

History of the Church – The Church at the dawn of the Modern Age.

(Notes taken from Canon Poucin's Faith talk)



Napoleon had set up the French Empire in 1804 and with it came the ideologies of the French revolution. These ideologies were to result in subsequent revolutions in all the countries once occupied by France at the time of Napoleon. Outside of France, Napoleon had seized and sold church property, leaving Bishopsrics vacant and parishes without priests. He imprisoned Pope Pius VII for his refusal to support his war efforts. With the defeat of Napoleon in 1815 at Waterloo and the liberation of the Pontiff, Cardinal Consalvi, the Papal Secretary of State set about the restoration of the Church. The suppressed Jesuits were restored in 1814.

The Church although now materially poor, began a period of spiritual flourishing, with the opening of new schools, congregations and missions. Thousands of young men joined the seminaries. (Unfortunately with the prior upheaval, the formation in the seminaries was not a rigorous as would be desired.) The beginnings of the Industrial revolution was bringing with it new social problems which the Church then addressed, energised by the sanctity of saints such as St. John Vianney, (now patron saint of Parish Priests), St John Bosco (who advised the Pope and established free schools for the poor, the teaching order of the Salesians and orphanages).

In the British Isles, centuries of catholic persecution began to end when the 'Emancipation Bill' was enacted in April 1829. This restored some freedoms to Catholics and was brought about when the Irish MP Daniel O'Connell refused to take the oath denouncing Catholic teaching. In 1850 under Pius IX the hierarchy was reestablished, due in part to the teaching of Bl. Cardinal Henry Newman and in part to Irish immigration.



Pope Pius IX

In Italy the seeds of revolution manifested in the 'Young Italy Party', who wished to unite all Italian States into one Kingdom. The impetus for this was not a love of the 'Home land', but one of social contract. As a concession, Pius IX allowed non-clerics some administrative authority. Several uprisings took place in the Papal States. The Pope was exiled from Rome and it was only with the aid of French and Spanish troops that in 1849 Rome was recaptured and peace could be maintained. A small unit of French troops remained to maintain security of the Pope.

The Pope sought to reorganise the Papal army in the Spirit of Pope Urban II, so as to defend Christendom. Thousands of young men responded to his call. In June 1870 France went to war against Prussia and so recalled her armies from Rome. The Italian Army then invaded Rome and the Pope was imprisoned in Vatican City. In 1871 he was released and given some influence on matters of diplomacy. Despite these troubles the Church was growing.

As Empires expanded around the world, missionaries took the faith to these new territories such as America, China, India, Asia and Africa.

Church Doctrines :

On 8th December 1854 Pope Pius IX proclaimed the Immaculate conception of the blessed Virgin a dogma of the Church

The infallibility of the pope was formally defined in 1870, although the tradition behind this view goes back much further