

The Attitude of the American Hierarchy Toward the Doctrine of Papal Infallibility at the Vatican Council

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In its attitude toward the doctrine of Papal Infallibility, the American hierarchy can be divided into three factions. Vigorously opposed to the definition of the dogma was a group under the aegis of Archbishop Kenrick of St. Louis. The members of this group, called the Anti-Infallibilists, including Archbishop Purcell of Cincinnati and Bishops Fitzgerald of Little Rock, McQuaid of Rochester, Mrak of Sault Ste. Marie, Domenec of Pittsburgh, and Verot of St. Augustine, firmly contended that the infallibility of the Pope was a doctrine that had no foundation in Scripture or Catholic tradition.

A second group, called Inopportunist, believed the dogma but deemed the period of 1870 unfavourable for any public definition.¹ In the third group, we may place the bishops who from the outset held for the definition of the doctrine – these we may refer to as the Infallibilists.²

By far the most ardent adversary of papal infallibility from the United States was Archbishop Kenrick of St. Louis. “Of the seventy members of the Council who were opposed to the definition of Infallibility as a dogma, the Archbishop of St. Louis was among the most formidable.”³ To Kenrick, the new dogma would impair the rights of bishops, for it implied a surrendering of episcopal dignity and pastoral responsibility to the Pope, who would speak as the official mouthpiece of the Church.⁴ Moreover, the bishop of St. Louis contended that the doctrine had

¹ The Inopportunist included the following prelates: *Archbishop* McCloskey, New York; *Bishops* Amat, Los Angeles; Whelan, Wheeling; Bacon, Portland; Bayley, Newark; Feehan, Nashville; Hennessy, Dubuque; Hogan, St. Joseph; Lynch, Charleston; McFarland, Hartford; Melcher, Green Bay; Mullen, Erie; O’Gorman, Nebraska; Henni, Milwaukee.

² The Infallibilists included the following prelates: *Archbishops* Spalding, Baltimore; Alemany, San Francisco; Blanchet, Oregon; *Bishops* Wood, Philadelphia; St. Palais, Vincennes; Conroy, Albany; Elder, Natchea; Quinlan, Mobile; Williams, Boston; Gibbons, North Carolina; Ryan, Buffalo; Miede, Rocky Mountains; Odin, New Orleans; O’Connell, Grass Valley; Lootens, Idaho; Martin, Natchitoches; Dubois, Galveston; Rappe, Cleveland; Goesbriand, Burlington; Heiss, La Crosse.

³ John J. O’Shea, *The Two Kenricks*, p. 318.

⁴ Johann Friedrich, *Documenta ad Illustrandum Concilium Vaticanum*, I, pp. 122-129.

never been presented as an article of faith in any of the catechisms,⁵ nor could it be found as such in any document of public worship. Such speculations led Kenrick to assert that the Church had never hitherto taught infallibility as a thing to believe as faith. No book treating of faith and morals contained any opinion that the dogma was a matter of faith. Kenrick pointed out that, on the contrary, any book treating the subject held that the opposite opinion was true.⁶

For him the proclamation of Pius IX's infallibility necessarily implied the infallibility of all his predecessors in the See of Peter. Yet history presented him with some grave arguments against the dogma. How could Pope Victor in 192 approve Montanism and later condemn it? How could Pope Honorius in 625 adhere to *Monothelism* or how could Pope Sixtus V in 1587 publish an edition of the bible to be condemned by Pope Pius VII? With these feelings regarding Papal Infallibility, Archbishop Kenrick sailed for Rome. During the sessions of the Vatican Council, he took every means possible to prevent the definition of the doctrine.

On January 15, 1870, he, together with Purcell, McQuaid, Domenec, Amat, Fitzgerald, Verot and Bayley, signed a petition sent to the Holy Father, begging that the definition of Infallibility be not proposed for it could only result in 'disunity among Catholics, alienation of possible converts and the impeding of the works of the ministry.'⁷ That such was the view of Archbishop Kenrick can be seen from the prelate's letter to his Vicar General, Monsignor Muehlsiepen, March 6, 1870:

The Council appears to have been convoked for the special purpose of defining the Papal Infallibility and enacting the propositions of the Syllabus as general laws of the Church. Both objects are deemed by a minority, of which I am one, inexpedient and dangerous, and are sure to meet with serious resistance. The minds of both parties are considerably excited and there is every reason to fear that the Council, instead of uniting with the Church those already separated from it, will cause divisions among ourselves most detrimental to Catholic interests.⁸

On March 15, 1870 Kenrick addressed another petition to the Holy Father, demanding that the doctrine be not inserted before some of the other business of the Council. This petition was signed by Purcell and Fitzgerald.

We hear that the schema on Papal Infallibility is to be placed before the next General Congregation and to be carried without discussion. We cannot think that such a proposal could be tolerated... but we give notice that if the impossible

⁵ No attempt here is made to comment on the theology of the American hierarchy, but simply to present their views.

⁶ Charles Butler's Historical Memoirs, IV, 501, in Leonard Bacon, *An Inside View of the Vatican Council*, p. 141.

The speech of Kenrick: "It is no matter of faith to believe that the Pope is in himself infallible, separated from the Church, even in expounding the faith."

⁷ John Mansi, *Amplissima Collectio Conciliorum*, LI, 782.

⁸ John Rothsteiner, *History of the Archdiocese of St. Louis*, II, 305.

should happen, we would immediately leave the Council and make public the reason of our departure.⁹

On receiving this petition, the president of the congregation disavowed any such intention and the general congregations, recessed since February 22nd, were resumed on March 18th for a discussion on the revised constitutions of the Catholic Faith.

On May 8th, some seventy-two ecclesiastics, all of whom opposed the definition, submitted a protest against the Council considering Infallibility: "While all accept the infallibility of the Church of Christ, it is impossible to accept the personal infallibility of the Roman pontiff."¹⁰ To this protest were affixed the signatures of Kenrick, Purcell, Verot and Domenec.

In a speech given before the assembled Vatican Council, June 4th, the Archbishop of St. Louis both protested against the termination of debates on the Infallibility issue and violently declared that the Council could not declare it an article of faith.

"The opinion that the Roman pontiff, and he alone, without the consent of the episcopate, is infallible is not certain and cannot be defined as a dogma of faith."¹¹ When the congregations terminated on June 5th for a period of recess during which the committee on Infallibility worked on the proper theological phrasing of the definition, Kenrick performed a very rash act. Leaving Rome, he went to Naples where he had a pamphlet printed and circulated containing his own objections to Papal Infallibility.¹²

In his pamphlet, referred to as the *Concio*, Kenrick reiterates his arguments against Papal Infallibility:

The successors of Peter and the rest of the Apostles constituting the Apostolic College have every power now which they had when the College was first instituted by Christ. The individual bishops, taken singly, receive, by the ordinances of the College itself, only an ordinary local jurisdiction in their several dioceses. But the bishops taken universally have a universal jurisdiction, not in that sense exactly that the universal jurisdiction is made up by the sum of the local jurisdictions, but that the bishops universally, whether dispersed and separated from each other or united in a general council, constitute the Apostolic College ... the primacy of the Roman pontiff, both in honour and in jurisdiction in the universal church I acknowledge... we have in the Sacred Scriptures perfectly clear testimonies of a commission given to all the apostles and of divine assistance promised to all. These passages are clear and admit no variation of meaning. We have not even one simple passage of Sacred Scripture, the meaning of which is undisputed, in which anything of the kind is promised to Peter separately from the rest. And yet the authors of the schema want us to assert that

⁹ John Mansi, *op. cit.*, LI, 714.

¹⁰ John Mansi, *op. cit.*, LI, 728.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, LI, 1059.

¹² This pamphlet, popularly referred to as the "*Concio*," is properly called "the speech of Peter Kenrick prepared for speaking but not spoken in the Vatican Council."

to the Roman Pontiff as Peter's successor is given that power which cannot be proved by any clear evidence of Sacred Scripture to have been given to Peter himself except just so far as he received it in common with the other apostles ... I admit that a great privilege was granted to Peter above the rest; but I am led to this conviction by testimony not of the Sacred Scriptures but of all Christian antiquity. By the help of this testimony it appears that he should use the counsel of his brethren and should be aided by the judgment of those who are his partners in this supreme function and should speak in their name of whom he is head and mouth.¹³

In analyzing the Concio of Archbishop Kenrick, we find that he begins by claiming that the doctrine is not so certain that it can be defined as an article of faith, and then takes up the position that even if it were certain, it would not be expedient that it should be defined by the present council. The dogma of infallibility would not only impair the rights of bishops but would impose on the faithful the necessity of believing that the Roman pontiff never did err in faith. Kenrick embraces under the head of expediency, matters very different indeed from what one would have anticipated. He barely indicates the social and political dangers likely to arise out of the contemplated changes in dogma. Having done this, he concludes that if the definition of Papal Infallibility should be proclaimed in the name of the Council it would rather increase dissension than promote peace and would lead to a diminution of the rights of bishops.

The Concio was published at an extremely inopportune time. The question was before the Tribunal de Fide: the Pope had proposed the doctrine for definition, the majority of the Fathers had supported the suggestion of Infallibility, and yet one of the Fathers declared to the world that the doctrine about to be defined was false.

Why proclaim it to the world? The people would not decide the question; it was more the act of an enemy of the Church and Council. Certainly as a bishop, Kenrick would have to submit humbly to the decision once promulgated. Actually his Concio only resembled all the other works and reasons written against Infallibility. It is true that Kenrick was scheduled to speak on May 20, 1870, before the Council and that he was unable to do so because of the long list of orators who preceded him. Dissatisfied, he protested and published his Concio – the action of a man seemingly piqued.

Archbishop Kenrick, like so many other leaders of thought and spokesmen of the Faith of his day, believed that it was the office of the Bishop of Rome, as supreme Pontiff, to decide controversies and condemn errors and that such decisions and condemnations must be regarded as final and infallible if accepted by the universal church. According to this view, the College of Bishops, whether assembled in Council or dispersed in their sees, in union however with the Roman Pontiff, was the true seat of Infallibility; but the Pope, separated from the body of the Bishops, if that were possible, did not enjoy the gift.

The views and ideas of Archbishop Kenrick were those of the small group of American Anti-Infallibilist prelates.

¹³ Leonard Bacon, *An Inside View of the Vatican Council*, pp. 119-120.

On New Year's Day, 1870, a petition was received from a huge majority of the bishops by the Committee de Postulatis, soliciting the definition of Papal Infallibility. This petition gave rise to a counter petition from the anti-infallibilists.

We sincerely beg that the question of defining the infallibility of the Supreme Pontiff as a dogma of faith be not proposed to the Council.¹⁴

On examining the protest, we find that the reasons against the definition were three-fold, namely, that discord would arise among the bishops, heresies would appear among wavering Catholics and the work of conversion would be hindered. It might be noted that these were reasons of inexpediency.

In the recess period from February 22nd – March 18th, two petitions were despatched to the Committee by the followers of Archbishop Kenrick. The first, March 11th, demanded that unanimity was necessary before the dogma be defined; and the second, March 15th, held that the dogma be discussed in its proper place on the agenda.¹⁵ These two petitions shed no light on the reasons for the attitude of the signers – they show, however, the fears of the anti-infallibilists over the possibility of an immediate declaration of Papal Infallibility.

The first petition which showed Verot, Domenec and McQuaid to be similar in thought to Kenrick, was presented to the Pope on April 17th. Following a petition by some American prelates for the immediate proclamation of Infallibility, the anti-infallibilists sent the following protestation:

We object to the declaration because it is not certain that it can be defined as a dogma of faith, and it is not expedient to define Infallibility as an article of faith even if it were true.¹⁶

From this date until the prorogation of the Council, the anti-infallibilists emphasized the lack of scriptural and traditional proof for infallibility. The possibility of the termination of the debates on the doctrine, which threatened momentarily early in June, led to another petition from the American opponents of Infallibility, for on June 4th they wrote protesting the ending of discussions.¹⁷

The first vote on the Infallibility Decree which occurred July 13th saw the anti-infallibilists vote “non placet.”¹⁸ Four days later, the Fathers protested against

¹⁴ Raymond Clancy, “American Prelates in the Vatican Council,” *Historical Records and Studies*, XXVIII, 41. This petition bears the names of the following American clerics: Kenrick, McCloskey, Purcell, Amat, Bacon, Bayley, Domenec, Feehan, Fitzgerald, Hennessy, Henni, Hogan, Lynch, McFarland, McQuaid, Melcher, Mullen, O’Gorman, Verot, Whelan.

¹⁵ John Mansi, *op. cit.*, LII, 703-716. This petition bears the names of Kenrick, Verot, Purcell and Fitzgerald.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, LII, 949. The names of Domenec, Kenrick, Verot and McQuaid are affixed to this declaration.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, LII, 380. Kenrick, Purcell, Fitzgerald, McQuaid, Mrak, Domenec and Verot all objected to the termination of the Infallibility debates.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, LII, 1285. All the American anti-infallibilists voted “non placet.”

the holding of the fourth public session which was to proclaim the doctrine:

We renew and confirm the votes which we have already cast. Thus confirming our votes by this writing, we have decided that we will not be present at the public session which is to be held on the 18th of this month. For filial piety and reverence for your Holiness will not suffer us, in a cause so proximately concerning the person of your Holiness, openly and before a Father to say: non placet.¹⁹

With the despatch of this petition, the work of the American anti-infallibilists in Rome was completed. None, save Bishop Fitzgerald, was present for the convening of the Fourth General Session. The Bishop of Little Rock petitioned on July 17th to the Holy Father that his name be not read out the next day. When it was, he became the sole American to offer a public dissenting vote against Papal Infallibility. When the doctrine was proclaimed, Bishop Fitzgerald showed his acceptance and belief in Papal Infallibility by humbly kneeling at the feet of Pius IX.

Other than Archbishop Kenrick, the most influential of the American anti-infallibilists was Bishop Verot of St. Augustine. On May 8th, he addressed the congregation and presented his arguments against infallibility, showing that it was inexpedient, then quoting from the French bishop Bossuet's opinions, and finally bringing out the seeming historical opposition in the persons of past Popes.²⁰ On June 30th, he attacked the doctrine on the grounds that it was not contained in the Scriptures and quoted Polycarp to show that it was not universal in tradition.²¹ Carrying his arguments to what he considered a correct conclusion, Verot, on May 28th, claimed that it was a sacrilege to vote for a dogma so intrinsically erroneous as Papal Infallibility.²²

Though absent from the fourth Public Session, Bishop Verot was quick to adhere to the definition once proclaimed. Just before leaving Rome, he indicated his acceptance of the doctrine by writing July 25th to His Holiness

"In the general congregation I voted 'non placet.' I was absent from the public session. I now adhere to the constitution."²³

Archbishop Purcell of Cincinnati, while firmly espousing the cause of the anti-infallibilists, tended to emphasize the role of the bishops of the world in the definition of infallible decrees.²⁴ The Archbishop left Rome June 30th before the final vote on infallibility, and the press and public felt great interest and curiosity as to his utterances on the subject since he was known to be a strong member of the minority. He was invited to give a lecture in the Catholic Institute Hall in Cincinnati, August 1, 1870. His acceptance of the definition was evident from the

¹⁹ Raymond Clancy, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

²⁰ John Mansi, *op. cit.*, LI, 1004.

²¹ *Ibid.*, LII, 958.

²² *Ibid.*, LI, 45.

²³ John Mansi, *op. cit.*, LIII, 1010.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, LII, 365.

opening sentence of his talk: "I am here to proclaim my belief in the Infallibility of the Pope, in the words of the Holy Father defining the doctrine."²⁵

Coming from the obscure hinterlands of Rochester, Bishop McQuaid, while feeling that the doctrine was not certain, had a thorough knowledge of the bitterness and bigotry directed against his flock. Consequently, inopportunist is frequently evident in his statements against the dogma:

It will be highly injurious to us in America ... if I had not confidence in God's protecting hand I would run from council in despair, so strangely ignorant are many men of what is going on in the world.²⁶

The acceptance speech of Bishop McQuaid was delivered in St. Patrick's Cathedral, Rochester, on August 28, 1870:

The question is simple enough, the definition is clear enough ... the Sovereign Pontiff, exercising the office of supreme head of the Church in matters of faith and morals as contained in Sacred Scripture, as revealed by Christ and contained in apostolic tradition cannot err ... the doctrine then and thus given by the Holy Father is the true doctrine ... I have now no difficulty in accepting.²⁷

"In the beginning the Church existed free, pure and immaculate without any such dogma (infallibility) and now it does not seem to me to be necessary."²⁸ Such words as these uttered in Council, June 3rd, showed Bishop Domenec of Pittsburgh to be opposed to the dogma solely because tradition and the Scriptures would not sanction it. However, he showed inopportunist leanings also when on May 8th he spoke: "the definition would be useless to Catholics, for if they are good ones they obey the Pope anyway, and if they are poor ones this may make them fall away."²⁹ Unlike his colleagues in opposition to the Infallibility definition, Domenec delayed in acknowledging his acceptance. Not until December 31, 1871, was word to this effect received at Rome, though the Bishop published the decree in his native diocese almost immediately on his arrival. His belated acceptance was in the nature of a gift to usher in the twenty-fifth anniversary of Pius IX's reign.³⁰ That Bishop Mrak of Sault Ste. Marie made his adherence is proven by a letter sent him by Cardinal Barnabo, Papal Secretary of

²⁵ Sister Mary McCann, *Archbishop Purcell and the Archdiocese of Cincinnati*, p. 93.

²⁶ Frederick Zwierlein, "Bishop McQuaid of Rochester," *Catholic Historical Review*, V (1920), 2. Quotation is an extract of a letter from McQuaid to Dr. Corrigan, dated Rome, February 6, 1870.

²⁷ Frederick Zwierlein, *Life and Letters of Bishop McQuaid*, II, 60. Taken from a sermon given by McQuaid, August 28, 1870, in St. Patrick's Cathedral, Rochester.

²⁸ John Mansi, *op. cit.*, LII, 427

²⁹ John Mansi, *op. cit.*, LI, 1034.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, LIII, 1016.

State:

Your letter in which you stated that you adhere fully to the decrees of the Vatican Council, and especially the decree handed down in the fourth Session has just been taken to our most Holy Father. As I know that His Holiness receives such letters with deep gratitude, I have been mindful to notify you.³¹

THE INOPPORTUNISTS.

Together with the anti-infallibilists, and forming the minority party in the Vatican, was a band of prelates known as the inopportunist. These latter were opposed to the declaration of Papal Infallibility, not because of any disbelief in the doctrine – for they believed the dogma to be in the body of tradition and the Scriptures – but because they deemed the period inopportune for formal declaration. The world seemed to them to be in a condition that would not prove receptive to the proclamation of a new Catholic doctrine – new in definition, though not in actual fact.

The group of American inopportunist comprised some thirteen ecclesiastics of whom Archbishop McCloskey of New York and Bishops Amat of Los Angeles and Whelan of Wheeling may be considered the most influential.³²

The arguments of the inopportunist may be catalogued under five headings. First, the proclamation of Papal Infallibility might retard conversions to the Catholic faith as it would be one more doctrine to be believed. Possibly, would-be converts might be confused regarding the meaning of infallibility to the extent that the Church was conferring Divinity on the Pope. This might be particularly true in a country such as the United States, filled as it was with religious bigots who were constantly picturing the Papacy in an unfavourable manner.³³

Secondly, the promulgation of the dogma seemed useless in Catholic circles. In all probability, good Catholics accepted the doctrine as true, though undefined, in much the same way as many Catholics accepted the doctrine of Mary's Assumption before its definition. Was it necessary to define the doctrine for persons who already accepted it and who shaped their religious thinking in conformity with it? On the other hand, poor Catholics would not mend their ways because of the Papal Infallibility decree: likely the severe criticism and raillery attendant on it might shake their already wavering faith.

Thirdly, the prelates had been accustomed to assume that the Church, the Pope in counsel with the College of Ecclesiastics, was infallible. To posit that the Pope alone was infallible might imply a lessening of their own prestige to the more worldly-minded bishops. The doctrine might result in the Pope ruling each diocese personally with the bishops being relegated to unimportant and menial capacities.

The doctrine could quite probably be a new weapon in the hands of governments and local officials, hostile to the Church. Scandal and bigotry, which

³¹ *Ibid.*, LIII, 1053.

³² For list of inopportunist, see p. 35.

³³ In proof of this, recall the Philadelphia riots.

are always based on ignorance and hate, would thrive as the proponents of anti-Catholic doctrines would viciously assert the mutability of Catholic teachings. Governments might offer it as a reason to seize Church property and to persecute the Catholic religion as they had done in the sixteenth century.

Fifthly, if the bishops themselves were not unanimous over the definition of the dogma, it would probably result in divisions in the Church. That this was no idle speculation is proven by the origins of the old Catholic movement in Germany under the aegis of Dr. Dollinger after the promulgation of infallibility.

These were the main motives that prompted the Inopportunist bishops consistently to support the Anti-Infallibilists and to oppose the publication of Papal Infallibility. Thus we find the name of McCloskey, Amat, Whelan, Henni, Bacon, Bayley, Feehan, Hennessy, Hogan, Lynch, McFarland, Melchor, Mullen and O’Gorman affixed to the petition of Archbishop Kenrick presented to the Committee, January 15, 1870.³⁴ This petition, though opposed to the declaration of the dogma, listed as its reasons only those conformable to the inopportunist, namely, the resultant lack of unity, the loss of converts and the consequent religious bigotry.

That the position of the bishops be not relegated to insignificance was a partial worry of Bishops Whelan and Mullen. They proposed that the Holy Father should speak as “confirming the doctrine of the bishops as well as exercising the functions of supreme teacher of all Christians.”³⁵ Apparently, the loss of episcopal prestige greatly worried Bishop Whelan, for in his public address to the Council he said:

Although the question of Papal Infallibility is a disputed one in America, England and Ireland, I myself am convinced by the arguments in favour of this doctrine. .. the formula should state explicitly that the definition of infallibility of the Supreme Pontiff is indeed an expression or a declaration of the faith of the Church which is the guardian and teacher of the revealed word, but that on the other hand the pronouncement of a council of bishops should not be ignored.³⁶

It was only natural that we find the names of McCloskey and Whelan supporting the petition protesting the termination of the debates on infallibility.³⁷ Holding the doctrines of inopportunism, Whelan objected to the closing “on account of the difficulties and controversies which had arisen.”³⁸ Amat had mentioned these difficulties in the Council the preceding day, May 11th, “divisions between pastors, the difficulty of converting heretics and the exasperation of rulers.”³⁹

³⁴ John Mansi, *op. cit.*, LI, 782.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, LI, 712. Presented to the committee, April 11, 1870.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, LII, 915.

³⁷ Raymond Clancy, *op. cit.*, p. 55. This protestation was sent to the Committee, June 4, 1870.

³⁸ John Mansi, *op. cit.*, LI, 1050.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, LI, 1029.

Though all during the Council, Bishop Amat had opposed the declaration of Papal Infallibility, he held that the doctrine was certain and contained in the tradition of the Church. On June 7th, he quoted from the Council of Florence to the effect: “the Roman pontiff is alone the head of the Church,” and then commented “the words of the Council (Florence) do not need further definition.”⁴⁰ In other words, for the Bishop of Los Angeles, the infallibility of the Pope was enunciated once and for all. Another definition would be but repetitious.

When the Committee was determining a proposed title for the Pope on June 28th, Amat suggested as an alternative for “infallibility” the “magisterial primacy.” He offered what seemed to him a clearer statement of the source of Infallibility, i.e. that it was a natural and implicit consequence of the supreme apostolic authority given to Peter and to his successors.⁴¹

When the first voting for the doctrine occurred, July 13th, Amat voted “placet juxta modum,” which inferred that he disagreed with the terminology of the infallibility outline. When questioned regarding his vote, he offered a criticism of the preamble as his reason. Nothing, however, was offered in criticism of the doctrine itself.⁴²

By voting “placet” on July 18th, Amat showed conclusively that he at no time doubted the truth of the doctrine, but merely thought it inexpedient to define papal infallibility in 1870.

Like Bishop Amat, Archbishop McCloskey held for the infallibility doctrine, but thought the time for its promulgation to be inexpedient. Representing the United States, a young priest from the New York diocese, Dr. Corcoran, had been summoned to Rome early in 1869 to help in the preparation of the subject-matter preliminary to the Vatican Council. In all probability, the young cleric reflected the idea of his immediate religious superior; at any rate, he wrote to McCloskey on March 6, 1869, regarding papal infallibility:

“I consider that he (Pius IX) has the thing theoretically and practically in the Catholic world of today. What more is needed. The *res* is more important than the *titulus*.”⁴³

McCloskey, in Rome, voted against the doctrine up to the last. We have seen that he joined in the protests against declaration on January 15th, and also against the termination of the debates on June 4th. On July 13th, he, along with Amat, voted “placet juxta modum,” on the grounds that the words “anathema sit” be deleted.⁴⁴ It is significant that the doctrine itself was not the subject of

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, LII, 538.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, LII, 955.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 1282.

⁴³ John Cardinal Farley, *Life of John Cardinal McCloskey*, p. 276. By *res*, Dr. Corcoran meant the possession of Infallibility; by *titulus*, he meant the possession of the title and official recognition of this title by the world.

⁴⁴ John Mansi, *op. cit.*, LII, 1301.

McCloskey's criticism and at the last public session he voted "placet."⁴⁵

The attitude of Archbishop McCloskey and of the inopportunist generally was summed up in the account of an eye-witness, Bishop Gibbons of North Carolina, later to become a Cardinal of the Church:

I have a distinct recollection of the attitude of the different prelates in regard to the question of Infallibility. Kenrick of St. Louis and Purcell of Cincinnati declared themselves against Infallibility in itself, but I recall most distinctly that Cardinal McCloskey was not opposed to Infallibility in itself but declared himself against the expediency of declaring it an article of faith at that time.⁴⁶

The inopportunist bishops voted "placet" at the Fourth Public Session, July 18, 1870, thereby evincing their approval of the doctrine as doctrine, and proving their earlier opposition to have been based on inexpediency.⁴⁷ Bishop O'Gorman of Nebraska best expresses the views and thoughts of the inopportunist. Called from Rome before the end of the Council, he wrote to the Secretary-General of the Trappists, June 9, 1870:

When leaving Rome, I would have given to some bishops the power of voting for me when the question of Infallibility should come up, but I understood that voting by proxy would not be recognized. I wish, however, to record my vote for the Infallibility, and I would ask you to request Reverend Bishop Gibbons to vote for me if it be allowed. I wish to repair any offense that I may unintentionally have given by signing my name to the letter of the inopportunist.⁴⁸

THE INFALLIBILISTS.

The bishops of the United States who believed in the doctrine of papal infallibility and desired its immediate definition were called "Infallibilists." Of the twenty infallibilists, Archbishop Spalding of Baltimore and Alemany of San Francisco and Bishop Gibbons occupied the rostrum of the Council chamber more often than any of the others, and by their speeches voiced the ideas of their colleagues of this majority group.⁴⁹

The attitude of Archbishop Spalding underwent several changes, not regarding the truth of the doctrine itself, which he always accepted, but over the necessity of enunciating a formal definition. In a series of lectures delivered in the cathedral in Louisville, Ky., in May 1867, he said of Papal Infallibility: "though not an article of faith, it is however the general belief among Catholics, and I

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, LII, 1339.

⁴⁶ John Farley, *op. cit.*, p. 285.

⁴⁷ John Mansi, *op. cit.*, LII, 1339-1347. The names of Bishops Henni, Bayley, Bacon, Hennessy, Hogan appear, as well as that of McCloskey.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, LI, 682.

⁴⁹ For list of infallibilists, see above, p. 35.

myself am inclined strongly to advocate it.”⁵⁰ This belief of Spalding in the dogma remained unaltered, and thus he could write to the theologians in Rome on May 27, 1869: “I firmly believe in the Infallibility of the Pope, but incline to think its formal definition unnecessary.”⁵¹ In other words, Spalding seems to take for granted that a definition will be made, and he simply indicates his preference for an implicit rather than a formal definition. The Baltimore prelate believed that all Catholics believed in the Infallibility of the pope, and hence the necessity of a formal promulgation was not apparent. This consideration led him to think that the most proper way of proclaiming the dogma of Papal Infallibility would be to condemn all errors opposed to it, and this was his opinion when he went to the Council.

Prior to leaving for Rome in August, 1870, he wrote to Cardinal Barnabo in Rome:

I have not the least doubt of this Infallibility... should the Fathers deem it necessary to make a formal definition ... statement should be made whether and how far this infallibility should be extended to pontifical letters, allocutions, encyclicals and other documents of this nature.⁵²

This letter affords evidence that Spalding had all along contemplated an explicit definition and that he was quite ready to accept such a proclamation. If he did not always advocate a formal definition, he was not in favour of abstaining from an affirmation of the faith of the Church on this point. It was not until Spalding reached Rome that he realized the possibility of an attack on the Eternal City by the army of Sardinia and found reports too, that rationalistic governments in France, Bavaria and Austria were intriguing to prevent the formal declaration.⁵³ It was then that he declared a definition to be necessary.

Therefore he drew up his ‘Postulatum’:⁵⁴

Unanimity seems to be altogether necessary on account of the rumours which have been spread ... to the effect there is discord among the Fathers. A definition unanimously pronounced by the Fathers ... would give great edification to the Church ... the proposed method of defining by implication, although it be indirect, seems to excel both in force and simplicity; for it is clearer and perhaps contains more than a formal and explicit definition.⁵⁵

⁵⁰ Leonard Bacon, *op. cit.*, p. 263. Archbishop Spalding had been invited to deliver a series of lectures in Louisville.

⁵¹ John Salding, *Life of Reverend M. Spalding*, p. 384.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 385.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 408.

⁵⁴ Archbishop Spalding’s “Postulatum” was called “A Schema for the Clear and Logical Definition of the Infallibility of the Roman Pontiff in Accordance with the Principles Already Received by the Church.” It was presented December 29, 1869.

⁵⁵ John Mansi, *op. cit.*, LI, 663.

When chosen to the Committee de Postulatis, Spalding refrained from taking further steps to bring his Postulatum to the notice of the prelates. Instead, his work was advocated by Bishop Wood of Philadelphia and supported by Bishops Conroy, Elder, Quinlan and Williams.⁵⁶ The only motive of Spalding in favouring an implicit definition was that he thought a schema of this kind would secure the unanimous vote of the prelates and thus prevent any possible discord or strife within the confines of the Council. What Protestants or liberal Catholics would think of the definition were matters that did not trouble him. In evidence of this interpretation of Spalding's postulatum and against the view that his was but the embodiment of inopportunism, we have only to witness his contradiction of Bishop Dupanloup of Orleans. This learned French Bishop, inopportunist in thought, began to quote Spalding's Postulatum in support of his own views.⁵⁷

To prove that his favouring a definition by implication did not mean he was opposed to a formal proclamation and hence inopportunist in thought, Spalding addressed a letter to Dupanloup, April 4, 1870:

Your citations are so arranged as to lead your readers to suppose that we are averse, if not to the truth, at least to the opportuneness of this definition and consequently to class us with what certain journals chose to call the party of the opposition in the Council... this mode of action attempts to place us among your allies – a character we feel compelled to repudiate.⁵⁸

In short, Spalding affirms that everything in his postulatum implies Infallibility and that anyone identifying it as the organ of an inopportunist is misconstruing the facts.

On May 30, 1870, Spalding spoke in favour of defining Papal Infallibility, arguing that the doctrine was contained in tradition – “the Church has always stood by the successors of St. Peter and their decisions.”⁵⁹ In defending his stand, the Baltimore primate showed the historical arguments of the anti-infallibilists to be erroneous because they refer to personal opinions or particular decisions of the Pope, and not to doctrines imposed on the whole Church. Shortly before, on May 10, 1870, together with Alemany, St. Palais, Quinlan, Conroy, Wood and Elder, Spalding presented the views of the infallibilists:

We hold and define that the Roman Pontiff assisted by the Holy Ghost, defines what in matters concerning faith and morals are to be held by the universal Church.⁶⁰

When any of the prelates of the Vatican Council wished to introduce any new matter for the consideration of the Council, the lawful way was to send a petition to the Committee de Postulatis, asking leave to suggest such a measure. On New

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, LI, 664.

⁵⁷ John Spalding, *op. cit.*, p. 396.

⁵⁸ John Mansi, *op. cit.*, LI, 397.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, LII, 315.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, LI, 1049.

Year's Day, 1870, Archbishop Dechamps of Mechlin circulated a petition addressed to all the fathers:

We solicit from the Council the sanction of that Catholic doctrine ... that the Roman Pontiff when teaching all the faithful with Apostolic power any question of faith or morals is supreme and therefore exempt from error.⁶¹

This petition requesting the proclamation of the dogma was signed by some three hundred and eighty clerics, among whom Blanchet, Odin, Dubois, De Goesbriand, Heiss, Lootens, Martin, Miega and O'Connell represented the Infallibilists of the United States.

On March 7, 1870, another formula for the definition of papal infallibility was distributed to the prelates and they were allowed until March 25th to write their observations. It soon became apparent that if matters took their normal course in the Council, a year or more would pass before the bishops came to the question of Infallibility. On March 10th, Bishops Dubois and Miega signed a petition that Infallibility be proposed immediately. However, the petition was apparently ignored as the session which commenced March 18th began a discussion on a revision of the Constitution de Fide Catholica.

Notwithstanding the hesitancy of the Committee to discuss Infallibility at this date, an observation signed by Alemany, Spalding, Conroy, Elder, Quinlan, St. Palais and Williams was sent in, March 20th: "Whatever the Roman Pontiff defines as the universal teacher ... in matters pertaining to faith and morals must be held or rejected by the universal Church."⁶² To further the demand for immediate proclamation, Archbishop Alemany wrote on May 14th: "the matter is open to no doubt but is more certain and more founded on Scripture than many dogmas of our religion."⁶³ The prelate from San Francisco was so insistent for the proclamation because of the many errors rapidly increasing throughout the world and the fear that the Council, once closed, could be re-assembled only with the greatest difficulty. His fears were the echoes of those voiced by Archbishop Spalding. On June 20th, Alemany proposed the insertion of a canon warning pastors to distinguish carefully in expounding the differences between infallibility, impeccability and inspiration.⁶⁴

At the preliminary meeting, June 13th, Blanchet voted "placet juxta modum."⁶⁵ He professed belief in the dogma, but thought the constitution was not explicit enough in proclaiming the Infallibility of the Holy Father when condemning error, and at the final vote, July 18th, he voted "placet." Bishop Ryan of Buffalo through sickness was absent from both these meetings, but confirmed his faith by letter, September 10, 1870: "I profess belief with all my heart in all the

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, LI, 644-6.

⁶² *Ibid.*, LI, 534.

⁶³ Raymond Clancy, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

⁶⁴ John Mansi, *op. cit.*, LII, 870.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, LII, 1297.

decrees of the Fourth General Session.”⁶⁶ Bishops Conroy and O’Connell, absent from the preliminary meeting, both voted “placet” on July 18th.⁶⁷

Although the meetings of the Council continued until October 22nd, when the army of Italy marched into Rome and the Council had to be prorogued, nevertheless the discussion on Infallibility had come to an end on July 18th. On this date the final vote was taken. Since it resulted in an overwhelming numbers of “placets,” the doctrine was now proclaimed.⁶⁸ Word of the proclamation was sent to the prelates who were absent from this final convocation, some of whom had left rather than vote “non placet.”

Among these was Archbishop Kenrick, who had left the Eternal City for his home diocese of St. Louis. Informed of the proclamation of the dogma as an article of Catholic faith the prelate was not slow to promulgate the doctrine in his diocese before announcing it on New Year’s Day, 1871. He issued a pastoral in August, 1870, informing the faithful of his province of his actions and beliefs:

Up to the very period of the assembling of the Council, I had held as a theological opinion what the Council has decreed to be an article of Christian faith and yet I was opposed to the definition. I knew that the misconceptions of its real character would be an obstacle in the way of the diffusion of Catholic truth. At least I thought so... on more closely examining the question itself on its intrinsic evidence, I was not convinced of the conclusiveness of the arguments by which it was sustained or of its compatibility with certain well-ascertained facts of ecclesiastical history which rose up strongly before my mind. These were the motives of my opposition. The motive of my submission is simply and singly the authority of the Catholic Church.⁶⁹

The official publication of the doctrine came in a sermon in St. John’s Church in St. Louis, New Year’s Day, 1871

During the discussions of the subject in the Council, questions arose which I thought at the time were unanswered. Now that the Council has decided differently I have only to say with St. Peter: ‘Lord to whom shall we go? Thou has the words of Eternal Life.’⁷⁰

So the tidings of the proclamation of the dogma reached the land of the free and the various prelates published the decrees in their dioceses until, with the belated acceptance of Bishop Domenec, which was in the nature of a gift to usher in the twenty-fifth anniversary of Pius IX’s reign, the whole American hierarchy, Anti-Infallibilists, Inopportunist and Infallibilists were in accord.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, LIII, 1050.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, LII, 1916. Among the others voting “placet” on this occasion were: Archbishops Alemany and Spalding, Bishops Henni, Goesbriand, Elder, Dubois, Williams, Heiss, Gibbons and Lootens.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, LIII, 1916. Of the 535 prelates who voted, 533 voted placet and 2 voted non-placet. Bishop Fitzgerald of Little Rock voted non-placet.

⁶⁹ John G. O’Shea, *op. cit.*, p. 332.

⁷⁰ Bertha Ivory, *Peter Kenrick – His Golden Jubilee*, p. 35.