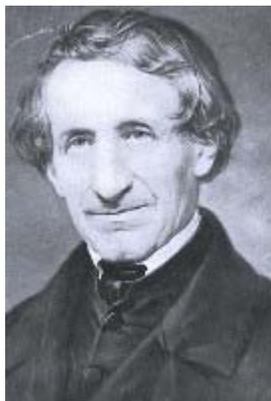


## JOHANN JOSEPH IGNAZ VON DOLLINGER

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JOHANN JOSEPH IGNAZ VON DOLLINGER, German theologian and church historian, was born at Bamberg, Bavaria, on the 28th of February 1799. He came of an intellectual family, his grandfather and father having both been physicians of eminence and professors of one or other of the branches of medical science; his mother too belonged to a family not undistinguished in intellectual ability.

Young Dollinger was first educated in the gymnasium at Wiirzburg, and then began to study natural philosophy at the university in that city, where his father now held a professorship. In 1817 he began the study of mental philosophy and philology, and in 1818 turned to the study of theology, which he believed to lie beneath every other science. He particularly devoted himself to an independent study of ecclesiastical history, a subject very indifferently taught in Roman Catholic Germany at that time. In 1820 he became acquainted with Victor Aime Huber (1800-1869), a fact which largely influenced his life. On the 5th of April 1822 he was ordained priest, after studying at Bamberg, and in 1823 he became professor of ecclesiastical history and canon law in the lyceum at Aschaffenburg. He then took his doctor's degree, and in 1826 became professor of theology at Munich, where he spent the rest of his life.

It has been stated that in his earlier years Dollinger was a pronounced Ultramontane. This does not appear to have been altogether the case; for, very early in his professorial career at Munich, the Jesuits attacked his teaching of ecclesiastical history, and the celebrated J. A. Mohler (q.v.) who afterwards became his friend, on being appealed to, pronounced on the whole in his favor. He also entered into relations with the well-known French Liberal Catholic Lamennais, whose views on the reconciliation of the Roman Catholic Church with the principles of modern society had aroused much suspicion in Ultramontane circles. In 1832 Lamennais, with his friends Lacordaire and Montalembert, visited Germany, and obtained considerable sympathy in their attempts to bring about a modification of the Roman Catholic attitude to modern problems. Dollinger seems to have regarded favorably the removal, by the Bavarian government, in 1841, of Professor Kaiser from his chair, because he had taught the infallibility of the pope. On the other hand, he published a treatise in 1838 against mixed marriages, and in 1843 wrote strongly in favor of requiring Protestant soldiers to kneel at the consecration of the Host when compelled officially to be present at Mass. Moreover, in his works on *The Reformation* (3 vols. Regensburg, 1846-1848) and on *Luther* (1851, Eng. tr., 1853) he is very severe on the Protestant leaders, and he also accepts, in his earlier works, the Ultramontane view then current on the practical condition of the Church of England, a view which in later days he found reason to change.

Meanwhile he had visited England, where he was well received; and he afterwards traveled in Holland, Belgium and France, acquainting himself with the condition and prospects of the Roman Catholic Church. In 1842 he entered into correspondence with the leaders of the Tractarian movement in England, and some interesting letters have been preserved which were exchanged between him and Pusey, Gladstone and Hope Scott. When the last-named joined the Church of Rome he was warmly congratulated by Dollinger on the step he had taken. He, however, much regretted the gradual and very natural trend of his new English allies towards extreme Ultramontane views, of which Archdeacon, afterwards Cardinal, Manning ultimately became an enthusiastic advocate.

In 1845 Dollinger was made representative of his university in the second chamber of the Bavarian legislature. In 1847, in consequence of the fall from power of the Abel ministry in Bavaria, with which he had been in close relations, he was removed from his professorship at Munich, but in 1849 he was invited to occupy the chair of ecclesiastical history. In 1848, when nearly every throne in Europe was shaken by the spread of revolutionary sentiments, he was elected delegate to the national German assembly at Frankfort, - a sufficient proof that at this time he was regarded as no mere narrow and technical theologian, but as a man of wide and independent views.

It has been said that his change of relations to the Papacy dated from the Italian war in 1859, but no sufficient reason has been given for this statement. It is more probable that, like Grosseteste, he had imbibed in early youth an enthusiastic sentiment of attachment to the Papacy as the only centre of authority, and the only guarantee for public order in the Church, but that his experience of the actual working of the papal system, especially after a visit to Rome in 1857, had to a certain extent convinced him how little correspondence there was between his ideal and the reality.

He may also have been unfavorably impressed with the promulgation by Pius IX. in 1854 of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin. But whatever may have been his reasons, he ultimately became the leader of those who were energetically opposed to any addition to, or more stringent definition of, the powers which the Papacy had possessed for centuries. In some speeches delivered at Munich in 1861 he outspokenly declared his view that the maintenance of the Roman Catholic Church did not depend on the temporal sovereignty of the pope. His book on *The Church and the Churches* (Munich, 1861) dealt to a certain extent with the same question.

In 1863 he invited 100 theologians to meet at Malines and discuss the question which Lamennais and Lacordaire had prematurely raised in France, namely, the attitude that should be assumed by the Roman Catholic Church towards modern ideas. His address to the assembled divines was "practically a declaration of war against the Ultramontane party." He had spoken boldly in favor of freedom for the Church in the Frankfort national assembly in 1848, but he had found the authorities of his Church claiming a freedom of a very different kind from that for which he had contended. The freedom he claimed for the Church was freedom to manage her affairs without the interference of the state; the champions of the papal monarchy, and notably the Jesuits, desired freedom in order to put a stop to the dissemination of modern ideas. The addresses delivered in the Catholic congress at Malines were a declaration in the direction of a Liberal solution of the problem of the relations of Church and State. The pope for a moment seemed to hesitate, but there could be little doubt what course he would ultimately pursue, and after four days' debate the assembly was closed at his command.

On the 8th of December 1864 Pius IX issued the famous *Syllabus*, in which he declared war against modern science and progress. It was in connection with this question that Dollinger published his *Past and Present of Catholic Theology* (1863) and his *Universities Past and Present* (Munich, 1867).

We now approach the critical period of Dollinger's life. It was about this time that some of the leading theologians of the Roman Catholic Church, conceiving that the best way of meeting present perils was to emphasize, as well as to define more clearly, the authority of the pope, advised him to make his personal infallibility a dogma of the Church, and urged strenuously on him the necessity of calling a council for that purpose.

There was considerable opposition in various quarters. Many bishops and theologians considered the proposed definition a false one. Others, though accepting it as the truth,

declared its promulgation to be inopportune. But the headquarters of the opposition was Germany, and its leader was Dollinger, whose high reputation and vast stores of learning placed him far above any other member of the band of the theological experts who now gathered around him. Among them were his intimate friends Johann Friedrich and J. N. Huber, in Bavaria.

In the rest of Germany he found many supporters, chiefly professors in the Catholic faculty of theology at Bonn: among these were the famous canonist von Schulte, Franz Heinrich Reusch, the ecclesiastical historian Joseph Langen, as well as J.H. Reinkens, afterwards bishop of the Old Catholic Church in Germany, Knoodt, and other distinguished scholars. In Switzerland, Professor Edward Herzog, who became Old Catholic bishop in Switzerland, and other learned men supported the movement.

Early in 1869 the famous *Letters of Janus* (which were at once translated into English; 2nd ed. *Das Papsttum*, 1891) began to appear. They were written by Dollinger in conjunction with Huber and Friedrich, afterwards professor at Munich. In these the tendency of the *Syllabus* towards obscurantism and papal despotism, and its incompatibility with modern thought, were clearly pointed out; and the evidence against papal infallibility, resting, as the *Letters* asserted, on the False Decretals, and accepted without controversy in an age of ignorance, was ably marshaled for the guidance of the council.

When, on the 8th of December 1869, the Vatican I had actually assembled, the world was kept informed of what was going on in the *Letters of Quirinus*, written by Dollinger and Huber while the debates of the council were proceeding. Some of these letters appeared in the German newspapers, and an English translation was published by Rivington. Augustin Theiner, the librarian at the Vatican, then in disgrace with the pope for his outspoken Liberalism, kept his German friends well informed of the course of the discussions. The proceedings of the council were frequently very stormy, and the opponents of the dogma of infallibility complained that they were frequently interrupted, and that endeavors were made to put them down by clamor. The dogma was at length carried by an overwhelming majority, and the dissentient bishops, who - with the exception of two - had left the council before the final division, one by one submitted to the party of the Ultramontanes.

Dollinger, however, was not to be silenced. He headed a protest by forty-four professors in the University of Munich, and gathered together a congress at Nuremberg, which met in August 1870 and issued a declaration adverse to the Vatican I decrees. An immense ferment took place. In Bavaria, where Dollinger's influence was greatest, the strongest determination to resist the resolutions of the council prevailed. But the authority of the council was held by the archbishop of Munich to be paramount, and he called upon Dollinger to submit.

Instead of submitting, Dollinger, on the 28th of March 1871, addressed a memorable letter to the archbishop, refusing to subscribe the decrees. They were, he said, opposed to Holy Scripture, to the traditions of the Church for the first 1000 years, to historical evidence, to the decrees of the Ecumenical Councils, and to the existing relations of the Roman Catholic Church to the state in every country in the world. "As a Christian, as a theologian, as an historian, and as a citizen," he added, "I cannot accept this doctrine."

The archbishop replied by excommunicating the disobedient professor. This aroused fresh opposition. Dollinger was almost unanimously elected rector-magnificus of the University of Munich, and Oxford, Edinburgh and Marburg universities conferred upon him the honorary degree of doctor of laws and Vienna that of philosophy.

The Bavarian clergy invited Bishop Loos of the Jansenist Church in Holland, which for more than 150 years had existed independent of the Papacy and had adopted the name of "Old

Catholic," to hold confirmations in Bavaria. The offer was accepted, and the bishop was received with triumphal arches and other demonstrations of joy. The three Dutch Old Catholic bishops declared themselves ready to consecrate a bishop, if it were desired. The momentous question was discussed at a meeting of the opponents of the Vatican decrees, and it was resolved to elect a bishop and ask the Dutch bishops to consecrate him.

Dollinger, however, voted against the proposition, and withdrew from any further steps towards the promotion of the movement. This was the critical moment in the history of the resistance to the decrees. Had Dollinger, with his immense reputation as a scholar, as a theologian, and as a man, allowed himself to be consecrated bishop of the Old Catholic Church, it is impossible to say how wide the movement would have been. But he declined to initiate a schism. His refusal lost Bavaria to the movement; and the number of Bavarian sympathizers was still further reduced when the seceders, in 1878, allowed their priests to marry, a decision which Dollinger, as was known, sincerely regretted. The Old Catholic Communion, however, was formally constituted, with Reinkens at its head as bishop, and it still continues to exist.

Dollinger's attitude to the new community was not very clearly defined. It may be difficult to reconcile the two declarations made by him at different times: "I do not wish to join a schismatic society; I am isolated," and "As for myself, I consider that I belong by conviction to the Old Catholic community." The latter declaration was made some years after the former, in a letter to Pastor Widmann. The nearest approach to a reconciliation of the two statements would appear to be that while, at his advanced age, he did not wish to assume the responsibility of being head of a new communion, formed in circumstances of exceptional difficulty, he was unwilling to condemn those who were ready to hazard the new departure.

"By conviction" he belonged to the Old Catholics, but he never formally joined them. Yet at least he was ready to meet their leaders, to address them, and to discuss difficult problems with them. His addresses on the reunion of the Churches, delivered at the Bonn Conference of 1872, show that he was by no means hostile to the newly formed communion, in whose interests these conferences were held.

In 1874 and again in 1875, he presided over the Reunion Conferences held at Bonn and attended by leading ecclesiastics from the British Isles and from the Eastern Orthodox Church, among whom were Bishop Christopher Wordsworth of Lincoln; Bishop Harold Browne of Ely; Lord Plunket, archbishop of Dublin; Lycurgus, archbishop of Syros and Tenos; Canon Liddon; and Professor Ossinine of St Petersburg, Russia. At the latter of these two conferences, when Dollinger was seventy-six years of age, he delivered a series of marvelous addresses in German and English, in which he discussed the state of theology on the continent, the reunion question, and the religious condition of the various countries of Europe in which the Roman Catholic Church held sway.

Not the least of his achievements on this occasion was the successful attempt, made with extraordinary tact, ability, knowledge and perseverance, to induce the Eastern Orthodox, Anglicans, and Old Catholics present to accept a formula of concord, drawn from the writings of the leading theologians of the Greek Church, on the long-vexed question of the Procession of the Holy Spirit. This result having been attained, he passed the rest of his days in retirement, emerging sometimes from his retreat to give addresses on theological questions, and also writing, in conjunction with his friend Reusch, his last book, *Geschichte der Moralstreitigkeiten in der romisch-katholischen Kirche seit dem sechzehnten Jahrhundert mit Beiträgen zur Geschichte and Charakteristik des Jesuitenordens* (Nordlingen, 1889), in which he deals with the moral theology of St Alfonso de' Liguori.

Dollinger died in Munich, on the 14th of January 1890, at the age of ninety-one. Even *in articulo mortis* he refused to receive the sacraments from the parish priest at the cost of submission, but the last offices were performed by his friend Professor Friedrich.

In addition to the works referred to in the foregoing sketch, we may mention *The Eucharist in the First Three Centuries* (Mainz, 1826); a *Church History* (1836, Eng. trans. 1840); *Hippolytus and Callistus* (1854, Eng. trans., 1876); *First Age of Christianity* (1860); *Lectures on the Reunion of the Churches*; *The Vatican Decrees*; *Studies in European History* (tr. M. Warre, 1890); *Miscellaneous Addresses* (tr. M. Warre, 1894).