

Vaticanism in England, 1874-1875

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By the second half of the nineteenth century, the Catholic Church in England was becoming a force which could not be ignored. Governed from Rome as a mission territory for almost three centuries, England was divided into dioceses in 1850. At that time there were only 826 priests to serve the almost 700,000 Catholics entrusted to their care. By the time of the first Vatican Council which met in December of 1869, there were close to 1,500 priests in England and Wales staffing some 1,000 churches, chapels and mission stations. Between 1850 and 1874, 439 churches were built.¹ These figures are particularly significant when we consider that until the nineteenth century, Catholics were barely tolerated in England and that until that time, they were allowed no active voice in the government.

With their numerical growth and their more active participation in public affairs, Catholics were gaining confidence. Not a few from their number were recognized as men of learning and influence; they were publishing their own journals; and at times, as during the months of the first Vatican Council, they were feared. The English reaction to the Vatican Council and, in particular, to the threat and eventual definition of papal infallibility, provides a picture which casts much light on the position of Catholics in England at the time. The intense criticism of the Council may be traced, in large part, to ignorance and lack of understanding. The English people did not understand Catholicism. Among the principal objections to papal infallibility was that one could no longer be a good Catholic and a loyal subject of the Crown. Most would admit today that such is not a realistic position. Catholics have made excellent citizens, particularly where they have been allowed to practice their religion in a spirit of understanding and freedom. This was not so obvious even to the educated mind of the nineteenth century. Although the old Catholic families within England were more or less accepted, they usually refused to discuss religious issues save to insist that they had no bearing upon their loyalty to the Government. The Oxford converts and those who followed them were scorned by non-Catholics and, often enough, misunderstood by their fellow Catholics. And the poor Irish immigrants were considered to be the playthings of the parish clergy. Oftentimes, moreover, Catholics – proud of their newly-gained recognition, much as a teenager who realizes that he may no longer be treated as a child – provoked the criticism which was levelled against them.

After the final session of the Council in July of 1870, the storm quickly subsided, and papal infallibility ceased to be a major point of controversy within England. There was, in fact, a great deal of sympathy expressed for the Pope when Italian armies, invading Rome, made him a virtual prisoner within the Vatican – all

¹ These statistics are quoted by Philip Hughes, "The Coming Century," *The English Catholics*, ed. G. A. Beck (London, 1950), p. 20. Also consult Philip Hughes, "The English Catholics in 1850," *ibid.*, pp. 42-85.

that now remained of his once extensive temporal domains. In 1874, however, the Pope again became a threatening menace – not only endangering the freedom of Catholics and hindering their allegiance to the State, but threatening the very activity of the State. This situation was not occasioned by the Pope himself. It was touched off by a pamphlet written by William E. Gladstone. Gladstone had been Prime Minister in England at the time of the Council. Thirty years before, he had espoused the Catholic cause when he voted against Lord John Russell's Ecclesiastical Titles Bill. He had then told the House:

You speak of the progress of the Roman Catholic religion, and you pretend to meet that progress by a measure false in principle as it is ludicrous in extent. You must meet the progress of that spiritual system by the progress of another; you can never do it by penal enactments. Here, once for all, I enter my most solemn, earnest, and deliberate protest against all attempts to meet the spiritual dangers of our church by temporal legislation of a penal character.²

In 1870, however, when it became obvious that some statement of papal infallibility would be defined by the Vatican Council, many persons feared that the Pope's temporal power would also become an article of faith. Gladstone did not conceal his displeasure. He believed that the proclamation of infallibility would strike a blow at the very heart of those liberal ideals to which he had dedicated his life. He was, in fact, attracted by the idea of a combination of the European Governments which might, through diplomatic action, dissuade the Council from any discussion of the relations between Church and State or of papal infallibility. He received little encouragement from his Cabinet, however, and in May of 1870, he wrote to the Queen informing her that in the opinion of the Cabinet, "it was not agreeable that we should occupy a forward place, but should carefully keep ourselves, as not being a Roman Catholic Power, in the second rank."³

Gladstone had always shown an avid interest in ecclesiastical matters. In particular was he interested in the relations between Church and State. Though adverse to events in Rome throughout the months of the Vatican Council, any personal, overt attack upon the papacy at that time could only have damaged the Irish Land Bill to which he was devoting his energies. Furthermore, Gladstone was a busy man in 1870. In 1874, retired from public life, he had leisure to think out the thorny questions posed by the declaration of the Pope's infallibility. Having failed to elicit the support of the Irish hierarchy for his Irish University Bill, he was not in a mood favourable to the Church which they represented. In his biography of Gladstone, Morley quotes the former Prime Minister who said:

It has been a favourite purpose of my life not to conjure up, but to conjure down, public alarms. I am not now going to pretend that either foreign foe or domestic treason can, at the bidding of the court of Rome, disturb these peaceful

² John Morley, *The Life of William Ewart Gladstone* (New York, 1921), I, 411.

³ George Earle Buckle (ed.), *The Letters of Queen Victoria, 1862-1878* (Toronto, 1926), II, 11.

shores.⁴

Gladstone did not prove his point in the controversy to be discussed.

In the fall of 1874, Gladstone had just returned from Germany where he had spent a great deal of time with his friend, Döllinger, the great Church historian and apostate from Rome. In October of that year, the *Contemporary Review* printed an article entitled, "Ritualism and Ritual." The author was Gladstone who, in the article, made several statements which were to be the keynote of a lively controversy. He claimed that Rome had "substituted for the proud boast of *semper eadem* a policy of violence and change in faith."⁵ He further pointed out that "she has refurbished and paraded anew every rusty tool she was fondly thought to have disused."⁶ And he concluded his charge by insisting that "no one can become her convert without renouncing his moral and mental freedom, and placing his civil loyalty and duty at the mercy of another ... She has equally repudiated modern thought and ancient history."⁷ It was due to the response which these accusations evoked that Gladstone published his pamphlet. It appeared almost as soon as he returned from Germany, and by December 8, 1874, more than one hundred thousand copies had been sold. *Punch*, with customary sarcasm, remarked:

Mr. Punch has lately, with astonishment and indignation, beheld a fallen Statesman, and other wretches, come forward like vipers and deny his infallibility.

The infallibility of *Punch* was always a doctrine maintained by every rational person. It has now been formally added to the Articles of the British faith.⁸

The "astonishment and indignation" of most Catholics was even more pronounced.

Numerous answers to Gladstone's pamphlet were forthcoming. Gladstone himself listed twenty-one of the principal replies including those of Archbishop Manning; Bishops Ullathorne, Clifford, and Vaughan; Fathers J. Coleridge and T. B. Parkinson, both of the Society of Jesus; Canon Oakeley; Monsignor Capel; Lord Robert Montagu; Mr. A. P. de Lisle; and perhaps most important of all, John Henry Newman.⁹ *The Times* first reviewed the pamphlet on November 7, 1874, and the replies – often occupying two or more columns – continued to appear until the end of December. Catholics and non-Catholics alike entered the lists, and the publicity given to the matter rivalled that which had centered about the Council four years earlier.

In February of 1875, Gladstone produced a second pamphlet on the Vatican

⁴ Morley, *Gladstone*, II, 516.

⁵ W. E. Gladstone, "Ritualism and Ritual," *Contemporary Review*, XXIV (Oct., 1874), 674.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Punch*, Nov. 28, 1874.

⁹ W. E. Gladstone, *Vaticanism: An Answer to Reproofs and Replies* (New York, 1875), pp. 89-90.

Decrees entitled, *Vaticanism: An Answer to Reproofs and Replies*. In surveying the situation which had thus developed, it can readily be seen that the controversy over papal infallibility had not ended. The men engaged in controversy were men of conviction. Manning, W. G. Ward, Gladstone, Herbert Vaughan, Newman, Acton – all acted upon that conviction. They used strong language; at times, in fact, their words appear shocking. This was an age which took such debates seriously. It was not simply a matter of personal animosities. It was, rather, a question of men defending their principles against those of other men.

In December of 1874, Gladstone wrote to Lord Acton stating that his primary purpose in publishing the pamphlet had been to move others to take up a position similar to that of his Catholic friend.¹⁰ Acton, in Rome during the greater part of the Vatican Council, had been staunchly opposed to the definition of papal infallibility. In the same letter, Gladstone insisted that he had carefully watched his language in order to avoid attacking the Roman Catholic religion such as a Catholic “was required to hold it before July, 1870,” and that he had curbed himself from all endeavours to “turn to account this crisis in the interest of proselytism.”¹¹ Gladstone had consulted Acton before publishing the pamphlet. The latter tried to dissuade him. As Acton wrote to another correspondent:

Objections in detail were attended to, but to all political, spiritual and other obvious arguments against publication he was deaf. I ended by saying that though not one of those attacked, I was one of those challenged, and that I should meet his challenge on my own account.¹²

We shall see how Acton replied to Gladstone’s attack.

In his first pamphlet entitled, *The Vatican Decrees in their Bearing on Civil Allegiance*, Gladstone repeated the theses which had been laid down in his article for the *Contemporary Review*:

1. Rome has substituted for the proud boast of *semper eadem*, a policy of violence and change in faith.
2. She has refurbished and paraded anew every rusty tool she was fondly thought to have disused.
3. No one can now become her convert without renouncing his moral and mental freedom, and placing his civil loyalty and duty at the mercy of another.
4. She (Rome) has equally repudiated modern thought and ancient history.¹³

Among other arguments, he quoted from the collective “Declaration” made by the Vicars Apostolic of Great Britain in 1826:

¹⁰ J. N. Figgis and R. V. Laurence (eds.), *Selections from the Correspondence of the First Lord Acton* (London, 1917), I, 146.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² F. A. Gasquet (ed.), *Lord Acton and his Circle* (London, 1906), pp. 358-359.

¹³ W. E. Gladstone, *The Vatican Decrees in Their Bearing on Civil Allegiance: A Political Expostulation* (New York, 1875), p. 13.

The allegiance which Catholics hold to be due, and are bound to pay, to their Sovereign, and to the civil authority of the State, is perfect and undivided

...

They declare that neither the Pope, nor any other prelate or ecclesiastical person of the Roman Catholic Church... has any right to interfere, directly or indirectly, in the Civil Government ... nor to oppose in any manner the performance of the civil duties which are due to the king.¹⁴

He also referred to a “Pastoral Address” of the Catholic hierarchy to the clergy and laity of Ireland in which, in Article II, they declared their belief “that it is not an article of the Catholic Faith, neither are they thereby required to believe, that the Pope is infallible.”¹⁵ The production of such assertions had been a favourite weapon of the opponents of papal infallibility in 1870.

Gladstone was particularly disturbed by what he considered to be the temporal aspirations of the Pope. A man could no longer be a loyal subject of the Crown and a faithful member of the Roman Church. He said:

I should feel less anxiety on this subject had the Supreme Pontiff frankly recognized his altered position since the events of 1870; and, in language as clear, if not as emphatic, as that in which he has proscribed modern civilization, given to Europe the assurance that he would be no party to the reestablishment by blood and violence of the Temporal Power of the Church.¹⁶

He was annoyed by those who reminded him that infallibility only touched matters of faith and morals:

Such a distinction would be the unworthy device of a shallow policy, vainly used, to hide the daring of that wild ambition which at Rome, not from the throne but from behind the throne, prompts the movements of the Vatican. I care not to ask if there be dregs or tatters of human life, such as can escape from the description and boundary of morals. I submit that Duty is a power which rises with us in the morning, and goes to rest with us at night. It is co-extensive with the action of our intelligence. It is the shadow which cleaves to us, go where we will, and which only leaves us when we leave the light of life.¹⁷

Throughout the pamphlet, Gladstone’s arguments were similar to the cries of alarm which had been heard during the months of the Council.

In his second pamphlet, Gladstone was at pains to answer those who insisted that, as a non-Catholic, he was in no position to judge fairly the situation created by the declaration of papal infallibility:

But what does this amount to? It is simply to say that when we look at the object in the free air and full light of day which God has given us, its structure is repulsive and its arrangement chaotic; but if we will part with a great portion

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

of that light by passing within the walls of a building made by the hands of man, then, indeed, it will be better able to bear our scrutiny. It is an ill recommendation of a commodity to point out that it looks the best where the light is scantiest.¹⁸

This pamphlet, longer than the first, was a defence of his original propositions. Drawing heavily from the historical arguments frequently asserted against papal infallibility, Gladstone felt that he had justified, “with ample proof,” the following declarations:

1. The position of Roman Catholics has been altered by the Decrees of the Vatican on Papal Infallibility, and on obedience to the Pope.
2. The extreme claims of the Middle Ages have been sanctioned, and have been revived without the warrant or excuse which might in those ages have been shown for them.
3. The claims asserted by the Pope are such as to place civil allegiance at his mercy.
4. The State and people of the United Kingdom had a right to rely on the assurances they had received that Papal Infallibility was not, and could not become, an article of faith in the Roman Church, and that the obedience due to the Pope was limited by laws independent of his will.¹⁹

Though neither pamphlet is lengthy, each is packed with material representing all of the major non-theological objections voiced in 1869-1870.

The effectiveness of Gladstone’s pamphlets in winning Catholics to his cause seems negligible. George B. Smith, a contemporary of Gladstone and one of his first biographers, wrote that “Mr. Gladstone’s essay performed one service at least – it demonstrated that there was a want of harmony between the members of the Romish Church themselves on the subject of the Vatican Decrees.”²⁰ Smith was, nevertheless, forced to admit that

it may ... be taken for granted that of all forms of controversy the religious is the least effectual in winning converts from one form of belief to another, and to those principles which the respective combatants believe to be in accordance with reason, truth, and justice ... Amongst Roman Catholics, Mr. Gladstone’s controversial writings may have had little effect, notwithstanding the cogency of their arguments. But to the rest of the world, at any rate, these eloquent and powerful essays have afforded substantial aid in demonstrating the hollowness of the Papal pretensions, as well as their insidious and dangerous character.²¹

Smith’s personal estimate of Gladstone’s essays was that shared by many non-Catholics. In December of 1874, *The Times* recorded an “Address” to Gladstone from a group of non-conformist ministers:

¹⁸ Gladstone, *Vaticanism*, p. 57.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 78-79.

²⁰ G. B. Smith, *The Life of the Right Honourable William Ewart Gladstone* (London, 1882), II, 311.

²¹ *Ibid.*, II, 317.

We pray God to spare you to become the fearless champion of that true English Protestantism, for the defence of which our fathers bled and died, and for which the non-conformists of England, in common with the great Evangelical section of the Established Church, are again prepared to act.²²

And in commenting upon the replies which Catholics made to Gladstone, *The Times* wondered whether “simplicity or audacity predominates in the course adopted by the leading Roman Catholic clergy on this subject.”²³ Gladstone had a great deal of support from his non-Catholic brethren.

Many persons questioned Gladstone’s motives in attacking papal infallibility. Sir George Bowyer, a convert to Catholicism, asked whether Gladstone would have published this “unaccountable diatribe if he was still the popular leader of a Parliamentary majority and the successful chief of a great Party?”²⁴ Another Catholic critic pointed out that “defection” from the Catholic cause was not a valid argument to be used against Gladstone:

I have never looked upon him as the champion of the Catholic cause. In my view, when he upset the Irish Protestant Church he did so not from any special sympathy for the Catholics, but as the leader of the liberal Party, and he would have acted similarly had the majority of the Irish people been Quakers or Moravians, instead of Catholics.²⁵

As a Liberal, Gladstone surely would not have denied such an assertion, nor does the accusation, so frequently made, that he was a traitor to the Catholic cause seem in order.

Many critics complained that Gladstone had chosen a time when the Catholic Church was suffering throughout Europe to add to her misery. The following complaint appeared in the *Month*:

It is surely among the most wonderful phenomena of an age of wonders, that when the Pope is a prisoner, when no precedent can be found for ages which even the enemies of the Papacy can interpret as an invasion on his part of the sphere of the civil power, when the Catholic party in Europe is all but prostrate, persecuted in Germany, persecuted in Italy, persecuted in Switzerland, persecuted in Austria, weak in Spain and weak in France – that at a moment like this, when England and Ireland are prosperous and tranquil, and the throne of Queen Victoria rests upon the contented allegiance of a loyal people everywhere, one of the first statesmen of the country should really in his conscience think it necessary to disturb the peace of the Empire by a deliberate charge of disloyalty against some millions of his fellow-subjects, because they are faithful members of the Catholic Church and nothing else.²⁶

²² *The Times* (London), Dec. 7, 1874.

²³ *The Times* (London), Nov. 17, 1874.

²⁴ *The Times* (London), Nov. 10, 1874.

²⁵ *The Times* (London), Nov. 23, 1874.

²⁶ “Commentaries on Public Affairs: External Aspects of the Gladstone Controversy,” *Month*, XXIII (Jan., 1875), 5-6.

In the previous issue of the same journal, another author had asked what Gladstone hoped to gain by such a move:

He has earned a yell of approbation from the anti-Christian party throughout the world. He has sharpened the sword and added strength to the arm of the tyrannical Prussian persecutor and oppressor. He has disturbed national harmony at home; marred the peace of families, and added a bitter drop to the cup of the poor Catholic labourer in his workshop, and of the homeless servant-girl in the scene of her humble and too often thankless labour. The higher and more educated classes of Catholics may put the whole thing on one side, by simply challenging Mr. Gladstone's right and competency to assume the office of guide and teacher over them; but the poor labourer and the drudging maid-of-all-work cannot so easily surmount the petty persecutions excited by Mr. Gladstone's new manifestation of physical force and energy. They can only exclaim with the frogs in the fable, "It is fun to you, but death to us."²⁷

Such a description exaggerates the situation brought about by Gladstone's pamphlets. Though read and discussed widely, they do not seem to have affected appreciably the state of Catholics in England and did not touch off the type of demonstration which accompanied the restoration of the hierarchy in 1850.

Many Catholics, while deploring the possible damage of Gladstone's pamphlets and of the renewed controversy, placed much of the blame upon their fellow-Catholics. The position of the following letter to *The Times* was not an unusual one:

I... have no hesitation in saying that I rejoice in the publication of Mr. Gladstone's "Political Expostulation." It is not because I agree in the justice of the charges which it contains but because it is a legitimate challenge on the part of one of the greatest statesmen, not only of England but of Europe, to our ecclesiastical authorities, to vindicate their principles and ours from the imputations which have been cast upon them, mainly in consequence of the exaggerations and perversions of our doctrine, which have been advocated and circulated in various organs of the Catholic press.²⁸

Such a criticism was levelled at those like W. G. Ward and Herbert Vaughan who, as editors of the *Dublin Review* and the *Tablet*, had published extreme statements regarding papal supremacy. For Ward, "all the direct doctrinal instructions of all encyclicals, of all letters to individual bishops and allocutions published by the Pope" were considered "*ex cathedra* pronouncements and *ipso facto* infallible."²⁹ Ward and his Ultramontane school were still active, and Catholics not sharing their views were quick to criticize those who had done the most to instigate the attack being made upon papal infallibility.

At the Vatican Council, Archbishop Manning of Westminster had been one

²⁷ T. B. Parkinson, "Mr. Gladstone's 'Expostulation,'" *Month*, XXII (Dec., 1874), 499.

²⁸ *The Times* (London), Nov. 23, 1874.

²⁹ Cuthbert Butler, *The Life and Times of Bishop Ullathorne* (London, 1926), 11, 41.

of the principal leaders of the group advocating the definition of papal infallibility. As soon as the Archbishop saw Gladstone's pamphlet, he issued a letter to *The Times* denying in broad terms all of Gladstone's charges. "As an Englishman, as a Catholic, and as a pastor," he claimed for his flock and for himself "a Civil allegiance as pure, as true, and as loyal as is rendered by the distinguished author of the pamphlet, or by any subject of the British Empire."³⁰ In the first line of his pamphlet, Gladstone had pointed out that his intention was "not polemical but pacific."³¹ Manning commented: "I am sorry that so good an intention should have so widely erred in the selection of the means."³² Pointing out that "the civil allegiance of every Christian man in England is limited by conscience and the law of God," Manning concluded that "the civil allegiance of Catholics is limited neither more nor less."³³

Manning did not immediately publish a lengthy reply to Gladstone's attack. He said that his reason for waiting to answer the charges in detail was the realization that others would do so far better than he could. His pamphlet, when published, was extremely effective in explaining Catholic doctrine. He concluded by outlining the harm which Gladstone had brought about:

He has not only invited, but instigated Catholics to rise against the Divine authority of the Catholic Church. He has endeavoured to create divisions among them. If Mr. Gladstone does not believe the authority of the Catholic Church to be Divine, he knows that they do.

If he thinks such a rising to be "moral and mental freedom," he knows that they believe it to be what his own litany calls "schism, heresy, and deadly sin." If he believes religious separations to be lawful, he knows that they believe them to be violations of the Divine law. I am compelled therefore to say that this is at least an act of signal rashness.³⁴

It is sobering to realize that it was religion which led to the estrangement of two men who had once been united by the closest bonds of friendship.

Father Philip Hughes estimates that "in the twenty years that followed the restoration of 1850," Bishop Ullathorne of Birmingham was "the real centre of English Catholic activities."³⁵ Bishop Ullathorne quickly rushed into the field in order to vindicate the allegiance and loyalty of Catholics. He wrote a letter to his diocese which he entitled, *The Döllingerites, Mr. Gladstone and Apostates from the Faith*. Large extracts from it were published in *The Times* of November 24, 1874. Later the letter was published in pamphlet form and entitled, *Mr. Gladstone's Expostulation Unravelling*. Ullathorne concluded his reply by writing as one deeply hurt and shocked by the attack:

³⁰ *The Times* (London), Nov. 9, 1874.

³¹ Gladstone, *Vatican Decrees*, p. 9.

³² *The Times* (London), Nov. 9, 1874.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Henry Edward Manning, *The Vatican Decrees in Their Bearing on Civil Allegiance* (New York, 1875), p. 166.

³⁵ Hughes, "Eng. Catholics in 1850," *Eng. Catholics*, ed. Beck, p. 74.

After ages of cruel persecution, the Catholics of this country were living in peace and content, loving their Church and Pontiff, loving their Queen and Country, and your political efforts in their favour had contributed to their peace; when to our sudden amazement and with no slight shock to our gratitude, we found our religious principles, in their bearing on our civil allegiance, called with vehemence into question by your eloquent, but this time misguided pen.³⁶

He chided the former Prime Minister and pointed out that this was a time when a united Christian force was needed to check the unchristian invasions upon the peace of mankind. He insisted that non-Catholics in England had no true knowledge by which to judge the Catholic religion since “they have had nothing of it in their minds for centuries but a grotesque caricature, to which your Expostulation corresponds.”³⁷ Ullathorne gave his personal word that the Vatican decrees had no bearing upon civil allegiance. He claimed that not a word had been uttered by the bishops at the Council which “either expressed or implied that any decree, whether passed or contemplated, bore the slightest reference to the civil power or to civil allegiance.”³⁸

The best-known reply to Gladstone – one that is still read as an outstanding piece of apologetics – was that of John Henry Newman. Newman wrote to Dean Church, a close friend and a leading member of the High Church Party, in order to explain his intentions:

I am writing against time, and my old fingers will not move quick. I am most dismally busy. *Don't tell*, for I wish nothing said from me as yet, but I am *trying*, as the Papers report, to answer Gladstone, but I don't like to commit myself till I have actually done. I have had so many urgent requests, asking me to do so. And I feel I must do so, if I can, for my own honour. I grieve indeed that he should have so committed himself – I mean, by charging people quite as free as he is, of being moral and mental slaves. I never thought I should be writing against Gladstone! But he is as unfair and untrue, as he is cruel. It is a marvel. I think men like W. G. Ward have in part to answer for it – but he should have had clearer notions of what we hold and what we don't, before he sent 100,000 of his pamphlets through the country.

I thought I should be in peace for the remainder of my life – and now I am in controversy again.³⁹

In 1870 Newman had been opposed to the definition of papal infallibility which he thought inopportune. He had written to his Bishop complaining of “an aggressive and insolent faction” within the Council which, in his opinion, was not averting an impending danger but rather, was creating a great difficulty.⁴⁰ He

³⁶ Butler, *Ullathorne*, II, 92.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, II, 93.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, II, 91.

³⁹ Wilfrid Ward, *The Life of John Henry Cardinal Newman* (London, 1921), II, 403.

⁴⁰ Cuthbert Butler, *The Vatican Council: The Story Told from Inside in Bishop Ullathorne's Letters* (London, 1930), I, 213.

offered no objection to the definition after the Council. His earlier opposition had been based purely on the grounds of what he considered its inopportuneness. Now, when his pamphlet appeared, even Gladstone had words of praise for it. He referred to it as “the work of an intellect sharp enough to cut diamonds, and bright as the diamond which it cuts.”⁴¹ He further thanked Newman for the “kindliness of his tone.”⁴² As a defence of the Catholic position on papal infallibility, Newman’s *Letter to the Duke of Norfolk* remains as one of the best works of its kind.

There were those, however, who still did not trust Newman. Cardinal Franchi, Prefect of Propaganda in Rome, wrote a confidential letter to Archbishop Manning pointing out that parts of Newman’s pamphlet were censurable as containing material which could harm the faithful. Among other passages, the Cardinal was referring to such statements as the following: “It seems, then, that there are extreme cases in which Conscience may come into collision with the word of a Pope, and is to be followed in spite of that word.”⁴³ Newman had devoted an entire section of his pamphlet to the supremacy of conscience. Yet he laid down stringent conditions to be verified before opposing the authority of the Pope and then only when it was not a matter of an *ex cathedra* pronouncement. The section concluded: “If I am obliged to bring religion into after-dinner toasts (which indeed does not seem quite the thing), I shall drink – to the Pope, if you please – still, to Conscience first, and to the Pope afterwards.”⁴⁴

Archbishop Manning’s defence of Newman was both politic and prudent. He admitted that “certain propositions” and a “certain method of reasoning” were “wanting in accuracy of expression,” but maintained that these “slight blemishes” in Newman’s apologetic would not be apparent to non-Catholics nor to most Catholics.⁴⁵ Newman had never before so “openly defended the prerogatives and infallible magisterium of the Roman Pontiff,” and a public censure of the pamphlet “would occasion the appearance, perhaps even more than the appearance, of division among Catholics in the presence of our enemies and of our non-Catholic friends.”⁴⁶ Manning thus urged that no public action be taken against Newman. The Holy Father himself wrote to Manning assuring him that nothing would be done but requesting that someone inform Newman of the objectionable passages in his pamphlet. A similar request was made of Bishop Ullathorne who replied:

When the pamphlet appeared I communicated to Dr. Newman certain things I thought imprudently written. Now, after a year, and when nothing is being said about the pamphlet in England, it would be impossible for me to approach him with a new list of passages, without his seeing at once I was acting under instructions of the Holy See. Father Newman has often complained that the authorities at Rome do not deal with him directly and openly, but by intermediaries and secretly. I strongly urge that if anything is to be done, he be

⁴¹ Gladstone, *Vaticanism*, p. 12.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 13

⁴³ John Henry Newman, *A Letter Addressed to His Grace the Duke of Norfolk on Occasion of Mr. Gladstone’s Recent Expostulation* (London, 1875), p. 55.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

⁴⁵ Butler, *Ullathorne*, II, 102.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, II, 101 and 102.

written to directly and openly.⁴⁷

Following this letter, no more is heard of the matter.

There were some Catholics who agreed wholeheartedly with Gladstone's accusations. These men were exceptions, but their statements were given much publicity. Lord Camoys wrote to *The Times* admitting that, in spite of a Jesuit education, he considered it to be his duty as an "independent English Roman Catholic" to respond to Gladstone's appeal:

For myself, I will say that history, common sense, and my early instruction forbid me to accept the astounding and novel... doctrine of the personal infallibility of the Pope, though limited, as asserted, to the large domain of faith and morals.⁴⁸

Camoys was supported by a Catholic gentleman, Henry Petre, who wrote that the only reply a subject could possibly make to Mr. Gladstone's appeal would be "an Englishman first, a Catholic after."⁴⁹ On November 27th, *The Times* noted that Archbishop Manning had been in Rome where he spoke to the Pope in a private audience. Three days later Manning issued a letter pointing out that Catholics were absolutely bound to accept the Apostolic Constitution declaring papal infallibility. Herbert Vaughan, now Bishop of Salford, immediately wrote to Mr. Henry Petre, a member of his diocese, urging him to admit his error. Petre refused to admit that the Church had the power to declare definitions of faith. Vaughan then directed the clergy of his diocese

that should Mr. Henry Petre ... or any person whom they suspect to be Mr. Henry Petre, ask for, or present himself to receive the sacraments, he must, first of all, be required to state explicitly that he admits *ex animo* and unreservedly the power of the Church to make definitions of faith, and that he accepts in like manner the definitions actually made and promulgated in 1854 and 1870. Should any priest act in contravention of this command, he will be *ipso facto* suspended from the use of his faculties.⁵⁰

This warning came as no surprise. Msgr. Capel, Archbishop Manning's appointee as rector of the newly established Catholic University College at Kensington, had written to *The Times* in November declaring that persons such as Camoys and Petre were making "shipwreck of the Faith" and that by their statements they had separated themselves "from communion with the Church and the See of Peter."⁵¹ A similar letter was written by Lord Herries who insisted that the attitude of such men was "neither consonant with the faith of the Catholic Church nor with the opinions of their Catholic fellow-countrymen."⁵²

Lord Acton was also the object of much criticism during these months. Acton

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, II, 104-105.

⁴⁸ *The Times* (London), Nov. 14, 1874.

⁴⁹ *The Times* (London), Nov. 17, 1874.

⁵⁰ *The Times* (London), Jan. 7, 1875.

⁵¹ *The Times* (London), Nov. 16, 1874.

⁵² *The Times* (London), Nov. 17, 1874.

had responded to Gladstone's challenge. Though denying that there was anything novel in the Pope's claims, his chief defence rested on the fact that they would have no practical effect. He accused Gladstone of exaggeration:

It is not the unpropitious times only, but the very nature of things, that protect Catholicism from the consequences of some theories that have grown up within it. The Irish did not shrink from resisting the arms of Henry II, though two Popes had given dominion over them. They fought William III, although the Pope had given him sufficient support in his expedition. Even James II, when he could not get a mitre for Petre, reminded Innocent that people could be very good Catholics and yet do without Rome. Philip II was excommunicated and deprived, but he despatched his army against Rome with the full concurrence of the Spanish divines.⁵³

Acton continued:

But you think that we ought to be compelled to demonstrate one of two things – that the Pope cannot, by virtue of powers asserted by the late Council, make a claim which he was perfectly able to make by virtue of powers asserted for him before; or, that he would be resisted if he did. The first is superfluous. The second is not capable of receiving a written demonstration. Therefore, neither of the alternatives you propose to the Catholics of this country opens to us a way of escaping from the reproach we have incurred. Whether there is more truth in your misgivings or in my confidence the event will show, I hope at no distant time.⁵⁴

The Times concluded that the only way Acton was able to reconcile allegiance to the Crown with acceptance of the Vatican decrees was by not accepting the decrees: "Lord Acton treats them as a nullity."⁵⁵

The *Dublin Review* could no longer remain outside of the controversy. In January of 1875 a repudiation of Lord Acton's statements appeared in this journal which paraphrased his defence thus:

My defence therefore of the Catholic Church against Mr. Gladstone is simply this: – (1) No Protestant can feel more strongly than I do the detestableness of that depraved morality, which has so constantly been inculcated on Catholics by their divinely-appointed moral teachers. (2) I assure you that most other Catholic laymen and not a few Catholic priests, detest this morality as much as I do. (3) And I think I may fairly ask you to accept this assurance of mine; and not suspect us of those odious qualities which, I freely grant, are largely exhibited in the public acts of our spiritual superiors.⁵⁶

Numerous Catholics refused to associate themselves with the attitude of Lord Acton. He wrote to *The Times* frequently in order to defend himself from the

⁵³ Figgis, *Correspondence of Lord Acton*, I, 123-124.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, I, 124.

⁵⁵ *The Times* (London), Nov. 9, 1874.

⁵⁶ "Replies to Lord Acton," *Dublin Review*, XXIV (Jan., 1875), 128.

attacks of other correspondents. His reply to critics was that

I should dishonour and betray the Church if I entertained a suspicion that the evidences of religion could be weakened or the authority of the Councils sapped by a knowledge of the facts with which I have been dealing, or of others which are not less grievous or less certain because they remain untold.⁵⁷

The ecclesiastical authorities were not completely satisfied by his explanation.

Refusing to follow the lead of Döllinger, Acton lived and died as a member of the Catholic Church. He protested to his own Ordinary, Bishop James Brown of Shrewsbury, that he “yielded obedience to the Apostolic Constitution” embodying the Vatican decrees. He added: “I have not transgressed, and certainly do not consciously transgress, obligations imposed under the supreme sanction of the Church.” He concluded his letter by stating:

I do not believe that there is a word in my public or private letters that contradicts any doctrine of the Council; but if there is it is not my meaning, and I wish to blot it out.⁵⁸

In November he had written:

I do not believe that there is a sentence in my letters which any ingenuity can twist into an heretical meaning. And in this view I am strengthened by observing that Father Newman has, in his reply to Gladstone, made use of many of the same facts, without thereby incurring the slightest suspicion against his orthodoxy.⁵⁹

Acton, of course, could not have known that Newman’s orthodoxy had been questioned for the very passages to which he was alluding.

Archbishop Manning wrote to Acton pleading that he make a public clarification of his views. Having submitted privately to his own Bishop, Acton did not offer the same satisfaction to Archbishop Manning. He replied that he had “no private gloss or favourite interpretation for the Vatican Decrees.” He continued:

The acts of the Council alone constitute the law which I recognize. I have not felt it my duty as a layman to pursue the comments of divines, still less to attempt to supersede them by private judgments of my own. I am content to rest in absolute reliance on God’s providence in his government of the Church.⁶⁰

In January of 1875 he wrote to a friend in order to describe his correspondence with Manning:

⁵⁷ *The Times* (London), Nov. 24, 1874.

⁵⁸ Shane Leslie, *Henry Edward Manning: His Life and Labours* (London, 1921), p. 235.

⁵⁹ Gasquet, *Lord Acton and His Circle*, pp. 361-362.

⁶⁰ Figgis, *Correspondence of Lord Acton*, I, 153.

Manning, in a letter which you will receive with my comment enclosing it, says he must leave the thing in the hands of the Pope, as everybody tells him I don't believe the Vatican Council. He means, it seems to me, that he simply asks Rome to excommunicate me – a thing really almost without example, and incredible in the case of a man who has not attacked the Council, who declares that he has not, and that the Council is his law, though private interpretations are not, whose Diocesan has, after inquiry, pronounced him exempt from all anathema.⁶¹

He had previously written to Gladstone:

What I want people to understand is that I am not really dealing with the Council, but with the deeper seat of the evil, and am keeping bounds with which any sincere and intelligent bishop of the minority must sympathise. If I am excommunicated – I should rather say *when* I am – I shall not only be still more isolated, but all I say and do, by being in appearance at least, hostile, will lose all power of influencing the convictions of common Catholics.⁶²

Acton's apprehensions were even more evident in a letter which he wrote to a correspondent in April of 1875:

Nothing can be more just than your estimate of the religious situation. It is simply at the choice of the authorities, Pope, Cardinal, bishop, or priest, when I am excommunicated. I cannot prevent, or even seriously postpone it, although Newman's conditions would make it possible, technically, to accept the whole of the decrees. ...It can only be a question of time.⁶³

Despite his expectations, Acton was not to be excommunicated. Following a series of letters to the ecclesiastical authorities in England, the matter was dropped. Acton was a loyal Catholic; he was also a liberal. He found the definition of papal infallibility to be a particularly bitter pill to swallow. He submitted to the Vatican decrees, however, and his testimony was accepted.

In January of 1875, an unsigned article appeared in the *Quarterly Review* to discuss a collection of the speeches of Pius IX. The lengthy review is a scathing attack upon the papacy and upon the utterances of the Pope:

Pope all over, and from head to foot, he has fed for eight-and twenty years upon the moral diet which a too sycophantic following supplies, till every fibre of his nature is charged with it, and the simpleminded Bishop and Archbishop Mastai is hardly to be recognized under the Papal mantle.⁶⁴

The Pope is criticized, among other things, for his use of Sacred Scripture: "The Pope's references to Holy Scripture are very frequent; and yet perhaps hardly such

⁶¹ Gasquet, *Lord Acton and His Circle*, p. 368.

⁶² Figgis, *Correspondence of Lord Acton*, I, 147-148.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, I, pp. 154-155.

⁶⁴ "Speeches of Pope Pius IX," *London Quarterly Review*, Am. ed., CXXXVIII (Jan., 1875), 140.

as to suggest that he has an accurate or familiar acquaintance with it.”⁶⁵ After discussing the political statements of the Pope, the author concludes with this estimate:

A Provincial Prelate, of a regular and simple life, endowed with devotional susceptibilities, wholly above the love of money, and with a genial and tender side to his nature, but without any depth of learning, without wide information or experience of the world, without original and masculine vigour of mind, without political insight, without the stern discipline that chastens human vanity, and without mastery over an inflammable temper, is placed, contrary to the general expectation, on the pinnacle, and it is still a lofty pinnacle, of ecclesiastical power. It is but fair towards him to admit, that his predecessors had bequeathed to him a temporal policy as rotten and effete in all its parts as the wide world could show.⁶⁶

Later the same year, the article was published in pamphlet form. The acknowledged author was William E. Gladstone.⁶⁷ It is difficult to assign motives to Gladstone’s attack upon the papacy during these years. As a liberal, he had opposed the Ecclesiastical Titles Act and the Establishment in Ireland as eagerly as he had defended those suffering under tyranny in Naples. He now felt the Catholic Church to be threatening the liberty which he had defended on so many occasions. The Catholic Church was accordingly to be the object of his attack.

The last half of the nineteenth century had seen a steady advance of the Catholic cause within England. The Vatican Council and the definition of papal infallibility seemed to disturb the advance which had thus far been made. There was little attempt at sympathy and understanding. In 1874 the wound was reopened by Gladstone’s attack. Shortly afterwards, however, the controversy again died out and never returned as a major issue. Some doubt and misunderstanding, of course, remain. Yet the convocation of a second Vatican Council has been met the world over by a spirit of hope and optimism – in vivid contrast to the fear and chagrin which met the same situation less than a century ago.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 143.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 159-160.

⁶⁷ Harper and Brothers published this pamphlet along with Gladstone’s two pamphlets on the Vatican decrees in a volume entitled, *Rome and the Newest Fashions in Religion* (New York, 1875). Gladstone himself wrote a preface for the volume.