

Chapter 25

Pius IX Says “No” to the Liberal Catholics

We had noted in Chapter 22 that the Catholic Church’s reaction to the Enlightenment, with its discoveries in science and its elevation of reason in intellectual life, was largely defensive and negative. Rather than dialogue, the Church resorted to condemnation. The Church parted ways with secular culture and adopted a siege mentality. During the years, 1823 to 1846, the popes who followed Pius VII - Leo XII, Pius VIII, Gregory XVI - were generally good men, but tended to defend the past and ignore the new spirit of social and individual liberty in their culture.

For example, Leo XII condemned religious toleration, reinforced the Index of Forbidden Books, restored feudal aristocracy in the Papal States and confined the Jews to ghettos. Gregory XVI, while condemning the slave trade, also banned railroads in the Papal States, condemned freedom of conscience, freedom of the press and the separation of Church and State. History views them as out of step with the times.

The Nineteenth Century Revival of Catholicism

The French Revolution had stripped the Church of its property, emptied the monasteries, killed and exiled thousands of priests and imprisoned Pope Pius VI. Napoleon had restored the Church somewhat, but had kept it under the control of the State and cut off communications with Rome. However, the Catholic Church had not only survived in France, but it was to experience a robust revival.

Pope Pius VII had taken a stand against Napoleon and basically won the battle. This restored the esteem for and the moral authority of the papacy. Gone was Gallicanism, which crippled the influence of the pope, to be replaced by Ultramontainism (beyond the mountains), which looked to Rome for guidance.

There were other positive developments. In 1814, the Jesuit order was restored and in 1815, the pope’s secretary of state, Cardinal Consalvi, obtained the restoration of the Papal States at the Congress of Vienna. New religious orders such as the Marianists and the Society of the Sacred Heart sprang up. The Jesuits and the Society of the Foreign Missions revitalized missionary activities around the world. Seminaries again filled up and the churches were crowded with the faithful. There was a general spiritual awakening which produced men like Jean-Baptiste Vianney (the Cure d’Ars), the famous spiritual director and confessor, who became the patron saint of parish priests.

On the negative side, in 1814 the Office of the Inquisition was restored and the Index of Forbidden Books reconstituted.

Catholic intellectuals now turned away from the skepticism and rationalism of the Enlightenment with its mechanistic view of the universe and of human nature. Faith in

the so-called Age of Progress, based on the goodness of human nature and its ability to build toward a human utopia, was dashed in the blood baths of the Revolution and the bloody battlefields of Napoleon.

Many French lay intellectuals turned again to the Church and participated in what historians call a “Romantic Revival”. This revival was a reaction against the liberal rationalism of the Enlightenment. For example, instead of exalting reason, such works as *The Genius of Christianity* (1802) by Vicomte de Chateaubriand asserted that “of all religions that ever existed, Christianity is the most poetic, the most human, the most favorable to liberty, to the arts and letters...(and) offers noble forms to the writer and perfect models to the artist”.

Writers like Joseph de Maistre argued for the infallibility of the pope, Louis de Bonald stressed the value of tradition over revolution, others wrote of the need of religion for individuals and society and many produced apologetic works to attack the liberals.

In Germany there were also many intellectuals who converted and participated in the Romantic Revival. The famous historian and philosopher, Frederick von Schlegel also stressed the value of tradition and looked forward to a restoration of the Holy Roman Empire under the authority of the pope. Others like Joseph Goerres supported the pope, but also championed individual freedom, human dignity and religious liberty for Catholics in Germany.

In 1848, German Catholics gathered in Mainz to devise a strategy to promote social justice. The new constitutional government made it possible for voters to become active in politics and use their voting power to protect the rights of the Church and to promote social justice for all citizens of the State. This strategy to promote Catholic ideals in social life was called “political Catholicism”. In 1848, the Romantic Revival in Germany ended in a failed revolution designed to unify Germany. Even though it failed, it prepared the way for unification under Bismarck some twenty years later.

In England the Romantic Revival consisted of three parts:

- 1) The emancipation of Catholics from the penal laws of the 16th and 17th centuries.
- 2) The Oxford Movement which aimed to enrich the liturgy and devotions of the Anglican Church, modeled on the Catholic Church. Some of its leaders like John Henry Newman and William G. Ward became Catholics and provided the intellectual core of the Catholic Church in England.
- 3) The re-establishment of the English Catholic hierarchy in 1850.

The Monarchs and Social Liberalism

As we have seen, the Enlightenment and the French Revolution had ignited a spirit of political liberalism that would finally result in the democratic nations of the present day. However, there was great resistance to this liberal spirit in the years following the defeat

of Napoleon. After his defeat, the Congress of Vienna had restored the Bourbon monarchy. While King Louis XVIII attempted to steer a middle course between the political right and left, in the end he and his successor Charles X chose the side of conservatism. There were other strong conservatives like Metternich, the Austrian minister, who, in an attempt to suppress the liberal spirit of the Revolution, used secret police, censorship of books and watchdogs at the universities to keep liberals and their ideas at bay.

The Hapsburgs controlled central Europe with a conservative hand. Prussia, who had toyed with the idea of a liberal constitution, issued the Carlsbad Decrees which gave more power to the secret police over the universities and forced liberal intellectuals into hiding.

In Spain, there was a harsh conservative backlash. Ferdinand VII arrested all prominent liberals, re-established the Inquisition and ordered all Church property confiscated under Napoleon to be restored. In 1819, the English Parliament passed repressive legislation entitled the Six Acts.

All in all, with the end of the French Revolution and the defeat of Napoleon, the liberal spirit of the Enlightenment and the Revolution came under attack by the monarchies of Europe. The coming of democracy to the nations of Europe would have to wait.

The Church and Social Liberalism

With a few exceptions - Ireland, Poland, Belgium - the clergy aligned itself with the monarchies in an attempt to squelch intellectual and political liberalism and restore the ideal of Christendom. In many ways they were successful. In the Papal States conservatives took over after the death of Pius VII. Reforms that had been put in place were revoked and clergy again were placed in important civil offices. The Jews were returned to their ghettos. The monarchies in various ways rewarded the Church for their support with money and power.

However, in 1830, a liberal revolution in France overthrew the Bourbon monarchy and ushered in a new constitutional government headed by king Louis Philippe, who promoted a liberal agenda, but was less liberal than anticipated. In any event, liberalism was in the air and the old style monarchies were to disappear. There was also a reaction in the Church aimed at reconciling the Church with the new liberalism. Thus a new movement known as "Liberal Catholicism" entered the intellectual life of the Church.

The Church and the Advent of Liberal Catholicism

The person who began the movement of Liberal Catholicism was Felicite de Lamennais (1782-1854). He was a product of the free thought of the Enlightenment who later turned to the Church and was ordained a priest in 1818. During the next three years he published articles defending the authority of the pope and Ultramontainism. He was invited to Rome by Pope Leo XII, who even considered making him a cardinal. However, Lamennais's writings on democracy gained him a following in intellectual

circles. He attracted such young Catholic scholars as Montalembert, Lacordaire and De Coux. They adopted the slogan “God and Liberty” and in 1830 established the newspaper, *L’Avenir*, to present their ideas.

They were convinced that the Church’s alliance with the monarchs of France combined with Gallicanism had nearly destroyed the French Church in the 18th century. Thus, they upheld a combination of democracy and Ultramontanism as correctives to restore the Church and allow for its renewal. They proclaimed the monarchs to be a dying breed and that the Church must separate herself from them lest she be dragged down with them. Thus, they held for a strict separation of Church and State. They also denounced such things as the system of reducing the clergy to paid employees of the State.

Their writings in *L’Avenir* aroused the hostility of the government and the conservative French bishops. The bishops noted that separation of Church and State would mean poverty for the clergy. Lamennais agreed and said that actually this could be a good thing, for it would bring them closer to the people, who also lived in poverty. It would also make them free from the control of the government.

Nevertheless, *L’Avenir* was banned by the bishops and Lamennais and Lacordaire were arrested by the government for their views. They were soon acquitted. Upon their acquittal they came upon the idea of appealing to Rome for support in their crusade against the conservative French clergy. As champions of papal authority and Ultramontanism, Lamennais was sure that they would get a favorable hearing in Rome. They were wrong.

The pope, Gregory XVI, was the absolute ruler of the Papal States. He was in the process of putting down a popular revolution and thus in no mood to hear of the Church accommodating herself to liberal democracy and revolution. After a cold reception, Lamennais and his friends left Rome. In August of 1832 the official reply came from Rome in the form of an encyclical *Mirari Vos*. In the encyclical, Gregory rejected the idea of the separation of Church and State, denounced liberty of conscience and freedom of religion as sheer madness and referred to liberty of the press as abominable and detestable.

The pope demanded unqualified submission to the encyclical. At first Lamennais submitted, making a distinction between the pope’s authority in spiritual matters as opposed to temporal matters. However, the pope demanded total submission. This was too much for Lamennais and after a year of unsuccessful negotiation with Rome he left the Church to become one of its bitterest critics. Later Gregory XVI condemned him by name in the encyclical *Singulari Vos*.

Lacordaire and Montalembert were hurt and disappointed, but accepted the condemnation and continued to make valuable contributions to the French Catholic Church. Montalembert became a foremost Catholic politician, founded the first Catholic political party in Europe and carried on a long struggle for freedom of education. Lacordaire became the most famous preacher in France and from the pulpit at Notre Dame he

continued to influence Catholic intellectuals, while avoiding confrontation with Rome. This liberal spirit also inspired such men as Frederic Ozanam who founded the Society of St. Vincent de Paul with a social mission to the poor.

The liberal Catholicism of Lamennais and his friends is judged by historians as a “romantic adventure”, full of enthusiasm and good intentions, but not well thought out. Ironically, the Catholic Church would adopt many of their policies, especially in the social encyclicals and in the documents of Vatican II.

While the efforts of these early liberal Catholics were premature, they did give concrete expression to the problem that had been facing the Church ever since the 1789 and which the hierarchy had refused to face: the problem of adapting the Church to the new society which had come into being with the French Revolution.

Liberal Movements Outside France

While liberal efforts were set back in France, in other countries the spirit of revolution and freedom won some victories. In Belgium, liberals and Catholics joined together to depose the Dutch King in 1830 as a rejection of the conservative Dutch rule imposed by the Congress of Vienna. In place of the ousted king they set up a liberal constitution in 1831, based on the very liberal principles condemned by Gregory XVI in the encyclical *Mirari Vos*.

Simon Bolivar in Peru and Bolivia and Bernardo O’Higgins in Chile brought the liberal revolution to South American and by 1830, many of the Latin American countries had adopted liberal republican constitutions. The Greeks, too, liberated themselves from the Ottoman Empire.

The Types of Liberalism

The label “liberalism” did not have a singular meaning. The liberalism of the French Revolution was a political liberalism focused on the rights of the individual - freedom from arbitrary taxation and imprisonment, freedom of speech and association.

Another form of liberalism was economic liberalism. This type of liberalism was focused on material success based on a *laissez faire* type of capitalism, which promoted a free market system without any government controls or labor union demands. Industry was to be free from customs, duties, and tariffs. This was a powerful force and labor unions did not become legal in England until 1871.

Against the threats to the workers posed by economic liberalism, other liberals proposed a liberal socialistic system designed to protect and reward the workers. Without these protections workers were in danger of being just another commodity in the economic system and subject to its power without any recourse to address grievances.

By the mid-19th century, liberalism went by many labels - economic, political and

intellectual. It was also variously characterized as radical, atheistic, moderate, conservative or Christian. In time, the term Liberal came to be mainly associated with the Liberal industrialists, big businessmen, bankers, railroad builders and traders.

Reaction to Liberalism - a Divided Church

Catholic liberals objected to economic liberalism because they saw human progress as dependent on greater freedom for the individual and the protection of human dignity. They felt that the Church should adapt to these new changes in society and not align itself with the dying systems of the monarchies or the oppressive industrialists.

Catholic liberals were opposed by Catholic conservatives who saw the spirit of liberty evidenced in the French Revolution as the work of Satan. They saw nothing good in liberalism and they called for an all out war against it. They wanted to promote political regimes that would allow for the union of Church and State. Their approach was authoritarian, allowing little room for dialogue.

Conservatives found support from Louis Veuillot, the editor of the *L'Univers* and the Italian Jesuits who edited *La Civiltà Cattolica*. Veuillot's critique of liberalism won over a large part of the French clergy, reinforcing their authoritarian tendencies. He gained the support of the conservative Cardinal Pie who was a strong royalist and initiated an effort to raise troops to defend the lost cause of the Papal States.

These conservatives were countered by such men as Montalembert who published the monthly *Le Correspondant*. Others like Monseigneur Dupanloup, a famous preacher and bishop of Orleans tried to find a way to bridge the gap between the conservative Church and the liberal modern world.

Throughout Europe the Church was divided over the issue of how the Church would related to the movement for greater freedom for individuals. German leaders such as Bishop Ketteler of Mainz focused not so much on the separation of Church and State, but on the issue of intellectual freedom within the Church. Freedom for Catholic intellectuals was championed by such men as Johannas Doellinger, a Church historian and theologian, who was one of the most outspoken opponents of the doctrine of papal infallibility. He became a member of Parliament and opposed an agreement between the State and the Holy See to regulate Church affairs in Germany.

In England, a disciple of Doellinger, John Acton, took over from John Henry Newman the publication of *The Rambler* which promoted the idea of intellectual freedom for Catholics. In Belgium men such as Archbishop Sterckx defended the liberal orientation of the Belgium Church and other intellectuals proposed that liberalism was more consonant with the Gospel than the old order idealized in Christendom.

By the mid-19th century, the Catholic Church in Europe was sharply divided between liberals and conservatives - liberals being accused of heresy and conservatives with intellectual witch-hunts.

The Election of Giovanni Mastai-Ferretti as Pius IX (Pio Nono) (1846-78)

After only two days of the conclave, Pius IX was elected in 1846. He was known as a warm person with an open mind and considered by many as a liberal with strong Italian nationalist tendencies. At first he seemed to live up to his liberal reputation. He released all political prisoners and, while retaining an absolute veto, reformed the organization of the Papal States. He allowed laymen a voice in the governance through an elected Council of Deputies who could vote on laws, including the laws governing taxation. He instituted a form of habeas corpus to protect against illegal imprisonment and abolished political press censorship.

These initial actions were hailed by liberals around the world. However, Pius IX would prove to be much more conservative than liberal. He stood firm against religious freedom and refused to allow Jews in the Papal States to have civil and political equality.

While Pius IX had been sympathetic to the cause of Italian unity - *risorgimento* - he balked when his parliament declared war to free Italy from the Austrians. To avoid a war with another Catholic state he vetoed the parliament's decision. He was denounced as a traitor by the citizens of Rome and riots broke out. An assassin stabbed and killed the Pope's Prime Minister, Count Rossi, and a revolution broke out. A rebel mob surrounded the papal palace and the pope was a prisoner.

Disguised as a common priest, the pope escaped Rome and fled to Gaeta in the South. Garibaldi, the leader of the Italian liberation movement, entered Rome and set up a democratic republic in February of 1849. Pius appealed for aid from Catholic countries and with the help of French troops he reentered the Eternal City on April 12, 1850. The rebels had been dispersed.

Humiliated by the liberals, he now saw liberalism as anarchy and a threat to the Church. Immediately, he adopted politically conservative policies for the Papal States, rejecting a constitutional form of government. He also rejected freedom of the press in territories under papal control based on his belief that the mission of the Church was to guide public opinion and teach morality.

The End of the Papal States

By 1830, Greece, Serbia and Belgium had become independent national States. Nationalism was in the air and it was strong in Italy. Pius became greatly alarmed with the success of liberalism in the northern Italian state of Piedmont. Piedmont had a king, Victor Emmanuel, but it also had a liberal constitution. And under Camillo Cavour, the Prime Minister, a number of laws offensive to the Church were enacted. They included the abolition of religious orders and State control over education. These actions cemented the pope's rejection of *risorgimento*, but he became a helpless witness to the gradual unification of Italy.

Of great concern for Pius, was Cavour's plan to unite all of Italy under the Piedmont liberal monarchy. His plans included seizure of the Papal States which he accomplished by supporting uprisings in the papal territories and then under the pretext of restoring order, he occupied the papal territories. Pius enlisted volunteers from other Catholic countries to join with his Swiss Guards in an attempt to resist Cavour's army. However, they were soundly defeated by the Piedmont troops in the Battle of Castelfidardo in 1860. This left the pope holding only the city of Rome and its suburbs.

In 1870, Victor Emmanuel's troops marched on Rome and the Pius retreated to the Vatican. Thus the "Roman Question" was created - who owned Rome? The question would not be settled until the Lateran Treaty of 1929, which established the State of the Vatican City as a sovereign state.

In November of 1870, the Italian government issued the Law of Guarantees to regulate the pope's new position. The Law invested the pope with the personal attributes of a sovereign: immunity from arrest, inviolability of his person and the same protection enjoyed by the king through the treason laws. It also allowed the pope to have a personal military guard, free communications with his bishops and foreign powers and his own postal and telegraph service. He was also to have exclusive use - not ownership - of the Vatican, Lateran palace and the villa of Castel Gandolfo. He was also to receive over three million lire a year.

After lengthy consideration, Pius refused to accept the Law of Guarantees. He did so on the grounds that it was a unilateral agreement not a negotiated settlement between sovereign powers. There was also a legitimate fear that the stage would be set for a resumption of State control over the Church as in the Avignon Papacy and in France during the days of Gallicanism.

Therefore, Pius IX rejected the notion of a liberal secular state for Italy and thus refused to recognize the new Italy and forbade Italian Catholics to participate in it. No longer in a liberal mood, Pius IX would now turn his attention to the issue of intellectual freedom in the Church.