

# The First Vatican Council

1869-1870

The 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries were marked with revolutions throughout Europe that often turned violent as well as scientific and other intellectual advancements. Commonly, these movements were initiated by concerns for justice as well as creative thought. However, the movements were also often used as covers for efforts to destroy the Church, faith itself, and eventually to remove the notion of the existence of God.

## Pope Pius IX



Elected Pope as a progressive moderate in 1846. Political and military events of the time, including his being forced from Rome led to a shift in his stance from the temporal (i.e. involvement with states and emperors) toward the spiritual. Challenges of heretical movements such as Jansenism (emphasis on human depravity and predestination), and state churches such as the Gallican church (aimed at formation of a French catholic church to preserve ancient French customs), and Febronianism (directed towards a separate German catholic church) were met by centralizing church authority. To accomplish this, Pope Pius IX summoned *Vatican I*.

## The *Vatican I* Council's Two Decrees

Chapter four of the 1<sup>st</sup> decree was deemed most significant in steering a middle course, “...*FAITH and REASON ... support each other*”, between the excessive authority of REASON exemplified by the Enlightenment and that of FAITH exemplified by religious fundamentalism.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> decree has been more notable, especially the chapter on papal infallibility. In essence it states: “...*a certain primacy among the apostles and over the church had been given to Peter...*”.

## The *First Vatican Council* moved the Church: From To

concern for effects of secular and intellectual attacks on Faith



a positive appreciation of human creativity and the advancement of science

questioning of papal authority



a clear statement of papal authority

Cardinal John Henry Newman on Vatican I ‘...*at first sight it would seem to invite the Pope to use his now recognized power. But we must have a little faith. Abstract propositions avail little-theology surrounds them with a variety of limitations, explanations, etc. No truth stands by itself-each is kept in order and harmonized by other truths. The dogmas relative to the Holy Trinity and the Incarnation were not struck off all at once-but piecemeal-one Council did one thing, another a second-and so the whole dogma was built up. And the first portion of it looked extreme-and controversies rose upon it-and these controversies led to the second, and third Councils, and they did not reverse the first, but explained and completed what was first done. So will it be now. Future Popes will explain and in one sense limit their own power. This would be unlikely, if they merely acted as men, but God will overrule them. Pius has been overruled-I believe he wished a much more stringent dogma than he has got. Let us have faith and patience.*’ \*



\* From: Letters of John Henry Newman, May 15, 1871