

BOSSUET AND THE CONSENSUS OF THE CHURCH

RICHARD F. COSTIGAN, S.J.

Loyola University, Chicago

THE FIRST Vatican Council's solemn assertion that the pope's infallible definitions of the faith do not derive their "irreformability" from the consensus of the Church continues to stimulate research into the historical controversy which the council intended to settle. The decree *Pastor aeternus* states that the definitions of the Roman Pontiff are irreformable "ex sese, non autem ex consensu Ecclesiae (of themselves, and not from the consensus of the Church)."¹ With these words, the council explicitly rejects the Fourth Article of the Declaration of the Gallican Clergy of 1682, which expressly stipulates that the consensus of the Church is essential.² *Pastor aeternus* was meant to close the door forever on any view, Gallican or any other, which might seem in any way to allow an appeal from the pope to the episcopate, either assembled in council or dispersed throughout the world.³

This is one of those situations where the study of the primary sources in the background of a controversy is as illuminating as the need for it is evident. For example, Hans Urs von Balthasar, surveying some individuals in the history of the Church who had expressed even slight reservations about the absolute supremacy of the Roman Pontiff, says that the Gallicans wanted "to qualify every papal decision, be it by an appeal to a council or by a stipulation that the directives must be accepted by the whole Church (bishops and flock) to be valid."⁴ He does not cite any source for this, and could not do so, for Gallicanism does not stipulate the consent of "the flock" to papal pronouncements, only that of the episcopate. Neither does von Balthasar cite any Gallican source in calling Bossuet "sincere" though grossly mistaken in teaching Gallican views,⁵ nor when he says that the "ex sese" clause of

¹ DS 3074 = Henricus Denzinger and Adolphus Schönmetzer, eds., *Enchiridion Symbolorum*, 36th ed. (Barcelona/Rome: Herder, 1965) no. 3074.

² On the debate at the council on the wording of the text on papal infallibility, and on the background of the controversy, see Richard F. Costigan, S.J., "The Consensus of the Church: Differing Classic Views," *TS* 51 (1990) 25-48, esp. 25-30, where numerous works on Vatican I, Gallicanism and Ultramontanism are cited. Among these, Georges Dejaive, S.J., "Ex Sese, Non autem ex Consensu Ecclesiae," *Eastern Churches Quarterly* 14 (1962) 360-78 (and printed in several other places) remains one of the most useful, for he shows that the drafters of *Pastor aeternus* accepted a "moral" need for the pope to consult the Church/bishops, but not a "juridical" need (e.g. 373).

³ Another paragraph of *Pastor aeternus*, DS 3063, explicitly rejects any possibility of an appeal to a council.

⁴ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Office of Peter and the Structure of the Church* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1986) 68.

⁵ *Ibid.* 67.

Vatican I was necessitated by the "equivocation" and "one-sided insistence on rights on the part of the Gallicans."⁶ Von Balthasar is typical of authors alluding to Gallicanism: they simply do not cite Gallican sources, and seemingly see no need to do so.⁷ But careful study of these sources is very instructive, and ignoring or misrepresenting what they really say about a matter like the consensus of the Church is not helpful in understanding the divergent historic viewpoints on papal infallibility. The present study attends closely to the concerns and ideas of a leading Gallican theologian, noting how his views on this ecclesial question are much more nuanced than those attributed to the Gallicans by their critics.

BOSSUET AND ECCLESIAL CONTROVERSY

Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet (1627–1704), bishop of Meaux from 1681, was one of the leading prelates of the Church of France in the 17th century. Remembered today perhaps mainly as a great orator, the Eagle of Meaux, he was also an author of serious theological and historical works, personal associate of King Louis XIV and tutor to the Dauphin, actively involved in a number of controversies, and a very important exponent of the ecclesiology of Gallicanism.⁸ A special meeting of certain French bishops and priests produced, on March 19, 1682, the Declaration of the Gallican Clergy (Gallican Articles).⁹ Bossuet was the main redactor on behalf of the group of this Declaration, and some years later wrote a massive (1372 octavo pages) *Defensio Declarationis Cleri Gallicani*, published after his death. This work of great erudition is the main source of the present article.

With the partial exception of the one area of ecclesiology, Bossuet has been generally recognized as an eminent Roman Catholic author, writing in the historic mainstream of Catholic thought. Gustave Lanson said of him in 1891: "Catholic, severely orthodox, he professes on

⁶ Ibid. 217.

⁷ On this, see especially citations of Gustave Thils, Heinrich Fries, Paul Nau, and Roger Aubert, in Costigan, "The Consensus of the Church" 27 n. 10.

⁸ The comprehensive scholarly study of Bossuet's thought on all matters relevant to ecclesiology remains Aimé-Georges Martimort, *Le Gallicanisme de Bossuet*, Unam Sanctam 24, (Paris: Cerf, 1953). This work also contains much information on the life and works of Bossuet. Among articles on Bossuet in standard reference works, two are major studies: A. Largent, in *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique* 2.2.1049–89 (1932), and E. Levesque, in *Dictionnaire d'Histoire et de Géographie Ecclésiastique* 9.1339–91 (1937).

⁹ For brief accounts of this meeting and the controversy between King Louis XIV and Pope Innocent XI which led to it, see standard works like André Latreille et al., *Histoire du Catholicisme en France* (Paris: Spes, 1960) 2.420–31; or Hermann Tüchle et al., *Nouvelle Histoire de l'Eglise* (Paris: Seuil, 1968) 3.388–93. An extended account of the meeting and the Declaration are found in Martimort, *Le Gallicanisme* 361–523, and an in-depth and nuanced discussion of it in the work of Pierre Blet, S.J., to be cited in the latter part of this article. See also Richard F. Costigan, S.J., *Rohrbacher and the Ecclesiology of Ultramontaniam* (Rome: Gregorian University, 1980) 214–35.

all points the doctrines that the councils and the uniform tradition of the Church have authorized; his theology is Catholic theology."¹⁰ Patrick Riley notes that Bossuet defended that Roman Catholic orthodoxy against Protestant and rationalist thinkers of many kinds.¹¹ George Salmon, in his major study on infallibility in 1888, is all in all correct in terming Bossuet "the most trusted champion of his Church."¹² He exaggerates somewhat when he says, referring to the fact that Bossuet's views on papal infallibility were strongly rejected at Vatican I, that "consequently, Bossuet is treated by the predominant Roman Catholic school as no better than a Protestant."¹³ But the exaggeration is not so great, for papalist (ultramontane) authors had for a long time tended to see Bossuet and other Gallican theologians as so unfaithful to absolute papal orthodoxy as to be not *much* better than Protestants. This was despite the recognition by such leading papalists as Bellarmine and Ballerini that papal infallibility was not a dogma of faith.¹⁴

The case of Joseph de Maistre is instructive and important, given his prominence as a leader of the Ultramontane Movement in the 19th century.¹⁵ His landmark work *Du Pape* (1819), asserting papal sovereignty and infallibility in forceful and trenchant terms, entails much scornful criticism of Gallicanism, a critique he continues in its sequel, *De l'Eglise gallicane dans son rapport avec le Souverain Pontife* (1820).¹⁶ Deep ambivalence about Bossuet comes through vividly in the five chapters in *De l'Eglise gallicane* which he spends discussing and lamenting the role of Bossuet in the Declaration of 1682 and in the

¹⁰ Gustave Lanson, *Bossuet* (Paris: Lecène, Oudin, 1891) 321; the 4th edition of this book was reprinted by Arno, New York, 1979.

¹¹ Patrick Riley, in the introduction to his translation of Bossuet's *Politics Drawn from the Very Words of Scripture* (New York: Cambridge University, 1990) xiv.

¹² George Salmon, *The Infallibility of the Church* (London: John Murray, 1923; first published in 1888) 87.

¹³ *Ibid.* 88.

¹⁴ See Pietro Ballerini, *Appendix de infallibilitate pontificia in definitionibus dogmaticis* (1768), as published together with Ballerini's *De potestate ecclesiastica* (Rome: Congregatio de Propaganda Fide, 1850) 231; and Robert Bellarmine, *Tertia controversia generalis: De summo pontifice* 4.2, in *Opera Omnia* 2 (Paris: Vives, 1870) 80. Both authors, while stating that all Catholics really should believe in papal infallibility, recognize that it had never been defined.

¹⁵ Among numerous treatments of the role of Joseph de Maistre in the Ultramontane Movement three brief but authoritative ones are Yves Congar, O.P., *L'Eglise de saint Augustin à l'époque moderne* (Paris: Cerf, 1970) 414–16; Roger Aubert, "La géographie ecclésiologique au XIXe siècle," in M. Nédoncelle et al., *L'ecclésiologie au XIXe siècle* (Paris: Cerf, 1960) 17–19; and Yves Congar, "L'ecclésiologie de la Révolution française au concile du Vatican sous la signe de l'affirmation de l'autorité," in the same volume by Nédoncelle et al., 81–85. For a longer discussion of de Maistre's ideas on the Church and the papacy, see Costigan, *Rohrbacher* 20–36. All these have numerous references to the literature.

¹⁶ The edition of *De l'Eglise gallicane* used here is Joseph de Maistre, *Du Pape, suivi de l'Eglise Gallicane dans son rapport avec le Souverain Pontife* (Brussels: H. Goemaere, 1852), two vols. in one. *De l'Eglise gallicane* is in vol. 2, so all pages numbers refer to that volume.

Defensio. He understands very well that the bishop of Meaux is like himself a man of order, stability and orthodoxy, so much so that he would not even want to convoke an assembly in which any questioning of authority might take place.¹⁷ He states as a "grande vérité," all in italics: "Never has authority had a greater or above all a more upright defender than Bossuet."¹⁸ "The idea of calling into question the authority of the pope at a meeting (*comitium*) in the Catholic church, of treating in a national meeting points of doctrine that could only be discussed by the universal Church" was foreign to him.¹⁹ De Maistre thinks that Bossuet attended the meeting hoping to serve as a moderating influence.²⁰

It is in his lengthy and troubled discussion of the *Defensio* that de Maistre regretfully but harshly decides that Bossuet lacked the strength of character to resist the royal demand that he write a full-scale defense of articles that he really despised in his heart,²¹ articles that really were "Protestant in their essence."²² This accounts for the fitful and foot-dragging way in which he wrote the *Defensio*,²³ his weak comment that the French had not dreamed of making the articles a dogmatic definition,²⁴ his unwillingness to publish it when he completed it,²⁵ and his unfulfilled desire to revise it.²⁶ De Maistre summarizes: "The four articles present incontestably one of the saddest monuments in ecclesiastical history. They were the work of pride, of resentment, of party spirit, and above all of weakness, to put it mildly."²⁷ If implemented, they would make "the government of the Church difficult or impossible."²⁸ This being the case, "The defense of the articles cannot be better than the articles themselves."²⁹ De Maistre's great conviction is that a clergy devoted to absolute papal sovereignty in all things would not comply with the demands of any national monarch. To his mind, the Gallican clergy's subservience to Louis XIV in the Declaration of 1682 proves the thesis: the king ordered it like a watch or a carriage, and they, Bossuet among them, spinelessly complied.³⁰ Noting that great men sometimes reach a "fatal point" after which they sadly decline, de Maistre says, "Bossuet should have died after the sermon on Unity, like Scipio Africanus after the battle of Zama."³¹

¹⁷ *De l'Eglise gallicane* 205.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* 205.

²¹ *Ibid.* 210.

²³ *Ibid.* 209.

²⁵ *Ibid.* 220-21.

²⁷ *Ibid.* 235.

²⁹ *Ibid.* 236.

³¹ *Ibid.* 265. The Sermon on Unity, preached by Bossuet at a general assembly of the French clergy on November 9, 1681, was widely admired by Ultramontanes as well as Gallicans for its reverent appreciation of the role of the pope in the universal Church (Bossuet's *Oeuvres complètes*, 31 vols., ed. F. Lachat [Paris: Louis Vives, 1862-1886] vol. 11, esp. 592-60).

¹⁸ *Ibid.* 259.

²⁰ *Ibid.* 207.

²² *Ibid.* 216.

²⁴ *Ibid.* 210-11.

²⁶ *Ibid.* 222.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*

Felicité Lamennais, who by the mid-1820s had emerged as the most vigorous spokesman of the ultramontane viewpoint, continued the fierce criticism of Gallicanism with indignation fueled by the experience of the France of that time.³² He and a growing number of younger clergy and some laity scorned the bishops who complacently accepted the Bourbon Restoration's continuance of the historic Gallican system's royal controls over the Church, reinforced by new ones added by Napoleon.³³ His *De la religion considérée dans ses rapports avec l'ordre politique et civile* (1825–1826), a scathing expose of the whole Gallican system, includes severe comments on Bossuet. It was the "lamentable destiny of this great bishop" that he cooperated in this cause.³⁴ Bossuet, Lamennais believes, did not share the "vile passions" of the other prelates of 1682, who acted out of resentment of the Sovereign Pontiff.³⁵ Indeed, he attempted especially with his Sermon on Unity to be a mediator between his confreres and the Church (by "Church" meaning evidently the papacy). He forgot that the Church does not accept such mediation. "Having nothing to cede, she never deals," and never accepts any alteration of her doctrine.³⁶

Lamennais devotes seventy pages to a critique of the four Gallican Articles. He devotes most attention to Article 1, which states that the Roman Pontiff has no power over kings in temporal matters.³⁷ This he professes to see as exempting governments from any moral norms or judgment, and thus as undermining all public morality.³⁸ As for the other three articles, he maintains that they "equally overturn the fundamental principle of the Church."³⁹ Article 2 states adherence to the

³² A very good book on Lamennais in English is Alec Vidler, *Prophecy and Papacy: A Study of Lamennais, the Church and the Revolution* (London: SCM; New York: Scribner, 1954). A briefer treatment is Adrien Dansette, *Religious History of Modern France* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1961) 1.207–26. A major modern work is Jean-René Derré, *Lamennais, ses amis, et le mouvement des idées à l'époque romantique, 1824–1834* (Paris: C. Klincksieck, 1961). On Lamennais's religious thought, see Louis LeGuillou, *L'évolution de la pensée religieuse de Felicité Lamennais* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1966).

³³ On this development, see Richard F. Costigan, S.J., *Rohrbacher* 39–70; "The Ecclesiological Dialectic," *Thought* 49 (1974) 134–44; and "Lamennais and Rohrbacher and the Papacy," *Revue de l'Université d'Ottawa*, 57 (juillet-septembre, 1987) 53–66. The Gallican system did entail very extensive royal controls over church matters. On this, see André Latreille et al., *Histoire du catholicisme en France*, 2.355–78, esp. 363–367, or Roland Mousnier, *The Institutions of France under the Absolute Monarchy, 1598–1789* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1979) 1.311–16.

³⁴ Felicité Lamennais, *De la religion considérée dans ses rapports avec l'ordre politique et civile*, as in *Oeuvres complètes de F. de la Mennais* (Paris: Paul Dubrèe et Cailleux, 1836–1837) 7.103.

³⁵ *Ibid.* 164.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ The text of the Declaration of the Gallican Clergy can be found in Latin in DS 2281–2284, and in English in Sidney Z. Ehler and John B. Morrall, *Church and State through the Centuries: A Collection of Historic Documents with Commentaries* (Westminster, Md.: Newman, 1954) 207–8.

³⁸ *De la religion* 165–94.

³⁹ *Ibid.* 194.

conciliarist doctrine of the Council of Constance, Article 3 asserts that the Roman Pontiff should govern the Church according to the canons of tradition, and Article 4 states that dogmatic definitions of the Pope are not irreformable apart from the consensus of the Church. He discusses and rejects Article 2 at some length,⁴⁰ and never moves clearly into Articles 3 or 4, except for a very long footnote which criticizes on logical and practical grounds the "dispersed infallibility of the Gallicans."⁴¹ His real argumentation throughout, like that of de Maistre, does not work from Scripture or tradition, but rather is logical and political in nature. There *must* be a really sovereign religious power that can rule and order society by simply decreeing solutions to all religious, moral, or even political questions. What constitutes a society is a supreme power, so if the Church does not have a certainly supreme power, it is not even really a society.⁴² The Mennaisian group, seeing the French episcopate pursuing a course of subservience to royal interests,⁴³ were not inclined to value the collective judgment of bishops, which is a basic assumption of the collegial and consensual ecclesiology of Gallicanism. Rather, they sought a supreme supranational spiritual leader who could simply assert and maintain Catholic principles no matter what the weaknesses of national clergies and hierarchies. In a spirit of great idealism, they projected onto the distant Holy Father in Rome the qualities seen as lacking in the bishops near at hand.⁴⁴ Low regard for bishops in practice led to a devaluation of the episcopate in theology, and as the ultramontane current surged through the decades before Vatican I very little thought was given to scriptural, patristic or historical considerations about the role of bishops in the Church.⁴⁵ These latter are central to Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet as he defends the fourth of the Gallican Articles, which upholds the role of the episcopate in the teaching of the faith.⁴⁶

⁴⁰ Ibid. 194–239.

⁴¹ Ibid. 203–7.

⁴² Cf., e.g., *ibid.* 207.

⁴³ This kind of critique of the French hierarchy is spelled out in greater detail in Richard F. Costigan, S.J., "Tradition and the Beginning of the Ultramontane Movement," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 48 (1981) 27–46, which draws on writings of three associates of Lamennais, Philippe-Olympe Gerbet, René-François Rohrbacher, and Thomas Gousset.

⁴⁴ This aspect of the Ultramontane Movement, developed throughout Costigan, *Rohrbacher*, is summarized in the conclusion (243–47).

⁴⁵ See articles cited above by Roger Aubert, "La géographie ecclésiologique au XIXe siècle," and Yves Congar, "L'ecclésiologie de la Révolution française au concile du Vatican."

⁴⁶ The edition of the *Defensio Declarationis Cleri Gallicani de Ecclesiastica Potestate* which is used here is that of F. Lachat, 31 vols. (Paris: Louis Vives, 1862–1866). The *Defensio* fills vols. 21 and 22 and totals 1372 pages. The fact that the work was not published by Bossuet during his life led to some confusion, as different editors arranged the numerous books of the work in varying orders according to personal preference. In fact, Aimé-Georges Martimort has published a whole separate book discussing the various editions, *L'établissement du texte de la Defensio Declarationis de Bossuet* (Paris: Cerf,

THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND THE ROMAN CHURCH

One of the basic and most manifest lessons of church history, Bossuet maintains, is that the Roman Church has at times been saved by the whole Catholic Church. The greatest and most instructive example of this is "the infamy of the tenth century," in which for many long decades "the most shameful encroachers occupied the chair of Peter," and the clergy of Rome seemed unable to do anything about it.⁴⁷ Clearly, the faith, staying power, and authority of the whole universal Church sustained the Roman Church in spite of unfit popes during those dark years.⁴⁸ "It is therefore the full and supreme and universal authority of the Catholic Church that supplies what is lacking even in the Roman Church."⁴⁹

The same lesson is shown very graphically also in the Great Western Schism, when for forty years even good and saintly women and men did not know which pope should be recognized as the true one.⁵⁰ Bossuet believes that through this long and painful ordeal Christ demonstrated two profound truths. First, "that by his inscrutable judgment the Roman Church could fall into this disorder and tumult from which it could not extricate itself, and depended [for a solution] on the authority of the Catholic Church."⁵¹ Second, "that under a doubtful and wavering pope, even under a false pope or no pope, there remains, even for a lengthy period, not only the unity but also the certain authority of the Catholic Church."⁵²

To Bossuet it seems clear that the universal Church which can survive corruption, malfeasance and stupidity in its supreme pontiffs can and does also survive errors made by the pontiffs in the exercise of their teaching office. It is his conviction that "even if the Roman Pontiff defines something false, the Catholic Church and the Apostolic See remain" steady as they were constituted.⁵³ History, he believes, shows that "they are refuted who think that the Catholic Church would at once perish if any Roman Pontiff defined something false: as if this were the one thing that the authority of the Catholic Church could not supply." Not only the whole community of the Church but the Apostolic See, the papacy, "founded by God as the bond of Catholic society

1956). Likewise, the alternative title *Gallia Orthodoxa* is used in different ways in different editions. Lachat uses it for the 124-page *Dissertatio Praevia*, and places it before Book 1.

⁴⁷ *Defensio* 9.219. The principal area of the *Defensio* in which Bossuet deals with Article 4 of the Declaration is Books 8–10. The *Dissertatio praevia* and Books 1–6 of the *Defensio* are found in vol. 21 of Lachat's edition; the remainder of the *Defensio*, including Books 8–10, is found in vol. 22. It seems most useful for our purposes to cite the *Defensio* by book number and the page number of the volume.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* 9.220.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* 9.223.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* 9.221.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵³ This is a chapter heading on 9.223.

and communion," certainly endures through every crisis.⁵⁴ Can it be thought that during the Great Schism, when two and finally three popes contended for the allegiance of the Church, "the seal of Christian fraternity established by Christ in the communion of the Roman Pontiff was broken off? Hardly!"⁵⁵ Rather a deep-seated conviction that there should be reunion under one pope animated and guided all parties, who continued "to enjoy the communion of the Catholic Church and of the Apostolic See joined with it."⁵⁶ In view of the abundant evidence of the resilience of the Church through such varied crises, "why should the Apostolic See or the Catholic Church collapse if the Roman Pontiff defines something false?"⁵⁷ Is this the one case in which the Holy Spirit given by Christ fails the Church? Surely there is no case more necessary than the preservation of the faith. Does it make sense to say that if the Pope preaches a false doctrine, "the Church is unarmed and devoid of all protection if he uses certain formulae and solemnities? What is more absurd than that?"⁵⁸

Bossuet accepts without question that Jesus Christ, in conferring on Peter a special role in governing and teaching the Church, established a real primatial authority. Discussing the "Tu es Petrus" text, he says, "That office, that magisterium, that power moving to unity of faith, is the foundation of the Church, and cannot be taken away from the Church, or ever made to collapse by any force."⁵⁹ But the papalists err in insisting that every individual pope is an immovable rock.⁶⁰ No, "that invincible and unshaken power is in him who is the principal and corner stone, namely Christ." The human leader of the Church certainly possesses real power: "There is undeniably power in the ministerial rock; it is the greatest and most important, but it is partial, and the whole is greater than the part, as we have often said."⁶¹ It is not the person of Peter but his office and the whole Church which has strength and authority from Christ: "the ministerial rock, the Apostolic See, the head of the Churches, cannot be overturned, because it has the strength promised and given to the whole body of the Church."⁶² (Bossuet does not pursue here or elsewhere the idea of "ministerial rock.")

Thus, Bossuet accepts as perfectly valid and legitimate the distinction between *sedes* (the seat, see) and *sedens* (the incumbent, pope) as an explanation for the endurance of the Church, and of the Apostolic See, through many episodes in which particular popes failed to utilize good judgment, or even to preserve the doctrine of the Church. This

⁵⁴ Ibid. 9.224.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid. Although he refers to phrases like *ex cathedra*, or other terms that could be used in a solemn definition, Bossuet does not name any in this passage.

⁵⁹ Ibid. 10.348; "magisterium" renders *magistratus*.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid. 10.349.

distinction was consistently dismissed by papalist authors as just another Gallican device to evade the absolute obedience owed to every Supreme Pontiff.⁶³ But we use this distinction, Bossuet says, not to evade the authority of the pope, "but so that we can show that the Roman Church was instituted by Christ in such a way that if the *sedens* makes a mistake, the *sedes* still remains intact, the uninjured series of Pontiffs remains, and a mistake made by one can be repaired by the diligence and faith of another."⁶⁴ The faith of the whole Church, or of the Roman Church, simply does not abruptly fail or cease when one pope makes a mistake. "The Roman faith does not perish when any one pontiff departs from it, nor does the Roman faith become void in vacancies or interregna even when they last for many years."⁶⁵

The case of Pope Liberius (352–366), whose lapse at one point in the Arian controversy has been much discussed, provided Bossuet with the first of several examples of popes whose errors in doctrinal questions did not impair the power of the Church and its primatial office to preserve the faith. He concludes a rather severe discussion of the case of Liberius with a comment that sums up admirably the main point that he wants to make: "Though Liberius altogether failed, the faith of Peter stood, the faith of Sylvester stood, and that of Mark, Julius, and the other Roman Pontiffs who had preceded Liberius."⁶⁶ The presbyters of the church of Rome, and many other persons at the time, upheld that faith, and the more they revered the Apostolic See the more they wanted it to be truly orthodox.⁶⁷

The case of John XXII (1316–1334), who publicly taught a doctrine regarding the beatific vision which was at variance with the traditional doctrine of the Church, has great significance for Bossuet. John XXII said in several sermons (1331–1334) that the just do not receive the beatific vision until the last judgment, but he was compelled on his deathbed at Avignon to recant. "You may say," Bossuet comments, "that it was a bold act for the French to teach the Roman Pontiff himself the faith."⁶⁸ In reality it was simply a matter of the Catholic Church acting to preserve the faith: this pope "no longer hesitating and wavering, was brought by the consensus of the Catholic Church to true and certain faith in the truth."⁶⁹

Preaching the faith from the eminent citadel of the papacy is certainly a central part of the apostolic office, continues Bossuet. The pope, he says, must not only define and anathematize but teach and preach the faith to the whole world. "John XXII plainly failed in this

⁶³ See, e.g., Giuseppe-Agostino Orsi, O.P., *De irreformabili romani pontificis in definiendis fidei controversiis iudicio* (1739) (editio altera; Roma: Paulus Junchius, 1771) tome 2, book 4, 259–63.

⁶⁴ *Dissertatio praevia* chap. 85, 109–10. ⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ *Defensio* 9.231.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Ibid.* 9.257. During the Avignon period most of the cardinals and other leading prelates there were French.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

duty."⁷⁰ Does the fact that he preached a falsehood mean that the faith of the Roman *Church* wavered, or that the *Apostolic See* preached something false or heretical?⁷¹ Or does it mean that "the Catholic Church did not resist the pope preaching this, or judging or defining this, or that it lacked the means to undo the false definition? Hardly."⁷² In referring to this pope's statements on the beatific vision as a definition, Bossuet is of course overstating the matter,⁷³ but he does seem correct in claiming that John was speaking on this issue of faith in his public capacity as pope, and not simply as a private doctor.⁷⁴ The Bishop of Meaux, in these final words of Book 9, offers a good summary statement of his view on the consensus of the Church. "Let us understand, therefore, that what the Roman Pontiffs have preached, believed and declared are not yet [the doctrine] of the Roman Church and Apostolic See until, having been promulgated by the Roman Pontiff and received by the whole Church, they have prevailed and solidified, and [so are recognized as] the Roman faith, the faith of Peter and the faith of the Apostolic See, which cannot fail."⁷⁵ The Church, in short, has the wherewithal to correct a mistake of the Supreme Pontiff. It will be noted that many of Bossuet's statements of the consensus of the Church fit the idea of "reception" in recent ecclesiological discussion.⁷⁶

THEOCRATIC CLAIMS OF GREGORY VII AND BONIFACE VIII

But most prominent among the genuine concerns of Bossuet and of the French generally was the doctrine enunciated by several popes asserting that the Roman Pontiff has a sovereign power to judge and if need be to depose kings and emperors. The blunt rejection of this doctrine constitutes Article 1 of the Gallican Declaration, and Bossuet devotes some 416 pages, Books 1–4 in the *Defensio*, to a comprehensive critique of it. Not only, he maintains, was there no consensus in the Church undergirding such an idea when Gregory VII (1073–1085) enunciated it in the eleventh century, it was an idea completely new. It had "never even been thought of" in the first ten centuries.⁷⁷ When Gregory proclaimed it, its "newness stupefied the world."⁷⁸ This pope and some of his successors "acted contrary to evangelical truth and to the most ancient tradition when they attempted to depose kings."⁷⁹ It

⁷⁰ Ibid. 9.257–58.

⁷¹ Ibid. 9.258.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ On this point, see James Heft, S.M., *John XXII and Papal Teaching Authority* (Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen, 1986) 97–99.

⁷⁴ Bossuet makes this point in *Defensio* 9.255.

⁷⁵ Ibid. 9.258.

⁷⁶ Among numerous scholarly treatments of reception in recent years, some useful brief ones with references, are Francis A. Sullivan, S.J., *Magisterium: Teaching Authority in the Catholic Church* (New York: Paulist, 1983) 50–51, 84–87, 109–17; Patrick Granfield, O.S.B., *The Limits of the Papacy* (New York: Crossroad, 1987) 134–68. See also the important article on reception by Yves Congar, O.P. cited below in n. 133.

⁷⁷ *Defensio* 1.149.

⁷⁸ Ibid. 1.151.

⁷⁹ Ibid. 9.239.

is true that they did not, despite their evident belief in the idea that such power belongs to the papacy, erect it into an ecclesiastical "dogma." However, in declaring and pressing this viewpoint, "they produced enormous resentment for the ecclesiastical power, provided grievances for schismatics and heretics, and led Catholics into error rather than confirming them in faith." The only reason why all this did not cause really irreparable harm was that "the Catholic Church never approved it, and never admitted it as a doctrine of faith."⁸⁰ It was, in other words, not "received" by the Church.

One of those successor popes, Boniface VIII (1294–1303), did come very close, Bossuet believes, to proclaiming the power of deposition to be a "dogma of the Church."⁸¹ Bossuet points out correctly that in the bull *Unam sanctam* (Nov. 18, 1302), written in the heat of his controversy with King Philip IV of France, Boniface certainly does say that the spiritual power is superior to the temporal and can judge it.⁸² Bossuet says that Boniface seems to prepare the way in the "exposition," the body of the document, for a definition of the deposing power.⁸³ But in the concluding sentence, which certainly uses the phraseology of a definition, and which does emphatically assert that every human being, to be saved, must be subject to the Roman Pontiff, Boniface refrains from adding the phrase "etiam in temporalibus."⁸⁴ He seemingly wanted to say it, and this is a point that Bossuet stresses, but "at that point restrained himself, deterred by the newness and difficulty of the matter."⁸⁵ He was aware that even after several centuries this idea still did not have broad support in the consensus of the Church. The French, Bossuet adds, did not assent to the Bonifacian view, well aware that "these new ideas were far from the ancient tradition of the Fathers and from the understanding (*sensus*) of the Gallican Church." They did this "so that the constitution of Boniface VIII could not harm" the Church.⁸⁶

Bossuet says that some, unnamed but presumably some more militant Gallicans, have said that the definition should be understood as proclaiming dogmatically the "manifest error" which had been spelled out in the exposition, and that therefore the whole document is indefensible.⁸⁷ Others, also unnamed but presumably of the ultramontane persuasion, maintain that everything in the document, proclaimed as

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ *Ibid.* 9.239. We will synthesize statements from both Books 3 and 9 in this section.

⁸² The Latin text of *Unam sanctam* is given in DS 870–875. Brian Tierney gives an English translation in *The Crisis of Church and State, 1050–1300* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1964) 188–89.

⁸³ *Defensio* 3.461. What Article 1 of the Declaration of 1682 specifically rejects is any claim of the Roman Pontiff over kings regarding temporal matters; cf. DS 2281.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.* That concluding assertion is DS 875, which states: "Therefore, we declare, state, and define (*declaramus, dicimus, diffinimus*) that it is altogether necessary for salvation that every human creature be subject (*subesse*) to the Roman Pontiff."

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ *Ibid.* 3.240.

it is by the Apostolic See, must be accepted as of faith.⁸⁸ Bossuet thinks of himself and the mainstream of the Gallican Church as standing in a middle ground, with most Catholics, in recognizing a primacy of the papacy in spiritual matters but not in temporal.⁸⁹ The age-old ecclesiology faithfully preserved by Gallican tradition, unlike that of Boniface VIII, Bossuet says in a summary comment, has stood the test of time. It is "a doctrine relying on Scripture, antiquity, and tradition, which by whatever name and by whatever authority it has been opposed, has remained established with eternal and with unconquered strength in the Catholic Church."⁹⁰ It is a basic belief of Bossuet that one major reason why the decrees of Boniface "did not harm the faith [meaning apparently did not ruin it], was that the Gallican Church, so great a part of the Catholic Church, while others remained silent, openly remonstrated and led Roman Pontiffs to temper the acerbity of the Bonifacian doctrine."⁹¹

Near the end of Book 4, Bossuet offers a summary in fourteen points of what he has said in defense of the First Article of 1682. Point 14 is strongly worded, and is an eloquent statement of the harm done to the fabric of the Church when its highest authority goes so far beyond the faith consensus of the ecclesial community. When the Roman Pontiffs claimed the power to depose kings, "this power was never recognized by any king, and never by the estates of any kingdom."⁹² Rather kings and kingdoms resisted the claim, and the attempt to depose kings gave openings to ambition and pretexts for rebellion. All in all this papal claim "was never useful to anyone and brought great harm" to many.⁹³ Pervading French thinking about Article 4 was the belief that the Church has no way of knowing that there will not be another Boniface VIII, issuing another *Unam sanctam*, and quite possibly presuming to define it as a dogma of faith.

CONSENSUS OF THE CHURCH AND THE ECUMENICAL COUNCILS

The relative authority of pope and ecumenical council is not directly related to Article 4's concern with the assent of the Church to papal pronouncements, and is indeed the subject of Article 2, which asserts the doctrine of conciliar supremacy. However, some things that Bossuet says in defending Article 2 are helpful in understanding the Gallican belief that supreme authority in the Church really rests with the consensus of the whole Church, by "Church" meaning always the whole body of bishops.⁹⁴ The recognition of the authority of the councils since the early centuries, Bossuet says, surely rests on the belief that they express the faith of the whole Church. When there is a

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid. 3.465.

⁹² Ibid. 4.522.

⁸⁹ Ibid. 3.461.

⁹¹ Ibid. 9.240.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Bossuet's main treatment of Article 2 is contained in Books 5 and 6, which cover pp. 543-758 in vol. 21 of Lachat.

general assembly of the bishops, the Church's known and accepted chief teachers, gathered from the whole world to settle a question of doctrine, then it is not a matter of this or that doctor or faction but of the voice of the Church. The great councils are recognized as having "certain and ineluctable authority" because they "represent the universal Church"⁹⁵ For this reason, "nothing has been regarded as infallible and irrefragable unless it has been confirmed by the consensus of the universal Church."⁹⁶ The judgment of the Roman Pontiff can be re-treated in a synod, "but after a synod, provided it is regarded as legitimate, nothing may be re-treated, nothing may be discussed [again]."⁹⁷

Bossuet sees the Council of Chalcedon, with its reception of the letter of Pope Leo I at a critical point in the debate, as illustrating the thesis. It is the consensus of pope and bishops on the doctrine that gives it its "irrevocable strength," not the authority of the pope alone, "which then no one thought of."⁹⁸ The fathers at Chalcedon "codecide and cojudge, and the *sententia* of the pope is the *sententia* of the council."⁹⁹ They studied Leo's letter carefully and concurred in its doctrine. Their individual signatures (on the council's decree) were not a matter of "mere obedience."¹⁰⁰ Going through the proceedings of Chalcedon, and some statements of Leo himself, Bossuet concludes that the bishops "judged, were persuaded, and understood that the faith expounded by Leo was the common faith of all of them."¹⁰¹

In Book 8, Bossuet addresses the papalist claim that the authority of the Roman Pontiff is certainly superior to that of any and all councils. "The adversaries," he says without naming any of them, assert that the supreme power of the Apostolic See is so great that only those councils confirmed by it are to be regarded as legitimate universal synods, and that each legitimate synod has only as much authority as the Apostolic See decides.¹⁰² In fact, they claim that "all the authority of bishops and of councils flows from Peter and his successors as from a font."¹⁰³ Rejecting this claim, Bossuet maintains that "confirmation does not entail any papal infallibility or superiority."¹⁰⁴ The word "confirm" does not have to mean the possession of superior power. Popes often confirm the decrees of their predecessors; does this detract from the power of these latter? Councils sometimes confirm, or reaffirm, decrees of other councils or of the Apostolic See. Thus, "even from the strongest approbation, confirmation, or corroboration that words

⁹⁵ *Defensio* 7.8.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.* 7.34.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.* 7.39. The famous exclamation of the Fathers at Chalcedon, "Peter has spoken through Leo," receives diametrically opposed readings from Roman and Gallican authors. For references and comment on this, see Costigan, "The Consensus of the Church" 42 n. 109.

¹⁰² *Defensio* 8.104.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ *Ibid.* 7.9.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.* 7.37.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.* 7.38.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.* 8.105.

can express there cannot be inferred a superior power, as the adversaries contend."¹⁰⁵ Concluding a survey of the first eight councils, he maintains that to the extent that these were confirmed by the Roman Pontiff this "did not provide their strength (*robur*), so that strength that was lacking in the decrees was added to them; rather it provided that what was in them might be more fully declared."¹⁰⁶

The Council of Jerusalem, as reported in Acts 15, stands for Bossuet as the model for all councils, and certain key words in that account really provide the basis for an authentic *theology* of the councils. In the history of the councils, he says in Book 10, we find everywhere valid the apostolic dictum of Jerusalem, "*visum est Spiritui sancto et nobis*" (Acts 15:28).¹⁰⁷ This clearly joins the "it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit" with the "and to us"; that is, the unity of the whole episcopal and apostolic order in teaching the faith is stipulated. This history, like the Scripture itself, certainly shows that "it is not, as they now claim, that councils have from the Pope the ability to decide rightly, [they have it] from the Holy Spirit, and joined with it the authority and testimony of the universal Church."¹⁰⁸

Other New Testament texts are at times cited by Bossuet as undergirding a conciliar ecclesiology. He notes a comment by Bellarmine acknowledging the value of councils in the transmission of the faith. Bellarmine noted that "definitions of faith depend principally on apostolic tradition and the consensus of the churches," adding that there is no better way to ascertain what is the belief of the whole Church than a large meeting of bishops from all the provinces.¹⁰⁹ But he erred, says Bossuet, in calling such a council a *medium humanum* which the Roman Pontiff may see fit to utilize. It is "not a *humanum medium*, but plainly *divinum*," because Christ had addressed his disciples in the plural when he said "ego mitto vos" (John 20:21) and "ego vobiscum sum" (Matthew 28:19).¹¹⁰

CONSENSUS ECCLESIAE: WHAT AND HOW

It has often been said that Gallicanism demands a *consensus subsequens* to papal pronouncements.¹¹¹ That is, after the Roman Pontiff issues a doctrinal statement, the churches in various countries study it, and if they believe it is authentic Catholic doctrine, give their consensus. The papal statement is not considered definitive or, to use a

¹⁰⁵ Ibid. 8.110.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. 8.118–19.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid. 10.341.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Bellarmine, *De Romano Pontifice* IV.7, quoted by Bossuet, *Defensio* 8.154.

¹¹⁰ *Defensio* 8.157.

¹¹¹ This habit of the older papalist authors continues in modern scholars; see, e.g., Paul Nau, O.S.B., "Le magistère ordinaire au premier Concile du Vatican," *Revue Thomiste* 62 (1962) 207; Roger Aubert, *Vatican I* (Paris: L'Orante, 1964) 219; Klaus Schatz, S.J., *Kirchenbild und päpstliche Unfehlbarkeit bei den deutschsprachigen Minoritätsbischofen auf den I Vatikanum* (Rome: Università Gregoriana, 1975) 84, 218, 324, 490.

term current among both papalist and Gallican authors, irreformable, until it has been so received in all countries. It is assumed that the doctrine of *consensus subsequens*, if implemented, would result in a long, perhaps interminable, process, and moreover that this is probably the real intention of the Gallicans: obstruction of the pope's conduct of the teaching office. Article 4 of the declaration of 1682 has commonly been understood to stipulate *consensus subsequens*, with the *nisi accesserit consensus ecclesiae* clause taken to mean that chronologically the consensus is added to the papal teaching after the pope issues it.

Gallican authors do indeed at times describe the consensus of the Church in these terms, and Bossuet is one of these. For example, near the end of Book 8, summarizing what he has said about popes and councils, he says, "nor is even anything issued by the Holy See, or by the Fathers, or by the Roman Pontiffs, held to be irrefragable except after the consensus of the Church is added (accessit)."¹¹² Again, concluding a section on a controversy in the early centuries, he says: "This stands unmoved: Cyprian, Augustine and others, in a question which they deem one of faith, if after a judgment of the Roman Pontiff there seemed some dissident churches, awaited the judgment of the universal Church in order to achieve certitude."¹¹³

But this is not the only, or principal, way in which Gallicans describe the *consensus ecclesiae*. It is actually more complex and nuanced, and the focus is really placed most often on *consensus antecedens*, which is the underlying or pervasive agreement of the Church as a whole on the basic truths of faith. This comes through consistently in Bossuet's statements about the consensus of the Church. He consistently rejects the imputation that Article 4 is really disloyal to the Holy See, and that it is calculated to delay indefinitely the acceptance of a statement of the pope. He is irritated by snide questions about the mode of implementation of the consensus called for by the Gallican ecclesiology. Nicholas Dubois and other critics ask what are the instruments of the consensus. Would you send messengers and letters everywhere to investigate it, with immense labor and expense? Bossuet impatiently dismisses these "vain and inane little questions."¹¹⁴ Critics ask, "how many churches, how many bishops, how many chapters, abbots, regions" are needed for the consensus? "Does it include the Indians and the Japanese?" "How much trouble, how much expense, how many messengers will be running all over" to try to discover a consensus that will satisfy the Gallicans?¹¹⁵

These questions are dismissed by Bossuet as "vain and absurd," for

¹¹² *Defensio* 8.153.

¹¹³ *Ibid.* 9.179.

¹¹⁴ *Dissertatio praevia* chap. 77, 100. Bossuet does not cite any text of Nicholas Dubois, a contemporary critic of the Gallican position; on Dubois, see Martimort, *Le Gallicanisme* 531.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

Gallicanism does not think of consensus in these terms.¹¹⁶ Elaborating on this point elsewhere, he says that just as in any other kingdom, so in the kingdom of Jesus Christ the most effective ideas and norms are those that are not decreed by any specific act of authority but consist in the perennial sense and usage of all the people.¹¹⁷ Vincent of Lerins, when he spoke of the faith which is *semper et ubique*, was surely thinking of this kind of consensus and not of messengers and letters. "These deliria were reserved for our time."¹¹⁸ There are truths of the faith which Catholics everywhere have traditionally understood even apart from formal new statements of the magisterium. When the pope enunciates one of these, all Catholics, including the French, readily assent, so the critics should stop accusing us of making unreasonable demands regarding consensus.¹¹⁹ One of Bossuet's best succinct statements of the nature of *consensus ecclesiae* occurs in this same Chapter 1 of Book 9: "When the successor of Peter pronounces from the common tradition in such a way that all recognize the sense of their own faith in his statement, then there is that consensus which provides pontifical judgments with their firm and unbendable strength."¹²⁰

But the Gallican ecclesiology does not think in terms of some collective sentiment in which the faith consists simply of what the mass of people seem to believe. Much less does it consist of what individuals think the Catholic faith is. Gallicanism is emphatically not democratic, and it is not a charismatic, or uninstitutional or antinomian form of Christianity. Gallican Roman Catholicism is as fully hierarchical as papalist or ultramontane Roman Catholicism, but it places emphasis on the episcopate as a whole, always including the Roman Pontiff, and not simply on the sovereign power of the Supreme Pontiff alone. Bossuet had no use for the democratic church theory of Edmond Richer, which he rejects as "issuing from horrible and deeply imbibed errors."¹²¹ For Bossuet, the *ecclesia in consensus ecclesiae* always means the episcopate. Robert Duchon notes that Bossuet "opposes every association of priests, of deacons and of the faithful in the government of the Church."¹²² But Duchon also shows at length how Bossuet differs from the more thoroughly episcopal theory of Febronius, accepting a greater role for the Roman Pontiff than the latter.¹²³ His conclusion is apt: "Adversary of all multitudinarism and of all ecclesiastical democracy, Bossuet closes the door on the discussion, for he

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid. 9.163.

¹²⁰ Ibid. 9.162.

¹²¹ *Defensio* 6.747. On Edmond Richer (1559–1631), see Yves Congar, *L'Église de saint Augustin* (Paris: Cerf, 1979) 394–95.

¹²² Robert Duchon, "De Bossuet à Febronius," *Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique* 65 (1970) 416, citing the *Dissertatio praevia* chap. 76, where the point is made, if not quite as clearly as Duchon says.

¹²³ This is the main gist of the Duchon article.

¹¹⁷ *Defensio* 9.162.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

knows that the successors of the apostles are alone qualified to manifest the Church and to speak in its name."¹²⁴

The bishops function as a community of teachers endowed with the full authority of the teaching office. To perform this function responsibly, Bossuet states, they need to know that what they are teaching is the traditional doctrine of the Catholic Church. Thus, when they study a statement from Rome in order to "receive" it, they are *not* claiming authority superior to that of the Roman Pontiff, or even equal to his. They are simply acting as responsible teachers, ascertaining that the doctrine is an authentic belief of the Catholic Church. "Thus the bishops, when they receive a decree of the Apostolic See, after study, conjoin their *sententia* to his *sententia*, their judgment to his judgment, their authority which has come from God to the supreme authority of the Roman Pontiff which has come from God."¹²⁵ They do this not with any thought of replacing the authority of the Roman Pontiff but to fulfill their own role as teachers of the universal Church. In Bossuet's words, "it is not that their judgment and authority equal the judgment and authority of the Apostolic See, but that they understand from the consensus and unanimity itself that full strength (*plenum robur*) exists."¹²⁶ This surely shows plainly that Bossuet does not think mainly in terms of a simplistic *consensus subsequens*.

A fairly early event in the long, complex Jansenist controversy is cited by Bossuet as a good example of "the reception (*acceptatio*) of pontifical constitutions that we are talking about."¹²⁷ In 1653 French bishops received the decree *Cum occasione* of Innocent X (1644–1655) against the "Five Propositions" of Jansenism.¹²⁸ That is, on reading it and discussing it, they recognized its doctrine as sound Catholic tradition and readily indicated their concurrence. The Roman Pontiff, as head of the whole Church, has a supreme power to teach. "Since this chief (*princeps*) of ecclesiastical communion wants by his definition to promote nothing other than what he knows all the churches think, when everything is done truly and in order, the consensus that follows attests" that he is right.¹²⁹ "Experience shows that this doctrine and practice do not infringe at all on the authority and power of the apostolic decree." "Where in the world more than in Gallia were the constitution of Innocent X and others in the Jansenist matter received with greater veneration, or with greater vigor implemented." Certainly the Jansenist sectaries, "even if they appealed a thousand times to ecumenical councils, would not be heard anywhere, for the very constitution once published and everywhere accepted, obtained the

¹²⁴ Duchon 422.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

¹²⁷ *Dissertatio praevia* chap. 78, 101.

¹²⁸ On this episode, see Martimort, *Le Gallicanisme* 202–15, esp. 213–14; or a briefer treatment in Hubert Jedin et al., *History of the Church 6: The Church in the Age of Absolutism and Enlightenment* (New York; Crossroad, 1981) 37–40.

¹²⁹ *Dissertatio praevia* chap. 78, 102.

¹²⁵ *Defensio* 9.202.

strength of an irrefragable judgment," for the Roman Pontiff and the bishops had acted in concert.¹³⁰

BOSSUET AND THE HISTORICAL CHURCH

Several modern authors have commented that Bossuet was too devoted to the past, specifically the ancient past, and that he was unprepared to recognize that development and evolution inevitably and properly pervade and characterize all human history. Owen Chadwick declares that "Bossuet had declared the axiom that variation in religion is always a sign of error."¹³¹ Chadwick is referring, of course, to Bossuet's critique of Protestantism in his *Histoire des Variations des Eglises Protestantes*, and does not deal with the ecclesiological issues which are our concern here.¹³² Yves Congar sees in Bossuet "a nuance of fixism" on the "ancient discipline" of the Church, "a certain forgetting of the human life of the Church, a certain closure to what opens the ways of the future."¹³³ Aimé-Georges Martimort, writing in the 1950s, criticizes Bossuet and his colleagues for the "anachronism" of clinging to an "ancient doctrine that they found in books."¹³⁴ In his conclusion also he faults Bossuet for being too attached to an idealized past.¹³⁵ He thinks that it was Bossuet's strong personal need for stability and continuity that made him "react against the Ultramontanes who, in his perception, admired without discernment all the novelties and changes" in the doctrine of absolute papal monarchy.¹³⁶ Raymond Thysman, dealing with the influence of Bossuet on Henri Maret, a leading opponent of papal infallibility at Vatican I, says that Bossuet was too devoted to Christian antiquity and not attuned to the proper growth of the church institution.¹³⁷

Bossuet does consider the Ultramontanes guilty of creating a new doctrine. He ends the *Dissertatio praevia* by asking how, if papal infallibility is a necessary doctrine of the faith, the Church could have lived for 17 centuries without knowing about it. "Certainly in the Catholic Church we are living in the 17th century, and there is not yet agreement on that infallibility among the orthodox and pious." "Holy

¹³⁰ These statements are all from the page just cited.

¹³¹ Owen Chadwick, *From Bossuet to Newman: The Idea of Doctrinal Development* (New York: Cambridge University, 1957) 5.

¹³² Chadwick makes only passing mention of the *Defensio* in an endnote on p. 198.

¹³³ Yves Congar, *L'Eglise de saint Augustin* (Paris: Cerf, 1970) 400. Congar's section on Bossuet in this work is good in its appreciation of the values actually sought by Bossuet (397–400) and by Gallicans generally (391–402). He says that Bossuet was guided by a "theological vision" of the Church, and not simply by social or political considerations (397). Congar makes similar comments in a noted article on reception, "La 'réception' comme réalité ecclésiologique," *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 56 (juillet 1972) 378, 389–91.

¹³⁴ Martimort, *Le Gallicanisme* 474. ¹³⁵ *Ibid.* 704.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.* 707.

¹³⁷ Raymond Thysman, "Le Gallicanisme de Mgr Maret et l'influence de Bossuet," *RHE* 52 (avril-juin 1957) 443–47.

and learned men resist it."¹³⁸ Therefore we should locate the certainty that the faithful need in the consensus of the whole Catholic Church, and not in a dubious papal infallibility. That infallibility is dubious, "for if Christ had granted it [to the pope], he would also have revealed it to his Church from the beginning, and not left it in doubt."¹³⁹ Elsewhere he says "it would seem incredible and absurd if such a great gift as infallibility were bestowed by Christ on the Pontiff and not revealed to the Church."¹⁴⁰

One could comment that Bossuet does not seem to allow for evolution in the implementation of the Petrine primacy in the course of centuries. But we also need to keep in mind that these comments, like the whole *Defensio*, were occasioned by a flurry of ultramontane polemical works published after the issuance of the Declaration of 1682. The first chapters of the *Dissertatio praevia* indignantly complain about several authors who attacked the Gallicans and impugned their orthodoxy. One of these was José Sáenz Aguirre, who caustically questioned whether the Gallicans really accepted even the authority of the councils.¹⁴¹ Others were Tirso González,¹⁴² and one that especially exercised Bossuet, Juan Tomás Rocaberti, who published both a lengthy and trenchant treatise on papal supremacy and a huge 21-volume collection of works upholding papal supremacy.¹⁴³ Rocaberti, "by far the most acrimonious of all, has declared war on a France not deserving [to be so attacked]."¹⁴⁴ Rocaberti accuses us of "error, schism and even heresy," and "if we bear this accusation in silence, the pristine honor of a France always orthodox will disappear."¹⁴⁵ Thus, Bossuet states that his reason for undertaking the *Defensio* is to show the true orthodoxy of the doctrine of the Parisian school: "that doctrine was not excogitated [in 1682] but from the very beginning of Christianity flows from common decrees and from the principles of the Christian nations."¹⁴⁶

¹³⁸ *Dissertatio praevia* chap. 97, 128. ¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ *Defensio*, Corollarium to book 11, 437.

¹⁴¹ José Sáenz Aguirre (1630–1699), a Spanish Benedictine cardinal, published *Auctoritas infallibilis et summa cathedrae sancti Petri, sive defensio cathedrae sancti Petri adversus Declarationem nomini illustrissimi Cleri Gallicani* (Salamanca, 1683). These questions about the French and the councils occur on 532–35 in this large book.

¹⁴² Tirso González (1624–1705), General of the Jesuits, published a lengthy and vigorous critique of the Gallican Articles entitled *De infallibilitate romani pontificis in definiendis fidei et morum controversiis* (Rome, 1689).

¹⁴³ Juan Tomás Rocaberti (1624–1699), a Spanish Dominican, followed his *De Romani pontificis auctoritate*, 3 vols. (Valencia, 1691–1694) with the great collection that he entitled *Bibliotheca maxima pontificia* (1695–1699).

¹⁴⁴ *Dissertatio praevia* chap. 5, 10.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.* chap. 1, 6. This is the very opening paragraph of the *Dissertatio*.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.* chap. 12, 20. Bossuet states in Chapter 6 of the *Dissertatio* that the Declaration of 1682 did not purport to be a dogmatic definition, but only the considered judgment of serious French theologians (13–15). He thinks of himself throughout as defending the ecclesiology of the "schola Parisiensis." In fact, his title for the long essay cited in this

Later Ultramontanes like de Maistre and Lamennais, dominated by their experience of the ongoing subjection of church to state in the Napoleonic era and the Bourbon Restoration, and by their idealistic devotion to the supranational papacy, were not prepared even to try to understand a less pope-centered ecclesiology. Their whole focus was on the urgent, imperative need of an utterly sovereign church power that would stand above all national and dynastic, and episcopal, concerns. They had no interest in any historical roots of a less centralized form of church governance, and no inkling that there could be any legitimate reasons for adhering to a more collegial and consensual ecclesiology.

The most valuable work to date on the meeting of French clergy that produced the Gallican Articles is that of Pierre Blet, whose massive archival research sheds much light on the ideas of the participants.¹⁴⁷ He maintains that the ecclesial views expressed in the articles were the genuine long-held beliefs of French clergy, and were not simply dictated by the Crown.¹⁴⁸ Regarding Bossuet personally, he reaffirms Martimort's finding that the four articles were Bossuet's "own theology (*propre théologie*) on the relations of Priesthood and Empire and on the relations between the bishops and the Pope."¹⁴⁹ Blet summarizes: "[W]hen Bossuet evoked the ancient canons, consecrated by the veneration of the whole universe, he spoke a language equally familiar and agreeable to the prelates of France; there was no need for Louis XIV and Colbert to make them accept it."¹⁵⁰ There was, of course, nothing particularly French about the idea of a Church more collegial and consensual in structure, for the Church actually was less monarchical and less centralized in earlier centuries.¹⁵¹ "The Gallicans of the 17th century," Yves Congar has noted, "knew their history re-

article as *Dissertatio Praevia* is "Gallia Orthodoxa, sive Vindiciae Scholae Parisiensis totiusque Cleri Gallicani adversus nonnullos." Martimort treats the Parisian ecclesiology at length (13–125). In reality, the "Faculté de Théologie de Paris," the body of several thousand men who had doctorates from the Sorbonne, always included many of the ultramontane or Roman view. Jacques Gres-Gayer, in a major recent study offers a wealth of information on a large number of *romains* in those years: "Gallicans et Romains en Sorbonne d'après le nonce Bargellini (1670)," *RHE* 87 (1992) 682–744.

¹⁴⁷ Pierre Blet, S.J., *Les Assemblées du clergé et Louis XIV de 1670 à 1693* (Rome: Università Gregoriana, 1972). For an appreciation of this work, see the extended review article by R. Darricau, "Lumières nouvelles sur l'histoire du Clergé de France sous Louis XIV," *RHE* 69 (1974) 93–102.

¹⁴⁸ This is summarized in *Assemblées* 348–62, esp. 350–51 and 360–61.

¹⁴⁹ This is Blet's wording (348), citing Martimort, *Le Gallicanisme* 451–52 and 549–63.

¹⁵⁰ Blet, *Assemblées* 350.

¹⁵¹ Much modern research on the evolution in the Church toward a more monarchical structure is succinctly and clearly synthesized in Patrick Granfield's chapter, "The Pope as Monarch," in his *The Papacy in Transition* (New York: Doubleday, 1980) 34–61. Also, Robert B. Eno summarizes a wealth of scholarship on this in *The Rise of the Papacy* (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1990).

markably well."¹⁵² In a chapter on the documentation of the *Defensio*, Martimort notes that Bossuet had a very large library of ecclesiastical literature, including the essential primary sources, and that he utilized it with great diligence in defending his theses.¹⁵³

Though Bossuet is obviously not a detached impartial historian, it is really not correct to portray him as dedicated mainly to impeding or blocking the papal teaching authority, or as simplistically wedded to a past thought to be "free" of a real papal primacy. His ideas on the consensus of the Church are embodied in an ecclesiology of collegiality that is historically informed and coherent, and intended to integrate both the pope and the body of bishops in one Roman Catholic Church. If he could read Pope John Paul II's recent encyclical on ecumenism, *Ut unum sint* (May 25, 1995), Bossuet would probably maintain that the most basic thesis that he was trying in his time and in his way to defend is affirmed in the new encyclical. John Paul II says that the ministry of the bishop of Rome, including the teaching ministry, exists "within the college of bishops."¹⁵⁴ He adds: "When the Catholic Church affirms that the office of the bishop of Rome corresponds to the will of Christ, she does not separate this office from the mission entrusted to the whole body of bishops, who are also 'vicars and ambassadors of Christ.'"¹⁵⁵ Bossuet does think of himself as defending this same vision of Church throughout the 1372 pages of the *Defensio*: Christ appointed not one but twelve apostles to lead the Church; the ministry of the Twelve should not be submerged in that of Peter. He sees a genuine need to show in church history how the successors of the Twelve shared in the ministry of guiding and teaching the community of faith. In any case, present-day scholarship needs to look attentively at the primary sources in a controversy, to try to ascertain as accurately as possible what people were saying and to understand their motives and goals.

¹⁵² Yves Congar, "Gallicanisme," in G. Jacquemet, ed., *Catholicisme* (Paris: Letouzey, 1956) 4.1735.

¹⁵³ Martimort, *Le Gallicanisme* 564–77.

¹⁵⁴ John Paul II, *Ut unum sint* (May 25 1995) no. 94, in *Origins* 25/4 (8 June 1995) 69; the phrase occurs twice in this paragraph.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.* no. 95 (*Origins* 69); the phrase quoted is from *Lumen gentium* no. 27.