THE ENLIGHTENMENT AND THE CATHOLIC RESPONSE

The intellectual movement known by its German nomenclature, Aufklärung, the Enlightenment, was a decisive turning point in history — the precursor of the twilight of the Ancient Regime, the triumph of the French and American Revolutions and the birth of a new world. The fires were kept burning by a host of thinkers, scientists, and littérateurs, whose writings stretched for well over a hundred years. Known as the philosophes, they devised in the mid-eighteenth century the Encyclopedia, their peculiar legacy to the publishing industry, as the unique and powerful medium for their innovative ideas.

The Enlightenment’s most immediate and strongest impact was undoubtedly on the religious consciousness of Europe. The philosophes thrust upon the Catholic Church the greatest and most difficult challenge ever by denying the supernatural revelation, the very foundation of her existence, and raising the issue of the validity of religion itself. New forms of textual and higher criticism impugned the veracity of the bible, pointing out errors, inconsistencies, and historical inaccuracies. Reports about ancient peoples like the Chinese, who for millennia had kept a high culture and moral code, dislodged the Church from her hitherto unchallenged position as the unique bringer of civilization. A new theology, called deism, reduced religious truth to the existence of God and the immortality of the soul, religious practice to ethical behavior, and the role of the Church and her ministers to mere moral guides. Christian revelation was replaced by “the
revelation of nature” or “natural religion,” based on reason, which, it was believed, would unite all of humankind.

But the project of the Enlightenment was the transformation of all society and culture. The social and political transcriptions of Enlightenment principles — particularly the autonomy of reason, panegerized in the philosophical writings of Kant and idolized in the riotous demonstrations of the French Revolution — sought to marginalize the Church and regarded religion as purely a private matter. The movement was toward the creation of the liberal democratic state, which withdrew the traditional supports from the Church, and the secularization of culture which progressively contracted the Church’s role in politics, education, arts, sciences, social services and other aspects of life.

Understandably, the Church’s immediate reaction was to preserve her traditional faith and protect the faithful from the onslaught of rationalist philosophical ideas and new dangerous forms of scholarship and research. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries for about a hundred and fifty years until Vatican II, Roman Catholicism developed features quite distinctive and different from those of the Catholicism of the Counter-Reformation and the Middle Ages, presenting itself as counter-culture to the modern world.¹ Consolidating the Church’s forces, the papacy, in which authority was increasingly centralized, directed the constant, planetary battle against the Enlightenment. The confrontation took place at various levels. In popular preaching, the philosopher were all branded as “unbelievers” presenting old errors in new form, lumped all together with no appreciation of their individual differences.² This error of unbelief was uncovered by its evil fruits, the immoral behavior of the unbeliever. Other preachers however, regarded a voluptuous life and free rein to the passions as leading to unbelief. It was generally held that those who persisted in their denial of the Catholic faith did so out of pride and obstinacy in their corrupt ways. Papal pro-


nouncements condemned the rationalist principles and their consequences. Then Pius IX called the First Vatican Council, which defined revelation and faith as essentially supernatural and the Church as founded by her divine master, Jesus Christ. The rationalist aggression stimulated the prolific production of apologetical works, from popular pamphlets to manuals and treatises. But generally, apologetics rested on authority — of the Church and the papacy, with scarce reference to religious experience and to arguments from immanence which would show how Christianity responded to human needs and aspirations.

It is the thesis of Joseph A. Komonchak that "it was the social and political consequences of the Enlightenment that principally engaged the Church's attention during the modern era and that it was to combat these that the Church chose to deal with the intellectual issues as it did." In the Syllabus of Errors the Church felt constraint to oppose any accommodation to "progress, liberalism and modern civilization." Against the tide of secularization, the Christendom of the Middle Ages was proposed by the Church as the ideal devoutly to be wished and aggressively to be fought for, which included official recognition of the Church as the state religion and religious unity as the foundation of political unity.

Now the dramatic clash between the Enlightenment and Catholic theology was so faithfully reflected in the Rizal-Pastells Correspondence, which took place in a little corner of the dying Spanish Empire in 1892-93, exactly a hundred years ago. Jose Rizal, aged 31, Jesuit alumnus turned rationalist, ilustrado in the dual sense of educated and on fire with Enlightenment ideas, political ideologue and activist, was an exile in Dapitan, Mindanao. Pablo Pastells, aged 46, former spiritual director of the student Rizal at the Ateneo Municipal de Manila, was stationed in Intramuros as Superior of the Jesuits in the Philippines.

On the part of Rizal, who initiated the Correspondence with

4. DS 2980.
a first missive on 1 September 1892, the purpose was to explain his religious views to Pastells and his Jesuit mentors. Reacting to the reference of Fr. Sánchez, his favorite professor, to his naufragio de la fe, shipwreck of faith, Rizal told Pastells: “I shall speak sincerely and openly so that you may see if everything is lost or whether something can still be of use.”⁶ Were there some pieces that could still be salvaged from the wreckage? Or was the ship beyond repair? Pastells’s concern, on the other hand, was Rizal’s spiritual welfare and recovery of lost faith. “Sooner or later you will return to the bosom of your holy Mother the Catholic Church.”⁷ His return would also repair the public image of the Society, so much tarnished by Rizal’s involvement in the Propaganda Movement and defection from the Church. There were altogether four exchanges, with an interval of about one month between letters, plus a short final fifth letter from Rizal putting an end to the correspondence. Rizal’s letters were among the longest he had ever written in a literary career noted for its voluminous correspondence. An apologia pro vita sua, they were respectful, deferential, personal, but astonishingly firm and forward, disarmingly honest and confessional, words flowing flawlessly in a refined literary style. On the other hand, Pastells — persistent and constantly probing, if less literary than Rizal — outdid his correspondent in Dapitan, already a well-read novelist and writer, two times over in the total length of his replies. While marked by genuine pastoral concern and deep affection, Pastells’s letters were professorial in tone, ponderous in content, often turgid in style, unabashedly wielding scholastic theological language and quoting lengthy passages from the documents of Vatican I without quotations marks.

Pastells baited Rizal more than once into a discussion of political issues, but Rizal plainly refused. The correspondence was thus confined to the role of reason, private judgement and conscience, and questions related to God’s existence and attributes, but the principal topic was revelation. Notwithstanding the mutual cordiality of the long exchange, there was right from the

very beginning a detectable strain of polemic and as time went on, the correspondence took on the air of religious debate. But the distinctive value of the correspondence was its private and personal character. Here in the forum of conscience and personal conviction, rather than in the arena of public debate, was the crucial test for the late nineteenth century Catholic theology and apologetics represented by Pastells. If we may trust Rizal who put an end to the exchange saying, “I am no longer able to comprehend any of your arguments . . . it is a useless task . . .”,8 Pastells failed.

This article focuses on the revelation debate between the two correspondents and gives a critique from perspectives afforded us by distance in time and the on-going dialogue, initiated by Vatican II, between the Church and the world, faith and culture.

RIZAL’S NOTION OF REVELATION

Among his fundamental beliefs, Rizal told Pastells, was revelation. However, Rizal believed in the “revelation of nature,” a deist notion expounded by the classsical British deists. But Rizal’s more immediate sources, it would seem, as I have indicated elsewhere, were Voltaire, Rousseau, Miguel Morayta and Francisco Pi y Margall.9

Rizal does not believe in the Catholic notion of divine positive revelation for the following reasons: (1) it does not meet the rationalist criterion of clarity; the mysteries of the faith are obscure; (2) it is not universal because of the language of scripture which not all can understand; (3) the bible, which is mere classical writing, the repository of “the insights of men and whole generations put down in writing, the knowledge of the past on which the future is built,”10 is unreliable because it contains errors, contradictions, and inconsistencies and admits

8. Rizal’s Letter to Pastells (June 1893), transcript in Arxiu S. I. de Catalunya (the Jesuit Archives where documents related to the Philippines are kept; henceforth, AHSIC), Sant Cugat del Valles, Barcelona, Spain.
10. Rizal’s Letter to Pastells, 9 Jan. 1893, AHSIC.
of conflicting interpretation; and (4) the miracle stories, which purport to authenticate revelation, are fictitious, since miracles, which are understood as "contradictions of nature," are impos-
sible.

Rather, Rizal believes in the revelation that comes to the human person through the universal mediation of nature and conscience. It is to be found "in all that surrounds me and in the mysterious sentiment speaking from within me, which I strive to purify above all else."¹¹ Natural revelation, like Descartes's idea, is "clear and distinct" and accessible to all possessed of reason.

I believe . . . in the living revelation of nature which surrounds us everywhere, in the voice speaking through nature — powerful, eternal, unceasing, incorruptible, clear, distinct, and universal as the Being from which it comes.¹²

Rizal drives an important point, namely, the essential link between revelation and human experience: natural revelation, in contrast with supernatural revelation, "speaks to us and penetrates our being from the day we are born to the day we die."¹³ In addition to telling us about God, our interior experience and the course of nature — including the behavior of animals and the process of evolution — readily provide us with the norms of human conduct. For instance, the urge and impulse to love the neighbor, which all experience within themselves, indicates an imperative placed by God in the human heart, a command which must be considered as God's word. Likewise, the precepts of charity and respect for the freedom and rights of others are also derived from the instincts of animals, gentle birds and fierce lions alike.

Seeing how freedom when overrated destroys and ruins the principle of life in a living thing which can subsist by itself, seeing the daily lesson in all creation of how weak creatures — from nestling birds to young lions in the den — are given support and protection, but

¹¹. Ibid. ER 4:86.
¹³. Ibid.
as soon as they can get or, by themselves, freedom and room for action, I find justification for the precepts of charity and respect for the rights of others.\textsuperscript{14}

In what appears to be a critical allusion to Marx and Darwin, Rizal establishes the principles of peace and harmony for the governance of humankind from the study of evolution and the progress of history. Evolution and history cannot be explained by the philosophy of conflict and the principle of the survival of the fittest. Dinosaurs have become extinct and mighty empires have gone from the face of the earth. Tigers have been reduced in number whereas house cats proliferate. Mighty conquistadors are no more, but witness the ubiquity of simple shopkeepers.

At first glance, after a superficial examination, we get the impression that the law of struggle holds sway and it is might that wins the day. But taking a closer look at things, when we contemplate the skeletons of gigantic monsters now gone from the face of the earth, when we read in history the epitaphs of great and mighty empires which lived off the life and freedom of humankind, when we see how the cat lives on whereas the tiger disappears, how shopkeepers increase in number whereas conquerors vanish; we become better aware of the principles of peace, the triumph of the mind, and the law of universal harmony — harmony which follows the world in its rapid course, demanding life for all and freedom for all.\textsuperscript{15}

This revelation is superior to Christian revelation because of its clarity and intelligibility. It is universal since nature and conscience have been given to all. It relies not on scripture but on the open book of nature, which is the sole manifestation of the Creator that we have here in this life — clear, perennial, living, powerful, capable of overcoming our blunders and errors, incorruptible, one that cannot play us false in spite of human caprice, with its laws constant and unchangeable in all places and all times.\textsuperscript{16}

\textsuperscript{14} Rizal's Letter to Pastells, 9 Jan. 1893, AHSIC.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid.
Rizal states that no religion has exclusive possession of the truth and pass judgement on other religions on the basis of its own norms, just as art students drawing sketches of the selfsame model, each from a particular perspective, cannot use any one sketch as the basis for passing judgement on the accuracy of another.\textsuperscript{17}

Respect for religious differences had led him to the conclusion, he wrote Pastells, that “religions, whatever they may be, ought to make men not enemies, but brothers of one another and good brothers at that.”\textsuperscript{18} Rizal was much impressed by the friendship between the Protestant Pastor Karl Ullmer, in whose house he had lodged for some months, and the Catholic priest Heinrich Bardorf, who dropped in regularly at the pastor’s house for a friendly chat. The two taught him the lesson of Christian brotherhood. “They looked upon themselves as two servants of the selfsame God, and instead of wasting their time quarrelling, each did his duty, leaving it up to the Lord who interpreted his will more accurately.”\textsuperscript{19}

But for Rizal contradicting his own assertion, the normative religion is the religion of nature. Christianity is still superior to all other religions not because God discloses himself in an unexpected and gratuitous manner in the Old and New Testaments, but because it best conforms to nature and fulfills the needs of the human person.

The best religions are those that are simplest, most in conformity with nature, most in harmony with the needs and aspirations of men. Here lies the excellence of Christ’s doctrine.\textsuperscript{20}

\textbf{PASTELLS’S RESPONSE}

Expectedly, Pastells depended on Vatican I for his response to Rizal’s arguments in favor of natural revelation. Vatican I, answering the challenge of deism, defined revelation principally

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{17} Rizal’s Letter to Pastells, 11 Nov. 1892, ER 4:67-68.
  \item \textsuperscript{18} Ibid. ER 4:64.
  \item \textsuperscript{19} Ibid. ER 4:64-65.
  \item \textsuperscript{20} Rizal’s Letter to Pastells, 5 Apr. 1893, ER 4:120.
\end{itemize}
in its objective sense as content — a body of truths and moral doctrines contained in scripture and tradition, which God had promulgated through the prophets and Christ, and entrusted to the infallible teaching office of the Church. Similarly, faith was viewed principally in its cognitional aspect as knowledge of a higher order, an assent to truths revealed by God.

Following contemporary Catholic theological manuals, Pastells argues that revelation is possible, appropriate and necessary. Above all, God has actually revealed truths inaccessible to us by the light of reason; and the reality of revelation is attested to by "extrinsic motives of credibility," namely, miracles and prophecies.

With regard to the charge of obscurity, there are, Pastells retorts, elements of clarity in supernatural revelation. First of all, mysteries are clear to God. They are clear to us as to their existence, though obscure as to their content. Above all, there are clear extrinsic motives of credibility, namely, miracles and prophecies, which can convince anyone of the fact that God had actually revealed certain mysteries. Of course, the mysteries of Christianity and the dogmas that express them will always remain obscure and beyond the powers of the human mind to understand. Nonetheless, the human mind should assent to them because they carry the weight of divine authority, for it is the Church, founded by God himself and endowed with the gift of infallibility, which teaches them.

In what concerns universality, the content of the Christian revelation may be reduced to a basic kernel, constituting the absolute minimum for salvation or "necessitas medii" — a few fundamental elements which are readily accessible to all, even to unlettered children and, in an allusion to Thomas Aquinas, "one who grew up in the jungle or among wolves." It is not necessary to know scripture and all the dogmas of the Church. It is sufficient to make a general act of faith in everything that the Church teaches; even children can do this. And God would not hesitate to go to the length of working a miracle, by sending a missionary or an angel, to reveal to the homo in silvis, the savage in the jungle, the fundamental truths necessary for

salvation.22

The religion of Christ remains the absolute religion, all others are false. He adds: “When Catholics interpret God’s will, their interpretations are always good, some being better than others; but when Protestants do so, their interpretations can neither be good nor better, but can only be bad, some worse than others.”23 Pastells passes harsh judgement on the Catholic priest cited by Rizal, calling him “a simple-minded, ignorant fellow who has lost his common sense as a Catholic.”24

Contrary to Rizal’s allegation of the fictitious character of miracle stories, there are no myths in scripture since historiography dispels myths. The books of scripture are assumed to be historical in the historicist sense, i.e., objective, accurate and reportorial accounts of what took place. Above all, they are inspired and hence contain no error. There are no contradictions in scripture; and in a moment of anger and impatience the Jesuit exclaims: “You will find contradiction only in the foolish pride of the swell-headed rationalists (el necio orgullo de los infatuados racionalistas).”25

Finally, arguing against Rizal’s denial of miracles, Pastells states that God works miracles by suspending the laws of nature for the purpose of authenticating revelation. He makes much of the probative value of the resuscitation of Lazarus which took place before a large crowd and Christ’s resurrection, “a public and well-known fact which everyone admitted.”26 To deny these miracles would be tantamount to denying the validity of all historical testimony.

The argument of Pastells employed the basic structure of a standard apologetic “historicist” approach, formulated in the latter half of the nineteenth century and espoused by a leading theologian, the Jesuit Giovanni Perrone.27 First, the bible was

24. Ibid.
assumed to be historical in the Rankean, historicist sense. From the bible, it was then shown that Christ proved his divine mission and his divinity by working miracles. Finally, Christ founded the Church, appointing Peter and his successors in the papacy to teach his doctrine with the charism of infallibility till the end of time. Thus, Christ's religion was the only true religion; and the Church's teachings, however obscure and beyond the mind's capacity to clearly and fully understand, must be believed because they ultimately came from God himself.

CRITIQUE

The following may be said in criticism of Rizal's notion of revelation:

1) Natural revelation cannot be revelation in the proper sense of the word, as Pastells rightly reminded Rizal. According to this deist notion, everything that can be learned about God is written in the laws of nature. God is as intelligible as nature itself: the reality of his being is emptied of the mystery of his incomprehensibility. There is really no divine communication properly so-called, God's bestowal of his life and love on the human person.

2) The idea that the course of nature provided the norm and pattern for moral behavior was based on a one-sided view of nature. John Stuart Mill had long pointed out that his ethical naturalism was blind to the all too obvious darker side of nature, the side marked by physical disorders and calamities, the aberrations of the human heart, and the tragedies of history.

3) Rizal falsely presumed that the study of nature was easy, of which all endowed with reason were equally capable and on which everyone would agree. But in fact, intellectual ability varies from person to person, nature admits of numerous and varied interpretations, and much of scientific knowledge is provisional. More important, the essence of religion cannot be the study of nature but the worship of God, which the common laborer may do better than the student who knows much of the secrets of

the universe.

4) Notwithstanding his avowed penchant for clarity, Rizal admitted to an awareness of the element of mystery in human life and his faith in God. Not consistent with his own rationalism, he stressed God's incomprehensibility and total otherness and called conscience a *mysterious* sentiment and voice within.

5) However unorthodox his idea of revelation was, his arguments raised two very important and valid points which the theology of revelation must take seriously: the intrinsic relationship of revelation with human experience, and the element of truth in the non-Christian religions. For Rizal, revelation must be something which one and all became conscious of in the very experience of themselves in the world of nature. Likewise, Rizal insisted that there must be something of the truth in all religions, if indeed God's revelation of himself was universal.

On the other hand, Pastells's response should be assessed in the light of today's theology.

1) Pastells was correct in attempting to show how Rizal had fallen from the Church's traditional doctrine. But Pastells's argument bore the imbalances of polemic discourse and neglected the intersubjective aspect of revelation as process and activity, as interpersonal relationship between God and the human person. Thus, his theology labored under that extrinsicism which looked upon God's word as addressed to the human mind principally from the outside, little attentive to the profound resonances it had in the structure of human experience and the aspirations of the human heart.

As a result Pastells so focussed on Rizal's doctrinal error, engaging him in a highly intellectual debate, as to miss the totality of his counselee's experience, picking on the trees, as it were, but missing the forest. He little appreciated Rizal's openness to correction, sincerity of conviction, fidelity to conscience, honest desire to do what was right in God's eyes, professed practice of daily prayer — most admirable dispositions to which any pastoral counsellor should be sensitive and all signs of Rizal's openness to God. He traced Rizal's spiritual condition to personal hurts and bitter resentments in his student days, 29

and even suggested, in a moment of impatience, that Rizal was blinded by bigotry and pride.

By way of contrast, Vatican II views revelation as the historical encounter between God and the human person, suggests that the intrinsic character of revelation rests in the gift of grace, which is at work in the hearts of all, and reaffirms the possibility of salvation, "of being associated with the paschal mystery,"30 for all including those who do not profess the Christian faith or have not even arrived at the explicit knowledge of God. Thus theology today, which has come to recognize revelation as essentially intrinsically related to human experience and in some hidden way present in non-Christian religions, is better able to explore the two valid points raised by Rizal. In fact, Vatican II in stating that "in her task of fostering unity and love among men, and even among nations, she (the Church) gives primary consideration in this document (Nostra Aetate) to what human beings have in common and to what promotes fellowship among them"31 comes close to Rizal's statement that religions should make men brothers of one another and contradicts Pastells's view that only Catholics have exclusive possession of all religious truth.

2) The strategy of Pastells's defense consisted in wielding the weapons which Rizal himself had dictated — reason and clarity of idea. As a result, his apologetics assumed the features of the rationalistic mentality which he was trying to combat. He relied heavily on the probative value of the extrinsic motives of credibility to the neglect of the inner properties of the mystery of the Christian faith and the meaning it gave to human existence. He did not escape the rationalist trap in which the mystery of faith was seen as a dark riddle that baffles the mind rather than a divine illumination, a light, which the human mind cannot fully comprehend, illuminating the mysterious darkness of human existence; a test of intellectual humility rather than the central element of revelation as the incomprehensibility of God's self-bestowal on the human person. Miracles appeared to be of such

convincing value as to compel assent. Moreover, the structure of historicist apologetics had the appearance of a neatly constructed syllogism, of which faith was the logical conclusion. Thus the tension between the Catholic doctrine on the gratuity of faith and grace and the rationalist tendency to think of faith as the outcome of clear, objective reasoning is much in evidence in Pastells's argumentation.

3) Pastells's historicist apologetics overestimated the probative value of scientific history in matters of faith. Even if by application of the historico-critical method to the gospels it should be possible to arrive at the facts and events of our Lord's life "as they actually had taken place," we would be in no more advantageous position than the original spectators, many of whom, even in the face of Lazarus come from the dead, did not believe. Faith required an interior disposition of openness to Christ's words and, above all, the gift of God's grace.

Moreover, historicist apologetics misconstrued the nature and character of the written gospels. Rather than specimens of scientific history, they are, as modern biblical studies have shown, testimonies of the faith of the early Christians, confessional documents written with a view to leading others to the faith and strengthening in the faith those who already believed. They are historical in the sense that they ground the faith of the early Christians on factual events, on the words, deeds, and person of Jesus who lived at a particular junction of world history. But the evangelists — each with his own peculiar theological viewpoint and distinctive purpose — felt free to select and arrange, amplify or reduce, the materials at their disposal. Hence, there are in the gospels real discrepancies and inconsistencies, which did not merely exist, as Pastells argued, in the mind of proud and bigotted rationalists such as Rizal.

Contrary to Pastells's claim, the resurrection was not a public fact admitted by all. It was indeed an event in history but of a unique order. The appearances of the risen Christ were historical in the sense of objective occurrences that involved sensory perception on the part of those who witnessed them; but not in the sense of universally verifiable public events, for the simple reason that, as Acts 10:34 tells us, Christ appeared only to a chosen few. The resurrection continues to have
apologetic value, which however must be placed in the nature of the gospels as confessional documents, more specifically, in the fact that Christ’s disciples were credible witnesses who attested to the objective fact of the resurrection by the conviction of their words as well as by the transformation which the risen Christ brought about in their own personal lives.

4) Finally, Pastells’s definition of a miracle laid itself open to the rationalist demand such as Renan’s that the miraculous event be physically and scientifically, even under laboratory conditions, proven as a suspension of nature’s law — a demand impossible to meet especially with regard to the gospel miracles, events belonging to the distant and irrecoverable past.

As early as 1893 in his L’Action, Maurice Blondel indicated the inadequacy of a definition focussing on the physical aspect of miracles and the need to restore the New Testament view of miracles as signs of salvation, so much insisted upon by Augustine.\textsuperscript{32} A miracle is not merely an extraordinary phenomenon arousing wonder, but a sign of the supernatural. Its apologetic value lies not in the fact that the miracle can be proved — which it cannot be, in every case — to be a contravention of nature’s law, but rather in that the religious context, in which the extraordinary physical fact takes place, points to God as its transcendent author and to the religious message that God wishes to communicate to us by it. A miracle does not compel assent but invites a person to believe in a religious message which has a profound meaning for life.

CONCLUSION

That the Enlightenment has made positive contributions to the modern world is acknowledged by Catholic and secular writers alike. The philosophes gave vigorous impetus to the process which led, beyond their wildest expectations, to the development of science and technology, the rise of democratic states, and worldwide awareness of the dignity of the human person.

But there lurks in some Catholic circles after Vatican II the danger of mindless euphoria over, and a naive endorsement of, the Enlightenment, which, to be honest, was not an unmixed blessing for humanity. The doctrine of the absolute autonomy of reason, as John Courtney Murray has shown, found its political transcription in the theory of the juridical omnipotence and omnicompetence of the state, on which was predicated the continental liberal democracy of the nineteenth century, which in turn must be judged as the precursor of the totalitarian state of the twentieth.\footnote{John Courtney Murray, S.J., “The Problem of Religious Freedom,” Theological Studies 25 (1964) 536-37, 539-40. The English historian E. E. Y. Hales has said as much at the conclusion of his Pio Nono: A Study in European Politics and Religion in the Nineteenth Century (New York: Kennedy & Sons, 1954) 331.} Further, the project of the Enlightenment was far from being an unqualified success: the “religion of nature” has failed to unify all of humankind and dwarf, let alone annihilate, traditional religions.

It is the thesis of Komonchak that the Church chose to deal with the philosophical and theological issues raised by the Enlightenment in the way she did with a view to combatting the political and social consequences of liberal principles. It is my belief that, similarly and to a greater degree if Komonchak is correct, Rizal’s principal concern was political; his engagement in the revelation debate and other doctrinal issues was a function of his political and ideological pursuits. Just as many a Spanish intellectual depended on the Enlightenment and the freak, peculiarly Spanish rationalist movement known as Krausism\footnote{See Raul J. Bonoan, S.J., “Spanish Krausism and Rizal,” Philippine Studies 40 (1992) 302-19.} to lend philosophic substance to the liberal reforms designed to restructure Spanish society, so Rizal found in the ideas of the philosophes the intellectual framework for the social, political, and cultural transformation he dreamt for his people. Rationalism did not give him unalloyed satisfaction, for he always maintained some residual attachment to the Catholicism of his youth, but it did provide him a rich armory of idiom, imagery, principles, concepts, and ideas for the on-going discourse on “national redemption,” of which among the Filipino propagandists he was
acknowledged as the leading and most articulate and convincing exponent. Rizal’s rationalism is not without ambiguity: he was not a rigorous rationalist or freethinker, as Unamuno stated in 1907 preferring to call him a librecreyente, freebeliever.35 His image of God was not Voltaire’s watchmaker God but that of the Lord’s Prayer, the Father of all to whom he frequently confessed and prayed daily. He still went to Church in Europe occasionally and from Dapitan wrote his mother that he went to Mass every Sunday. Notwithstanding the acerbity of his attacks, his break with the Church lacked the boisterousness and irreverence of Voltaire’s.

The fact is that it was well nigh impossible in nineteenth century Spain to be a liberal and be regarded as a good Catholic. And the few Catholic intellectuals in Europe, such as Lacordaire, Lamennais, Montalembert, Döllinger, who attempted to seek an accommodation to liberalism, suffered great personal difficulties and fell afoul of Church authorities. It is therefore understandable, and in fact should be quite expected, that Rizal in espousing liberal political ideas would succumb to rationalist philosophical beliefs diametrically opposed to the dogmas of the Church.

That he could not disengage political ideas and social and cultural developments from false philosophical principles within the totality of rationalist discourse, is symptomatic of the confusion of the times. Neither could Pastells nor Pius IX, who in the Syllabus condemned “progress, liberalism and modern civilization,” inasmuch as political reforms were being urged on the basis of erroneous rationalist principles (e.g., the absolute autonomy of reason, the competence of the state to pass judgement on religious matters, religion as having no public significance); the first acts of liberal governments were often enough to deny the Church and religious orders that very freedom in whose name the liberals had pursued and gained power; and the clear intent of liberal groups such as the freemasons and movements such as the German Kulturkampf was to banish the Church out of public existence. In Spain a special focus of liberalist ire were the Jesuits, who on several

35. Wenceslao E. Retaña, Vida y escritos del Dr. José Rizal (Madrid: Victoriano Suarez, 1907) 492.
occasions were expelled or suppressed by liberal governments. As I have indicated, there were intrinsic flaws in Pastells’s apologetics. But its principal weakness was the apologist himself, who early in the correspondence diagnosed Rizal’s spiritual condition in the following manner:

This exaggerated reliance on your own judgement and this excessive self-love prepared you to finally cross the bridge of unreason. Upon reaching Germany, you took the great leap, or rather, suffered the great fall plunging into the deep abyss of treason, and thus you estranged yourself from the Catholic religion and the Spanish nation and hoisted the flag of subversion. This, in fact, the foreign enemies our religion and our fatherland foresaw; and from then on, without relent and with the greatest effort and skill, they labored to confuse your brilliant mind with reformist and separatist doctrines, inoculating your already wounded heart with the virus of sectarianism. And when you carelessly drank the deadly poison they had poured in a golden cup, the inevitable took place . . . The Protestants and a little later the freemasons laid their hands on you. The first captivity produced the Rizal of the Noli me tangere; the second the Rizal of El filibusterismo.36

Thus Rizal was only too well aware that Pastells was linking his “shipwreck of faith” with the political issue. For Pastells, as well as for his Jesuit confreres, la fe católica y la nación española were inseparable twins. In fact, the Spanish Jesuits in the late nineteenth century could scarcely disguise their sympathies for the Integrist Movement which sought the restoration of the fifteenth-century Christendom of the Catholic Sovereigns Ferdinand and Isabel. In fact, the imprudent behavior of a few Jesuits who showed public approval of this extremist movement won for the order in Spain a strong letter of admonition from the Holy See.37 For all his kindness and pastoral concern, Pastells could not appreciate the politics of this Jesuit alumnus, who was now struggling to lay the foundations of the emergent nation. The

failure of Pastells’s apologetics must be blamed, ultimately, on the closedness of Pastells, the Jesuits, and in fact the Church to the legitimate aspirations of Rizal and his people.