

CHAPTER ONE

Faith and Reason: The Case of Jacob Frohschammer

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Gerald A. McCool's groundbreaking work *Catholic Theology in the Nineteenth Century: The Quest for a Unitary Method* gave many Catholics a first look at the struggle between those nineteenth-century Catholic philosophers and theologians who saw the need to address new modes of thought and their intransigent opponents who insisted that only the philosophy and theology that came down from the medievals, especially St. Thomas, were compatible with Catholic orthodoxy.¹ McCool chronicles the strong interventions of papal authority, which effectively drove from the field all the proposed alternatives to scholasticism.²

The interventions and the theological arguments which led up to them gave rise to significant theological developments, some of which were incorporated into official Church teaching about its own teaching authority. I have dealt with the development of the terminology "*ordinary magisterium*" in an earlier publication.³

The archival research cited in earlier research made it clear that the Roman authorities were particularly concerned in the early 1860s with one German scholar, not well known today among university theologians and philosophers, who tried repeatedly to offer a revised view of Catholic theology. Jacob Frohschammer (1821-93) was professor first of theology and later of philosophy in the University of Munich.⁴ In this paper, I look more closely at Frohschammer's work and the influence it had on

the response of the neo-scholastic theologians as well as on the response of the Pope and the curial congregations both to Frohschammer himself and to scholars perceived to be sympathetic to Frohschammer's positions.

In fact, Frohschammer's work had attracted attention from neo-scholastic theological critics like Joseph Kleutgen, S.J., and from the Roman congregations of the Index and the Holy Office almost from the beginning of his teaching and publishing career. I will concentrate in this paper on his 1861 work, *Über die Freiheit der Wissenschaft*, and the response which it provoked from church authorities. That response and the theological positions which underlay it passed into the teaching of the First Vatican Council and then into the theology of the twentieth century.

First, some biographical information. Jacob Frohschammer was born in 1821 at Illkofen near Regensburg, where his father owned a large farm. In his autobiography he wrote:

On the feast of the three holy kings I first saw the light of the world and I came into the world with at least the deep desire to seek the truth, even if, like them, on wide and difficult roads; and a favorable star has been able to lead me as well as them to right knowledge.⁵

The young Frohschammer found it difficult to decide whether to pursue the truth in philosophical studies or follow his lingering call to the priesthood. His family helped to push him in the direction of the priesthood, and so he turned to theology in studies at the Georgianum in Munich. In 1847 he received a doctorate from Munich with a dissertation on the gift of tongues in the account of Pentecost in the Book of Acts and in chapter 12 of Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians. There followed another personal crisis over whether his calling was really to the study of philosophy rather than to theology and the priesthood. Without funds to continue studies and with his energies exhausted, but with the encouragement of his teachers, Frohschammer was ordained a priest in Regensburg in 1847. He functioned as a priest for only a few years.

His first assignments were as a curate in small villages, which Frohschammer carried on at the same time that he repeatedly petitioned his bishop for permission to resume his philosophical studies. He went so far as to threaten to leave the priesthood if his request was not granted. In 1848 Frohschammer returned to Munich. He wanted to be a privatdozent in the Faculty of Philosophy, but was rebuffed by a faculty apparently suspicious of a Catholic priest. To support himself, he turned to several jobs, including being a university preacher and finally a privatdozent in theology, lecturing on the history of theology. He also completed a *Habilitationschrift*, which was a study of the Catholic and Pelagian doctrines of free will. He then turned to lectures on the philosophy of religion and pedagogy. At the same time, he did intensive studies in philosophy and psychology. His preparatory studies complete, he turned to the life of a university scholar.

In 1854 Frohschammer published a volume reflecting his studies: *Über den Ursprung der menschlichen Seelen. Rechtfertigung der Generationismus* (*On the Origin of Human Souls: A Justification of Generationism*). The defense of generationism provoked a warning letter from the Archbishop of Munich, Karl August von Reisach. Nonetheless, Frohschammer, who shortly before had been promoted to extraordinary professor of theology, was incardinated in Reisach's archdiocese of Munich and Freising. In 1855 Frohschammer, to the surprise of many, was appointed ordinary professor in the Faculty of Philosophy, a position he held, in spite of many attacks upon him, until his death in 1893. He attributed the promotion to the initiative of King Maximilian II, whose attention had been drawn to Frohschammer's work on generationism, understood as an attack on materialism. The king stood by him later in difficult times.

Frohschammer's need for a patron became apparent in 1857, when his book on generationism, which had received little notice apart from criticism by the influential German Jesuit theologian Joseph Kleutgen, was put on the *Index of Forbidden Books*.⁶ Kleutgen was a consultor to the Congregation of the Index. Even after many efforts, including some by the famed Munich historian Ignaz von Döllinger, Frohschammer issued no reassuring "clarifications" of his views, much less a submission to the findings of

the congregation. Still, no proceedings against him were undertaken at the time.

In 1858 Frohschammer published another book, *Einleitung in die Philosophie und Grundriss der Metaphysik. Zur Reform der Philosophie (Introduction to Philosophy and Outline of Metaphysics. Toward the Reform of Philosophy)*.

It was clear early in his career that Frohschammer was a forceful proponent of the freedom of "science" and that the primary example of a "science" for him was philosophy. That is clear in the *Einleitung*, but made unmistakable in *Über die Freiheit der Wissenschaft*, published in 1861.

The German context of Frohschammer's discussion of the freedom of science was a bitter dispute that had erupted between the Tübingen theologian J.E. Kuhn and the scholastic theologian Franz Jacob Clemens of Münster over the dictum "philosophy is the handmaid of theology." The dispute extended to issues of the place of faith and reason and the role of church authority in relation to theology. Clemens strongly asserted the subordinate role of philosophy *vis-à-vis* theology, describing theology as the "fundamental principle" and the "cornerstone" of Catholic philosophy.⁷

Frohschammer's account of human knowledge is heavily influenced by German idealism. He describes a form of human knowledge originating in the senses and processed through the understanding (*Verstand*), but he also holds that human reason (*Vernunft*) has a direct "God-consciousness." The fact that this direct intuition of God is a function of reason itself denies the common view that knowledge of the divine nature is beyond the capacity of human reason. This issue, Frohschammer insisted, was a difference of legitimate opinions among Catholic theologians. Clemens, Kleutgen, and other neo-scholastic critics denounced the idealist view as heretical, saying that it obliterated the distinction between the divine and the human and eliminated the need for grace to make possible an act of saving faith in God's revelation. Frohschammer responded that attempts to impose revelation upon reason by appeals to authority reduced the motive of faith to external despotism (*Freiheit*, vii).

Frohschammer recognizes the logical implications of his position. In a footnote he explicitly denies the distinction of

“natural” and “supernatural” truths in Christianity. He points out that some Christian thinkers claimed that there was a primitive revelation at the very beginning which was modified and dimmed in the process of being handed on and which has been renewed by Christian revelation (*Freiheit*, 40, n.1). And he insists that whether the Christian revelation is divine or not is a matter of fact and cannot be demonstrated without simultaneously arguing for the content of that revelation. The proofs offered in traditional apologetics — prophecies, miracles, the moral conduct of the founder of Christianity — cannot provide the desired proof apart from the content of the revelation, especially if the unconditional right of reason to make free rational judgments upon the positive law and the bearers of authority is denied (*Freiheit*, 41).

Nor does introducing the work of divine grace change anything. Frohschammer insists that the work of human reason is as important as the operation of grace to the act of faith. In no way can grace substitute for human judgment about the credibility of revelation. Blind faith carries with it no great merit (*Freiheit*, 50).

The publication of *Über die Freiheit der Wissenschaft* once again called the immediate attention of church authorities in Rome to Frohschammer. One important new factor was that in 1855 Archbishop von Reisach had been created cardinal and transferred from his place as archbishop of Munich to the curia in Rome. Along with the influential German, Joseph Kleutgen, S.J., Reisach played a major role in relations between Rome and the German university theologians until his death in 1869 on the eve of the First Vatican Council, of which he had been nominated a co-president by Pius IX.

As I pointed out, criticism of Frohschammer had already been published in Kleutgen's *Die Philosophie der Vorzeit verteidigt*, and the publication of *Über die Freiheit* finally provoked from Rome a strong official response. Pius IX sent the letter *Gravissimas Inter* to the then-archbishop of Munich, Gregor von Scherr, O.S.B., dated December 11, 1862.⁸ The papal letter explicitly condemned Frohschammer's views in his *Einleitung* and in *Über die Freiheit*. The Pope also condemned the periodical which Frohschammer published almost single-handedly between 1858 and 1862 under the title *Athenaeum*.

Drawing upon a study of Frohschammer's works which the Pope ordered from the Congregation of the Index (separate in those days from the Congregation of the Holy Office), the Pope pointed to two fundamental errors:

The author has strayed from catholic truth especially in two ways: first, the author attributes to human reason such powers as do not belong to it at all; and second, he grants to that same reason such freedom to hold any view and always to dare anything that the rights, the office and the authority of the church itself are removed altogether (*DS*, 2850).

Frohschammer is reproached also for holding that humans can attain not only to those things which are within the reach of natural reason, but also to things having to do with the supernatural end of human beings, e.g., the mystery of the incarnation. Indeed, if his position is taken to its logical conclusion, the deepest mysteries of the divine wisdom and goodness and of God's free will are attainable by natural reason. No one, the Pope continues, will fail to see just how false and erroneous such views are.

The Pope continues with warm praise for those who cultivate philosophy within the proper limits:

Indeed true and sound philosophy has a noble place, since it is for that philosophy diligently to seek out the truth and for human reason, though darkened by the guilt of the first humans but not extinguished in any way, rightly and assiduously to cultivate, to illumine, to perceive, to understand well, to promote the object of its knowledge and a great number of truths. Among these many truths are the existence of God, his nature and attributes, which even faith proposes for belief, and to demonstrate, vindicate, defend by arguments taken from its own principles, and in this way to prepare a way for these dogmas of the

faith to be held more correctly and for the more recondite dogmas, which faith alone can first perceive, to be understood by reason in some manner. To do these things and to be versed in them should be the difficult yet beautiful science of true philosophy. (*DS*, 2853)

The Pope declares that he cannot tolerate the confusion of the power of natural reason to know some things about God with the claim that reason can penetrate even the profoundest realities of Christian dogma. Nor are such claims simply disputes about theological opinion. They are deviations from the common and immutable teaching of the Church.

The Pope also rejects Frohschammer's claims for the freedom of science, describing them as claims not for the "liberty but rather the license of philosophy." And against Frohschammer's claims that science, and especially philosophy, must have complete freedom, the Pope asserts the right and the duty of the church to proscribe and condemn errors when the integrity of the faith and good of souls demand it.

The letter then takes the form of a decree in which Pius IX condemns the works of Frohschammer and orders the congregation to place them on the *Index of Forbidden Books*. The letter concludes with an appeal to Frohschammer to submit to the decree while noting that he did not submit to the earlier condemnation of his book on generationism. Again Frohschammer did not submit, and after delays which exasperated the Roman authorities, he was suspended from priestly duties by the archbishop in March 1863.

He felt himself isolated and very much alone. Just how alone was clear when he was not invited to a meeting of German Catholic scholars in Munich in September 1863, and again in January 1864, when his colleagues from the Faculty of Theology published a "Declaration of the Theological Faculty of the University of Munich against Dr. Frohschammer" in the archdiocesan pastoral bulletin.

Although Frohschammer moved to the margins of the Church early in his career and finally left it completely, the influence of his ideas and their rejection by the Church endured. In December

1864, Pius IX published an encyclical, *Quanta Cura*, to which was attached a *Syllabus* of the errors condemned by the pope in the nearly twenty years of his pontificate. Among the eighty propositions listed in the syllabus were three, numbers 9, 10, and 11, which repeated the condemnation of Frohschammer and made reference to the letter *Gravissimas Inter*. The First Vatican Council included the condemned opinions in its dogmatic constitution on the Catholic Faith, *Dei Filius*, published April 24, 1870.⁹

Frohsammer continued to publish smaller theological works, among them criticisms of the *Syllabus of Errors* published in December 1864, by Pius IX and still more criticisms of the First Vatican Council of 1869-70.¹⁰ The condemnation of Frohsammer's own views by Pius IX was repeated in both places. In December 1871 — a year and a half after the publication of the dogmatic definitions of the First Vatican Council on faith and reason and on the primacy and infallibility of the pope and after great pressure was exerted by Rome on lagging bishops and theologians to publicly submit to the conciliar definitions — the archbishop of Munich and Freising published a document declaring Frohsammer excommunicated. But following Vatican I, he never associated himself with the Old Catholics as a number of disaffected scholars did or with any Protestant group. Through all of this, Frohsammer continued his university teaching, while lamenting that his work got little attention and his students had little influence. He died unreconciled to the Church in 1893.

Concern is reflected in the alarm about the influence of Frohsammer which preoccupied the Roman authorities in the summer of 1863 (recall that he had been suspended in March of that year), especially after the announcement in August of a planned meeting of German Catholic scholars in Munich in September 1863. The meeting was organized by Professors Ignaz von Döllinger, Bonifacius Haneberg, and Johannes B. Alzog. Roman concern can be seen in notes prepared by Cardinal von Reisach as the Roman authorities developed a response to the announcement of the meeting of scholars. Reisach puts the concern over the proposed meeting in Munich in the context of other doctrinal controversies in Germany. After noting the circumstances that prevail in Germany and the "character of the

persons who have promoted this meeting" (probably a reference to the controversial Döllinger), the cardinal expresses the fear that "the results of the meeting could cause grave harm to the authority of the church with regard to its theological and religious teaching." Then he suggests the larger context:

It is known to the Holy See that the question of the relation of faith and reason is agitated among the Catholic theologians of Germany with great animosity, and it is also known that the various opinions on this matter which divide German theologians and philosophers derive from their having in fact abandoned the principles of the ancient and traditional philosophy and theology of the schools and put in its place the various principles of modern philosophy which are substantially and essentially opposed to the ancient philosophy and therefore opposed to the teaching received and approved by the church not only in method but also on many important points of theological doctrine. The fact of Herr Frohschammer is not an isolated one; the doctrine taught by other professors of the University of Munich and especially by those of Tübingen, not to speak of those professors who have imbibed more or less the systems of Günther and of Hermes, shows many traces of the influence of modern philosophical systems and on that account above all are opposed to the teaching of the church.

This influence, while admitting divine revelation and even the authority of the church to preserve it in its integrity, attributes, however, to philosophy or to scientific development and scientific teaching a certain independence and freedom in explaining the meaning, the coherence, and the principles of revealed truth. While it refuses to recognize direction by ecclesiastical

authority, it is ready to explain dogmas in a sense foreign to the definitions and the common teaching of the church. It is ready in the end to destroy the character and the nature of supernatural truths by attributing to reason the ability and the power to deduce them from the principles of natural reason and thus to arrive at a perfect scientific knowledge of the truths taught by faith.¹¹

Reisach asserts that some German theologians have returned to the teaching of the schools to refute false philosophies, a fact viewed "with great displeasure" by "the defenders of the so-called German science and of the freedom of science generally." The allusion to Frohschammer is unmistakable. The cardinal's notes describe the critics of the ancient theology and philosophy in terms strongly resembling *Über die Freiheit der Wissenschaft*. His description of disputes among Catholic theologians could well have the exchanges between J.E. Kuhn of Tübingen and F.J. Clemens of Münster in mind.

In fact, Frohschammer did not attend the Munich meeting, and it appears that he was not invited. However, Rome's response to the Munich meeting came in another papal letter to the archbishop of Munich and Freising entitled *Tuas Libenter*, dated in December 1863, though not distributed until February 1864. The letter asserts in strong terms the authority of the church's *magisterium* over theology and theologians. That authority demanded submission to the teachings of the *magisterium*, meaning not only the solemn definitions of doctrine issued by an ecumenical council but also what the letter called the teaching of the *ordinary magisterium* of the church. The term appears for the first time in a papal document in *Tuas Libenter*.¹² The forcefulness of the Roman statement seems directed not only at the Munich meeting, which was attended by a number of theologians who supported the traditional theology and philosophy of the church, but clearly was intended as another blow at the independence claimed for theology, especially by Jacob Frohschammer.

It is not too much to say that the continued and forceful claims made for Church teaching authority in the nineteenth and

twentieth centuries are part of the legacy of Frohschammer to theology and philosophy. His strong dissent from traditional teaching and his virtual declaration of the independence of philosophical and theological science from magisterial supervision provoked strong negative reaction from church authorities. The numerous and forceful restatements of magisterial authority and the creation of hierarchical controls over theologians and their work which have been put in place since Frohschammer's time are evidences that his legacy is not exhausted.

Notes

1. Gerald A. McCool, *Catholic Theology in the Nineteenth Century: The Quest for a Unitary Method*. (New York: Seabury, 1977; rpt. New York: Fordham University Press, 1989.

2. See McCool, *Catholic Theology*, chapter 6, 128-45.

3. See J.P. Boyle, *Church Teaching Authority: Historical and Theological Studies* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), especially chapter one, "The Ordinary Magisterium," 10-29, and chapter two, "The Influence of Joseph Kleutgen, S.J.," 30-42.

4. See brief biographical notices on Frohschammer in *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique, Index*, t. I, cols. 1753-54 (A.W. Ziegler); *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*, 2nd ed., t. IV, 357 (K. Leckner); *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, VI, 210 (C. Buckley);. See also the entry in *Dictionnaire d'histoire et de géographie ecclésiastique* t. 19, cols. 140-46 (B. Hassler). The accompanying bibliography is very extensive. A fuller account is Rudolf Hausl, "Jakob Frohschammer (1821-1893)," in *Katholische Theologen Deutschlands im 19. Jahrhundert*, ed. Heinrich Fries and Georg Schwaiger (Munich: 1975), 3:169-89. I am indebted to Hausl for much of the biographical material in this paper.

5. Cited in Hausl, "Jakob Frohschammer (1821-1893)," 170.

6. See Joseph Kleutgen, *Die Philosophie der Vorzeit verteidigt*, 2 vols., 2nd ed. (Innsbruck, 1878). His attack on Frohschammer is at 2:583-92. The first edition, published 1860-63, was not available to me.

7. Jacob Frohschammer, *Über die Freiheit der Wissenschaft* (Munich: Lentner, 1861), vii. All further quotations from this work will be cited by page number in the text of my essay. Frohschammer seems to have seen in Clemens' *ancilla* thesis a principle which worked like principles

in his own thought. See Joseph Stracke, *Ecclesiae iudicium de Jacobi Frohschammers doctrina circa mysteria*, unpublished doctoral dissertation (Rome: Pontifical Gregorian University, 1934), 18.

8. See *Pii IX pontificis maximi acta: Corpus RR. Pontificum*, Pars prima. vol. 3 (Graz: Akademische Druck-u Verlagsanstalt: 1971), 548-56. Excerpts are in Denzinger-Schönmetzer, *Enchiridion symbolorum, definitionum et declarationum de rebus fidei et morum*, 35th ed. (Barcelona: Herder, 1973), nn. 2850-61, hereafter cited as *DS*.

9. The development of the constitution by a commission of bishops, including the *vota* of the theologian-consultors (including Joseph Kleutgen), is described in detail by Hermann Pottmeyer in *Der Glaube vor dem Anspruch der Wissenschaft* (Freiburg: Herder, 1968).

10. The *Syllabus* is published in *Pii noni . . . Acta*, 701-17. Propositions 9, 10, and 11 are noted as condemned by *Gravissimas Inter*.

11. The Italian notes of Cardinal von Reisach are in the Archivio Segreto Vaticano in the archives of the Secretariat of State, *fondo moderno*, 1864, rub. 255, fasc. 1. Georg Hermes and Anton Günther had been condemned earlier. Reisach had been involved in both condemnations.

12. See my study of the development of the letter and the terminology in *Church Teaching Authority*, chapters one and two.