

Some thoughts on the infallibility of  
conciliar and papal  
definitions

1. All definitions are inadequate and therefore revisable (i.e. subject to development) because of: (1) the limitations of the human mind; (2) the inadequacy of language to deal with the divine; (3) human sin (?). Indeed, the contrary, or even the contradictory, of some definitions could have been asserted with full orthodoxy, e.g.: (a) the Pope is not infallible, if by infallible is meant a charism to detect truth without considering the evidence or consulting others; the Son is not homoousios in the Sabellian sense; etc.
2. Therefore it is not the formula itself that is infallible, but the Church's understanding of the formula.
3. Even within the Church's understanding of the formula one must (as with scripture) distinguish between essential religious content, ~~and~~ conceptual framework and presuppositions (such as the literal truth of the Adam myth in the Tridentine definitions of original sin). Only the religious content is implied by the gospel, ~~and~~ therefore it alone can be ~~xxx~~ taken with certainty as part of the faith
4. Therefore infallibility implies (a) the truth of the religious content; (b) the utility of the chosen (inadequate) formulation.
5. Therefore the formula itself is not infallibly true but certainly safe.
6. Therefore, as regards the formulation, infallibility is an exercise of prudent practical guidance rather than speculative illumination.
7. Is the same true of the historical (as opposed to conceptual) terms in which a doctrine is phrased. I.e., that the formulation in historical terms (e.g. corporal assumption of BVM) is simply a useful symbolical framework, and not guaranteed as historically.

Submitting in all things to the judgement of  
Holy Church,

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