that certitude and infallibility operate in different spheres. Infallibility is a faculty or gift that covers an indefinite range of propositions; certitude is directed to some one proposition in particular. William Chillingworth had objected against Catholics that they had no infallible means of knowing that the Church was infallible. That is true enough, Newman replied, but certitude can be had without infallibility. I can be sure of what I did yesterday even though my memory is by no means infallible. And there is no contradiction in asserting that an authority is probably infallible. The immediate and proper effect of infallibility is not certitude but truth. Infallibility is a help for attaining certitude in certain matters in which we depend on authority.<sup>26</sup>

Newman never wrote at length about the nature of infallibility, but his occasional brief remarks on the subject are very helpful. He viewed it not as a distinct charism or infused gift, but as a set of providential dispositions by which God brings about a determinate effect: the preservation of the truth of revelation in the Church's definitive teaching.<sup>27</sup> Infallibility, as distinct from revelation or inspiration, was a mere assistance, and at that a primarily negative assistance. It served to prevent the Church, in certain of its acts, from falling into error.<sup>28</sup>

#### THE SEAT OF INFALLIBILITY

In some of his less-well-known writings Newman devoted considerable attention to two very difficult questions: the seat of infallibility and the limits of infallibility. A brief discussion of each of these points may be in order.

Regarding the first question, Newman held that the adequate bearer or subject of infallibility was the whole Church. As he put it in the

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.* 226.

<sup>26</sup> *Grammar* 146–49; cf. *Development* II.2.6–7.

<sup>27</sup> *Norfolk* 189; *The Theological Papers of John Henry Newman on Biblical Inspiration and on Infallibility*, ed. J. Derek Holmes (Oxford: Clarendon, 1979) 113.

<sup>28</sup> Letter to Alfred Plummer of April 3, 1871, in *LD* 25 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1973) 309.



*Apologia*, "The deliberate judgment, in which the whole Church at length rests and acquiesces, is an infallible prescription and a final sentence against such portions of it as protest and secede."<sup>29</sup> In his essay *On Consulting the Faithful in Matters of Doctrine* Newman maintained that since divine tradition was committed to the infallible Church as a whole, it might at various times come to expression through different channels: now through the voice of the pope and bishops as teachers, now through that of the faithful as the great body of believers. Pius IX, in defining the Immaculate Conception in 1854, had spoken of the "singularis catholicorum Antistitum ac fidelium conspiratio." In this phrase, as Newman notes, two different witnesses—the Church teaching and the Church taught—are placed together, "illustrating each other, and never to be divided."<sup>30</sup>

Newman's characterization of the sense of the faithful as a reliable witness to the faith of the infallible Church seems harmless enough, especially since Vatican II, which explicitly taught that "The body of the faithful as a whole, anointed as they are by the Holy One (cf. 1 Jn 2:20, 27), cannot err in matters of belief."<sup>31</sup> Nevertheless Newman's thesis, appearing in an article that contained several other daring statements, aroused hostile criticism and led to his denunciation to Rome by Bishop Thomas J. Brown of Newport. The objection, as formulated by John Gillow, a theology professor at Ushaw College, was that Newman seemed "to imply that the infallibility of the Church resides in *Communitate fidelium*, and not exclusively in the *Ecclesia docente*. Else the infallible portion would consult the fallible with a view to guiding itself to an infallible decision."<sup>32</sup>

The objection seems to rest on a misinterpretation. Newman never held that the faithful, apart from the hierarchy, were an infallible witness, but only that they were a constituent part of the total Church, which was infallible. Inasmuch as their views generally reflected those of the teaching Church (*ecclesia docens*), the bishops might appropriately consult the faithful as a man might consult a mirror in order to contemplate his own reflection.

Occasionally Newman borrowed from certain Continental theologians the distinction between the "active" infallibility of the hierarchical magisterium and the "passive" infallibility of the faithful.<sup>33</sup> These terms,

<sup>29</sup> *Apologia* 110.

<sup>30</sup> *On Consulting the Faithful in Matters of Doctrine*, ed. J. Coulson (Kansas City, Mo.: Sheed & Ward, 1985) 71.

<sup>31</sup> Vatican II, *Lumen gentium* 12.

<sup>32</sup> Letter from Dr. Gillow of May 15, 1859, in *LD* 19 (London: Nelson, 1969) 134, n. 3; for discussion see Ian Ker, *John Henry Newman: A Biography* (Oxford: Clarendon, reprinted 1989) 477–87.

<sup>33</sup> Letter to Isy Froude of July 28, 1875, in *LD* 27:338.

however, do not do justice to Newman's real thought on the matter. The laity, in deciding what they are bound to accept or reject, are in some sort active. Their instinct of faith is in its way an authentic expression of the infallibility of the Church as a whole. In certain cases in which the pope or the bishops failed to teach, or taught wrongly, the sense of the faithful could serve as a corrective.<sup>34</sup>

If doubts arose about whether a particular dogmatic definition fulfilled all the necessary conditions needed for infallibility, the reception accorded to it by the faithful could serve as a criterion. Immediately after Vatican Council I, before he was able to learn whether the bishops of the opposition were submitting to its decrees, Newman wrote to a friend:

If the definition is consistently received by the whole body of the faithful, as valid, or as the expression of a truth, then too it will claim our assent by the force of the great dictum, 'Securus judicat orbis terrarum.' This indeed is a broad principle by which all acts of the rulers of the Church are ratified. But for it, we might reasonably question some of the past Councils or their acts.<sup>35</sup>

Within the community of the faithful, Newman gave a special place to the body of theologians, which he called the *schola theologorum*. They were especially active in preparing the way for dogmatic definitions and in interpreting the definitions once given. Commenting on the Vatican I definition of infallibility, Newman pointed out that after the Church magisterially enunciates some general principle, "she sets her theologians to work to explain her meaning in the concrete by strict interpretation of its wording, by the illustration of its circumstances, and by the recognition of exceptions."<sup>36</sup> The exact interpretation of papal and synodal utterances requires time and skill.<sup>37</sup> The theologians, using their reason and private judgment, ultimately settle the force of dogmas somewhat as courts of law solve the meaning of acts of Parliament.<sup>38</sup> As the theologians probe into the matter, they frequently find that what had seemed to be closed off is in fact still open.<sup>39</sup> In the jargon of our day we would say that Newman was keenly aware of the hermeneutical problem and of the role of the theologians as a kind of "second magisterium."<sup>40</sup>

<sup>34</sup> *On Consulting the Faithful* 75-77, 104-5.

<sup>35</sup> Letter to Ambrose Phillipps de Lisle of July 24, 1870, in *LD* 25:164-66, quoted in *Norfolk* 168-70, at 170.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.* 183.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.* 76.

<sup>38</sup> Letter to Henry Cope of Dec. 10, 1871, in *LD* 25:447.

<sup>39</sup> *Norfolk* 193.

<sup>40</sup> J. C. Fenton attacks Newman for giving the final say to theologians: "The Doctrinal Authority of Papal Encyclicals," *American Ecclesiastical Review* 121 (1949) 136-50, 210-20, at 219. For a response to Fenton based on Newman's correspondence, see Romuald A. Dibble, *John Henry Newman: The Concept of Infallible Doctrinal Authority* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America, 1955) 250-51.

Newman, of course, never questioned the specific role of the pope and bishops as official teachers of the faith. They and they alone, he insisted, have the task and power of defining and promulgating the doctrine of the Church.<sup>41</sup> Under certain conditions the teaching of the hierarchical magisterium was, in Newman's judgment, protected against error. According to all Catholics the pope, when defining doctrines of faith and morals in a general council, could not err.<sup>42</sup> On the other hand, a general council apart from the pope was fallible.<sup>43</sup>

On the question whether the pope could speak infallibly without the adherence of the universal episcopate, Newman asserted until 1870 that theologians were not agreed. He personally accepted papal infallibility as a matter of theological opinion.<sup>44</sup> He believed that the proclamation of the Immaculate Conception by the pope in 1854 was an infallible act, but he looked forward to its ratification by an ecumenical council.<sup>45</sup> When it first became known that Vatican I would take up the question of papal infallibility, Newman voiced his opposition, on the grounds that there was no pressing need for the definition and that the Church was not prepared to receive it.<sup>46</sup> He was afraid, also, that the definition would be framed in broad terms according to the wishes of fervent infallibilists such as Louis Veuillot, William George Ward, and Henry Edward Manning. Such a definition would be inexpedient because it would be misunderstood by non-Catholics and would confuse and alienate many Catholics.

When the definition was adopted, Newman immediately expressed his pleasure at its moderate tone.<sup>47</sup> It affirmed the pope's infallibility only within a strictly limited province: the doctrine of faith and morals initially given to the apostolic Church and handed down in Scripture and tradition. Nevertheless Newman hesitated to say that the council's decree was binding, for the unanimity normally required for conciliar definitions seemed to be lacking. The departure of 80 or 90 bishops on the eve of the definition was an ominous sign.<sup>48</sup> If the opposition had continued and solidified, Newman might have rejected the validity of the definition. But he soon found on the contrary that nearly all the opposing bishops submitted and that the vast majority of the faithful accepted the defini-

<sup>41</sup> *On Consulting the Faithful* 63.

<sup>42</sup> *Development* II.2.12.

<sup>43</sup> *On Consulting the Faithful* 76.

<sup>44</sup> *Norfolk* 89, 171.

<sup>45</sup> Letter to Charles Russell of May 17, 1865, in *LD* 21 (London: Nelson, 1970) 470; letter to Edward Pusey of July 21, 1867, in *LD* 23 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1973) 272.

<sup>46</sup> Letter to Bishop Ullathorne of Jan. 28, 1870, in *LD* 25:18-20; cf. confidential letter to Robert Whitty, S.J., of April 12, 1870, in *LD* 25:92-96, esp. 93.

<sup>47</sup> *Norfolk* 168; also letter to Henry Cope of Dec. 10, 1871, in *LD* 25:447.

<sup>48</sup> *Norfolk* 169; cf. full text of letter of July 24, 1870 to Ambrose Phillipps de Lisle, in *LD* 25:164.

tion. Thus the conciliar decrees were ratified by their reception. If a few individuals such as Ignaz Döllinger continued to dispute the definition, they justified their stance by an exaggerated interpretation that Newman found untenable.<sup>49</sup> The history of Vatican I thus confirmed Newman in his opinion that the adequate subject of infallibility was the Church as a whole—the united episcopate under the pope, together with the theologians and the faithful as a body.

While Newman was content with the dogma as he interpreted it, he felt that it presented only one aspect of infallibility. The role of the pope still had to be seen in relation to other elements in the Church. In his letters Newman consoled his friends by pointing out that doctrine normally developed by a dialectical process, involving an alternation between different facets. Just as the Christology of Ephesus needed to be cured of its one-sidedness by the teaching of Chalcedon, so too, Newman predicted, it would fall to the lot of a future council to “trim the boat,” offsetting the imbalances of the late Vatican Council.<sup>50</sup> Newman may be said to have anticipated the general thrust of Vatican II, though he did not foretell the doctrine of episcopal collegiality that would there emerge.

#### THE LIMITS OF INFALLIBILITY

In his published writings Newman had little to say about the extension or object of infallibility, the final point to which I now turn. In his *Apologia* he stated: “The great truths of the moral law, of natural religion, and of Apostolical faith, are both its boundary and its foundation.” In the first edition of the *Apologia* he then added the following words, deleted in all subsequent editions: “Thus, in illustration, [infallibility] does not extend to statements, however sound and evident, which are mere logical conclusions from the Articles of the Apostolic *Depositum*; again, it can pronounce nothing about the persons of heretics, whose works fall within its legitimate province.”<sup>51</sup> Later Newman affirmed as his personal opinion that logical deductions from the deposit could be made portions of the Church’s dogma, though he did not hold this to be a matter of faith.<sup>52</sup> In his diaries and private correspondence he frequently raised the question whether the dogmatic facts, such as the heretical quality of Jansen’s work, or the fact that Pius IX was a legitimate pope, could be matters of faith. He seemed to consider that infallibility ex-

<sup>49</sup> Letters to Alfred Plummer of March 12 and April 3, 1871, in *LD* 25:301, 308.

<sup>50</sup> *Norfolk* 173; cf. letter to Alfred Plummer of April 3, 1871, in *LD* 25:310.

<sup>51</sup> *Apologia* 227, with footnote; see also editor’s note, 568. As Newman elsewhere explains, this sentence, reflecting the opinion of Philipp Neri Chrismann, seemed to take a position on a disputed question that Newman had really intended to leave open. See his letter of 1868 to Father John Stanislas Flanagan in *Inspiration and Infallibility* 155–56.

<sup>52</sup> Letter to Flanagan, *Inspiration and Infallibility* 154–55.

tended indirectly to matters such as these, insofar as they served to give concrete form to the truth of revelation.<sup>53</sup> He was unwilling to say that such truths were to be believed on a motive of "ecclesiastical faith," a term that seemed to imply that the Church could exact faith in its own word. For Newman faith properly so called could extend only to matters revealed by God.<sup>54</sup> For matters indirectly pertaining to the revealed deposit he apparently preferred to speak of acquiescence through a reverence stemming from faith (*pietas fidei*).<sup>55</sup>

From his satisfaction with the moderate and limited character of the Vatican I definition of papal infallibility one might expect Newman to reject the infallibility of the pope in the canonization of saints. In a private note of 1866 he seems to incline toward the view of Eusebius Amort that the pope is infallible not in the canonization but only in commending the cultus.<sup>56</sup> In a letter of 1868 he makes the curious statement about canonization, "to him who thinks it infallible it is such."<sup>57</sup> But, finally, in his 1877 Preface to *Via Media* Newman comes to the affirmative position. He lays down the principle, "No act would be theologically an error, which was absolutely and undeniably necessary for the unity, sanctity, and peace of the Church."<sup>58</sup> Then he adds as his first example the canonization of saints. In so serious a matter, he declares on the authority of Thomas Aquinas and Benedict XIV, God could not allow his Church to fall into error, as would happen if a sinner were venerated as a saint. At this point Newman goes far beyond what the Vatican I definition of papal infallibility seemed to provide for. He speaks more like the school of Manning and Ward.

#### CONCLUSION

Newman's teaching on infallibility is of abiding interest because as an Anglican he presented a strong case against infallibility and then, as a Roman Catholic, answered most of his own previous objections. With his vast knowledge of history and his brilliance as a controversialist he became a formidable apologist for the Catholic position.

More than an apologist, Newman was a creative theologian who notably advanced the understanding of what infallibility is and how it functions. In characterizing infallibility as the fundamental tenet of the Roman Catholic system he offered an intriguing thesis that deserves more discussion than it has received. It is generally acknowledged that Roman Catholicism inculcates a high regard for the living magisterium and for the power of that magisterium to require internal assent for its teaching, even in cases where the charism of infallibility is not invoked.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.* 119, 141.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.* 112.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.* 146, 155.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.* 128.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.* 155.

<sup>58</sup> *Via Media* 1:lxxxiv.

But the authority of the magisterium is greatly strengthened by its capacity in certain cases to require its word to be accepted on the motive of "divine and Catholic faith," to use the expression of Vatican I (DS 3011). Implicit faith in the guidance of the magisterium gives a distinct modality to the faith of Roman Catholics, even in their acceptance of doctrines which they share with other Christians. Although infallibility is certainly not the most important belief of Roman Catholics, it may be the principal feature distinguishing their beliefs from those of other Christians.

Newman never explicitly answered his own contention as an Anglican that infallibility is a legal fiction or symbol intended to fire the imagination of the faithful rather than a proposition addressed to their intelligence.<sup>59</sup> By the time he wrote the *Essay on Development* he had evidently abandoned this theory, for he then maintained that the doctrine of infallibility would be falsified if the magisterium had definitively taught anything that it subsequently denied. It remains true, however, that infallibility does produce an aura or mystique surrounding the pope and the bishops, lending added authority even to their noninfallible teaching. This may be beneficial insofar as it restrains unwarranted dissent, but harmful insofar as it provides an occasion for what some authors have called "creeping infallibilism." By repeatedly insisting on the limits of infallibility, Newman sought to prevent such exaggerations.

Newman's view that the adequate bearer of infallibility is neither the hierarchical magisterium (*ecclesia docens*) alone, nor the body of the faithful (*ecclesia discens*) alone, but the Church as a whole, when the official teachers and the faithful concur, is, I believe, consonant with the teaching of Vatican II, which treated infallibility primarily as a charism of the whole people of God, and only secondarily as an endowment of the hierarchy or the pope. Although Newman had hesitations about ascribing infallibility to the pope as an isolated individual, he would have experienced no difficulty, so far as I can see, in saying with Vatican II that under certain strictly limited conditions "the charism of the infallibility of the Church itself is individually present" in the successor of Peter.<sup>60</sup>

Newman is rightly praised for his recognition of the importance of the assent of the faithful. He used the *sensus fidelium* not to offset the infallibility of the magisterium in teaching and defining, but rather to confirm the teaching of the magisterium when the latter is not uncontestedly infallible. Newman might have admitted that in certain cases the lack of acceptance on the part of the faithful could raise a question

<sup>59</sup> See Nicholas Lash, "The Legal Fiction of Infallibility," *Heythrop Journal* 16 (1975) 57-58.

<sup>60</sup> Vatican II, *Lumen gentium* 25.

as to whether a given pronouncement of the hierarchy was in fact infallible, but he never suggested that the views of the faithful had infallible normative value apart from, or in opposition to, the teaching of the hierarchy. In many respects Newman's doctrine concerning reception as a criterion for the valid exercise of the infallible teaching office, and as a principle for the interpretation of hierarchical teaching, anticipates the insights of contemporary theologians such as Yves Congar.<sup>61</sup>

Newman's views on the role of theologians in the preparation and interpretation of infallible hierarchical pronouncements may still be studied with profit. He may be said to recognize in theologians a complementary magisterium, scarcely less important, in its own way, than the official magisterium of popes and bishops. The evidence and arguments brought to light by theologians often play a decisive role in shaping the beliefs of Catholics.

Possibly Newman goes too far in trying to resurrect under modern conditions the medieval concept of the *schola theologorum*. Whatever the assets and deficiencies of the university faculties as quasi-official doctrinal instances in the Middle Ages, it would be difficult to find in our own day a body of theologians who could speak authoritatively for the Church as such. Newman's analogy between the theologians' interpretation of magisterial definitions and the work of courts of law in the interpretation of acts of Parliament might be questioned on some points. The courts of law are official organs of the civil government; the teaching of theologians, at least in modern times, belongs to the private sphere. In order for the theologians as a class to have public standing in the Church, the ecclesial norms for membership in the theological community would have to be clarified.

Newman reflected long and deeply about the infallibility of popes and councils. His patristic studies gave him an excellent platform from which to criticize the liberal positions of Döllinger and Acton, as well as the ultramontane positions of Manning and Ward. He focused his attention principally on solemn pronouncements of the extraordinary magisterium. He did not, however, give much attention to the infallibility of what is known as the "universal ordinary magisterium," although this had been referred to by Pius IX in his Munich Brief of 1863 (DS 2879) and by Vatican I in its dogmatic constitution *Dei Filius* (DS 3011). If Newman had systematically pursued this theme he might have come closer than he did to the concept of collegiality as taught by Vatican II.

The modern reader who has access to the letters and diaries of Newman

<sup>61</sup> Cf. Yves Congar, "Reception as an Ecclesiological Reality," in Giuseppe Alberigo and Anton Weiler, eds., *Election and Consensus in the Church* (Concilium 77; New York: Herder and Herder, 1972) 43-68.

cannot but be fascinated by Newman's hesitations regarding the seat and the extension of infallibility. He writes as if caught between two mind-sets, unable to choose between them. He is torn by two sets of fears. When he looks at the ultramontane curialists, he speaks almost as a liberal, defending the rights of private judgment and conscience against the harsh impositions of authority. But when he contemplates the rapid spread of infidelity, he rushes to the defense of centralized authority. Thus he is at one moment the ally of Döllinger and the Gallicans and at the next moment the admirer of Cardinal Dechamps and the papalists. He wavers and sometimes contradicts his own previous statements.

In a certain sense it may be said that Newman always remained the apostle of the *via media*. As a Catholic he sought a middle path no longer between Romanism and Protestantism, but between Gallicanism and ultramontanism. Even in his vacillation, or perhaps especially there, Newman can be seen as the patron of all who refuse to join a party in the Church, and who strive to reconcile the valid concerns of factions that are mutually opposed. This very fact gives special actuality to his work in the polarized Church of our own day.