

New Wine in Old Bottles

There were Catholics in countries other than France and Holland that opposed the growth of the new interpretation of Papal authority. In England and Ireland opposition to ultra-montanism was great. Vigorous attempts to "Romanize" these countries were inaugurated and a clear distinction was made between "Catholics" and "Romanists." "Catholics" frankly committed themselves to the rejection of Papal infallibility. In 1780 a committee of Roman Catholics in England declared that of the total number of priests in England, estimated at 360, the whole body of clergy including their four Bishops, with the exception of 110 Jesuits, opposed ultra-montanism.

William E. Gladstone in his book "Vaticanism" quotes Bishop Baine, a Roman Catholic Bishop in England in 1822, as saying, "Bellarmine and some other theologians, chiefly Italians, have believed the Pope infallible when proposing 'ex cathedra' an article of faith. But in England and Ireland I do not believe that any Catholic maintains the infallibility of the Pope." The Pastoral Address of the Irish Bishops to the clergy and laity in 1826 declared that, "It is not an article of the Catholic Faith, neither are they thereby required to believe that the Pope is infallible." An official Catechism of the English Roman Catholics is the famous Keenan's Catechism in which, previous to the year 1870, the following question and answer were contained. "(Q) Must not Catholics believe the Pope in himself to be infallible? (A) This is a Protestant invention: it is no article of the Catholic faith."

The ultra-montanists hoped to eliminate this belief amongst the Roman Catholics of Great Britain and Ireland by a process of "Romanizing." Cardinal Wiseman "the instrument under God to Romanize England" and Manning, his successor, "he could not go too far in conceptions designated ultramontaine" were especially selected by Rome, over the objections of the local clergy, for this purpose. "Thus by the oppression of independent thought and a rewriting of history, imposed by Romanized Bishops upon a reluctant community," says a recent historian, "a process of 'changing' the thought of English and Irish Catholics was attempted." These attempts were resisted by Catholics and were unsuccessful even to the time of the Vatican Council in 1870 when several Irish and English Bishops openly opposed the new theories of papal prerogatives.

In Germany, too, under the celebrated theologian, Ignatius von Dolinger, and on the continent everywhere, "old" Catholics were strong and numerous enough to resist the encroachments of this terrifying novelty, little dreaming that the proposition so much dreaded by Catholics everywhere would be considered seriously enough to be proclaimed as a article of Faith binding upon all the faithful.

Up to the eve of the famous Vatican I Council we have shown, in the preceding chapters, the uninterrupted existence within the Roman Church of "old" Catholics struggling always to maintain an unmutilated faith in the Catholic Church. But with the curtain rising on the first Vatican Council, we enter the final phase of their struggles, a period that is, from any point of view, the most critical in the history of the papacy. On the 18th of July 1870 the transition of Roman Catholicism into a new phase of Catholicism took place, to leave only a remnant of the faithful clinging to what the Church had always, everywhere believed--the "old" Catholic Faith, unchanged, yet progressively revealing.