

**The Pope and the Professor: Pius IX, Ignaz von Döllinger, and the Quandary of the Modern Age**, Thomas Albert Howard, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017 (ISBN 978-0-198-72919-8), xx+339 pp. hb. £35.

This exceptional and erudite book recounts the story of Ignaz von Döllinger (1799-1890), German priest, academic, theologian, and the man who challenged papal infallibility. Few today will have heard of Döllinger, although his celebrity in the 1870s was such that the universities of Oxford, Edinburgh, and Marburg all conferred honorary doctorates on him in the space of a single year. Döllinger's cause célèbre was to have been excommunicated in April 1871 by Gregor von Scherr, Archbishop of Munich. Scherr's punishment, never retracted, deprived Döllinger of his role in the Church, admonished fellow Catholics to shun him, and denied him Christian burial. Döllinger won plenty of plaudits from diverse sources, the Manchester Guardian, Harper's Weekly, and the New York Herald amongst them. But such acclaim offered him little consolation compared to the fate that had been pronounced upon him. He died unrepentant and insisting on his loyalty to the Church to the last.

Scherr acted against Döllinger because Döllinger had publicly rejected the decrees of the Council which had met in the Vatican from 1869 to 1870. The Council, in particular, had declared the pope's judgment in matters of doctrine to be dogma – a declaration which had complex origins. Pius IX (r. 1846-78), an embattled and beleaguered figurehead whose sovereign state was undergoing its last death-rattle, had welcomed it, but had not been its prime mover. Henry (later Cardinal) Manning, convert and Archbishop of Westminster, had been a tribune for the popular groundswell of opinion favouring the development and had marshalled considerable support for it within the wider Church hierarchy. Yet the decision was still controversial, with powerful detractors as well as supporters. Some detractors objected on pragmatic grounds: they feared that the decision would alienate many Catholics and antagonize non-Catholics, that it would place a further wedge between the Church and other Christian Churches, and that might provoke secular governments to interfere in Church matters even more. Döllinger, though he may have accepted some of these other arguments, had a more fundamental objection: those who promoted claims of the pope's infallibility did so on the basis of fabricated documents which distorted the historical record. For Döllinger, the leading Catholic exponent of Historicism, the pope's claim to be infallible was unacceptable because it was untrue. Döllinger became one of forty-four Munich professors who organized a congress to condemn the Vatican decrees.

Döllinger was a reluctant standard-bearer and endured a life as tragic as it was compelling. As he himself confessed a little after his excommunication: 'I had not the slightest clue [when I was younger]... that I would achieve a world-wide reputation as the opponent of the Pope. This weighs heavily upon me' (p.115). Yet this book is about more than just its chief protagonist. Its secondary combatant, Giovanni Maria Mastai-Ferretti, is scarcely less prominent. Moreover, even as Döllinger's papal opponent Pius IX, he is no simple villain of the piece. Pius emerges from these pages a complicated and forlorn man. Instinctively liberal (at least by the standards of the early nineteenth-century episcopate), he underwent a Damascene conversion to hard-line conservatism

after the revolutionaries of 1848 forced him to flee Rome. That much is well known. But the nuances of Pius' personality and of his tortured, ultimately doomed, strategy for resisting Italian Unification are as well-captured here as in any other study in English to date. In fact, the pre-*Risorgimento* papacy gets its own chapter to parallel that on Döllinger's early life. Howard's reading of the problems popes faced is fresh and surprisingly sympathetic: he empathizes with the bind that the successors of Pius VI (r. 1775-99) were in and understands them very much as men of their time. Crucially, Howard makes the case that the papacy's reactionary position had a certain internal logic: nineteenth-century popes saw themselves not as quaint anachronisms but as divinely ordained spiritual and temporal leaders whose on-going authority was needed if Christian souls were to be saved from eternal damnation. No price could be worth paying if it jeopardized that.

Today, we may sense that popes' absolute and abject opposition to Liberalism and modernity was a mistake. But, even from a pragmatic perspective, it is not at all clear that it was the wrong policy at the time. The papacy is still here, tending to its *cura animarum* – a situation which seems at first glance to vindicate Pius IX. The 'Quandary of the Modern Age', to which Howard refers in his subtitle, was this: the papacy could only hope to survive modernity by rejecting it but ordinary Catholics could only hope to profit from it by embracing it. How to square that circle was anyone's guess. That problem brings me to my final observations about Howard's magnificent achievement. One gets a strong sense that Howard sympathizes rather more with Döllinger than with Pius and also that he believes the Catholicism which has emerged since Vatican II reflects Döllinger's vision of a faith governed by conscience rather more than it does Pius' of one governed by authority. I wonder how far that is necessarily true? In any case, especially if you hold that it was Döllinger who won out in the end, John Paul II's decision to set *Pio Nono* on the road to sainthood is ironic. Döllinger's name, by contrast, is still – and, as Howard shows, unjustly – relegated to the obscure footnotes of academic historians. I hope that this book changes that and I feel sure that it will.

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