How the Pope Became Infallible: Pius IX and the Politics of Persuasion
by August Bernhard Hasler

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Introduction by Hans Küng; translated by Peter Heinegg.

EXCERPTS

FOREWORD
to the First Edition

Paul VI laid aside his tiara. Both his successors, John Paul I and John Paul II, dispensed with the throne and crown. But the popes' claim to infallibility has remained, and hence so has their position of power. For power was the issue in 1870, when the First Vatican Council ascribed to the pope inerrancy in matters of faith and morals, together with direct sovereignty over the entire Church.

Discussion of the dogma of infallibility has been going on now for several years, with theological and philosophical arguments getting most of the attention. Until very recently there had been no historical study of the way the solemn definition of papal infallibility came about and why this happened precisely in 1870.

In the late summer of 1977 I published a two-volume work dealing with these problems. Not only did it evoke a wide response, but some of the more heated reactions to it showed how important the pope's supreme authority was and is to many people and, on the other hand, how historical research can make tempers flare when it touches on one of Catholicism's sore points without glossing it over or explaining it away. And so in this book I would like to make the most important findings of my investigation available to a broader reading public, presenting these results within a historical framework that stretches from Jesus to the pontificate of Paul VI. Anyone, of course, who wishes to explore this question thoroughly, in all its complex detail, will have to consult both volumes of the earlier version. That edition also contains all the references for material cited here, except for a few new items, which I annotate. I have not given references for the quotations carried over from the longer version so as to keep the critical apparatus down to reasonable limits.

This book was supposed to appear (in German) in the fall of 1978, put out by a well-known Catholic press. For reason of church politics, however, the publisher withdrew from his contract on short notice. I should therefore like to thank Mr. Klaus Piper all the more for taking my manuscript. It is a pleasure to recall my collaboration with R. Piper & Co., especially with Mrs. Renate Bohme and Dr. Klaus Stadler. I thank Professor Georg Denzler for his help in reading galley proofs.

The opening up of numerous archives and the publication of several historical studies have altered our idea of the events which led to the dogma of infallibility. Only when as many people as possible take note of these new and still widely ignored discoveries can the papal claims of infallibility have a fair public trial. It is the author's opinion, naturally, that these claims constitute, even today, one of the grave problems facing the Church and society. The Vatican dogma is not merely one of the greatest obstacles in the path to Christian unity, it also blocks reform within the Church and, generally speaking, supports the spirit of authoritarianism in the community at large.

Rome/Munich, November 1978 August Bernhard Hasler

FOREWORD
to the Second Edition

Hardly anyone thought it could still happen, but it has: Papal Rome is once again branding as heretics those unwilling to believe in its infallibility. Of late, events have been following each other in rapid succession. On December 18, 1979, Professor Hans Küng was stripped of his ecclesiastical teaching privileges. In the future he can "neither be considered a Catholic teacher nor engage in teaching as such." A final "attempt at reconciliation" between Küng and the bishop of Rottenburg, Georg Moser, on December 30, 1979, proved to be a failure. The Congregation of the Faith justified its action on the express grounds that in the introduction to this book and in another piece Küng had disputed the pope's infallible magisterium.

Rome has spoken out in condemnation without advancing even a single argument on the matter at issue. This is all the more incomprehensible and regrettable in that those of us who have challenged infallibility have always called for a fair and open discussion of this doctrine, which has crumbled in the wake of recent scholarly studies. Innumerable Catholics now find that they can no longer accept the dogma of infallibility. For this reason arguments about it must go on — and they will.

Once more it has become evident that the doctrine of the infallible pope is no mere harmless leftover from the past, as some would like to believe. No, the Roman Curia is not simply adhering to it as firmly as ever, and using it to prop up its system, but ruthlessly hounding the dogma's opponents as well. This just heightens the need to show that Rome's pretensions are standing on feet of clay. And only if we realize this and act accordingly can the Church become truly Christian again.

For the second edition some corrections have been made, along with additions to the notes giving a listing of reviews of my book, *Pius IX (1846-1878), Papal Infallibility, and the First Vatican Council,* which have appeared since the spring of 1979.

St. Gall, January 1980 August Bernhard Hasler

Excerpt from Chapter 2, "Manipulating the Infallibility Debate"

(Pages 61 – 63)

Help from the Curial Machine

Conversely, writings critical of papal infallibility were the target of the pope's displeasure. The most dangerous attack on infallibility, *The Pope and the Council,* by Johann Joseph Ignaz von Döllinger, professor of church history in Munich (published under the pseudonym "Janus"), was put on the Index of Forbidden Books on November 26, 1869 — *quocumque idiomate,* "in whatever language" it might appear, as the decree particularly stressed. The Orientalist and theologian Peter Le Page Renouf fared no better. At the suggestion of John Henry (later Cardinal) Newman, he had written a study of Pope Honorius I (625-38), who was condemned as a heretic by the Sixth Ecumenical Council (678-87). Le Page Renouf came to the conclusion that Honorius I had actually advocated heresy. On December 14, 1868, his book, *The Condemnation of Pope Honorius,* was placed on the Index. Bishop Henri Maret, dean of the theological faculty of the Sorbonne and author of a book dealing with the Council and the issue of infallibility, escaped the same fate only because a long line of French bishops and the French authorities in Rome stood up for him.

Even writers who published well-meaning and less controversial articles discussing the coming Council — people like Georg Carl Mayer, canon of the Bamberg cathedral, or his colleague Johann Sporlein, or Professor Friedrich Michelis from Braunsberg — might find their names on the Index. In Germany, works by the philosopher Jakob Frohschammer and the church historian Aloys Pichler were officially banned; in France, Gallicanist books by Andre Dupin, the writings of Jean Baptiste Bordas-Demoulin on church reform, and the history of France In Henri Bordier and Edouard Charton.

Episcopal sanctions were leveled against the *Letters* by the philosopher and theologian Alphonse Gratry, a member of the Académie Frangaise. In them he had defended Bishop Felix Dupanloup against Archbishop Victor Dechamps. The bishop of Strassburg, Andreas Raess, forbade his clergy to read them, and many of his fellow bishops followed suit. These moves may not have been initiated by the pope, but at the least he approved of them.

With members of religious orders and congregations other methods were available to restore the proper spirit. Consider, for example, the case of the Franciscan Alois Matthias Hötzl, lecturer in philosophy and theology at Munich. When he wrote in defense of Döllinger, he was summoned to Rome by the general of his order. Even

before this, the nuncio to Munich, Pier Francesco Meglia, had recommended to the Curia that Hötzl be dismissed from his teaching post. Once in Rome, Hötzl was condemned to compulsory spiritual exercises in a monastery on the Palatine. The sentence was only lightened on account of King Ludwig II of Bavaria's personal interest in the whole affair. On several occasions he ordered the Bavarian ambassador in Rome to intervene for Hötzl. But even so, Hötzl was not allowed to leave Rome before recanting his views and submitting in advance to the decisions of the Council. If this was the lot of foreign professors, their Roman colleagues had it even worse. Anyone who didn't toe the mark was threatened with dismissal.

All these tactics were part of the broad strategic preparations for the dogmatization of papal infallibility. They were not aimed, in the first instance, at the council fathers, but they nonetheless affected them. Above all, they were a way of bringing some extremely unpleasant pressure to bear on the representatives of the conciliar opposition.

Excerpt from Chapter 7, "How the New Dogma Was Passed"

(Pages 202 – 204)

Retraction of Writings on the Council

The moment of reckoning was particularly inevitable for the bishops who had attacked the new dogma in print — a true scandal in the eyes of the Infallibilists. First in line for censure was the dean of the theological faculty of the Sorbonne, Bishop Henri Maret. After Vatican I the congregation of the Index opened proceedings against his book, *The Council and Religioui Peace*. Maret was threatened with condemnation unless he formally recanted. All his protests and excuses went for nought. Rome was not satisfied until Maret officially disavowed his wink and withdrew it from sale. And so the titular bishop from Paris publicly trimmed his sails and followed the course prescribed by Rome. At the reopening of the Sorbonne in 1871, Maret's first job, as he informed the new archbishop of Paris, Joseph Hippolyte Guibert, was to register the declarations of assent to infallibility on the part of faculty members in the minutes of the conference.

Archbishop Peter Richard Kenrick also wrote a piece on infallibility which was belatedly condemned by the Congregation of the Index. For personal reasons, however, the Vatican took its time in pronouncing sentence. In contrast to Maret, Kenrick managed to appease the Roman Curia without having to make a formal retraction.

Forced Resignation of Bishops

In France the punishments for recalcitrance sometimes proved to be still harsher — even after the bishops submitted. Some of them lost their dioceses. Bishop Felix de Las Cases of Constantine had his nerves so unhinged by the war, by the debts burdening his diocese and, above all, by his experiences at the Council that he had to enter a sanatorium. While recuperating there from a state of temporary nervous exhaustion, he was talked into resigning from his diocese. He, too, later recanted, but to no avail.

Pius IX wanted a special sort of reparation from Bishop François Lecourtier of Montpellier. Back in 1865 Lecourtier had complained about the Ultramontanes to the Minister of Religion, Pierre Jules Baroche. Later he had written anonymous newspaper articles about the lack of freedom at the Council, and when he left Rome

prematurely, as already mentioned, he threw his conciliar documents into the Tiber. Despite his quite explicit net of submission, the Curia's anger went on smouldering. In 1873 Lecourtier was slanderously accused of writing antireligious letters to a priest friend of his, now deceased. The nuncio in Paris, Flavio Chigi, with the connivance of the secretariat of state, made use of this calumny to prepare the final blow. At the nuncio's behest, Cardinal Charles Lavigérie assigned Lecourtier's former vicar-general, Auguste Lamothe-Tenet, the mission of employing false information, threats, intimidation, and appeals to Pius IX's express wish in order to force the bishop into retirement. Lecourtier was caught unawares; once he had signed his resignation, all his later recantations were in vain.

Bishop Frédéric Marguerye of Autun also resigned after the Council. The circumstances surrounding his move are quite obscure, but he was certainly under pressure from his own clergy and still more from Nuncio Chigi in Paris. It appears that Bishops Nicolas Gueulette, Giovanni Pietro Sola, Jean Pierre Bravard, and Jean Jules Dours were also forced to step down in a similar fashion.

Final pages of Chapter 7, "How the New Dogma Was Passed"

(Pages 232 – 235)

"All That Has to Be Burned … Has to Disappear …"

This repression also had telling effects on potential archival material. Thus, as previously mentioned, Bishop Joseph Hefele, not only burned all his papers but asked his friends to return his letters so he could burn them too. All the papers of Cardinal Charles Philippe Place were also incinerated on order from Richard, his secretary. Archbishop Georges Darboy directed some of his documents to be burned during the siege of Paris. After he was arrested by the Commune, Darboy's sister carried on the job; a few pieces, however, were spared. In Hungary, Gustav Janosi, an episcopal secretary and Roman correspondent for the newspaper *Fovarosi Lapok,* consigned his two volumes of personal notes on the Council to the flames. Benedictine Archabbot Krizosztom Kruesz from Pannonhalma/St. Martinsberg likewise destroyed important private documents relating to the Council.

Bishop Joseph Alfred Foulon had a bout with fear when he read over his conciliar correspondence. "All that has to be burned," he wrote his friend Abbe Tapie on December 29, 1873, "with the exception of the first and perhaps the second letter. For my part, I shall see whether the same goes for the copy which you were kind enough to make. All that has to disappear. I am counting on the courage of your friendship to give you the strength which you, perhaps, will need. But I implore you, do it." Abbe Tapie calmed Foulon, promising to burn anything with the faintest resemblance to conciliar polemics. All compromising letters would disappear. Tapie did not burn much, but some things he must have destroyed. For example, the reply to Tapie's question as to whether it was true that the pope had had a vision of the Mother of God declaring him infallible is no longer to be found among Foulon's letters. The papers left by other minority bishops have either vanished or were heavily expurgated.

There was also some burning on the Infallibilist side. In the archives of the Jesuit Curia, for instance, all the letters from Germany for the period 1860-70 are missing. They were probably destroyed on purpose before the Italian troops entered Rome. In the same archive, it is impossible to get hold of the correspondence of Jesuit General Pierre Jean Beckx with *La Civiltà Cattolica* for precisely the years 1865-75. Again, in the archives of this Jesuit journal, which played a central role in the pope's conciliar policies, all documents concerning the activities of the Jesuits during the Council are missing. Most notably, the diary of *La Civiltà Cattolica* from 1860 to 1890 has vanished. It would have told us a great deal about the part played by the

Jesuits at the Council. Before the Italian occupation of Rome on September 16 and 17, 1870, officials of the papal police burned large portions of their secret archives. Such destruction of documentary material was already a tradition in papal Rome. In the years 1815-17 Vatican agents in Paris, with the approval of the Secretary of State, Cardinal Ercole Gonsalvi, had taken 4,158 volumes of trial documents belonging to the Roman Congregation of the Index — they had been carried off to the French capital by Napoleon I — made them illegible, and sold them oil to dealers in old paper.

Ever since July 18, 1870, a stigma had been attached to the bishops of the minority, which greatly lessened any incentive to publish their papers. This attitude of negligent indifference almost brought about the total destruction of Bishop Maret's extremely important and well-organized documentation. Some sections had already been burned in Chartres, when the French historian Xavier de Montclos saved the rest. To date, the most important documents of the French minority have not been published. The papers of von Senestrey and Manning, the chief exponents of infallibility, remain inaccessible.

Worst of all, however, the Vatican still continues to practice its old restrictive archival policy. In December 1966 the Vatican secret archives opened up all materials touching on the pontificate of Pius IX to researchers. This included the archives of Vatican I. But before this wealth of manuscripts and records could really be looked into, the doors were shut once more. In a tedious effort that had consumed years, three employees of the Vatican secret archives had sorted through all the material down to the last box, completing all the necessary preparations for an exhaustive index. Then, at the end of 1969, Pope Paul VI announced plans for a critical edition of the conciliar documents. Publication would take a long while, but in the meantime an archival inventory might be published. Anyone familiar with the language of the Vatican could have predicted what happened. The inventory was not published and the promised edition of conciliar documents proved to be mostly a convenient excuse for continuing to withhold the archival material of Vatican I from researchers, and for preventing anyone from getting an overview of the documents on hand. The way in which Roman Prelate Francesco Dolinar has gone about implementing the papal announcement thus far makes one question the seriousness of the desire to produce a comprehensive critical edition. It has simply become harder to get at the documents.

Other portions of the archives dating back to the days of Pius IX have been tidied up for public use. Confidential material from the pope's personal papers, such as medical evidence concerning his epilepsy, has wandered off into an unnumbered box and thus become unobtainable.

The condition of the sources looks even more uncertain, when one recalls the oft ignored fact that two central organs of the Roman Curia — the Congregation for Extraordinary Church Affairs, which handled the most explosive questions, and the Congregation of the Faith, the successor to the Holy Inquisition — keep all their nineteenth-century archives closed. Since both of these "dicasteries" played such a vital role in the Council, especially in the story of the submissions made by the bishops, much is bound to remain shrouded in darkness for a long time to come.

Initial pages of Chapter 8, "Social and Religious Repercussions"

(Pages 237– 250)

Can Papal Authority Change Public Opinion?

The Infallibilists exaggerated the significance of the new definition: They actually believed that by raising the pope's authority to its upward limit they could gradually break society of its liberal and democratic habits. The Council, in the view of Archbishop Victor Dechamps, was to be "the rainbow after the Flood." Bishop Félix Dupanloup outlined his opponents' position this way: "The great evil of our day is that the principle of authority lies prostrate. Let us strengthen it in the Church and we shall save society." On May 25, 1870, the Ultramontane newspaper *Unità Cattolica* wrote, "The infallible pope must counteract and cure the prevailing abuses of unbridled freedom of the press, thanks to which journalists daily spread lies and calumny. Every day the pope can teach, condemn, and define dogma — and Catholics will never be permitted to question his decisions."

At first the Infallibilists complacently entertained the hope that their goal was achieved. Bishop Claude Plantier said they had succeeded in bringing about the apotheosis of authority. This was for him the most important result of the Council. The Roman pontiff's new authority, it was hoped, would also benefit the Papal States. But only two months after the definition of infallibility such expectations were cruelly disappointed. The day after the Council ended the Franco-Prussian War broke out. Shortly thereafter the last French troops left the papal harbor of Civitavecchia and the Italian Government in Florence was finally free to settle the problem of Rome. On September 20, 1870, the forces of a newly united Italy, under General Raffaele Cadorna, stormed the Porta Pia. To the very end Pius IX had thought it impossible that the Piedmontese would ever tread upon Roman soil. As in other matters, here, too, the pope believed, in his mystical extravagance, that he had been granted a special divine illumination: There is no other way of explaining the imperturbable confidence of his statements during those last days. Full of inner contentment, he could even find the time to work out a rebus which was quite popular then. But finally he ordered his general, Hermann Kanzler, to put up a token resistance — which nevertheless caused seventy human lives to be sacrificed to *raison d'etat*. (During fighting at the city walls, forty-nine soldiers were killed on the Italian side, while twenty died on the papal side.) But this symbolic protest against violent and unjustified Italian aggression could not prevent the loss of Rome once and for all. The situation was not without a certain irony: The dogma of infallibility, which was supposed to prop up the secular power of the pope, only hastened the process of its

disintegration. The new doctrine irritated the governments of Europe and made them apprehensive of church interference in their affairs. Neither France nor Austria nor Germany displayed any willingness to lift a finger to win back his lost territories for the pope. The whole episode reveals how completely the Infallibilists had lost their sense of political reality.

The capture of Rome would not be their only disappointment. In many countries where relations between Church and State were already strained, the definitions of Vatican I led to a crisis situation. A few weeks after the Council ended, Austria abrogated the concordat it had signed with the Holy See in 1855 on the grounds that the new dogmas had altered the nature of the other party to the contract.

In Germany the Vatican decrees triggered the Kulturkampf most notably in the provinces of Prussia, Hessen, and Baden. Al the root of this conflict lay the tension, which had been building up for decades, between modern liberal society and the reactionary impulses of Catholicism. After the Council, more than ever before Bismarck and the National Liberals came to look upon the Catholic Center Party as the focal point of the *gross-deutsch* opposition, hostile to Prussia and the new *klein-deutsch* Empire. Hence, in the years from 1871 to 1875 the Prussian state tried to restructure its relationship with the Church through a series of laws (the "Pulpit Article," prohibition of the Jesuit Order, state supervision of all schools, legal conditions governing the appointment of Catholic clergy, introduction of obligatory civil ceremonies for marriage), and to subject the Church to strict regimentation. These hostile measures backfired: The Catholic Center Party grew stronger. After the death of Pius IX, the new pope, Leo XIII, worked out a step-by-step reconciliation between the Vatican and Germany. In Switzerland, too, the Council exacerbated Church-State troubles, especially in the cantons of Solothurn, Bern, Basel, and Geneva. Some Swiss bishops and priests were forced to leave the country.

Closely bound up with the Kulturkampf was the creation of the Old Catholic Church. Many Catholics, including a particularly large number of professors of theology and history, could not, in conscience, accept the new dogma. They wanted to hold on to their old Catholic faith — hence their name. But the bishops insisted that they recognize the new dogma, and the schism that people had feared at last took place. In Germany, Austria, and Switzerland various communities were founded (with some encouragement from the government) independently of Rome. In the years after the Council they grew to about two hundred thousand members. But the movement never caught on. Today Old Catholic churches in German-speaking countries number about one hundred thousand believers.

In France the Vatican decrees deepened the alienation between Church and Society. The tension became so great that in 1906 Church and State were permanently separated. One of the crucial factors in this development was the Dreyfus affair. In 1894 Alfred Dreyfus, a French officer of Jewish extraction, was condemned for treason on the strength of forged documents and was sent to Devil's Island. The discovery of this

scandal rallied the Left, which viewed the Catholic Church as the mainstay of the nationalistic Right. As early as 1870 the French bishops belonging to the conciliar opposition had feared that the Vatican definitions might provoke the separation of Church and State.

This did not occur in Italy, but Catholics there excluded themselves from political life. Mortally offended by the loss of the Papal States, the papacy boycotted the newly unified state of Italy and with its *Non expedit* forbade Catholics to vote or run for office. Pius IX even refused to take note of the laws passed by the Italian Parliament, which recognized him as a secular monarch and guaranteed all his rights. He wanted no partnership with Italy. The dogma of infallibility eased the ghetto existence of Italian Catholics by reinforcing their feelings of self-sufficiency. Such political abstinence, which lasted for decades, would prove dangerous to democracy in Italy, as the trials it faced after World War I showed only too clearly.

The Church might have dealt differently with the movement for Italian unity. This was demonstrated by such cardinals as Girolamo Marchese d'Andrea and Vincenzo Santucci, by bishops, theologians, and laymen who had long felt that the Papal States were an anachronism. And the Roman populace left no doubt as to the enormous hatred and resentment it had stored up towards the papacy, when the body of Pius IX was taken from St. Peter's to the Church of San Lorenzo fuori le mura on the night of July 13, 1881. "The pope's coffin was raised," writes Catholic historian Joseph Schmidlin, "verified, covered with a rich pall, and transported, in a four-in-hand funeral coach built just for the occasion, from St. Peter's over the Bridge of Sant' Angelo through the city to the Campo Verano. Four carriages for prelates from the papal court went along in the procession, followed by two hundred for the members of Roman society. The houses along both sides of the route were illuminated, and people threw flowers down onto the casket. But at St. Peter's mobs had already gathered, crying out, 'Viva l'Italia! Morte al Papa! Morte al Preti! Al fiume il Porco! Al Tevere la carogna!' [Long live Italy! Death to the Pope! Death to the Priests! Throw the pig in the river! Throw the beast in the Tiber!]. All along the way crowds insulted the participants and showered them with stones. They had, in fact, every intention of hurling the corpse into the river. Six of the demonstrators were penalized for 'disturbing a religious function,' but otherwise the police let them have their way. So much so that Leo XIII, in his allocution of August 4, and the Secretary of State, in a note dated July 13, rightly protested to the government against this outrage to the former pope and to the papal dignity."

Pius IX would not have been the first pope thrown into the Tiber by the Roman people. In the year 897 Pope Stephen VI (896-97) had the corpse of Formosus (891-96), his predecessor on the Chair of St. Peter, removed from the grave, set up in the hall of the synod, and solemnly condemned. "The papal garments were ripped off the mummy, the three fingers of the right hand (with which the Latins give the blessing) were cut off, and with a barbaric shout the people dragged the dead man out of the hall, pulled him through the streets, and plunged him into the Tiber amid the press of the howling rabble."

And so the golden age of a society living in accordance with the old order, which so many Infallibilists had hoped to see, never dawned at all. The attempt to change the course of history failed right down the line. Papal infallibility, once thought of as a cure for the ills of the age, instead promoted the advance of an ever more widespread secularism.

Better Success Within the Church

But weren't the anti-Infallibilists also guilty of gross exaggeration when they had called the new dogma a catastrophe for the Church? They had believed that the Church would lose its credibility on account of this definition, which had no basis in either Scripture or tradition. Beyond that, they had feared that the extraordinary increase in papal power would downgrade the bishops to mere lackeys of Rome, thereby upsetting the divinely willed order of the Church. Did these fears come true?

As a matter of fact, the First Vatican Council came as a shock to Catholics who were anxious to harmonize science and faith. The resistance to infallibility on the part of so many professors, particularly in Germany, is an eloquent example of this. How could the new dogmas accord with the findings of historical research? It was no accident that Catholic historians suffered through the greatest crisis of conscience over the definition, or that a substantial number of them turned their backs on the Church.

The Council's disregard for history was pregnant with consequences. The Church not only missed its chance for a rapprochement with the scientific scholarship of the day but began more and more to look like an obstacle to cultural evolution and an enemy of the unprejudiced search for truth.

It is hard to deny the justice of such complaints — the way the dogma came to be defined would be proof enough. But the anti-Infallibilists had a still more pointed objection: The dogma of infallibility was not just one more doctrine among others. It took a comprehensive position on the issue of truth. It involved a very broad claim, namely, that the pope could pronounce on questions of faith and morals with guaranteed certainty. The faith was no longer to be brought to light by laborious research and investigation but by the determination of an infallible authority.

Naturally, these implications were not clearly perceived at first. The Curia pressed forward its efforts at centralization with a gentle hand. The first item on the agenda was simply to get everyone to accept the new dogma, to win over the many members of the opposition who had spoken out explicitly at the Council and who later continued to resist in silence.

Modernism: Trying to Break Out of the Ghetto

On December 8, 1864, in his encyclical *Quanta cura,* Pius IX had listed eighty contemporary errors and condemned them. The document culminated in the anathema laid upon the thesis that the pope had to reconcile himself to progress, liberalism, and modern culture. This catalog of modern errors, the famous (or notorious) *Syllabus,* was taken to be the opening battle of the Church's war against the *Zeitgeist* and created serious difficulties for many Catholics. For in this same encyclical the pope also denounced "the proponents of freedom of conscience and freedom of religion," as well as "all those who assert that the Church may not use force." In an encyclical letter dated August 15, 1854, Pio Nono had already declared, "The absurd and erroneous teachings, or rather twaddle, presented in defense of freedom of conscience are an extraordinarily pernicious mistake — a plague which the state must fear above all others."

Unlike the pope, many other people were interested in making peace between Catholicism and modernity. But if such attempts faltered before Vatican I, they collapsed afterwards when the Council resulted in a total victory for the Ultramontanes.

In any case, the problems caused by infallibility were only covered up, not solved. That would become evident by the time of Leo XIII. Pope Gioachino Pecci, in contrast to his predecessor, was bent on compromise — up to a point — with modern culture. Thus, along with his social encyclicals (above all *Rerum novarum,* promulgated on May 15, 1891) he also worked for a revival of philosophy and theology without, of course, wishing to disturb the existing structure of doctrine. Rather, in his letter of instruction *Aeterni Patris* he proposed Thomas Aquinas (ca. 1225-74), the greatest Western Doctor of the Church, as its intellectual model. The question of history and the scientific study of history, however, was not even mentioned. For Leo XIII there was simply no problem here. In 1881 he made the resources of the Vatican archives available for general use. "Non abbiamo paura della pubblicità dei documenti" (We are not afraid of the documents' being published), he declared in 1884 to a group of historians in Rome. Leo XIII was convinced that the sources, provided they were studied without prejudice, would always support the papacy. But the pope underestimated the range and significance of historical research. It was precisely the application of modern historical methods to the Bible and early Christianity which, by the end of Leo's pontificate, increasingly threatened to rock the doctrinal edifice of the Catholic Church.

Some Catholics, such as the Dominican exegete Albert Marie Joseph Lagrange and the historian Louis Duchesne, also made important contributions to this field. The French theologian Alfred Loisy, in his noted book *L'Évangile et l'Église (The Gospel and the Church)* from the year 1902 was merely airing a general feeling of discontent when he asked how the Church's dogmas could still be justified in the light of the findings of modem research. By now it had become obvious to many people that there was no direct path from Jesus to the Church. "Jesus proclaimed the coming

of the Kingdom," Loisy observed, "but what came was the Church." And yet the Church still remained oriented to the messianic vision of salvation. It had, as it were, institutionalized the expectation for the Kingdom of God. On the basis of this situation, Loisy — called by many "the father of modernism" — tried to explain the rise of dogmas. He understood them as an adaptation to the variable conditions of time and place. Since the Church was compelled to establish itself — when the end of the world did not occur — it had fashioned for itself a doctrinal system (dogmas), hierarchical institutions, and sacramental rites. Building on such historical facts, and drawing upon contemporary philosophical trends, Loisy saw the essence of Christianity not in some solid core but in the process of becoming. This approach left room for new developments: The Church's dogmas would merely reflect the point in its evolution where it found itself. But this also meant that any substantial change in the scientific view of the world might necessitate a "new interpretation of the old formulas," especially since "dogmas are not truths dropped down from heaven" but only symbols of the divine truths. Loisy hoped such considerations might point the way for the Church to deal with dogmas which, in his eyes, had become untenable owing to historical scholarship. He was thinking, among other things, of such doctrinal items as the founding of the Church by Jesus, the Virgin birth, and Jesus' divine sonship.

A number of Catholics appreciated Loisy's concerns and the merits of his work; they believed they had found in him a sheet anchor to save them from rationalist criticism. "He is a true Noah, and the Church will be glad to have his ark," wrote the French theologian Henri Bremond, speaking of Loisy, in a letter (May 23, 1904) to Maurice Blondel. But the majority of Catholic theologians, particularly the representatives of the magisterium, were soon branding Loisy's writings as damnable heresy. They were unwilling to allow historical criticism so wide a scope. In fact, the task of historical research as Loisy saw it was to furnish the essential building blocks for a kind of Christianity which could make sense in today's world without recourse to the Church's teaching authority.

The leading English theologian, George Tyrell, cast the conflict between scientific criticism and the magisterium into still sharper relief. In his book *The Church and the Future* (1903) he attacked the Roman Curia as a system of concentrated despotic authority. The Church, he thought, had no business being an official Institute of Truth. It simply ought to translate the inspirations wrought in the hearts of the faithful by the divine life into certain formulas, which would always be provisional.

From these few examples it becomes obvious that the main point at issue in the highly complex modernist movement was the relationship of science, above all the science of history, to the Church's magisterium. Do science and its representatives enjoy autonomy even within the Church or must they remain forever subordinate to the magisterium? And what should be done in case of conflict? Who and what decides when science has come up with unequivocal results which contradict the doctrine or decisions of the Church?

The reader is by now familiar with these questions. They had already been raised at the First Vatican Council during the debate on infallibility. At that time the controversy was settled in an authoritarian manner: The magisterium had its way. And now, a generation later, the situation was not about to change. Leo XIII, who was more inclined to a conciliatory stance, had exercised restraint, but the same could not be said of his successor, Pius X. Even before his election as pope, Giuseppe Sarto had been extremely disturbed over the sorts of theological discussions going on then, especially in France. This was not surprising for a pope who, in 1899, had extolled the dogma of Mary's Immaculate Conception, the First Vatican Council, papal infallibility, and the miracles of Lourdes and Pompeii as the "greatest events of the nineteenth century." In the very first months of his pontificate, Pius X had the major works of Loisy put on the Index. In 1904 he issued warnings in two encyclicals against innovators who were calling into question the history of early Christianity with a grand display of learning. In the years that followed, the papal admonitions took on a harsher tone, and the Vatican began to make visitations of seminaries and schools of theology. The Curia went after various professors it suspected of modernist errors and had them dismissed.

In 1907 the storm burst with full force. On July 17, after issuing a few more denunciations and warnings, the pope bade the Holy Office (later called the Congregation of the Faith) publish a decree condemning sixty-five theses. This new *Syllabus* dealt with most of the doctrinal issues facing the Church. Its chief target, however, was the erroneous teachings which curtailed the authority of the Church and, above all, the papal magisterium, and which cast doubts on the historical value of Holy Scripture and of certain dogmas. On September 8 of the same year the encyclical *Pascendi gregis* was published, in which Pius X banned the whole modernist movement. According to the pope's diagnosis, the root cause of all these errors was the philosophy of immanence and its view that religious truths merely grew up in response to human needs. Dogmas, it claimed, were just the expression of a subjective state of consciousness — with no "objective correlative" in reality.

Just as revealing as the pope's analysis of modernism was the series of practical measures he introduced to protect believers from the poison of this new heresy. He called for the supervision of all professors in church-run institutions and the dismissal of anyone who taught new theories. Candidates for the priesthood had to be chosen with scrupulous care. All those who showed signs of intellectual pride were to be turned down. Attendance at state universities was, for all practical purposes, forbidden, and censorship of all writings published under church auspices was intensified. Congresses of the lower clergy were no longer to hold meetings. Finally, the pope ordered the creation of a special commission for each diocese to investigate modernist errors and make periodical reports to Rome.

Three years later, in 1910, Pius X decreed in *Sacrorum antistitum* — a *motu proprio* (an ordinance laid down "on his own initiative") — that everyone who preached or taught in an official capacity had to take a special oath abjuring all the errors of

modernism. He further declared a general prohibition against the reading of newspapers by all seminarians and theological students, specifically adding that this rule also applied to the very best journals.

There was one area of theology which Rome felt was in need of particularly sharp surveillance: biblical scholarship. From 1906 to 1915 the papal commission on the Bible issued yearly decrees aimed at immunizing Catholics against higher criticism. By defending positions which had long since become outdated, it forced many exegetes into a conflict with their consciences. Others lost their teaching posts and consequently their only means of support.

All these precautionary arrangements can only be understood as an attempt to set up an impregnable shield against scientific research and scholarly criticism. Exchanging opinions with the modern world struck the Vatican not only as superfluous but dangerous and harmful as well. This constrictingly defensive attitude was not limited to theology. It affected other cultural realms, such as philosophy and literature, denying them even relative independence.

Initial pages of Chapter 9, "The Ideology of Vatican I"

(Pages 275 – 280)

Knowledge and Special Interests

Judging from the facts already presented and reviewed in considerable detail, the dogma of papal infallibility must be characterized as an ideology. I use this term in the widely accepted sense of a doctrine with no substrate in reality, something which arises out of the needs of interest groups and is spread and protected by them.

Our analysis of the claim that the pope has always exercised an infallible magisterium has shown that this runs contrary to historical evidence. Back in 1870 the conciliar opposition had clearly drawn attention to this point. In their eyes the proofs adduced by the Infallibilists did not hold up and were not strong enough to dispel the difficulties raised by the doctrine. Modern scholarship has fully confirmed this assessment.

The minority's objections also serve to demonstrate that even in those days people might have known better. The decisions made at the First Vatican Council, therefore, lagged behind the current (or potentially current) state of knowledge at the time. This draws our attention to another characteristic of all ideologies: They always constitute a regression in the history of thought. The reason why the truth was never discovered al Vatican I, although it might very well have been, lies primarily in the social interests which dominated the Council. The plan was to enhance the pope's authority as much as possible, not only in hopes of strengthening the old hierarchical order within the Church but, above all, in society at large. The methods employed to achieve this matched the forces that wanted it. The ideology of infallibilism would never have been defined as dogma had there been free, unprejudiced discussion. There would have been no definition had not a group been at work in the conciliar underground, applying all sorts of pressure to force a decision upon the bishops which a goodly number of them had no wish for at all. The pope and the curial machine certainly did more than their share in this regard. But decrees that had not been freely agreed upon had to be pushed through and after wards defended with the instruments of represssion. "The new dogmas have come into being thanks to force and coercion," wrote Ignaz von Döllinger on March 1, 1887, to the archbishop of Munich, Anton von Steichele. "They will also have to be maintained by the constant use of force and coercion."

Ideologizing Ideology

The new dogma taught that the pope was infallible in matters of faith and morals — a uniquely ideological thesis. This claim extends not to one doctrinal statement but to all of them; it covers every single one. It shields the entire doctrinal structure of the Catholic Church from criticism. Papal infallibility — the formal principle, as it were, of Catholicism — becomes the crowning conclusion of the system. The insurance policy is flawless: There can be no appeal from the pope to any other authority. Infallibility in this context functions as a meta-ideology, the ideologizing of an ideology. The many ideological elements in the system are protected by a single, constitutive, all-encompassing ideology. The aim of all this is stabilization and integration. Presupposing the fundamental principle of infallibility, the Church's entire operation can run smoothly.

This process of formal legitimization was clearly observable for the first time in the late Middle Ages, when serious criticism of the Church's teaching arose. The magisterium stressed the sanctity and immutability of its own utterances and tried to head off the spread of uncertainty among believers. These efforts reached their apogee at the First Vatican Council.

The Church in a Blind Alley

Was the goal met? There can be no doubt that the thought of infallibility provided many believers with a great sense of religious security all through life. In order to deal with the most important and crucial questions, Catholics were given answers which were beyond dispute and hence imparted stability and freedom from anxiety. The dogma of infallibility went a long way towards relieving emotional pressures and softening the impact of reality — as ideologies often do. From a psychological standpoint, the object of belief is secondary, the fact of belief is what counts. This disburdening function of dogma is probably the best explanation why the Roman Curia was able to win general acceptance for infallibility in such short order, despite heavy resistance from some parts of the Church. There was always the unspoken fear that without infallible authorities there would be no more security, no really binding pronouncements, that everything would somehow be left hanging in the air. In the final analysis, people were afraid of uncertainty — and of freedom.

Nonetheless, it is still an open question whether the quest for security was not carried too far. Even at the Vatican Council some individuals perceived this act of violence — the claim to total truth — as logically impossible and ultimately self-destructive. The papacy, they thought, had gone down a blind alley from whence there could be no escape without a critical loss of authority. "The results of the Vatican decree of 1870 are only now beginning to come to light," the Catholic church historian Franz Xaver Kraus noted in his diary on February 9, 1900. "Rome has locked the door leading to its only way out. There seems to be nothing left but for

the whole papal system to break down." The Swiss theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar, who could certainly not be accused of hostility to Rome, followed the same line when he called the Vatican dogmas a "gigantic disaster."

Papal infallibility, as a matter of fact, did go too far. In an attempt to provide complete insurance for the system of doctrine, it overdrew the fund of public credit and thereby risked losing most of it. The dogma, to vary the image, exposed such a broad flank to the attacks of historical criticism that the Church's credibility was threatened. This was precisely what the minority bishops at Vatican I were so worried about. The results of research carried on since then have not served to lessen this concern.

A no less serious problem is the structural impasse which Vatican I maneuvered the Church into. Strictly speaking, the pope can now do everything even without the bishops. The supreme leadership is thus so isolated that the flow of information to it is cramped and sluggish, making it difficult to find adequate solutions to problems. Once again stabilization is pressed too far and the whole process backfires: The papal office is on the way to petrifaction. So far, attempts at reforming it have failed. Indeed, they could only have been set in motion and accomplished by the personal initiative of the popes themselves. But self-reform is an exceedingly rare phenomenon in history. The life expectancy of the popes — materially lengthened thanks to modern medicine — magnifies the opportunities for trouble in all sorts of ways. And we cannot rule out the possibility that in the future it might become necessary to remove a pope from office — but there is simply no structural solution for a case like this.

What can the bishops do against the declared wishes of a pope? This was a burning question at Vatican I — and it still is today. It highlights the real dimensions of the Church's blind alley. The fact that behind the campaign for infallibility, ultimately so self-destructive, stood a pope with the intellectual and psychic qualities of a Pius IX must truly give us pause.

Ideological Presuppositions

The need for security and the fear of uncertainty in matters affecting one's life do not, in themselves, suffice to explain the genesis of the Infallibilist ideology. This sort of thing can only arise when people's thinking is molded by certain specific factors, the most basic of which is the wish to lay claim to universal truth. Such a mentality denies the fragmentary character of every human utterance and absolutizes its own interpretations. The Infallibilists were so positive that they were in possession of the whole truth because their thinking was unhistorical: In their eyes the Church had been in possession of the whole truth from the very beginning. They had only a foggy realization of the extent to which all statements are limited and temporally conditioned. Otherwise they would never have wished to make use of infallibility to insure the Church's dogmatic decisions and make them irrevocable.

A further presupposition for the kind of thinking that can lead to ideology is alienation from experience. "One is much more inclined to pay attention to data that confirm one's ideas than to data that contradict them, because in this way one can avoid undesirable cognitive dissonances." The Infallibilists, in fact, closed their eyes to the historical difficulties their dogma presented. Their misuse of history shows how serious their conflict with reality actually was.

Another important characteristic of ideological thinking is that its real presuppositions are kept hidden. In the case of Vatican I, the foundation on which papal infallibility rested, namely, the Church's witness to itself — or, rather, the pope's witness to himself — never came to light. Instead, the Infallibilists trotted out hundreds of arguments, most of them from history. All this pseudodiscussion ever achieved, however, was a laborious concealment of the actual reasons why they thought as they did.