

I need to retrieve the truth in the Roman Catholic teaching concerning infallibility and irreformability in the same way in which I have already done this in the case of the Protestant teaching concerning inspiration and inerrancy.

What makes one a Protestant is not that one simply denies infallibility and irreformability, but rather that one gives a distinctive account of them. For the Protestant, indicative statements about Christian existence are always to be understood as implying imperatives. Therefore, if the church is said to be infallible, this is to be understood, not as a simple indicative claim about the church as it actually exists, but as also implying a demand on the church that continually has to be fulfilled in order for it to be infallible as it is said to be. To paraphrase Paul in Galatians 5:25, "If, then, we are infallible, let us also act infallibly," i.e., in accordance with the gospel that is the sole explicit source of the church's infallibility.

But even if all Protestants agreed about this, they would still disagree in ways analogous to the ways in which they understand the inspiration and inerrancy of scripture. In my view, the church is infallible and its teachings irreformable in the same general way in which scripture is inspired and its teachings are inerrant.

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