

# **The Incongruous Bull: *In Supremo Apostolatus***

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*To*  
*Terri and the Robs: for life, love, and support*  
*T.M.: for luck*  
*Charlie: for dreams*

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## INTRODUCTION

The movement to abolish the African Slave Trade began in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century and was propagated continually by Britain in the century afterward. Through a variety of diplomatic mediums, Britain coerced several European nations into joining the mission to end the African Slave Trade. However, the Catholic monarchs of Spain and Portugal had presented a particular problem for Britain. After multiple failed attempts to gain their participation in Slave Trade abolition, Britain petitioned the papacy for a letter commanding the Catholic monarchs to exit the commerce. In 1821, they received assistance from Pope Pius VII. A politically liberal pope, by Britain's request Pius VII authored censures to the monarchs of Spain and Portugal, demanding their discontinuation of involvement in the African Slave Trade. However, neither monarch followed the pope's command. A decade later, after it had once more extinguished its other forms of diplomatic persuasion, Britain again petitioned the papacy for aid in dealing with the Catholic monarchs. Once again, the papacy complied and issued a condemnation of the African Slave Trade which, unlike the former letter authored by Pius VII, Britain published worldwide.

In late December of 1839 by the request of Britain, Pope Gregory XVI authored the Papal Bull<sup>1</sup> *In Supremo Apostolatus* in which he condemned the "trade of Negroes and all other groups of humans."<sup>2</sup> However, due to an obscure passage, early interpreters of *In Supremo* vacillated over whether or not the Bull's aim was to condemn the African Slave Trade or, additionally, the institution of slavery itself. Modern interpreters remain divided on the Bull's intended purpose due to the same misreading of the Bull. This

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<sup>1</sup> A Bull is an apostolic letter written by a pope for a general audience.

<sup>2</sup> Joel S. Panzer, *The Popes and Slavery*, (New York: the Society of Saint Paul, 1996), 97.

trans-temporal contention will be resolved in the first three sections of this essay.

However, a more important question, which has yet to even be explored by scholars, is why Pope Gregory XVI agreed to author *In Supremo* to begin with.

At the time of the Bull's authorship, African Slave Trade abolition was a resolutely liberal political ideology, condemned worldwide by political conservatives. Therefore, Gregory XVI's agreement to aid Britain in abolishing the African Slave Trade was a remarkably aberrant event; for the Pope had, throughout his career, made his conservative socio-political views clearly known to the entire world. Through his governance of the Papal States, and the publication of his international papal encyclicals, Gregory had publicly condemned everything from international trade, industry, and modern transportation to progressive social ideas of freedom of speech, freedom of thought, and freedom of the press.<sup>3</sup> Compared to these innovations, abolition of the African Slave Trade was an ideology much more radical. Thus, *In Supremo* stands as an incongruous bull in the historical career of Gregory XVI. I contend to resolve the motivation behind this paradoxical letter through a description of the Bull itself, its interpreters: both early and modern, and the career life of Gregory XVI. This analysis ultimately shows that Gregory XVI's motivations for authoring the Papal Bull *In Supremo* stemmed from his desire to halt modern technological, economic, and socio-political innovations that were largely produced through the profits of the African Slave Trade.

### **AFRICAN SLAVE ABOLITION AND THE AUTHORIZING OF THE BULL**

By the time Britain sought the support of Pope Gregory XVI they had, for less than half a century, been working to end a movement that had drastically transformed

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<sup>3</sup> See discussion of the papal encyclical *Mirari Vos* in the final section of this essay.

Africa, Europe, and the Americas for over three hundred years. The African Slave Trade originated in the 1440s with Portugal's colonization of Africa's western coast.

Recognizing Portugal's profits from the capture and sale of African natives, soon other European nations began claiming lands in Africa and exporting slaves themselves. By its end in the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Trans-Atlantic African Slave Trade produced some 12,000,000 to 15,000,000 slaves for mostly Europe and the Americas and, in the process, extinguished the lives of some further 36,000,000 to 60,000,000 Africans.<sup>4</sup> The damage this commerce had caused to Africa by the time of its abolition was tremendous and, literally, incalculable because of want of data.<sup>5</sup> In contrast, Europe and the Americas nations profited from greatly, not only from the sale of Africans, but also from the products they produced like cotton, sugar, tobacco, and coffee. The massive growth in the world labor force resulting from the African Slave Trade created a sharp increase in production of goods. In turn, this growth strengthened trade markets in, and between, Europe and the Americas. To the western world on both sides of the Atlantic, African slaves provided the commercial activity that would one day fuel industrial revolution.

Until its complete abolition in the 19th century, the African Slave Trade was greatly profitable to nations in Europe and the Americas. While modern scholars still dispute its precise contribution, consensus among most academics agree that profits

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<sup>4</sup> Consensus on the exact number of persons enslaved is debated in literature on this topic, however most recent scholars estimate that between 12,000,000 and 15,000,000. Further, it is hypothesized that this range represents only 15 to 25 percent of the total number of Africans that were enslaved but who died on route to their final destination. See David E. Stannard, *American Holocaust: The Conquest of the New World*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 317 footnote 9. See also Patrick Manning, "The Slave Trade: The formal Demography of a Global System," in *The Atlantic Slave Trade: Effects on Economies, Societies, and Peoples in Africa, the Americas, and Europe*, eds. Joseph E. Inkoir and Stanley L. Engerman (Durham: Duke University Press, 1992), 121.

<sup>5</sup> For modern attempts at estimating the damage done to Africa by the Slave Trade see for example Dijibril Tamsir Niane, "Africa's understanding of the slave trade," in *Diogenes* vol. 45 issue 3 (1997), 75-91.

from the Trade propagated industrial growth.<sup>6</sup> The surge in labor provided by African slaves increased worldwide production and consumption of goods, which in turn stimulated innovations in transportation, steel, and other coal burning technologies. This amalgamation of phenomena created a world demand for goods greater than any previously seen and gave economic stimulus for the development of industry.<sup>7</sup> Because of its monetary and material benefit in the West, the rise of African Slave Trade abolition in the late 18th and early 19th has intrigued scholars. How could nations like the Britain and the United States, who had been involved in the Slave Trade for several centuries and continued to profit from it, abandon the commerce?

While Britain and the U.S. continued to gain from their involvement in the African Slave Trade, by 1807 both countries had legally deserted it due to social movements that re-defined the Trade's image as sordid. Movements to abolish the African Slave Trade were visible in Britain and the United States from at least the 1780s.<sup>8</sup> By that time, the Slave Trade had been labeled a "tainted form of commerce," which violated newly founded philosophies on human liberty by Slave Trade abolitionists.<sup>9</sup> In

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<sup>6</sup> For a thorough review of the scholarly debate over exactly how profitable the African Slave Trade was see Kenneth Morgan, *Slavery, Atlantic Trade and the British Economy, 1660-1800*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 36-48. See also Ronald Bailey, "The Slave(ry) Trade and the development of capitalism in the United States: the textile industry in New England," and William Darty Jr, "British Industry and the West Indies Plantations," in *The Atlantic Slave Trade* 205-246, and 247-282 respectively.

<sup>7</sup> For research on how increased production created demand for new goods Ralph A. Austen and Woodruff D. Smith, "Private Tooth Decay as Public Economic Virtue: The Slave-Sugar Triangle, Consumerism, and European Industrialization," in *The Atlantic Slave Trade*, 183-204.

<sup>8</sup> Peace negotiations between the United States and Britain in 1783 hinted at Slave Trade abolition, see W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Suppression of the African Slave-Trade to the United States of America 1638-1870*, (Millwood; NY: Kraus-Thomson Organization limited, 1973), 133. Also, the London Abolition Committee was publicly formed in 1787, see Judith Jennings, *The Business of Abolishing the British Slave Trade, 1783-1807*, (London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., 1997), 34-51.

<sup>9</sup> For the quote see Jennings 133. Revolution in France produced wide social change throughout Europe and created new constructions of innate human equality and freedom. For an introduction to these ideas see *From Enlightenment to Romanticism*, eds. Ian Donnachie and Carmen Lavin, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 70-100. These ideas were absorbed globally and widely cited in the Slave Trade abolition movements in the U.S. and Britain, see Du Bois 41.

Britain, public support and Parliamentary action ended British involvement in the Slave Trade in 1807. In the United States, the story was much the same. However, in both countries, Slave Trade abolition was refuted by those who recognized how radical the movement was and disagreed with its position.

Anti-abolitionists in both Britain and the U.S. denounced Trade abolition as a revolutionary movement whose aim would cripple national and world economies. Also, those who rejected Slave Trade abolition disagreed with the blanket moral condemnation of the African Slave Trade invoked by Trade abolitionists. In Britain, slave traders accused abolitionism as being a threat to global British supremacy. Their accusation was valid.<sup>10</sup> Since Britain's first involvement in the Slave Trade in the latter half of the 16th century, slave traders held profitable positions in the Empire.<sup>11</sup> By the 17th century, Britain had essentially monopolized the trading of slaves from Africa, along with international its commercial markets.<sup>12</sup> In the United States anti-abolitionists made the same claim, however theirs was not historically valid. By the beginning of the 19th century the United States' domestic slave economy was virtually self sustaining: with slave-breeding and the inter-state slave trade providing for the labor demands of southern plantation owners.<sup>13</sup> This meant that the U.S. economy would not be greatly harmed by the Trade's erasure. Further, many southern slave owners were themselves Slave Trade

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<sup>10</sup> Recent scholarship has tended to agree with these early contenders to abolition. The African Slave Trade was abolished at the height of its profitability. In the years preceding 1807, the year British parliament officially closed off the country's involvement in the slave trade, profits made from both the sale of slaves and the goods they produced were higher than they had ever been. For an example of this view among scholars, see Drescher, *Econocide* 16 and 75.

<sup>11</sup> See *The British Transatlantic slave trade* 186 and 341 for examples of this fear.

<sup>12</sup> By the 19th century Britain had been responsible for almost half of Europe's total slave exports J.M. Deveau and Summer Mack, "European slave trading in the eighteenth century," *Diogenes* 179 (1997), 53-55.

<sup>13</sup> While generally supportive of Slave Trade abolition, southern plantation owners in the U.S. did press for its reopening when the supply of slaves ran short, as when the U.S. first annexed Texas. Du Bois 154.



abolitionists. They, as did many Trade abolitionists in Britain, saw a clear distinction between slavery and the Slave Trade. The former was legal, productive, and even humane towards the dimwitted who by nature were slaves. The latter was a squalid commercial business, run by greedy and foul slave traders, which wrongfully enslaved and exploited innocents.<sup>14</sup> Global Slave Trade abolition was not concerned with the emancipation of slavery itself. Abolition of the institution of slavery would not become popular anywhere until the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Beyond Britain and the United States, other European nations were also involved in Slave Trade abolition.

Britain and the U.S. were not the only countries involved in abolishing the African Slave Trade. France sporadically supported abolition throughout the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Denmark had actually abolished its ties to the Trade in 1803, but was never actively involved in gaining others' support for Slave Trade abolition.<sup>15</sup> The U.S. too was not heavily involved halting the trade internationally. No country had a larger impact on the abolition movement than Britain, which actively sought participation in the abolition of the African Slave Trade from neighboring nations in Europe.

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century Britain was relatively successful in gaining adherents to the Slave Trade abolition movement, pushing several countries out of the Slave Trade by incorporating the requirement of abolition into its international peace treaties. However, the Catholic monarchies of Spain and Portugal had repeatedly refused or ignored Britain's

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<sup>14</sup> The distinction between a "slave owner" and a "slave trader," along with the positive image of the first and the negative image of the latter, is an old one and dates back to at least the Roman era. For example, this distinction is seen in the letters of Paul in the New Testament where Paul condemns slave traders but promotes slavery, see Albert J. Harrill, "The Vice of Slave Dealers in Greco-Roman Society: The Use of a Topos in 1 Timothy 1:10," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 118 (1999), 97-122.

<sup>15</sup> Deveau 61.

many attempts to gain their cooperation.<sup>16</sup> The colonies of both governments were too reliant upon slave labor from the Trade to concede to any serious prohibitions.<sup>17</sup> After several treaties failed to incite collaboration from either Spain or Portugal to cut their ties to the Slave Trade early in the century, Britain turned to the Papacy in search of support for their mission.

At the Congress of Vienna in 1814, abolition of the African Slave Trade was not a primary issue of concern for the Great Powers of Europe, other than Britain. France's grip on Eastern Europe had been recently dissolved, and Russia, Prussia, and Austria (the other Great Powers) had greater interest in returning the continent to its pre-Napoleon station than joining Britain in its quest to end the Slave Trade. Nonetheless, seeking to shore up support for their position on the Catholic governments, Britain requested that a Papal presence at the conference speak in support of Slave Trade abolition. However, nothing came forth from the papacy as it was also concerned more with regaining its former power than attacking the Trade. By the end of the conference Britain had gained little ground for the abolition movement.<sup>18</sup>

Seven years later, the Great Powers met again to discuss strategies for stabilizing Europe, and once more Britain pushed the abolition issue. But, again, at the Congress of Verona in 1821, Britain gained few supporters. There were more pressing domestic issues to be discussed. Britain had again requested that the papacy show support for the

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<sup>16</sup> In 1817 Spain agreed to end slavery in its territory north of the equator and promised to end involvement completely by 1820, however neither agreement was upheld. A similar treaty was made with Spain again in 1833 that required it secede from the Slave Trade, and with Portugal in 1810 and 1839, none of which were upheld by the Catholic nations.

<sup>17</sup> During the 1830s both countries had agreed to prohibit slave trading in their colonies south of the equator. However, these decrees met strong opposition in both countries and were never strongly enforced by the Spanish or Portuguese governments. *The Historical Encyclopedia of World Slavery*, ed. Junius P. Rodriguez, (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 1997), 516.

<sup>18</sup> O'Dwyer. 190.

abolition movement and put pressure on Spain and Portugal at the conference, but again its interest at the conference lay in improving its political condition and so Britain received no assistance.<sup>19</sup> However, soon after the Congress ended the papacy complied with Britain's request and authored a censure to the Catholic monarchs.

Having failed to react promptly at the Congress of Verona, Pope Pius VII (1800-1823)<sup>20</sup> quickly took up the British request after the conference and sent to the leaders of the Catholic monarchs of Spain and Portugal a command to withdraw from the African Slave Trade.<sup>21</sup> The "pope of the new age," Pius VII was a politically liberal leader of the Catholic Church.<sup>22</sup> As a bishop, Pius had openly supported the newly founded ideal of political democracy. During his pontificate, he modernized economic and temporal components of the papal government by reforming the state tax system and permitting the laity positions in the papal administration.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, it was not unsurprising that he decided to aid Britain in prohibiting Spain and Portugal's commerce in the Slave Trade.<sup>24</sup> However, even with a command from the Pontiff, neither country could be persuaded to halt the Slave Trade. In the years that followed Pius VII's letter to the monarchs in 1823, Britain continued, unsuccessfully, to convince Spain and Portugal of the abolition cause through their old diplomatic means. In 1839, frustrated with the lack of progress their own political maneuverings could produce, Britain once more petitioned the Papacy for aid in pushing Spain and Portugal out of the Slave Trade.

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<sup>19</sup> Irby C Nichols Jr., *The European Pentarchy and the Congress of Verona, 1822*, (Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1971), 179-80.

<sup>20</sup> Note: dates adjacent to the names of each pope are the duration of their papal reign, when adjacent to others dates indicate lifespan.

<sup>21</sup> O'Dwyer 194-195.

<sup>22</sup> *New Catholic Encyclopedia* vol. 11, 381.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.* 379.

<sup>24</sup> J.D.N Kelly, *The Oxford Dictionary of Popes*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 302-305.

By the 1830s Spain and Portugal were still actively involved in exporting slaves from Africa, and so in 1839 again Britain petitioned the Papacy to put pressure on the Catholic monarchs to abolish their connection to the Trade.<sup>25</sup> However, Pius VII had died over a decade earlier, and a new pope now reigned in the Papal States.<sup>26</sup> Gregory XVI (1830-1846) had made his conservative socio-political views known well through a series of international papal encyclicals<sup>27</sup> earlier in the decade.<sup>28</sup> As shown above, the abolition of the African Slave Trade was viewed as a radical politically liberal movement by conservative thinkers. In Britain and the United States, political conservatives wished to maintain the African Slave Trade and were highly critical of Slave Trade abolitionists.<sup>29</sup> Therefore, there was concern that Gregory would not agree to author a censure. However, Britain had received cooperation from Gregory XVI on a previous issue they had brought him, so there was hope that he might agree to provide them aid once more.<sup>30</sup> Britain's aspiration was satisfied, and despite Gregory's conservative ideologies, he agreed to author a document condemning the African Slave Trade.<sup>31</sup>

Although British concern for abolition in Spain and Portugal generated the pope's response, neither Britain nor its mission of ending the African Slave Trade were

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<sup>25</sup> David R. Murray, *Odious commerce Britain, Spain and the abolition of the Cuban slave trade*, (New York: Press Syndicate of the Cambridge University Press, 1980), 124.

<sup>26</sup> Britain and the Papacy had no official diplomatic relations from 1831 to 1844. Saho Matsumoto-Best, *Britain and the Papacy in the age of revolution 1846-1851*, (Rockchester: Boydell Press, 2003), 20.

<sup>27</sup> A papal encyclical is an apostolic letter issued to bishops.

<sup>28</sup> The content of these encyclicals will be described in the final section of this essay.

<sup>29</sup> See discussion above.

<sup>30</sup> Gregory had agreed to condemn a rebellious Catholic in British owned Ireland several years earlier. Edward Fitzgerald, "Michael Anthony Fleming and Ultramontaniam in Irish-Newfoundland Roman Catholicism, 1829-1850," in *Historical Studies*, vol. 64 (Toronto, 1998), 27-45. Gregory was known to be supportive of the idea that Catholics should obey their temporal rulers no matter their religious preoccupation. The title of this encyclical was *Cum Primum* (1832). Again, see the third section of this essay for description of this encyclical.

<sup>31</sup> Gregory's conservative socio-political views will be detailed in the third section of this essay.

mentioned in the Bull.<sup>32</sup> Instead, *In Supremo Apostolatus* claimed to be itself a familiar censure in a long line of similarly condemning historical Catholic censures of the African Slave Trade. The Bull was sent to the monarchs of Spain and Portugal, as well as to Britain where it was reproduced and distributed worldwide. *In Supremo*'s point was clear: Catholics were to halt any and all involvement in the "trade of Negroes and all other groups of humans." In defense of this claim the Bull argued that the Catholic Church had opposed the very notion of "slave trading" since before the opening of the African Slave Trade in the 15th century.

### INTERPRETING THE BULL

Resting on the theme of charity, *In Supremo* demanded Catholics' abandonment of the African Slave Trade and argued for a long history of Catholic censure of the Trade. However, its argument for longstanding Catholic support for abolition was invalid. Familiarizing the aberrant support of the papacy to historical Catholicism, *In Supremo* used a potpourri of sources and distorted their significance to remold past Catholic silence and approval of the Trade. First, the Bull cited the work of Church Father Gregory of Nyssa (?-385), who the bull stated to have taken note of the "custom" of early Christians of opposing the trading of slaves "especially upon the occasion of the Easter Feast."<sup>33</sup> Nyssa had indeed noted this "custom" among early Christians, and had promoted abolition of slave trading in a lengthy treatise: "He who knew the nature of mankind rightly said that the whole world was not worth giving in exchange for a human soul. Whenever a human being is for sale, therefore, nothing less than the owner of the

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<sup>32</sup> Gregory conflated abolitionism with anti-clericalism, and thus was initially angered at Britain's request. Serget Daget, "A model of the French Abolitionist Movement and Its Variations," In *Anti-Slavery, Religion, and Reform: Essays in Memory of Roger Anstey*, eds. Christine Bort and Seymour Drescher (Wm. Dawson & Sons Ltd, 1980), 67.

<sup>33</sup> Panzer 98.

earth is led into the sale-room."<sup>34</sup> However, while appearing genuinely against slave trading, Gregory of Nyssa's stood against the practice due to his belief that owning slaves caused the owner a greater harm than that done to the slaves themselves. Owning slaves made the master prideful, which was itself a greater offense to God.<sup>35</sup> Another early Father of the Catholic Church, Pope Clement I (90-99?), is also said in the Bull to have "testified that he himself knew many instances" of early Christians who out of "ardent charity," sold *themselves* into slavery in exchange for the freedom of slaves:<sup>36</sup> "We know that many among ourselves have given themselves to bondage that they might ransom others. Many have delivered themselves to slavery, and provided food for others with the price they received for themselves."<sup>37</sup> Seemingly abolitionist, *In Supremo* again distorted the true meaning of the text. Slave trading was not attacked by Clement I. Instead, the evidence put forth by this pope merely showed how desperate early Christians were; some sold themselves as slaves in return for their kinsmen, others entered slavery solely to provide food for other believers.

From evidence of the early Church fathers, the Bull then cited the work of five popes who, it argued, condemned the trading in slaves before the publication of *In Supremo*. The first four popes cited; Pius II (1458-64), Paul III (1539-49), Urban VIII (1623-44), and Benedict XIV (1740-1758) had all condemned the capture of "Indians and

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<sup>34</sup> *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on Ecclesiastes: an English version with supporting studies: proceedings of the Seventh International Colloquium on Gregory of Nyssa*, ed. Stuart George Hall, (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1993), 74.

<sup>35</sup> Gregory of Nyssa held that slave owners committed the sin of pride by being harsh towards their slaves. "Gregory's message was not intended to influence the behavior of his audience towards their slaves, but something less than the total renunciation of slave owning was anticipated: perhaps a generous program of manumission, and a special effort to treat slaves humanely." See Peter Garnsey, *Ideas of slavery from Aristotle to Augustine*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 83-84.

<sup>36</sup> Gregory is referring to a letter titled I Clement, a pseudepigraphical work of perhaps the 2<sup>nd</sup> century ascribed to Pope Clement I.

<sup>37</sup> Jennifer A. Glancy, *Slavery in Early Christianity*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 82-83.

the West and South (America) who were being reduced into slavery.”<sup>38</sup> For over three centuries, the papacy had issued similar censures on this issue. However, all four popes had focused prohibition solely on “Indians in the West and South (America)” and, further, on those Indians who had embraced “faith in Christ.”<sup>39</sup> Only American natives had accepted Catholicism had gained papal clemency historically. Those who were “outside the bosom of the Church in the darkness of native superstition” were not protected.<sup>40</sup> The final pope mentioned, Pius VII, had as mentioned above “dutifully used his offices with those in power” in attempt to halt Spanish and Portuguese involvement in the Slave Trade.<sup>41</sup> However, besides the final pope mentioned, none of the previous pontiffs had dealt with the issue of slave trading in Africa, or the idea of “slave trading” in general. Before Pius VII, papal sanctions had arisen to protect converted Indians from enslavement, but no quarter was given to unconverted heathens. Beyond its misuse of anti-slave trade sources in Catholic history, the Bull also omitted mention of past papal commendations of the African Slave Trade.

After its initial settlement of Africa’s west coast in 1482, Portugal looked to the papacy several times over the next decade to frame its capture and export of African natives in the context of “holy war” to quicken the pace of colonization. In 1482 Portugal’s Prince Henry had Pope Eugene IV (1431-1447) authored the Apostolic letter *Illius qui*, in which the pope granted “full remission of sins to all who participated” in

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<sup>38</sup> Quote from Urban VIII’s *Commissum Nobis* (1639). See Panzer 89. Those on the same issue noted in *In Supremo* are a letter to the Bishop of Rubicon (1462) by Pius II, the brief *Pastoral Officium* to Cardinal Juan de Tavera of Toldeo (1537) by Paul III, *Commissum Nobis* by Urban VIII (1639), and *Immensa Pastorum* (1741) by Benedict XVI. .

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid 101.

Africa's colonization.<sup>42</sup> In 1452 and 1455, for similar reasons, Pope Nicholas V (1447-1455) authored two additional letters; *Dum Diversas* and *Romanus Pontifex*, in which he gave Portuguese colonizers the religious authority to render into perpetual slavery African "pagans" and "other enemies of Christ."<sup>43</sup>

Next, as was typical of those censuring the African Slave Trade, the existence of slavery itself was not at issue in the *In Supremo*. Conversely, the Bull celebrated Christianity's amelioration of slavery's punitive element,

"Inspired by Divine Spirit, the Apostles indeed urged slaves themselves to obey their masters according to the flesh as though obeying Christ, and to do the Will of God from their heart. However, the Apostles ordered the masters to act well towards their slaves, to given them what was just and equitable, and to refrain from threats, knowing that the Lord in heaven...is indeed Lord of the slaves and of themselves. Indeed...by the law of the Gospel...Christians should regard as brothers their slaves, especially their Christian slaves"<sup>44</sup>

Here, the Bull argued that the institution of slavery was ordained divinely and pacified by the Christian religion.<sup>45</sup> Under the Christian God slaves were required to venerate their holders as they would Christ, but in return gained leniency from their masters. "By divine law" slavery was made not only acceptable, but was supported in *In Supremo*.

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<sup>42</sup> *The Historical Encyclopedia of World Slavery*, ed. Junius P. Rodriguez, (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 1997), 261.

<sup>43</sup> *The Historical Encyclopedia of World Slavery*, 469.

<sup>44</sup> Panzer 97-8.

<sup>45</sup> The teachings of the "Apostles" here likely refer to the house codes for slaves and masters found in the Deutero-Pauline letters and 2 Peter 2:19 of the New Testament. The Deutero-Pauline letters are those among Paul's contribution to the canon that are believed to be pseudepigraphic; authored by Christians well after Paul's death. They are Ephesians, Colossians, 2 Thessalonians and the Pastoral Epistles of 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus. For a discussion of the Deutero-Pauline letters see Calvin J. Roetzel. *The Letters of Paul: Conversations in Context* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1998), 133-160. Those passages that dealt with rules for slaves and masters are found in Ephesians 6:5-9, Colossians 3:18-4:1, 1 Timothy 6:1, and Titus 2:9. The Bull also omits mention of the only condemnation of slave trading found in the New Testament in 1 Timothy 1:10. For a detailed study of this passage see Harrill 97-122.



As was reflected in the popular movement to abolish the African Slave Trade, Gregory's Bull *In Supremo* did not vacillate on its position on slavery itself: the Bull strictly acknowledged and commended its presence. However, ignoring the passage above, some of the Bull's language was vague enough that several interpreters, both past and modern, misinterpreted the Bull's message to be condemnatory of both the Slave Trade and the institution of slavery: "We, by apostolic authority, warn and strongly exhort in the Lord faithful Christians of every condition that no one in the future dare to bother unjustly, despoil of their possessions, or *reduce* to slavery Indians, Blacks, or other such peoples. (emphasis added)"<sup>46</sup> When viewed hurriedly and out of context, this section appears to support anti-slavery. However, when viewed more closely, this passage condemns only the *reduction* of non-slaves into slavery, not slavery itself.

### **THE BULL'S EARLY INTERPRETES**

Political ideologies, rather than ideological obscurity, blunted the Bull's impact in Europe. But these same factors meant that the Bull aroused interest in Britain and the United States: two large Slave Trade abolition epicenters.<sup>47</sup> In Britain, the Bull was celebrated by Daniel O'Connell (1775-1847), a lawyer a member of the British Parliament, as condemning both the African Slave Trade and slavery itself.

Daniel O'Connell spent much of his adult life fighting to liberate Catholics from British institutionalized discrimination in his homeland of Ireland. Ireland had been under British rule since 1800, and Catholics there had suffered undue hardships beneath the Empire: including restrictions on land ownership and occupation and participation in

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<sup>46</sup> Panzer 46.

<sup>47</sup> Papal relations with Spain and Portugal were strained throughout the reign of Gregory XVI due to "anti-clerical" regimes in both countries. Not until 1845 were relations to both countries made better at Rome.

politics. In 1823, O'Connell co-established the Catholic Association of Ireland to combat this indoctrinated British prejudice. The organization flourished with over 14,000 members at its apex, including much of the Church hierarchy in Ireland.<sup>48</sup> Through this popular base, O'Connell was able to gain considerable freedoms for Catholics marked; most famously by his contribution to the Catholic Emancipation Act of 1829, which liberated Catholics from many of the hardships incurred by the Catholic Penal Laws they had faced over the previous half century.<sup>49</sup>

While secondary to his work in Ireland, O'Connell was also actively involved in the Slave Trade abolition movement. In 1833, as a Member of Parliament, he aided in the decision to emancipate slavery in the West Indies.<sup>50</sup> Having worked much of his life to free the Irish from underneath a British yoke O'Connell took up the fight against slavery; for mirrored in that struggle O'Connell saw the same prejudice and injustice had he fought for years to liberate his own people from. When he read *In Supremo*, O'Connell interpreted the Bull as condemnatory of both the African Slave Trade and slavery itself, due to his misreading of the vague passage described above. With this misconception of *In Supremo*'s intended message, O'Connell went about spreading his interpretation of the Bull in Britain, as well as the United States. In Britain, O'Connell roused some support for his interpretation of the Bull. However, in the U.S., most Catholics were hard pressed to support his reading of *In Supremo* because of their desire

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<sup>48</sup> John F. Broderick, *The Holy See and the Irish Movement for the Repeal of the Union with England: 1829-1847*, (Rome: Apud Aedes Universitatis Gregorianae, 1951), 28.

<sup>49</sup> To summarize, the abolition of the Penal Laws permitted Catholics the right to land ownership, seats in Parliament, and "equity above the law". See George D. Boyce, *Nationalism in Ireland*, (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1982), 141. As one author discusses, the benefits received by the Emancipation Act were almost strictly limited to the middle class. See James A. Reynolds, *The Catholic Emancipation Crisis in Ireland, 1823-1829*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1954), 108.

<sup>50</sup> Gilbert Osofsky, "Abolitionists, Irish Immigrants, and the dilemma of Romantic Nationalism," In *American Historical Review*, Vol. 80 No. 4 (1975), 891-905.

to avoid prejudice in the south which conflated Catholicism with the abolition of slavery.<sup>51</sup>

By the 1830s immigration from Ireland had made Catholics a visible group on the national level in the U.S.<sup>52</sup> However, arriving to country mostly impoverished and unskilled, Irish immigrants met immediate stark criticisms from the native population (whose European ancestors had migrated to the U.S. in years prior) that their presence would surely be a financial burden on society. Irish xenophobia grew, creating fears among the natives that Catholic loyalties lay primarily in the Papacy, and not with their new temporal government.<sup>53</sup> The beginnings of a heated debate over the abolition of domestic slavery in the U.S. further excited these prejudices; particularly in the south where Catholics, and especially Irish Catholics, were a minority. U.S. Catholics wanted nothing to do with the debate. From across the Atlantic, O'Connell's interpretation of *In Supremo* helped solidify the southern anti-Catholic perception that Catholicism was naturally abolitionist.

While O'Connell's interpretation of *In Supremo* fueled the anti-Catholic view that Catholicism was inherently abolitionist, in reality Irish Catholic immigrants were mostly apathetic towards, or supportive of slavery in the United States and did not involve themselves in the debate.<sup>54</sup> In 1807 most citizens in the U.S. supported the country's abolishment of the African Slave Trade: the Trade was perceived as a moral vice and, by that time the country's domestic slave supply was self sufficient. However, by 1840 the

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<sup>51</sup> John F. Quinn, "Three Cheers for the Abolitionist Pope!": American Reaction to Gregory XVI's Condemnation of the Slave Trade, 1840-1860," in *Catholic Historical Review*, .90 (2004), 68-9, 72-3.

<sup>52</sup> John Tracy Ellis, *Perspectives in American Catholicism*, (St. Paul: North Central Publishing Company, 1963) 176-7.

<sup>53</sup> Osofsky 900.

<sup>54</sup> Quinn 77.

morality of the *institution* of slavery itself was being debated by a growing minority in the United States spawning fears especially among slave-owning southerners. In late August of that year, while touring the country in support of the incumbent Democratic presidential candidate (Martin Van Buren), then Secretary of State John Forsyth (1780-1841) spoke in Fredericksburg, Georgia, on the importance of the upcoming election in maintaining the nation's system of domestic slavery.<sup>55</sup> To damage the image of the Whig opponent, William Harrison, Forsyth played to southern Catholic xenophobia and accused Harrison of holding sympathies towards Britain.<sup>56</sup> With the Pope's recent Bull *In Supremo*, Forsyth had fresh ammunition to further exploit the anti-Catholic, British, and abolition prejudices of his southern audience against Harrison: "The same Government (Britain) has been lately employing itself as the volunteer or selected agent of the Pope, in presenting an apostolic letter on slavery...which it is not at all improbable was prepared under influences proceeding from the British isles."<sup>57</sup> Forsyth exaggerated the intent of the Bull, derived from O'Connell's misinterpretation of the Bull, but was correct in his suspicion over its British origin. However, according to Forsyth the Bull was part of a British conspiracy to recapture its lost profits in the West Indies due to the 1835 emancipation act (which O'Connell had helped to pass). Nevertheless, Forsyth made the connection that a vote for Harrison in the south meant supporting despised constituencies; British imperialism, slavery abolition, and Catholicism.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> John Forsyth, *Address to the People of Georgia*, (Fredericksburg: 29 Aug. 1840). Alvin Laroy Duckett, *John Forsyth: political tactician* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1962), 213-23.

<sup>56</sup> Neither Harrison nor Van Buren was abolitionist, but both did stand against the extension of slavery into the newly annexed Texas. Garland Haas, *The politics of disintegration: Political party decay in the United States, 1840-1900*, (Jefferson: McFarland and Company Inc, 1994), 10. See also Earl R. Kruschke, *Encyclopedia of third parties in the United States*, (Santa Barbara, 1991), 32-6, 66-9.

<sup>57</sup> Forsyth 3.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.* 4. Since Britain had abolished the African Slave Trade and slavery itself in the West Indies, profits in the Empire had shrunk considerably. So, according to Forsyth, the Bull Britain had procured was

Forsyth's comments came too late to help Van Buren win the presidency, but they did attract the attention of a Catholic bishop from South Carolina. Bishop John England (1786-1842) of Charleston had been an associate of O'Connell in his homeland of Ireland, where he had aided in the fight for Catholic emancipation, before moving to the U.S. in 1820.<sup>59</sup>

Having lived in the Southern United States for two decades when Forsyth gave his speech in Fredericksburg, Bishop England was well aware of the prejudices against Catholicism and domestic slavery abolition that existed in South Carolina. Moreover, he was familiar with the incorrect inference which was often made between the two: that being Catholic meant one was also an abolitionist, and the danger that this erroneous supposition caused for Catholics living in the South. In 1835 Bishop England had been forced to defend his Church<sup>60</sup> from a mob that, having destroyed a post office under suspicion of it holding abolition propaganda, turned on his congregation under the assumption that Catholics supported abolition as well.<sup>61</sup> To combat the potential harm Forsyth's comments in Georgia might pose to southern Catholics, Bishop England produced eighteen letters, published in his newspaper the *Catholic Miscellany*, in which he refuted Forsyth's argument at Georgia with an analysis of the Bull, Scripture, Catholic theology, and European history.

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part of a scheme to drive free slaves in the United States north to Canada where they would be recaptured by Britain and sent to the British West Indies to be put back to work.

<sup>59</sup> For citation on British Penal Laws see footnote 47 of this work. For history of Bishop England see Patrick Carey, *An immigrant bishop: John England's adaptation of Irish Catholicism to American Republicanism*, (Yonkers: U.S. Catholic Historical Society, 1982), 20-4. R.B. McDowell, *Public Opinion and Government Policy in Ireland: 1801-1846* (London: Faber and Faber, 1952), 32.

<sup>60</sup> There were purportedly some 5000 Catholics, a quarter of which were slaves, living in Charleston. See Peter Clark, *A Free Church in a Free Society: The Ecclesiology of John England, Bishop of Charleston, 1820-1842*, (Greenwood, SC: Center for John England Studies, 1982), 389-92.

<sup>61</sup> Nicholas E. Callaghan, *A most difficult and dangerous controversy: Bishop John England and the letters to the Honorable John Forsyth on the subject of Domestic Slavery* (M.A. thesis., Catholic University of America), 11-16.

In his first letter Bishop England denied the British origin of the Bull made by Forsyth outright and, through a literal reading of the *In Supremo*, argued that its thesis along with the content of the sources it cited clearly illustrated that its scope was only to condemn the African Slave Trade and not domestic slavery itself.<sup>62</sup> In his second letter to Forsyth, Bishop England offered two additional reasons to show that *In Supremo* attacked only the African Slave Trade and not domestic slavery. First, he noted that the Bull was "formally read and accepted" by the third U.S. Provincial Council of bishops as condemning only the Slave Trade.<sup>63</sup> Secondly, Bishop England claimed that during a visit to Rome in 1836, Gregory XVI made it clear to him that domestic slavery, as it was in the southern U.S., was acceptable. In his third and fourth letters Bishop England discussed the absence of derision and presence of support for slavery in the Hebrew Bible and New Testament: from the common presence of slave ownership in Genesis and the slave laws of Exodus, to the absence of condemnation of slavery in the Gospels and the slave codes found in the Deutero-Pauline letters.<sup>64</sup> In the fourteen letters that followed, Bishop England detailed a history of slavery as an institution in Europe into the first millennium. Bishop England discussed how slavery had been an integral component of ancient civilization and how, as *In Supremo* had claimed, Christianity had pacified the institution.<sup>65</sup> Moreover, he summarized what famous Christian theologians Augustine

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<sup>62</sup> *Letters of the late Bishop England to the Hon. John Forsyth on the subject of domestic slavery*, (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969), 3.

<sup>63</sup> Collectively Bishops in the United States did not express negative opinions on domestic slavery until after the Civil War.

<sup>64</sup> Many major figures in Genesis owned slaves. For example, Sarah, the wife of Abraham, owned Hagar who gave birth to Ishmael. The laws for slaves in Exodus are found in chapter 21 verses 1-11. There is no denouncement of slavery in the Gospels. Conversely, the use of the slave and master relationship as a metaphor of faith (for example in Luke 12:35-48), and the event in which a slave owning Centurion is deemed to have the greatest faith found "not even in Israel" show the Gospels to be at the very least apathetic to slavery. For a listing of the Deutero-Pauline slave-code passages see footnote 43, above.

<sup>65</sup> See Quinn 71.

and Aquinas stated on the subject of slavery: that it was a result of the original sin of Adam which therefore made some humans by nature slaves, others not, and that those whose nature it was to be free should never be enslaved.<sup>66</sup> Before he could finish his responses to Forsyth, Bishop England died in the spring of 1842. However, his responses were successful in deterring the potential danger posed to Catholics in Charlottesville by Forsyth's comments in Fredericksburg.

Overall, none of the Bull's first interpreters correctly read *In Supremo*. All three, on some point, disagreed with one another over the Bull's message or origin of authorship. Debate over the correct reading of *In Supremo* continues among today's interpreters.

### **THE BULL'S MODERN INTERPRETERS**

Modern interpreters of the Bull continue to debate over the proper interpretation of *In Supremo*: whether it condemns solely the African Slave Trade or if its censure encompasses slavery as well. Of those who interpret the Bull as condemning of the African Slave Trade only, Noonan has provided the most cogent analysis. In his discussion of *In Supremo*, Noonan notes the Bull's obvious British origin, along with its thesis that clearly states its purpose of eliminating the Slave Trade only. Further, he concludes that the Bull's use of historical sources provided a weak support structure that "gave an unrealistic account of early and medieval Christianity (and)... referred to papal actions without acknowledging their limited scope (which a)...theologically literate

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<sup>66</sup> For an in depth analysis of Augustine's view on slavery, see the entire work by Garnsey. For description of Aquinas's views, see Winston Ashley, *The Theory of Slavery According to St. Thomas* (Ann Arbor: Edwards Brothers inc., 1941), 102-128.

reader would see...remarkable omissions."<sup>67</sup> On the other hand, of the authors who read the Bull as condemning the Slave Trade, as well as slavery itself, Panzer has been the most popular among supporters of the proposition that *In Supremo* condemned both institutions.<sup>68</sup>

In his analysis of the Bull, Panzer's argument relies on its censure of Christians who in the past "did not hesitate to *reduce* into slavery Indians, Blacks, and other unfortunate peoples (emphasis added)," along with the immediately following list of previous Popes who had condemned such activity as "dangerous to the spiritual welfare of those who did such things."<sup>69</sup> As discussed above, this vague passage has confused both early and modern interpreters. As illustrated by Bishop England's responses to Forsyth in 1840, Catholic theologians differentiated between those who God intended to be slaves, and those improperly enslaved.<sup>70</sup> Those who by nature were to be slaves needed not to be "reduced" into slavery. Conversely, it was criminal to enslave those who by nature were not slaves. Panzer omits any mention of the section of the Bull quoted above that pronounced Papal acceptance and support of slavery. Thus, as O'Connell and Forsyth, Panzer incorrectly interprets the Bull as condemnatory of slavery itself.

### THE INCONGRUOUS BULL

In committing to the Trade's abolition, Britain had contradicted centuries of involvement and support of the African Slave Trade. Similarly, in authoring *In Supremo*,

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<sup>67</sup> John Thomas Noonan Jr., *A Church That Can and Cannot Change: the Development of Catholic Moral Teaching*, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 51.

<sup>68</sup> Panzer 44-48. Eamon Duffy, *Saints and Sinners: a history of the Popes*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 285. Derek J. Holmes, *The Triumph of the Holy See: A short history of the Papacy in the Nineteenth Century*, (London: Burns & Oates, 1978), 83.

<sup>69</sup> Panzer 45-7

<sup>70</sup> Gregory XVI was familiar with the works of the theologians, and "revived the teachings of Augustine and Aquinas in Catholic institutions."(Catholic Encyclopedia 506)



so had Gregory XVI betrayed centuries of Papal support for the Slave Trade. However, whereas British society underwent a massive social transformation earlier that century which lead to modern understanding of its involvement in abolition, the Papacy under Gregory XVI maintained an anti-modernist position on political and social issues seemingly counter to the movement for Trade abolition. Pius VII was politically very liberal and had been persuaded to condemn the African Slave Trade, but he had been the only pope to do so. Gregory XVI, on the other hand, was clearly against socio-political and economic change in the 19<sup>th</sup> century on the same level with the Slave Trade abolition movement. Therefore, some explanation for why he agreed to aid such a politically liberal movement as Trade abolition must be formulated. This last component to the argument, an examination of Gregory's governance of the Papal States along with his international Papal Encyclicals, provides the final pieces of evidence required to prove the thesis of this essay: that Gregory's agreement to aid Britain in the abolition of the African Slave Trade originated from his desire to halt the economic, social, and technological progresses nascent from the Trade.

During the 17th and 18th centuries, much of Europe had experienced innovation in industry, transportation, as well as revolutionary changes in government structure and social liberties. Increased production and profit from the African Slave Trade stimulated technological improvements in industry as well as transportation. In Britain, innovations in the production of cotton strengthened the economy of the Empire. By the 1830s France had created hydraulic turbines to aid in their production of agriculture. Throughout Europe the manufacture of iron advanced from charcoal fire to coke smelting, vastly strengthening the metal and quickening its production. With the advent

of railways and powered water vessels late in the 18th century, and the creation to steam powered locomotives by the 1840s, international trade flowered in Europe and the Americas.<sup>71</sup> By 1848, many nations in Europe had steered nations away from purely monarchical governments of the past towards more democratic systems of government. France had led the way almost a century earlier, creating a new form of government for themselves, and Italy along with much of Europe followed by the early 1870s. Separation of Church and State was being implemented in parts of Europe and the Americas. Furthermore, during the 19th century European males were gaining individual rights of free speech, of press, right to hold property, and others throughout the continent.<sup>72</sup> In Contrast to the changing climate of Europe from the 18<sup>th</sup> to the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Italian peninsula had changed very little in any such respects.

Rulers of the Italian nations had feared that the political change and technology breakthroughs of the 18th and 19th centuries threatened their authority and traditions. To combat progress, Italian rulers attempted to outright prohibit modernity in their lands. As one author put it they "drew a line of quarantine across which the dangerous ideas of progress and reform might not pass."<sup>73</sup> Industry and railways were virtually non-existent in the Italian region.<sup>74</sup> The political and personal liberties experienced elsewhere in Europe were absent. Throughout the first half of the 19th century these deficiencies had aroused resentment among the citizens of the peninsula. Revolts were commonplace in every state throughout the peninsula during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. By the reign of Gregory

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<sup>71</sup> Rondo Cameron and Larry Neal, *A Concise Economic History of the World: from Paleolithic Times to the Present*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 187-219, 259-261.

<sup>72</sup> See footnote 7, above for reference to material on the French Revolution.

<sup>73</sup> William Roscoe Thayer, *The Dawn of Italian Independence: Italy from the Congress of Vienna, 1814, to the fall of Vienna, 1849*, vol. 1 (Boston: Houghton Mifflin and Co., 1893), 381.

<sup>74</sup> Cameron and Neal 201.

XVI, beginning in 1831, the Papal States fit well into the stern and anachronistic atmosphere of Italy.

The roots of Gregory's socio-political conservatism can be traced to his earliest years serving in the Catholic Church. In 1765 Pope Gregory XVI was born Bartolomeo Alberto Cappellari into a wealthy family in Lombardy, Italy. In 1783 he entered the monastery of San Michele di Murano and received ordination in 1787.<sup>75</sup> From 1814-1826 he acted as counselor and from 1826-1831 he headed the Propaganda Fide as Prefect. Most biographers of Gregory acclaim his work in the Church missions.<sup>76</sup> With his intense interest and knowledge of the missionary movement, the presence of documents pertaining to the African Slave Trade reviewed by the Propaganda Fide during his time as counselor, along with his continued public support of the missions during his time as Pope indicate his knowledge of global politics and economy, such as the African Slave Trade, was likely substantial.<sup>77</sup> Further, from before his time as pope, Gregory clearly disdained the trend towards "globalization" he saw arising. In 1799 Gregory published a "work of merit" titled "The Triumph of the Holy See against the Assaults of the Innovators" in which he denounced modern idealists he felt threatened the Catholic

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<sup>75</sup> *New Catholic Encyclopedia* 505.

<sup>76</sup> See De Montor 46-7, Holmes. 82-111, Wiseman 46-7, as well as Robert Maloney. *Mission directives of Pope Gregory XVI (1831-1846)* Ph.D. diss. (Rome: Pontificum Athenacum Internctionate: 1959).

<sup>77</sup> While Gregory likely held at least some knowledge of the African Slave Trade before his pontificate, any discussion of it is completely absent from his life prior to his election. Missionary materials provided by several authors clearly indicate that the issue was present in conversations with the Papacy during Gregory's time as Pope (See Lennec 365-7). Interestingly, African Slave Trade abolitionist material was on the Index of Prohibited Books during the Pope's reign. Gregory XVI remained actively involved in the managing of the Church's missions during his time as Pope. Under Gregory, seventy new dioceses and vicariates and two hundred missionary bishops were created, see. Kelly 307-309. Also, during his time as counselor there were several reports presented to the Propaganda Fide specifically on the subject of the African Slave Trade of which Gregory likely had knowledge of. Unfortunately, these papers are stored in the Vatican Archives and are out of reach for this discussion

Church.<sup>78</sup> By his election as pontiff, Gregory would have found reasons to despise modern socio-political ideas.

Upon his Papal election on February 2<sup>nd</sup> 1831, revolts arose throughout the Papal States by common citizens causing Gregory to vacate Rome.<sup>79</sup> Quickly obtaining military aid from Austria, Gregory soon retook the Papal States. However, the financial burden of attaining and keeping Austrian troops in the Papal States was considerable and worsened by the Pope's political inability. For the first ten years of his reign no state budget was drafted and no financial plan was made to pay back Austria.<sup>80</sup> Exacerbating the problem further was Gregory's prohibition of modern economics and technology that would have aided his country's fledgling economy. International trade, political-economic theory, railways, and industry were all banned in the Papal States during Gregory's Pontificate.<sup>81</sup> Austria later sent diplomatic aid to in attempts to help the Pope improve the condition of his country's finances. However, the Austrian envoy reported that his government could do little to help the "inefficient and disorganized" Papal government, as the Pope refused to implement any serious changes to improve the economic condition of his country.<sup>82</sup> Gregory's disdain for modern economic, political, and technological innovations being clearly visible in his governance of the Papal States,

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<sup>78</sup> *The Papal Encyclicals: 1740-1878*, vol. 1 (Wilmington: McGrath Publishing Company, 1981), 165.

<sup>79</sup> Artaud De Montor.. *The lives and times of the Popes* (New York: The Catholic publication society of America, 1921), 48-9. As Thayer discusses, "To be a laymen (under Gregory XVI) meant practically to be cut off from all privileges and sinecures...and from all hope of preferment." (415).

<sup>80</sup> G.F.H. Berkeley, *Italy in the Making 1815 to 1846*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1932), 130.

<sup>81</sup> De Montor 75. Trade was banned throughout most of the Papal States and political economic theory was on the Index of Forbidden books during Gregory's reign. For the lack of modern innovation in the States, see for example Cameron and Neal 217-18. Railways were especially denounced by Gregory (Kelly 307).

<sup>82</sup> See Reinerman 187, Scabia 11, and Bolton 74-5.

equally present in his Papal Encyclicals was the pope's distaste for modern social progress.

In *Mirari Vos* (1832), Gregory condemned a man named Felicite Robert de Lamennais (1782-1854), and his Catholic followers in France. Lamennais was a French priest who promoted a form of Catholic liberalism which presupposed that, while Catholicism was God's one true religion, it was an evolving institution and thus incomplete in its current state. Therefore, much to the disdain of Gregory XVI, Lamennais called for several revolutionary reforms he believed would help the Church adapt to the modern world. These reforms, including freedom of conscience, religious worship, education, opinion, right to assemble, and self government were abrasive to the values held dear to both the authority at France and Rome during this time.<sup>83</sup>

In *Mirari Vos*, commonly thought of as the precursor of Pius IX's *Syllabus of Errors*, Gregory XVI did not condemn Lamennais or his group by name, but instead denounced their ideas. Major items condemned included the notion of religious tolerance, as well as freedom of the press, speech, thought, and the idea of separation of Church and State.<sup>84</sup> After receiving the encyclical, Lamennais halted his revolutionary actions. However, he later began his movement anew, to the irritation of the Pope, and was eventually excommunicated in 1834.

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<sup>83</sup> Von Aretin 56.

<sup>84</sup> On the issue of religious tolerance, Gregory stipulates that those who refuse the Catholic religion will "perish eternally without any doubt." Gregory refers to freedom of the press as "the most fatal liberty." An interesting side note: the Church in the U.S. was worried about the reaction the general public might have to *Mirari vos*, so for almost two years they kept it secret and unpublished. Then, anti-Catholic proponents made public the document and the Church was forced to respond. However, even then there was little Catholics could argue: the substance of the encyclical ran completely counter to the prized ideals of which the United States was supposedly founded, Carey 89, 95.

In 1832 Gregory published another encyclical which one author characterized as one of the "most controversial acts of the nineteenth-century Papacy."<sup>85</sup> At the request of Austria Gregory authored *Cum Primum* (1832) in which he denounced Polish bishops, priests, and members of the lay community who were revolting against their temporal government. It was ineffective in prohibiting Catholic involvement in the Polish revolts, but caused serious harm to the relationship between the Papacy and the majority of Catholics in Poland. In condemning their rebellion Polish Catholics felt Gregory had betrayed them.

In a further letter written in 1832, *Summo Iugiter Studio*, Gregory rebuked Catholics in Bavaria who, against the tradition of the Church, engaged in mixed marriages with non-Catholics. The Bavarian priests were targeted for special rebuke as they had reportedly permitted and supported the marriages. Later, the Encyclical *Quas Vestro* (1841) addressed the same issue to the people of Hungary, in which Gregory issued a similar rebuke.

In 1833 Gregory authored the Encyclical *Quo Graviora* in which he addressed priests in Prussia who were followers of a theologian named George Hermes. Hermes (1775-1831) felt that the church needed change to enter the modern world. Gregory complained in the letter that his followers believed "that there are many things in the discipline of the Church in the present day, in its government, and in the form of its external worship which are not suited to the character of our time. These things, they say, should be changed."<sup>86</sup> These included clerical celibacy, the system of indulgences, and the stipend demanded by clergy for giving mass: all of which Hermes and his

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<sup>85</sup> See Reeinerman 603-19

<sup>86</sup> Pastoral Encyclicals 154.

followers felt could be done away with. Gregory criticized these reformers as revolutionaries, and called for the remaining clergy loyal to Rome to "draw the sword of the spirit" and "preach as the apostle Paul impresses upon you in the person of Timothy (to) drive every profane reform far away from the Church."<sup>87</sup>

In *Commissum Divinitus* (1835) Gregory addressed Swiss clergy who had agreed to separate everything ranging from the election of clergy and the administration of holy days, to the "right and office of dispensing sacraments" from the actions of civil government. As in the encyclicals previously discussed, Gregory rebuked the clergy of Switzerland, calling for both loyal laity and clergymen to overturn the rebellious heretics.

In *Probe Nostis* (1840) Gregory showed his continued interest in the Church missions. Unaddressed to any particular country or person, this encyclical honored missionaries worldwide who "fearless in the face of every danger...bravely enter the woods and caves of savages...and...snatch them from the devil's rule"<sup>88</sup>. Nuns were also encouraged to continue in their work on behalf of the Papacy, and were honored for devoting "themselves entirely to saving women from the way of perdition... (permitting no) natural weaknesses of their sex or fear of any danger" to restrain them in their work.<sup>89</sup>

*Inter Praecipuas* (1844) was written as a condemnation of worldwide "Biblical societies" originating in England. Gregory charged these groups with permitting Catholics and non-Catholics access to unauthorized versions of scripture without benediction from the Holy See. One biblical society in particular, the "Christian

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Pastoral letters 167.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid 112.

League", bears the brunt of Gregory's criticism for its "common purpose is to spread religious liberty...among Romans and Italians."<sup>90</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Early and modern interpreters of *In Supremo* have, in several cases, incorrectly identified the Bull's intent based on a misreading of the letter. *In Supremo* was solely a condemnation of the African Slave Trade, but not of slavery itself. Conversely, the Bull accepted slavery and proudly acknowledged Christianity's pacification of the institution.

Gregory XVI's authorship of the Bull *In Supremo* was clearly a result of Britain's African Slave Trade abolition movement. However, Gregory had for his entire adult life stood against the kind of radical change that Slave Trade abolition represented. In his governance of the Papal States, Gregory conveyed disdain for innovative economic and technological progress of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Through his international encyclicals, the pope had issued a blanket condemnation of many socio-political progresses common in his day. Thus, his behavior supporting the radically liberal movement of Trade abolition was anomalous and *In Supremo*, the product of that behavior, appears incongruous in the context of his career. What then can explain the authorship of this uncharacteristic Bull?

Gregory XVI's prescience of the African Slave Trade throughout his life, and his silence on the issue of abolition before the British petition, seem to indicate that before authoring *In Supremo* he was, at the very least, apathetic towards the Trade's continuation. Further, the pope's censures of modern innovation seem to illustrate his vision of the ideal world as static and retrograde compared to the rapidly changing landscape of Europe in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Gregory associated innovation of any kind with the potential usurpation of the current temporal powers of Europe. His prohibition of

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid. 143.



trade, technology, and modern transportation in the Papal States reflects some knowledge, or fear, of how modern innovation changed the world in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The African Slave Trade, with its enormous monetary and material profits, was perhaps the greatest contributor to global change. Therefore, in line with his anti-modern stance, it was likely that Gregory authored the Bull condemnatory of the African Slave Trade with the aspiration of halting world progress.

From this conclusion, *In Supremo* is not truly incongruous, after all, in the context of Gregory's career. Indeed, the motivation for the Bull fits with what would likely be expected of Gregory, given his other life facts. The weight of indirect evidence in support of this hypothesis is strong. However, because there is no direct evidence relating the Bull's authorship to this interpreted motivation, there is a danger of wrongly harmonizing *In Supremo* with Gregory's other pronouncements. Although Gregory's personal history of political conservatism seemingly leads to the assumption that he authored *In Supremo* to weaken modern society, with no direct evidence this conclusion assumes that Gregory was incapable of dynamic thought and unable to traverse narrowly constructed partisan viewpoints. Thus, as was determined in this essay, the strength of the indirect evidence for Gregory's motivation warranted harmonization of *In Supremo* to Gregory's universal anti-modern stance.

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