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FEATURE

Infallibility

task is to confirm his fellow believers in the faith, he proclaims with a definitive act that a doctrine of faith or morals is to be held as such."

The second paragraph of the canon notes that the college of bishops "also possess infallible teaching authority" when they exercise their teaching office either gathered together in an ecumenical council where "as teachers and judges of faith and morals, they declare that for the universal Church a doctrine of faith or morals must be definitively held," or while scattered around the world "but united in a bond of communion among themselves and with the successor of Peter when together with that same Roman Pontiff in their capacity as authentic teachers of faith and morals they agree on an opinion to be held as definitive."

The Second Vatican Council, for example, could have produced infallible teachings if all necessary conditions were fulfilled. It did not.

Meanwhile, paragraph 3 of the canon cautions, "No doctrine is understood to be infallibly defined unless it is clearly established as such."

Father Joseph Hart, of St. Bernard's Institute in Rochester, observed that this last point is a key ingredient in infallible teachings by a pope. "The pope must make it manifestly clear that he is defining dogma," Father Hart said, noting that an infallible declaration contains words such as "we teach and define that it is dogma divinely received." Thus because they do not contain such language, he observed, the declarations concerning birth control and women's ordination are not infallible teachings.

The idea that the pope and the bishops have such authority to teach and define infallibly is an ancient one, but one which was not defined until 1870 by the First Vatican Council. That council approved the decree *Pastor aeternus,* which enunciated the teaching we now call papal infallibility.

The pope had been regarded as the successor of Peter and as possessing teaching authority since the church's early days, observes Father Francis A. Sullivan, SJ, in his 1983 book, "Magisterium: Teaching Authority in the Catholic Church."

Father Sullivan notes that the Holy Spirit was guiding the church during its early centuries in such areas as deciding the canon of the Bible, and, he continues: "It seems to me that we are justified in being equally confident that the Holy Spirit must have guided that second and third century Church in its recognition of its bishops as the rightful and authoritative teachers whose decisions about matters of Christian doctrine would be normative for its faith."

And as the successor of Peter and the bishop of Rome, the pope was accorded particular authority.

Theologians' understanding, Father Sullivan explains, was that the church as a whole is "indefectible," meaning that due to the Holy Spirit's ongoing guidance the church will continue until the end of time and will ultimately remain true to Christ's teachings despite error and heresy and human frailty.

The notion of papal infallibility was not voiced until the 13th century, according to Brian Tierney, in his 1972 study, "Origins of Papal Infallibility: 1150-1350." The concept was enunciated by Father Pietro Olivi in connection with a dispute between two branches of the Franciscan order over the issue of poverty. However, Father Olivi's arguments were rejected by Pope John XXII (1316-34), who argued that infallibility would actually put a limit on papal power, as individual popes would be restrained by what previous popes had declared infallibly.

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Discussion over the issue decreased, but did not entirely disappear over the next few centuries. One of the focuses of this discussion was the issue of papal authority versus the bishops' authority — particularly in ecumenical council. The Gallicans, who were primarily French, hence the name, even argued that ecumenical councils had supremacy over the pope, declaring in 1682 in the "Articles of the Gallican Clergy" that, "In questions of faith the Supreme Pontiff has a principal role, and his decrees pertain to each and every church, but his decision is not irreformable unless it obtains the consent of the Church."

And that consent, they claimed, comes from the bishops.

Traces of Gallicanism continued into the 19th century, and was one of the factors that helped lead to the declaration of papal infallibility at Vatican I, Father Hart said. Other factors included the papacy's loss of temporal power as the papal lands were under attack and were being lost.

In addition, the Enlightenment, Father Hart noted, had begun to question Christianity's foundations. "There was a mood of wanting surety in a radically conservative way," he said. "There were some in the church who began to talk of infallibility — especially papal infallibility — as a way to ensure that surety."

Some Jesuit theologians, and especially the editors of the journal *La Civilita Cattolica,* began promoting infallibility, even asking readers to take an oath that they would be willing to shed their blood in support of the charism, Father Hart said. Some bishops and theologians who took this oath were among those who helped prepare the documents to be considered at the Vatican Council from 1869-70.

Pope Pius IX (1846-78) addressed the issue of papal authority in his very first encyclical, "Qui pluribus" (1846). Father Hart observed that in his encyclical, Pius IX wrote "that infallibility was a charism of the papacy."

In 1854, Pope Pius, after returning from exile during the ongoing wars that led to the loss of papal land and the formation of Italy as a nation, and "as a thank offering to the Blessed Virgin Mary, who he felt had provided him with safety, decided to use the charism by proclaiming the (doctrine of the) Immaculate Conception," Father Hart said.

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>
> **Father Joseph Hart**

The pope made sure in proclaiming this dogma that Mary was conceived without sin, however, by consulting with the bishops, the Rochester priest observed.

All of these circumstances converged at Vatican I. Nevertheless, the declaration of papal infallibility was opposed by a small, yet significant minority at the council — including Rochester's first bishop, Bernard J. McQuaid.

Father Robert F. McNamara, diocesan archivist and author of the 1968 book, "The Diocese of Rochester: 1868-1968," noted that some bishops present at the council advocated a broad definition of papal infallibility. On the other hand, some opponents of papal infallibility argued strongly in favor of the power of ecumenical councils.

Bishop McQuaid was among those who believed "that collegiality should be present," and that "the pope should speak as the head of the body of prelates," Father McNamara explained. "It would seem in some way that the pope should consult with them."

Thus the Rochester bishop was among 88 bishops who voted against *Pastor aeternus* during a preliminary vote on July 13, 1870. An additional 62 bishops voted only conditional approval, while 451 voted in favor of the doctrine.

An official vote on the document was scheduled to take place with the pope present on July 18. Bishop McQuaid, along with a number of other bishops, received permission to leave Rome without taking part in this vote. In seeking permission to leave the council, the dissenting bishops cited concerns in their home dioceses, but the real reason was that they did not wish to vote in front of the pope against something which he clearly wanted.

The vote on July 18, 1870 among those who remained at the council was 531 in favor, two opposed.

Once infallibility was approved, however, Bishop McQuaid accepted it and proclaimed it in the diocese, Father McNamara said.

Although infallibility was defined at the council, Father McNamara noted, the opposition to it helped to limit its scope. Indeed, Bishop McQuaid himself wrote in a letter during the council: "It seems to me that God has used a small minority of 120 to 150 to hold the majority in check and compel them to act with care and deliberation."

That infallibility has been invoked so infrequently is not necessarily an argument against the value of the doctrine, Father Hart acknowledged.

The value, Father Hart concluded, "is to say that the church has never committed itself to false teachings, and never will. It is the belief that the Roman Catholic Church will be maintained in the truth."

Correction

Last week's Page One story included some erroneous information regarding bingo proceeds.

James Rinefierd, chief financial officer for the Rochester diocese, noted that 39 percent of all diocesan churches that offer bingo accounted for 57 percent of the $58.9 million in total revenues reported by diocesan parishes.

We regret the error.