II. Modernization of the Papacy and Catholicism in the Postmodern: Legacy and Challenges to Vatican I

In the ongoing *aggiornamento* of the *aggiornamento* of Vatican II by Pope Francis, it would be easy to forget or dismiss the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of Vatican I (1869–1870). The council planned (since at least the *Syllabus of Errors* of 1864), shaped, and influenced by Pius IX was the most important ecclesial event in the lives of those who made Vatican II: almost a thousand of the council fathers of Vatican II were born between 1871 and 1900. Vatican I was in itself also a kind of ultramontanist "modernization" of the Roman Catholic Church, which paved the way for the *aggiornamento* of Vatican II and still shapes the post–Vatican II church especially for what concerns the Petrine ministry.

This statement is based on at least two facts. The first is that the unfinished constitution on the church, *Pastor Aeternus*, took a bigger role than the constitution *Dei Filius* on God, the revelation, and faith—at least for what concerns the Catholic imagination and public self-representation of the church. The second assumption is that the most enduring and settled doctrine of *Pastor Aeternus*, 150 years later, is not about papal infallibility, but about papal primacy. Margaret O'Gara pointed out, following Klaus Schatz, that the dogma of infallibility has not had the significance attributed to it in 1870 by its supporters or by its opponents. Instead, it is the papal primacy of jurisdiction that has acquired a greater scope than it actually had in 1870.[13]

There are different ways to look at the legacy of Vatican I. One way is to see in Vatican I the long shadows that have blocked the Catholic Church until recently.[14] But there is in Vatican I and its effects an "irony" that should not get lost: conceived as a negative response to modernity, Vatican I was not

[13] See Margaret O'Gara, "Three Successive Steps toward Understanding Papal Primacy in Vatican I," *The Jurist* 64 (2004): 208–23, esp. 219, following Klaus Schatz, *Papal Primacy: From Its Origins to the Present*, trans. John A. Otto and Linda M. Maloney (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1996) 165–67.

[14] For this thesis, see Peter Neuner, *Der lange Schatten des I. Vatikanums. Wie das Konzil die Kirche noch heute blockiert* (Freiburg i.Br.: Herder Verlag GmbH, 2019).

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only a modern happening, but also it unintentionally opened the Roman papacy to modernity and to a new role in global Catholicism.[15]

Vatican I was certainly a key moment in the antimodern ultramontanization of Catholicism: "the definition of primacy and infallibility at Vatican I provided the momentum for the making of the ultramontane church of contemporary Roman Catholicism."[16] The nineteenth-century theological and political movement of Catholic ultramontanism was one particularly assertive way to react against the external political threats to the role of the church in Europe. But ultramontanism was also a reaction against the internal theological threats against the papacy. Vatican I was dealing not only with the recent memory of episcopalism, but also with the more distant memory of conciliarism.[17] This allowed Vatican II to deal indirectly with the "dangerous" memory of the ecclesiological debate before Vatican I. Vatican II had to deal with eighteenth-century episcopalism (especially the Synod of Pistoia of 1786) and not with Vatican I directly.[18] As Kristin Colberg put it concisely in her recent book, "Vatican II sought to build on the teachings of Vatican I rather than reject or radically reconfigure them."[19]

Roman Catholicism lives today in the theological paradigm of Trent, Vatican I, and Vatican II, and not just of the post–Vatican II, post-1960s period; Vatican I has not been completely superseded by its successor. The attitude of Vatican II toward Vatican I can be seen also in the way Catholicism today deals with *Pastor Aeternus*, whose effects are still crucial for the Petrine ministry to operate in global ecclesial and political modernity.

This is not to say that the Catholic Church is still stuck in 1870. From an internal ecclesiological perspective during the pontificate of Pope Francis, the magisterial ecclesiological debate has moved from the twentieth-century binary debate on "primacy and collegiality" to the quest for ecclesial synodality, but still on the basis of a strong papal primacy.[20] This is important to understand the necessity of Vatican I for the implementation of Vatican II—

[15] See Mary Dunn, "The Impossible Irony of Vatican I," *Harvard Theological Review* 113, no. 1 (2020): 138–45, a review article on John W. O'Malley's *Vatican I*.

[16] O'Malley, "Infallibility," in *Vatican I*, 242.

[17] See Klaus Schatz, "Das I. Vatikanische Konzil (1869/70) und der Konziliarismus," *Schweizerische Zeitschrift für Religions- und Kulturgeschichte* (109) 2015: 183–95.

[18] See Massimo Faggioli, *Il vescovo e il concilio. Modello episcopale e aggiornamento al Vaticano II* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2005); Shaun Blanchard, *The Synod of Pistoia and Vatican II: Jansenism and the Struggle for Catholic Reform* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019).

[19] Kristin M. Colberg, *Vatican I and Vatican II: Councils in the Living Tradition* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2016), 118.

[20] See Fermina Alvarez Alonso, *Cum Petro et Sub Petro. Primato ed episcopato dal Vaticano I al Vaticano II* (Milan: Ancora, 2019).

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and also for overcoming the shortcomings of Vatican II in terms of ecclesial synodality. On the other hand, the way Vatican II dealt with the previous conciliar tradition proves an obstacle for those trying to delegitimize the ecclesiology of Vatican II. Nostalgia for Vatican I, when it is simply a way to express the rejection of Vatican II, cannot reconcile itself with the fact that "many of the most important questions at Vatican I and Vatican II were manifestations of the same intellectual trajectory."[21] The effort to frame ideologically Vatican I and Vatican II in terms of pure contraposition or, on the contrary, of uninterrupted material continuity between the teachings of the two councils is a sure symptom of the lack of grasp for the meaning and intention of both councils.

From the perspective of the function of Vatican I in a Catholic Church dealing with secular modernity and the post-1870 international political order, the institutional rigidity acquired by the papacy of the Catholic Church at Vatican I became an asset in facing totalitarianism in the twentieth century and helped shape the model of the papacy at Vatican II. Also as a reaction to the rise of nationalism and of the social and political mobilization of the masses, the Catholic Church developed a new model of its hierarchical leadership in the bishop of Rome, what can be called a *Vatican I–Vatican II papacy*. Markers of this papacy are the absence of nostalgia about papal monarchy and the Papal States; more freedom from the constraint of monarchs; freedom from ecclesiologies antagonistic to the papacy; almost total free rein in appointing bishops; the rise of the loyalty to the pope as marker of Catholic identity; and the transition from the pope as a judge to the pope as a teacher of the faith.

The internationalization of the Roman question was adopted initially as a strategy to tackle the crisis created by the loss of the Papal States. Then beginning especially with Leo XIII, this same internationalization became a new important agent of mediation in international situations and for humanitarian issues of biopolitics, along with social and economic justice. This is one of the fruits of Vatican I and of its historical context. *Pastor Aeternus* stood the test of time. The year 1870 can be seen as the beginning of the *Vatican I–Vatican II dispensation* for independent and sovereign papal power, which was developed and strengthened with the Lateran Treaty of 1929. Vatican II never put in doubt the need to keep to the post-1870 agreement for papal primacy, namely the ecclesiological developments of *Pastor Aeternus*, but also the institutional and political acquisitions coming from the solution of the "Roman question" with the Lateran Pacts of 1929 especially.

[21] Colberg, *Vatican I and Vatican II*, 142.

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But surely the twenty-first century represents a new kind of test for Catholic ecclesiology—of papal primacy, of the episcopacy, and of the laity—and for *Pastor Aeternus* as well. A first issue is represented by the latest developments of the *sexual abuse crisis* in the Catholic Church, both at the national level and at the global level. This crisis of authority of the Catholic Church puts back into question the sustainability of that delicate theological-ecclesial, legal-political, and sociocultural settlement that shaped the global standing of the Roman Catholic Church between the late nineteenth century and the late twentieth century. This settlement, from a theological-ecclesial perspective, includes not only papal primacy but also the canonization of the papal office itself through the canonization of many of the twentieth-century popes beginning with Pius X in 1954. From a legal-political perspective, the settlement is embodied by the Vatican City State as a sovereign state expression of the Holy See, with the pope as the sovereign. On the sociocultural level, the settlement is illustrated by the role of the papacy as the global spokesperson on behalf of Catholics *and* non-Catholics. The role of the papacy as the agent of reconciliation among religions is a post–Vatican II development.

A second issue is the relationship between the post–Vatican I papacy and the great social leveling brought about by democracy and mass media. The development of the mass media and its use by the Vatican has further enhanced papal primacy and caused the bypassing of intermediate ecclesial (the lived experience), ecclesiastical (the institutional dimension), and ecclesiological (theological) levels in the Catholic Church. What the papacy did not acquire in infallibility, it acquired in primacy. It is still too early to tell what the impact of social media, the age of virtualization, altering of reality, and the depersonalization of religious identities will be on this *Vatican I–Vatican II papacy*.

A third issue is the balance between bureaucratization and charismatic leadership for the Roman papacy. Max Weber wrote one of his major works, *Economy and Society*, looking at a post–Vatican I Catholicism—and with a strong interest in the institutional history of the government of the Catholic Church. Weber noted that Catholicism, too, went through a process of bureaucratization through what he called a "passive democratization":

> This was begun by Gregory VII and continued through the Council of Trent and the [First] Vatican Council, and it was completed by the edicts of Pius X.... This process meant an advance of bureaucracy and at the same time of "passive" democratization, as it were, that is, the leveling of the governed. In the same way, the substitution of the bureaucratic army for the self-equipped army of notables is everywhere a process of "passive" democratization, in the sense in which this applies to every establishment of an

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> absolute military monarchy in place of a feudal state or of a republic of notables.[22]

Weber understood one of the dynamics of the peculiar modernization of the Catholic Church: the elevation of the papacy produced the great leveling of all those governed, bishops included—despite the attempts of Vatican II to recover a role for the episcopacy through collegiality.

Pope Francis' grand opening—in words and in decisions—of the debate on ecclesial synodality in the Catholic Church is an act of reception of Vatican II, but also of Vatican I because it leverages a Petrine ministry—in a way that is significantly different from the dreams of nineteenth-century ultramontanists. It also sanctions the posthumous victory of the conciliar minority of 1869–1870 in the nonextremist way in which the definition of papal infallibility has been interpreted in the church and by the magisterium.

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III. *Pastor Aeternus*, Liberalism, and the Limits of Papal Authority

Two dogmatic constitutions from the First Vatican Council, *Dei Filius* and *Pastor Aeternus*, are worth revisiting today. These documents were in part a response to the challenge of liberalism. Although such a retrieval of the wisdom of *Dei Filius* and *Pastor Aeternus* is necessary as a means of protecting Christ's revelation, this is not sufficient. The doctrine of *Pastor Aeternus* should also be developed to make more clear the limits of papal authority.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, the church was under attack almost everywhere in Europe. In the various revolutions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that swept across Europe, the church was despoiled of her lands, and her religious orders were forcibly suppressed; marriage and

[22] Max Weber, *Economy and Society* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1978. Original German: *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, vol. 2 [Tübingen: Mohr, 1922]), 986.

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