

## THE COMMON-SENSE ARGUMENT FOR PAPAL INFALLIBILITY

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**A** MERICAN CATHOLIC apologists of the 19th century argued publicly for the special place of the Petrine office, affirming papal primacy both of honor and jurisdiction. The successor of Peter served as the final arbiter in controversies over the practical applications of the divine law. Many also highlighted his role as vicar of Christ, the visible manifestation of the Church's spiritual source of authority. After the declaration of infallibility at Vatican I, these same apologists publicly defended as theologically reasonable the infallibility of Peter's successor, Christ's earthly vicar. These positions are well known.

What has not been so clearly recognized is the way in which the presuppositions of the 19th-century American intellectual scene shaped the American Catholic defense of papal infallibility. The common intellectual assumptions had their source in Scottish "common sense" realism, the nation's vernacular philosophy that shaped a variety of public discourses including those of religious apologists. Indeed, at the conservative end of the broad spectrum of American religious thought, common-sense affirmations of an infallible religious authority predominated. The very influential Princeton theologians, even as they decried an infallible pope, still insisted upon the existence of an infallible religious authority, i.e. Scripture.<sup>1</sup> Their arguments were rooted in the common sense that such authority was the necessary condition for faith. The point of this article is to show that the distinctive discourse of American Catholic apologetics grew out of the same root.

These matters are not merely of historical interest. Over the last two decades, common-sense approaches to religious epistemology have taken center stage in Anglo-American philosophy of religion. It is instructive to note how Catholic apologists responded to common sense in the 19th century, for analogous moves are being made today by Catholic philosophers in responding to contemporary "reformed" epistemology. This contemporary debate suggests that there may be unacknowledged religious "constants" affecting these discussions. While it is beyond the scope of this article to argue extensively for this claim, the parallels are striking.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> On the Princeton school, see Mark A. Noll, ed., *The Princeton Theology, 1812-1921: Scripture, Science, and Theological Method from Archibald Alexander to Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983).

<sup>2</sup> On contemporary "reformed" epistemology, see, e.g., William P. Alston, *Perceiving God: The Epistemology of Religious Experience* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1991), Alvin

I begin from the broad intellectual context that led to a widespread assumption among orthodox Christians that an infallible religious authority must exist in the world, and then I move into the particular American Catholic ecclesiological claims that allowed for the "logical" conclusion of papal infallibility. The Catholic apologists featured are Francis P. Kenrick (1796–1863), bishop of Philadelphia and archbishop of Baltimore; John Hughes (1797–1864), New York City's prelate; Martin J. Spalding (1810–1872), bishop of Louisville and archbishop of Baltimore; Orestes Brownson (1803–1876), convert and journalist; and Isaac Hecker (1819–1888), convert and founder of the Paulist Fathers. These apologists' Protestant counterparts are the Princeton theologians, especially Archibald Alexander (1772–1851) and Charles Hodge (1797–1878).

My first section describes the epistemology that both the Catholics and the Princeton theologians used to affirm an infallible authority. The second describes the Catholics' distinctive insistence that this infallible authority must come through a society, i.e. the Church, rather than a book, i.e. the Bible. My third section describes the apologists' focus upon papal primacy as the organizational principle within this infallible Church. The fourth section focuses upon the close connection in the preconciliar literature between the visible head and its invisible one, Christ. The fifth and sixth sections demonstrate how the apologists made Vatican I's definition of papal infallibility a logical extension of their preconciliar concepts of the papacy's function within the Church, thus making a common-sense argument for papal infallibility.

#### INFALLIBILITY IN AMERICAN RELIGIOUS THOUGHT

Logical arguments for an infallible religious authority fit well within the theological parameters of religious conservatives in mid-19th-century America. Among the premier defenders of Protestant orthodoxy were the Princeton theologians. They, as well as the Catholic apologists, defined faith as a believer's certitude in the knowledge of God's revealed truths. Each group identified an unerring teacher who proclaimed the divine revelations in human language. The Protestants depended upon an inerrant Bible, while the Catholics looked to an infallible Church.

The assertions about inerrancy and infallibility followed from their

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Plantinga, *Warrant: The Current Debate* (New York: Oxford University, 1993) and *Warrant and Proper Function* (New York: Oxford University, 1993); both Alston and Plantinga acknowledge Thomas Reid's influence. For Catholic responses, see Linda Zagzebski, ed., *Rational Faith: Catholic Responses to Reformed Epistemology* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1993), Terrence W. Tilley, *The Wisdom of Religious Commitment* (Washington: Georgetown University, 1995), and the trenchant article of James F. Ross, "Rational Reliance," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 62 (1994) 769–98. Ross argues for the "reasonable reliance" of "religious believing" within a broader epistemological argument depicting most of humans' "general knowledge" as "acquired by reliance upon 'what everyone thinks or knows'" (ibid. 791–92).

common presuppositions about the nature of knowledge and truth.<sup>3</sup> Scottish common-sense realism had provided the basic tenets for the epistemology which permeated American intellectual life.<sup>4</sup> The philosophy had originated as a reaction against Hume's skepticism and Berkeley's idealism. Its proponents, such as Thomas Reid and James Beattie, argued that "knowledge was based on self-evident truths." These "first principles" were accessible "to all mankind, and therefore [were] properly called Common Sense."<sup>5</sup> Humanity's common sense, like the principles it grasped, transcended national boundaries and historical periods. Truth, within this epistemological framework, was a "static entity," presented to reason through propositional formulations.<sup>6</sup>

Common-sense philosophy molded an elite academic discipline into the populist form that appealed to Americans. As Catholic apologist Orestes Brownson explained, "truths are not the peculiar possessions of the philosopher. They are the truths of the universal reason and are the property alike of all men."<sup>7</sup>

The democratizing of the intellectual life, while it affirmed the people's intuitive power, also fostered Americans' suspicion of philosophical complexity. Archibald Alexander, Princeton's first major theologian, suggested to his audience the superfluity of philosophical speculation because truth is so accessible. "If he [a rational being] is as certain as he can be already of the truth of a proposition, why should he wish for further light?"<sup>8</sup> The skeptic's doubts also appear completely absurd within this perspective. As Brownson wrote, "everyone who knows knows that he knows." The difficulties arise in "judgment of matters . . . of which we have only an imperfect knowledge." Knowledge, according to Brownson, is "assent" through an intuitive or discursive act of the intellect. Intuitive knowledge, in which "the immediate presence of the object" demands assent to its existence, provides the epistemological basis for the assertion of self-evident truths.<sup>9</sup>

As Princeton's Archibald Alexander explained to his students, human beings "from the constitution of our nature . . . are under the necessity of believing, as soon as they are presented to the mind . . . self-evident truths." These truths range from philosophical principles

<sup>3</sup> The terms "inerrancy" and "infallibility" are used interchangeably in the mid-19th-century American literature considered in this article.

<sup>4</sup> Noll, *The Princeton Theology* 30.

<sup>5</sup> Shirley R. Letwin, "Certainty Since the Seventeenth Century," in *Dictionary of the History of Ideas* (New York: Scribner's, 1973) s.v.

<sup>6</sup> Noll, *The Princeton Theology* 31, 117, 135.

<sup>7</sup> Orestes Brownson, "Philosophy and Common Sense," *Boston Quarterly Review* (January 1838), in *The Works of Orestes A. Brownson*, 20 vols., ed. Henry F. Brownson (Detroit: T. Nourse, 1882-1907) 1.14.

<sup>8</sup> Noll, *The Princeton Theology* 65.

<sup>9</sup> Brownson, "Authority in Matters of Faith," *Catholic World* (November 1871), in *Works* 8.576-77; see "The Church Against No-Church," *Brownson's Quarterly Review* (April 1845), in *Works* 5.376-77. See also Isaac Hecker, *The Church and the Age* (New York: Catholic World, 1887) 80 and 92; Noll, *The Princeton Theology* 677.

like cause and effect to plain facts that are “reported to us by a sufficient number of competent witnesses.”<sup>10</sup> Among the “facts” included as ones we are under the necessity of believing, if we follow the common-sense definition, are those found in the Bible. The competence of the witnesses is self-evident, for the text is the undisputed testimony of God.

The dynamics of faith parallel those of reason. Faith is, for them, a certain knowledge of divine things. It always remains consonant with reason, but extends certitude beyond the limits of nature into the supernatural realm. For Archbishop Martin John Spalding faith is “a full and unwavering conviction of those things which are not known by the senses, but by the positive and unerring revelation of God.” He identifies “two distinct but connected elements” in Christian faith. One is “the firm persuasion of the mind as to the fact that God has spoken.” The other, a divine element, is “a ray of heavenly light flashed into the soul” which removes all doubts and allows unhesitant belief “on the authority of God.” In light of this description, Spalding’s logical conclusion is that “faith essentially, and in its very nature, excludes all doubt.”<sup>11</sup>

Charles Hodge, a Princeton theologian, also emphasized the certitude intrinsic to faith. The similarity between his and Spalding’s explanations is striking. According to the *Princetonian*, “it is the persuasion that [Scriptures] are the product of the infallible intellect of God.” Scriptures provide an external element. The internal element of faith consists “in a supernatural illumination imparting spiritual discernment . . . this anointing teacheth them what is truth.”<sup>12</sup> Hodge’s “supernatural illumination” parallels “the heavenly light” informing Spalding’s Catholic soul.

A sincere disposition is the key to an individual’s recognizing what is a self-evident religious truth. Hodge, in explaining rejection of Scripture, blames the unbelievers’ “moral state” for their doubt, rather than a “deficiency in the evidence of truth.” He recognizes a “positive internal evidence of a Divine origin which gives power and authority to the claims of the Bible.”<sup>13</sup> Truth, for all these persons, is bound to facts which lend themselves to presentation in indisputable propositions. According to Hughes’ “Letter to David Hale,” “the doctrines of the Constitution, in civil matters, are facts, and not opinions.” This docu-

<sup>10</sup> Noll, *The Princeton Theology* 68.

<sup>11</sup> Martin J. Spalding, *The Evidences of Catholicity: A Series of Lectures Delivered in the Cathedral of Louisville*, 6th rev. ed. (Baltimore: John Murphy, 1844) 83–84. See Brownson, “Professor Park against Catholicity,” *Brownson’s Quarterly Review* (October 1845), in *Works* 6.366; Hecker, *Questions of the Soul* (New York: D. Appleton, 1855) 143, and *Aspirations of Nature* (New York: James B. Kirker, 1857) 18; and Kenrick, *A Vindication of the Catholic Church, in a Series of Letters Addressed to the Rt. Rev. John Henry Hopkins, Protestant Episcopal Bishop of Vermont* (Baltimore: John Murphy, 1855) 27.

<sup>12</sup> Noll, *The Princeton Theology* 137.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.* 133; also 129.

ment, within the political sphere, parallels the dogmas of revelation within the religious one. "What he [God] says is a fact, a truth to be believed, not an opinion to be tried at the bar of man's feeble reason."<sup>14</sup> For the Princetonians, the Bible contains "the facts" of religion, and facts are among the "self-evident truths."<sup>15</sup>

The conviction that religious truth, like any other truth, is self-evident makes an infallible authority a reasonable claim. All the statements that I have cited demonstrate the epistemological similarities between the Catholics and the conservative Protestants and bring into focus the one irreconcilable difference about the locus of this infallibility. The similarities lie in the certitude of faith, truth as assent to propositions elicited by facts, the centrality of testimony, and the moral failure of those who do not assent to the self-evident facts and truths. However, Catholics submit themselves to an infallible society whereas Protestants subject themselves to an infallible text. Common sense for the Protestant confirms the self-evident truths of the sacred text. Hecker argued that for the Catholic: "Common sense is the decision of unperverted reason and its voice has been given counting nineteen centuries in favor of the Catholic Church."<sup>16</sup>

#### AN INFALLIBLE CHURCH

The mid-19th-century American Catholic apologists maintained that an infallible religious authority, like all authority operating in the human sphere, had to manifest itself through a visible social order to be effective in the world. Their ecclesiology could be described as a "sociology of the Incarnate Word." They explained why Christ intentionally chose a visible social order rather than a text to mediate His infallible authority to the world. Comparing the Catholics' assertions about the nature of infallible authority to those of the Princeton theologians accentuates the Catholics' presumptions about the necessity of a social context for the human reception of divine revelation. For Charles Hodge, the individual's belief in Christ precedes the individual's participation in any community. In his criticism of Romanism, Hodge indi-

<sup>14</sup> John Hughes, "Right Rev'd Bishop Hughes to David Hale, Esq." (New York, November 21, 1842), in *Complete Works of the Most Rev. John Hughes, D.D., Archbishop of New York, Comprising His Sermons, Letters, Speeches, Etc.*, ed. Lawrence Kehoe (New York: American News, 1864) 1.2.51. See also Hughes, "An Examination of the Reasons Alleged by a Protestant for Protesting against the Doctrine of the Catholic Church; or, an Answer to Objections under the Title of 'Protestant and Popery,' made by an Anonymous Writer" (Philadelphia, 1827), in *Works*, 2.665. See further Spalding, *D'Aubigne's "History of the Great Reformation in Germany and Switzerland" Reviewed* (Baltimore, John Murphy, 1844) 164-65; and *Evidences* 45.

<sup>15</sup> Noll, *The Princeton Theology* 68, 70-71.

<sup>16</sup> Isaac Hecker, *The Catholic Church in the United States: Its Rise, Relations, with the Republic, Growth and Future Prospects*, 2nd ed. (New York: Catholic Publication Society, 1879) 17.

cates this fundamental difference: "We are in the church because we are in Christ, and not in Christ because we are in the church."<sup>17</sup>

The defenders of Protestant orthodoxy focused upon a psychology of personal conversion to complement the infallible authority of the sacred text. Scripture confronts each person. "It is the experience of true Christians in all ages and nations that their faith is founded on the spiritual apprehension and experience of the power of the truth." They believe Scriptures to be the Word of God because of "the witness in themselves and . . . not because others believe."<sup>18</sup>

Catholics as much as their Protestant counterparts believed human language to be the primary tool of the infallible authority. The Romanists, however, identified the ultimate this-worldly source of the sacred language to be the believing community rather than the sacred text. Hughes explains: "Men are brought into the light of faith, the community of discipleship, and the unity of the Church," where "they learn the doctrines . . . they ascertain the true Scriptures, and . . . their true meanings," where "they are taught in the language of our Savior himself."<sup>19</sup> The linguistic source bears the amorphous quality of a communal oral tradition dependent upon elders who pass on ancient teachings.

Princeton's Charles Hodge decried this position as the Romanist "error of mediating church or priesthood." His predecessor, Archibald Alexander, had reminded contemporaries that Scripture remains precious because "there we can find *Jesus Christ*." Its revelation, "Christ and him crucified," is the centre of the Christian's religion."<sup>20</sup> The linguistic source possesses the definitive textual location of the Protestant sacred canon.

The standard Catholic perception of Christ's continuation through his Church did, in effect, relativize Scripture's value. Hecker's "earnest seeker" in *Questions of the Soul* vividly expresses this attitude. He refuses to "admit that a book written in a dead language by his disciples, containing . . . a small part of what [the Savior] said and did, is the fountain-source of God's eternal and everlasting Truth." He describes the Protestant demand "to read a book" written 18 centuries ago as "downright mockery" of the one who "feels the pressing need of the love of the infinite God in his heart." Christ the Savior, who is supposedly "God with us," must be really present "in this age of ours also." The Lord himself, Hecker claims, "condemns Protestantism, because it fails to represent him, in its authority, as the unerring and divine

<sup>17</sup> Noll, *The Princeton Theology* 158.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.* 134.

<sup>19</sup> Hughes, "The Importance of being in Communion with Christ's one, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church, by Rt. Rev. John Hughes, D.D.," *Freeman's Journal*, 1858, in *Works* 1.5.84. Brownson has several discussions on language with a direct link to infallibility; see, e.g., "Catholic Polemics," *Brownson Quarterly Review* (July 1861), in *Works* 20.120.

<sup>20</sup> Noll, *The Princeton Theology* 90.

Teacher and Saviour of mankind."<sup>21</sup> The Catholic Church makes the limitless presence known in its organically developing tradition.

The Catholics constantly impress upon their readers that Christ had revealed himself as the Word made flesh. In Spalding's words, "man had long panted for freedom: . . . his Liberator was to be the Truth taught by the infallible lips of Truth Himself incarnate." The prelate then identifies "the religion of Christ" as the Savior's choice for continuing the work of "this glorious regeneration." His "religion" is to be a visible social order that affirms the reality of the Incarnation. It is "the impregnable fortress of His truth on earth, . . . the school of heavenly liberty. Nay, more: it was a kind of second incarnation of the Word."<sup>22</sup>

This Church exists as a living entity for the apologists. It is, in Brownson's words, "an organic body, existing in time and space."<sup>23</sup> Isaac Hecker claimed that there exists "no real vital communion with Christ except in connection with his body, the Church."<sup>24</sup> American apologists, especially the prelates, certainly used the standard counter-reformation description of the Church as a well-structured society, but none of them reduced it to this formal definition. John Hughes' 1835 series, "The Infallibility of the Church," answered the question "What is the Church of Christ?" with the standard reply, "the visible society of all the believers united by the profession of the same faith, the participation of the same sacraments, and the submission to the same legitimate pastors."<sup>25</sup> In a series of letters in 1857–58, Hughes demonstrated his appreciation of another dimension of this society. The Church is the Savior's "grand idea . . . to unite all mankind in one brotherhood of a common faith, hope, and a common charity."<sup>26</sup> The fleshly life of God's Word appears in the "social life" of the complex religious body of the Church.

All the mid-19th-century American Catholic apologists believed their Church to be, in Isaac Hecker's words, "the logical sequence of the Incarnation, and not an accident or after-thought," with the power to transmit "Divine Life in its purity from one generation to another, until the end of time."<sup>27</sup> Identification of the Church, rather than Scripture, as Christ in the world justifies their conclusions that the society must possess infallible authority. In Brownson's words, Christ, "the

<sup>21</sup> Hecker, *Questions* 110–11 and 130–31; and see Hughes, "The Infallibility of the Church. Remarks on the Rev. Mr. Mason's Convention Sermon and the Review of it in the 'Protestant Episcopalian,'" *Philadelphia Catholic Herald* (1834), in *Works* 2.438.

<sup>22</sup> Spalding, *Evidences* 38.

<sup>23</sup> Brownson, "Nature and Office of the Church," *Brownson Quarterly Review* (April 1844), in *Works* 4.487; see also Brownson, "Christianity and the Church Identical," *Brownson Quarterly Review* (July 1857), in *Works* 11.68.

<sup>24</sup> Hecker, *Aspirations* 295. See also Hecker, *The Church and the Age* 248; and Brownson, "Heresy and the Incarnation," *Ave Maria* (1867–68), in *Works* 8.206.

<sup>25</sup> Hughes, *Works* 2.438; see Spalding, *Evidences* 384.

<sup>26</sup> Hughes, "The Importance of Being in Communion," in *Works* 1.5.112.

<sup>27</sup> Hecker, *Aspirations* 294; see *Questions* 172, and Spalding, *Evidences* (1847) 50–51.

Word made flesh . . . incarnates himself in the race" as the Church. "She has in her the Word, the idea, the truth (*Ego sum veritas*), and must be infallible. Her Infallibility is her permanence . . . as the incarnation of the idea or Word on the earth.—*Ego sum vobiscum*."<sup>28</sup> Hughes provides his audience with the logic of history that complements Brownson's ontological claims: "If Christ appointed a Church to preserve and communicate His revelation, that Church must be infallible." The prelate then defends his fellow Catholics who "do but honor Christ in recognizing the infallibility of His Church."<sup>29</sup>

The apologists drew from Scripture itself to support their defense of the Church's infallibility. Matthew 16:18 proved with the Savior's own words that Christ had founded a Church, not written a text, against which "the gates of hell shall not prevail." In the preconiliar editions of *Evidence of Catholicity*, Spalding quotes the entire verse in the introduction and conclusion of Lecture 9 on the "Infallibility of the Church—the Seventh Evidence of Catholicity." To impress upon his readers Christ's promise that "the gates of hell shall not prevail," that particular phrase appears in the conclusion entirely in capital letters, with "shall not prevail" in even larger capitals. Spalding's final sentence is a prayer that all "may bow down to the Infallible authority, conferred on her by the solemn promises of Christ, hear her voice . . . and become her dutiful children."<sup>30</sup>

The social dimension of the Catholics' infallible authority manifests itself not only in its form but also in its effects. The infallible Church promotes "the common good" because it embodies the divine social order of the Incarnate Word. According to Hughes, the Lord's ultimate purpose in investing his Church "with this essential of His own nature" was "not for the exaltation of her ministry, but for the good of her members, for the security of all."<sup>31</sup>

The emphasis on the common good contrasts sharply with the Protestant focus upon the individual's freedom. Charles Hodge asserted "that God is now accessible to all men by Jesus Christ," and Jesus Christ is available through the Scriptures. He extols "this liberty of access" which permits a "priesthood of all believers." Hodge himself notes the enmity between his perspective and the Catholic one. "The assertion

<sup>28</sup> Brownson, "The Reunion of All Christians," *Brownson Quarterly Review* (January 1862), in *Works* 12.484.

<sup>29</sup> Hughes, "The Importance of Being in Communion with Christ's Church," in *Works* 1.5.93.

<sup>30</sup> Spalding, *Evidences* (1847 and 1876) 261, 290–91; similarly, *Pastoral Letter . . . The Syllabus Condemned* (Baltimore: Kelly and Piet, 1865) 6. See Brownson, "Modern Idolatry," *Brownson Quarterly Review* (July 1845), in *Works* 10.14–15. See further Hughes, "A Review of the Charge Delivered May 22, 1833, by the Right Rev. Bishop Onderdonk, on the Rule of Faith," in *Works* 2.681; "The Importance of Being in Communion," in *Works* 1.5.68; and "Sermon in St. Patrick's Cathedral, New York, on the Feast of SS. Peter and Paul, Sunday, June 29, 1851," in *Works* 2.170.

<sup>31</sup> Hughes, "The Importance of Being in Communion with Christ's Church," in *Works* 1.5.93.



of the sole infallible authority of the written word of God is their [the Reformers'] protest against the doctrine of an inspired church to whose teaching we are obliged to bow."<sup>32</sup> Against these Protestant accusations, Hughes had declared: "It is the faith of the people, the faith of the clergy, the faith of the Church, that 'lords it' over the pastors as well as the flocks."<sup>33</sup> It is not, then, a hierarchy inspired by God to whom the flock must bow. Rather, all are dominated by the faith of the Church. And faith is the certitude one has of the truth of the proposition that Christ is the Incarnate Word proclaimed and manifested in the perfect society which he instituted.

The social rather than private character of Catholic infallibility grounds the apologists' claims of the authority's regenerative impact upon the world's order. Hecker's earnest seeker had demanded just such "a visible and divine authority to unite and direct the aspirations and energies of individuals and nations to great enterprises for the common welfare of men upon earth."<sup>34</sup> The Protestants' invisible unity is inadequate. Christ ensured the continuance of his infallible Church as a social order effective in the world. He established a very specific form of government whose "organization in all its details depends wholly and solely on the will of Christ."<sup>35</sup>

The issue between the Princetonians and the Catholics is not infallibility, not the nature of faith, not common-sense realist epistemology, not mediated vs. immediate perception, and not the moral component of assent to truth. The issue is the primary locus of authority in the individual's perception of the truth in the Scriptures or the unfractured community's constancy in making Christ really present. In presuming the latter, the Catholics were not attacking common-sense realism; indeed, they were relying on it. They simply included a radically different religious fact as part of their common sense. Taking this fact for granted, we can see how the common-sense argument for papal infallibility developed.

#### THE PRIMACY OF PETER

From the American Catholics' perspective, the pope exhibited to the world the visible existence of that unified and universal society which embodies the infallible authority of its invisible head, Christ. The Savior himself, in his divine wisdom, had selected one apostle to serve as the foundation and visible center of his Church's unity and universality. The primacy of Peter and his successors is the organizing principle for the society chosen by Christ to represent his infallible authority in the world. Papal primacy, from the American perspective, gave their

<sup>32</sup> Noll, *The Princeton Theology* 159.

<sup>33</sup> Hughes, "The Infallibility of the Church," in *Works* 2.449.

<sup>34</sup> Hecker, *Aspirations* 43.

<sup>35</sup> Spalding, *Evidences* (1847) 52.

church a distinct advantage in demonstrating its validity. Spalding simply asks his readers: "Did Christ wish his Church to be ONE?" If the answer is "yes," then "He must have established but one center of Unity, but one Primate and visible head for the whole Church."<sup>36</sup>

The one Scripture text that American Catholic apologists frequently used to substantiate their claims about Christ's intention was Matthew 16:18–19: "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. I will give thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." American Catholics relied upon a very long tradition in their use of that passage. The text had been used to substantiate the juridical primacy of Peter and his successors since the late fourth century. It was cited to substantiate the Roman Church's primacy of teaching as early as 519 in the Formula of Union, an agreement between Pope Hormisdas and Emperor Justinian. The sixth-century formula was, in fact, invoked at the First Vatican Council in support of papal primacy.<sup>37</sup>

American Catholics were also well aware of the Protestant challenge to their interpretation of the text, particularly the meaning of the term "rock." Brownson used the text to prove the "extols" of the Church. He found it inconsequential "whether you call the rock on which he said he would build his church, and against which the gates of hell shall not prevail, Peter, the truth that Peter confessed, or Christ himself, her extols is equally asserted."<sup>38</sup> The single passage was, of course, the Catholic proof-text for Christ's expressed intention not only to establish the primacy of Peter but also to protect the Church from error. The infallibilists at Vatican I insisted that the internal logic of the passage led to only one conclusion. The rock on which an infallible Church rests must, quite obviously, be infallible. Brownson's own conviction that the rock refers to Peter and indicates the office's infallible authority is evident throughout his works, but the essay he wrote only a year before the council indicates the wide range of acceptable interpretations of the text prior to the council.<sup>39</sup>

The apologists offered other arguments for the necessity of papal primacy that stood on grounds independent of the controversial pas-

<sup>36</sup> Ibid. 337.

<sup>37</sup> Walter Ullmann, *A Short History of the Papacy in the Middle Ages* (London: Methuen, 1972) 41.

<sup>38</sup> Brownson, "The Church and Her Attributes," *Catholic World* (March 1868), in *Works* 8.566.

<sup>39</sup> Brownson, "The Two Brothers," *Brownson Quarterly Review* (1847–48), in *Works* 6.318–19; also "Thornwell's Answer to Dr. Lynch," *Brownson Quarterly Review* (1848), in *Works* 6.487. See Hughes, "The Importance of Being in Communion," in *Works* 1.5.113; and the first few chapters in each edition of Kenrick, *The Primacy of the Apostolic See Vindicated*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: M. Fithian, 1845), 3rd rev. ed. (New York: Edward Dunigan and Brother, 1848); 4th rev. ed. (Baltimore: John Murphy, 1855).

sage. Kenrick, in explaining Christ's intention to create "a state of Christian society," appealed to self-evident truths about social order as well as the facts of revelation in his defense of papal primacy. He observed that Christ's personal appearance "on earth as Supreme teacher, with all power and authority" indicates that "one should hold his place." That "social form," according to Kenrick, "is best adapted to the great ends of revelation, reason itself must convince us." The existence of "a chief depositary and supreme guardian" provides "the chair of instruction" from which "the voice of truth may issue to the farthest extremities of the earth."<sup>40</sup>

Hecker appealed to scientific observations. He recognized the Church's centralized government to be a perfection of unity analogous to the unity observed in an organism of the natural order. In *Aspirations of Nature*, he referred to the scientific discovery of "Professor H." to demonstrate the similitude. The professor's microscopic examination of a "family of animaculæ" revealed "a perfect system of an organized government" with a "chief" and "subordinate officers all acting in unison and perfect order." The professor perceived "a stamp and similitude of nature's Author" and wondered "whether, if God had made known his will to his rational creatures, he would not display the same laws, the same government, but only in a higher and more perfect form." The scientist, Hecker notes, eventually converted to Catholicism.<sup>41</sup>

The Church government's more perfect form was marked not only by unity but also universality, and papal primacy is again the determinative factor. In a sermon preached on the occasion of three episcopal consecrations, Hughes asked his audience, "Was not Christ's mission one of universality?" His answer relied upon the same logic that Spalding used to answer his question on unity. "Take away the [papal] foundation thus provided [by Christ], and universality, community, cannot by any possibility exist." Both unity and universality require "one root and one alone." He, like Hecker, drew from science to increase the credibility of his claim: "Even the system of our world was a puzzle, until one centre was discovered."<sup>42</sup>

Brownson demonstrated the ontological reasons behind his papally dominated ecclesiology. "The papacy is the key-stone of the arch . . . a centre of unity and authority, essential to the very idea of catholicity, for catholicity without unity is a metaphysical impossibility." For Brownson catholicity means more than internationality. The Church "is catholic, because she is the organ of the whole spiritual order, truth, or reality, and that order in its own intrinsic nature is one

<sup>40</sup> Kenrick, *Primacy* (1855 ed.) 2; the opening remarks about unity are less forcefully stated in the 1845 ed. See Hughes, "The Importance of Being in Communion," in *Works* 1.5.67.

<sup>41</sup> Hecker, *Aspirations* 203.

<sup>42</sup> Hughes, "Sermon in St. Patrick's Cathedral on the Occasion of the Consecration of the Bishops of Brooklyn, Newark and Burlington, October 30th, 1853," in *Works* 2.215.

and universal.”<sup>43</sup> The papacy, as the “visible head” of this realm, has authority over every spiritual matter whether it involves a nation or an individual, whether it judges a theological or scientific principle. Submitting to the papacy’s universal jurisdiction produces, according to Brownson, freedom: “we throw off the despotism of opinion, of passion, of caprice”; we are “admitted as citizens into the commonwealth of Christ, and made partakers of the liberty of the children of God.”<sup>44</sup>

Hughes reminds his audience why the primacy of Peter establishes the superiority of the Catholic social order especially in contrast to the Protestant one. The Lord commissioned a “visible head to preserve the faithful from being tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine, as . . . Protestants have been, ever since their first separation from the centre of unity.”<sup>45</sup> “Primate” describes the papacy’s relationship to Christ’s infallible Church. Another commonly used title, “vicar,” indicates his relationship to the infallible Christ himself.

#### THE VICAR OF CHRIST

The American Catholics highlight the unique relationship between Christ and the pontiff to demonstrate that authentic spiritual authority resides only in the Roman Catholic Church. The parallel images of Christ, the Church’s “supreme invisible head,” and the pope, “his vicar and the visible head,” suggest a mystical connection between Christ’s heavenly activity and the pope’s concrete actions.

The language parallels that used to define a sacrament as a visible sign of an invisible reality. True to Catholic theology, the sign is also efficacious. After using the head imagery to note the important distinction between the Savior’s power and his vicar’s, Hughes explains how “pre-eminence of authority over the Church was communicated by our Saviour to St. Peter.” The divine empowerment, to which the Scriptures testify, made Peter “the supreme visible head,” while Christ became “the supreme invisible” head.” Peter’s successors “receive those same powers” given by Christ to our first pontiff.<sup>46</sup>

The pope, by the very fact that he is an individual acting in history, crystalizes Christ’s personal commitment to the Catholic Church. Kenrick expresses the Church’s gratitude to Christ for “leaving her a visible head to govern in His Name.” By establishing the papal office, “He left her the pledge of His own personal presence, in virtue of which she

<sup>43</sup> Brownson, “Independence of the Church,” *Catholic World* (October 1866), in *Works* 13.91.

<sup>44</sup> Brownson, “Cape’s Four Years’ Experience,” *Brownson Quarterly Review* (July 1850), in *Works* 20.9.

<sup>45</sup> Hughes, “An Examination of the Reasons . . . or an Answer to . . . Protestantism and Popery,” in *Works* 2.636. See also *Works* 2.439–40; and “Sermon Preached in the Cathedral, Baltimore, at the Opening of the First National Council, May, 11th, 1852,” in *Works* 2.193, 195.

<sup>46</sup> Hughes, “An Examination of the Reasons,” in *Works* 2.636.

repels every attack, and remains secure of victory over all foes."<sup>47</sup> The pope, as Christ's duly chosen representative, signifies the whole Church's christological character. Brownson spoke boldly out of this perspective. The Church's distinctive unity depends "on the head, the pope, who is so to speak, the personality of the Church." He asserted, "The whole organization of the church was from the first based upon Peter as the immediate representative of Christ and prince of the apostles."<sup>48</sup> Kenrick, despite his reluctance to inflame the nativists, called the Church "a monarchy" because "she has one supreme ruler, representing Christ, her Divine Founder." Of course, this particular monarch wields "the sceptre of justice" with the "common good" as his "great object."<sup>49</sup>

The pontiff appears to be the point at which the Church's human and divine elements converge to manifest to the world its authority to teach supernatural truths. "The Church is about to pronounce, and Peter, in the name of the Church, utters the decision also in a human manner, but, at the same time, with a direct leaning on the Divine and invisible element which constitutes the source of her inerrancy."<sup>50</sup> With this single sentence, Hughes captures the aura of infallibility which enshrouds the papal activity. His words were intended, however, to impress the reader with the Church's infallibility, not the pope's.

Kenrick, in justifying submission to papal authority, claims to be in complete agreement with the Church Father Jerome, who chose to "follow no primate but Christ." He wrote: "Neither do we. It is his divine authority which we reverence and adore when we yield obedience to him whom He had entrusted with the care of His flock."<sup>51</sup> Kenrick used similar reasoning to defend the rituals surrounding papal election. They included kissing the new pontiff's feet and hands, elevating him on the altar, and crowning him with the tiara. Kenrick admits "that the magnificence of this ceremonial" may go against "modern feeling and sentiment; but it is enough that its object is to impress our minds with veneration for the viceregent of Christ." He also notes that the tradition "derives authority from the splendid ritual which God himself prescribed to the ancient priesthood."<sup>52</sup>

<sup>47</sup> Kenrick, *Primacy* (1855 ed.) 18.

<sup>48</sup> Brownson, "Channing on Social Reform," *Brownson Quarterly Review* (1849), in *Works* 10.178; see "Heresy and the Incarnation," *Ave Maria* (1867-68), in *Works* 8.199. The "whole organization" quote appears in "Guettee's Papacy Schismatic," *Catholic World* (1867), in *Works* 8.515; see "The English Schism," *Brownson Quarterly Review* (1858), in *Works* 12.174; "The Papal Power," *Brownson Quarterly Review* (July 1860), in *Works* 12.354; and "The Temporal Power of the Popes," *Brownson Quarterly Review* (April 1854), in *Works* 11.124.

<sup>49</sup> Kenrick, *A Vindication of the Catholic Church* 331-32; compare Brownson, "The Spiritual Not for the Temporal," *Brownson Quarterly Review* (April 1853), in *Works* 11.61-62.

<sup>50</sup> Hughes, "The Importance of Being in Communion," in *Works* 1.5.118.

<sup>51</sup> Kenrick, *Primacy* (1838 ed.) 268.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.* 340.

All the apologists impressed upon their readers the devotion due to the one specially commissioned to represent the Savior. Spalding, in his biography of Bishop Flaget, pays tribute to the prelate's absolute fidelity to the Holy See: "The Pontiff was, in his eyes, truly the Vicar of Christ, having full charge under Him,—the great invisible Head of the Church." Flaget, writes Spalding, "sought not to place artificial bounds to a power which Christ Himself had not limited, but had made ample enough to meet every want and emergency of the Church."<sup>53</sup>

The apologists' claims always stopped short of granting the pontiffs personal inerrancy. The pontiffs' humanity, in fact, proved the actual presence of divine guidance. Kenrick notes with amazement how all the papal decrees are free from "sanctioning any immoral principles." He attributes their ability "to steer the vessel of the Church through rocks and shoals" to "the overruling providence of God which directed their judgment" rather than their own personal "learning or wisdom."<sup>54</sup>

Maintaining the clear distinction between the human and the divine makes it easier to enshroud the papacy with the mystique of Christ's infallibility. The distinction between the transcendent office and its finite representative had been introduced by Leo I to establish that the papacy held its powers as an inheritance directly from Peter. When Bernard claimed Peter's successor to be Christ's vicar, he was indicating that the papal inheritance included the vicarious powers of Christ. The influential Church Father had described the pope as "flesh from God's flesh, spirit from God's spirit." Walter Ullmann observes that this objectivation of the office worked very well within a worldview where the divinely willed order absorbed the individual personality. A bad pope had little impact upon the prestige of the office. When the humanism of the late Middle Ages brought the individual back into focus, the subjective dimension of the office absorbed the objective authority. The undesirable personalities claiming to be Peter's successors convinced the Reformers that the papacy was no longer a viable institution.<sup>55</sup>

The tension between the subjective personality and the objective divine authority found in the vicariate of Christ is evident among the 19th-century American apologists. The divine, of course, prevails. According to Hecker, because Peter's successor is Christ's legitimate representative, "his voice is Christ's voice. His voice is not only Christ's voice to others, but also to himself. The Pope, as a man and as a Catholic, is bound, first of all, to obey the authority of Christ, of which he is the representative, central organ, and mouthpiece."<sup>56</sup> When

<sup>53</sup> Spalding, *Sketches of the Life, Times, and Character of the Rt. Rev. Benedict Joseph Flaget, First Bishop of Louisville* (Louisville, Ky.: Webb & Levering, 1852) 306.

<sup>54</sup> Kenrick, *Primacy* (1855 ed.) 225.

<sup>55</sup> Ullmann, *A Short History of the Papacy 19–27* (on Leo I), 182–83 (on Bernard), 314–18, 323, and 326–32 (on subjective/objective perspectives on the papal office).

<sup>56</sup> Hecker, *Questions* 170.

viewed as part of the common-sense logic of papal infallibility, this claim undergirds the Catholic defense of a personal manifestation of religious authority. The person of Christ teaches through the Church, his Body, in a singular voice rather than through a text whose meaning is heard in the cacophony of individual Protestant voices.

Hughes' sermon on the Immaculate Conception provides an even more dramatic example of the power of Christ's personal authority. The prelate explains to his congregation that a universal belief becomes a dogma when "an Infallible Propounder of what is true gives authority to this faith." Belief in the Immaculate Conception "received the sanction . . . of the Holy Catholic Church—of the Supreme Pastor of that Church; of him who is the Viceregent of Christ in determining the truth." He then asks the rhetorical question: "Who, then, is it that thus teaches doctrine?" He answers, "It is the Son of God."<sup>57</sup> The pontiff clearly serves as the mouthpiece of the infallible Christ as well as his infallible Church.

#### THE DEBATE OVER PAPAL INFALLIBILITY

The same apologists, who defended the primacy of Peter's successor, and who used image after image to honor the vicar of Christ, readily admitted that papal infallibility was a debated issue in Catholicism. The recently converted Brownson wrote that "the Catholic undoubtedly believes the church, as the church is infallible . . . based solely on the fact, that Christ has promised to be with [it] . . . unto the consummation of the world." Although he defends "the decision of the pope, when he represents, or decides for, the church universal, to be infallible," he admits the debate on the issue. "A man may be a Catholic, without believing that the decision of the pope, unless assented to by the body of the bishops, is to be regarded as infallible."<sup>58</sup>

Kenrick even makes the debate another example of Catholics' enviable position. "The four opinions on the extent of Pontifical prerogative, only show the liberty which we [Catholics] enjoy in all things where the defined doctrines of faith are left untouched." He appeals again to the American audience by noting "how many political controversies agitate the republic with regard to the precise extent of the power of the President, and yet the presidency itself is acknowledged by all, and its chief prerogatives are recognized with equal unanimity."<sup>59</sup> He used the political paradigm again when he considered the issue in his review of John England's works, but in this case he defended papal infallibility as a practical necessity. "In every government," he explained, "official

<sup>57</sup> Hughes, "Triumphs of the Catholic Church. Sermon on Palm Sunday, 1855," in *Works* 2.245.

<sup>58</sup> Brownson, "Literary Policy of the Church of Rome," *Brownson Quarterly Review* January 1846), in *Works* 6.540.

<sup>59</sup> Kenrick, *Primacy* (1838 ed.) 331.

infallibility is necessarily supposed in the supreme tribunal, from which no appeal lies, since otherwise litigation would be endless."<sup>60</sup> If he had a strictly theological justification for papal infallibility, he failed to assert it in the article. Francis Patrick Kenrick, who died six years before the council's convening, also had no reason to consider the practical wisdom of promulgating a conciliar document defining "official infallibility."

Several American prelates who faced the question at the council, including Martin Spalding, expressed serious reservations about the necessity of an official declaration. For the most part, their reasons centered on the definition's "inopportuneness" rather than its theological untenability. The prelates imagined the dilemma of explaining a change from freedom of choice to mandate from Rome on papal infallibility. They dreaded anti-Catholic reactions.<sup>61</sup>

The European Ultramontanes, concerned with the collapse of religious authority amidst a new and hostile political order, had little sympathy for local American problems. The opposition party, on the other hand, promoted an alternative that sounded too Gallican to gain the sympathy of moderate Roman loyalists like Spalding. Most American bishops, who saw no pressing need to define papal infallibility, also embraced the traditions about the papacy as center of unity and universal authority. The papal formulas had a special significance in the United States where the leveling effect of tolerance threatened Roman Catholic identity. Allegiance to the papacy distinguished American Catholics as participants in a universal religious order. The American perspective, though it created a slightly different point of view on the relationship between papacy and episcopacy, had no representative with the theological astuteness and political influence to propose a positive alternative to the Ultramontane and Gallican positions. Defending the honor and universal jurisdiction of the papacy meant, at least within the council debates, defending its infallible authority.<sup>62</sup>

<sup>60</sup> Kenrick, "Bishop England's Works," *Brownson Quarterly Review* (April 1850) 145. See the appendix of Spalding, *Evidences* (1878 ed.), which is the pastoral written from Rome after the declaration. He uses the same argument on p. 469.

<sup>61</sup> James Hennesey, S.J., *The First Council of the Vatican: The American Experience* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1963) 328–29.

<sup>62</sup> Hennesey notes the rapid adjustment made by the Americans to dealing with the debate on the Europeans' terms (ibid. 55–58); the difficulty in pinpointing Spalding's position in terms of the usual categories offered by the European debate (ibid. 216–17); and the lukewarm to hostile reception by the rest of the council fathers when the Americans offered their observations on the debate (ibid. 231–44). Roger Aubert has noted that "the announcement of the council made more pronounced the opposition between the two schools of thought within the Church which had been confronting one another over the past twenty years: liberal Catholics and neo-Gallicans on the one side, ultramontanes and opponents of modern liberties on the other." The Americans held a variety of interpretations among the common traditions about the papacy and debated from diverse sides. Neither of Aubert's "schools," however, fully characterizes the American apologists' perspective (Roger Aubert et al., *The Church in Secularized Society*, vol. 5 of *The Christian Centuries*, ed. Louis J. Rogier et al., trans. Janet Sondheimer [New



The apologists, while they acknowledged the various configurations for the seat of infallibility, usually downplayed their significance. They characterized the controversy as purely academic and claimed its practical effect to be inconsequential. Kenrick dismissed any serious objections to the pope's "official infallibility, *ex cathedra*" by emphasizing his role as, in John Chrysostom's words, "the mouth of the apostles." He speaks for the Church, not for his own opinion. "Practically, there is no room for difficulty, since all solemn judgments hitherto pronounced by the Pontiff have received the assent of his colleagues." Kenrick presupposed that the self-evident character of the one faith, which "is the vital principle of papal authority," disallows serious discrepancies.<sup>63</sup>

Spalding's compromise document, the *Postulatum*, expressed the same attitude to the definition's opponents. In his opening remarks, he condemned those council fathers who imagined "a rash and preposterous division between the collective episcopate and the Supreme Pontiff." As James Hennesey notes, the sweeping statements of the *Postulatum* in effect granted the pope unlimited power. Spalding wrote, for instance, "believing that by the mouth of Pius Peter has spoken, whatever for the preservation of the sacred deposit you have said, confirmed, and announced, we also say, confirm, and announce."<sup>64</sup> The vague but expansive approach to the papal authority fits well with the glorification of the papacy seen in preconciliar apologetics.

#### AN INFALLIBLE POPE DEFENDED

After the council, Spalding, Hecker, and Brownson presented the declaration on papal infallibility as a definitive affirmation of the

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York: Paulist, 1978] 60–67, at 60.) Peter R. Kenrick, the brother of Francis, stands as a notable exception among the American prelates who attended the council; he articulated a theologically cogent argument directly challenging the majority's position which he expressed in his "Concio." Although the document was never debated before the council, its observations, critical of the infallibilist position, provide a useful summary of the fundamental presuppositions that made papal infallibility a defensible, though not a necessary position within 19th-century American Catholic thought. His objections highlight why the American apologists' common-sense epistemology, that equated faith with certain knowledge of self-evident facts, provided a firm basis for defending the document; see Peter R. Kenrick, "The 'Concio' of Archbishop Kenrick," cited in Raymond J. Clancy, C.S.C., "American Prelates in the Vatican Council," *Historical Records and Studies* 28 (1937) 93–131. For a commentary on the "Concio," see Hennesey, *The First Council of the Vatican* 248–51.

<sup>63</sup> Kenrick, *Primacy* 223. See also Brownson, "Ultramontane Doubts," *Brownson Quarterly Review* (October 1851), in *Works* 10.346–47; and "Thornwell's Answer to Dr. Lynch," in *Works* 6.450.

<sup>64</sup> *Postulatum*, translated in its entirety in J. L. Spalding, *The Life of the Most Reverend M. J. Spalding* (New York: Catholic Publication Society, 1873) 388–99. For comments on the *Postulatum*, see Hennesey, *The First Council of the Vatican* 103–17; and for a careful examination of Spalding's shifts at the council, see T. W. Spalding, *Martin John Spalding: American Churchman* (Washington: Catholic University of America/Consortium, 1973) 283–325.

Church's infallible teaching authority which they had defended prior to the council. The shift from the preconconciliar to a postconciliar assertions about infallibility, therefore, was subtle. What sounded like logical extensions of the previous arguments for an infallible Church did, in fact, include one significant change in ecclesiology. The American Catholic apologists made their primary focus the infallible center around whom an infallible Church revolves rather than an infallible Church united around its visible center. Spalding's chapter on infallibility in *Catholic Evidences* graphically illustrates his ability to mold the declaration of papal infallibility to fit with his previous defense of the Church's infallibility. The prelate changed only three pages within the first half of his chapter on infallibility to accommodate the new definition.

In the preconconciliar editions, all that a Catholic was bound to uphold was "that the body of the bishops, in conjunction with the Pope, is infallible." Spalding also judged debating the seat of infallibility to be "of very little, or rather of no practical importance whatsoever." After all, no single case exists "during the last four centuries, in which any considerable number of bishops dissented from the Pope in doctrinal matters."<sup>65</sup> The postconciliar edition explains that "the general belief among Catholics" in the pontiff's official infallibility "has been wisely and solemnly defined" at the Vatican Council. He had, in fact, acknowledged the "general belief" in the earlier editions. His claim that the pope and the bishops have, in the past, never disagreed on doctrinal matters reappears in the final edition with an important comment on the future relationship. "According to the essential constitution of the Church, it never can happen, that the great body of the bishops can dissent from the *ex cathedra* definitions of the Pontiff." He then continues, with the exact text of the earlier editions, overturning the Protestants' examples from the Church's history of instances when the bishops and "the *undoubted* pope have taught opposing doctrines."<sup>66</sup>

Spalding's pastoral letter, written while still in Rome, is the prelate's lengthier commentary on papal infallibility. The archbishop appeals primarily to a believer's logic in his defense. "Given the Infallibility of the Church, that of the Pontiff follows as a logical and necessary consequence." Christ's promises as revealed in Scripture become major premises in his rationale for the definition. He asks in reference to Matthew 16:18, "Can we logically conceive of an infallible and undestructable edifice built upon a fallible and tottering foundation?" After a series of similar questions referring to other scriptural texts, he concludes: "Evidently, in conformity with His [Christ's] plan and promise, the infallibility of the Church and that of its visible head are indissolubly associated; they stand and fall together, they are one."<sup>67</sup>

<sup>65</sup> Spalding, *Evidences* (1866 ed.) 266.

<sup>66</sup> Spalding, *Evidences* (1876 ed.) 263, 266.

<sup>67</sup> Spalding, *Evidences*, "Appendix," 454–55; also 264–65.

Spalding also dedicates a whole section to quelling fears about non-Catholic animosity over the definition. He reminds his readers of certain obvious facts about Catholicism. A "cultivated non-Catholic" can readily see "its world-wide grandeur of extension, its superhuman and marvelous unity of faith and its tenacious consistency." Catholics can then point to "the official Infallibility of the Pontiffs" to explain "the secret of that wonderful unity and tenacity of faith which so puzzles the unbeliever." The ultimate reason for success, Spalding notes, arises not from the pontiffs' extraordinary personal virtues but from Christ's fidelity. His unflinching promise, "that the gates of hell shall not prevail against His Church built upon Peter as a rock, and that his faith shall not fail . . . makes clear what else would be wellnigh, if not wholly, inexplicable."<sup>68</sup>

Spalding even admits to a certain weakness in the Catholics' standard precconciliar defense of the Church's infallibility. It had been done "more or less haltingly in the view of the more intelligent and shrewder non-Catholic inquirers." He notes that his usual answer had located "the seat of Infallibility" in the head, i.e. the pope, together with the body, i.e. the bishops. Although this teaching remains Church doctrine, "its explanation would probably be more satisfactory to the intelligent mind, if our process began with the head and proceeded to the body."<sup>69</sup>

Spalding even uses, for the first time, a chronology to corroborate the logic of primacy. "The promises of Christ were first made to Peter, and then to the apostles along with Peter." Relying upon his "historical data," Spalding asserts, "What is true of Peter and the apostles, is also true of the Pope and Bishops."<sup>70</sup> When this account is compared to Hughes's account which always began with the gathering of disciples and ended with the appointment of a primate, the implications of Spalding's shift upon the conception of "Church" becomes quite clear.<sup>71</sup> The office provides the context in which the community gains its identity, rather than the Church providing the context in which the Petrine office receives its meaning.

Brownson also recognized the council's work in advancing a new Catholic ecclesiology. The document displays "an important innovation, not in doctrine indeed, but in the mode of presenting it." Unlike all previous ecumenical councils, this one "has treated the primacy of Peter as the first part of *De Ecclesia*, or the foundation before treating the body of the edifice." The shift is "proof of the presence and controlling influence of the Holy Ghost" at the council. The Church's teaching authority chose "to adopt what is really the scientific method of treatment."<sup>72</sup> Brownson's recognition of the scientific soundness gave new

<sup>68</sup> Ibid. 465-66.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid. 467.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Hughes, "The Importance of Being in Communion," in *Works* 1.5.66-68.

<sup>72</sup> Brownson, "The Doellingerites, Nationalists, and the Papacy," *Brownson Quarterly Review* (January 1873), in *Works* 13.351.

impetus to his own "ultra-Papalism." He interpreted the document as a definitive denial of all claims "that the church can exist as the church of Christ without the pope." He takes seriously his observation that all sound ecclesiology must begin with a consideration of the head rather than the body. "Prior to Peter is Christ incarnate and his blessed Mother, and nothing else in our conception of the church."<sup>73</sup> He also incorporates the defense of the spiritual authority's definition into his right to guide the temporal sphere. The pontiff's infallible teaching authority in "defining the revealed truths" must "necessarily" extend to "the principles on which the revealed truth is founded." Because "all real principles [are] catholic, the same in all orders [i.e. generation, regeneration, and glorification], the papal infallibility must extend to the principles of all the sciences no less than to dogma."<sup>74</sup> The pope's duty, accordingly, is to judge the truth of the principles guiding science, politics, and social reforms.

Isaac Hecker unlocks the meaning of the ecumenical event with his "key of universal history." God always intends by his activity to bring "into clear light the divine character of his Church, His spouse" to make it "less possible . . . not [to] be Christians, and being Christians not [to] be Catholic."<sup>75</sup> The declaration is the definitive response to the 16th-century religious revolt. Because the Reformers and their descendants had sought "the destruction of the centre and guardian of the unity of her organization, the Roman Pontiff. . . she [the church] was compelled to settle beyond dispute all doubt of the authority, the rights, and prerogatives communicated by Christ to his Apostle Peter and the successors of his see."<sup>76</sup> In his grand overview of history, Hecker singles out the Jesuits as fostering "a special devotion to the Holy See, and a filial obedience to the voice of the Pope." They made papal allegiance "the distinguishing mark of a sincere Catholic" since the Reformation.<sup>77</sup>

Hecker's providential history still features the Holy Spirit as the primary mover in the believer and the Church. By identifying "two distinct offices of the Holy Spirit," he is able to maintain a dialectical harmony between individual religious aspirations and the Church's spiritual authority. "The Holy Spirit, in the external authority of the Church, acts as the infallible interpreter and criterion of divine revelation. The Holy Spirit, in the soul, acts as the Divine Life giver and Sanctifier." Hecker rejects the possibility of "any opposition or contradiction between the action of the Holy Spirit" in the external and

<sup>73</sup> Brownson, "The Constitution of the Church," *Brownson Quarterly Review* (July 1875), in *Works* 8.528, 535.

<sup>74</sup> Brownson, "Papal Infallibility," *Brownson Quarterly Review* (July 1873), in *Works* 13.428.

<sup>75</sup> Hecker, *Church and the Age* 154.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.* 14–15.

<sup>77</sup> Hecker, "Dr. Knox on the Unity of the Church," *Catholic World* 24 (February 1877) 663.

internal workings. On any occasion of doubt, "the test of a truly enlightened and sincere Christian will be the promptitude of his obedience to the voice of the Church." These "plain truths" about the Church's authority ultimately affirm an authentic human freedom. "The soul can walk, run, or fly, if it chooses, in the greatest safety and with perfect liberty, in the ways of sanctity."<sup>78</sup>

Papal infallibility, according to Hecker, complements human reason as well as sanctity. He boldly confronts a Protestant detractor who distinguishes "'a fair reason' on one side and 'the papal dogma' on the other!" Hecker informs his readers that the real choice is "Rome and Reason against Unreason and Protestantism." He warns his readers of "the day" in the not too distant future when the only choice left will be between, on the one hand, entrance into the fold of the Catholic Church, which knows how to reconcile reason with Christianity, and, on the other, being swept off into the dark abyss of atheism.<sup>79</sup> Papal infallibility became not an occasion for embarrassment but another demonstration of the Catholic world's superiority in matters of faith as well as reason.

In describing the definition's universally positive impact, Hecker also appeals to the philosophical principle that "authority is always secondary to something else its end." He insists that the Church's "present and future influence due to the completion of her external organization, will be exerted on the side of soliciting increased action." From his global vantage point, Hecker has good reason to welcome the definition. It becomes "the axis on which turns the new course of the Church, the renewal of religion, and the entire restoration of society."<sup>80</sup>

American Catholics saw their own superior enlightenment reflected in the papacy's infallible teaching authority. Long before the council, they had heard that the papacy illuminated their special world with an unfailing light. The message came through with clarity in the words of Kenrick, "If a cloud has sometimes passed over that See, which shines in the Church like the sun in the firmament, it soon passed away, and left the world in admiration of its undiminished splendor. Sooner shall the orb of day be extinguished than the prayer of Christ for Peter fail."<sup>81</sup> The impression given the reader differs very little from Brownson's words celebrating the council's declaration. The infallible pope is in the spiritual firmament what the sun is to the material, and gives light, life, warmth, and health to all on whom he sheds his radiance. The great difficulty men have in believing it, is that it seems

<sup>78</sup> Hecker, *Church and the Age* 34–35.

<sup>79</sup> Hecker, "The True and False Friends of Reason," *Catholic World* 33 (June 1881) 297–98.

<sup>80</sup> Hecker, "An Exposition of the Church in View of Recent Difficulties and Controversies and the Present Needs of the Age," *Catholic World* 21 (April 1875) 138 and 125.

<sup>81</sup> Kenrick, *Primacy* (1855 ed.) 427; and see Hughes, "Sermon in St. Patrick's Cathedral on the Occasion of the Consecration of the Bishops of Brooklyn, Newark and Burlington, October 30th, 1853," in *Works* 2.216.

too good to be true.<sup>82</sup> The Catholic order, according to the apologists, possesses in the visible form of their pontiff the light of Christ. His authority gives security as they make their way through this world. It also reaffirms its members' confidence that their community appears, as Hecker said, "in the strength of all Unity, in all the majesty of Catholicity, in all the beauty of Holiness, as the only hope Humanity has for the Future."<sup>83</sup>

#### CONCLUSION

American Protestant and Catholic apologists of the 19th century did not differ in their basic view of revelation, the nature of faith, or the desire for certainty. They differed on the locus of the infallible authority. An analysis of the structure of American Catholic apologists' discourse shows that they made a common-sense argument for an infallible Church. When Vatican I reduced in practice the number of acceptable accounts of infallibility to one, they adapted their arguments to support that claim. Whatever personal difficulties they may have experienced in accepting the dogma were easily accommodated by their theological argument. In the process of accommodating, they also incorporated into the common-sense rubric a much more definitive centralization of ecclesial authority. The papacy served as the logical context for the Church's infallibility, rather than the Church's infallibility serving as the context of the papacy's authority.

Their demonstrations used the classic Petrine prooftexts and argument strategies of their European Catholic counterparts. At the same, the popular forms of the Scottish common-sense philosophy proved a culturally embedded intellectual framework that transformed the standard European arguments over infallibility. The common-sense roots of the American apologists' arguments suited their national audience who recognized as familiar and even as comforting the arguments demonstrating the common sense of their religious convictions. This familiar discursive framework sheds some light upon the apparent ease with which American Catholics made and heard public defenses embracing the doctrine promulgated in *Pastor aeternus*.

<sup>82</sup> Brownson, "Doellinger and the Papacy," *Brownson Quarterly Review* (January 1873), in *Works* 13.364.

<sup>83</sup> Hecker, *Aspirations* 290–91.