

### Philosophical and Theological Background of *Aeterni Patris*

When Leo XIII became pope, his brother, Giuseppe Pecci, urged him to write an encyclical expressing his desire that the philosophy and theology of St. Thomas become the only ones taught in the Church's seminaries and universities. Matteo Liberatore, a leading Jesuit Neo-Scholastic, and, in all probability, Msgr. Salvatore Talamo made similar requests.<sup>19</sup> In 1846 Gaetano Sansaverino had founded the first Italian academy of Thomistic philosophy at Naples. Talamo was Sansaverino's most prominent disciple and a respected scholar in his own right.

Liberatore was the most prominent writer in the vigorous campaign conducted by the Jesuit editors of *Civiltà cattolica* for the restoration of Thomism. His articles, reprinted in book form, are ranked among the major works of nineteenth-century scholasticism. Liberatore's closely argued treatises on epistemology (*Della conoscenza intellettuale*), philosophy of man (*Del uomo*), and ethics (*Istituzioni di etica e diretto naturale*), citing St. Thomas as their sole authority, are a sustained exposition and defense of Neo-Scholastic philosophy.<sup>20</sup> In their pages epistemology, philosophy of man and being, and ethics are related to one another. Liberatore's scholastic philosophy thus assumes the character of a coherent, integrated system better suited than the post-Cartesian systems of philosophy to deal with the problems of truth, reality, and human conduct. Since Liberatore was commissioned to prepare a draft scheme for *Aeterni Patris*, his influence on its content is more than a matter of conjecture.

Another schema was prepared by a second Jesuit Neo-Scholastic, the German theologian Joseph Kleutgen. Kleutgen, who was, in a way, the Vatican's "German expert," had been attached for years to the German College in Rome and had held important positions at the Jesuit Curia there. He had served as consultor to the Congregation of the Index at a time when Rome condemned the works of several non-scholastic philosophers and theologians, and, with his Jesuit colleague Johannes Franzelin, co-authored the draft of the Constitution on the Act of Faith adopted at the First Vatican Council.<sup>21</sup> Kleutgen is considered the most powerful thinker among the group of Jesuits committed to the restoration of scholasticism