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Defending Roman Loyalties and Republican Values: The 1848 Italian Revolution in American Catholic Apologetics

SANDRA YOCUM MIZE

Pius IX's categorical rejection of an Italian republic from 1848 to his death in 1878 created a daunting task for American Catholic apologists, who wanted to defend their besieged leader without fueling anti-Catholic nationalism.¹ The responses, even from those who had only minimally defended the papacy's temporal power prior to 1848, exceeded predictable expressions of sympathy. Pius IX's long suffering became the prism through which a beleaguered American Catholic community viewed the whole spectrum of its own experiences of hope and frustration in securing influence in an often hostile society.

The apologists' rhetoric depicted a world in which an embattled Catholicism stood firm and triumphed. The papacy signified Catholicism's providential protection against all enemies and its innate inclination to defend republican values in the midst of the battle. Christ's promise that "the gates of hell shall not prevail" against the Church built upon the Petrine rock (Mt. 18:16) served as the anchor that firmly secured their hope in the Catholic tradition. America's republican principles, especially separation of church and state and religious liberty, served as the political framework for justifying the pontiff's temporal prerogatives. The apologists thus intertwined the familiar religious rhetoric with the nation's popular political rhetoric. What emerges is the pope as a larger-than-life figure who offers American Catholics a locus for their ecclesial loyalty as persecuted papists and a rallying point for their republican fervor as justice-seeking United States citizens.

Five prominent American Catholic apologists provide the views considered. Their observations were made in various public forums including lectures, sermons, newspaper editorials, and more formal theological debates. These interpreters of the papacy's predicament had few serious Catholic competitors for the faithful's attention. Francis P. Kenrick (1796–1863), bishop of Philadelphia and archbishop of Baltimore, wrote a treatise on papal primacy in 1838 which he revised three times. The last two revisions

1. Roger Aubert, *The Christian Centuries*. Vol. 5, *The Church in a Secularized Society*, (New York, 1975), pp. 57–65, 83–90, 248–254.

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reflect the papal states crisis. He also authored a national pastoral (1849) that discussed, among other things, Pius IX's predicament.² John Hughes (1797–1864), bishop and later archbishop of New York, addressed the issue with his inimitable rhetorical flair in sermons, public lectures, and newspaper articles.³ Orestes Brownson (1803–1876), a convert and well-known lay journalist, expressed his often controversial views in the *Brownson Quarterly Review* and later the *Catholic World*.⁴ Martin J. Spalding (1810–1872), bishop of Louisville and archbishop of Baltimore, used essays, public lectures, and national pastorals to protest the Italian rebels.⁵ Isaac T. Hecker (1819–1888), a convert and founder of the Paulist Fathers, used his community's periodical, *Catholic World*, to discuss the situation's providential import.⁶

1.

The foreigners who flooded urban centers in the mid-nineteenth century (c. 1830–1888) evoked fear of antirepublican conspiracies among “native Americans” as they proudly identified themselves.⁷ Roman Catholics, whether native-born or immigrant, found themselves automatically classified as conspirators undeserving of American citizenship because they were “papists.” The papacy symbolized the threatening spectre of the Old World where superstition subverted enlightenment, authoritarianism squelched liberty, and archaic practices stifled progress. The nineteenth-century American Catholic apologists challenged the nativists' characterizations. Their works lauded the pope as the one who looked after his people's welfare in this world as well as the next. His universal vigilance made him the Western world's foremost champion of civil liberty and preeminent guardian of civilized progress. American Catholic allegiance, the apologists insisted, was to this spiritual leader not to an Italian prince. The pontiff's moral authority always remained their primary focus.⁸

2. Francis P. Kenrick, *The Primacy of the Apostolic See and the Authority of General Councils Vindicated* (Philadelphia, 1838); *The Primacy of the Apostolic See Vindicated* (Philadelphia, 1845); 3rd rev. ed. (New York, 1848); 4th rev. ed. (Baltimore, 1855). These are found in *Pastoral Letters of the American Hierarchy, 1792–1970*, ed. Hugh J. Nolan (Huntington, Ind., 1971), pp. 121–126. See also pp. 115–120.

3. All Hughes citations unless otherwise noted are from *Complete Works of the Most Rev. John Hughes, D.D.*, 2 vols., Lawrence Kehoe, ed. (New York, 1864).

4. All Brownson citations unless otherwise noted are from Henry F. Brownson, ed., *The Works of Orestes Brownson*, 20 vols. (Detroit, 1882–1907).

5. Martin J. Spalding, *General Evidences of Catholicity*, (Louisville, 1847); 6th ed. (Baltimore, 1876). *Miscellanea*, 2 vols. (Louisville, 1852). *Pastoral Letter [on] the Syllabus of Errors Condemned* (Baltimore, 1865). *Lecture . . . on the Temporal Power of the Pope and the Vatican Council*; (Philadelphia, 1870).

6. See also Isaac T. Hecker, *The Church and the Age* (New York, 1870).

7. See Ray Allen Billington, *The Protestant Crusade 1800–1860* (New York, 1938).

8. See Kenrick's “Pastoral Letter (1846) (6th Provincial Council of Baltimore),” in Nolan, *Pastoral Letters of the American Hierarchy*, p. 117; Brownson, “Native Americanism,”

A newly elected Pius IX strained the credibility of the apologists' arguments about the papacy's singular commitment to spiritual concerns. In 1846, Western countries, including the United States, had heralded "the liberal pope" who was going to reform his temporal government according to modern constitutional principles. His grant of amnesty to the Roman states' political prisoners became proof of his progressive outlook. The 1848 revolution, however, quickly ended illusions of a papally blessed Italian republic. Depending upon one's allegiance, the pope was either a despot caught by his own republican ploy or a noble leader betrayed in his efforts "to conciliate the truths of religion with the best interests of human liberty."⁹

John Hughes and Francis P. Kenrick, like most American Catholic apologists prior to 1848, had minimized the significance of the pontiff's territorial sovereignty in their public debates. Kenrick, for instance, in his 1845 edition of the *Primacy*, admitted to controversy concerning the "Donation of Constantine." He wrote "[I]t was long believed that Constantine bestowed ample possessions on the Bishop of Rome." In the subsequent revision of the *Primacy*, Kenrick omitted all questions about the emperor's generosity when he declared "[I]t is certain that the Emperor Constantine bestowed large possessions on the Bishop of Rome."¹⁰ In the 1845 edition, he concluded the chapter with the sobering observation that "there is no divine guarantee that it [the temporal power] will continue." His later revision recalled God's intervention when Pius VII's imprisonment had "left little human hope that the States of the Church would be restored, or that the See itself could continue."¹¹ Kenrick's editing indicates an important shift in his public discourse on the sensitive issue of the papacy's temporal power. The papal states' imminent demise allowed no room for ambiguity in Kenrick's defense of its legitimacy as a human institution under Providence's protection. The changes in Hughes' rhetoric before and after the 1848 revolution is even more striking. In his 1842 response to some anti-Catholic literature, Hughes adopted a matter-of-fact tone. "I will merely state that the Pope's being a temporal prince is, in the mind of Catholics, an accident, and that as a temporal prince they look upon him as any other of the rulers of the earth."¹² In his 7 January 1849 sermon, "The Present Position of Pius IX," Hughes declared that "something providential in the force of circumstances" propelled reluctant popes "little by little, to assume the sovereignty of a small

Brownson Quarterly Review (hereafter BQR) 10:27 (1845), Hughes, "The Relation between the Civil and Religious Duties of the Catholic Citizen," 2 (27 June 1856) 144–145, 148, Spalding, *Miscellanea*, pp. xli–xlv, Hecker, "The Outlook in Italy," *Catholic World* (hereafter CW) 26 (Oct., 1877) 15–16.

9 Hughes, "The Present Position of Pius IX" (7 Jan., 1849), 2:12. Compare with Kenrick, *Primacy*, 1855 ed., p. 254, Spalding, *Miscellanea*, 2:3 585, 592, Brownson, 16:172–173.

10 Kenrick, 1845 ed., p. 219, 1855 ed., p. 256.

11 Kenrick, 1845 ed., p. 229, 1855 ed., p. 268.

12 Hughes, "Letter to David Hale, Esq.," (14 Nov. 1842), 1:246.

province in the Italian Peninsula”¹³ Hughes had moved from dismissing papal political power as an accident of human history to asserting its role in some unfolding providential plan

A tentativeness, consistent with the American Catholic focus upon the papacy’s distinctly spiritual character, still remained in John Hughes’s and Francis Kenrick’s arguments. Even amidst appeals to providential sanctions of the temporal power, they kept their audiences mindful that the Supreme Pontiff would continue to exist even if the Italian prince disappeared forever. In the Seventh Provincial Council’s pastoral letter (1849), for example, Kenrick qualified his defense of Pius IX’s temporal sovereignty by noting that “the Kingdom of Christ is not of this world, and the successor of Peter has of divine right no temporal domain”¹⁴ Hughes, in his 1849 sermon, admitted that it is not necessary “for the Pope that he should be Sovereign,” but it is necessary “that he should be free, and if there is no other choice except between sovereign and vassal, then must he be a sovereign”¹⁵ For Hughes and the other four apologists, territorial sovereignty became a practical means to the religious freedom necessary for the pope to fulfill his divinely ordained mission within an international setting

The nativists viewed these appeals to the papacy’s need for spiritual independence with skepticism. In the 1830s, Samuel F. B. Morse and Lyman Beecher had outlined in pamphlet and sermon respectively a papal plot to take over the Mississippi Valley. The eclipse of Pius IX’s political power in 1848 provided, in some suspicious minds, the clear motive for implementing the papist infiltration.¹⁶ The preposterous idea even amused some American Catholics. In the essay, “Our ‘New’ American Literature,” Martin J. Spalding provided a caricature of the nativists’ tale: “The pope, not satisfied with imperial Rome and beautiful Italy, has cast a wistful glance at the teeming Valley of the Mississippi, which his followers are preparing for his inheritance.” He further demonstrated the plot’s absurdity by pointing out that the pontiff was “politically so weak that he cannot maintain himself in his temporal sovereignty over his insignificant States without foreign bayonets”¹⁷ The characterization of Pius IX as an inept political ruler bordered upon insult, but it corresponded with American Catholics’ insistence upon the papacy’s distinctively spiritual character. Catholicism’s ever expanding spiritual mission to wrest the world, including the United States, from Satan’s grasp provided the impetus for the apologists’ positive assertions concerning the

13 Hughes, 2 16

14 Nolan, *Pastoral Letters of the American Hierarchy*, p. 121

15 Hughes, 2 19

16 Samuel F. B. Morse, ‘A Foreign Conspiracy against the Liberties of the United States,’ *New York Observer* (1834); Lyman Beecher, *A Plea for the West* (1835). Sources cited in Billington, *The Protestant Crusade 1800–1860*, pp. 118–135

17 Spalding, *Miscellanea*, 2 3 736

papacy's past and current need for temporal sovereignty within a limited territory

2

The five apologists' justification of the pontiff's territorial rule clearly drew from familiar anti-Protestant rhetoric. The great apocalyptic battle against the anti-Christ to extend Christ's reign provided the broader context for understanding Pius IX's ordeal. In this popular literature, the pope emerged as a quasi-apocalyptic figure who leads Catholics in the struggle to establish God's kingdom of justice, liberty, and progress.¹⁸ Isaac Hecker, for example, identified "two fundamental movements in this world." The one that served Christ originated in and remained obedient to the Catholic church. All other movements were simply "rebellion against divine action."¹⁹ Brownson also wrote of a "general war of temporal and spiritual." He identified gnosticism, Manichaeism, absolute monarchy, and nationalism as particular manifestations of a singular malevolent power whose most hated enemies were the popes, the unfailing "assertors of the supremacy of the law of God, or of the moral order, and the defenders of the freedom and independence of religion."²⁰ The pope, as Christ's fearless vicar, remained the point of attack for those hoping to thwart God's reign.

Pius IX's humiliation at the hands of political liberals was one more major offensive by the demonic in its ultimately futile attempt to overpower the divine. The Holy Father might be, in Hughes's words, "the most conspicuous mark, for the powers of darkness," but the office was also the special recipient of God's unfailing protection. A particular pontiff "may be put aside, may be banished, may be put to death. But the pope, as such, is like his divine Author, in his official capacity, immortal, and shall never die until the consummation of the world."²¹ Hughes's words sought to inspire confidence among his listeners in Catholicism's inherent power against that evil which unleashes every attack against the church. The apologists, although they anticipated final vindication of the pontiff's providential protection at some future time, remained just as adamant about an ongoing divine dispensation that enabled the papacy to transcend the political crisis in the present. In the years following the 1848 fiasco, the apologists constantly identified for their

18 Sandra Yocum Mize. *The Papacy in Mid Nineteenth Century American Catholic Imagination*. (Ph D diss. Marquette University 1987)

19 Hecker. *The Political Crisis in France*. *CW* 25 (Aug 1877) 579

20 Brownson. *Luther and the Reformation*. *BQR* 10 (1855) 490–491. (See also pp 486–491.) Compare with Hughes 2–38. Spalding. *Miscellanea* 1:176 and Hecker. *An Exposition on the Church*. *CW* 21 (Apr 1875) 118

21 Hughes. *The Pope's Return to Rome* (sermon 13 May 1850) 2–32. Compare with Brownson. *Works* 10:383. Kenrick. *Primacy* 1845 ed. p 75. 1855 ed. pp 230–231. Spalding, *Evidences* pp 374–375

community the clear signs that Christ was keeping his promise. The gates of hell had not and would never prevail against Peter's successor.

Pius IX's 1850 return to Rome after his two year forced exile in Gaeta, according to Hughes, "brings out palpably before the world's eyes the evidence that the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth." God gave "the word of promise to His Church, and that word shall not fail."²² Even with the continued disintegration of Pius IX's territorial control, Kenrick still appealed to the unfailing promise but with a slightly different twist to his message. "No vicissitudes of the Roman States can affect that spiritual authority, which, going forth from the See of the fisherman, is felt even in the midst of its enemies."²³ Whether it be the papacy's overtly political triumph celebrated by Hughes in 1850 or the papacy's spiritual endurance despite political turmoil, the apologists asserted the reality of God's unfailing promise to Catholicism manifested in the perdurance of its earthly head.

Pius IX's promulgation of the Immaculate Conception on 8 December 1854, further justified unswerving confidence in the papacy's enduring spiritual authority. Hughes, in an 1855 Palm Sunday sermon, declared the Marian dogma to be proof "that *the Church is not dead* . . . that she lives and reigns and is conqueror." The archbishop who witnessed the ceremony drew his congregation into the victorious moment. "There sat the august successor of St. Peter, the head of that Church which had endured persecution and still triumphs; while the tempests now agitating the world, and the waves of persecution were wasting their harmless fury around the base of the rock."²⁴ Hughes told his congregation to regard their "uplifted palms . . . as a token of triumph, the celebration of victory." A people struggling amidst the Know-Nothings' (nativists') "waves of persecution" should take comfort in knowing that the papacy's victory was their own.

The 1864 promulgation of the Syllabus of Errors became one more occasion to speak of Pius IX's moral courage in the face of enemies. In his defense of the Syllabus, Hecker eulogized Pius. While "powerless to do physical harm to anyone," this pontiff stood "in the sole strength of his convictions." Hecker declared this "noble old man" to be "the most august and sublime figure the nineteenth century had witnessed."²⁵ This spiritual leader mirrored the American Catholic community's struggle to remain unyielding against the hostility of the dominant social forces.

The 1870 loss of Rome to rebel forces became another sign of the enduring freedom inherent in spiritual power. In "Protestant AntiChristian" (1873), Orestes Brownson praised Pius IX for "asserting his own independence and

22. Hughes, "The Pope's Return to Rome," 2:31.

23. Kenrick, *Primacy*, 1855 ed., p. 268.

24. Hughes, "Triumphs of the Catholic Church," 2: 238–239, 242.

25. Hecker, "The Outlook in Italy," *CW* 26 (Oct. 1877): 12–13. Compare with Brownson, 13: 178–179.

that of the church" by being a "prisoner in the Vatican," not a "slave or tool" of Europe's rulers.²⁶ Even with the situation at its worst, the apologists predicted not mere survival but triumph in liberty for the spiritual order. In Hecker's haughty words, "Let, then, attacks come from any quarter, the Catholic Church will stand with perfect faith upon this divine *Magna Carta* [Mt 16 18] of her Founder as upon the adamant rock."²⁷ Pius IX's refusal to accept the political reality of the end of the papal states was an act of moral fortitude that transcended a world gone awry.

"Papists," disdained by nativists for their Roman allegiance, had a distinct advantage over their enemies. Peter's successor was their "adamantine rock" to which they clung when attacks came from their own "quarter." In earlier reflections on the Know Nothings' persecution of Catholics in the 1850s, Brownson had made a similar promise. God "will protect us too, if we bind ourselves to Peter by our filial love and unreserved obedience."²⁸ All five apologists, in fact, used this image of "the rock" over and over again to convince their own community that only by maintaining their much maligned fealty to the pontiff would they be heirs to the promise "the gates of hell shall not prevail."

The Petrine office as depicted by these apologists existed in a realm best described by the familiar phrase, "in this world, but not of this world." By identifying Pius IX's survival as only one particular sign among many of the providential protection guaranteed the universal Catholic community, the apologists proclaimed not only the Holy See's invincibility but also their own certain triumph over persecution. Whether Irish, German, or American born, Catholics shared a common bond as "papists" who through an imaginative leap of faith knew their security rested on that invincible rock of Peter. The apologists augmented the hope-filled message by confirming the pontiff's spiritual freedom as a cause to be championed by those who champion liberty.

3

The apologists drew from other sources to convince Americans outside the fold of the papacy's right to govern the papal states. They argued for the legitimacy of papal rule on the basis of two familiar American standards: 1) the people's rights and duties relative to a legitimate government, and 2) the church's right to control its own property. In examining the historical data, all apologists found the establishment of the papal states to be perfectly defensible. Kenrick tied the principality's formation to a "spontaneous act of

26 Brownson *BQR* 18 (1873) 449

27 Hecker "The Outlook in Italy" p. 12. Compare with Hughes 2:13

28 Brownson "Luther and the Reformation" 10:488-499

a people redeemed from bondage”²⁹ Hughes, in his lecture, “The Popes and Their Temporal Power in the States of the Church,” enfolded this idea. A desperate people in central Italy “threw themselves upon the Sovereign Pontiff for that protection which they could not [sic] longer expect from any other nation”³⁰. The pope, far from being a despot, became the political savior given power by popular acclamation. The Catholic apologists, besides commenting on the ancient pontiffs’ yielding to the will of the people, also considered the papacy’s right to the land itself based on the question of the legitimate transfer of property from the emperor to the pontiff. According to Spalding, the imperial withdrawal from the West provided a purely legal justification for the papal assumption of temporal duties. He cited, with an air of expertise, “the axiom of human law more technical than religious *Bona derelicta sunt primi occupantis*—what is abandoned belongs to the first occupant”³¹. As portrayed in accounts of the later period, the West’s new temporal leaders, Pepin and later Charlemagne, reaffirmed the pope’s right to govern the small principality.³² The apologists claimed that nothing up to their own time had altered the papacy’s right to the land acquired over 1000 years earlier.

The apologists realized that their defense of the right to land was an issue quite separate from supporting the right to govern a people seeking independence. To mitigate the antirepublican appearance of the papacy’s rejection of a unified Italy, Pius IX’s defenders acknowledged the people’s right to self-determination but condemned the Italians’ use of force to achieve that end. Only the legitimate means that relied on a constitutional process would produce authentic liberty. Brownson, in a series of articles, provided a thoroughly American interpretation of the papal dilemma including sympathy for the people’s aspirations. He judged the papal government using the political theory of the social contract, that is, a government originating in the people’s consent to a particular form of rule. He, like the other apologists, acknowledged the pontiff’s “right to govern them [the Roman states] by a title than which none other can be firmer or more sacred. But the people of these states,” he noted, “are not the property of the church.” They deserve a just government with a sovereign who rules “according to their nature, for the common good.” Brownson admitted that to ignore the people’s right to determine its government meant defending “caesarism,” that is, political power coming directly from God to the ruler. His proposed solution in 1859 was “a federal union . . . under the perpetual presidency or moderatorship of the pope.” He later withdrew this proposal, since it contradicted Pius IX’s

29 Nolan, *Pastoral Letter of the American Hierarchy*, p. 121.

30 Hughes (1 July 1860), 2:66. Compare with Hughes, 2:16, 41–42.

31 Spalding, *Lecture on the Temporal Power*, p. 10.

32 Hughes, *Works*, 2:16. Spalding, *Lecture on Temporal Power*, pp. 12–13.

position His retraction did not suggest, however, that the pontiff objected in principle to a federal form of government arising from the people ³³

Brownson alone of the five apologists articulated the political theory behind a defense of the Roman people's sovereignty In an 1860 article, "Rights of the Temporal," that contained his retraction of the federal union proposal, Brownson set out "to vindicate the right of lay society and laymen" ³⁴ His argument was based upon a carefully wrought distinction between spiritual authority and temporal sovereignty He concluded that the papacy's temporal power, though convenient, was not essential to the integrity of papal spiritual authority and that a lay-run Italian government was a legitimate option Certain Brownson critics, ignoring the nuances of his position, denounced him as a rebel sympathizer and demanded that Cardinal Alessandro Barnabo, prefect of the *Propaganda Fide*, investigate the journalist's orthodoxy After correspondence with several clergymen including John Hughes, as well as Brownson, the Roman prelate determined that no retraction was necessary Aiding in his own defense, Brownson denounced the Italian unification movement's use of force as invalidating their cause He also voluntarily ceased writing on the issue in the *Brownson Quarterly Review* from 1862 until the journal's temporary end in 1864 ³⁵ In later articles in *Catholic World* and a revived *Brownson Quarterly Review* where he discussed the 1870 invasion of Rome, Brownson remained committed to his distinction between temporal and spiritual power but shifted his focus from lay rights in relation to the church to the church's rights in the face of a lay-controlled state ³⁶

Hecker, who advocated republican values, also empathized with "the natural desire for unity among the Italian people" even after the pontiff's Vatican "imprisonment," but he protested the means used to achieve this ideal In an 1877 essay, "The Outlook in Italy," he placed the blame upon leaders rather than on "the people" He chided "the religious, intelligent, and influential classes" for their failure to provide the movement with "proper and just means" for gaining unity ³⁷ Hecker appealed to an American confidence in "the people" as defenders of liberty He also counted on suspicion of foreign radicals as subverters of law and order

Spalding, in an 1870 lecture, criticized the liberal Italian leaders because

33 Brownson, "The Roman Question," *BQR* 18 (1859) 427 (on "the people") and 423–424 (on "federal government") Compare with Brownson, 12 369 and 373, 12 391 Compare with Kenrick, *Primacy*, p 264 Brownson, retraction in "Rights of the Temporal," *BQR* 12 (1860) 391

34 Brownson, *BQR* 12 (1860) 404

35 Ryan, Thomas R C PPS, *Orestes A Brownson Definitive Biography* (Huntington, Ind., 1976), pp 520–612

36 See "Sardinia and the Holy Father," *CW* 18 (June 1871) 432 and "European Politics," *BQR* 18 (1873) 509, 513–514

37 Hecker, *CW* 26 (Oct 1877) 1

"their idea of liberty is the very reverse of Americans' " It "excludes the essential elements of law and order " Definitive proof of these charges lay in their flaunting of fundamental constitutional principles the absolute right to legitimately owned private property and the separation of church and state Any legitimate solution to the Roman people's quest for unification had to take into account that the papal territory, because it served an international religious community, was church property with a relationship to the state that was without parallel In Hughes's words, "the States belong in a certain sense to all Catholics " Brownson called it the "old Catholic homestead " Hecker claimed the "religious institutions to be "the fruits of the piety and industry of Catholics of almost every country under the sun " ³⁸ So "the state" that should respect the papacy's rights was not a nation but the world

The apologists emphasized the universal connection, not simply to evoke sentimental piety, but to justify a practical response to the papacy's immediate needs These apologists made clear that the papacy's strength lay in the loyalty of the Catholic people rather than in the power of Catholic rulers They offered their community specific suggestions for grassroots demonstrations of spiritual allegiance They encouraged Catholics to pray for the pontiff's triumph, to protest his unjust treatment, to adhere faithfully to Catholic practices, and to support his temporal needs through voluntary contributions The apologists refused, however, to endorse any attempt to raise an army to settle the territorial dispute between the pope and the Italian rebels Prayer was the primary "weapon" employed in waging this spiritual battle The pope himself proclaimed five jubilees from 1846 to 1854 These proclamations pleaded the pontiff's cause through personal requests for prayers for special papal intentions The pope, thereby, enlisted every Catholic in a world-wide mobilization against his opponents, political and otherwise, who threatened his privilege and power He reciprocated by providing everyone who prayed for him with the spiritual remuneration of a plenary indulgence ³⁹

The American episcopacy had established Catholicism as a self-sufficient religious society through the laity's free offerings within their local jurisdictions The papacy could become self-sufficient within its global jurisdiction, through a world-wide practice of voluntarism Kenrick, Hughes, and Spalding supported diocesan collections for the pontiff's temporal needs ⁴⁰ Hughes was an especially strong advocate of voluntarism as a response to the pope's dilemma In an 1849 sermon lamenting Pius IX's exile, Hughes argued that territory was the best guarantee of the pontiff's independence He indicated

38 Hughes, *The Pope's Return to Rome*, 233 Brownson, *Christian Politics*, *BQR* 12 (1860) 347 Hecker, *Liberty and Independence of the Pope*, *CW* 35 (Apr 1882) 5

39 Spalding, *Pastoral Syllabus*, pp 3-4, 22 See also Hughes, 268

40 Nolan, *Pastoral Letters of the American Hierarchy*, pp 123 and 149

that the purpose of the collection was to assure the pontiff had his own sovereign territory, "even though he should occupy an island in the Mediterranean Sea a single square mile in extent." Hughes was willing to concede the loss of the papal states but not a propertyless, and in his mind, powerless church. Catholics in his diocese contributed almost six thousand dollars. Dioceses throughout the nation responded with monetary gifts.⁴¹

The vigor of Hughes' appeals caught the attention of Horace Greeley's newspaper. The *Tribune* reported that Hughes was engineering "the relief and support of Pius IX. [sic] in his present struggle against the Roman Republic"⁴² The prelate publicly refuted these anti-republican insinuations in two letters to the editor published in the *Courier and Enquirer*. The second letter identified donors not only as faithful Catholics but also as "freemen of America" who "refuse to allow the ministers of absolute courts to stamp, in the presence of Pius IX, the brow of true freedom."⁴³ Hughes's commentary elevated the collection to symbolic significance. For him, the collection indicated the American Catholics stand against despotism and for religious liberty.

The American-bred promotion of voluntarism inevitably led to a consideration of its correlative, separation of church and state. Despite its condemnation in the 1864 Syllabus of Errors, Hecker discreetly promoted some form of separation in an 1877 article. "The balm that will cure the present wound in Italy," he warned, "is not likely to be found in a closer alliance of the church with the actual state."⁴⁴ Brownson rejected "the separation of church and state, in the sense condemned by the syllabus," but he also found the former European arrangement to be "an embarrassment to the free and independent action of the church." The separation sought was political not moral. The church must be free from political control to be the moral guide desperately needed by the temporal sphere.

The apologists voiced an American sensibility that republican principles could solve the most complex of Europe's religio-political conflicts. Spalding, justifying the pope's territorial sovereignty shortly after the 1870 invasion of Rome, deliberately chose "an illustration familiar to all of us Americans." "In the great united states of Christendom, as in the United States of America, there should be a small independent territory set apart as the seat of the

41 Hughes, "The Present Position of Pius IX.," p. 20 "Hughes to Eccleston" (22 July 1849), Archdiocese of Baltimore Microfilm, (MABA Reel 16) in University of Notre Dame Archives. See also "Kenrick to Eccleston" (9 August 1849) in Archdiocese of Baltimore Records (CABA 2/34), also in the University of Notre Dame Archives. The file cites smaller amounts from Philadelphia (\$2743), Albany (\$140), and Detroit (\$360).

42 Hughes, 2:22. Emphasis in text.

43 Hughes, 2:26.

44 Hecker, "Outlook in Italy," p. 14.

general government—a sacred District of Columbia—independent of all State influence and control, where the visible executive head, with all the other branches and departments of the spiritual government, may freely conduct the general business of Christendom for the common good.” The archbishop’s use of the illustration exceeded simple analogy. He implied America’s dependency upon papal wisdom. America’s “wise and sagacious forefathers” were inspired to create an independent national capital by observing the church’s effective organization. Spalding’s assertions also exceeded claims of influence. As a “sacred District of Columbia,” the papacy’s principality was “the most necessary government in the world.”⁴⁵ America, like the rest of the world, needed a papacy free from the machinations of Old World politics to protect the common good. Hecker claimed that it was “in this age of electricity and rapid transit” that freedom for the Holy See necessarily involved “the interests and welfare of Catholics throughout the world.”⁴⁶ The papacy’s territorial sovereignty was to be a *cause celebre* for modernity.

The apologists’ impact on their audience is difficult to determine. A pamphlet describing receptions in Baltimore and Georgetown, when Martin Spalding returned from the Vatican Council (1870), provides some clues. Laity at both receptions read “resolutions and protests against the sacrilegious invasion of Rome and the papal states” and scarcely mentioned the declaration of papal infallibility. These remarks emphasized local and global unity. The preamble of the Baltimore resolution claimed that the more than fifty thousand assembled were unanimous in their protest. Georgetown students emphasized their oneness with the “TWO HUNDRED MILLION CATHOLIC HEARTS [sic]” who condemned the invasion. The laity’s objections echoed the apologists’ arguments from those denouncing the violation of rights to those proclaiming the territory’s parallel with Washington, D. C. Beyond these protests were assertions of victory not only for the pope, but for all Catholics. As one Georgetown speaker noted, these events are “but the misfortunes of an hour . . . [through which] the Church refined and purified by the fires of persecution, will come forth from the struggle more glorious than ever.”⁴⁷ As the speaker’s assertion illustrates, American Catholic concern moved beyond maintaining an ancient institution. Papal independence ensured that the Church’s visible head could lead a church beyond the confines of a European-centered universality into a new and even more glorious universality encompassing the New as well as the Old World.

45 Spalding, *Lecture on the Temporal Power*, pp. 5 and 15.

46 Hecker, *Liberty and Independence of the Pope*, p. 8.

47 *Reception by the Clergy and Laity*, (Baltimore, 1870) 14–17, 32–33.

4.

American Catholic reactions to the 1848 revolution marked an important turning point in American Catholic apologetics in two ways. First, Pius IX's sufferings, beginning with his "exile" in Gaeta, elicited an almost unqualified devotion to the papacy. Because the temporal question affected Pius IX's whole reign (1846–1878), unity with the Holy See became a central focus in American Catholic rhetoric after 1848. The nativist persecutions against "the papists" further heightened American Catholic sensitivity to their relationship with the papacy. Their conflicts became an extension of Pius IX's struggles. Second, they heard, at the same time, that despite nativist challenges, American political principles were the basis of a social order that the church embraced in its dealings with the world. These intertwining arguments suggested to American Catholics a particular view of the world and their place in it. Identification with their afflicted leader put their suffering in a context of ultimate meaning, that is, the providential promise of Christian victory. Like other Americans who incorporated the United States' political system into some overarching providential plan, the apologists introduced republican ideals into the Catholic version of a divinely ordained scheme of things. The American Catholic community's steady growth despite persecution lent credibility to the apologists' claims.

The political dimension of this American Catholic worldview has a peculiar nuance. Catholicism's affinity with America's political order originated not in its incorporation into American society but in its unity with Rome. The apologists made the papacy central to the birth of the modern political order. They argued that the pontiffs had in their temporal government intuitively anticipated and even inspired America's founding fathers to maintain religious liberty through separation of church and state. American Catholicism's unity with Christ's vicar, therefore, gave the community a distinct advantage over all other Christian groups. It alone shared in the grace and wisdom granted to the special beneficiary of the divine promise that the "gates of hell shall not prevail."

Roman Catholicism was, by all these accounts, the only spiritual force free enough and strong enough to champion republican principles. The pope personified the spiritual leadership that Catholicism offered any civilization aspiring to dominance in the world. Those who publicly supported the pontiff's right to spiritual independence through territorial sovereignty were fulfilling their duties as American citizens and as Catholics. This worldview invited a beleaguered community to envision itself as the preeminent spiritual force necessary to produce a worthwhile society anywhere on the globe, and especially in the United States. American Catholics heard that, despite all signs to the contrary, their place was firmly secure in the New World order where liberty and progress depended upon stalwart protectors.