

AMERICAN PROTESTANT AND LUTHERAN REACTION TO THE DEFINITION OF PAPAL INFALLIBILITY

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In the summer of 2011, Michelle Bachman, who at the time was running for the Republican nomination for President, came under scrutiny because her former church still confessed that the papacy is the Antichrist.¹ The media were quick to condemn such a view, and Bachman was forced to deflect these attacks. As would be expected, her former church was inundated with media inquiries. This incident demonstrates that the definition of papal infallibility, formally promulgated at the First Vatican Council, continues to have an influence and impact on religion and politics.

The First Vatican Council was the key event in the history of Roman Catholicism in the nineteenth century. It also proved to be important in the history of American Catholicism in the nineteenth century. For the first time, American bishops were present at such a general council. In addition, the American bishops brought with them uniquely American concerns and outlooks as they dealt with the key item on the council's agenda: the definition of papal infallibility. Martin John Spalding (1810–1872), the archbishop of Baltimore, considered the prime prelate of America, held positions on two important committees at the council and he was the first to publicly respond to the definition with a pastoral letter. A number of other bishops were influential in opposition to the definition. They were concerned about how the definition of papal infallibility would be received in America where the secular media was oriented toward and controlled by Protestants and where Protestants were in the majority.

In 1941, J. Ryan Beiser explored the reaction of American secular newspapers to the First Vatican Council's definition of papal infallibility.² James Smylie looked at the Protestant interpretation of the

¹She previously was a member of Salem Lutheran Church in Stillwater, MN, a member of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS).

²J. Ryan Beiser, *The Vatican Council and The American Secular Newspapers, 1869–1870* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1941). This was Beiser's doctoral dissertation.

First Vatican Council in a 1969 essay.³ Smylie endeavored to show that Protestants, while they did not have complete information because of the lack of media availability at the council, reacted on the basis of the knowledge they could obtain from Catholic publications. Their reactions were politically, historically, and theologically based, although many of them tended to emphasize political arguments against papal infallibility.

Smylie, however, largely ignored Lutheran reactions.⁴ While Roman Catholics usually lump all non-Catholic, non-Orthodox church bodies into the Protestant category, there is a decided difference between Lutherans and other churches which have their roots in the Reformation. In fact, Lutherans usually prefer not to be labeled as “Protestants” because of this pronounced difference. Lutheran theology begins with the doctrine of justification by grace through faith.⁵ Lutherans emphasize the Word of God and baptism as the means by which the Holy Spirit gives the gift of faith in Jesus.⁶ By faith the believer receives the gifts Jesus won with his perfect life and his death on the cross.⁷ Classical Reformed theology, on the other hand, begins with the absolute sovereignty of God and his holy decrees. This generic Protestantism emphasizes God’s decree of election from eternity. The believer needs to show in outward living that he or she is one of the elect. This was especially true in the nineteenth century when Calvinist theology still exercised a dominant influence among Presbyterians and Episcopalians. The emphasis in Protestant thought trends, therefore, is toward the legal and legislative,⁸ while Lutherans emphasize the power of the gospel in Word, baptism and the Lord’s Supper.

This article examines the reactions of both Protestants and Lutherans to the definition of papal infallibility. Their reactions, while addressing a very contemporary issue, echoed arguments which have

³James H. Smylie, “American Protestants Interpret Vatican Council I,” *Church History*, 38, no. 4 (December, 1969), 459-474. Smylie was a professor at Union Theological Seminary in Richmond, Virginia.

⁴He mentions several Lutheran sources in a footnote (459-60), but he only discusses one of them in any depth.

⁵See Romans 3:23-28; Ephesians 2:8-9.

⁶See Romans 1:16; Romans 10:17.

⁷This faith is not dead, but produces fruits of faith (good works) in the Christian’s life out of thanks for God’s gifts of salvation. See Ephesians 2:10.

⁸This is illustrated by John Calvin (1509–64) and his theocratic rule in Geneva. The Arminian branch of Protestantism focuses on the need for the believer to decide for Christ and show that their decision is sincere by their outward life. Arminian theology is best seen in the Methodist, Baptist, and general “Evangelical” churches of today. In both Arminian and Calvinist theology, the focus is on the believer obeying God’s law to show that he or she is a Christian.

a three-hundred-year history. This will be evident by examining Martin John Spalding's pastoral letter and how he anticipated their reactions. A comparison of Protestant and Lutheran reactions will show that, while they shared some similarities, the Lutherans differed in their approach because of the Lutheran theological underpinnings. Both were polemical in nature. Both were highly influenced by Dr. Johann Joseph Ignaz von Döllinger (1799–1890), a highly vocal German Catholic opponent to the definition of papal infallibility. But the Lutheran reaction pointed to the definition as further proof that the papacy is the Antichrist, a reaction taken from Scripture, church history, and a concern for the doctrine of justification by faith alone. The Protestant reaction tended to find its basis in legal matters and flowed from a concern for how the definition would play out politically. The approaches of Lutheran and Protestant reaction to the definition differed because of different theological emphases.

Overview of American involvement at the First Vatican Council

In his book on the American involvement at the First Vatican Council, James Hennesey wrote that, while the primary emphasis of the council was European, the mere presence of the American bishops was significant. "For the first time in the eighteen-hundred-year history of ecumenical councils the New World was represented, and the bishops of the United States were part of the delegation."⁹

In comparison to Vatican II, however, where over two hundred American bishops were in attendance and several played very prominent roles in formulating the promulgations, the American involvement at the First Vatican Council was slim. Only forty-eight bishops and one abbot represented the Catholic Church in America, although this was the third largest representation by nation, exceeded only by Italy and France.¹⁰ Only one American theologian served on the dogmatic commission to prepare for the council: Father James Corcoran.¹¹

Yet, the American bishops played significant roles at the council in a variety of ways. Archbishop Martin John Spalding of Baltimore, considered the most prominent American bishop, was elected to the two

⁹James Hennesey, *The First Council of the Vatican: The American Experience* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1963), 18.

¹⁰Hennesey, 24. Thomas W. Spalding, *Martin John Spalding: American Churchman* (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1973), 293. Spalding mentions that only forty-five bishops attended, but Hennesey points out that several bishops were not personally in attendance, but appointed others to represent them. For example, Isaac Hecker represented Sylvester Rosecrans.

¹¹Thomas Spalding, 284.

most important committees of the council: the congregation on proposals, as well as the deputation on faith. Archbishop Joseph Alemany of San Francisco also served on the deputation on faith. Archbishop John McCloskey of New York and Bishop Michael Heiss of La Crosse were elected to the deputation on ecclesiastical discipline. Bishop Stephen Ryan of Buffalo represented the United States on the deputation on religious orders, while Bishop Louis de Goesbriand of Burlington served on the deputation for eastern churches and foreign missions.¹² Eight American bishops spoke from the rostrum during the council.¹³ Archbishop Peter Richard Kenrick of St. Louis proved to be the leader of the Americans who were opposing the definition. He was influential in the international opposition group. He signed numerous written petitions and spoke from the rostrum. Many of the concerns he raised were regarding what he viewed as a lack of transparency and proper order in carrying out the elections, discussions, and decisions of the council.¹⁴ Overall, though some had hoped for more American involvement,¹⁵ the Americans did not stand idly by.

It quickly became clear, however, that the focus of the council was European. The difficulties the Catholic Church had endured in France during the previous century were still fresh in the minds of many.¹⁶ The revolutions of 1848 had stirred up a growing nationalism, especially in Italy and Germany, and a push for liberal democratic governance throughout Europe. Italians desired unity. France and Prussia had been on the brink of war for several years. Such an outbreak would affect Rome and the Papal States which were protected by French troops. In addition, philosophy and science were falling under the influence of rationalism and modernism. All of these were viewed as threats to the religious and political power and influence of the Catholic Church.

¹²Hennesey, 48-9.

¹³Hennesey provides details of each of the speeches throughout his book. One American in particular, Bishop Augustin Vérot of Savannah, became notorious at the council for his humor. It was not always appreciated by the serious-minded Europeans.

¹⁴He raised similar objections at the Second Plenary Council in Baltimore in 1866. See Thomas Spalding, 194ff. Kenrick was also concerned that the role of councils and the bishops would be diminished.

¹⁵William Gladstone expressed this sentiment about the American bishops prior to the council. See Hennesey, 9.

¹⁶Jansenism (a 17th and 18 century movement in France which divided the Catholic Church by opposing the Jesuits and the Counter-Reformation and stressing personal piety and absolute predestination), Gallicanism (late 17th century teaching emanating from France which advocated for the equal power of pope and councils, as well as independence of French kings from papal power) and the French Revolution (when Catholic Church lands were seized) had been devastating to the Catholic Church in France.

These issues in Europe were largely responsible for Pope Pius IX issuing his encyclical, *The Syllabus of Errors*.¹⁷ This encyclical had caused a certain degree of angst among many American bishops. The American bishops had nearly one hundred years of experience in the context of a democratic government. Freedom of religion was part of the American culture. Liberal democracy was only now coming into vogue in Europe. And freedom of religion was not as appreciated, understood, or even practiced in Europe, as it was in America. So it is not surprising that some of the American bishops were worried over the direction the council might take on *The Syllabus of Errors*.

The definition of papal infallibility was also a concern on the part of some of the bishops. Nativism¹⁸ was still fresh in the minds of many of these Catholic leaders, and a new nativist movement was on the rise with the end of the Civil War and the continuing influx of European Catholic immigrants, especially from Southern and Eastern Europe. American Catholic leaders had typically defended the Protestant charge against papal infallibility, arguing that it was merely a theological opinion and not required as an article of faith for Catholics.¹⁹ Many bishops feared that defining the doctrine of papal infallibility would only intensify Protestant attacks against Catholicism and give legitimacy to their attacks against the papacy. Others were strongly infallibilist, trusting that the "truth," as they saw it, would win in the end. When the vote was finally taken, twenty-four American bishops and one abbot voted for the definition. Twenty-two bishops left Rome before the vote was taken. Some had personal reasons. Others chose to abstain so that they would not vote against a position held by the majority. One American bishop, Edward Fitzgerald of Little Rock, was one of the two dissenting votes against the decree.²⁰

Martin John Spalding and His Pastoral Letter

Spalding, as the Archbishop of Baltimore, had primacy of place among the American bishops because the See of Baltimore was the

¹⁷Pius IX's papal encyclical was given in 1865. Among other things, it condemned the separation of church and state and freedom of religion. Needless to say, American Catholic leaders and theologians had to put an American spin on this encyclical.

¹⁸Nativism, in general, is an anti-immigration sentiment. From the 1830's to the 1850's, there was an anti-Catholic nativism in America because of the influx of immigrants, especially from Ireland, into America.

¹⁹Thomas Spalding, 289-90. Martin John Spalding acknowledged, "Though not an article of faith . . . it is, however, the general belief among Catholics, and I myself am inclined strongly to advocate its soundness, chiefly on account of the intimate connection between the Pontiff and the Church."

²⁰Hennesey provides the details of the vote, especially the decision on the part of the minority opposition party to abstain (273ff). Apparently, Fitzgerald missed the memo.

first established in the United States. He was viewed as the leader of their delegation. But his leadership was compromised somewhat by a perception that he was waffling on whether or not to support the definition of papal infallibility. Prior to the council, he had held the typical American stance—papal infallibility is generally believed by Catholics, but it is not an article of faith. He was certainly not as outspoken against the definition as was Kenrick, but he was viewed by some as a potential leader of a strong American opposition.²¹

After his election to the two key committees, it became apparent that Spalding was now on the majority side of the issue. This led both the secular press and Kenrick to accuse Spalding of changing his view in exchange for positions on the committees.²² However, Spalding had in mind to offer a compromise solution, which would make an implied definition without using the word, “infallible.” It would also require assent from the bishops or a council when the pope made declarations on faith or morals.²³ Despite the fact that his compromise proposal failed to gain traction, it shows that Spalding was not a strong infallibilist. He recognized and appreciated the concerns of the “inopportunist,” especially because of his own personal American experience. He knew the realities which Catholics faced in the religious pluralism of a predominantly Protestant America. But he was alarmed that the theology of the “inopportunist” had the flavor of Gallicanism.

When the final vote was taken and the council was closed, Spalding immediately responded with a pastoral letter to help American Catholics understand the definition of papal infallibility and what it meant for the Church, its mission in America, and its apology to Protestants.²⁴ Of all the pastoral letters by American bishops pertaining to the definition, Paul Hennessey notes that “the most lengthy of the pastorals and the most definitive in explaining the theology behind the actual texts was that of Archbishop Spalding.”²⁵ Spalding

²¹Most of the opponents to the definition of papal infallibility were not against the dogma itself, but did not see the need to formally define it at this time. They were labeled “inopportunist.” That is, they did not see this as the opportune time in history to formally define papal infallibility.

²²Hennessey, 57-8.

²³Thomas Spalding, 303ff.

²⁴Martin John Spalding, “Pastoral Letter of the Most Reverend Martin John Spalding, D. D., Archbishop of Baltimore to the Clergy and Laity of the Archdiocese, on the Papal Infallibility (July 19, 1870),” from *American Catholic Religious Thought*, ed. by Patrick W. Carey (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2004). Note that the date of issue is the day after the vote at the council, indicating that Spalding already had the letter written before the vote was taken.

²⁵Paul K. Hennessey, “The Infallibility of the Papal Magisterium as Presented in the Pastoral Letters of the Bishops of the United States after Vatican I,” *Horizons* 23 (Spring 1996), 9.

had the educational background, extensive writing experience, and his time on the deputation on faith to provide the necessary tools to expound and explain the definition.²⁶

Spalding began his letter by showing that the council provided for lengthy, thorough, and open debate and discussion before a vote was taken. "Every sentence, every phrase, every word, every comma even, was searchingly examined; and with a triple discussion and a triple preparatory vote, even humanly speaking, there could scarcely be room for a mistake."²⁷ He made the point that the vast majority of debate occurred not over content of the dogma, but over expression. Hence, the overwhelming majority voted in favor.²⁸

After promulgating the Constitution on the Church of Christ (*Pastor Aeternus*), he explained three key points. First, the teaching of papal infallibility is derived from the promises of Christ that the Catholic faith has been kept pure only in the Roman See. Second, the primacy of the pope makes him the defender, judge and teacher of the faith. Third, as Vicar of Christ, he has this authority over the whole Church.²⁹

Three great historical facts were presented to illustrate papal infallibility. First, since the fourth century, the bishops had the custom and habit of referring doctrinal questions to the Bishop of Rome. Second, the popes "carefully studied the questions referred to them for final decision, availing themselves of all the means placed in their power, sometime convoking general councils, or enquiring into the belief of the Church dispersed, sometimes assembling particular Synods, or employing such other aids as divine Providence afforded"³⁰ before final decisions would be rendered. Finally, all the decisions of the popes were "willingly accepted and adhered to by the venerable Fathers and orthodox doctors of the whole Church, who were deeply persuaded that they could contain nothing but the truth."³¹ This explanation was undoubtedly provided to assuage the fears of those who saw in the definition a marginalizing of the bishops and future councils.

Spalding then went on to explain what papal infallibility is not. The popes are not sinless. The pope is not infallible in regard to his use of temporal power, or judgments of judicial cases, or in his ordinary life. The pope is not divinely inspired or given new revelations,

²⁶Hennessey, 17.

²⁷Martin John Spalding, 212.

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Ibid, 213-4.

³⁰Ibid, 214.

³¹Ibid.

but only divine assistance to expound the faith entrusted to the Church. Therefore, Spalding concludes, “the pontiffs cannot define any new doctrine not contained either expressly or impliedly in the original deposit of faith.”³²

He then explained what papal infallibility is. First, he placed great emphasis on the *ex cathedra* phrase, that the pope is infallible when speaking “from his official magisterial or teaching chair—as the father and teacher of all Christians.”³³ Based on this, he concluded that the pope’s infallibility is confined to faith and morals; that he must be settling a doctrine, not just expressing a belief; that what he defines must be held by the whole Church; and that the definition must be official. Second, he drew the connection between the infallibility of the pope and the infallibility which Christ promised to the Church. The Constitution itself made this logical connection. Finally, he showed that the teaching of papal infallibility is derived from the promises of Christ, not the consent of the Church. This was a clear answer to the teachings of Gallicanism and those bent on a new conciliar movement.³⁴

In order to illustrate the definition of papal infallibility, Spalding put forth three propositions. With the first, he endeavored to show that this was not a new teaching of the Catholic Church. He gave a brief rundown of the pertinent passages of Scripture to show that the papacy was appointed by Christ to feed, care for, and rule his infallible Church.³⁵ On the basis of these passages, he concluded,

Can we logically conceive of an infallible and indestructible edifice built upon a fallible and tottering foundation? Can we imagine an infallible body of brethren confirmed, or strengthened in the faith, by a fallible confirmer? Can we suppose that an infallible sheepfold can be guided, governed, and nurtured with the food of sound

³²Ibid, 216.

³³Ibid.

³⁴Ibid, 217.

³⁵ Those pertinent passages are Matthew 16:18 (“*And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.*”); Luke 22:32 (“*But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.*”); John 21:15-17 (When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “*Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?*” “*Yes, Lord,*” he said, “*you know that I love you.*” Jesus said, “*Feed my lambs.*” Again Jesus said, “*Simon son of John, do you truly love me?*” He answered, “*Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.*” Jesus said, “*Take care of my sheep.*” The third time he said to him, “*Simon son of John, do you love me?*” Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, “*Do you love me?*” He said, “*Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.*” Jesus said, “*Feed my sheep.*”); Matthew 28:20 (“*And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.*”); Matthew 24:35 (“*Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.*”).

doctrine by a fallible chief shepherd? Finally can we conceive of an infallible body directed by a fallible head?³⁶

Based on this conclusion, he made the point that all Catholics are bound to assent to and obey the formal definitions of the pope. According to Catholic theology, papal definitions are to be based on Scripture and Tradition. He even directly mentioned that this is in opposition to Gallicanism.³⁷ He demonstrated that neither councils, nor canon law supersedes the exercise of the pope's authority in matters of faith and morals. Yet he pointed out that the Church, through its councils and bishops, validates what the Roman pontiff defines. Spalding gave a brief history review of various councils to illustrate this.³⁸

Spalding's second proposition asserted that non-Catholics should not be surprised by the teaching of papal infallibility because it is what the Catholic Church has always taught and it should not be a hindrance to their return to the true faith. This was the apologetic part of his letter. He pointed to the unity, world-wide extension, and ancient history of the Catholic Church as appealing and persuasive to non-Catholics. Based on Matthew 16:18, where Jesus gave primacy to Peter, he endeavored to show that this promise given to Peter is why all Christians should follow Rome. Because the pope is the successor of Peter, whom Christ made infallible, therefore the pope is the infallible head of the infallible Roman Catholic Church.³⁹ In this proposition, he also continued to attack the Gallican principle of conciliarism, comparing the papacy to the Supreme Court. Just as American citizens must respect and adhere to judgment of the Supreme Court for there to be order in society, so order in the Catholic Church is secured when bishops profess fidelity to the doctrinal decisions of the papacy.⁴⁰

With his final proposition, Spalding addressed the concern that the definition of papal infallibility would not be compatible with a free, republican form of government. He denied that this definition offers any threat to any civil government. He differentiated between American republicanism and the liberal democracies which were being introduced in various European nations. He claimed that the Catholic Church has always held to the theory of free government where the citizens are free, the property and rights of the Church are upheld, and all religions are protected by the law.⁴¹ He pointed out that this definition of democracy does not fit the new European gov-

³⁶Martin John Spalding, 218-19.

³⁷Ibid, 220-221.

³⁸Ibid, 223ff.

³⁹Ibid, 228.

⁴⁰Ibid, 230.

⁴¹Ibid, 233.

ernments which confiscate church property and “trample on her dearest rights and liberties.”⁴² It seems evident that he was providing an American interpretation of *The Syllabus of Errors*.

The American Protestant and Lutheran reactions

The First Vatican Council was not just a significant event in the history of the Roman Catholic Church. Since it was the first ecumenical council in over three hundred years, it also grabbed the attention of other Christian denominations. Nowhere was this truer than in America. Protestantism was part of the fabric of America’s early history. It had the deepest roots. Catholicism’s growth came in the nineteenth century with the large influxes of immigrants from predominantly Catholic European nations.⁴³ Protestants still held the majority of governmental positions and owned most of the secular media. As was mentioned earlier, nativism was still in recent memories and some nativist attitudes against the immigrant Catholics seemed to be again on the horizon. In addition, there was a longstanding general Protestant/Lutheran vs. Catholic dynamic in the nation. In some ways, this was a carryover from the religious wars which plagued Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

In America, this conflict was carried out in print. So it was only natural that both Protestants and Lutherans would be reacting in print to the council, especially its debate over and eventual promulgation of the definition of papal infallibility. But what tack was taken by Protestants and Lutherans in their reactions to what was happening in Rome in the first half of 1870? Were they consistent in their approaches? This essay will now attempt to show that there were some consistencies, but also some differences because of the differing theological perspectives of Protestants and Lutherans, by examining several examples of Protestant and Lutheran reactions to the definition of papal infallibility.

Part I:

Protestant reactions

Three Protestant sources have been chosen for analysis: *The Nation*, the *American Quarterly Church Review*, and Charles Hodge’s *Systematic Theology*.⁴⁴ These three sources give a view of the broad spectrum of Protestant reaction to papal infallibility in America in the nineteenth century.

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Lutheranism actually parallels Catholicism in this regard. Some of the later difficulties immigrant Catholics faced were also faced by immigrant Lutherans, especially in the area of education.

⁴⁴For an examination of even broader Protestant sources, see Smylie’s article.

The Nation was a weekly newspaper out of New York. Beiser considers *The Nation* a secular newspaper, especially pointing out that it consistently opposed the reading of the Bible in public schools. Nonetheless, *The Nation* deliberately had a “high moral tone” and a distinctly Protestant outlook.⁴⁵ Since it was not tied to any specific denomination, it appealed to a wide, generically Protestant audience.

American Quarterly Church Review (AQCR) was the official theological journal of the Protestant Episcopal Church. As a church body with ties to the Anglican Church, it shared a hierarchal view of the church and apostolic succession with the Roman Catholic Church, but the Protestant Episcopal Church did not recognize the Pope as the supreme leader of the visible church on earth. The *AQCR* also maintained a decidedly American outlook on religious matters.

Charles Hodge (1797–1878) was the primary theological professor at Princeton Theological Seminary, a Presbyterian institution. He was the leading Calvinist theologian in America in the nineteenth century. His *Systematic Theology* (1870) remains a standard exposition of strict Calvinism.

The Nation

Generally speaking, *The Nation* kept its readers informed about what was happening in Rome through short paragraphs in the opening “news” section of each week’s issue. News from the council was not given in every issue, but often enough to give a flavor of the Protestant reaction. *The Nation* was very aware of the political situation and ramifications of the definition, especially regarding French political opposition⁴⁶ and the role of French troops stationed in Rome.⁴⁷ Several articles noted that a few of the governments of Europe, especially the French, were concerned with what was happening in Rome. The French and Austrians even appealed to the pope for lay representation at the council, but he refused.⁴⁸

The Nation especially reported on the internal politics at the council, although some of this was hard to come by because of the lack of press coverage allowed at the council. Therefore, the paper was often forced to report rumors of what was happening.⁴⁹ But one emphasis

⁴⁵Beiser, 111.

⁴⁶“France—Bishop Dupanloup and M. Veuillot,” *The Nation*, 16 December 1869, 533-4.

⁴⁷News item, *The Nation*, 17 February 1870, 99. News item, *The Nation*, 17 March 1870, 167. “France and Rome,” *The Nation*, 31 March 1870, 204.

⁴⁸News item, *The Nation*, 17 March 1870, 167. News item, *The Nation*, 14 April 1870.

⁴⁹News item, *The Nation*, 27 January 1870, 51. News item, *The Nation*, 3 February 1870, 67. News item, *The Nation*, 24 March 1870, 185. This last item even included a rumor that the pope was ill.

was that there was extensive division and debate at the council. In early January, *The Nation* reported that it was clear that the definition of papal infallibility would not be able to be passed by simple acclamation because there was too much opposition. The editors predicted that most American bishops would oppose the definition and even questioned how the decree would stand up to debate.⁵⁰ They suggested that the definition would be rammed through with little regard for those who were opposing. In that case, "What is the use of the bishops, and why ever call a council?"⁵¹ They saw the political machinations of the Roman hierarchy in trying to ram through the definition as the cause for these divisions. They decried "the secrecy of the debates in the Council and the arbitrary restriction on the freedom of speech."⁵²

The Nation was well aware of Dr. Johann Joseph Ignaz von Döllinger's sharp criticism of the definition. Dr. Döllinger was a priest, theologian and professor of church history and canon law at the University of Munich.⁵³ They surmised that he was the anonymous "Janus," the author of *The Pope and the Council* (1869), a book published just prior to the council which attacked the definition for lack of historical support and blamed the Jesuits for pushing the definition.⁵⁴ The editors seemed to side with that viewpoint, especially about the Jesuits, when they printed an article in early June entitled, "The Crisis at Rome." This article is actually a letter from an American traveler who had been in Rome. He wrote:

Power . . . will rest with the spiritual authority that has the best disciplined forces, that asserts its claims the most positively, and that tries no compromises with freedom of thought. The leaders of the Papal party distinctly mean "obscurantism;" they mean to make all the bishops more dependent than heretofore on Rome, to have all the Catholic institutions of learning wholly under control, to exclude all liberal professors, and to reduce the whole ecclesiastical body, so far as obedience and submissiveness are concerned, to the likeness of the order of the Jesuits.⁵⁵

As an interesting sidelight, *The Nation* expressed an admiration for the organizational structure and discipline of the Roman Church.⁵⁶ But they also saw some dangers in the definition of papal infallibility.

⁵⁰News item, *The Nation*, 6 January 1870, 3.

⁵¹News item, *The Nation*, 27 January 1870, 51.

⁵²News item, *The Nation*, 3 February 1870, 67.

⁵³After the definition of papal infallibility, he refused to accept the doctrine and was excommunicated in 1871. Johann Finsterhölzl, *Ignaz von Döllinger*, Verlag Styria, 1969.

⁵⁴News item, *The Nation*, 17 February 1870, 99.

⁵⁵"The Crisis at Rome," *The Nation*, 2 June 1870, 350.

⁵⁶"A Catholic Lesson for Protestants," *The Nation*, 16 December 1869, 530.

In their opinion, this would make the Roman Catholic Church more centralized, more authoritarian, more powerful, “and far more dangerous and difficult to deal with in a free state.”⁵⁷

The Nation reacted from a theological standpoint to one point of the definition of papal infallibility: the issue of *ex cathedra*. In one article, the editors actually ridiculed the idea:

There are no arguments tending to show that a mortal man, with a liver and brain, needing sleep, and liable to have his digestion disordered by certain articles of food, never can be mistaken on any subject on which he chooses to pronounce a formal opinion, which can in our day be gravely uttered before a large assemblage, especially in Latin.⁵⁸

This is an obvious misrepresentation of the definition and these arguments occurred early in the debate. It shows, however, the logical conclusions some were making to the discussions taking place in Rome. In a more serious vein, they simply questioned how anyone will know when the pope is speaking *ex cathedra*.⁵⁹

American Quarterly Church Review

Two articles in *AQCR* addressed the issue of papal infallibility, one during the council and one after. In “Rome and Her Council,” the author evaluated the issue in light of the “Janus” book and two publications by Edmund Ffoulkes (1819 or 1820–1894), a former Anglican turned Catholic, who was excommunicated by the Catholic Church for writing a historical treatise showing that the papacy had corrupted the true Christian faith.⁶⁰ His writings were addressed to Archbishop Edward Manning (1808–1892), an English prelate who was a leader of the majority advocating for the definition. After making the point that the power and organization of the Roman church was a direct result of the ancient Roman Empire,⁶¹ the author used Ffoulkes’ books to criticize the Catholic hierarchy in Rome.

The author then latched on to “Janus’” historical criticism of the doctrine of papal infallibility. He pointed out that few of the ancient church fathers ever quoted Matthew 16:18 or John 21:17 as proof that the bishops of Rome were successors of Peter.⁶² He echoed “Janus” by

⁵⁷“The Crisis at Rome,” *The Nation*, 2 June 1870, 350.

⁵⁸News item, *The Nation*, 6 January 1870, 3.

⁵⁹News item, *The Nation*, 17 February 1870, 99.

⁶⁰“Rome and Her Council.” *American Quarterly Church Review*, April, 1870, 110. Ffoulkes’ pamphlet was entitled, “The Church’s Creed or the Crown’s Creed.”

⁶¹An argument also made in *The Nation*.

⁶²“Rome and Her Council,” 117.

listing several of the manufactured documents which Rome had traditionally used to support the primacy and power of the papacy.

[Rome's] inventions against truth and Catholicity were neither few nor meagre, but are surprising for their multitude. It invented acts of spurious martyrs, fables of the conversion and Baptism of Constantine; imaginary decrees of Councils committing greater trusts to Peter; letters of power that no honest man had written; histories of events that had never happened to give Rome at some new point advantage in some new struggle; Canons never received or heard of outside Rome; letters of Fathers like St. Cyprian altered; false lists of Popes set up; false documents touching pretended gifts of territory from Constantine ; even a like letter of St. Peter to a heathen King, whereby there was something more for Rome; in short inventions which for their magnitude and number have never been equaled in either Christian or heathen ages. Thus the foundations of the Infallibility dogma were laid by different hands in different ages, so as best to serve Roman pride, and least to be detected in their dishonesty.⁶³

These are very typical Protestant arguments of the nineteenth century (and previous centuries). This author, like other Protestants at the time, seemed to take delight in having his arguments backed up by a Catholic source.⁶⁴

The author then discussed some logical results based on the definition of papal infallibility.

In the first place it puts all human society and government under the Pope, and gives to one man or God, as this dogma may define him, irresponsible and final authority against and over all human institutions, in politics, arts, literature and arms. It unthrones all kings and dejects all peoples under an Italian Curia with a somebody at the head of it who may be a Borgia, and is, according to the Jesuits, omniscient and omnipresent Deity.⁶⁵

He aimed at the political ramifications of the definition and echoed exactly what American bishops like Kenrick feared would be the dominant message used against Catholics in America.

A second result, as the author pointed out, showed their misunderstanding of the definition, but it was a characterization common among Protestants and the secular press. "Its exact office is not merely to control all affairs to the Papal pleasure but to dig out from mankind and consume those immutable principles of justice, right and honor which among heathen as well as Christians have in all ages

⁶³ "Rome and Her Council," 117-8.

⁶⁴ Smylie notes this in his article, "American Protestants Interpret Vatican Council I," 465.

⁶⁵ "Rome and Her Council," 121.

been thought to rest in the eternal qualities of God.”⁶⁶ In other words, they perceived that the logical consequence of the definition of papal infallibility was to endow the pope with divine characteristics, even to the point of equating the pontiff with God.

To illustrate this, the author made the logical conclusion that, if Rome claimed to be the true protector of the Christian faith, then serious theological questions arise with this definition because it threatens to put Rome outside the pale of Christendom. He pointed to the papal decree on the Immaculate Conception, which, in the author’s opinion, created a “Quaternity,” instead of a Trinity. He then took it a step further:

To men not of the Latin obedience, it has been of late clearly shown by the addition of the new dogma of the Immaculate Conception to the Faith, by the simple act of the Roman pontiff, that the primitive Faith had been boldly corrupted. For as by that dogma the Holy Trinity was changed to a Quaternity, wherein there was one Goddess, the ever Virgin Mary, so now in the new assault on the Creeds by a still more elaborate mixture of sex, even this Quaternity is to be changed to a Quinternity in which his holiness stands a good chance of becoming the First Person in the ever adorable Godhead.⁶⁷

He was not ignorant of the Roman argument that the pope was only infallible in spiritual matters, because he commented that it is either all or nothing. He concluded by urging those in the Episcopal Church who might long for an ecumenical union with the Catholic Church that

there are indeed set in this age two Romes—the one of the imagination in which she appears as primitive, apostolic, Christlike, immutable and full of peace; and the Rome of Fact, novel, papal, Italian, and full of the red flame that consumes the happiness of the world. Neither of the two are worthy as the case stands of Catholic Communion, but must be resisted by all who love the Church of Christ.⁶⁸

The second article in *AQCR*, “The Fall of the Temporal Papacy,” related and commented on the pope’s loss of the Papal States in September of 1870, a mere two months after the definition. The author saw this event as God’s judgment against the Catholic Church for the definition of papal infallibility. “Never before, as it seems to us, in the long course of Christian history, has the overruling Providence of God been more clearly visible than it is now, in this wild rush of human

⁶⁶Ibid, 122.

⁶⁷Ibid, 124.

⁶⁸Ibid, 126.

policy and of secular events onward to His own destined purposes.”⁶⁹ In his reporting, he interpreted the lack of European military support for the pope as backlash against the definition.⁷⁰ In fact, his final conclusion claimed that the downfall of the papal temporal power was something brought on by the pope throughout the centuries, dating back to *Unam Sanctam*⁷¹ and reaching its culmination with *The Syllabus of Errors* and the definition of papal infallibility.⁷² He saw in these events God’s providential action against the errors of the Catholic Church and evidence for even non-Christians that God is still at work in the world. His final point was political in nature, especially aimed at his American audience.

The question may be formulated thus: “How can a religious system, which condemns all the essential and fundamental principles of liberal governments, which claims the right to set human laws at naught and to withhold obedience from all constituted authorities at pleasure, and which exacts submission *ex animo* to these claims under penalty of eternal damnation, be reconciled with a free government which maintains that freedom of conscience in religion is one of the dearest rights of a free people?”⁷³

Charles Hodge

Charles Hodge spent an entire chapter in *Systematic Theology* describing the Catholic doctrine on the teaching authority of the papacy as a contrast to the Protestant view of Scripture.⁷⁴ That he had in mind the recent definition of papal infallibility is evident from the fact that he spent fully twenty pages addressing and attacking the Roman doctrine.⁷⁵ He systematically presented five theological arguments against the doctrine of papal infallibility. First, the Catholic doctrine of the Church equates the Church with a visible organization, similar to the Jewish theory that salvation was only for the Jewish nation. In contrast, Hodge looked to the Protestant definition of the Church as all true believers in Christ.⁷⁶ Second, Hodge argued that the teaching of infallibility and, for that matter, the

⁶⁹ “The Fall of the Temporal Papacy,” *American Quarterly Church Review*, January, 1871, 492.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, 495-96.

⁷¹ Papal encyclical by Boniface VIII in 1302 stating that there is no salvation outside of the Roman church.

⁷² “The Fall of the Temporal Papacy,” 506-7.

⁷³ *Ibid*, 508.

⁷⁴ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology, Volume 1* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1871), 104-150.

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, 129-150.

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, 133-4.

entire papacy, is built on the false assumption of apostolic succession. He pointed out that today's bishop cannot be equated with the apostles of the New Testament.⁷⁷ Third, he claimed that Christ never promised to make his Church infallible. "As the Church has gone through the world bathed in tears and blood, so has she gone soiled with sin and error. It is just as manifest that she has never been infallible, as that she has never been perfectly holy."⁷⁸ Fourth, he made the historical argument against infallibility, laying out the case that the Church at Rome has erred in the past. His primary piece of evidence was the Arian error.⁷⁹ He knew the Catholic argument that "the majority of bishops living at any one time cannot fail to teach the truth." But he pointed out that, at the time of Arius, most bishops were siding for the heretic against the orthodox Athanasius.⁸⁰ He also saw historical evidence in the Catholic departure from the teaching of Augustine on grace. His final argument was that the Church of Rome now teaches error. Therefore, how can it be infallible? He then listed eight errors, among them the fact that the pope demands allegiance for salvation, the teaching about purgatory, and the veneration of the Virgin Mary.⁸¹

Hodge concluded by echoing other Protestant reactions that the definition of papal infallibility was not compatible with a free, democratic society. While he responded with the usual Protestant theological arguments against the papacy, his final conclusion has a political side to it.

It is obvious, therefore, that where this doctrine is held there can be no liberty of opinion, no freedom of conscience, no civil or political freedom. As the recent ecumenical Council of the Vatican has decided that this infallibility is vested in the Pope, it is henceforth a matter of faith with Romanists, that the Roman pontiff is the absolute sovereign of the world. All men are bound, on the penalty of eternal death, to believe what he declares to be true, and to do whatever he decides is obligatory.⁸²

Even when he was addressing the issue from a political viewpoint, however, Hodge still made a theological argument in his reference to the penalty of eternal death.

⁷⁷Ibid, 139.

⁷⁸Ibid, 142-3.

⁷⁹Arius of Alexandria (about 250-336) taught that Jesus was not the Son of God from eternity, thus diminishing his divinity. His heresy was answered by the Nicene Creed.

⁸⁰Ibid, 146.

⁸¹Ibid, 147-9.

⁸²Ibid, 150.

Part II:

*Lutheran reactions*⁸³

Four Lutheran sources have been selected for analysis: *Lehre und Wehre, Der Lutheraner*, a sermon by C. F. W. Walther on Matthew 16:13-20, and an article from the *Quarterly Review of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*. These sources had varied audiences, from laymen to pastors and theologians. In addition, they covered the spectrum of German and English-speaking Lutherans in America in the nineteenth century.

Lehre und Wehre was the monthly theological journal of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod's⁸⁴ Concordia Seminary in St. Louis.

Der Lutheraner was the semimonthly newspaper of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. Its audience was primarily lay people.

The sermon by C. F. W. Walther⁸⁵ on Matthew 16:13-20 was given at the Missouri Synod convention in the summer of 1870. It was chosen for its timeliness.

Quarterly Review of the Evangelical Lutheran Church was the theological journal of the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg. This was a seminary of the General Synod.⁸⁶ *Quarterly Review* was a new publication in 1870 and its readers were primarily English-speaking Lutherans on the East Coast.

Lehre und Wehre

The reaction of *Lehre und Wehre* tended to focus on the historical aspect of the definition, especially the opposition as presented by Döllinger. In two articles in successive months, both entitled, "Zur Geschichte des römischen Concils,"⁸⁷ the author⁸⁸ showed a familiarity with the issues and the arguments from the opposition. The April article summarized Döllinger's career, influence, and the support he enjoyed in Germany. It speculated that he was "Janus" and reprinted a

⁸³The challenge with evaluating Lutheran writings in the nineteenth century is that most are still in German, even in America. Since my German skills are rusty, I am grateful for the translating assistance of Dr. Mark Lotito and Christopher Ewings.

⁸⁴The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, headquartered in St. Louis, was founded in 1847 and made up primarily of German-speaking immigrants. It was the largest American Lutheran church body at the time.

⁸⁵C. F. W. Walther (1811–1887) was the first president of the Missouri Synod and longtime president and professor of Concordia Seminary in St. Louis.

⁸⁶The General Synod was primarily an East Coast federation of various Lutheran church bodies, founded in 1820.

⁸⁷"Zur Geschichte des römischen Concils," ["Concerning the History of the Roman Council"] *Lehre und Wehre* 16, no. 4 (April, 1870), 106-113. "Zur Geschichte des römischen Concils," *Lehre und Wehre* 16, no. 5 (May, 1870), 147-8.

⁸⁸Most likely Walther, since it is signed "W."

portion of his historical arguments against papal infallibility. The May article briefly spoke of the continuing opposition coming from Döllinger and the pressure he was under to keep silent. The article then reprinted a portion of the decree under discussion.⁸⁹

In a July article,⁹⁰ *Lehre und Wehre* reprinted the May 10 version of the Constitution *De Fide* so their readers would know what was being discussed. The article also reprinted some of the arguments being raised by various German newspapers, attempting to show the opposition and debate occurring around the world regarding the definition of papal infallibility.

In October, *Lehre und Wehre* reprinted an article by a Pastor Wagner from Silesia.⁹¹ This article repeated the usual Lutheran argument against the papacy from an historical perspective, echoing the Lutheran Confessions.⁹² He wrote against a new revisionist history book by a Professor Kurtz, which tried to cast the Gregorian reforms in a positive light. In contrast, Pastor Wagner pointed out that the conflict between Pope Gregory VII and Henry IV was a usurping of temporal authority on the part of the papacy. He mentioned Pope Innocent III's attempts to subject all temporal power to the papacy. He revisited the selling of the papacy and church offices under Pope Benedict IX, among others. He opined that the desire of the papacy was that all nations of Europe should be brought into one state with unity bound around the papacy.

A final article in *Lehre und Wehre* looked at a proposed Lutheran-Catholic union in Germany under a state church.⁹³ The author resisted this idea and again pointed out the reason: the papacy is the

⁸⁹“Zur Geschichte des römischen Concils,” *Lehre und Wehre* 16, no. 5 (May, 1870), 147-8.

⁹⁰“Zur Geschichte des vaticanischen Concils,” *Lehre und Wehre* 16, no. 7 (July, 1870), 209-216.

⁹¹A. Wagner, “Wie urtheilen die Lehrer der lutherischen Kirche im 19ten Jahrhundert über den Antichrist; nachgewiesen am Prof. Kurtz in Dorpat,” [“How the Teaching of the Lutheran Church in the 19th century about the Antichrist Is Expressed; Over Against Professor Kurtz at Dorpat”] *Lehre und Wehre* 16, no. 10 (October, 1870), 289-304.

⁹²In the Smalcald Articles, Luther reviewed statements of some church fathers, notably Jerome, and reviewed examples from history, especially the Council of Constance. He then concluded: “This business shows overwhelmingly that he is the true end-times Antichrist, who has raised himself over and set himself against Christ, because the pope will not let Christians be saved without his authority (which amounts to nothing, since it is not ordered or commanded by God). This is precisely what St. Paul calls ‘setting oneself over God and against God’” (Kolb and Wengert, 309; Smalcald Articles, Part II, Article IV:10-11).

⁹³Sihler, “Das Papstthum und die Unionisten,” [“The Papacy and the Union”] *Lehre und Wehre* 17, no. 4 (April, 1871), 107-112.

Antichrist.⁹⁴ Besides reciting the usual suspects in papal history (Boniface VIII and Innocent III), he also pointed to more recent historical developments as his proof, including the definition of papal infallibility by Pius IX. His conclusion was that any kind of Lutheran-Catholic union would be incompatible with the gospel.

Der Lutheraner

Der Lutheraner first dealt with the council in its 15 April 1870 issue, giving a rather sharp reply to Pius IX's invitation to Protestants to attend the council.⁹⁵ Their "answer" centered around one of Jesus' answers when he was tempted by Satan in the wilderness. "Our answer, you Roman Pope, to your invitation is this: 'Get away from us, Satan, for it stands written: "Worship the Lord your God and serve Him only.'" And we say as much: whoever doesn't agree with us in this answer and doesn't confess the same with us is an enemy of Jesus Christ."⁹⁶ The authors gave this answer because they saw the papacy doing the devil's work of turning people away from Christ alone to Christ plus their own merits or Christ plus the intercession of the saints. They also made reference to Paul's words in 2 Thessalonians 2,⁹⁷ equating the papacy with the "man of lawlessness," or the Antichrist.

⁹⁴The traditional Lutheran confession that the papacy is the Antichrist is based on Paul's words in 2 Thessaalonians 2:1-12 describing "the man of lawlessness." Lutherans view the papacy as the Antichrist (meaning "in place of Christ") because the Pope in Rome has declared himself to be the head of the Church on earth, demands obedience, and undermines the teaching of justification by grace through faith.

⁹⁵Johann Moll and F. Schumann, "Unsere Antwort auf die alle Protestanten vom Papst ergangene Einladung zu seinem Concil," ["Our Answer to the Invitation from the Pope to All the Protestants to His Council"] *Der Lutheraner* 26, no. 16 (15 April 1870), 123.

⁹⁶Ibid, 123. Translation by Christopher Ewings.

⁹⁷"Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers, not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by some prophecy, report or letter supposed to have come from us, saying that the day of the Lord has already come. Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God. Don't you remember that when I was with you I used to tell you these things? And now you know what is holding him back, so that he may be revealed at the proper time. For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but the one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming. The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness." (2 Thessalonians 2:1-12)

Just so that no one thinks that this is our own private opinion, Paul talks about this very thing. The Antichrist, the Pope, does the work of Satan. He curses the Gospel, makes new articles of faith, shames the most holy Sacraments, strangles the little sheep of Christ wherever he can battle them, calls himself the true Christ since he calls himself the Way, the Truth and the Life, etc.⁹⁸

They concluded with a little sarcasm. "Most Holy Father in Rome, we apologize that this answer didn't get to you earlier."⁹⁹

The very next issue (1 May 1870) had two articles pertaining to the council. The first¹⁰⁰ presented some of the popular rumors about the Jesuit influence on the definition, mentioning that this was Döllinger's opinion as expressed by "Janus." The article especially looked at three points in *The Syllabus of Errors* rumored to be brought before the council. The first dealt with the papacy's use of force. "The Church is an institution of compulsion and can also punish with blows, dungeons, gallows and pyres. The Inquisition is right."¹⁰¹ The author made the claim that the pope might look pious and religious, but he has the same spirit as the Jesuits in their Inquisition. The second addressed the place of Protestants in the Christian world. "The Protestants should not be allowed to have the same political rights as the Catholics; it should not be permitted for the Protestant opposition to carry out their worship freely."¹⁰² This was an embellishment of what *The Syllabus* said, but not by much. *The Syllabus* condemned: "Protestantism is nothing more than another form of the same true Christian religion, in which form it is given to please God equally as in the Catholic Church."¹⁰³ The author pointed out that "Janus" wrote about the Jesuits' use of force to suppress Protestants. The third spoke to the political issue. "The present, liberal constitutions of the State must be overturned."¹⁰⁴ The article quoted *The Syllabus* directly: "These ones find themselves in a damnable error, maintaining that it is possible for the Pope to be reconciled with progress, liberalism and the new civilization."¹⁰⁵ The author then wrote that "Janus" said that

⁹⁸Moll and Schumann, 123.

⁹⁹Ibid.

¹⁰⁰"Was selbst römische Katholiken von den jesuitischen Zwecken des 'Concils' sagen," ["What the Roman Catholics Themselves Say about the Jesuit Purpose of the 'Council'"] *Der Lutheraner*, 26, no. 17 (1 May 1870), 129-131.

¹⁰¹Ibid, 129.

¹⁰²Ibid, 130.

¹⁰³"The Syllabus of Errors," accessed 22 November 2011, <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Pius09/p9syll.htm>

¹⁰⁴Was selbst römische Katholiken von den jesuitischen Zwecken des 'Concils' sagen," 130.

¹⁰⁵Ibid.

the Roman hierarchy hates and fears free governments, especially the Protestant-influenced state in America. The Jesuit teaching demands an oath of obedience to an infallible pope over every other authority.

The second article in this issue was a history lesson of encouragement for Lutherans.¹⁰⁶ The article went back to 1737, when a newly crowned prince of Württemberg, a south central German state, had converted from Lutheranism to Catholicism. The principle of “cuius regio, eius religio”¹⁰⁷ was still in effect, so this meant that the entire territory would become Catholic, if the prince so desired. In this case, the prince so desired. As the history unfolded, the Lutherans of Württemberg prayed for deliverance. They celebrated Holy Communion for spiritual strength. They pleaded with the prince for the preservation of their faith. He responded with threats of bloodshed and vowed that no Lutheran church would remain. He died of a stroke and was replaced by a Lutheran prince. The moral was that God answers the prayers of his people for victories over their devilish enemies: “One little word can fell him.”¹⁰⁸

Der Lutheraner reacted in the 15 June 1870 issue with a little polemical article reminding their readers that the pope forbids people to read the Bible.¹⁰⁹ The article gave a history lesson on past papal pronouncements against lay people reading the Bible and compared that with *The Syllabus of Error's* condemnation of Bible societies.

In the July and August issues, instead of responding directly to the happening of the council, *Der Lutheraner* reprinted a sermon of Martin Luther on Matthew 16:13-20.¹¹⁰ In great detail, Luther gave his interpretation of these verses, upon which the Catholic Church builds the claim for papal primacy and infallibility. Luther preached that when Jesus said, “You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church,” he meant the rock of the confession of faith Peter had just given. “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” In other words, the church is built on infallible, holy Christ, not the fallible, sinful Peter.

¹⁰⁶Schmitt, F. W., “Wir einst der Herr Christus dass liebe Württemberger Land in grosser Gefahr vor dem Pabstthum mächtig beschützt hat,” [“How the Lord Christ Once Mightily Protected the Dear Württemberg Land from the Papacy”] *Der Lutheraner* 26, no. 17 (1 May 1870), 131-134.

¹⁰⁷The principle governing church/state relations in the Holy Roman Empire, first established at the Religious Peace of Augsburg, 1555: “whose rule, his religion.” In other words, the legal religion of the territory followed the religion of the ruler.

¹⁰⁸A line from Martin Luther's famous hymn, “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God.”

¹⁰⁹“Warum verbietet das Pabsttum die Bibel?” [“Why Does the Papacy Forbid the Bible?”] *Der Lutheraner* 26, no. 20 (15 June 1870), 155-6.

¹¹⁰“Du bist Petrus, und auf diesen Felsen will ich bauen meine Gemeine. Matth. 16:13-20,” [“You Are Peter, and on This Rock I Will Build My Church”] *Der Lutheraner* 26, no. 21-24 (July 1, 15, August 1, 15, 1870).

After the definition, *Der Lutheraner* took up the topic by publishing a review of “Janus’” “The Pope and the Council.”¹¹¹ While the reviewer applauded “Janus” (who he suspected was Döllinger) for his courage to stand against the Roman hierarchy and his thorough historical treatment, he faults “Janus” for his desire to merely reform the papacy, rather than leave the Roman church and find true peace and comfort in Lutheranism.

One final response in *Der Lutheraner* was also in the 1 September issue. It took the form of a polemical, satirical poem.¹¹² The poet reflected the general view that the Jesuits were behind the push for the definition.

The Church cries, the world laughs—
You were entrusted with the pastoral office
So that you would pay attention to God’s Word
To enlighten the erring.
But, oh! You allowed yourselves to be captured
By the snakes, by the Jesuits.¹¹³

The satire is seen

Say, has the Pope really never made a mistake?
Read world history!
It will be shown to you on every page
That he only espouses lies and deception,
And his entire power is grounded upon
Lies which he freshly preaches.¹¹⁴

The poet wrote that the biggest “sin” of the pope is his denial and suppression of God’s grace, which Luther brought back to light. The poem concluded with words of warning for the council.

Woe to you! That you so openly
Mock the holy Word of God!
Woe to you! That you have crowned
As infallible the greatest blasphemer of God!
Woe to you! That you have protected his kingdom
And have strengthened it with new liars!
Woe to you! With contemptible flattering
You have prayed to the Beast of the Abyss!
Indeed, there is soon a council coming
Before which all of you must tread,

¹¹¹“Das Papst und das Concil von Janus,” [“The Pope and the Council by Janus”] *Der Lutheraner* 27, no. 1 and 2 (1 and 15 September 1870).

¹¹²“An das Concil,” “To the Council”] *Der Lutheraner* 27, no. 1 (1 September 1870), 1. Translation by Christopher Ewings.

¹¹³Ibid.

¹¹⁴Ibid.

When Christ will damn to the flames of hell
The Antichrist.¹¹⁵

C. F. W. Walther's Sermon

C. F. W. Walther echoed Luther's sermon in a timely way in his sermon to the Missouri Synod convention in the summer of 1870.¹¹⁶ Walther showed that his sermon text was chosen with the definition of papal infallibility in mind with his sermon introduction.

In our days, the Antichrist in Rome is again lifting up his head on high. He of whom it is prophesied "He was given the key to the shaft of the bottomless pit. He opened the shaft of the bottomless pit, and from the shaft rose smoke like the smoke of a great furnace, and the sun and the air were darkened with the smoke from the shaft" [Revelation 9:1-2]—he now again, publicly and solemnly, before the face of all Christendom, claims in satanic impudence that he alone possesses originally the Keys of the kingdom of heaven and that therefore from him alone the power devolves upon the Church. Now, therefore—if ever—undoubtedly is the time for us Lutheran Christians to recall the answer that our Church, the Church of the Reformation, gives to the question "Who on earth is in truth the original possessor of the Keys of the Kingdom of heaven?" and to compare again this answer with the Word of God, which alone is infallible.¹¹⁷

The body of his sermon then answered the question posed in his introduction. With a careful exegetical examination of Matthew 16:13-20, Walther arrived at the conclusion that "the doctrine of our Church, that the Keys of the kingdom of heaven are given originally neither to Peter, nor to any ministerial person, but to the entire Church of believers is true."¹¹⁸ The second part of his sermon examined the importance of this Lutheran doctrine. He looked at it from a negative viewpoint. If the Keys are not given to the entire Church of believers, then people can never be sure if they have the Word, baptism, or Lord's Supper. If the Keys are only given to Peter or other ministerial persons, then the logical end-result is what happened at the council: "The anti-Christian presumption that the pretended supreme bishop, with his so-called high clergy is by Christ Himself appointed the infallible master of the Christians' faith and the sovereign ruler of all Christendom."¹¹⁹ Walther's concluding exhortation was also a response to the definition.

¹¹⁵Ibid.

¹¹⁶Walther, C. F. W., "The Keys Are Given to the Church of Believers: Sermon on Matthew 16:13-19," in *At Home in the House of My Fathers*, edited by Matthew C. Harrison, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009, 183-192.

¹¹⁷Walther, 184.

¹¹⁸Ibid, 189.

¹¹⁹Ibid, 191.

Now, therefore, when the Antichrist again roars as a lion in order to frighten the sheep of Christ and to drive them into his den, let us hold fast the precious treasure of this doctrine, defend it valiantly against all attacks from without and from within, and rather yield up everything, tranquility, peace, friendship, favor, honor, good reputation—in short, rather lay down our life and property—than deliver up even an iota of this doctrine.¹²⁰

Walther was preaching to the representatives of his church body, both pastors and lay people. They were gathered to review the work of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and make decisions on what ministry and mission work to carry out in the future. Walther's timely sermon was intended to encourage his church body to continue faithfully and diligently confessing Lutheran doctrine, especially since many Missouri Synod congregations were in towns with high Catholic populations.¹²¹

Quarterly Review of the Evangelical Lutheran Church

The *Quarterly Review of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* had one article dealing specifically with the council¹²² and a later article alluding to it.¹²³ The initial article began by offering the opinion that the council was called because the papacy was threatened by modern thinking, liberal government, and the loss of temporal power. The article claimed that the council had been stacked in favor of the definition and that those who opposed had really not been convinced because so many left before the final vote.¹²⁴ The majority of the article is a reprint of *Pastor Aeternus*, with Latin and English side by side. The article then pointed to Döllinger as an example of how not all Catholics have acquiesced to the definition. After giving a brief biography, the article cites his letter of 28 March 1871 to Archbishop Scherr of Munich is reprinted. In that letter, Döllinger repeated many of his arguments against papal infallibility and refused to accept the definition. The article concluded that “the pretense of Infallibility is too silly to be received.”¹²⁵ It was seen as a further demonstration of the disunity and weakness in the Catholic Church.

¹²⁰Ibid, 192.

¹²¹The Missouri Synod was concentrated in the Midwest states of Missouri, Wisconsin, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio and Michigan where many Catholic immigrants, especially of German descent, had also settled.

¹²²“Papal Infallibility,” *Quarterly Review of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* 1, no. 3 (October, 1871), 585-620.

¹²³“Protestant Infallibility,” *Quarterly Review of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, 2, no. 1 (April, 1872), 161-179.

¹²⁴Smylie also noted this (468).

¹²⁵“Papal Infallibility,” 620.

Six months later, the *Quarterly Review* ran an article attacking the eastern conservative Lutherans, under the leadership of Charles Porterfield Krauth.¹²⁶ The author saw Krauth replacing the papacy with the Augsburg Confession as a kind of infallible interpreter of Scripture and church doctrine. He opined that Krauth's reliance on the Augsburg Confession was a step backward toward Rome, rather than a step forward in the interpretation and confession of Scripture in the modern world.¹²⁷

Analysis of Reactions

It is clear, when evaluating and comparing the Protestant and Lutheran reactions, that both groups were aware of the debate over the definition. While they obviously were not privy to all of the internal discussions because of the lack of openness provided to the press corps at the council, the writings of Döllinger and other anti-infallibilists kept them informed of the fact that defining the doctrine of papal infallibility was not being supported by a unified front. Both groups took advantage of that in their writings. They highlighted the seeming lack of unity demonstrated by the supposedly one, united Roman Catholic Church. This is seen in the fact that almost every sample mentioned Döllinger and "Janus" and had some praise for his courageous stance.

To some extent, this misunderstands how Roman Catholics would view the debate and discussion over a doctrine such as papal infallibility. Spalding noted that a council means that there will be debate and discussion. That is how every council has been carried out, since the beginning of the New Testament Church.¹²⁸ He also delineated the extensive process which took place at the council before any vote was taken. In his opinion, nothing was spared to give this doctrine of papal infallibility a fair, honest and open hearing before a vote was taken. Then, he was careful to note that no one was forced to vote a certain way. Even those who abstained had the freedom to vote against the decree.¹²⁹ One can see how Spalding was appealing to the democratic nature of both his Catholic hearers and his potential American Protestant readers, as well as answering the Protestant, Lutheran and secu-

¹²⁶Charles Porterfield Krauth (1823–83) was professor at Lutheran Theological Seminary in Philadelphia and one of the founders of the General Council in 1867, an organization comprised of Lutheran church bodies which withdrew from the General Synod and promoted the Lutheran Confessions.

¹²⁷"Protestant Infallibility," 161.

¹²⁸Spalding, 211.

¹²⁹Ibid, 212 (footnote). Both Lutherans and Protestants pointed out that most of those who opposed the definition left town before the final vote was taken, so they would not have to vote against it.

lar criticisms that the definition had been rammed through. His implied conclusion is that, while there was much debate and discussion, the definition passed by an overwhelming majority and the one Roman Catholic Church remains united.

Yet the reaction of the *Quarterly Review of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* made a good point by referring to Döllinger's refusal to accept the definition. The fact that he was subsequently excommunicated demonstrates that there was still little tolerance for contrary viewpoints.

Both Protestants and Lutherans mirrored the pattern of historical arguments set by Döllinger, although the Lutherans followed this tack more than the Protestants. The Lutherans, in their historical arguments, really did not present anything new. These were the same historical arguments that dated back to the time of the Reformation. The council simply provided a new opportunity to bring these arguments to bear upon what they saw as further evidence that the papacy is the Antichrist. While both Hodge and the *AQCR* made limited use of historical arguments, these points did not lead them to a conclusion that the papacy is the Antichrist.

Spalding was aware of the historical arguments. In a lengthy footnote, he addressed the case of Pope Honorius I (Pope, 625–38), whose monothelite teaching¹³⁰ was condemned by the Council of Constantinople in 680. Protestants and Lutherans used Honorius as an example of how past popes have erred. Spalding offered an explanation. He also pointed to the continuity of the papacy in an effort to debunk the historical arguments. By and large, however, he ignored Lutheran references to Boniface VIII and Innocent III.

The Protestants made extensive use of political arguments against the definition. The Lutherans mentioned something of the issues in Europe (especially Germany). The Protestants speculated on the ramifications which the definition might have on the political situation in Europe (especially France and Italy). The Protestants seemed to have a greater awareness of the world situation in their responses and how the papacy fit into that situation. This included America. While both Protestant and Lutheran responses mentioned that the logical conclusion of the definition was detrimental to free governments, the Protestants relied more heavily on this political argument. This imitated the secular newspapers of the day, which saw the definition as opposed to the democratic liberalism which was sweeping Europe in the nineteenth century. This made sense since so many of the secular newspa-

¹³⁰Monothelitism taught that Christ only had one will, his divine will. Taken to its logical conclusion, this denies the two natures of Christ.

pers were owned and operated by at least nominal Protestants. The political argument fit a Protestant mindset, which has tended to have a stronger reliance on legislation to advance their viewpoint.¹³¹

Spalding showed his greatest awareness of the responses coming from outside the Catholic Church in the lengths he went to show that the definition of papal infallibility does not give Americans anything to fear. “No intention whatsoever is entertained, or even as much as thought of, to interfere with existing civil governments.”¹³² He then made the point that Roman Catholicism has always taught freedom for citizens and respected governments where “all are equally protected in their legitimate rights, all are equal before the law, and all are equally governed and are equally benefitted by the law.”¹³³ He wisely pointed out the difference between American democracy and the liberal democracies which were overtaking Europe to put into perspective and context *The Syllabus of Errors*’ condemnations regarding church-state relations.

It is clear that both Protestants and Lutherans exaggerated in some of their rhetoric regarding the political aspects of the definition. Protestants could not envision Catholics being loyal to both civil government and an infallible pope. They failed to make a distinction between church and state. Lutherans overstated their premise that the pope wanted Europe united under his rule.

Spalding, however, seemed to employ revisionist history when he made the claim that “the theory of liberty was, in substance, laid down by the Catholic schoolmen of the Middle Ages.”¹³⁴ That this is revisionist history can be seen from the example of “heretics” like John Hus (1369–1415) burned at the stake and the persecution carried out against Protestants and Lutherans in Europe, especially in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The history lesson in *Der Lutheraner* showed how mindful Lutherans in particular were of the hardships their ancestors endured at the hands of Catholic persecution.

Instead of political arguments, Lutherans relied more extensively on the theological arguments. While Hodge¹³⁵ gave scriptural reasons for opposing the papacy and the definition of papal infallibility, only the Lutherans systematically attacked the scriptural basis for the papacy in an exegetical way. The reprinting of Luther’s sermon on

¹³¹See Calvin and his rule of Geneva, as well as the “blue laws” which used to be prevalent in towns with a heavily Reformed influence.

¹³²Spalding, 231.

¹³³Ibid, 233.

¹³⁴Ibid.

¹³⁵Smylie pointed out that Philip Schaff also addressed the issue of papal authority and infallibility from a scriptural and theological viewpoint.

Matthew 16:13-20 and Walther's sermon on the same text are evidence of this method. Again, this fit the "sola scriptura" mindset of Lutheranism and the desire to return to the biblical authority for answers to doctrinal questions.

Spalding emphasized the scriptural support for the primacy, power and infallibility of the Church and pope. He cited pertinent Bible passages.¹³⁶ But he never really addressed the scriptural issues raised by Lutherans, especially concerning Matthew 16. Lutherans point out that Peter is "petros" in Greek, which means "stone or rock." But Jesus said that he would build his church on this "petra," which means "rocky ledge or cliff." Peter had just made the confession that Jesus is "the Christ, the Son of the living God."¹³⁷ That confession of the faith is the "petra," the solid, rock-like foundation of the Church. In other words, Lutherans point out that the Church is built on the Gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God and Savior. They go back to the doctrine of justification by faith because faith is grounded alone in Christ. For Lutherans, to take this away is to take away the reason for the Church's existence. Spalding did not address these Lutheran concerns. The Protestants did not go into the same exegetical detail in their reactions.

One should also note the use of satire and sarcasm, especially on the part of the Lutherans. While it may mask a certain feeling of inferiority in the face of the vastness of Rome, there is also a fearless confidence expressed. The Lutherans—especially the German-speaking Lutherans of the Missouri Synod—knew what they believed. They knew that their beliefs were centered on the Bible. So they were not afraid to make those beliefs known.

In summary, it is interesting to note that, while the Lutheran and Protestant reactions are not entirely consistent with one another, they all are consistent with arguments from the past. It is as though the disagreements which had been raging since the Reformation were given a new context with the First Vatican Council. The church-state situation in America, and the changing political climate in Europe, gave different nuances to the political arguments. The definition of papal infallibility provided a new focus for the arguments. But almost all of them were anticipated by Spalding because they were the same arguments that had been used in the polemical battles of the previous three hundred years. The only exception would be the Lutheran arguments from Scripture which Spalding addressed only in a cursory fashion.

¹³⁶Spalding, 218.

¹³⁷Matthew 16:16.

Conclusion

We are over 140 years removed from the First Vatican Council. Times have changed. Lutherans¹³⁸ and Catholics have been dialoguing over the issues of authority in the church and the papacy for almost forty years, even coming to some agreement on these doctrines.¹³⁹ Some Lutherans have moved toward a belief in apostolic succession. Many Protestants, like the Episcopal/Anglican Church, have much friendlier relations with Rome. The polemics, either from Protestants and Lutherans against Catholics or vice versa, are less frequent and more subdued than in an earlier age. The ecumenical movement and Vatican II have seen to that. Gone are the days when Catholics and Lutherans, or Catholics and Protestants, were intense rivals.¹⁴⁰

Yet, in some ways, times have not changed. The Michelle Bachman case is an example. Mark Schroeder, the president of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS), publicly affirmed his church's confession that the papacy is the Antichrist, repeating the same arguments as Martin Luther and the Lutheran Confessions. He was also quick to point out that this does not mean that WELS hates Catholics:

While WELS holds to this historic position, it is wrong and dishonest to portray this belief as stemming from anti-Catholic bigotry. We hold no animosity toward Catholic Christians. We respect the right of people to hold beliefs different from ours, even as we point out the error.

Furthermore, we rejoice that in the Roman Catholic Church there are many people who hold to a saving faith in Jesus Christ as their Savior. Identifying errors in doctrine is actually an expression of love; remaining silent or glossing over doctrinal differences would express the opposite.¹⁴¹

While many churches, both Protestant and Lutheran, have softened their doctrinal stance, there are some Lutherans who continue the historical polemical arguments from a distinctly Lutheran theological point of view. Like Missouri Synod Lutherans of the nineteenth century, there are still some Lutherans who stand on their confession, are

¹³⁸From America, Lutherans who eventually formed the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) have been involved in doctrinal dialogue with Rome on a variety of subjects.

¹³⁹See P. C. Empie, et al., ed., *Teaching Authority and Infallibility in the Church: Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue VI* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1978).

¹⁴⁰Many smaller Midwestern communities had sharp divides along religious lines, especially between Catholics and Lutherans. There were serious ramifications if a Catholic and a Lutheran wanted to get married.

¹⁴¹Mark Schroeder, "WELS and Bachman are not anti-Catholic," *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, 19 July 2011. See also Mollie Ziegler Hemingway, "Michelle Bachman and the Pope," *The Wall Street Journal*, 22 July 2011. Hemingway is a member of the LCMS.

not afraid to state their convictions, and are convinced that their confession is based on Scripture.

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