

“NO VOICE AT THE TABLE”: BISHOP THOMAS GRACE AND VATICAN I

It's been since my 8th grade year at Nativity School that the Vikings played (and lost!) their last of four Super Bowls, and since 1991 that my beloved Twins have won the World Series. But that *ain't nothin'* compared to the Church's ecumenical council **drought** between the 16th and 19th centuries! It was a whopping **306 years** (and four days!) between the closing of Trent and the opening of Vatican I, the longest period of **inactivity** between any two ecumenical councils. To add insult to injury, even the calling of Vatican I was a surprise. “Life happens,” as they say. The French Revolution (1789) and the industrial revolution brought **huge changes** to the Church and society, respectively. So too did the Enlightenment, posing many intellectual challenges. Before becoming too critical of this long absence, it is worth noting that the many decrees and priorities of Trent kept the Church engaged for generations.

The breadth of Trent was so vast that even a handful of columns in these pages barely scratched the surface. It was a plan for **reform**, revitalization, and regrouping. Though likely too little and too late to repair the damage done by the reformation, it did set a new course. By insisting upon formal seminary structure, the Church protected the faithful from apprentice priests, **poorly trained** both intellectually and spiritually. Trent provided stability, a reliable ecclesial structure that could be replicated across national borders. Still, the many challenges posed by the late 19th century forced the Church to respond to **new currents** of thought, new threats to authority within the Church itself. As effective and clear as the decrees of Trent were with respect to adequate seminary formation, the Church was now facing new issues. These must be understood before the theology begins to make any sense.

Entitled *Aeterni Patris*, Blessed Pope Pius IX's papal bull of 29 June 1868 announced that a Council would solemnly begin on December 8, 1869. He wrote “...and therefore we wish and command that all should come to this ecumenical Council that we have convened, from all the parts of the world— all venerable brother Patriarchs, Archbishops, Bishops.” It was a surprise in large part because Italy was in the throes of a **unification** movement. One of the main obstacles to a unified nation of Italy was the existence of the Papal States, the **historic lands** under the pope's direct control. This also explains the anti-Catholic sentiment that existed. Church control was slipping away! For 1000 years, the **pope ruled** over a swath of Italy extending to Bologna in the north (see map in sidebar). As a single unified nation, Italy is **younger** than the United States!

Vatican I was the first council to invite bishops from beyond Europe. Eastern Orthodox bishops were also invited, though declined to attend. As it turns out, they weren't the only ones who were no shows. Forty-eight of the fifty-five active U.S. bishops attended the Council. None other than the 31-year-old **Fr. John Ireland** set out for Rome in November of 1869, allowing sufficient time to arrive for the solemn opening on the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception. This was no vacation— he was to accompany **Bishop Thomas Grace** as his assistant. There was just one problem— due to “ill health,” Grace had petitioned Rome to **be excused**. His **petition languished** for months in the Roman Curia, not an unknown occurrence. He only received news of his exemption **days before** he was set to sail. Suddenly, Fr. Ireland was completely on his own.

Grace had traveled to Rome for the celebration of the **1800th** anniversary of the martyrdom of St. Peter in 1867. He had **no desire** to traverse the ocean again! He was too busy petitioning Rome for a division of the Diocese of St. Paul, at that time covering the entire state (166,000 square miles). Today, we have six dioceses. To think that a 31-year-old priest could be seen as a surrogate was a stretch. He was an “official” representative of the Bishop of St. Paul—in Rome's view, little

more than a **distant ecclesiastical outpost** in the United States. By 1870, St. Paul finally grew to 20,000 residents, while Minneapolis was making a name for itself as the nation's top producer of flour. During the next six months, Ireland sent reports about the Council—its pomp, and ceremony, published in the *Northwestern Chronicle*. But he did not participate in the deliberations. According to Fr. Marvin O'Connell's biography of Ireland, these reports were **rich** in detail. Ireland wrote of the relative ease of understanding everyone's Latin pronunciation, the *lingua franca* of the Council.

Future columns will delve into the substance of Vatican I's teaching. For the first time, the Church was trying to **engage modernity**, making a serious attempt to dialogue with the intellectual currents of the day, while preserving the place of tradition in the Church. Yet, sadly our Diocese was **not really represented** at all. Bishop Grace continued in active ministry a full 14 years longer, and yet he was excused due to ill health? With no official role at the Council, Ireland travelled to southern Italy, France and visited his birthplace in **Burnchurch**, Ireland. In reality, he was little more than a tourist, or a priest on a six-month sabbatical. He finally returned to St. Paul in early May, just as the Council was heating up with its final decrees. Yet, our diocese had **no place at the table** for this historic Council.

- It may appear macabre to gather to **celebrate** on the Feast of the Passion of St. John the Baptist, but I invite all men of the parish to join us in **faith, fellowship** and **fraternity** on August 29. At least it's no longer called the Feast of the **Beheading** of John the Baptist! Join us for a simple gathering on the Cathedral courtyard at 5:30 p.m. I will offer a few reflections to those who gather and look forward to spending an enjoyable evening together. **Food and beverages** will be provided!
- The **Knights of Columbus** held their national convention in Nashville. Attended by over 2,500, new Supreme Knight Patrick Kelly announced the KC's initiative to donate at least **\$5 million** to pro-life pregnancy centers across the U.S. They will also assist Ukraine. Just recently, the St. Paul **Abria** center was **vandalized**. He stressed the need to engage Catholic young men to join the Knights. He is 100% correct. Our Cathedral Council would welcome them!
- Did you know that by the time an **ectopic** pregnancy is identified, 90% of the time, the unborn baby has already died? The removal of the fallopian tube housing the embryo to treat the extreme condition of the mother is licit. It is the **Principle of Double Effect**, about which I should write at greater length. There is tremendous **misinformation** floating around about these rare medical interventions following the reversal of *Roe v. Wade* in the recent Dobbs decision.
- **Vin Scully**, voice of the L.A. Dodgers for **67 years** died at the age of 94 on August 2. The **devout Catholic** was arguably the **greatest** baseball **announcer** of all-time— he gets my vote! Scully retired in 2016. He called the 1965 World Series against the Twins, Hank Aaron's **715th** home run against the visiting the Dodgers on April 8, 1974, even Don Larsen's **perfect game** in the 1956 World Series!
- Although the Solemnity of the Assumption is **not** a holy day of obligation this year, I **invite** you to join us Monday at **7:30 a.m.** to honor the Blessed Mother on this special day.

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. John L. Ubel,
Rector



Blessed Pope Pius IX
Roman Pontiff 1846-1878

- * Presided over Vatican Council I (1869-70)
- * First Pope to have set foot in the New World
- * As a young priest he was sent on mission to South America
- * Longest serving pope in history: 31+ years