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The significance of the friendship between William E. Gladstone and Ignaz von Döllinger

William Ewart Gladstone (1809–98) was the “Grand Old Man” of English statesmen who has been described as “the greatest Victorian”¹. Gladstone at one stage hoped to enter the ordained ministry of the Church of England, however, his father, whose influence prevailed, wanted him to become a politician. He was born in Liverpool; his father was a wealthy merchant who, for a time, was a Member of Parliament. William Gladstone’s faith influenced every aspect of his life, and he was a convinced Anglican. A friend said, “his faith was to him what the Nile is to Egypt, what sunshine is to the world”². He became a Member of Parliament in 1832 and began his Parliamentary career as a Tory and held office in Sir Robert Peel’s administration. Gladstone later joined the Liberal Party and served as Chancellor of the Exchequer for ten years. He became Prime Minister for the first time in 1868, and held office until 1874. He was to serve as Prime Minister on three other occasions; from 1880 to 1885; again in 1886, and finally from 1892 to 1894.

At Oxford University he got to know the leaders of the newly emerging Oxford Movement, John Henry Newman (1801–90), Edward Bouverie Pusey (1800–82) and John Keble (1792–1866). Later he was to know all the leading churchmen of his generation. He also formed friendships with James Robert Hope and Henry Edward Manning, both of whom later became Roman Catholics as, of course, did Newman. The large number of such conversions caused Gladstone enduring anxiety, as will often be apparent in this paper. In order to explain Gladstone’s anxiety, it is necessary to remember that he was unique among English politicians for his knowledge of Church history and theology. Then it is necessary to look at the thesis of a book which he published in two volumes in 1838. It was an important but ponderous volume with the title, *The State in its Relation to the Church*³. He envisaged the relationship of the two as the equivalent of a “marriage” and had difficulty in believing that those who were not members of the “national” Church could be loyal citizens. Later in life he came to believe that the book was out of date, even at the time of its publication and although he seemed to moderate his views over the ensuing

¹ D. L. Edwards, *Christian England*, vol 2, London 1983, 219. See also O. Chadwick, *The Victorian Church*, part 1, London 1966.

² Quoted by *Bernard Palmer*, *High and Mitred*, London 1992, 86.

³ See *A. R. Vidler*, *The Orb and the Cross*, London 1945.

decades he never quite abandoned his fears about conflicts of loyalty, and the point recurs in other publications. At the time, the book did receive favourable comment from some politicians and churchmen, although Gladstone eventually came closer to Döllinger's opinion, and to believe that an exclusive relationship between Church and state was actually impossible and even, theoretically, mistaken. However, evidence remains that he was reluctant to abandon the concept entirely. In English terms, it is impossible to separate his thinking from the historical recollection that what he described was precisely the same dilemma in which the Roman Catholic subjects of Queen Elizabeth I had found themselves in the late sixteenth century. This had reached its most acute form when Pope Pius V, in 1570, excommunicated Queen Elizabeth I and claimed to release her subjects from their oath of allegiance.

By the 1840s J. R. Hope had already met Dr. Döllinger, and it was he who suggested that Gladstone should call on him when (in 1845) Gladstone went to Germany to help his sister who was living in Baden-Baden. It was a suggestion that Gladstone accepted with enthusiasm. He had gone to Germany at the request of his father and had arrived towards the end of September and remained for nearly two months. Helen Jane Gladstone had converted to Roman Catholicism in 1842, one of the first to do so in that turbulent decade. She was an unstable woman who caused difficulties for her family who found their patience and their resources strained by her behaviour. Nevertheless, she was warmly attached to her brother William and their father decided that he was the one who could do most good for her. Gladstone arrived to find the situation worse than he expected. Roy Jenkins, a distinguished modern British politician who is now a member of the House of Lords, is a recent biographer of Gladstone, and he described a horrific scene, when having taken the vast dose of three hundred drops of laudanum and become partly paralysed, Miss Gladstone had to be held down by force while leeches were applied.

It is a strange coincidence that John Henry Newman's conversion to Roman Catholicism took place while Gladstone was in Germany, and Jenkins makes the ironic observation that Newman's spiritual turmoil was taking place at the same time as William Ewart Gladstone was witnessing his sister's convulsions. Gladstone "stayed in and around Baden-Baden for five gloomy weeks doing his clumsy best"⁴. Eventually, their father lost patience with the situation and threatened to cut off their supply of money. It was this rather than the entreaties of William Ewart Glad-

⁴ *R. Jenkins, Gladstone, London 1995, 74.*

stone, and a local priest and a doctor that persuaded Helen to return to Britain shortly after her brother.

Not surprisingly, he had found his relationship with his sister somewhat difficult and it may be that he decided to visit Dr. Döllinger in order to find some relief from his domestic concerns. It was with immense delight that Gladstone met Döllinger, and he delighted in an interlude of theological discussion. Döllinger was ten years older than Gladstone. By the time the two men met, he had begun to abandon his earlier ultramontanism and had also come to the conclusion that the German Church should be free from State control, but in full communion with Rome.

Gladstone was in his mid thirties when he met Döllinger for the first time, and they corresponded from that time, although after Döllinger's death Gladstone wrote to Lord Acton, "I have the fear that my Döllinger letters will disappoint you. When I was with him, he spoke to me with the utmost freedom; and so I think he wrote, but our correspondence was only occasional". Certainly there were long periods when no letters seem to have been exchanged, and Gladstone concluded, "I think nine-tenths of my intercourse with him was oral..."⁵. Döllinger was delighted with his new friend, and so was Gladstone who came to have a very high regard for him personally and as a theologian and historian. He described him as follows:

"Like those great artists for whom painting was only a single development of their comprehensive art faculty, Dr. Döllinger's theology was really a branch, although the main branch, of that great tree of knowledge which was rooted in his all-embracing historical faculty"⁶.

On 30 September 1845 Gladstone wrote to his wife

"Today I have spent my evening ... in tea and infinite conversation with Dr. Döllinger, who is one of the first among the Roman Catholic theologians of Germany. A remarkable and very pleasing man. His manners have great simplicity and I am astonished at the way in which a busy student such as he is can receive an intruder... He surprises me by the extent of his information and the way in which he knows the details of what takes place in England. Most of our conversation related to it. He seemed to me one of the most liberal and catholic in mind of all the persons of his communion whom I have known. Tomorrow I am to have tea with him again..."⁷

⁵ *J. Morley*, *The Life of William Ewart Gladstone*, In three volumes, London 1903, vol. III, 422.

⁶ *W. E. Gladstone*, "Dr. Döllinger's Posthumous Remains," in *The Speaker*, (a weekly journal) August 1890, 232.

⁷ *Morley*, *Gladstone*, vol. I, 318–9. Twenty-five years later Gladstone repeated his pleasure in Döllinger's knowledge of the Church of England in a letter of 29 April 1872

The next day he continued the letter and remarked that he had remained with Döllinger until one o' clock in the morning. At their second meeting other guests were present, but Gladstone enjoyed himself, remarking that he had "lost my heart" to Döllinger.

"What I like perhaps most, or what crowns other causes of liking towards him, is that he ... seems to take an hearty interest in the progress of religion in the Church of England, apart from the (so to speak) party question between us, and to have a mind to appreciate good wherever he can find it. For instance, when in speaking of [John] Wesley [the founder of Methodism in the eighteenth century], I said that his own views and intuitions were not heretical, and that if the ruling power in our Church had had energy and a right mind to turn him to account, or if he had been in the Church of Rome I was about to add, he would then have been a great saint, or something to that effect. But I hesitated, thinking it perhaps too strong and even presumptuous, but he took me up and used the very words declaring that to be his opinion..."

At this point in his letter, Gladstone reported another, somewhat more obscure aspect of British Church history to which Döllinger referred⁸, and then continued, "He is a great admirer of England and English character and he does not at all *slur* over the mischief with which religion has to contend in Germany. Lastly, I may be wrong, but I am persuaded that he in his mind abhors a great deal that is too frequently taught in the Church of Rome"⁹. Gladstone's observation was prophetic in view of what was to follow a quarter of a century later.

Gladstone's report of his conversations with Döllinger in 1845 is fluent and reveals that he had considerable ease in understanding Döllinger and making himself understood. For his part, Döllinger thought that they shared some similarity in their ways of thinking¹⁰. We know that by middle life Gladstone had learned some German, and Gladstone himself recorded that Döllinger had a good grasp of English. Some notes of these early conversations are extant in the British Library¹¹. On 4 October 1845 and again the following day, Gladstone made notes of their talk, but the six or seven hundred words (as I would guess them to be) of these notes are not *ipsissima verba*. On the first day they explored the difficulties posed for the Church of England in general, and for Gladstone in partic-

(British Library, 44140, f 286–8). The unpublished letters of the British Library, 44140 ff were kindly copied to me by Hubert Huppertz.

⁸ Döllinger made an admiring reference to the pious Archbishop Robert Leighton (1611–84) who worked unsuccessfully for conciliation between Presbyterians and Episcopalians in Scotland.

⁹ *Morley*, Gladstone, vol. I, 319.

¹⁰ Döllinger to Gladstone, 15 November 1845.

¹¹ British Library, additional material 44735, f 77 and f 83.

ular, by some of the doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church, including “the worship of images, the invocation of saints and particularly that of the Blessed Virgin, and the purgatorial indulgences.” Gladstone recalled that Döllinger said the latter was a problem “scarcely existing or scarcely sensible for them in Germany”¹². Later they discussed prayers for the dead, and seem to have spent most of the time on the nature of the Real Presence. Sadly very little detail of the actual content of the conversations is recorded in a form that is of use to us.

The notes do reveal genuine toleration and true greatness on the part of Döllinger, because these were issues that were of current acute concern in the Church of England, whereas they were not particularly relevant to Döllinger’s circumstances, I would guess. Similarly, the conversation which took place on the following day (a Sunday) reflects what one might call Church of England concerns. They agreed, it seems without any trace of irony, with Gladstone’s opinion “that England never would be united to the rest of the Western Church through the agency of the Roman Catholic body.” It is clear that Gladstone was stating the obvious, but his way of expressing himself was not so clear! He told his wife, on 4 October 1845, however, that “...it should be remembered that Dr. D spoke in a tongue not his own, although he understands it extremely well...” The report of Gladstone’s next visit to his friend suggests that Gladstone himself did not find the exchange as easy as his earlier remarks suggest. Referring again to Döllinger, he continued, “Last night” [that would have been 1 October 1845],

“He invited several of his friends whom I wanted to meet, to an entertainment which consisted first of weak tea, immediately followed by meat supper with beer and wine and sweets. For two hours I was there in the midst of five German professors, or four, and the editor of a [news]paper who held very interesting discussions; I could only follow them in part and enter into them still less, as none of them (except Dr. D) seemed to speak any tongue but their own with any freedom, but you would have been amused to see and hear them and me in the midst. I never saw men who spoke together in a way to make one another inaudible as they did, always excepting Dr. Döllinger ... being as he is a much more refined man than the rest. But of the others, I assure you always two, sometimes three, and once all four, were speaking at once, very loud, each not trying to force the attention of the others, but to be following the current of his own thoughts.”¹³

After the visit in 1845, it was to be almost thirty years before Gladstone and Döllinger met again. Döllinger was in London in 1858 and called at Gladstone’s home but, sadly, he was away. His last attempt to find Glad-

¹² British Library, additional material 44735, f 77.

¹³ *Morley*, Gladstone, vol. 1, 320.

stone was made on the day before his own return to Germany, as he reported to his friend in a letter written on 7 October of that year. The correspondence also seemed to lapse after 1862, due on Döllinger's part, he later admitted, to his desire for secrecy about the "Janus letters." It was resumed in 1870 by which time Döllinger's opposition to ultramontanism was well known. He said that Gladstone was the only European politician of sufficient stature to cause the Vatican to pause in developing its ambitions¹⁴. In 1874 Gladstone lost the General Election and retired from the leadership of the Liberal Party. Consequently he had more free time; as Döllinger observed, he was available for theological debate and study. Döllinger also expressed the hope that they could revive their flagging correspondence and strengthen their friendship; he also expressed the hope that Gladstone's health would benefit from his comparative leisure. He set out for Germany and spent the period from 7 to 25 September 1874 there, although he decided to stay away from the First Bonn Conference. Döllinger hoped that Gladstone would attend because of his importance as a statesman, but recognised that his political position could mean that it was unadvisable for him to do so. Döllinger's disappointment at Gladstone's decision was increased when accusations began to be made that the Conference had sought to exclude some possible attendees by the process of issuing specific invitations to named individuals. In 1875, as you know, a general invitation was issued. This avoided the allegation that the Conference was a closed and private affair, but Henry Parry Liddon, a distinguished Anglican who attended both, thought that the 1875 conference was less effective as a result¹⁵.

Gladstone had gone to Germany from Hawarden, his estate in north Wales where he had passed the previous few weeks, primarily occupied in writing an article for the October 1874 number of *The Contemporary Review*. This was an important article of about 10,000 words on "The Church of England and Ritualism." It puts into written form many of his views expressed in the debates about the Public Worship Regulation Act which had, that same year, been passed by the new Government led by Disraeli, who had succeeded Gladstone as Prime Minister. This lengthy article discussed the growth of more elaborate ritual within the Eucharistic liturgy of the Church of England. This development was beginning to characterise the later development of the Oxford Movement and was known (largely by those opposed to it) as "ritualism." Gladstone received

¹⁴ Döllinger to Gladstone, 15 March 1870.

¹⁵ *Michael Chandler, The Life and Work of Henry Parry Liddon (1829–90)*, Leominster 2000.

the proofs of his article very soon after his arrival in Germany, and showed them to Döllinger. He reached Munich on the evening of the second day and stayed with the British Minister to Bavaria, Robert Morier, whose accommodation Döllinger had described in favourable terms in a letter to Gladstone.

During his time in Munich in 1874 a curious exchange with Lord Ripon began, which centred around the question of divided loyalty in a particularly acute form. At the beginning of September, Lord Ripon, a friend of Gladstone's and former Cabinet colleague, announced his conversion to Roman Catholicism. Because Ripon was a prominent politician, his secession from the Church of England caused quite a lot of newspaper comment and criticism. Most outspoken was *The Times* of 5 September 1874 which described Lord Ripon as having "renounced his mental and moral freedom to the guidance of the Roman Catholic priesthood," and continued with the comment, "a statesman who becomes a convert at once forfeits the confidence of the English people" and "to become a Roman Catholic and remain a thorough Englishman are – it cannot be disguised – almost incompatible conditions..." Ripon, naturally, was distressed at such comments, but he retained a dignified silence. He was even more pained, however, when Gladstone's article on ritualism appeared. The opponents of ritualism in the Church of England were many and vocal. A favourite tactic was to accuse the ritualistic clergy of being Roman Catholic sympathisers. The more extreme even alleged that ritualistic clergy were some sort of Roman Catholic secret agents: "Jesuits in disguise," and so on. It was necessary, therefore, for their sympathisers, of whom Gladstone was a cautious representative, to emphasise the differences and distinctions between High Church Anglicanism and Roman Catholicism. In his article, Gladstone came back to his old theme and tried to emphasise how the Vatican Council of 1870 had robbed individuals of their intellectual liberty. This he saw as a contrast between Roman Catholicism and Anglicanism. He put the fact starkly, "No one," he wrote, "can become [Rome's] convert without renouncing his moral and mental freedom and placing his civil loyalty and duty at the mercy of another."¹⁶ Lord Ripon's biographer claimed that actually Gladstone inserted this statement in his article after receiving the proofs in Munich shortly after hearing of Ripon's conversion. Whether that is true or not, the appearance of the article in *The Contemporary Review* caused Lord Ripon much pain and he felt the need to protest privately to Gladstone. An unsatisfactory

¹⁶ L. Wolf, *Life of the First Marquis of Ripon*, In two volumes, London 1921, vol. 1, 296.

correspondence ensued in which Gladstone was compelled to defend his position. Ripon's was not the only attack upon his article, as Gladstone acknowledged in a letter written when he was back at Hawarden on 8 October 1874. Gladstone had been accused, by at least one correspondent, of condemning *all* Roman Catholics with his words, not merely converts.

He thought that the way forward would be a

“declaration from Roman Catholic sources ... showing that if the Pope shall at any time make, in the name of faith or morals, any declaration of belief, or any order as to conduct, which shall interfere with civil duty, be either of these *ex cathedra* or not, you and other Roman Catholics will repel and resist them”¹⁷.

He had the audacity to hope that Ripon, and the (unnamed) other person to whom he had made this suggestion, would “consider it a fair one and well calculated to dispose of the point immediately in contention between us”¹⁸.

Gladstone's attitude is, to say the least, rigid but it seems likely that his conversations with Döllinger in September 1874 began the process of modifying his views. He did manage to retain his friendship with Lord Ripon, and four years later moderated his language when revising the article on ritualism for inclusion in his eight-volume collection entitled *Gleanings of Past Years, 1844–78*. He also added a footnote: “... some, at least, who have joined the Latin Church since the great change effected by the Vatican Council would, upon occasion given, whether with logical warrant or not, adhere under all circumstances to their civil loyalty and duty”¹⁹. His conviction regarding such people, at least in the case of Lord Ripon, was given public and sufficient acknowledgement when, in Gladstone's 1886 administration, Lord Ripon was appointed Viceroy of India.

During his visit to Munich in 1874, Gladstone reported, in one of his frequent letters to his wife in England, “I think I have spent two-thirds of my whole time with Dr. Döllinger”²⁰. He called on Döllinger on 9 September and they spent the period from 10:30 A.M. to 6:00 P.M. in conversation together. The following day, according to Jenkins, they spent another six and half hours together. Döllinger himself wrote of a visit from Gladstone at this time, “I remember Gladstone's paying me a visit at six o'clock in the evening. We began talking on political and theo-

¹⁷ *Wolf*, Ripon, vol. I, 304–5.

¹⁸ *Wolf*, Ripon, vol. I, 305.

¹⁹ *Wolf*, Ripon, vol. I, 311.

²⁰ *Morley*, Gladstone, vol. II, 513.

logical subjects, and became, both of us, so engrossed with the conversation, that it was two o'clock at night when I left the room to fetch a book from my library bearing on the matter in hand"²¹.

On his third and fourth days in Munich the two men had long afternoon walks and talks together. On one of these walks they encountered the Archbishop of Munich who had excommunicated Döllinger in 1871, an event which Gladstone thought to be "the most trying crisis of [Döllinger's] life." The process of excommunicating Döllinger had been quite a lengthy one, and it may be that the Roman Catholic authorities had subsequently regretted it. In 1890 Gladstone wrote of it,

"The Latin Church does not seem to have been insensible of the great gap made in its ranks by the expulsion of this most eminent man... The ejected Professor, however, was continually hunted down by uninvited solicitations to submission. Those solicitations would seem to have been as warm and respectful, as they were various. But they amounted in plain English to this, 'Eat your words; throw your convictions behind you; stain your long life with the colour of a lie.' On the other side is his reply: 'When I am told that I must swear to the truth of those doctrines, my feeling is just as if I were asked to swear that two and two make five and not four'"²².

This fixity of view, however, was not unconsidered. Gladstone wrote "...in 1874, during a long walk, ...we spoke of the shocks and agitation of our time." He told Gladstone how the Vatican decrees had required him to re-examine and reassess all his deepest convictions²³. Gladstone remembered the walk after Döllinger's death and described it to Lord Acton. It was a point, however, that Döllinger made more than once, for it was repeated in a letter which he wrote to Gladstone on 22 September 1878. The "solicitations," as Gladstone called them, went on almost until the end. In October 1887, it was intimated to Döllinger that his return to the Roman Catholic church would be to the Pope, "the crown of his joys for his approaching jubilee," and that other learned men in the Church of Rome would similarly be delighted!

It is unfortunate that he did not record any details of the meeting with Archbishop Scherr in his diary, but Gladstone was clearly offended by the excommunication of Döllinger. Once again, our source of information is a letter to his wife, "it makes my blood run cold to think of *his* being excommunicated in his venerable but, thank God, hale and strong old age"²⁴.

²¹ *Morley*, Gladstone, vol. II, 513–514.

²² Gladstone in *The Speaker*, 232.

²³ *Morley*, Gladstone, vol. III, 422.

²⁴ *Morley*, Gladstone, vol. II, 513.

This series of meetings in 1874 with Döllinger may be what prompted Gladstone to write his important pamphlet *The Vatican Decrees in their bearing on Civil Allegiance: A Political Expostulation*. This was published by John Murray in the same year and sold a very large number of copies, something in the region of 150,000. He sent Döllinger an early copy, but emphasised in his letter²⁵ that he was not asking for a critique; nevertheless, he was pleased to learn that Döllinger did not want to see “one iota” of it altered. Döllinger also hoped that a German translation would be made, and when one was produced he was careful to send Gladstone a copy²⁶. Early in the pamphlet Gladstone insisted that he was trying to avoid not only religious bigotry but also theological controversy,

“indeed, with theology except in its civil bearing... I have here nothing whatever to do. But it is the peculiarity of Roman theology that, by thrusting itself into the temporal domain, it naturally, and even necessarily, comes to be a frequent theme of political discussion. To quiet-minded Roman Catholics, it must be a subject of infinite annoyance, that their religion is, on this ground more than any other, the subject to criticism; more than any other, the occasion of conflicts with the State and of civil disquietude”²⁷.

He spelled out yet again and with great clarity his conviction that Roman Catholic citizens of non-Catholic states found themselves in the impossible position of a higher loyalty being expected of them by their Church than they could offer if they were to be loyal citizens of the state in which they lived. It was a repetition of his long-standing convictions. This was the main reason why his pamphlet attracted such a considerable reaction. Vociferous Protestants applauded what he had to say on the grounds that it proved what they had thought all along. Equally, vociferous Roman Catholics objected that it was an exaggeration and misrepresentation of what the Vatican Decrees had said. Gladstone reported later that his view had been condemned by Rome²⁸. It was certainly condemned by John Henry Newman and in the context of noticing Newman’s criticism Gladstone observed that it “was commonly alleged that I have insulted the Roman Catholics of these kingdoms.”

²⁵ Gladstone to Döllinger, 1 November 1874.

²⁶ *W. E. Gladstone, Die vatikanischen Dekrete nach ihrer Bedeutung für die Unterthanentreue. Eine politische Fragestellung, Nördlingen 1875.*

²⁷ *W. E. Gladstone, The Vatican Decrees in their bearing on Civil Allegiance: a political expostulation (1874), 9.* Cited in further references as *Gladstone, The Vatican Decrees.*

²⁸ *W. E. Gladstone, Vaticanism: an Answer to Reproofs and Replies (1875), 6.* Cited in references as *Gladstone, Reproofs.*

In another pamphlet, *Vaticanism, an answer to Reproofs and Replies* published in 1875, Gladstone moderated his views, but only slightly, “it is an entire, and even a gross, error to treat all affirmations about Rome as equivalent to affirmations about British subjects of the Roman Communion. They may adopt the acts of Rome: the question was and is, whether they do”²⁹. He seems to have left a certain amount of room for manoeuvre for those individuals who were part of the Roman system but who could not conceive of acting in any way that could be construed as disloyal to their national allegiances. A practical expression of this was to be Lord Ripon’s loyal fulfillment of his duties as Viceroy of India. But, having made that concession Gladstone then repeated his original claim about the context and substance of the papal pronouncement: “the Vatican Decrees do, in the strictest sense, establish for the Pope a supreme command over loyalty and civil duty”³⁰.

It may be that Gladstone was not thinking with appropriate detachment, indeed, quite early in the pamphlet his personal involvement was revealed when he wrote these words:

“I now pass to the operation of these extraordinary declarations on permanent and private duty.

When the cup of endurance which had so long been filling, began, with the Council of the Vatican in 1870, to overflow, the most famous and learned theologian of the Roman Communion, Dr. von Döllinger, long the foremost champion of his church, refused compliance, and submitted, with his temper undisturbed and his freedom unimpaired, to the extreme and most painful penalty of excommunication. With him, many of the most learned and respected theologians of the Roman Communion in Germany underwent the same sentence”³¹.

He went on to sympathise with the dilemma of private individuals who found themselves in difficulties as a result of this situation, but he continued with a reference to the more acute dilemma of what he called the “leaders of society, the men of education and leisure.” He said, “a change of religious profession is under all circumstances a great and awful thing. Much more is the question, however, between conflicting, or apparently conflicting, duties arduous, when the religion of a man has been changed for him, over his head, and without the very least of his participation”³². One is tempted to speculate that Gladstone’s pamphlet on the Vatican Decrees contained the substance of his conversations with Döllinger in

²⁹ *Gladstone, Reproofs, 7.*

³⁰ *Gladstone, Reproofs, 7.*

³¹ *Gladstone, The Vatican Decrees, 21.*

³² *Gladstone, The Vatican Decrees, 22.*

1874, and certainly Döllinger's comments in his letters would have served to strengthen Gladstone's arguments, and sometimes they took the form of specific suggestions. It has to be remembered, though, that Gladstone was writing from the point of view of an Englishman who lived at the highest level of political life. He was a citizen of a country and a member of a national Church which was not, and had not been for a very long time, in communion with the Church of Rome. Consequently he was aware of the conflict of interest that could occur for Roman Catholics with their potentially divided loyalty. It seems to me to be extremely unlikely that Döllinger would have shared the same concern in anything like the same degree, not least because, although it was against his will, Döllinger had actually ceased to be a Roman Catholic.

It was to be expected that such a successful publication as *The Vatican Decrees* should attract a response, but even so, for a while the furore was considerable. More than twenty replies were published. This remarkable response was in addition to the letters and private communications which Gladstone received and which he ignored in the public controversy. His sympathetic reference to Döllinger suggested to some that Gladstone was acting as the mouthpiece for Döllinger and publishing, or at least publicising, the older man's views. We do know from the correspondence that there is at least a grain of truth in the supposition, although it led to a very specific denial in his later publication on the subject,

"Justice to Dr. Von Döllinger requires me to state that he had no concern, direct or indirect, in the production or the publication of the tract, and that he was, until it had gone to press, ignorant of its existence. Had he been a party to it, it could not have failed to be more worthy of the attention it received"³³.

He went on to defend Döllinger from the outrageous charge, made in England and elsewhere, that "he never was a theologian"; and he included an approving quotation to the effect that "almost for an entire generation, Dr. von Döllinger has been held *the most learned theologian of Catholic Germany* and he indisputably counts among the greatest intellectual lights that the Catholic Church of the present age has to show"³⁴. Gladstone's third visit to Döllinger took place in 1879. He left England on 14 September and returned on 21 October and divided his time between Bavaria and Italy. He saw Döllinger on 17 September, and on the 18 recorded in his diary "... whole forenoon in conversation with Dr. D. and in the afternoon a drive to Kreuth in the same carriage..." The diaries provide our main source of information concerning this visit and the en-

³³ Gladstone, *Reproofs*, 122, Appendix B.

³⁴ Gladstone, *Reproofs*, 122, italics original.

try for the next day contains the interesting information that the two men walked five miles together. Gladstone at this time was seventy years of age and Döllinger nearly eighty. They walked in the morning and Gladstone observed that Döllinger is “slightly deaf: slightly less easy with his English: at 80 not diminished in his musculature: the mind as heretofore free comprehensive and profound.” That the two of them were sufficiently fit to undertake a five mile walk, presumably talking earnestly the whole while, is a tribute to them both. The meetings continued and the next noteworthy one is recorded in the diary for 21 September when they conversed on “Dante’s papal and antipapal views and discussed St. Thomas respecting Papal Infallibility... and Absolution..., church and state in England and the condition of the English Church”. Shortly after this, following “further rich drafts of conversation with Dr. D.”³⁵, Gladstone continued on his journey. He returned to Munich on 11 October and again saw Döllinger that day, in both the morning and the afternoon, having a long walk in the latter. The conversation again turned on Dante and what Gladstone described as “various matters of theology.” It was, he said, “most instructive and most harmonious.” They dined on 12 October and sat together a long while. Gladstone recorded that he “got more learning from Dr. D about the old commentaries.” The visit came to an end on 13 October 1879 when the two friends met for tea in Gladstone’s lodgings. They had a final conversation “an affectionate ‘Adieu’, God be with him in all his thoughts and words and works.” Once again, no further details of their conversation survive and regrettably it is not possible to enter more deeply into the matters that they discussed.

It was, however, to be nearly seven years before the two friends met again. Gladstone travelled between 25 August and 19 September 1886 and spent the first part of his holiday in Döllinger’s company. Again the diary records that they talked much, but we are not given any details, “conversation as yesterday...” Lord Acton, however, was later to record that the problem of Ireland, and Gladstone’s “Home Rule scheme” formed part of the discussion and that Döllinger told him that he was not happy with his companion’s plans. Remarkably, he expressed the view that Gladstone did not really know enough Irish history, nor did he understand the Irish character sufficiently for his scheme to be successful³⁶.

³⁵ The Gladstone Diaries in 14 volumes, edited by *M. R. D. Foot* (volumes 1 and 3) and *H. G. C. Matthew* (volumes 3 and 4) and by *H. G. C. Matthew* (volumes 5 to 14), Oxford 1968–1994, vol. 9, entry for 23 September 1879.

³⁶ *A. Plummer*, *Conversations with Dr. Döllinger, 1870–90*, ed. *R. Boudens*, Leuven 1985, 217–8.

In addition, in a letter to Acton, Döllinger referred to these conversations and went on to say that he feared the outbreak of a civil war in Ireland³⁷. They had a walk together on 1 September, another on 4 September and “a good conversation.” On 6 September 1886 Gladstone walked “with Dr. D and Lord A[cton]. It is wonderful to hear them pour forth their learning in two great streams.” It is, though, a fair assumption that anyone walking with them would have heard learning poured forth in *three* great streams!

The last meeting between Gladstone and Dr. Döllinger took place on 10 September 1886 and Gladstone noted, “Farewell with Dr. D in the evening. He most kind and affectionate.”

He told Lord Acton that the correspondence was very precious to him, particularly with regard to that of the early years, but it was their conversations that were totally absorbing and which formed the real bedrock of their friendship. One can conclude, however, but admittedly it is an argument from silence, that Gladstone’s attitudes and views on ecclesiastical matters were influenced by the time that the two spent talking, and that the conversations had consequences for Gladstone’s perception of the Church and an influence on his attitudes as a senior politician. I hope that it is not too fanciful to think that Döllinger’s influence helped to moderate Gladstone’s initially fierce opinions about conflicts of religious loyalty, although I have no hard evidence for this!

He said of Döllinger that

“his attitude of mind was more historical than theological. When I first knew him in 1845, and he honoured me with very long and interesting conversations, they turned very much upon theology and I derived from him what I thought very valuable and steadying knowledge. Again in 1874 during a long walk, when we spoke of the shocks and agitation of our time, he told me how the Vatican Decrees had required him to re-peruse and retry the whole circle of his thought. He did not make known to me any general result; but he had by that time found himself wholly detached from the Council of Trent, which was indeed a logical necessity from his preceding action.”

Presumably Döllinger had also confided to Gladstone something of how he stood in relation to the Old Catholics. My information for this is his obituary article in *The Speaker* for August 1890, to which I have already referred, and in which he quoted a letter of Döllinger’s to a parish priest [Johann Nepomuk Widmann] in October 1874:

³⁷ *I. von Döllinger*, Briefwechsel, ed. Victor Konzemius, 4 volumes, München 1963–81, vol 3, 356.

“As concerns myself, thus far I count myself by conviction in the Old Catholic communion, [that] I believe it has a higher mission to fulfill, and that in three ways...”

He advised the priest “to follow his own convictions, and not to be intimidated by reproaches concerning unity and implicit obedience.” And specifically, following those “three ways”:

“(1) To testify on behalf of the ancient doctrine of the Church; (2) to bring about by degrees the exhibition of a Church more conformable (than now) to the old and undivided Church; (3) as an instrument, to prepare and promote the reunion of Christendom”³⁸.

It is with the expression of the desire for the reunion of Christendom that I draw to a close. When he and Döllinger parted in 1845, not to meet again for thirty years, Gladstone recorded,

“When we said ‘farewell’ he said ‘well, we are in one Church by water – upon that I shall rest.’ I said, ‘It is my happiness, if I may say so, to be allowed to go further.’ I must indeed carry away with me a lively sense both of his kindness and of the great value of intercourse with him.”

He concluded his private note with a hint of how he rejoiced at the “breadth of those grounds of agreement” which he had discovered in their conversations, and he was pleased to learn in a letter many years later, that Döllinger was optimistic about the Church of England³⁹. In 1874 when his younger friend, Henry Parry Liddon returned from the first of the Bonn Conferences and arranged for its Report to be published in English, Gladstone made the remarkable claim that “The Bonn Conference appeared to show [Döllinger] nearly at the standing point of Anglican theology”⁴⁰. I suspect that Gladstone was being a little naive, but I rejoice to think that there was so much in common between the theology of Dr. Döllinger and that of Anglicanism at its best!

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³⁸ *Gladstone*, *The Speaker*, 30 August 1890; he appears to be quoting from *Briefe und Erklärungen von I. Döllinger über die Vaticanischen Decrete 1869–87*, Munich, 1890, 104–5.

³⁹ Döllinger to Gladstone, 3 July 1888.

⁴⁰ *Morley*, *Gladstone*, vol. 3, 422.