

THE SYLLABUS OF ERRORS SQUELCHES IBE LIBERAL CATHOLICS

Another important issue in the debate between liberals and conservatives in the nineteenth-century Church had to do with the question of intellectual freedom. Unlike the advocacy of political liberalism, which found its strongest leaders in France in the circle around Montalembert, this issue was explored most vigorously and intelligently by the German Catholics. This was in keeping with the obvious superiority of their theological and historical scholarship. As the only Catholic community in the world with theological schools located in the secular universities, they were forced to keep in touch with scientific developments and so were more acutely aware of the need of the Church to face realistically the problems raised by modern culture. They saw that the Church could only deal effectively with the arguments raised by the rationalists by emulating their spirit of scientific impartiality. And so the German Catholic scholars broke away from the obsolete Scholastic texts and developed new scientific methods to defend the faith, with intellectual freedom presupposed as a *sine qua non*.

The German liberal Catholics were more than confident in their ability as Church apologists to hold their own in the intellectual free market. They could point to a number of important scholars who showed that the German Catholic Church possessed genuine intellectual vitality. Catholic theologians of the Tübingen school beginning with Johann A. Mohler (d. 1838), lay converts of genius such as Friedrich von Schlegel (d. 1829) and Joseph von Görres (d. 1848) were leaders in the Catholic revival. By 1850, Ignaz von Döllinger (d. 1890) was unquestionably the leader of the German liberal Catholics. A Church historian primarily and professor at Munich since 1826, Döllinger had gained an enviable reputation by a series of remarkable studies, including a four-volume Church History (1833-38) and the Reformation (1848). In addition, he was deeply involved in journalism and political activity. Although originally ultramontane and conservative in Church matters, he was

gradually led by his historical studies to adopt a liberal attitude in regard to Church authority.

The issue of intellectual freedom was also vigorously debated among English Catholics, thanks to the influence of Doellinger's young protege, John Acton, scion of an old Shropshire family. Acton's family tree spread great branches throughout Europe, and Acton was nothing if not cosmopolitan, having mastered six languages in his youth. The great formative influence on his mind was his four-year sojourn at Munich, where he lived with Doellinger as his friend and student. On Acton's arrival back in England in 1844 he felt it his mission in life to introduce into the Catholic body the German historical method and its spirit of free inquiry. And he found in the Catholic monthly the Rambler a perfect organ for the dissemination of liberal Catholic ideas.

To his great joy he was able to enlist in the cause an Oratorian priest, John Henry Newman. As the leader of the Oxford movement, Newman occupied the center of the English ecclesiastical stage during the 1830s and 1840s. By his sermons at St. Mary's, Oxford, his writings and personal example, and in close association with his friends John Keble, Hurrell Froude, and Edward Pusey, Newman had stirred the Anglican Church to a deep theological and spiritual renewal. But eventually he felt compelled by the inner logic of the movement to submit to Rome, and after an agony of mind and heart, he left his maternal Church and became a Roman Catholic priest.

While never fully subscribing to Acton's brand of liberal Catholicism, Newman was sympathetic to its basic goal of reconciling faith with modern culture insofar as that was possible. So while contributing several articles to the Rambler, he also tried to influence its tone, which he found needlessly flippant at times and calculated to antagonize the already alarmed bishops. Newman, it may be added, had little sympathy with the free thinkers of the day and considered their brand of liberalism the bane of society. He looked back wistfully to the Christian liberty of thought of the Middle Age and regretted the tight discipline increasingly exercised by Rome.

The struggle of the liberal Catholics for greater intellectual freedom in the Church was severely hampered by the deteriorated state of the Catholic intellect itself. Outside of Germany intellectual life in the Church was at a very low ebb. The disruption of French Catholicism during the Revolution gravely retarded intellectual pursuits and lowered the quality of teaching in the French seminaries; the French clergy weren't able to pursue higher studies on the university level until late in the nineteenth century. The resurrection of the University of Louvain augured well for the future of theology in Belgium, but there were few signs elsewhere of revival. Austria, Poland, and Spain, with a few unexciting exceptions, produced no Catholic intellects of any significance. And one could hardly expect to find original thinkers in Rome itself, where in 1820 a book espousing Newton's theory of gravitation was put on the Index and where the salvaging of the Papal States was the chief preoccupation. The "safe" sciences Canon law, liturgy, and archaeology-it is true, were cultivated with some degree of expertise under Pio Nono; De Rossi's work on the catacombs excited considerable interest, and the Jesuits Passaglia, Schrader, and Franzelin at Gregorian University made respectable contributions to positive theology.

Nor did the liberal Catholics expect much from the neo Scholastic renaissance that was gaining momentum and was soon to become the dominant intellectual force in Catholic seminaries and theological faculties. Its leaders tended to be conservative and authoritarian. To place this neo-Scholastic renaissance in proper perspective we must recall that during the Counter Reformation medieval Scholasticism was revived but then again fell into complete obscurity during the Enlightenment. And by the year 1800 the theologian who quoted Thomas, Scotus, or Suarez was rare. Cartesianism and Newtonianism had given the coup de grace to Aristotle, and Scholasticism, with its heavy debt to the Greek philosopher, suffered accordingly. But around 1800 a movement began to revive the medieval system. As in the sixteenth century, the revival was decidedly Thomist in emphasis and was again the work of Jesuits, many of them associated with La

Civiltà Cattolica, their monthly founded in 1850. Outstanding among the leaders of the Thomist renaissance were such priests as d'Azeglio, Curci, Sordi, Liberatore, and Vincenzo Pecci, archbishop of Perugia and later Pope Leo XIII.

Outside Italy the revival of medieval Scholasticism was most successful in Germany, where the diocese of Mainz played a leading role and where Bishop von Ketteler's seminary housed many of its leaders. A team of professors there edited the journal *Der Katholik*, which pursued an aggressive line of propaganda in favor of restoring medieval Scholasticism to honor in the Church. The idea was taken up enthusiastically by scores of influential bishops and priests like Archbishop Reisach of Munich, Cardinal Rauscher of Vienna, the Jesuit professors at Innsbruck, and most notably a German Jesuit, Kleutgen, considered the most original and profound of the nineteenth century's neo-Thomists and chief defender of the Scholastic citadel.

By 1850, as neo-Scholasticism gathered strength, two rather well-defined schools of thought formed in Germany and to some extent elsewhere over the issue of the Church's proper relationship vis-a-vis modern culture: the Ultramontanes, led by the neo-Scholastics of Mainz, vs. the liberal Catholics, led by Doellinger and his Munich school. In the mind of the former, modern culture was hopelessly rationalist and secular and inimical to the Church; they therefore favored a state-of-siege strategy and authoritarian methods. They wanted the Catholic faithful protected from contamination by secularism and rationalism and welded into a disciplined army led by zealous and pious priests trained in seminaries isolated from the pernicious influences of secular culture. To achieve this aim, they favored strengthening Rome's authority over the Church. Catholic theologians, in particular, were to be subjected to a tight censorship and be compelled to give assent not only to the dogmas of the Church but even to the ordinary teaching as laid down by the Roman congregations. In effect, this meant a monolithic conformity to the Scholastic tradition, which had succeeded in gaining predominance over the minds of the Curia.

On the other hand, the Munich school, led by Doellinger, was more optimistic about modern culture; it was an optimism based on a profound confidence in Catholicism's perennial vitality and its ability in the past to assimilate the good in any culture while escaping its excesses. Rather than tighter control by Rome over scholars and theologians, they wanted them to have more independence. As Lord Acton put it: [the Catholic scholar] must meet his adversaries on grounds which they understand and acknowledge . . . [he must discuss] each topic on its intrinsic merits-answering the critic by a severer criticism, the metaphysician by closer reasoning, the historian by deeper learning, the politician by sounder politics and indifference itself by a purer impartiality. In all these subjects . . . [he] discovers a point preeminently Catholic, but also pre-eminently intellectual and true.

With Rome itself at the time literally under siege by Garibaldi and in a state of theological and intellectual disarray, it is not surprising that the conservative Scholastics of Mainz soon got the upper hand. They carried on an aggressive campaign against the "liberals" and were aided in this by the nuncio at Munich. Though they counted within their ranks men of real talent and breadth of view, too many of them unfortunately were anti-intellectual bigots completely ignorant of the positive results of historical research and readily inclined to identify their own opinions with orthodoxy itself. Rather than wrestle with the knotty problems raised by historical and biblical research, they preferred the easier recourse to an instant authority and systematically denounced to Rome all those who did not share their narrow theological views. Many of their attacks were totally unjustified and were inspired more by personal rivalry than by love of truth. Their first great success came with the condemnation of Austrian philosopher Anton Gunther, a theologian of genius, whose wide circle of followers included the archbishop of Vienna, Cardinal Schwarzenberg.

The conflict between the two parties became increasingly bitter as Doellinger reacted to the tactics of the "Romans" by loading sarcasm and invective on the Scholastics and pointing with scorn to

the low level of learning at Rome. Nevertheless, it was Doellinger who tried to bring about a reconciliation between the two schools. He and some colleagues sent invitations to most of the leading German scholars to attend a congress in Munich scheduled for September of 1863. The attendance surpassed all expectations; most of those invited showed up-with the exception of the Tiibingen faculty and the Jesuits. Doellinger delivered the keynote address, "The Past and Future of Theology," in which he sketched a program for revitalizing Catholic theology. This classical statement of intellectual liberal Catholicism began with a brief history showing how successively Greeks, Italians, Spaniards, French, and English theologians had exerted the dominant influence and concluded that it was now the turn of the German Catholics to take up the torch, since they were the ones best trained in history and modern philosophy, the two sciences that henceforth would shape the content of theology, since the Scholastic approach was now obsolete.

He then finally addressed himself to the crucial issue-the intellectual freedom of the Catholic scholar-and made a forceful plea for his right to work untrammelled by authority, arguing that intervention by Church authority was needed only in the rare cases, where his conclusions were in obvious contradiction with the dogmas of the Church. Otherwise he demanded a great amount of freedom for the individual theologian; his errors would not be fatal, since it was the very mark of a healthy theology to be able to correct its own mistakes. The only effective weapons against error, he asserted, were the weapons of science, not ecclesiastical censure.

Acton, in the pages of his *Home and Foreign Review*, hailed the speech as the dawn of a new era in theology and argued that Doellinger had safeguarded the legitimate rights of authority in the Church by professing his complete submission to defined dogma. Pio Nono, however, was deeply disturbed by the liberal pronunciamento of Doellinger, and in a brief to the archbishop of Munich emphatically laid down the hard line: The Catholic scholar must be subject to the ordinary magisterium (the Church's teaching function)

as well as to the decrees of the Roman congregations; and he deplored Doellinger's negative attitude toward Scholasticism. A month before the Munich congress another impressive assembly of Catholics was held at Malines; the leader of the French liberal Catholics, Montalembert, before an immense audience of cardinals, bishops, priests, and laymen, called on the Church to embrace the modern liberties and get in step with the rest of the world. He held Catholic and liberal Belgium up to the eyes of the world as proof that the Church could flourish in the climate of liberty. The old regime of intolerance, Inquisitions, and unions of thrones and altars. was in the last stage of decrepitude and could never be revived, and Catholics should be among the first rather than the last to applaud the fact. Thunderous applause greeted his words, and he received the personal congratulations of the cardinal archbishop of Malines.

Both events-the Munich congress and the assembly at Malines-joined with other signs, convinced the Pope that the liberal virus was spreading with fearful rapidity through the Church, and he finally decided to take a step he had been contemplating for some time: the issuance of a general condemnation of modern errors, including those associated with liberalism. It would be a summary of the condemnations he had issued over the past fifteen years.

And so his famous Syllabus of Errors appeared on December 8, 1864, accompanied by an encyclical, *Quanta Cura*. The Syllabus of Errors listed eighty errors, including rationalism, naturalism, a socialism that would subject the family totally to the state, and liberal capitalism that had no other end than material gain. For most people, however, the most startling thing was the condemnation of freedom of religion, progress, and liberalism found in Error No. 77: "It is no longer expedient that the Catholic religion should be treated as the only religion of the state, all other worships whatsoever being excluded," and No. 80: "The Roman Pontiff can and ought to reconcile and harmonize himself with progress, with liberalism, and with modern civilization."

The public commotion that resulted was without parallel in the modern history of the Church until our own day. Unlike

Mirari Vos, issued when majority sentiment in Europe was still conservative and reactionary, the Syllabus struck against the broad mainstream of public opinion. Even the average Catholic was shocked to hear the Pope condemning progress and modern civilization. Moreover, the formulations of the Syllabus lent themselves readily to misinterpretations, since they consisted largely of verbatim extracts lifted out of their context in previous papal documents and that could only be properly understood if put back in that context. Error No. 80, for instance, was taken from an allocution of the Pope protesting against Piedmont's spoliation of convents and harassing of priests and that had concluded: The Roman Pontiff does not have to reconcile himself with progress and modern civilization "if by the word 'civilization' must be understood a system invented on purpose to weaken, and perhaps to overthrow, the Church "

But the average reader did not realize when he read the encyclical that this is what the Pope meant by "civilization," but might easily conclude that the Pope had declared war on the modern world.

To forestall such a disaster, a French bishop, Felix Dupanloup, came to the rescue. Working day and night, he was able quickly to publish a skillful commentary that placed the propositions of the Syllabus in their original context. And by means of a subtle distinction between thesis and hypothesis was able to show that Rome did not mean to condemn or repudiate the liberal constitutions actually in force in such countries as Belgium, England, Latin America, and the United States. Put on sale on January 26, it sold out in two hours, and within three weeks one hundred thousand copies were distributed, not counting numerous translations.

The liberal Catholic movement was not completely destroyed by the Syllabus, but it was certainly checked. Most liberal Catholics remained in their former opinions, and thanks to Dupanloup they could not simply be condemned as heretics, but they were in disgrace and on the defensive, especially since Pius himself favored those who swallowed the encyclical whole hog. And so they had to be extremely prudent in order not to draw down more

lightning. But some were less prudent than others: The liberal archbishop of Paris, Dar. boy, for example, said in an appeal to the Pope: "You have just ••• condemned the principal errors of our time. Now tum your eyes toward its honorable and good features and give them your support. • • • For it is your duty to • • • reconcile liberty with authority.