

Chapter 27

Pio Nono Carries Ultramontanism to a Grand Triumph at Vatican I

The loss of the Papal States, while at the time considered a humiliation and a defeat by liberal political powers, actually contributed to the tremendous increase in power and influence of the papacy during the 19th century. Free from the political and administrative concerns of maintaining a small “nation State”, the pope - notably Pius IX - was now free to build a theological base for papal power and maintain it through the political influence of Catholics throughout Europe.

Gone was Gallicanism, replaced by Ultramontanism supported by some liberals and, of course, the conservatives who had the ear of Pius IX, (noted in Chapter 27), who had expressed his views in the *Syllabus of Errors*. Liberals in the Church had been successfully identified by conservatives as co-conspirators in the post-Enlightenment culture’s attack on all that the Church embodies in its life and teachings. In this conservative atmosphere, the Church again adopted a siege mentality and an attitude of authoritarianism in its teaching mission, rather than an open intellectual climate fostering research and new ways to communicate the Gospel.

The Growth of Ultramontanism

General - Bokenkotter (284-5) mentions six reasons for the growth of the Ultramontane movement in the early 19th century:

- 1) Political conservatives saw in the papacy a strong bulwark against the revolutionary spirit arising from the French revolution and Enlightenment intellectuals.
- 2) Pius VII’s heroic and successful defiance of Napoleon enhanced the prestige of the papacy.
- 3) The French clergy who had been stripped of their property, privileges, and taxing power saw the papacy as their only defense against the whims of the State.
- 4) The many clergy who had been persecuted for their loyalty to Rome came out of their experience with a strong loyalty to Rome.
- 5) The provision in the Concordat of 1801 struck between Napoleon and Pius VII (see Ch. 24) that gave the pope the power to demand the resignation of the entire French episcopate, struck a severe blow to Gallicanism and was an unprecedented and awesome demonstration of the pope’s power over the bishops.
- 6) The Concordat of 1801 had also given the newly appointed bishops almost unlimited authority over their priests and this drove the priests into the arms of the pope as their only defense against the arbitrariness of their bishops.

Ultramontanism - Support and Critique

French Support - The charter document of Ultramontanism was a book by Joseph de Maistre (1754-1821) entitled *Du Pape*. De Maistre was a diplomat and an apologist who opposed the French Revolution and the Enlightenment philosophy. He argued that reason alone was not able to discern the moral and religious truths necessary to ground society, these are revealed and handed on through tradition - the Church's tradition.

Another interesting supporter of Ultramontanism was Felicite Lamennais (1782-1845), whom we discussed in Chapter 25 (pp.3-4). Oddly, while he was a strong advocate of papal authority and Ultramontanism, he was also a social liberal. While dedicated to Rome, he championed religious liberty and a strict separation of Church and State. The Ultramontane side of him engendered the hostility of the French Gallican bishops and his defense of religious liberty and separation of Church and State earned him suspicion in Rome. His liberal views, published in *L'Aviner*, combined with his view that ultimate truth is grounded in the "common consent of all humanity" finally earned him condemnation from Pope Gregory XVI. Ironically, Lamennais, the strong supporter of the papacy left the Church, never to return.

German Support - By the 18th century, Catholics found themselves a minority in Germany. In dealing with the Protestant government they found a helpful ally in Rome. The government, for its part, chose to deal directly with Rome, rather than encourage a strong national Catholic Church. Germany had a history of dealing directly with Rome since the Revolution had left many dioceses vacant without bishops to take care of local Church affairs. Thus, Ultramontanism was favored by the majority of the German Catholics and the German government.

French Critique - In France, the older clergy, including many bishops, maintained a strict to moderate Gallican mind set. The French Gallicans were led by Bishop Maret and the archbishop Darboy of Paris. Many other bishops saw the *Syllabus of Errors* as a disaster and Ultramontanism an erroneous approach to the culture of the modern world. They wanted true dialogue, not apologetics and condemnations.

Even though a moderate form of Gallicanism was still taught in the French seminaries, over time, intellectuals like De Maistre and Lamennais brought many of the younger clergy around to an Ultramontane view. Thus, the French clergy were divided on the issue.

Rome Reacts to Moderate French Gallicanism

In 1852, French Gallican bishops, led by the archbishop of Paris, issued a memorandum which insisted on the right of each diocese to regulate its own affairs. Pius IX responded with a strong rebuke to the bishops in his letter *Inter Multiplices*. The pope then began a campaign to further the cause of Ultramontanism in France. To that end he prohibited the French bishops from convening national councils that might ferment Gallican ideas. Books supporting Gallicanism were placed on the *Index of Forbidden Books*, including a treatise on Canon Law written by the vicar general of Paris. Through his official nuncio,

Pius IX encouraged the French laity to deal directly with Rome, even if it meant going over the heads of their bishops.

Pius IX, during his long reign, was able to shape the character of the episcopate by appointing bishops who supported Ultramontanism. Bishops who resisted his ideas were often called into Rome for a personal audience. He also established national seminaries in Rome where Roman ideas were taught -- an American College was instituted in 1859.

The religious orders, many of whom were headquartered in Rome, also spread the pope's Ultramontane ideas. These religious orders were located throughout the world and were a powerful vehicle in spreading papal ideas. In a special way the Jesuits supported and influenced the pope and their publication, *La Civiltà Cattolica*, became for all practical purposes, the official mouthpiece of the Holy See.

Pius IX often bypassed the College of Cardinals and dealt with Church affairs with the aid of personal counselors, many of whom were not trained to deal with the complicated issues facing the Church, especially on political issues.

The Proclamation of the Dogma of the Immaculate Conception

The dogma of the Immaculate Conception was promulgated on December 8, 1854, ten years before the *Syllabus of Errors* on December 8, 1864. It is included here because it was another important step in the process that reinforced the Ultramontane position of the infallible teaching authority of the pope leading up the Vatican I. In this respect, it is important to note that while Pius IX consulted with theologians and the bishops on the issue of defining the Immaculate Conception, in the end, he based the proclamation of the doctrine solely on his own authority.

The dogma of the Immaculate Conception holds that Mary was free from Original Sin from the very moment of her conception. This concept is not explicitly found in Scripture, neither does it show up in the writings of the early Church Fathers. However, by the 7th century, the Eastern Church began to celebrate a feast of her Conception. In the 11th century, the Church in England introduced a feast of the Immaculate Conception of Mary.

In the 12th and 13th centuries, theologians like St. Anselm, St. Bernard, St. Thomas and St. Bonaventure objected that such a claim would exempt Mary the universal redemptive work of Christ. Bernard of Clairvaux argued that Mary was free from sin at birth, but not at conception. However, later in the 14th century Dun Scotus made the distinction of Christ's redemptive work being able to save those in the state of sin and also of being able to preserve someone like Mary from ever being in the state of sin. For this argument, he was hailed as the "Herald of the Immaculate Conception".

In 1476, Pope Sixtus IV approved the feast of the Immaculate Conception and the Council of Trent in 1546 excluded Mary from its decree on the universality of Original Sin. In 1568, Pius V made it a universal feast and excommunicated the theologian

Michel Baius for denying Mary's innocence at conception. In 1661, Pope Alexander VII forbade any attacks on the doctrine and the Dominicans who had opposed it began to reconsider their view.

Nearly three centuries later, in 1830, St. Catherine Laboure reported a vision in which Mary was surrounded by an oval frame on which appeared the words: "O Mary, conceived without sin pray for us who have recourse to thee." Following this, there were demands that the doctrine be defined. Pope Gregory (d.1846) did not respond positively to those demands. However, in 1846, the U.S. bishops declared Mary their patroness under the title of her Immaculate Conception and upon his election in that same year, Pius IX began proceedings to define the dogma.

In 1848 Pius IX appointed a commission of twenty theologians to study the question, in 1849 he asked the bishops of the Church for their prayers and advice, their response was positive. In December 8, 1854 the bishops were invited to Rome to witness the proclamation, which Pius IX made on his own authority, thus affirming the conservative view that the pope can speak infallibly on matters of faith.

The pope solemnly declared that the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception was part of the "deposit of faith" and all who dissented were in error and excluded from the Church: "If, therefore, any person shall dare to think - which God forbid - otherwise than has been defined by us, let them clearly know that they stand condemned by their own judgment, that they have made shipwreck of their faith and fallen from the unity of the Church."

The First Vatican Council, the Time of Preparation

Pius IX announced his intention to call a general council in 1864, a few days before the publication of the *Syllabus of Errors*. The official, public announcement of the council came on June 29, 1867, as the bishops were convened in Rome to celebrate the feast of Sts. Peter and Paul. The impression was given that as the Council of Trent had been called in response to the Reformation, this general council would be called in response to the challenges of the 19th century culture of social liberalism and intellectual rationalism, spawned by the French Revolution and the Enlightenment.

Exactly one year later, the council was formally convoked by the papal bull *Aeterni Patris*. The first session would finally open on December 8, 1869, on the fifteenth anniversary of the declaration of the Immaculate Conception (December 8) and the five year anniversary of the *Syllabus of Errors* (December 8)..

Liberal and Conservative Views Prior to the Council. Both conservatives and liberals understood that the council would likely be a test of the defensive posture of Ultramontaniam toward modern culture, versus the liberal agenda of entering into dialogue with modern culture, establishing common ground and making the Church's case intellectually credible through this process.

During the two years between the official announcement of the council and its opening session, liberals and conservatives expressed their hopes and fears of the results of such a council. Conservatives noted that the Church was long overdue for a council, because the last General Council, the Council of Trent, had been held in the mid-1500's. The world had changed, the Church faced new challenges and therefore a general council was necessary. Some conservatives even hoped that council would declare part of the *Syllabus* to be included in the deposit of faith. With the fall of the Papal States, conservatives also wanted to enhance the authority and prestige of the papacy.

Liberals voiced concern that the council would be used to increase the pope's power and even to declare him infallible. However, the issue of infallibility was not on the official agenda. Early in 1865 a committee of five cardinals and their consultants had drawn up a tentative agenda which included only two areas of discussion: Catholic doctrine and Church organization. Infallibility was not specifically mentioned.

Nevertheless, the first round in this contest between conservatives and liberals on the issue of infallibility was begun with a conservative article in *La Civiltà* in 1869, seen by liberals as a means of cutting off even the possibility of debate on the issue:

Everyone knows that Catholics in France are unfortunately divided into two parties: those who are simply Catholics, and others who call themselves Liberal Catholics...The Catholics...hope that the council...will proclaim the doctrine of the *Syllabus*...and will accept with joy the proclamation of the dogmatic infallibility of the sovereign Pontiff...(and) will define it by acclamation.

As expected, there was a strong response from the liberals. In Germany, Doellinger published articles attacking infallibility on historical grounds using the pseudonym of "Janus". The conservative Cardinal Hergenro answered these articles under the name of "Anti-Janus". In a scholarly paper entitled *The Pope and the Council*, Doellinger argued that from a historical perspective, a definition of infallibility was an impossibility. Others in Germany, bishops and intellectuals, objected to the consideration of infallibility on the grounds that it was inopportune. In the summer of 1869, fourteen German bishops informed Rome of their lack of support for a definition of infallibility.

In France, Bishop Maret published an article, *On the General Council and Peace*, based on the Gallican thesis that the consent of the bishops was necessary for any papal statement to be infallible. Dupanloup published articles arguing that a consideration of infallibility was inopportune.

From England, Acton and Newman concurred with Dupanloup's assessment and from the United States, Archbishop Spalding of Baltimore joined the chorus.

The First Vatican Council Convenes (Dec. 1869-Oct. 1870)

The Council convened on December 8, 1869. Contrary to custom neither ambassadors

nor princes were invited. Orthodox bishops, Anglicans and Protestants were issued a cool *pro forma* (according to form) invitation, but none complied. Of the 1,050 participants invited, 774 were present for the opening of the Council. Two-thirds of the assembly were Europeans (one-third Italian), most missionary bishops were European and the United States was represented by forty-eight bishops and one abbot.

Only about twenty percent of the bishops were liberals, but they represented important nations. Nearly all the Austro-Hungarian bishops were liberals, most of the Germans and about a third of the French bishops were also in the liberal camp. The liberals feared that the cards had been stacked against them and that perhaps it was likely that a definition of infallibility might well be attempted by acclamation.

Some felt their fears were realized when, contrary to the procedures at Trent, they found out that the pope had drawn up restrictive ground rules before the Council had begun. Under these rules, only the pope could address questions to the Council. Also, many liberals felt that St. Peter's had been chosen as the place for the Council, precisely because of its bad acoustics.

Another rule change that upset the liberals was that, contrary to tradition, any motion could be carried by a mere majority. Some liberals contemplated leaving the Council and challenging its legitimacy on that rule alone. However, the major complaint of the liberals was that none of their number was represented on the *De Fide* committee, which would deal with any statement about infallibility.

The Work of the Council - Part One - Fifty-one proposed decrees had been prepared for consideration by the Council, only six were discussed and only two were finally acted upon. The first decree, the dogmatic constitution on faith, *Dei Filius*, concerned the issues pertaining to the faith raised in the *Syllabus*. It dealt with the erroneous teachings of rationalism, traditionalism, pantheism and semirationalism.

It reaffirmed traditional Catholic doctrine on the nature of God, of Revelation, of Faith and of the relationship of Faith to Reason. It declared that human reason was sufficient to know God without revelation, stressed the reasonableness of faith, and affirmed the two kinds of knowledge: faith and reason.

The initial formulation was severely criticized, reworked and finally unanimously approved on April 25, 1870, six months before the Council was adjourned. While this decree was probably the most important work of the Council, it was overshadowed by the discussion and dissent over the next decree - and discussion of the Church and infallibility.

The Work of the Council - Part Two - While the question of infallibility was not specifically on Pius's initial list of topics to be discussed, it was the major focus of the liberal and conservative bishops at the Council. The divisions on infallibility among the assembled bishops can be divided into three groups:

- 1) A small group of active infallibilists holding an extreme view that all papal teachings,

especially the *Syllabus*, were infallible and that papal infallibility was the source of the Church's infallibility.

- 2) The majority who were not necessarily in favor of a definition of infallibility (it was inopportune), but wanted to strengthen the principle of papal authority and were thus receptive to the arguments of the infallibilists.
- 3) The twenty percent minority mentioned above who were opposed to the definition of infallibility, because historically it went against the collegial nature of the Church.

In any event, at the request of 380 bishops, an extremist definition of papal infallibility was attached to the schema on the Church. Even with this victory, the conservatives felt that the proceedings on the schema on the Church were going too slow, so a group of 100 bishops petitioned that Chapter 11, dealing with infallibility, be taken out of order and considered first. The liberals objected, but Pius sided with the conservatives and put the matter immediately before the Council, separately as the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church of Christ (*Pastor Aeternus*).

A good amount of discussion followed and the greatest concern was that the pope would not act simply on his own, but within the tradition of the Church. The great Dominican theologian, Cardinal Guidi proposed that the formula should speak of "the infallibility of the pope's decisions" rather than "the infallibility of the pope". He suggested inserting a clause that would require the pope to make a serious examination of tradition, including consultations with the bishops. Pius IX tersely replied: "Tradition! I am Tradition".

Another more successful list of suggestions was offered by Gasser, the Secretary of the Commission on Faith. He recommended that for a decree by the pope to be infallible it must be *ex cathedra* (from the chair (of Peter), that is he must be acting as supreme pastor. The decree must also be in the area of faith and morals. In these decrees the pope is not "inspired", but given the divine assistance to be free from error that is granted not only to the pope, but to the entire Church. These suggestion would make it into the final formula on infallibility which read:

Wherefore, faithfully adhering to the tradition handed down from the beginning, for the glory of God our Savior, for the exaltation of the Catholic religion, and the salvation of Christian peoples, with the approbation of the Sacred Council, we teach and we define the divinely revealed dogma that: when the Roman Pontiff speaks *ex cathedra*, that is, when in the discharge of his office as Doctor and Pastor of all Christians, in virtue of his supreme Apostolic authority, he defines a doctrine concerning faith or morals to be held by the whole church, he enjoys, but the divine assistance promised him in Blessed Peter, that infallibility with which the divine Redeemer willed that His Church would be endowed for the purpose of defining doctrine concerning faith or morals, and therefore such definitions of the Roman Pontiff are irreformable of themselves and not from the consent of the Church.

Basic Points of the Definition - In a number of ways the final definition was a

compromise as we can see in the following points:

- 1) The definition does not say that “the pope is infallible”; rather the pope is empowered with the infallibility that Jesus conferred on the Church, this power essentially belongs to the Church and is for the benefit of the Church.
- 2) The concept of infallibility was not defined, leaving room for theological treatment.
- 3) Infallibility can only be exercised according to strict rules.
- 4) The statement that the pope can exercise infallibility does not eliminate the possibility that others (bishops? laity?) can exercise this gift along with the pope.
- 5) The pope can invoke infallibility only in his role of “pastor and teacher of all Christians” (*ex cathedra*) and not as an individual theologian.
- 6) The content of infallible statements is confined to the areas of “faith and morals”.
- 7) The pope is able to speak infallibility not because of his personal abilities, but because of divine assistance.
- 8) Infallible statements are “irreformable of themselves and not from the consent of the Church” (against Gallicanism).

Results of the Council - The liberal minority sought to have some mention of the need to consult the bishops to be included, but in the end, the final formula excluded the need for any such consultation. Having lost their case, out of protest, some sixty-one members of the liberals left Rome before the final vote of approval on June 18, 1970. The final vote was 535 to 2.

After the vote, the Council was dismissed to meet again in November. However, caught in a war with Prussia, French troops pulled out of Rome and, as noted above, Rome was occupied by the troops of Victor Emmanuel and Pius IX became “the prisoner of the Vatican”. The Council was never officially closed, but it never convened again.

Eventually all of the liberal bishops who left in protest finally accepted the decree. However, some German liberals, most university professors, under the influence of Doellinger refused to accept the definition and some left the Church to join the Old Catholics. Others like Newman expressed hope that future councils would modify any exaggerations in the decree, while others like Acton abandoned any hope of liberalizing the Church.

In the view of the conservatives, Vatican I fulfilled the dream of making the long-disputed issue of infallibility a settled fact. What infallibility meant and how it would be used, was not yet settled. Some conservatives were of the opinion that no other Councils would ever be necessary, while liberals hoped that someday the role of the bishops and the laity in framing the teachings of the Church would be examined. They would have to wait until the 1960’s and the Vatican II to have their hopes realized.

While some broke away from the Church over the infallibility issue, others worked toward a more balanced view of authority that would be expressed at Vatican II. Others, like Hans Kung, in his 1971 book “Infallible? An Inquiry”, would directly question the meaning of the concept of infallibility and seek to discover its limits and place it within

the wider context the bishops and the laity.

Most theologians would say that while the definitions of infallibility do include matters of “faith and morals”, as of the present date only the Assumption of Mary (Pius XII, 1950) and possibly the Immaculate Conception (Pius IX) has been infallibly defined and there have been no infallible definitions in the area of morals. What the future may bring is anyone’s guess.

In the final analysis, with the reign of Pius IX and the event of Vatican I, Gallicanism was put to rest, the conservatives had the pope on their side and liberals would have to wait for Vatican II to have their issues discussed and have some of them enunciated in the official decrees of a General Council.