

THE *HUMANI GENERIS* AND ITS PREDECESSORS

On Dec. 8, 1864, Pope Pius IX issued his famous encyclical *Quanta cura*, and sent it, together with his *Errorum syllabus*, a listing of the doctrinal vagaries he had proscribed and condemned in earlier apostolic pronouncements, to the Catholic episcopate throughout the world. After an interval of about forty-three years another pontifical document, the encyclical *Pascendi dombijci gregis*, was written by Pope Pius X to unmask and to destroy the inaccurate teachings on the subject of religion that were current at that time. Four months ago, again after the space of about forty-three years, the present Holy Father signed his encyclical *Humani generis*, a document in which several dangerous contemporary errors have been denounced and corrected.

Obviously the world of Catholic scholarship is very much interested in the *Humani generis*, and its interest is far more than merely academic. In this encyclical the Holy Father has charged "the Bishops and the Superiors General of Communities, binding them most seriously in conscience, to take most diligent care that such opinions [as those condemned in this document] be not advanced in schools, in conference, or in writings of any kind, and that they be not taught in any manner whatsoever to the clergy or the faithful."¹ He has likewise warned "the teachers in ecclesiastical institutions" that they must "be aware that they cannot with tranquil conscience exercise the office of teaching entrusted to them, unless in the instruction of their students they religiously accept and exactly observe" the norms set forth in this letter.² The profound interest in the *Humani generis* manifested in our land constitutes an indication that, the Holy Father's commands are being obeyed wholeheartedly. J

There is much to be learned about the content and the spirit of the *Humani generis* by looking at it in the light or against the background of the *Quanta cura* and the *Pascendi dominici gregis*. The three pontifical letters have certain common characteristics. Nevertheless each one of them is dominated by individual elements and concerns, calculated to resolve the religious difficulties and errors

¹ In the *NCWC* translation (Washington, 1950), n. 41.

* *Ibid.*, n. 42.

I prevalent in the particular situation towards which each has been
 I directed. As a result, an examination of the *Humani generis*
 I against the background of the other two documents will serve to
 I show that some of the errors deplored by the present Holy Father
 I have been evils affecting Catholic thought and teaching over much
 I of the century, while others are definitely the products of our own
 I generation.

In the *Quanta cura* Pope Pius IX points to the fact that, during the course of his reign as Sovereign Pontiff, he has followed the example set by his illustrious predecessors and has many times ? "in several published letters, in consistorial allocutions, and in many other communications condemned the outstanding errors of our most unhappy age."³ He describes the *Quanta cura* itself as a document intended to stir up the vigilance of the Bishops "to reprove other evil opinions that spring up from these same errors as from their sources."⁴ The references attached to the *Syllabus* which accompanied this encyclical show that Pope Pius IX had in mind no less than thirty-two of his own documents which were devoted to the condemnation of errors current at that time. There were no less than eighty propositions contained in the *Syllabus*. They were divided under ten different headings.

There are some rather interesting parallels between the *Syllabus* and the *Humani generis*. The present Holy Father denounces the error of those who try to explain all things in terms of evolution, while the *Syllabus* designates as condemned the proposition that "divine revelation is imperfect and therefore subject to continuous and indefinite progress, which should correspond to the progress of human reason."⁵ The *Humani generis* attacks the notion that the decrees of the visible ruler of the Church militant are opposed to the free progress of science, a contention previously condemned in the *Syllabus*? Both documents likewise discountenance the notion that the method and the principles excogitated by the old scholastic teachers are inadequate for the demands of our times and for the progress of science.⁷ Both likewise reprove a broad

³ In the *Libellus fidei*, edited by Bernard Gaudeau. S.J. (Paris: Lethielleux, 1897), n. 618.

⁴ Gaudeau, n. 619; *DB*, 1688.

⁵ *Syllabus*, n. 5; *DB*, 1705.

⁶ *Humani generis*, n. 18; *Syllabus*, n. 12, *DB*, 1712.

⁷ *Humani generis*, nn. 14 ff.; *Syllabus*, n. 13, *DB*, 1713.

and evasive interpretation of the teaching on the Church's necessity for salvation,⁸ and both rejected the idea that Catholics are obligated to assent only to those propositions which the Church has infallibly defined as dogmas, as truths revealed by God as a part of Christian revelation and entrusted to the Church to be guarded and taught infallibly always.⁹

The *Quanta cura* charges the men who are spreading naturalism, socialism, and communism, the three errors with which it was principally concerned, with striving to bring about a situation in which the "salutary doctrine and force of the Catholic Church should be entirely taken away from the training and the education of youth."¹⁰ It asserts that these individuals are directing all their plans, their efforts and their activities to the task of deceiving and spiritually harming the young people. The *Humani generis* likewise contains an accusation that the erroneous teachings against which it is directed tend to bring about spiritual harm especially among the younger clergy.¹¹ This same encyclical states that the opinions it sets out to combat are actually being advanced, "either openly or covertly," and it credits these false teachings with a power to "entice the incautious."¹² The present Holy Father's letter, however, contains no direct attack on the intentions of the men who are engaged in spreading the false teachings the *Humani generis* sets out to oppose. It merely asserts that these views are being spread abroad in our day "through a desire for novelty or through a certain immoderate zeal for the apostolate."¹³ The Holy Father takes cognizance of the fact that these false teachings have been taught both openly and covertly, but he likewise, shows that, in his opinion, these evils have not yet had sufficient time to become deeply rooted in Catholic society.

On these points it is quite interesting to compare the *Humani generis* with the *Pascendi dominici gregis*. One of the most striking paragraphs in the present *Holy Father's* encyclical is the one in which he accuses the teachers of the opinions reproved in this document of advocating their views in two different manners, moder-

⁸ *Syllabus*, nn. 15 ff.; *DB*, 1715, ff.; *Humani generis*, n. 27.

⁹ Cf. *Syllabus*, n. 22, *DB*, 1722; *Humani generis*, n. 18.

¹⁰ Gaudeau, n. 622.

¹¹ Cf. n. 13.

¹² Cf. n. 40.

¹³ *Ibid.*

ately in their signed and printed writings, and more boldly elsewhere. These are his words.

These new opinions, whether they originate from a reprehensible desire of novelty or from a laudable motive, are not always advanced in the same degree, with equal clarity nor in the same terms, nor always with unanimous agreement of their authors. Theories that today are put forward rather covertly by some, not without cautions and distinctions, tomorrow are openly and without moderation proclaimed by others more audacious, causing scandal to many, especially among the young clergy and to the detriment of ecclesiastical authority. Though they are usually more cautious in their published works, they express themselves more openly in their writings intended for private circulation and in conferences and lectures.¹¹

The corresponding passage in the *Pascendi* is much more detailed and much more bitter. In describing the methods of the Modernists, Pope Pius X adverted to the fact that "In sermons from the pulpit they disseminate their doctrines, although possibly in utterances which are veiled. In congresses they express their teachings more openly. In their social gatherings they introduce them and commend them *to others*."¹⁴

It is in keeping with the spirit of the *Humani generis* that the present Holy Father omits any complete parallel to certain other passages in the *Pascendi*, passages in which Pope Pius X spoke of certain procedures adopted by the writers who upheld various sections of Modernistic teaching. Pope Pius X charged that the Modernistic authors bitterly and unjustly attacked the writers who opposed them, or else surrounded the persons and the works of these men by a definite conspiracy of silence. He also claimed that these men constituted a group that was perpetually engaged in showering the highest praise upon its members and sympathizers.¹⁵ It was his contention that, as a result of these manoeuvres, "The young, excited and confused by all this clamor of praise and abuse, some of them afraid of being branded as ignorant, others ambitious to rank among the learned, and both classes goaded internally by'

¹⁴ *Humani generis*, n. 13.

¹⁵ Translation in *The Doctrines of the Modernists* (London: Catholic Truth Society, 1937), p. 56.

¹⁶ Cf. *ibid.*

curiosity and pride, not infrequently surrender and give themselves up to Modernism."¹⁷18

Some of that charge is actually reproduced in the *Humani generis*. Pope Pius XII lists as one class guilty of teaching error within the Church, certain men "desirous of novelty, and fearing to be considered ignorant of recent scientific findings."¹⁸ He charges these individuals, not with becoming Modernists, but with trying "to withdraw themselves from the sacred teaching authority,"¹⁹ and declares that they "are accordingly in danger of gradually departing from revealed truth and of drawing others along with them into error."²⁰

The situation in 1950, however, differed from that which existed forty-three years previously in one very important respect. There was nothing today to oblige the Holy Father to denounce anything like the chorus of opposition towards their adversaries and the mutual hymn of praise for their own lucubrations which Pope Pius X noted and reproved among the Modernists during the first decade of our century. The old Modernists were geniuses, if not in the field of clerical studies, at least within the highly colorful province of advertising. Subsequent history has had to record how powerful their efforts were along this line, despite the earnest and repeated warnings by Pope Pius X.

Although they were, of course, unable to pervert the Catholic faith itself, the enterprising writers of the Modernistic school were spectacularly successful in leaving a highly distorted and over-optimistic picture of themselves and of their movement in the minds of many Catholics. Among the comparatively few reputable Catholic writers who have dealt with the question of Modernism during the past few decades, there has been manifest an overwhelming sympathy with those members of the Church who were in some way involved in or sympathetic to the Modernistic movement, but who were never in any immediate danger of leaving or of being expelled from the Church. And, whatever bitterness they may have shown towards such as Loisy and Tyrrell, it has been nothing in comparison with the contempt they have manifested towards the men who criticized their conclusions in the Catholic press before these teachings were condemned by the ecclesiastical

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Humani generis*, n. 10.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*

•authority. Thus, in sonic sections of Catholic writing, the works of men like Benigni anti Fontaine, to mention only two of the anti-Modernist group, have been con.dstciitly belittled or *ignored*, while *some* rather pretentious efforts at Catholic scholarship still give altogether undeserved attention to the statements *of* such as Loisy. This attitude is mirrored in some epigram? that improperly compare Modernism itself with Integralism, the name given <7r *facto* to the teachings of those men who wrote against the Modernists. One such formula reads, "To preserve life, .Modernism sacrificed forms—to preserve forms, imegralism sacrifices lite."²¹

Not a few of the errors actually reproved in the *Pascendi*, and in its companion-document, the decree *Lamentabili sane exitu*, are also to be found among the false teachings stigmatized by the present Holy Father in the *Humani generis*. It is interesting to find that, on the subject of Holy Scripture, the ninth, the eleventh, and the twelfth of the theses condemned in the *Lamentabili* are also castigated in the recent encyclical.²² The sixty-second proposition of the *Lamentabili* contains a clear expression of that dogmatic relativism which Pope Pius Nil. opposes so powerfully in his Own document.²³ The sixty-fourth proposition condemned in the *Lamentabili* maintains that "The progress of science demands that the concepts of Christian doctrine concerning God, Creation, Revelation, the Person of the Incarnate Word, and about the Redemption, be reformed."²⁴ The *Humani generis*, on the other hand, reproves those who seek to reform or recast the concepts employed in theology and even in dogma, on the grounds that such a process might be useful in furthering the advance of the Church.²⁵

Thus, in the *Quanta cura*, in the *Pascendi dominici gregis*, and in the *Humani generis*, three Sovereign Pontiffs named Pius have reproved errors current in the field of religion in their own times. They have indicated the fact that these errors have been related among themselves, that some of them followed logically from others. All of them have pointed to the real and proximate danger to the Catholic faith itself which would inevitably result from ac-

21 Cf. *Growth or Decline* (Smith Bend: hides, 1948), p. 51.

22 Cf. *DB*, 2009; 2011 f.; *Humani generis*, nn. 22 f.

23 Cf. *DB*, 2062; *Humani generis*, nn. 14 ff.

24 *DB*, 2064.

Humani generis, nn. 11 ff.

ceptance of these false teachings, and all of them have placed the Catholic Bishops throughout the world on their guard against them, k The persistent recurrence of some errors, in the face of the op- y ' position from and condemnation by the visible head of the Church militant, is something disquieting. It is a factor which shows that the Sovereign Pontiffs are pursuing an absolutely necessary course when they appeal to the episcopate and to the body of Catholic teachers throughout the world to join in their efforts for the purity of the Catholic faith. Obviously one of the disadvantages with which the Church has had to contend during the past century has been the naive acceptance on the part of some of its own children of the advertising propaganda put forward by purveyors of error on their own behalf and in support of their own theses.

The desire or love of novelty, manifesting itself in an utterly illusory hope on the part of some men, themselves mediocre or even worse in their capacities as theologians, to blaze new trails in the field of the sacred sciences, has been a persistent occasion of harm to the *children* of the Church. With that desire there has gone a fear in the hearts of others that fidelity to the traditional Catholic teachings and methods would stamp them as outsiders in what they fondly imagined to be the most select circles in the world of scholarship. Now, as something added to this combination, the present Holy Father has noticed and indicated a *misplaced hope* and an indiscreet zeal for ecclesiastical unity, a tendency to seek unity in the worship of *God by* means of the relaxation of Catholic dogma.

All of these factors now constitute evils which the Catholic body throughout the world must avoid and combat in order to be faithful to the teachings and the faith of Jesus Christ.

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Answers to Questions

DANCING IN THE PARISH HALL

Question: In the July issue of *The American Ecclesiastical Review* the view was proposed that it would not be contrary to the decrees of the Holy See for Canada and the United States if a priest allowed the use of the parish hall for a dance arranged by the laity (at which he himself should not be present). Is not this opinion contrary to the decision of the Consistorial Congregation to the Bishop of St. Cloud: "Graviter admoneas parochos ut observent praescripta saepius data circa choreas non promovendas in locis parochialibus"?

Answer: The decision which the questioner quotes, since it was private, does not of itself impose any obligation on others besides those for whom it was given. Nevertheless, since it refers to "praescripta saepius data" it possesses, for practical purposes, the force of a public response. However, the question remains whether a priest can be said to *promote* a dance if he merely allows the parish hall to be used for that purpose, while others make the arrangements. Best answers in the affirmative (*Introductio in Codicem* [Collegeville, Minn., 1944j, 192), asserting that the prohibition to promote and sponsor dances involves the obligation to exclude them entirely from parish property. I would hesitate to say that this conclusion must necessarily be drawn from the decisions of the Holy See. It could be argued that the mere granting of permission to a group of the laity to hold a dance in the parish hall is not equivalent to promoting or sponsoring it. Certainly, many priests in our country at the present day are following this latter view. I do not think their attitude implies disregard for the decisions of the Holy See, but is rather due to a desire to interpret these decisions as liberally as possible, on the grounds that since our young folks are going to dance anyway, it is better that they do so in circumstances where good Catholic persons can supervise and chaperon them than that they go to public dance halls, where there is no such supervision. It is hardly necessary to add that if the local Ordinary follows the former view and prohibits the use of the parish buildings for dances, his ruling must be obeyed by the priests and the faithful.