

PIO NONO CARRIES ULTRAMONTANISM TO A GRAND TRIUMPH AT VATICAN I

One of the most remarkable trends in nineteenth-century Catholicism was the tremendous increase in the power and influence of the papacy. This resurgence of ultramontanism was closely associated with the Catholic revival of the early nineteenth century. The Ultramontanes were Rome-centered Catholics who in contrast with the Gallicans, their adversaries, saw a strong papacy as the only salvation of the Church in an age of godless, anti-Christian, and anticlerical liberals. No one was more fervently ultramontane than Pius IX himself, and his long reign (1846-78), coupled with numerous other religious, social, and political factors, enabled him to steer the movement to its climax-the definition of papal infallibility at Vatican I. This increase of spiritual authority more than compensated for his loss of temporal authority. It also set the Church's stamp of approval on his condemnation of liberalism and hardened the Church in the state of siege mentality that Pius himself did so much to foster.

Numerous reasons can be found for the strong ultramontane upsurge in the early nineteenth century. First, political conservatives saw in the papacy a strong bulwark against the revolutionary ideas. Second, Pius VII's heroic defiance of the autocratic Napoleon enhanced the prestige of the papacy. Third, the clergy, who had been stripped by the Revolution of their property and privileges, found Rome their only dense against the whims of the lay state, which wanted to make them mere civil servants. Fourth, many priests who suffered persecution for their obedience to Rome came out of their experience strengthened in their loyalty. Fifth, the Concordat of 1801, requiring that the whole French episcopate tender their resignation to the Pope struck a heavy blow at Gallicanism by providing an unprecedented and awesome demonstration of the Pope's power over the bishops. Sixth, the same concordat, by giving the bishops almost unlimited authority over their priests, drove the latter into the arms of the Pope as their only safeguard against episcopal arbitrariness.

On the literary front two important French writers, Lamennais and De Maistre, greatly advanced the cause of ultramontanism. The latter's book *Du Pape* (1819)-a best seller in its day-argued in favor of an infallible authoritarian papacy as indispensable to a conservative European political order. Lamennais for his part won over a large section of the younger clergy to his vision of a cohesive Church closely linked with the Pope and ready to struggle with the new and godless liberal order. So it took only twenty years in France to gain wide popular acceptance of the ultramontane Church order-stressing the personal infallibility of the Pope and close control by the Roman Curia over the internal affairs of the Church.

Conditions in Germany also favored a grass-roots ultramontane movement. During the Revolution numerous sees remained vacant for a long period; in the interim the German Catholics got accustomed to depending on Rome for dispensations and other necessities. Moreover, thanks to the gerrymandering of the Congress of Vienna, Catholics found themselves everywhere in a minority. In dealing with the Protestant governments, they learned to appreciate Rome's help and support. On the other hand, these Protestant governments also found it to their advantage to deal with Rome rather than with the local churches, since they didn't want to do anything that would encourage the rise of a strong national German Catholic Church.

However, Gallicanism still remained strong for some time, especially the moderate kind found in Bailly's *Theology* a standard seminary textbook. And the struggle between the two viewpoints divided the Church; it often involved a conflict of generations, with the older priests clinging to the Gallican traditions imbibed in their training. It also involved a conflict of styles of religious life, as the Gallicans objected to the centralizing and authoritarian characteristics of the new system. Others disliked the extermalism of its new style of piety, emphasizing frequent reception of the sacraments and numerous devotions.

A critical turning point in the struggle between Gallicans and Ultramontanes in France occurred in 1852 when the Gallican

bishops, led by the archbishop of Paris, issued a long memorandum, the *Memoire sur le droit couturier*, which insisted on the rights of each diocese to regulate its own affairs. Rome, which up to this point had more or less observed a prudent neutrality, now seized this as an occasion for stepping in on the side of the ultramontanes. Pius issued *Inter Multiplices*-a stinging rebuke to the Gallican signatories of the memorandum-and from this time on used a definite strategy in order to further the cause of ultramontanism. Bishops were prohibited from holding national councils, regarded as possibly dangerous forums for Gallican ideas. Books of Gallican tendency were regularly put on the Index, including a treatise on Canon Law written by the vicar general of Paris, and the clergy and faithful were encouraged to have constant recourse to Rome-over the heads of their bishops if necessary.

In this way Pius Nono was gradually able to tighten his control over the bishops. Thanks to the extraordinary length of his reign-the longest in history-he was able to shape the character of the episcopate by choosing wherever possible men of strong ultramontane tendency and also by keeping in close contact with them. He used the apostolic nuncios as watchdogs to keep the bishops in line; recalcitrants were sometimes invited to a personal audience, which could be stormy. He also spared no pains in winning over the lower clergy to ultramontanism. One measure that proved most effective was the establishment of national seminaries in Rome, where young seminarians brought to Rome could imbibe the Roman spirit at its source. The American College, started in 1859, was only one of many such foundations.

The proclamation of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception on December 8, 1854, represented a distinct triumph for the Ultramontanes, as the whole affair was deliberately staged to dramatize the authority of the Holy Father, who read the decree with the bishops looking on as simple spectators. Most effective among the allies of the Pope in this great ultramontane campaign were the religious orders, many of them already headquartered in Rome and therefore ideally suited to be his agents in spreading the ultramontane spirit and doctrines to their

far-flung outreaches. The Jesuits in particular were well fitted for this purpose, and they had immense influence on the Pontiff, who tended to adopt their viewpoint in many matters of ecclesiastical politics, theology, and spirituality. Their journal *La Civiltà Cattolica* was thought of as the mouthpiece of the Holy See.

The Pope tended to bypass the College of Cardinals in dealing with day-to-day problems and depended most on a number of personal friends and counselors such as Antonelli, who remained Secretary of State from 1849 to 1876; Cardinals Bedini, Patrizi, and Barnabo, who exerted a lot of influence over certain departments; and several non-Italian priests—an Englishman, Talbot, and a Belgian, de Merode. Unfortunately, however, none of these men—in the opinion of historians such as Professor Roger Aubert—were endowed with the qualities of historical sense and political sagacity demanded by the extremely complicated situation of the Church.

But historians agree that what counted most in the triumph of ultramontanism was Pius IX himself—one of the most remarkable men to occupy the chair of Peter, a man of profound religious faith and total confidence in God, a man absolutely devoted to the interests of the Church. Not gifted with great intelligence and rather superficially trained in theology, he nevertheless had a shrewd sense of affairs, radiated strength of character, and was able to captivate almost everyone who met him by his handsome presence, musical voice, and subtle combination of dignity and informality. He quickly broke with the venerable tradition that kept the Pope isolated from the people. He loved to walk around Rome chatting and joking with the people, making little gestures that soon became legends—like the time he stopped the tears of a little girl who dropped a bottle of wine she was carrying home when he bought another one and handed it to the surprised child. His most effective way of reaching the people, however, was through audiences; he was the first modern Pope to use them on a grand scale. These often took up his whole day, but they were invaluable for the ultramontane cause since they brought many average Catholics from around the world into personal touch with their Holy Father. A

decidedly new feature of modern Catholicism developed from this: personal devotion to the Pope.

The success of Rome's strategy was clear by 1860; thanks to the causes mentioned, the ultramontanist current deeply penetrated the Catholic clergy and masses in astoundingly rapid fashion. Cardinals Rauscher at Vienna, Reisach at Munich, Manning at Westminster, and Cullen at Armagh presided over Churches strongly committed to the Roman theology of the Church, which emphasized centralization and the personal infallibility of the Pope. By 1863, for instance, only eleven dioceses still clung to their non-Roman liturgies; even the Sulpicians, stalwart Gallicans since their beginning, were converts to ultramontanism.

At times this ultramontane enthusiasm for things Roman and the Pope got out of hand-"idolatry to the papacy," the archbishop of Rheims called it, referring to exaggerations such as that reported of one bishop who claimed that God was incarnate in the Pope or the general tendency of these neo-Ultramontanes, as the extremists were called, to attribute infallibility to every papal statement.

Strong opposition to this ultramontane movement was rather limited. Most of it was found in the universities of Germany and among the French bishops. Doellinger was the leader of the German intellectuals who opposed it as an antihistorical conception of Church order alien to the modern concepts of liberty and, in fact, nothing but a medieval creation based on notorious forgeries. The French Gallicans were led by Maret, one of the few theologians of real value on the episcopal bench, and by Darboy, archbishop of Paris. Behind them stood a coalition of bishops who regarded the Syllabus of Errors as a disaster and ultramontanism as a leap the wrong direction. Nor could even the offer of a cardinal's hat turn Darboy around, as Pius Nonus found out. Also all long the opponents were the liberal Catholics who repented of their original ultramontane faith; they now feared a centralization of Church government that would confide the destiny of the Church to men who-as the Syllabus of Errors proved-were profoundly ignorant of the needs and aspirations of the modern world.

The first official public announcement of the Pope's intention to call a general council occurred in 1867, when the bishops gathered to celebrate the eighteenth centenary of the martyrdom of Sts. Peter and Paul. The impression was given that the purpose of the council would be to rally the Church against the rationalism of the nineteenth century, as the Council of Trent had done against Protestantism in the sixteenth. The two parties-Ultramontanes and Integralists together on one side, Gallicans and Liberals on the other girded themselves for a crucial test of strength. The big question in their minds was whether or not the council, the first Vatican Council, would confirm the growing ultramontane trend and ratify Pius' anti-liberal, state of siege position as defined in his Syllabus of Errors.

An article published in *La Civiltà* on February 6, 1869, stirred up the wrath of the Liberals by attempting to cut off all debate: 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 doctrines of the Syllabus and win accept with joy the proclamation of the dogmatic infallibility of the sovereign Pontiff [and] will define it by acclamation.

The liberal Catholics reacted with vigor to this trumpet blast. DoeIIinger published *The Pope and the Council*, an erudite study presenting the history of the papacy as a history of usurpation of power over the Church. Following his lead, many German intellectuals as well as the German bishops themselves declared against the opportuneness of defining papal infallibility. In France, Bishop Maret published a more moderate reply, *On the General Council and Religious Peace*, based on the Gallican thesis that papal statements need the consent of the episcopate in order to enjoy infallibility. Bishop Dupanloup also produced a pamphlet, which declared the definition of papal infallibility inopportune. This preconciliar debate served at least one useful purpose: It brought the issue of infallibility to the fore, so that when the seven hundred or so bishops assembled on December 8, 1869, they had a pretty good idea of the terms of the debate. And it was soon evident that they were

divided into two groups: an overwhelming majority who favored a strong statement defining papal infallibility and reaffirming the Syllabus, and a minority who opposed any such moves.

In spite of its numerical inferiority-never more than 20 per cent of the Council-the liberal minority was nevertheless an imposing body by reason of the important sees represented: nearly the whole Austro-Hungarian episcopate, most of the German bishops, a good third of the French, and numerous American bishops from large dioceses. The minority came to the Council with considerable fear of finding everything prearranged and the Curia prepared to use the bishops merely as rubber stamps to ratify what had been determined in advance. The minority feared in particular At the Curia would engineer a move to have papal infallibility accepted by simple acclamation instead of by vote.

Their fears and misgivings were confirmed during the first weeks. Several grave errors of judgment were committed that further alienated them and helped to harden them in an attitude of systematic opposition. First, they were very annoyed to find on their arrival that the Pope himself, contrary to the Procedure at Trent, had drawn up the ground rules in advance and greatly restricted their freedom of initiative. Only the Pope, for instance, was allowed to propose questions to the council. The choice of St. Peter's basilica as their assembly hall was another grievance; its acoustics were very poor and unsuited for real debate, and the minority suspected that it was deliberately chosen on this account. But what caused the greatest consternation was the high-handed maneuver Y which Cardinal Manning deprived them of any representation on the key committee-De Fide-which would be responsible for drafting any statement on infallibility. So it was in a climate of suspicion and discontent that the bishops began to work on the first draft document submitted to them: a statement on the errors of modern rationalism.

Then two more maneuvers by the majority aroused more bitterness. A modification of the rules was made that allowed for a motion of cloture at the request of only ten bishops. And it was also determined that any motion could be carried by a mere majority.

This abandonment of the traditional principal of moral unanimity made many of the minority think seriously about leaving Rome and challenging the legitimacy of the council.

At the request of 380 bishops, an extremist definition of papal infallibility was appended to the schema on the Church, which previously contained only a general statement about papal primacy. Delivered to the bishops on March 6, it brought the issue out into the open. An intense agitation began as partisans on both sides strove to win over the undecided through personal contact as well as by hastily printed leaflets. The Liberals and Gallicans stressed the danger of emphasizing the authoritarian character of the Church in an age so enamored of liberty, while the other side argued that unlimited freedom of thought was the greatest menace to the Church. The minority were more sensitive to the complex nature of the Church's constitution and afraid of disturbing the delicate balance of power between Pope and bishops, while the majority were more concerned about extirpating the remnants of Gallicanism.

The Catholic press around the world took sides, and attempts were made to stir up Catholics to put pressure on the bishops in favor of one side or the other. A remark by Newman referring to the leaders of the majority as an "insolent and aggressive faction" was published and caused a certain sensation, as did a letter Montalembert published shortly before he died in which he castigated the attempt to "sacrifice justice, truth, reason, and history as a holocaust to the idol they have erected in the Vatican."² But the most damaging attack on the credibility of the council was Doellinger's tendentious chronicle that he published under the pseudonym Quirinus and that he based on correspondence with eyewitnesses. It put the machinations of the majority in the darkest light and helped permanently to discredit the council among large sectors of public opinion, especially in Germany.

But though the majority had succeeded in getting the question of infallibility on the agenda, things were still moving so slowly that they estimated it would take a whole year before they could begin debate on this topic. So once again they made a special appeal to the Pope in a petition signed by around a hundred bishops

asking that Chapter 11, dealing with infallibility, be taken out of its order and be considered first. Exasperated by this attempt to invert the order of discussion the minority remonstrated with the Holy Father about the dangers of treating the Pope's prerogatives before dealing with the Church as a whole. But Pius once again sided with the majority. Chapter 11 was therefore recast into a separate, brief constitution of four chapters entitled *De Summo Pontifice* and immediately passed out to the bishops for examination.

The debate on this schema lasted from the middle of May until the middle of July 1870, during which time the minority made a futile effort to ward off the inevitable. A brilliant phalanx led by Hefele, Rauscher, Maret, Ketteler, Stressmayer and Darboy presented the minority point of view, questioning the expediency of defining infallibility, pointing out the historical and theological problems it raised. But the majority were not going to be dissuaded by argument from a course they had long before decided on. Ill prepared for the most part to cope with their more learned adversaries intellectual grounds, they merely waited with impatience until they could decently move to close debate.

However, the effort of the minority was not completely wasted. This is indicated by the concessions made to their point of view in the speech by a Dominican, Cardinal Guidi, the most distinguished theologian of the majority. He proposed a formula that would speak of the infallibility of the Pope's doctrinal definitions rather than of the "infallibility of the Pope"-a phrase that connoted an idea of his personal infallibility. And Guidi suggested including a clause obliging the Pope to make a serious examination of tradition-which, Guidi said, would normally include consultation with the bishops. Although Guidi's conciliatory proposals found favor with both sides, he later received a stinging rebuke from Pio Nono, who shouted at him, "Tradizione! La tradizione son' io!" ("Tradition! I am Tradition!")

Still another gesture of conciliation was made by the official secretary of the Committee on Faith, Gasser, who in his authorized commentary stressed the numerous conditions needed for a papal decree to qualify as infallible: It must be *ex cathedra*-that is,

the Pope must act as supreme pastor; it must deal with a doctrine of faith and morals; and the divine assistance (not inspiration) that protects him from error is due to the gift of infallibility not granted exclusively to the Pope but to the Church itself. Gasser affirmed the exact "co. incidence of papal infallibility with the infallibility of the Church."& Many entertained hopes of finding a formula that would somehow reconcile both points of view: the insistence of the minority that the bishops be associated with the Pope in any exercise of infallibility, and the determination of the majority to repudiate the Gallican thesis requiring consent of the bishops to make a papal definition irreformable. But the task proved insurmountable, Darboy, at the head of an imposing delegation, personally pleaded with the Pope to have some words inserted in the final formulation that would imply participation by the bishops in the papal exercise of infallibility. But in the end Manning and his group prevailed; the final formula definitely excluded the need of any such participation. Definitions of the Roman Pontiffs, it stated, were of themselves irreformable.

It might be noted that most of the bishops were moderates and were anxious to find some compromise formula rather than to crush their opponents. This was particularly true of the Italians, who made up a third of the assembly and had no part in the original politics of putting infallibility on the agenda. And according to some recent studies, it seems that the majority would have finally rallied to a compromise formula had it not been for Pius IX, who upheld the intransigents.

Some sixty bishops of the minority, unable in conscience to subscribe to the definition and unwilling to expose their dissent to the public eye by voting in the negative, quietly packed up their bags and left Rome. The remaining 53 5 bishops registered their approval of the final text in the midst of a frightful storm on July 18, 1870.

They were dismissed immediately afterward until November. But Italian history barged in and prevented the continuance of their work. Caught in a war with Prussia, France pulled her troops out of Rome and left the way open for the troops of united Italy to

occupy Rome. This happened on September 20. The Pope in protest declared himself a prisoner in the Vatican and prorogued the Council sine die.

Those bishops who deserted Rome without voting had in some cases a severe struggle of conscience before submitting to the Vatican decrees. One of the most reluctant was Bishop Hefele of Rottenburg, who blamed the Jesuits for making a caricature of the Catholic Church. But eventually all of the minority bishops submitted and accepted the decree-consoling themselves that they had at least stymied the extremists. The only large-scale resistance to the decree occurred in German university circles, where many professors, under the influence of Doellinger, rejected the definition of infallibility. The decree on infallibility completed the rout of the Liberal Catholics. A few like Newman took comfort in the idea that future councils would rectify whatever was exaggerated in the decree, but others, like Acton, abandoned any hope of liberalizing the Catholic Church.

Liberal Catholics, like liberals in general, considered the dogma a blow to progress and freedom. A little more historical hindsight, however, helps us see the dogma as the Church's way of defending itself against the liberal state which in practice tended to be less liberal than it was supposed to be, especially in regard to the Church. The liberal state could easily assume an infallibility of its own and infringe on the proper freedom of the Church. Under the old regime the clergy were able to protect their interests by means of their various privileges and the financial independence secured by their large landed estates. But the clergy of the new order, as the Concordat of 1801 shows, was becoming a salaried bureaucracy and hence more easily controlled by the government. In these circumstances the Church could easily lose its international character. It was these political conditions that necessitated the dogma of papal infallibility for the same reason that the political conditions of the eleventh century necessitated the papal decree on lay investiture: The liberty of the Church was at stake.

Fortified by the acts of the First Vatican Council, Pius continued his policy of intransigence toward modern secular liberal

culture and showed clearly that he was unable to adapt the Church to the profound social and political transformations going on around him. At his death in 1878 the Church was left in a virtual state of war with the rest of society-a Kulturkampf by no means limited to Bismarck's Germany.

Pius IX's real success was with the interior renewal of the Church, and he deserves credit for the magnificent leadership he gave in deepening its sense of piety and spirituality. Under his guidance many of the old religious orders were revitalized and many new ones founded. The Jesuits nearly doubled their membership during his reign and once more exerted a mighty influence in all fields of the apostolate. The Dominicans and Franciscans likewise made considerable progress, as did the order of Saint Sulpice, the Brothers of the Christian Schools, the Passionists, and the Redemptorists. The same was true of the venerable monastic orders-the Benedictines, Cistercians, Trappists, and Carthusians-which filled their new monasteries with enthusiastic recruits.

Many new orders of women and men were founded-too numerous even to list here. Some of the most successful were the Fathers of the Blessed Sacrament, Maria Reparatrix, and Don Bosco's Salesians. New missionary societies also sprang up, as, for instance, the White Fathers and the Society of the Divine Word.

The ultramontane movement fostered by Pius IX also favored a new style of piety-one that encouraged frequent reception of the sacraments, emphasized devotion to Mary, and engendered many sentimental devotions, such as to the Sacred Heart. In spite of certain excesses, this ultramontane spirituality represented an authentic renewal of the Catholic tradition by its rediscovery of the sacramental character of Catholic life, the reality of the supernatural, and above all the centrality of Christ-true God and true man. It succeeded in removing from the Catholic consciousness the vestiges of the cold, rationalistic, and Deistic tendencies so prevalent among Christians during the eighteenth century.