Is the Pope Always RIGHT?

of Papal INFALLIBILITY

by Grover Ables

A QUEEN'S WORK PAMPHLET

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THE informal, conversational Doctor Bill-Father Charlie discussions that first appeared in "Indulgences for Sale" and were continued in "Who Wants a Hair Shirt?" are brought to you once more, this time for the clarification of the subject of Papal Infallibility.

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DOCTOR BILL looked up from his office desk as Father Charlie entered.

"Sorry"—he spoke with a businesslike air —"but we do not treat mental cases. I'll be glad to give you the name of a reputable psychiatrist however."

Father Charlie grinned. "Keep it," he advised. "You might need it yourself someday. Besides this is not a professional call."

"How do you mean?" asked Doctor Bill, peeling off his white jacket preparatory to donning street clothes. "That you aren't looking for my professional help? Or that you aren't trying to give me yours?"

"I don't need yours," replied Father Charlie, lightly, "and you won't take mine."

Fair Return

Bill laughed. "You might be wrong on both counts there, you know," he said, hanging his jacket in the closet. "I can't get you to hold still long enough to find out whether or not you need my services. But for my part I'm willing to take some of your medicine to get the taste of my own out of my mouth after ten hours at this office.

"I'll tell you what. Let's make a trade. You come on over to my rooms now for a

cup of tea, during which time you can give me a short homily to make me forget the ills of the town for awhile. In return I'll give you a thorough physical tomorrow, free for nothing, to see whether or not your next of kin should be notified. How about it?"

"As the offer stands, I can't complain," considered Father Charlie, judicially.

"Well what are we waiting for?" Bill asked, shrugging into his coat and reaching for his hat. "If we don't step on it, you or I will get a call, sure as fate." The doctor led the way through the side doorway to his coupé, which was parked at the curb.

Open Mind

Father Charlie glanced affectionately at his friend as they rode through the streets of the little southern city where both of them were doctors—he of souls, Bill of bodies. For the thousandth time since he had come to the town, he thanked God that the leading doctor there was a boyhood school friend, on whom he could depend both for companionship and for help in his spiritual mission. For although Bill was nominally Protestant, he had a great love for his friend Charlie and a great respect for his opinions and his office as priest.

Bill found difficulty in escaping from the purely materialistic attitude that his medical training had emphasized. But it was with a thoroughness amounting almost to

passion that he explored the religious vistas that his frequent discussions with the priest opened up to him, as if he subconsciously felt that these avenues afforded wholesome release from his daily occupation with the ills of the flesh.

Father Charlie encouraged this interest of Bill's, partly because he took delight in Bill's keen mind, but mostly because he recognized his friend's real need for something beyond materialism. If only, he thought, he could keep before the doctor a vision of realities beyond the reach of drugs and scalpels, Bill would someday see that drugs and dogmas, scalpels and scapulars are complementary parts of the same whole.

On his side Bill rendered real service to the priest. He conscientiously baptized weak babies born to his Catholic patients. At a sickbed he was quick to see when it was time for medicine to give way to mediation. It was then that Father Charlie's telephone would ring, and Bill's quiet voice would repeat what had become almost a formula: "Charlie, you'd better come and take over." And few of Bill's Catholic patients died so suddenly that they did not have the last rites of their Church to sustain them.

As the car rolled up before the modest apartment house where Bill maintained his bachelor establishment, Father Charlie felt optimistic. Some night as he struggled with the powers of darkness on one side of a

bed while Bill at the other side called down with his efficient hands the magic of medical science, the doctor would suddenly understand that the two were working, not in different fields, but together, providing that complete service which man, composed as he is of both clay and the breath of life, requires.

"Properly Speaking . . ."

"Passengers change here for all points," announced Bill, halting in the driveway. "A lounge and a rest room will be found on the second floor."

"And tea, I hope," added Father Charlie, stepping out and closing the door of the car.

"The management keeps its promises," said Bill, with dignity, waving his hand grandly toward the entrance. "Please use the stairs; there is no elevator."

Father Charlie sank gratefully into an easy chair in Bill's sitting room. "Nice place you have here, Bill," he said, appreciatively, watching the doctor fill the kettle and set it on the gas burner.

"Nice enough," grunted Bill. "But I seldom have a chance to enjoy it. I wonder if religion can explain why it is that people who in the daytime walk the streets with the robust glow of health on their faces suddenly double up with excruciating pain at two o'clock in the morning."

"I'm afraid not." His visitor chuckled. "The fact is, we priests have thought of asking medical science the same question."

Bill eased himself onto the sofa, waiting for the kettle to boil. "I don't mind the work," he said, filling his pipe and extending his tobacco pouch to the priest. "Do you know what worries me most about my job?"

Father Charlie shook his head negatively as he accepted the pouch that Bill held out.

"No. What?" asked the priest.

"The fact that much of what I'm expected to do is not my job at all, properly speaking. It's yours." Bill sucked the flame of the lighter into his pipe.

Father Charlie nodded, welcoming his friend's communicative mood. "That's probably true," he assented. "It is also true that many who come to me for spiritual advice really are in need of medical care first."

Certainty

"There's that of course," admitted Bill. "But I think it's oftener the other way around. At least you aren't expected to set broken limbs. I suffer professionally if I fail to relieve a patient's insomnia, even if it is caused by a guilty conscience."

The priest laughed. "It's a tough life," he commiserated. Then he asked, seriously, "What, do you think, Bill, is at the root of

these nonphysical ills that you are called upon to treat?"

"Fear based on uncertainty," answered Bill, positively. "Too many people haven't an adequate philosophy of life. The aims that they have are for the most part selfish ones. Then when danger threatens or hardships come, they have nothing to fall back on . . . they can't take it. They develop neuroses and haunt doctors' offices, looking to the doctor for relief that can come only from a change within themselves."

"Certainty is a wonderful thing," murmured Father Charlie.

"And where can it be found?" Bill's voice was suddenly tense. "Oh I know roughly what you'll say in reply. But there are so many other voices, all clamoring to be heard. I pass along the street down by the Kingdom Hall of Jehovah's Witnesses. Across from it is the Christian Science reading room, near which a neon sign on a small church flashes off and on: 'Jesus Saves.' Within sight of one another there are churches of at least five denominations, each raising its head for attention, each saying implicitly, by its very presence, 'Here is the answer to your problems.'

"A Salvation Army lass with her collection plate and a couple of sisters from the convent pass near the park, where a revivalist preaches raucously to a small group. 'Faith alone!' he shouts, 'Faith alone saves us!'

"Over my radio a preacher's voice comes smoothly: 'The Bible is the sole rule and guide of faith. Read it, and find out for yourselves the way of salvation. Let no ecclesiastical hierarchy bind your conscience. You are free to devise your own creed.'

Over the Teacups

"And we muddle along, wondering what's what.

"And here I go now"—Bill was embarrassed at his sudden eloquence—"letting the kettle boil its head off, and two thirsty customers waiting for tea."

He bustled about, putting tea into the pot and pouring in the boiling water, rattling cups and saucers, getting out the sugar and the cream, and opening up packages of cookies. Father Charlie remained silent, puffing his pipe, watching Bill's preparations, and waiting for the dissipation of the slight air of constraint that Bill's outburst had created.

"I'm tempted to beg the bishop's permission to let you preach at next Sunday's Mass," Father Charlie said, lightly. "Cream and two lumps, please."

"I'd give 'em an earful," grinned Bill, his usual debonair self again.

"I don't doubt it in the least," declared the priest, sipping his tea. "You have some good thoughts there. All of what you say

though resolves itself roughly into one question."

"Yes it does," agreed Bill, quickly. "And I can state the question: 'Whom can we believe?' "

"Close enough," assented Father Charlie. "And the answer is certainly important both from the physical and the spiritual angles, as you have indicated."

"Can you answer it?" inquired Bill, innocently.

Coercion?

"No," said Father Charlie. Seeing the expression of slight surprise on Bill's face, he continued, "Not for you, I can't. I can answer it for myself, and I have already done so. But even if I could impose my answer on you, I wouldn't; it would do you no good. You'll have to find your own answer."

" 'Helpful Charlie,' they call him," joked Bill. "I always heard that the Catholic Church's aim was to impose her beliefs on everybody."

"I think you can see how silly that charge is." Father Charlie spoke mildly. "A belief cannot be imposed; it must necessarily come from within oneself. Of course it is my duty to explain and present the Catholic faith in such a way that others may see its reasonableness and beauty, but I know of no way that I could enforce it upon anybody even if I tried.

"It is something of a mystery why people today believe that the Church wants to shanghai converts. What good would such unwilling and unconvinced converts be to the Church even if by some malignant power she were able to bring them in?

"Actually it would seem much more plausible to accuse the Protestant denominations of this desire. Most of them attempt to persuade people to come into their churches on the spur of the moment, under stress of carefully built-up emotion. The Catholic Church on the other hand will not accept a convert until he has been carefully instructed in the faith and then voluntarily embraces it. This sometimes requires months, as any convert will tell you. And sometimes the person decides not to become a Catholic at all."

Regimentation?

"I know that's true," commented Bill. "I'm certainly not afraid of your using strong-arm methods on me to get me into your Church. But I think that the reason so many Protestants feel that the Catholic Church coerces her members into unanimity of belief is because Protestants are unable to understand how this unanimity can otherwise be attained. They are accustomed to wide divergence of belief among their own ministers, often even among ministers of the same denomination. So that they see in the solidarity of the Catholic Church, not free adherence to her teachings, but regimentation."

"That is possible," said the priest. "But —and you can take it from one who knows —the strongest tie that binds a Catholic to his Church is that of love. And who is better able to judge whether or not the Church deserves such love: The one who has been intimately associated with her devotional life from earliest childhood, who has observed that life in his parents as well as in numerous priests and religious? Or the person who is unacquainted with the Church — perhaps even antagonistic toward it?

"It is a significant thing that there are few Catholics—even great sinners or those who disregard her discipline to the extent that they are banned from her sacraments —who speak of the Church with anything but reverence and respect. Even those Catholics who have separated themselves from the active life of the Church still love to slip into a Church alone and sit or kneel before the flickering sanctuary lamp; they feel that there they are at home.

To Die in . . . and Live in

"And when death threatens these Catholics, they shake off whatever worldly affections have led them away and humbly ask that a priest be called so that they may be received back into the bosom of the Church. It may be partly fear of what comes after death that brings them back; but it is love for the Church and confidence in her ministrations that make them seek her in their fear."

Bill had listened thoughtfully to the priest's words. Now he nodded agreement. "I've been at the deathbed of several Catholics who for one reason or another had left the Church; and without exception every one, if he was conscious, called for a priest. I've just about come to agree with Longfellow, I think it was, who said that he didn't know whether or not the Catholic faith was the best faith to live in, but his observation indicated that it was by far the best faith to die in."

"His statement is based on sound judgment," said Father Charlie. "And I can clear away the 'or not' hesitation of his statement: The Catholic faith is the best faith to live in too."

Large Claims

"I won't argue the point," said Bill. "In fact I come very near agreeing with you. But I can see how there might be those who, while they would admire the Church for her humanitarianism, respect her for her strength and courage in her fight against evil, even believe most of her doctrines, would still hesitate to commit themselves to the finality of saying to her, 'You are right in your claims.' Because you know"—Bill's voice was almost diffident—"she claims so much."

Bill reached for the teapot and refilled Father Charlie's extended cup.

"She does indeed claim much," the priest agreed, conversationally. He deliberately

kept his voice casual because he did not want to break the delicate spell of ease and confidence. "She claims so much that I cannot imagine any other organization daring to make these claims, or any other group of people admitting the validity of those claims over a period of nearly two thousand years—unless they were true."

It Scares 'Em

"That's a point of course," admitted Bill. "There's little doubt in my mind that if the truth of the claims of the various churches is to be determined pragmatically —simply on the basis of how widely they are accepted and how well they work—the Catholic Church would come through the test with flying colors. But you would not base your proof of the Church's divinity on pragmatism, would you?"

"No," replied the priest. "Not altogether. But the fact that the Catholic Church has been able to flourish in every age since her foundation, in spite of the unrelenting efforts of her enemies to discredit and destroy her, and that today she has the loyalty of more Christians than have all other churches combined . . . that's some indication of her divine origin."

"A good indication, I'd say," agreed Bill. "But there's one thing in particular that scares people away from the Catholic Church who might otherwise be disposed to listen more seriously to her: the doctrine of Papal infallibility. Leave that off, and

you'd gain many more converts than you do."

Father Charlie refilled his pipe and lit it before he answered.

"Papal infallibility is an essential doctrine of the Church," he said, carefully. "For no reason whatsoever could it be omitted, any more than could, say, the doctrine of the Holy Trinity be omitted, since it is an integral part of divine revelation and hence cannot be tampered with even by the Church."

"How about the Orthodox Churches?" inquired Bill. "They deny the doctrine of Papal infallibility. Yet you admit that they are a part of the true Church, don't you?"

Schism

"The Eastern Churches, called Orthodox, have a valid ministry and valid sacraments," said Father Charlie. "But by separating themselves from communion with Rome, they have become schismatic and do not enjoy many of the spiritual privileges that such communion would bring. The result of this deplorable condition is evident too in the lack of unity of the various national divisions of these Churches and in the general decay of the spiritual life among them. They send out few missionaries; they have little influence upon their people; too often they have become simply the tools of the states in which they exist. The Russian Orthodox Church is an exam-

ple of this. It is only by active union with the See of Rome that real sanctity and unity can grow."

"But aren't there Anglicans who claim to be a part of the Catholic Church? And they deny Papal infallibility," Bill reminded him.

"A few," admitted Father Charlie. "And their presence in the Anglican communion is a fine compliment to the Catholic Church. The leaders of the Oxford Movement, of whom John Henry Newman—later Cardinal Newman—was one, were for the most part a group of good and pious men who saw clearly what three hundred years of separation from the Catholic Church had done to the spiritual life of the Church of England.

"It has been said that imitation is the sincerest form of flattery. Such flattery was obvious in the thinking of these men, for they insisted upon the necessity of a return to the beliefs and ceremonies of the Church of pre-Reformation England—which was the Catholic Church. The same flattery is manifested in and by their followers today, who call themselves Anglo-Catholics.

Testimonial

"Wherever an Anglican clergyman puts on Catholic vestments and bows before an altar, believing that he is celebrating the Sacrifice of the Mass, there we have an eloquent testimonial to the truth of the

Catholic Church's claim to being the historic Church established by Jesus Christ. If this were not true, the clergyman would have no foundation for his contention that he is a Catholic priest, since he traces his Orders back to those of St. Augustine, first archbishop of Canterbury, sent to England by Pope Gregory the Great to preach the Gospel to the Angles and the Saxons of the British Isles.

"High-Church Anglicans admit the validity of Roman Orders; they are rash to spurn unquestionable validity for a ministry the validity of whose Orders has been at best uncertain."

"Well just why aren't Anglican Orders valid?" asked Bill.

"The form of ordination of the English Church after the break with Rome was so altered as to cast grave doubt upon the intention of that Church to ordain priests in the sense that the Roman Church uses the term ordain—a bishop setting a man apart in a lawful manner to celebrate Mass, give absolution, and perform the other functions that his office calls for. The liturgy of the new Church of England was admittedly a compromise affair intended to placate the strong Puritan element among the English leaders, who had absorbed the ideas of Calvin and of other Protestants on the continent.

"That the intent of the English bishops was indeed to abolish the priest and the Mass is more evident today from the fact that that intention has been effectively accomplished. The great majority in the Anglican communion, her clergy included, would deny that Our Lord is really and substantially present in the Eucharist, that the communion service is a sacrifice in which Christ is the victim, or that confession made to a priest is the ordinary means by which we become reconciled to God after we have fallen into sin.

"With regard to the claim of High-Church Episcopalians that their ministers are Catholics priests, it has been said that they demonstrate a greater faith in the efficacy of the Sacrament of Orders than do Catholics."

"How is that?" asked Bill, curiously.

"Because High-Church Episcopalians are committed to the proposition that a bishop who has no intention of making a priest can take a man who has no idea of becoming a priest, ordain him by the use of an ordinal that has been declared defective by the majority group of what the Anglican would call by his own definition the Church, and presto! you have a priest who doesn't want to say Mass for a people who don't want him to say Mass."

Bill laughed heartily. "It must take a rather peculiar type of mind to be able to

reconcile so many contradictions. But of course the greater part of non-Catholic Christendom simply discard altogether any idea of a hierarchy, including in the discard any belief in the necessity of an historic ministry. They would say that the Bible alone as it is interpreted by the individual is the sole rule and guide of faith and that we are bound to believe only what we think the Bible teaches. What would you say to that?"

Those Other Sides

The priest seemed for a moment to be struggling with some strong emotion. At last he spoke gravely.

"Bill," he said, "I always honestly try to see the other fellow's point of view, even if I think he's wrong. Often I can understand how he might reasonably hold to what I consider a completely wrong opinion. But when he loosely and without basis declares that Our Lord intended the holy Scriptures to be interpreted by each individual, and each individual to live according to his own interpretation, I'm pretty much puzzled.

"Not only does the Bible itself fail to make any such ambitious claims for itself, but in the conclusion of Peter's second epistle we are warned against doing that very thing. Speaking of Paul's epistles, Peter says: 'In these epistles there are certain things difficult to understand, which the unlearned and the unstable distort, just

as they do the rest of the Scriptures also, to their own destruction.'

"Let's look at the thing from the standpoint of reason for a moment. Let's say that you were founding an organization whose spread you considered of vital importance to all mankind. Let's say that at that time very few people could read and, because of the difficulty of making books, reading matter was available to only the very wealthy. You knew this condition of affairs would continue for fifteen hundred years. You wished your organization and its message to reach as many people as possible. Would you under such existing conditions make a book the basis of authority for your organization and the message of that organization?"

Bill opened his mouth and started to speak: "I—"

Let's Suppose . . .

"Just a moment," the priest interrupted. "Let's say for the sake of illustration that you did choose such a standard of authority. Would you have allowed this book to be written by your followers after your death? Would you have refrained from including in it even one line of your own? Would you have been content for over half a century to pass before the book was completed and for five hundred years to go before it was assembled and declared authoritatively to be your word? and wait one thousand more years for an invention, a printing press, to make it possible for

that book to be placed in the hands of most of your followers? Would you have been so unwise, so shortsighted?"

"No," said Bill, flatly.

"Neither would I," said Father Charlie, quietly, relaxing in his seat. "Nor was Our Lord, as history shows. He emphasized the spoken word, using it to instruct the Apostles, who were to be the nucleus of His Church. He then commissioned them to go forth into all the world and teach in His name. He declared moreover that whosoever heard them heard Him. Also He promised to be with them 'even to the consummation of the world,' indicating that the authority which He gave them should extend to their successors.

The Bible . . . and the Church

"He promised that His Spirit would guide them in the way of all truth and that the gates of hell would not prevail against His Church—the organization that He empowered them to oversee. To show us the solemn authority that these ministers would possess, He warned us that if we would not hear the Church we were to be treated as heathens or publicans. In the Biblical account itself all the emphasis was upon the authority of the Church and upon our obligation to listen to that Church . . . not a word about our making up a creed according to our own conception of what the Bible means."

"That makes sense to me, Charlie." Bill

spoke thoughtfully and then paused. "Before you run down though," he continued, "I wish you'd explain to me just how Papal infallibility fits into the picture. I know already the Biblical texts that you say indicate the primacy of Peter, and they sound, I admit, convincing. But I know that you wouldn't base your argument on these texts alone."

"No I wouldn't," said Father Charlie. "The proof of the dogma of the primacy of Peter and the infallibility of his successors does not depend upon those texts. Those texts are revealing in view of the later acceptance of these dogmas by the universal Church. But the real test of the truth of any proposition of this sort is whether or not the Church has from earliest times taught it. And from the days of the Apostles the Fathers of the Church have been unanimous in holding that communion with Rome is the test of orthodoxy.

When Infallible?

"Of course the formal definition of the dogma of Papal infallibility did not come until the last century. But this does not mean that Papal infallibility was not taught or believed before that time. The Church makes authoritative definitions of faith only after due deliberation, after it becomes clear to her that such a definition is necessary to settle doubts that may have arisen about an article of faith.

"You are aware of course that the doctrine of Papal infallibility does not imply

that the Pope cannot make a mistake. He might make a mistake even on a question of faith or morals—when he speaks as a private teacher. This doctrine does not declare that the Pope is the subject of divine inspiration by which he can devise and announce new doctrines.

His Will

"This doctrine simply means that when the Pope in his capacity as earthly head of the Church defines an article of faith or morals, with the intention to bind the whole Church on the subject, the Holy Ghost protects him against the teaching of anything contrary to the faith that Our Lord delivered once and for all to His Church.

"This necessarily follows the belief in the infallibility of the Church in spiritual things, which was explicitly promised by the divine founder. That the Church must have an earthly head in order to preserve the unity that Our Lord desired for it can be seen from the deplorable disharmony and disunity today among the religious denominations that are separated from communion with the Holy See.

"Unity in religion is Our Lord's will; it is evident from His prayer that we be one even as He and His Father are one. If His will is not to be thwarted—and to thwart it is unthinkable—there must be eventually 'one fold and one shepherd.' History shows unmistakably that this earthly shepherd of Christ's flock can be no other than the occupant of the chair of Peter, the Apostle

whom Christ particularly commissioned to feed His flock.

"Now if this earthly head of the Church could officially promulgate false doctrine, then he could lead the Church into error, distort and even make void our Lord's purpose in establishing the Church, and thereby imperil the salvation of those who trust that Church. This we cannot conceive. Therefore we must come to the conclusion that the Pope cannot solemnly teach false doctrines; he must be infallible as the supreme religious teacher of the Church."

Our Rights

"Your logic seems good to me," said Bill, who had been listening attentively. "But Americans are inclined to be suspicious of the concentration of power in one person. They are afraid that if they accept that kind of authority their individuality will be threatened. The average man is proud of his personal rights, you know."

"And well he might be," exclaimed Father Charlie, heartily. "But no matter how high a man places his esteem of his individuality, it is impossible for him to regard himself as solicitously as God regards him. That is precisely why He has given us an infallible teacher. This infallibility is not a personal mark of divine favor about which the Popes can boast; it resides in them solely by virtue of their office and for the sole purpose of protecting us, collectively and individually, against error.

"After His Incarnation and death on the cross God could scarcely have chosen a more striking way than this to show His great love for His humble creatures. Far from being a means by which the Roman Pontiff can add to his personal glory, this infallibility is the ultimate expression of the sacred importance with which almighty God considers the individual souls of His ignorant children.

"God condescended to become a man in order to bear our sins. The doctrine of Papal infallibility is only an extension of this condescension: God makes humanity the channel of His own infallibility. Papal infallibility is in a sense a continuation of His sacrifice for us, since through this doctrine He makes Himself and His will evident to us. When the Pope speaks *ex cathedra,* God honors me individually; He stoops from heaven, as it were, and lays a protecting finger on His Vicar's lips to make it impossible for him to speak error. Why? As a mark of esteem for the Holy Father? No. To guard my soul and yours against error.

"Does Papal infallibility then usurp human rights?"

Heretic?

The priest had risen as he spoke. Bill was looking at him with respect, moved by his words. For a little while there was silence. Then Bill said, with the levity that he always assumed in order to hide his deeper feelings, "It's a cinch that you aren't

a likely prospect for a bread-pill patient—if my idea is true that their condition is caused by a lack of certainty."

Father Charlie smiled, but his voice was still serious as he asked, "What about you, Bill? What are you certain of?"

The telephone shrilled, and Bill reached for it. "I'm certain, for one thing, that this pleasant party is about to break up. And I'm also certain that I'll never become neurotic from lack of work. Get your hat and coat, and I'll drop you off at the rectory."

As they stopped at the little vine-covered church and Father Charlie got out, Bill leaned out of the car window and said, cheerfully, "How about my standing godfather for the new Murphy kid that's to be presented to your parish before morning?"

"You can't be the godfather," the priest reminded him. "You're a heretic."

"Oh yeah?" snorted Bill. "If I am, it's no great compliment to your ability as an instructor—and I think you're pretty good. Now figure that out."

With a grin and a casual flip of his hand Bill roared his car up the street toward the hospital. Father Charlie looked after him almost unbelievingly. The priest's expression was still one of reflective doubt as he fumbled for his door key. As he mounted the steps to his bedroom however, the doubt on his face cleared and he seemed to be delighted.

"Now whom would Bill want to be *his* sponsors at baptism?" he mused.

THE QUEEN'S WORK

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