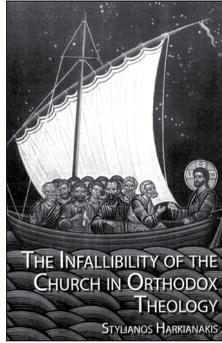




ETERNAL BE HIS MEMORY
ARCHBISHOP STYLIANOS (HARKIANAKIS) OF AUSTRALIA
1935 - 2019

Founder and Dean of St Andrew's Greek Orthodox Theological College (1986 - 2019)

BOOK REVIEW



Stylianos Harkianakis, *The Infallibility of the Church in Orthodox Theology*, trans. Philip Kariatlis. Hindmarsh, SA and Redfern, NSW: ATF Press and St Andrew's Press, 2008. ISBN 9781920691981 (pbk.), pp. xvii + 277.

It is certainly not conventional to begin a book review in an academic journal with a personal reflection. But the nature of this special edition of *Phronema*, dedicated to the late Archbishop Stylianos of blessed memory, moves me to undertake a review of the translation of his important book—completed by the Archbishop's protégé, Dr Philip Kariatlis, in 2008—with the bittersweet nostalgia of a former student who can vividly recollect the publication of this book into English; its subsequent launch, and the spiritual shepherd who wrote it...

Originally published in 1965 in Greek during the height of the Roman Catholic Church's Second Vatican Council, when the young Archimandrite Stylianos—an Orthodox observer at the council—was undertaking postgraduate research in Western Europe, *The Infallibility of the Church in Orthodox Theology* is a groundbreaking study of the doctrine of infallibility—"the acquisition and possession of truth" (p. 3)—from an Orthodox Christian perspective. This was necessary at the

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time on account of the Second Vatican Council's reaffirmation of the controversial doctrine—propounded for the first time in 1870 during the First Vatican Council—that when the Roman pontiff, the pope, speaks “*ex cathedra*, that is, when, in his office as shepherd and teacher ... he defines a doctrine concerning faith and morals to be held by the whole church, he possesses, by the divine assistance promised to him by the blessed Peter, that infallibility which the divine Redeemer willed His Church to enjoy...” (pp. 170-71).

This novel doctrine, predicated on the legitimate (though often exaggerated) primacy (i.e. not infallibility) of honour among the sees of Christendom—which Rome interprets through “Petrine” succession (pp. 165-73)—remains, without doubt, the greatest obstacle to the mutual rapprochement between the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches that, before the great schism in 1054, constituted what Archbishop Stylianos described as “the ancient undivided Christian Church” (p. xvi). The desire for this rapprochement has indeed increased since the historic meeting between Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras and pope Paul VI on January 5, 1964, leading to the mutual lifting of the anathemas that the Churches had pronounced against one another in 1054 on December 7, 1965. Archbishop Stylianos’ assertion at the time, that the concentration of divine infallibility—of unerring truth—in the person of the pope remains problematic even in modern times, since (as he pointed out), despite the Second Vatican Council’s attempt to give a greater role to conciliar processes, nevertheless that same council ended up not only by confirming the pope’s infallibility *ex cathedra*—but even declaring that infallibility dwelt in the pope in a manner *utterly unique* to the entire Church (p. 200). This, for the late Archbishop, posed serious questions in relation to Rome developing “a fruitful dialogue, on equal terms, especially with Orthodoxy” (p. 200). Despite his reservations, Archbishop Stylianos did strive for this dialogue in his role as “Chairperson of the Orthodox delegations to the official Dialogue with the Roman Catholic Church” (p. xiv) over several decades. That the ‘dialogue of love’ between the two Churches continues is attested by a recent volume on

Orthodox-Roman Catholic encounters,¹ nevertheless it is doubtful the extent to which Rome has shown willingness to redress the doctrinal innovation of papal infallibility.

The book is in four parts. Part One: Analysis, addresses ‘The Notion of Infallibility’ (pp. 3-50) and begins with a definition of infallibility as deriving from the Greek term ἀλάθητον and having the same origin as the word for truth, ἀλήθεια, thereby signifying the indelible link between ‘infallibility’ and ‘truth’ (p. 3). Next, the Archbishop delineated infallibility in the general religious experience of humankind (pp. 3-5), before addressing the subject in relation to theology *per se*, namely from a historico-dogmatic and systemic perspective (pp. 6-15). It is in the latter that he outlined a definition for infallibility from an Orthodox Christian perspective, namely:

Infallibility is that attribute of the Church which by the power of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, safe guards the faith entrusted to it from all error and rightly teaches the word of truth (p. 10).

If infallibility means truth, then the consistent use of the former throughout this book constitutes a clear attempt at critiquing the notion of infallibility as inhering solely within the person of the pope in the Roman Catholic Church. Archbishop Stylianos accomplished this by deftly shifting the emphasis of this term and articulating it as inhering within the whole Church—by which he meant the Orthodox Church that has remained faithful to the main instrument of infallibility that he identified later as the Ecumenical Councils (pp. 134-35)—by the grace of the Holy Spirit. In other words, it is the Holy Spirit’s (and the Trinitarian God’s) presence in the Church that ensures that it does not err; that it is infallible. What ensues is a thorough analysis of the Old and New Testament sources and Holy Scripture generally that demonstrates that the presence of God with his people and in the Church discloses and ensures truth (pp. 27-41). This is followed by an analysis of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan creed’s

¹ John Chryssavgis, ed., *Dialogue of Love: Breaking the Silence of Centuries* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014).

explication of the Church as “one, holy, catholic, and apostolic”, where holiness is especially emphasised as an abiding attribute of the Church, demonstrating that as long as God abides with his Church it will always remain infallible (pp. 42-50).

Part Two: Synthesis, addresses ‘General Ecclesiology’ and contains two chapters (pp. 53-109). The first (chapter two) is on ‘Ecclesiological Realities Directly Related to the Infallibility of the Church’ and the second (chapter three) is on ‘The Teaching of Infallibility According to Concrete Ecclesiological Data.’ This part addresses ‘The Church as a Centre of Salvation and Communion of the faithful’, where the role of clergy and laity is outlined as constituting the ‘fulness of the Church’ (pp. 57, 59), and where its apostolicity is defined as comprising the eschatological character of Christ’s twelve followers which is transferred to their successor-bishops throughout the generations (p. 63). After the consecutive sections on the sacraments or mysteries celebrated by the clergy (pp. 70-74), and the laws administered in the Church by the hierarchy via the canons (pp. 74-86), one immediately discerns Archbishop Stylianos’ desire to transfer the notion of infallibility to the twelve disciples as a whole and through this to all the bishops as their successors (pp. 86-101). After this, in opposition to some Protestant trends, the Archbishop affirmed that the conscience of the Church resides in both clergy and laity but is expressed via the hierarchy on account of their apostolicity (pp. 101-9), which, while not mentioned (since it was not the author’s object or concern), is also manifested in the lives of the saints (male or female, clergy or laity) that are always to be found canonically within (via obedience to their bishop), or often comprising (i.e. bishops who are acknowledged as saints), this hierarchical framework. (Thus, when he was canonised by the Ecumenical Patriarchate at the beginning of the twentieth century, we find the humble monk St Silouan the Athonite described as ‘apostolic’, even ‘prophetic.’)

It is very clear that the author’s objective is to set out the main parameters of Orthodox ecclesiology before systematically addressing the notion of infallibility, which he does in the next chapter, ‘The

Teaching of Infallibility According to Concrete Ecclesiastical Data.’ Here, Archbishop Stylianos went into detail regarding three main concepts pertaining to infallibility: its *meaning* or *object*, its *bearer*, and *instrument* (p. 111). Interpreting infallibility “within the category of truth”, he affirmed that “only the true Church can be infallible” in relation to faith and morals that remain unchanged (p. 116-17), by which of course he meant the Orthodox Church, especially in its fidelity and witness to Scripture and Tradition (p. 118). To this meaning of infallibility, the Archbishop associated the whole Church comprising the clergy and the laity as infallibility’s bearer(s). The instrument of infallibility, however, he considered to be the bishops—the successors of the apostles—when gathered in council or synod (pp. 127-29). The author then traced the development of the synodal structure from its general characteristics (pp. 129-35) to its highest form, which is the Ecumenical Council (pp. 135-39)—in other words, a synod comprising the whole Church represented by bishops who in turn represent the laity—the model for which can be discerned in Acts 15 (p. 135) where the apostles, forebearers of the bishops, are inspired by the Holy Spirit when they gather together to address issues pertaining to the Church’s faith and morals.

The third part of the book addresses ‘Two Erroneous Extremes and their Critique’ regarding the notion of infallibility. The first is in relation to ‘The Roman Catholic Understanding of Papal Infallibility’ (pp. 143-202) that we assessed at length above. The second is ‘The Sobornost Theory of A.S. Chomiakov’ (pp. 203-43) which, if the former represents an extremism relating to the monopolisation of infallibility in one person of the hierarchy, the latter represents the opposite: what Archbishop Stylianos described as an exaggerated pneumatocracy that elides the role of hierarchy and leaves the faithful in a state of relativism (p. 243). Indeed, his assessment of ‘sobornost’ ecclesiology is based on his criticism of Chomiakov’s identification of the term—stemming from “‘*so*’ [co-] and *brat* [gather], namely from the verb ‘*sobirat*’ or ‘*sobrat*’ which means to ‘convoke’” (p. 208)—with catholicity, which he interpreted as “according to all believers” and not as what Archbishop Stylianos described as its synodal sense (p. 211). There is no room here

to address the Archbishop's assessment in detail. Suffice it to state that his assessment of infallibility from a traditional Orthodox perspective, as an abiding attribute of the Church on account of the permanent presence of the Holy Spirit which guides the truthful articulation of faith and morals when bishops gather in synod—especially synods of an Ecumenical nature (to which the Orthodox Church has adhered only to the first seven)—is a necessary corrective to the 'extremes' addressed in this last part of the book.

The significance of this volume cannot be overstated, for it does not fit the characteristic of academic 'theological' works that become dated because of advancements in research. This book delivers permanent insights into ecclesiology precisely because of the permanent characteristics of the Church that it addresses. Indeed, Archbishop Stylianos' monograph, in highlighting the synodical institution guided by the Holy Spirit, and especially the Ecumenical synod, as the highest form of authority (to which we saw can be added the saints who are in communion with the infallible God) in the Church, is a timely reminder—love for one's neighbour notwithstanding—that overtures to the Orthodox Church made by ecclesiastical institutions that do not adhere to these axioms should be treated with caution. For this abiding contribution to holy Orthodoxy—along with so many others—we venerate our reposed spiritual Father and shepherd in Christ. May his memory be eternal.

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