Pope Pius IX

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Shortly before the joint beatification of Pope John XXIII and Pope Pius IX on September 3, 2000, Catholic News Service published a story contrasting popular reaction to the two men.[1] The report noted Italian television specials planned on Pope John XXIII, gift shops crowded with holy cards, books and videos on his life, and pilgrims still flocking to his tomb. This was contrasted with virtual silence over Pope Pius IX, whose tomb at the Basilica of St. Lawrence was closed to the public as workers wrestled with a drainage problem.

Pope John XXIII (1958-1963) remains "Papa Giovanni" in the public imagination. Though pope for only five years (he was elected as an "interim" pontiff at the age of 77), he is recalled as the pope who convened the Second Vatican Council. His encyclicals *Mater et Magistra* and *Pacem in Terris* were considered landmarks in the development of modern Catholic social doctrine. On the popular level, he is remembered as much for his approachable demeanor and down-to-earth spirituality after the seemingly esthetic, mystical later years of his predecessor, Pius XII. The pope of ecumenism, John XXIII's popularity extended well into the non-Catholic world and*Time* magazine named him its "Man of the Year" in 1962.

Pope Pius IX is a man of another century. He served as pope from 1846 to 1878, the longest and one of the most difficult pontificates in history. (St. Peter's pontificate was traditionally listed as 25 years and, until Pius IX, it was assumed that no pope would ever reign longer than the first pontiff.) He was immensely popular in his own times throughout much of the Catholic world, though certainly not in

the leadership of the burgeoning 19th century republics or in radical circles. He was the first public pope of the modern era.

Pope Pius IX, or *Pio Nono*, as he was both affectionately and not so affectionately called in Italian, has been treated less kindly by the world. Though Pope John XXIII himself spoke well of Pius IX and reinvigorated the investigation of his possible canonization,[2] the popular portrait of his papacy has him as a diehard reactionary adverse to the modern world. He is pictured as interested only in amassing papal power, and through the First Vatican Council he substituted a definition of papal infallibility for the loss of the papacy's temporal kingdom in the nineteenth-century creation of the Italian State. He is seen as an anti-Semite who collaborated in the kidnapping and forced conversion of a Jewish child, with the dark hint of a papacy that helped generate the mindset in Catholic Europe that would lead to the Holocaust. Finally, he was the enemy of the freedoms of the modern world through his infamous *Syllabus of Errors* that condemned all that was right in modern thinking. This image of Pius IX persists. It is certainly encouraged within certain Catholic circles that have never forgiven the First Vatican Council's definition of papal infallibility. They create an image of Pius IX forcing such a definition on an unwilling hierarchy.[3]

Beatification and canonization in the Church involve judgments of sanctity on the merits and holiness of an individual's life. The reasons for the beatification of Pope Pius IX certainly center on those aspects of his life, not necessarily on the impact or results of the policies of his papacy. Yet, various pundits have put forward their own explanations of his beatification by Pope John Paul II. These range from an attempt to balance an allegedly "liberal" Pope John XXIII with the caricature of a "conservative" Pius IX, as

well as the more realistic view of connecting the popes of the First and Second Vatican Councils. In any case, the alleged purpose of his beatification beyond recognition of his own personal sanctity is simply conjecture. What is of concern, however, are the historical caricatures created of Pope Pius IX. Painting Pius as the anti-Semitic enemy of freedom interested only in exercising power over lives fits a portrait of Catholicism common in the bitterly anti-Catholic world of 19th century Europe and America. The caricature also fits comfortably with contemporary anti-Catholic sentiment. Yet, Pius IX and his world – as well as his reaction to it – are far more complicated than the secularized propaganda that greeted his beatification.

Though Pope Pius IX would serve for 32 years, the modern caricature of his papacy surrounds four events: his resistance to Italian unification and political trends in 19th century Europe; the *Syllabus of Errors* that appeared to set the Church squarely against democratic ideals; the "kidnapping" of Edgardo Mortara, a Jewish child taken from his family by authorities after his Christian baptism was discovered; and the definition of the doctrine of papal infallibility at the First Vatican Council of 1870. It is these events that bear closer inspection, while keeping in mind the larger agenda of a pontificate that would see the Church reborn and revitalized after it appeared to be virtually destroyed at the beginning of the century.

Background

The future Pope Pius IX was born Giovanni Maria Mastai-Ferretti in Senagallia in the Papal States, the ninth child of a minor count in 1792. He was born into a troubled world. Before he had reached the age of 21, French authorities imprisoned two popes and, without the bravery of those popes, the Church would have become an effective puppet of France. The Church in revolutionary France had been virtually

destroyed and the old Catholic dynasties of Europe seemed destined to collapse.

In 1797, Pope Pius VI was forced by the French to accept the virtual destruction of the Papal States, the "patrimony of St. Peter" that the popes had ruled for over a thousand years. After a riot broke out over the planting of "Liberty Trees" around Rome, French troops entered the city and Pius VI, terminally ill, was carted off as a prisoner. He died under French imprisonment in August 1799. His successor faired no better. Pope Pius VII had returned to Rome when Napoleon had assumed complete power and appeared to moderate his position against the Church. He concluded an agreement with Pius over the reconstruction of the French hierarchy. Pius VII was forced to take part in Napoleon's self-coronation as emperor in 1804.

Within a short time, however, Napoleon's desire to become "King of All Italy" and to secure the Pope's alliance in his war against the allies led to French occupation of Rome and cannons aimed at the papal residence. In July 1808, like his predecessor, Pope Pius VII was arrested by French troops when he refused to abdicate as sovereign of the Papal States. He would live as a monk (he had been a Benedictine monk prior to his election) in the episcopal residence at Savona for four years before being forced to France in 1812. He was unable to exercise any authority and on more than one occasion, came close to virtually surrendering his authority over the Church to the whim of the Emperor. But with Napoleon's defeat, Pius returned to Rome on March 24, 1814, welcomed as a living martyr.[4]

Before Giovanni Mastai-Ferretti had been ordained a priest in 1819, two popes had been imprisoned and the Church in Europe nearly destroyed by the revolutionary movements and nationalist fervor that swept out of France and across the continent. At age 15, the young man had begun to suffer from

epileptic seizures and he needed a special episcopal dispensation before ordination. It required that he not celebrate Mass without the assistance of another priest. However, his career soon progressed rapidly. He was assigned to the papal diplomatic corps (he would serve for a time in Chile) and in 1827 became archbishop of Spoleto and, in 1832, bishop of Imola near Bologna.

The Church had been dramatically affected by the chaos of the French Revolution and its Napoleonic aftermath. The seizure and restoration of the Papal States had a strong impact on how the Church viewed itself and what was necessary for it to continue its mission in the 19th century. The Papal States were lands in Italy directly ruled by the Holy See, stretching back over the centuries. Though tradition held that they came by donation of the Emperor Constantine in the Fourth Century, they can directly be traced to the "Donation of Pepin" in 756. Varying in size, but always centered in Rome, the Papal States were ruled directly by the Pope as a temporal sovereign. Napoleon had annexed the Papal States to the French Empire in 1809. The reconstruction of Europe at the Congress of Vienna in 1815 restored the Papal States.

The surrender of the Papal States by Pius VII and his virtual incarceration by Napoleon reinforced in the Church the vital need for the pope to maintain his position as a temporal ruler. Without the Papal States, the Emperor dominated Pius and his spiritual authority compromised. It became clear to the Church at the time what history appeared to teach: without the Papal States, the pope could become merely a pawn of whatever European ruler dominated at any given point. The pope should be a citizen of no country and not subject to the laws of individual rulers. Free exercise of the papal ministry was equated with the freedom guaranteed by being a temporal ruler subject to no other ruler or nation. "On the lips of Napoleon the call for the Pope to lay down his temporal sovereignty and to rely on spiritual authority had

been blatant code for the enslavement of the papacy to French imperial ambitions. Without his temporal power, Pius VII…had come within a whisker of signing away his spiritual authority. If the Pope did not remain a temporal king, then it seemed he could no longer be the Church's chief bishop."[5] That firm belief was central to Church's understanding from 1814 on. But it would directly clash with the movement for Italian unification as a nation-state. The Papal States cut Italy in half and was centered in Rome, Italy's most important and historic city.

While the Church struggled to rebuild after the devastation of the Napoleonic wars, the restoration of the monarchies established by the Congress of Vienna would prove a chimera. A new world was emerging where national identity – rather than identity with ancient royal houses – would become a driving forced in both politics and how people thought of themselves. It was an era when racial identity, and racism, became a growing and dangerous part of "modern" thinking. This new "racialism" would underlie many of the tragedies that would be faced by Giovanni Mastai-Ferretti when elected pope in 1846.

The two major predecessors of Pio Nono, Pope Leo XII (1823-1829) and Pope Gregory XVI (1831-1846)[6] faced this new world sternly. Pope Leo worked diligently – some would say harshly – to reestablish firm control over the Papal States. Pope Leo re-instituted difficult rules against Jews living in the Papal States and followed a diplomatic policy that supported the royal houses of Europe. It was this seeming alliance between "throne and altar" in an age where there were growing movements toward more representative forms of government that was be a difficult inheritance for Pius IX. Pope Gregory would carry this policy so far that he condemned a Polish Catholic uprising against the Russian Czar who viciously persecuted the Polish Church. Facing rebellions in his own Papal States, Gregory would not consider compromising

to the principle of revolution.

At the same time, however, the severity of what the Church faced must be understood. The new, “liberal” regimes that would arise in Europe were not as we might picture them. The separation of Church and State, for example, was not a constitutional prescription for both to operate independently of each other. It meant, instead, that the Church would be dominated by the new regimes. Church property was confiscated, religious orders suppressed, the Church banned from education. The government would determine Church appointments and anti-clerical legislation would be widespread. Papal authority to work with the bishops within the nation states would be severely limited, and government permission was needed – and routinely denied – for the publication of papal edicts and encyclicals. Throughout the 1830s and 1840s, Pope Gregory confronted over and over again governmental attempts to limit and suppress Church life. As will be seen in the section on papal infallibility, pressure for a clearer definition came from many bishops who had seen the papacy as their means of protection against state persecution and control.

At the very beginning of his pontificate, Pope Gregory had made what would be seen as a disastrous decision. Gregory had needed to call on the assistance of Austrian troops in the summer of 1831. The 1830 revolution in France overthrew the Bourbon monarchy reestablished at the Congress of Vienna and replaced it with the so-called “Citizen King,” Louis Phillippe, who would rule until overthrown in the revolution of 1848 that would return a Bonaparte to power. This sparked uprisings in Italy where there was growing popular movement for a unified Italian state. It was the birth of the “risorgimento,” the Italian reunification movement. Within weeks of Gregory’s election, rebels controlled many cities throughout the Papal States. He called on the Austrian government to help suppress the rebellion. “It was a fateful moment for the papacy, in which it threw its lot in with the

big battalions, against a growing Italian desire for liberty and self-determination. The aftermath in the Papal States was disastrous. The papal prisons filled up, and exiles schooled Europe in anti-papalism."[7] Gregory's rule of the Papal States, protected and propped up by foreign troops, was hated in Italy and became a symbol in Europe – unfairly when compared to most contemporary governments – of the worst in reactionary authority.

This was the legacy that would be inherited by Pope Pius IX: a commitment of the Church to the Papal States as the only means to assure the freedom of the popes to spiritually rule the Church; a rise in nationalism and racialism as the dominant aspects of European life; a growing reliance on papal authority as the only means to protect the Church from the anti-Catholic repression of the new "liberal" states; and an unfortunate reliance on foreign troops to maintain papal authority within the Papal States, forcing the pope to be seen as a hindrance to Italian dreams of unification.

Pope Pius IX, Nationalism and the Italian Risorgimento

When Pope Pius IX was elected at the surprisingly young age of 54 the more conservative forces in Europe shuddered. At first glance, he appeared to be sympathetic to the new liberal nationalism. He was elected in only two days, one of the shortest conclaves in history. He was elected primarily by Italians, who made up 54 of the 62 cardinals.[8] The new pope immediately ordered amnesty for prisoners and exiles, most of whom had been had been revolutionaries. The new pope was hailed a "liberal," and Europe proclaimed him a hero. In Italy and in certain Church intellectual circles, it had often been expressed that the pope could provide the monarchial leadership of a united Italy under a constitutional government. In Pius IX, many Italians felt they had found such a man.

It was a misreading of Pius that would help create an image of an early, “liberal” pope that would be replaced by a reactionary once he faced revolution in Rome. This is a common understanding in historical interpretation of his reign, but needs to be modified. In fact, Pius from his first days could not be defined politically. He was moderate, deeply spiritual, yet also a simple man. He would be known for a playful sense of humor (as well as a sharp temper), and had an almost naïve, caring soul. Even when his temper gained the best of him, he did not bear grudges and was almost always self-effacing and apologetic at the next meeting with those who had generated his anger. Even his most strident enemies, once having met him, uniformly praised his charm, spirituality and simplicity. Most important, he was completely and totally a man of the Church who saw God’s providence in all the events of his reign. Even in the loss of the Rome and the Papal States he would see the mysterious action of God. Though certainly sympathetic early to Italian patriotic movements, his concern was with the Church and, through the Church, for the salvation of souls. Ascribing to Pius a consistent and driving political philosophy or a political agenda separate from the Church is to misunderstand the man. Even his loyalty to the Papal States was not a temporal matter. He saw his rule as part of the Patrimony of Peter and as an absolute necessity for the spiritual independence of the Church.

Pius IX began rudimentary representative political reforms in the Papal States. He removed many of the restrictions on Jews and tore open the gates of the Jewish ghetto in Rome. In 1847, he demanded that the Austrians withdraw from a border city within the Papal States. When the Austrians withdrew, he was seen as a hero to Italian patriots. (It is said that the revolutionary Garibaldi, living in Brazil, offered his service to the papal representative upon hearing the news.) More and more, Italian patriots came to believe that unification could be had by throwing the Austrians out of Italy, overthrowing the “foreign rulers,” and

establishing Pope Pius IX as a constitutional monarch.

In the year 1848, revolutions swept Europe. Louis Phillippe lost his throne in France and rulers throughout the states of Germany faced uprisings. In Austria, the architect of the Europe that arose from the Congress of Vienna, Chancellor Metternich, was overthrown. In a short time, Italy was in flames. Pius IX had instituted reforms in the government of the Papal States that were promising, and in 1848 he established elected municipal government in Rome. But the fear remained that whatever happened, revolutions in Italy would be squelched by Austrian or French troops. When war broke out in northern Italy against the Austrians, it was hoped that the Pope would order papal troops to join the battle. He did not. Instead, on April 29, 1848, he announced that he could not send men to war on a Catholic nation. He renounced any tactic to name him king of a unified Italy, and called for an end to violent revolution. Throughout Italy, it was believed that the Pope had abandoned the cause of liberty.

Pius struggled over the next few months to maintain the integrity – and neutrality – of the Papal States against the Austrian army, while keeping civil peace within the Papal States. Rome itself was seething with violence and potential revolution. Pius appointed Pelligrino Rossi to be his prime minister in September. Rossi "cleansed the police force of unreliable men, ordered an army battalion out of Rome, protected the Jews in the old ghetto who were at risk from the mob, brought in a strong force of police from outside Rome, and ejected to Naples a couple of well-known revolutionaries…"[9] He hoped to counter the king of Piedmont in northern Italy who was making strong moves to head up a federated Italian state. He cleaned up the streets of Rome and made them safe. He gave all the appearances of a man putting down a rebellion. He was. And on November 15th he was stabbed to death.

Mob violence exploded in Rome. Outside the papal residence, the Quirinal palace, a mob demanded a new government, and a monsignor standing next to the Pope was killed by gunfire. When a revolutionary government was forced on the Pope, he decided to flee Rome and went to Gaeta under the protection of King Ferdinand of Naples. In Rome, the revolutionary government attempted to secure the Pope's return but could not guarantee his freedom to reign over the Church, let alone the Papal States. The Roman rebellion turned ugly and though the new government attempted to restrain the mobs, priests were killed and churches desecrated. Five bishops were arrested and the government took over Church property. However, the revolts throughout Italy began to collapse under the crush of Austrian troops. At that point, the French, now under the dictatorship of Louis Napoleon, deemed it wise to invade Rome and restore order, rather than see the Austrians occupy the city. Nine months later, on April 12, 1850, the Pope returned. He abandoned the Quirinal for the Vatican, a symbolic move from the palace of his temporal authority to the home of his spiritual authority. For 20 years, Pope Pius IX would retain temporal power but solely through the occupation of Austrian and French troops in Rome.

It was certainly true that Pope Pius became far less sympathetic to the cause of Italian unification after 1848. Wherever revolutions occurred, widespread violence and attacks on the Church took place. He had been shown clearly what revolution meant in this period of European history, with a priest shot dead next to him. The revolutionary Roman government was decidedly opposed to the Church and vowed to eliminate the Catholic impact on civil society. Pius had seen revolution and found it dangerous.

In the three decades of his papacy, Pius IX would develop an enormous personal following among Catholics worldwide. The Church was growing rapidly, particularly outside the chaos of continental Europe. The

internationalization of the Church expanded as it never had before. And Pius was its leading public figure, not because of his political savvy but rather the strength of his faith and how well it resonated with the world's Catholics. "The strength of the authority of Pope Pius IX in the Catholic Church lay not in the crowned heads, nor in the need of clergy under pressure from governments to appeal to Rome for help, nor in better communications, nor even, in the world-wide sense in Catholicism, that the Pope was in danger of persecution in the modern world…Pius IX shared the people's affection for a warmth of devotion, for the cults of the Blessed Virgin and the Sacred Heart, and the coming forms of eucharistic devotion. He was a religious man and a pastor by instinct, not at all a politician. The development of the Churches in Europe during the next three decades elicited all the priestly side of him, so that his personal influence upon the Catholic Church became greater than any of his predecessors…"[10]

After the revolutions of 1848 and 1849 and their suppression, Piedmont – with a constitutional government under the monarchy – became the hope for Italian unification by driving out the Austrians and taking over the Papal States. It became the darling of liberal and Protestant Europe, while the Papal States were tarred as a medieval throwback destined for the dustbin of history. Piedmont would launch a series of anti-Catholic legislative acts to prove its stripes in Europe and to maintain support toward its goal of assuming the leadership of the entire peninsula. Under the brilliant leadership of Count Camillo di Cavour, a consistent publicity campaign to undermine the credibility of papal rule was undertaken worldwide. The spreading impact of newspapers on the rising middle classes would be a tremendous source in undermining his reputation in Europe and America in particular. Newspapers of this era were little more than hysterical propaganda sheets, as this was long before there existed even the slightest commitment to objectivity and

balance. (It would be an important concept to remember when the *Syllabus of Errors* would condemn the concept of freedom of the press. This was a reaction not to objective and responsible journalism, but rather to the concept of hate literature and irresponsible political propaganda of which most newspapers thrived in that period.)

Pope Pius IX inadvertently fueled this hate campaign when he reestablished the British hierarchy in 1850. The Catholic population in England had been growing through Irish immigration and had accelerated during the disastrous famine of the 1840s. The Catholic Church in England was ruled previously by vicars reporting directly to Rome. The reestablishment of the hierarchy allowed for direct and quicker action. It made sense. Also, the Oxford Movement within Anglicanism – an attempt to recapture the apostolic and Catholic nature of the Church – had recently led to a number of prominent conversions to Catholicism, including that of John Henry Newman. Combined with the reestablishment of the hierarchy, England saw all this and went through one of its periodic bouts of "no-popery." A practical result of this was England's formal declaration in 1856 that the Papal State was a European scandal and demanded that Austrian and French troops should be withdrawn.[11]

In the United States, the 1850s saw the rise of anti-Catholicism in the powerful Know Nothing movement. A political movement prior to the Civil War, the popular appeal of the Know Nothing Party was based on a growing anti-immigrant and anti-Catholic sentiment. Catholics were considered illiterate and ignorant Irish immigrants. They were viewed as bible-burners eager to rob the public till to pass on their superstitious beliefs to a new generation in their own schools where dangerous doctrines were taught. The Know Nothing Party combined nativism, anti-Catholicism, temperance and anti-slavery into a potent political force that would dominate in Northern state houses in the late 1850s.[12]

The combination of many of these forces not only dramatically impacted on the history of that era, but upon that history's portrayal. The propaganda spread by supporters of Italian unification, England's consistent anti-Catholicism, and a receptive audience in the United States, helped to create fertile ground for the image of an intractable medieval Pope dominating an impoverished Papal States yearning for freedom from theocracy. These sentiments in combination would support what was essentially a land grab against a virtually defenseless Papal States by the government of Piedmont.

Cavour secured the support of France to oust the Austrians from their strongholds in Northern Italy and war broke out in the Spring of 1859. Cities within the Papal States erupted in support of the popular war to oust the Austrians. (When a revolt in Perugia was ruthlessly suppressed by Swiss mercenaries, the papacy took another propaganda defeat in the eyes of Europe.) Under the pretext of war, Piedmont annexed a large section of the Papal States. This was simple aggrandizement and Pius IX could do nothing but thunder in protest. With Garibaldi's victories in Sicily and southern Italy, Victor Emmanuel, king of Piedmont, was declared king of a not-quite-united Italy in 1861. The Papal States by now virtually ceased to exist, leaving only Rome and a small strip of western Italy under papal control. Throughout Italy, the new Italian state would wage war on the Church with the Church fighting back by refusing the sacraments and not taking part in state celebrations. Bishops were jailed, monasteries and Catholic schools suppressed, convents disbanded. All that was left was the final taking of Rome. Prussia had overthrown Austrian power in 1866, leaving only the French troops in Rome to defend the Pope. In 1870, at the onset of the Franco-Prussian War, the French troops were withdrawn and Victor Emmanuel sent his soldiers to secure the city. On papal orders, only token resistance was offered. Italy was now unified, and the Pope declared himself a "prisoner" and retreated to the Vatican.[13]

While in the Catholic world Pope Pius was viewed as a martyr, his defense of the Papal States reinforced an image of him as a stern opponent of freedom. It is true that, in the end, the loss of the Papal States would actually serve to elevate the papal reputation worldwide. At the time, however, it was viewed as a stunning defeat by both the Church itself, and a secular world that assumed the Church had received a mortal blow. The Church would quickly understand, however, that loss of temporal authority for the Pope did not destroy his spiritual authority. In fact, it enhanced it in the eyes of the world.

Pope Pius IX would live for another eight years after the final loss of the Papal States. The absorption of the Papal States was an act of raw piracy no matter how positively the outcome was viewed by the world and history. The Pope would speak out – excommunicating those involved in the seizure – but never truly adopted a policy to either regain the Papal States or directly undermine the new Italian government. If anything, he hoped for a miracle and if no miracle was forthcoming, it must be God's will.

The final political challenge that engaged Pius IX was the Prussian *kulturkampf*under Otto von Bismarck. When the Prussian armies defeated Louis Napoleon in the Franco-Prussian War in 1870, the Prussian state would turn on the Church as its paramount danger. Among other matters, a series of laws were promulgated against the Church, including convent inspections, the removal of the church from education, the ouster of the Jesuits, the right of the state to reject Church appointments, and for the local Church to be free of "foreign intrusion," meaning papal authority. This was how the separation of Church and State was defined in the period. With the growth of the national State apparatus, all aspects of civil life fell under State control. It was strongly believed, for example, that religious schools would undermine the secular State. Education should be the monopoly of the State

and it was viewed as a violation of Church and State separation if religious controlled individual schools. Education was the duty of the State to raise children in proper nationalistic fervor.

Bismarck's *kulturkampf* backfired. Strong resistance united Catholics under Pius IX. By 1877, Bismarck knew the policy was a failure and would slowly withdraw it. When Pius IX died in 1878, Bismarck offered a toast and felt free to abandon the policy completely. Curiously, Pius is often blamed for the vehemence of the *kulturkampf*. The argument is made that the definition of papal infallibility promulgated by the First Vatican Council triggered repression of the Church in Germany. This was not the case. Bismarck viewed the Church as an enemy to control long before the First Vatican Council. Germany, he believed, could not be united with a strong Catholic presence as a counterpoint to the power of the State. Wherever the new nation states arose Catholicism was seen as a force that undermined nationalism.[14]

The endless battles of Pope Pius IX with the new Europe that was emerging throughout his long pontificate dramatically affected how he would be viewed by history. From a liberal "hero" in the first two years of his pontificate, Pius' refusal to wage war on Austria in the cause of Italian unification turned "thinking" Europe against him almost over night. Much of the popular knowledge of his pontificate is forever colored by the incessant propaganda of his political enemies. We also tend to forget that the "liberalism" of the growing nation states of Europe was not how we define liberalism today.

The nation states developing in Europe – fiercely anti-Catholic and highly nationalistic – were the forerunners of the totalitarian states of the 20th century. Bismarck's Prussia and Cavour's Italian kingdom, would become Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy. The seeds of this horrific

development were planted in racialism, nationalism and communism that grew directly from the philosophy of liberalism of 19th century Europe. From that perspective, the political policies of Pius IX make much greater sense than merely a reactionary bigotry most often portrayed, particularly when the beatification of the pope was treated in the popular press. It also helps to frame at least an understanding of the vehemence of his *Syllabus of Errors* and the concerns that were behind it.

The Syllabus of Errors

No other document of Pope Pius IX generated more controversy in his own time than the *Syllabus of Errors*. It became a document cited consistently – and to our own day – by fundamentalist critics of the Church. At the time it was issued, it was viewed by liberal Europe as proof that the Catholic Church was an anachronism doomed to extinction.

The *Syllabus of Errors* was issued as an attachment to an 1864 encyclical of Pius IX, *Quanta Cura*. The encyclical itself and the *Syllabus* had been in the planning stages for a number of years, though the immediate cause was a speech given in France by a liberal Catholic, Count Charles Montalembert in 1863. He argued that the Church must accept the rise of independent democracies and the new world that was emerging. The old Catholic regimes were dying, and absolutism was dead. The Church must forget the concept of Catholic states and enter the turbulent world of the new democracies. His view was summarized as a call for a "free Church in a free state." It was better to tolerate error, as long as the Church was free to respond with the truth.

The speech irked conservatives within the Church who demanded a clear refutation. Particularly from the Italian perspective, they looked at the world of the so-called "free states" and saw confiscated property, nuns and priests driven from their Religious Orders, bishops arrested, the Church

drummed out of any role in education or the public arena, heated anti-Catholic rhetoric in newspapers and legislatures, and the confiscation of the Papal States by armed force. They wondered if this was the future of a "free Church in a free State."

By early 1860, many within the Church had argued that a formalized response to the errors of the modern world was necessary. The Church was being portrayed universally as the enemy of thought and civilization, representing a return to the Dark Ages. This disgusted Catholics who saw the Church as the converter of barbarian Europe, the preserver of ancient knowledge, the creator of the glories of the Renaissance, and the salvation of the world through Christ. To their minds, what had modern civilization created – slums, crime, political chaos, hatred, racism, war, agnosticism and atheism. They looked at the world since the French Revolution, and they saw not the rebirth of civilization, but its collapse.

The *Syllabus* itself was a collection of 80 statements from the Church responding to specific propositions. The *Syllabus* read as propositions to be condemned. For example, condemned were the propositions that "All action of God upon man and the world was to be denied"[15]; and "The State, as being the origin and source of all rights, is endowed with a certain right not circumscribed by any limits."[16]

The encyclical and the *Syllabus* went through any number of drafts and, over time, Pius seemed to have lost interest in it and may not have read the final draft.[17]The encyclical with the *Syllabus* was released in 1864 and caused an almost immediate firestorm. The encyclical in many ways was a fair statement against a host of current thought that remain worthy of condemnation today – indifferentism, atheism, rationalism. The *Syllabus* itself contained 80 condemned propositions, many of which are similarly worthy of rebuke:

denying the existence of God and the truth of Scripture, the Church's right to teach is dependent on the consent of secular authority, the equation of human reason with Divine Revelation, the all-inclusive authority of the State.

Other areas provided more graduated degrees of difficulty, particularly if read in the context of today's understanding of the ideas involved. The condemnation of separation of Church and State seems archaic. What must not be forgotten is how such separation was defined at the time. It certainly meant in many countries, such as Bismarck's Prussia, that the Church was absolutely subservient to the State and must be divorced entirely from civil life. When the encyclical condemned freedom of the press, it was being drafted at the time of a viciously anti-Catholic press and a journalism that had no norms of objectivity or balance.

There are areas in the *Syllabus* that are both prophetic and a grim reminder of the philosophy of State and race that was growing more and more popular in Europe, particularly in the growing acceptance of the thesis that as the State represented the race of people, the State has the right to wield complete authority over the individual as the representative of the people.

The most serious difficulties in the public perception of the *Syllabus*, however, were in the last four condemned propositions. These propositions supported the concept of the Catholic Church being the official religion of a State and appeared to deny religious tolerance to non-Catholics. The 80th and last proposition would be greeted with hilarity and satire, when it condemned the notion that the "Roman Pontiff can, and ought to, reconcile himself, and come to terms with progress, liberalism and modern civilization."[18]

"The *Syllabus* was in fact a far less devastating document than it appeared at first sight. Its 80 propositions

were extracted from earlier papal documents, and Pio Nono repeatedly said that the true meaning of the *Syllabus* could be discovered only be referring to the original context. So, the offensive proposition 80 came from the brief*Iamdudum Cernimus* of 1861. Its apparently wholesale condemnation of 'progress, liberalism and modern civilization' in fact referred quite specifically to the Piedmontese government's closure of the monasteries and Church schools."[19] That was the explanation given to the *Syllabus* in an immensely popular pamphlet written by the bishop of Orleans, Felix Dupanloup. Pius IX accepted the bishop's interpretation as accurate. Citing each of the propositions, Dupanloup noted the exact source of the condemnation in reference to an exact event or statement. This gave vital historical context to the *Syllabus* as well as a clear frame of reference. It roots the *Syllabus* in its specific point in time, and gives it a greater understanding than when read with contemporary eyes.

With Bishop Dupanloup's explanation in hand, much of the initial furor over the*Syllabus* died out. The *Syllabus* generated the most difficulty in the United States, where it was often used as anti-Catholic fodder in making the case that the Church was fundamentally opposed to the separation of Church and State, religious tolerance, public schools and free speech. It is still used today in that regard by some fundamentalist critics, forgetting the time and the context in which it was written.

The Kidnapping of Edgardo Mortara

In recent years, no event more surprised Catholics than the story of a young Jewish boy taken from the home of his parents during the papacy of Pius IX to be raised as a Catholic. Though it caused an international furor in its time, the story had been generally forgotten until resurrected in David Kertzer's, "The Kidnapping of Edgardo Mortara" published in 1997.[20] Kertzer theorizes that the story had disappeared

because Jews were embarrassed that the young boy would eventually become a priest, and Catholics were simply embarrassed by the whole affair.[21]

Kertzer, however, makes the additional argument that the Mortara affair was also a sign of the roots of racial anti-Semitism that would emerge in Italian Fascism, and as such the Church played a role in establishing the framework for the Italian racial laws of 1938.[22] This misunderstands the motivations involved in the Mortara affair at the time, and forgets that it was the Church that protested vehemently the 1938 laws and was the single greatest protector of Italian Jews during the war years.[23]

Pius IX was considered a friend and protector of the Jews during the early years of his pontificate. Rome had its own Jewish ghetto in 1846, established in the late 16th century. (Most other cities in Europe with Jewish populations had similar ghettos.) The ghettos existed both to "protect" Christians from possible apostasy in contact with Jews, and to protect Jews from mob attack. Jews were allowed outside the ghetto during the day, but were expected to return in the evening. Four synagogues existed within the Jewish ghetto in Rome, the only non-Catholic religious facilities allowed to function within the city. Upon becoming Pope, Pius IX ordered the end to various insulting traditions aimed at the Jewish community in Rome: anti-Jewish comedies, parading of rabbis in costume during Carnival, and the necessity that representatives of the community be forced to hear sermons once a year exhorting them to conversion. The walls enclosing the ghetto were torn down. To the Jews, "the liberal regime of Pius IX felt to them like a miracle."[24]

After the revolt in Rome in 1848, Pius IX initially withdrew these liberal statutes, angered at Jewish participation in the revolt (three Jews served on the Roman

municipal council during the revolt). It was alleged – and doubtful – that Jews had robbed churches during the uprising. But though the restrictions were back on the books, and the insulting conversion sermon was reestablished, most of the anti-Jewish laws were no longer enforced and Jews were no longer confined to the ghetto. In different areas within the Papal States, the Jews could generally live, work and move about freely, such as in Bologna.

"The knock came at nightfall. It was Wednesday, June 23, 1858." Thus Kertzer begins his study of the Edgardo Mortara affair. Bologna was still part of the Papal States and the Mortara family had settled there after the end of the uprisings of 1848 and 1849, rather well off as part of the new middle-class. Edgardo, age six, was one of eight children of Marianna and Momolo Mortara. The Mortaras had employed a Christian servant to help in raising the children. It was not an uncommon practice, though by law Jews were not to employ Christian servants. It had come to the light of Church authorities in Bologna, specifically the Dominican head of the local Inquisition, that the servant girl had baptized young Edgardo as an infant when she thought he was in danger of dying. (This was one of the very clear reasons why Christians were not supposed to be employed in Jewish households. It was against the law for Jews to be baptized without consent and fear of just such cases was at the heart of the legislation.) The law in the matter was clear: a baptized Christian could not be raised in a Jewish home. To do so at that time would be seen as being a party to apostasy, a denial of the validity of Baptism, and endanger the soul of the baptized. Edgardo was taken from his parent's home and transported to Rome, where he would be raised a Catholic.

The Mortara affair would create an international furor. It was quickly utilized by the enemies of the Church, and Pius IX, as a symbol of papal backwardness and viciousness. Just two years before most of the Papal States

would be seized by the Kingdom of Piedmont in the rush to Italian unification, it became a valuable propaganda tool in the effort to present the Church as a medieval institution, and the Pope as an intolerant fanatic.

The difficulty for the Church, and Pius as he became aware of the affair, was that it was left with little choice at the time. While it is impossible today to understand the position of Pius and the Church in taking a child from his parents, the action was not without precedent and was not uncommon. It was simply considered impossible for a baptized child to remain in a home where he would not – could not – be raised Christian. Such experiences were commonplace even decades later in America. As late as the early 20th century, it was common for Irish Catholic children to be plucked off the streets of New York and transported to the West to be raised by solid Protestant families. It was considered an act of charity and evangelization, assuring that the children would be raised good Protestants.[25] Later, out of sensitivity to such actions of the past, it became common practice by the mid 20th century to place orphan children in adopted homes of the same faith. It continues today in the area of racial adoptions, where it is preferred that an adopted child be of the same race as the adopting parents.

As the young Edgardo was transported to Rome, it was claimed that he showed immediate signs of the desire to live the Catholic faith, eagerly following the guards into church to celebrate Mass. The exact story, of course, will never be known of these early days as it became wrapped up in propaganda from both sides. Supporters of the Church would argue that the reality of Edgardo's baptism could be seen as soon as he was placed in a Catholic environment. Supporters of the parents argued that he was merely trying to please his kidnappers and longed to be returned to his parents. Edgardo would disagree later in life with that interpretation, though

it is easy to understand how he was influenced by the Catholic environment that quickly enveloped him as a young child.

Pope Pius IX would eventually be asked to use his authority to have Edgardo returned to his parents. By then, of course, the papal hands were even more tightly bound by the international publicity surrounding the case. To give in, would be to surrender to the enemies of the Church. Edgardo had also became a favorite of the pope, and could be seen scurrying around the papal rooms. He would eventually study for the priesthood and be ordained. When Rome was absorbed into the unified Italian State in 1870, Edgardo was 18 and had begun his studies for the priesthood. When another Jewish boy who had claimed conversion to the Church was seized and returned to his parents,[26] Edgardo fled to Austria. He eventually made peace with his mother and family, though his father passed away before they could be reconciled.[27]He remained a monk and died in 1940 at the age of 88 at a Belgian abbey where he lived and studied for many years.

The Mortara affair supplied the enemies of Pius IX with a strong propaganda weapon at a point when the Papal States were about to collapse. The extent of the vitriol aimed at Pius was enormous and worldwide. Adopting the anti-Catholic rhetoric of the Know Nothings, Jewish groups in the United States saw it as a Jesuit-inspired conspiracy of "soul-less lackeys," compared Pius to the "Prince of Darkness" and reminded their Protestant audience of the "history of these incarnate fiends, written in the blood of millions of victims."[28] For Cavour, who aimed at Italian unification, it was one more weapon to be used in the propaganda arsenal.

Was Pius XI's refusal to return Edgardo Mortara an act of pure anti-Semitism? In the context of the times, it clearly was not. This did not involve racial prejudice. The Church in Rome had a long history of defending Jewish converts to the faith and accepting them completely after such a

conversion, as was done in the case of Edgardo Mortara. The Church in Rome viewed with disgust and disdain the Spanish Inquisition's attacks on *conversos* – Jewish converts to Catholicism accused in later generations to be secretly practicing the Jewish faith – as simple racial prejudice, or a means to extort Jewish money.[29] The motivations of Pius IX were not anti-Semitic, though they certainly were offensive to the Jewish faith. But in his actions, Pius reflected both the generally accepted norms of the time concerning families of mixed religion, as well as the law as it stood within the Papal States. To return Edgardo would have been, to Pius IX, denial of the validity and sacredness of the sacrament of baptism.

The actions of Pius IX are not defensible in today's understanding, and would not be defended by the Church. Yet his motivations were not racially motivated. It was not understood by him to be an anti-Jewish act, but an act to assure the salvation of a soul. His motivation was primarily religious. He believed unquestionably that a baptized child could not be raised in an unbaptized household. That is why he so firmly rejected returning the boy, despite the favorable publicity it would have engendered for him in perilous times.

Papal Infallibility

In 1867, a huge gathering of bishops from around the world was held in Rome to celebrate the eighteenth hundredth anniversary of the deaths of St. Peter and Paul. It was both a celebration – and a reminder to the world – of the universality of the Church. It was to this assembly that Pius announced his plans for a General Council of the Church. The Curia opposed the plan, fearful that in those dangerous times a Council could show the world a divided Church. Pius had no such fears. It was originally though that the Council would be pastoral in tone, dealing with the widely felt need to update Church canonical law and the status of the growing foreign missions.

However, the agenda quickly turned doctrinal in intent. It was generally concluded that a Council was necessary to discuss the authority of the papal office itself.

Why? Many of the events of the previous 40 years had centered on the office of the papacy and the nature of papal authority. There were various movements at play within the Church. On the one hand, a strong movement – referred to as "ultramontanism" – believed that papal authority must be understood in virtually limitless spiritual terms. Ultramontanism – from the Latin for "beyond (or across) the mountains" – traditionally referred to those European Catholics who supported papal authority over the concept of regional churches. These people believed that a strong papacy provided protection to the local Catholic communities and stood as a voice for the universality of the Church. This was particularly evident in states where the Church was under attack or subject to government control. There were other historic movements, such as Gallicanism which saw the pope as simply a "senior bishop among bishops," which would dramatically limit papal authority in the face of national Churches. Similarly, there were strains of Conciliarism that sought to place the authority of General Church councils over the Church, or even "Josephenism" which would subject the local Church to the control of the State.

But at this point, many of those historic movements to limit the papacy had lost serious theological momentum within the Church. Even before the devastating events of the French Revolution and the wars of Napoleon, they had lost much of their theological steam. But those events, combined with the emergence of the modern liberal states, had reconfirmed to many within the Church the vital importance of the ancient belief of the central authority of the bishop of Rome as the successor of St. Peter. Virtually no one in the hierarchy of the Church outright rejected the theological concept of papal infallibility – that when the Pope addressed matters of faith

and morals as the Vicar of Christ, he was guided by the Holy Spirit and therefore not subject to error. However, it had never been clearly defined as to the extent of that infallibility and that is where true divisions existed. A perfect example was the *Syllabus of Errors* – was that an infallible papal statement, true for all times and for all people? Was every public statement of the pope on doctrine and morals to be considered infallible? The ultramontanes certainly believed so.

Pope Pius IX certainly leaned heavily toward the ultramontane definition of infallibility. Others, however, were far less certain. There were two prominent schools within the hierarchy, all in minority to the ultramontanes. There were some that rejected outright any definition of papal infallibility as unclear within Catholic tradition. While acknowledging the authority of the pope, they thought it theologically dangerous to attempt to define it. They believed that the authority of the Church had historically existed, that all Catholics believed it, and to define it would simply mean to limit it, or to misunderstand it. Others, called "inopportunists," felt that in the current state of the world, it was not "opportune" to define papal infallibility. This was the position of Cardinal Newman of England, as well as a number of prominent American bishops. They believed that a definition would cause difficulties within the liberal democracies for the Church, as well as with other Christian traditions. Finally, there were extreme anti-infallibilists such as Lord John Acton of England, a prominent Catholic layman, who dreaded any such definition.

Acton believed that a definition of papal infallibility would retroactively extend to bad popes and bad decisions of the past. He thought it historically a disaster. Acton also believed that authority in the Church should be greatly limited. It prevented the free exchange of ideas with modern culture. Truth existed within the Church, Acton

believed, but authoritative statements were not in keeping with the spirit of the times. His teacher, the historian and theologian Father Ignaz von Dollinger, shared many of Acton's concerns.[30]

Acton would be of three-fold importance to the Council. First, he became an outside agitator demanding intervention from various governments to prevent a definition of papal infallibility. (It was later argued that Acton's rhetoric against the definition was utilized by Bismarck as a reason for the *kulturkampf*. Bismarck had his own reasons, however, and Acton's rhetoric was unnecessary to sour him on the Catholic Church.) Second, Acton was in Rome for the Council and provided accounts of the Council through his contacts with those opposed to a definition to von Dollinger. Under the pen name "Qurinus," von Dollinger re-wrote the letters and published then in the *Allgemeine Zeitung*, an Augsburg newspaper. The accounts from an anti-infallible perspective were read internationally and became the basis for most historical accounts of the Council. Finally, Acton's Roman apartment became a center for strategizing the anti-infallible positions.[31]

Pius IX exerted as much pressure as he could to secure the definition of papal infallibility, proclaiming famously to one cardinal, "I am the church! I am the tradition!" Yet even Acton, who loathed Pius and looked for curial conspiracies everywhere, had to acknowledge that debates were open and ideas freely exchanged. He wrote in his journal, "Nobody molested on account of hostile opinion. Letters carefully examined, and much espionage. But no serious hindrance put in the way of distributing documents, pamphlets, etc. Newspapers frequently stopped; but distributed to the bishops, so that their effect on the course of events was not prevented."[32]

The accusation is made that a definition of papal

infallibility was demanded by Pius IX and forced on an unwilling Council by papal pressure, curial conspiracies, and squelched debate. Garry Wills charged that the Council was rigged and opponents silenced.[33] However, he has no explanation for the debate that openly went on for months, or that the final definition of papal infallibility fell far short of the desires of the ultramontanes. The fact was that consensus emerged, except for extremists on each side, that spelled out a definition of papal infallibility clearly in line with Church tradition and the theology of the papacy. As the conciliar fathers grew closer to consensus and understanding, a definition emerged that was far from ultramontane. The Council proclaimed no new teaching that extended papal authority beyond a point the Church had understood for centuries. Subsequent popes have issued one *ex cathedra* statement (Pope Pius XII defining Catholic teaching on the Assumption of Mary in 1950) and did so only after extensive consultation with the world's bishops.

The definition of Papal infallibility by the First Vatican Council was not created or mandated by Pope Pius IX. It was a reaffirmation of a consistent teaching of the Church as subsequent history has clearly shown.

Conclusion

The legacy of Pius IX has suffered much at the hands of 19th century anti-Catholic propaganda as seen in contemporary negative reaction to his beatification. Pius was not an anti-Semite. His response to the "liberalism" of his day was not a response to liberalism as we define it. "The heritage of the eighteenth-century rationalism, however, together with the anti-religious or atheist element of the French Revolution, survived in the development of Continental liberalism and the centralized modern state. Belief reigned in the unstoppable advance of science, in Darwinism, in modern technology, economics, capitalism. The educated elite and the working

classes constituting a new urban proletariat became increasingly divorced from religious influences. Politics and economics mattered as never before; political passions replaced the religious zeal of old."[34] It was a "modernism" that would lead not to a secular utopia, but to the horrors of the world wars of the 20th century and national, political and racial ideologies gone mad.

Pius was not an anti-Semite, though he certainly was a man of his times in regard to the questions of religious tolerance. He defended the thousand-year existence of the Papal States not for monarchial pretensions, but for defense of the freedom of the papacy to exercise its spiritual authority. He defended the Church against modern propositions that were high-sounding, but utilized to arrest bishops, shoot priests, close Catholic schools, disband religious orders and force the Church out of civil society. Though firm in his belief in papal infallibility, he did not force a definition on the First Vatican Council that was greater than the tradition of the Church.

The greatest enemies of Pius IX never questioned the deepness and sincerity of the faith he believed and lived. His incessant promotion of a rich devotional life within the Church led to a renewal of popular Catholic spirituality that had not been seen for over a century.

Pius IX was certainly the first "popular" pope of the modern era, recognized and esteemed by Catholics worldwide. "The Catholic world knew this pope as no pope was known before….He was the first pope in the history of the papacy to be, in the modern sense of the word, news." [35]

During his long pontificate, "the Church had been transformed in every aspect of its life. Almost the entire episcopate had been re-appointed during his reign. The religious orders had experienced a renewal and growth

unimaginable a generation earlier, not merely by the expansion of existing orders, but by the creation of new ones. Many of these new orders were dedicated to apostolic work in schools, hospitals and overseas missions, and they represent an astonishing flowering of Christian energy."[34] The Church grew enormously and the internationalization of the episcopacy began in earnest. The hierarchy was reestablished in England, and the Church in the United States expanded at an enormous rate.

The long papacy of Pope Pius IX rescued the Church from its darkest days in the aftermath of the French Revolution. In 1815, the Church as an institution in continental Europe had nearly been destroyed. Two popes had been imprisoned, religious orders destroyed, the Church in chaos. When Pius IX died on February 7, 1878, after a 32-year reign, the Church had been reborn.

RESOURCES

The best biography of Pope Pius IX is not available in English – Father Giacomo Martina's three-volume work, "Pio Nono" is considered the best study of his pontificate. Eamon Duffy's "Saints and Sinners" gives an overview of his papacy. The section on Pius IX in Owen Chadwick's "A History of the Popes: 1830 – 1914" gives a solid overview as well. We await an English translation of "Pio Nono."

SUMMARY POINTS

- · Beatification and canonization in the Church involve judgments of sanctity on the merits and holiness of an individual's life. The reasons for the beatification of Pope Pius IX certainly center on those aspects of us life, not necessarily on the impact or results of the policies of his papacy.
- · Though Pope Pius IX would serve for 32 years, the modern caricature of his papacy surrounds four

events: his resistance to Italian unification and political trends in 19th century Europe; the *Syllabus of Errors* that appeared to set the Church squarely against democratic ideals; the "kidnapping" of Edgardo Mortara, a Jewish child taken from his family by authorities after his Christian baptism was discovered; and the definition of the doctrine of Papal infallibility at the First Vatican Council of 1970.

- · Giovanni Maria Mastai-Ferretti was born into a troubled world. Before he had reached the age of 21, the French imprisoned two popes and, without the bravery of those two popes, the Church would have become a virtual puppet of the Empire. The Church in revolutionary France had been virtually destroyed and the old Catholic regimes of Europe seemed destined to collapse.
- · A new world was emerging in the 19th century where national identity – rather than identity with ancient royal houses – would become a driving forced in both politics and how people thought of themselves. It was an era where racial identity, and racism, became a growing and dangerous part of "modern" thinking.
- · This was the legacy inherited by Pope Pius IX: a commitment of the Church to the Papal States as the only means to assure the freedom of the popes to spiritually rule the Church; a rise in nationalism and racialism as the dominant aspects of European life; a growing reliance on Papal authority as the only means to protect the Church from the anti-Catholic repression of the new "liberal" states; and an unfortunate reliance on foreign troops to maintain papal authority within the Papal States, forcing the pope to be seen as a hindrance to Italian dreams of unification.
- · Ascribing to Pius IX a consistent and driving political philosophy or a political agenda separate from the Church, is to misunderstand the man. Even his loyalty to the Papal States was not a temporal matter.

He saw his rule as part of the Patrimony of Peter and as an absolute necessity for the spiritual independence of the Church.

- · When war broke out in northern Italy against the Austrians, it was hoped that the Pope would order papal troops to join the battle. Instead, on April 29, 1848, he announced that he could not send men to war on a Catholic nation. He renounced any tactic to name him king of a unified Italy, and called for an end to violent revolution. Throughout Italy, it was believed that the Pope had abandoned the cause of liberty.
- · When a revolutionary government was forced on the Pope in 1848, he decided to flee Rome and went to Gaeta under the protection of King Ferdinand of Naples. On April 12, 1850, the pope returned. For 20 years, Pope Pius IX would retain temporal power but solely through the occupation of Austrian and French troops in Rome.
- · After the revolutions of 1848 and 1849 and their suppression, Piedmont – with a constitutional government under the monarchy – became the hope for Italian unification by driving out the Austrians and taking over the Papal States. It became the darling of liberal and Protestant Europe, while the Papal States were tarred as a medieval throwback destined for the dustbin of history. Piedmont would launch a series of anti-Catholic legislative acts to prove its stripes in Europe and to maintain support toward its goal of assuming the leadership of the entire peninsula.
- · The propaganda spread by supporters of Italian unification, England’s consistent anti-Catholicism, and even a receptive audience in the United States, helped to create fertile ground for the image of an intractable medieval pope dominating an impoverished Papal States yearning for freedom from theocracy. This would combine to support what essentially was a land grab against a virtually defenseless Papal States by the government of Piedmont.

- · In 1870, at the onset of the Franco-Prussian War, the French troops were withdrawn from Rome and Victor Emmanuel sent his soldiers to secure the city. On papal orders, only token resistance was offered. Italy was now unified, and the Pope declared himself a "prisoner" and retreated to the Vatican.
- · We tend to forget that the "liberalism" of the growing nation states of Europe was not how we define liberalism today. The nation states developing in Europe – fiercely anti-Catholic and highly nationalistic – were the forerunners of the totalitarian states of the 20th century. Bismarck's Prussia and Cavour's Italian kingdom, would become Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy. The seeds of this horrific development were planted in racialism, nationalism and communism that grew directly from the philosophy of liberalism of 19thcentury Europe. From that perspective, the political policies of Pius IX make much greater sense than merely a reactionary bigotry most often portrayed.
- · By early 1860, many within the Church had argued that a formalized response to the errors of the modern world was necessary. The Church was being portrayed universally as the enemy of thought and civilization, representing a return to the Dark Ages. This disgusted Catholics who saw the Church as the converter of barbarian Europe, the preserver of ancient knowledge, the creator of the glories of the Renaissance, and the salvation of souls. To their minds, what had modern civilization created – slums, crime, political chaos, hatred, racism, war, agnosticism and atheism. They looked at the world since the French Revolution, and they saw not the rebirth of civilization, but its collapse.
- · The encyclical with the *Syllabus* was released in 1864 and caused an almost immediate firestorm. The encyclical in many ways was a fair statement against a

host of current thought that remain worthy of condemnation today – indifferentism, atheism, rationalism. The *Syllabus* itself contained 80 condemned propositions, many of which are similarly worthy of rebuke: denying the existence of God, the truth of Scripture, the Church's right to teach is dependent on the consent of secular authority, the equation of human reason with Divine Revelation, the all-inclusive authority of the State.

- · The 80 propositions of the *Syllabus* were extracted from earlier papal documents, and Pio Nono repeatedly said that the true meaning of the*Syllabus* could be discovered only be referring to the original context. So the offensive proposition 80 came from the brief *Iamdudum Cernimus* of 1861. Its apparently wholesale condemnation of "progress, liberalism and modern civilization" in fact referred quite specifically to the Piedmontese government's closure of the monasteries and Church schools.
- · The *Syllabus* generated the most difficulty in the United States, where it was often used as anti-Catholic fodder in making the case that the Church was fundamentally opposed to the separation of Church and State, religious tolerance, public schools and free speech. It is still used today in that regard by some fundamentalist critics, forgetting the time and the context in which it was written.
- · In recent years, no event more surprised Catholics than the story of a young Jewish boy taken from the home of his parents during the papacy of Pius IX to be raised as a Catholic. Though it caused an international furor in its time, the story had been generally forgotten until resurrected in David Kertzer's, "The Kidnapping of Edgardo Mortara" published in 1997. Kertzer theorizes that the story had disappeared because Jews were embarrassed that the young boy would eventually become a priest, and Catholics were

simply embarrassed by the whole affair.

- · The Mortara affair is portrayed as a sign of the Church's part in creating the racial anti-Semitism in Italian fascism. As such, the Church played a role in establishing the framework for the Italian racial laws of 1938. This is both to misunderstand the motivations involved in the Mortara affair at the time, and forgets that it was the Church that protested vehemently the 1938 laws and was the single greatest protector of Italian Jews during the war years.
- · Upon becoming Pope, Pius IX ordered the end to various insulting traditions aimed at the Jewish community in Rome: anti-Jewish comedies and the necessity than representatives of the community be forced to hear sermons once a year exhorting them to conversion. The walls enclosing the ghetto were torn down. To the Jews, the liberal regime of Pius IX felt to them like a miracle.
- · It had come to the light of Church authorities in Bologna, specifically the Dominican head of the local Inquisition, that a servant girl had baptized young Edgardo Mortara as an infant when she thought he was in danger of dying. This was one of the very clear reasons why Christians were not supposed to be employed in Jewish households. It was against the law for Jews to be baptized without consent and fear of just such cases was at the heart of the legislation.
- · The difficulty for the Church, and Pius as he became aware of the affair, was that it was left with little choice at the time. While it is difficult today to understand the position the Church took in taking a child from his parents, the action was not without precedent and was not uncommon. It was simply considered impossible for a baptized child to remain in a home where he would not – could not – be raised Christian. Such experiences were commonplace even decades later in

America. As late as the early 20th century, it was common for Irish Catholic children to be plucked off the streets of New York and transported to the West to be raised by solid Protestant families. It was considered an act of charity and evangelization, assuring that the children would be raised good Protestants.

- · Edgardo Mortara eventually made peace with his mother and family, though his father passed away before they could be reconciled.[27] He remained a monk and died in 1940 at the age of 88 at a Belgian abbey where he lived and studied for many years.
- · In his actions, Pius reflected both the generally accepted norms of the time concerning families of mixed religion, as well as the law as it stood within the Papal States. To return Edgardo would have been, to Pius IX, the very denial of the validity and sacredness of the sacrament of baptism.
- · It was originally though that the First Vatican Council would be pastoral in tone, dealing with the widely felt need to update Church canonical law and the status of the growing foreign missions. However, the agenda quickly turned doctrinal in intent. It was generally concluded that a Council was necessary to discuss the authority of the papal office itself.
- · Virtually no one in the hierarchy of the Church outright rejected the theological concept of papal infallibility – that when the Pope addressed matters of faith and morals as the Vicar of Christ, he was guided by the Holy Spirit and therefore not subject to error. However, it had never been clearly defined as to the extent of that infallibility and that is where true divisions existed.
- · Pius IX exerted as much pressure as he could to secure the definition of papal infallibility, proclaiming famously to one cardinal, “I am the church! I am the tradition!” Yet even Lord Acton, who loathed

Pius and looked for curial conspiracies everywhere, had to acknowledge that debates were open and ideas freely exchanged.

- · The fact was that consensus emerged, except for extremists on each side, that spelled out a definition of papal infallibility clearly in line with Church tradition and the theology of the papacy. As the conciliar fathers grew closer to consensus and understanding, a definition emerged that was far from ultramontane. The Council proclaimed no new teaching that extended papal authority beyond a point the Church had understood for centuries. The definition of papal infallibility by the First Vatican Council was not created or mandated by Pope Pius IX. It was a reaffirmation of a consistent teaching of the Church as subsequent history has clearly shown.
- · Pius was not an anti-Semite, though he certainly was a man of his times in regard to the questions of religious tolerance. He defended the thousand-year existence of the Papal States not for monarchial pretensions, but for defense of the freedom of the papacy to exercise its spiritual authority. He defended the Church against modern propositions that were high-sounding, but utilized to arrest bishops, shoot priests, close Catholic schools, disband religious orders and force the Church out of civil society. Though firm in his belief in papal infallibility, he did not force a definition on the First Vatican Council that was greater than the tradition of the Church.
- · The greatest enemies of Pius IX never questioned the deepness and sincerity of the faith he believed and lived. His incessant promotion of a rich devotional life within the Church led to a renewal of popular Catholic spirituality that had not been seen for over a century.
- · The long papacy of Pope Pius IX rescued the Church from its darkest days in the aftermath of the

French Revolution. In 1815, the Church as an institution in continental Europe had nearly been destroyed. Two popes had been imprisoned, religious orders destroyed, the Church in chaos. When Pius IX died on February 7, 1878, after a 32-year reign, the Church had been reborn.

ENDNOTES

[1]Vatican Letter, by John Thavis, August 25, 2000, "Balancing Act: Popes to be beatified were very different" (Catholic News Service).

[2]Ibid.

[3]For the case against Pius IX within Catholic circles, see *Commonweal*, August 11, 2000, "No! No! Pio Nono!"

[4]For an outline of the troubled pontificates of Pius VI and Pius VII, see *Saints and Sinners: A History of the Popes*, by Eamon Duffy (Yale University Press, 1997) pp. 195-214.

[5]Duffy, p. 214.

[6]Pope Pius VIII ruled for 17 months from 1829-1830. He had been imprisoned for six years under Napoleon for refusing to swear allegiance to the French government. As pope, he would relax Leo XII's restrictive measures in the Papal States and would recognize the regime of Louis Phillippe in France after the Revolution of 1830.

[7]Duffy, p. 219.

[8] *A History of the Popes, 1830-1914*, by Owen Chadwick (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1998) p. 63.

[9] *Chadwick*, p. 81.

[10] Ibid, p. 112.

[11] Ibid, pp. 114-115, 124-125.

[12] See *Nativism and Slavery*, by Tyler Abner (Oxford University Press, 1992) pp. 127-161.

[13] Chadwick, pp. 141-160, pp. 215-218.

[14] See Chadwick, pp. 254-265.

[15] *Syllabus of Pius IX* (2).

[16] Ibid (39).

[17]Chadwick, pp. 174-175.

[18] *Syllabus of Pius IX* (80).

[19] Duffy, p. 229.

[20] *The Kidnapping of Edgardo Mortara*, by David I. Kertzer (Alfred A. Knopf, 1997).

[21] Ibid, p. 301.

[22] Ibid.

[23]For Vatican reaction to the Italian racial laws of 1938 see *Hitler, the War and the Pope*, by Ronald J. Rychlak (Our Sunday Visitor, 2000) pp. 103-104.

[24] Chadwick, p. 129.

[25] See *The Great Arizona Orphan Abduction*, by Linda Gordon (Harvard University Press, 1999) for the case of Catholic children transported to be raised by Hispanic Catholic families. The children were seized upon their arrival to protect them from being raised in a Catholic – and Hispanic – environment.

[26] Giuseppe Coen was a 9-year-old Jewish boy who lived in the Rome ghetto who had asked his employer to assist him in converting, or so the story is related. His parents believed that his employer forced the issue. When troops entered Rome, Coen was found and returned to his parents. He apparently wanted nothing to do with them and demanded he be set free. A court ordered him to his parents' custody. They took him out of the city. He would eventually return to Rome and become a priest.

[27]In a curious aftermath, Edgardo's father was charged with murder in the death of a servant girl in his employ in 1871.

He was convicted, then freed by an appeal's court when it was ruled the girl's death was a suicide. See *Kertzer*, pp. 266-294.

[28] Cited in Kertzer, p. 125, 126.

[29] See *The Spanish Inquisition: A Historical Revision,* by Henry Kamen (Yale University Press, 1997), p. 309.

[30]For a contemporary biography of Acton see *Lord Acton*, by Rolland Hill (Yale University Press, 2000).

[31]Hill, p. 200.

[32]Ibid.

[32]Ibid, p. 407.

[33] *Papal Sin*, by Garry Wills (Doubleday, 2000) pp. 252-256.

[34] Chadwick, 113.

[35] Duffy, p. 234.