The Local Church in a Non-Catholic Society

When Purcell became bishop in 1833 Ohio’s population was predominantly non-Catholic. He knew that Protestantism was the dominant force in the state, as was true of the whole country. The American principles of separation of church and state, freedom of religion, and religious tolerance permeated all his relations with non-Catholics and was evident in the public lectures of his diocesan visitations and in his participation at the First Vatican Council in 1870. Though firm in his opposition to bigotry, he was conciliatory toward the tolerant. While in Hamilton in the summer of 1835 he preached a strongly apologetic sermon in the courthouse and urged Catholics and non-Catholics alike “to cherish a feeling of benevolence and regard for all, whatever might be their religion, and to resist steadily, and energetically, any efforts to ally Church & State.” In the process he challenged the teaching of the Bible in public schools and helped establish a separate school system for Catholics in the diocese. Overall, Purcell’s relations with the community were concerned mainly with what affected the mission of the Catholic Church.

Like many of his episcopal colleagues, Purcell was especially concerned over the growing anti-Catholicism in the nation in the 1830s. In his journal dated January 24, 1834, he recorded that “Bigots” were “growing fierce in their opposition to Popery. . . . Why do not Catholics awake?—Such apathy in the ranks of our own Clergy is inconceivable.” Though he acknowledged “that prayer & Study & Visiting the Sick . . . [were] more meritorious and commendable, . . . we must descend sometimes,” he wrote, “into the Plain & fight the Philistines with their own arms.” When in early 1834 Father James Mullon, who had been managing the Catholic Telegraph and
conducting the college, left Cincinnati for New Orleans to raise money for St. Peter's Orphan Asylum and to solicit subscriptions to the diocesan paper, Purcell became rector and professor in the seminary. He also took over the editorial management of the *Catholic Telegraph*. As editor he did considerable writing, hoping to counter Protestant charges and the developing nativism in the country. Anti-Catholicism, Purcell wrote to Bishop England, "begins to have noon-day apologists. A stronger tide than ever is setting in against us." Not everyone was pleased with the course of the diocesan weekly. Some thought it was a "party organ" and a bit too controversial. But Purcell had no intention of changing the policy. Refuting anti-Catholic charges and writing polemical pieces, the *Catholic Telegraph* also kept its readers informed on national and European Catholic matters. It also helped build a sense of community in the growing diocese.

Organized anti-Catholicism became a major force in the 1830s. The significant increase in the Catholic population, churches, and schools doubtlessly reawakened fear and intolerance among some non-Catholics. As Protestant books and weekly newspapers played on Protestant fears, they invoked images of a church that was largely a traditional, hierarchical, undemocratic institution. A church that worshiped in a foreign tongue, namely Latin, and took orders from a foreign power, namely the pope. They viewed the Catholic religion as being irredeemably foreign and intrinsically opposed to the principles of American civilization. Could Catholics be loyal to the country and to the pope at the same time? Were the two identities compatible? Two works that received much publicity in the Midwest were Samuel F. B. Morse's *Foreign Conspiracy* (1834) and Lyman Beecher's *Plea for the West* (1835). In his attempt to show that the papacy, allegedly subservient to Austria, was out to undermine American democracy, Beecher printed in the appendix of his book an 1830 letter from Edward Fenwick to the Austrian emperor, thanking him for money he had received for his diocese. Beecher, who had left Boston in 1832 to take over the presidency of Lane Theological Seminary in Cincinnati, argued that part of his ministry was to fight the pope in the Midwest. At the same time, Morse, painter and inventor of the telegraph, maintained that Catholics threatened American liberties. He accused Bishops Purcell and Flaget of trying to subvert the American republic. These were not ecumenical times for American Catholics and Protestants.

Cincinnati's *Western Christian Advocate*, a Methodist journal, and the *Cincinnati Gazette*, a secular newspaper, supported Beecher's and Morse's allegations and lashed out strongly against the Catholics. "What [did] the yearly erection of so many gorgeous temples, colleges, nunneries, and free schools [mean]? What," the *Advocate* asked, "... is meant by the sound of martial music, the military parade, the tramp of the footmen with the display
of banners, at the laying of the cornerstone of each new Popish Church . . . in our Queen City?” To the editor it suggested that “Papal Rome is attempting to lay her foundations broad and strong in this great Valley, with the ultimate hope and design of the overthrow of all our free institutions.” There were even rumors of ghosts inhabiting St. Peter’s Orphan Asylum. Concerned over the increasing wave of anti-Catholicism and the “bigoted and misguided zealots” in the community, Purcell exclaimed that Beecher “is persecuting us fiercely, here. I seriously believe the hour of persecution,” he wrote to Bishop Joseph Rosati of St. Louis, “is not far distant.” Though anti-Catholicism in the Ohio Valley never reached the intensity that it did in the East, Catholics nevertheless felt the prejudice. There was “no country, claiming to be free, in which there is more underhand persecution than in America,” the Catholic Telegraph editorialized, “nor is there a city in proportion to its population, where more instances can be produced of this vulgar bigotry, than in our own fair town of Cincinnati.” Partly in response to nativism and to the needs of immigrant life, Catholics became increasingly defensive.4

PURCELL-CAMPBELL DEBATE

Purcell’s early defense of Catholicism was very well illustrated in his debate with Alexander Campbell, a Baptist clergyman from Bethany, Virginia. Campbell was a founder of the denomination that would later become the Disciples of Christ. In 1836 Cincinnati’s Western Literary Institute and College of Teachers, a voluntary organization of teachers more popularly called the College of Teachers, invited Purcell to address the Institute. Founded in 1832, the organization met for several days each year to debate various topics of interest to educators. On October 8 both Purcell and Campbell addressed the Institute. Following Campbell’s morning presentation in support of Protestantism, Purcell challenged the minister’s interpretation of the Reformation. Throughout the remainder of the day the College of Teachers debated various issues. Over the next three days Campbell and Purcell and their supporters continued their heated discussion at the Baptist Church on Sycamore Street. Through the Cincinnati Gazette Campbell in mid-October challenged the bishop to an oral debate on nine propositions he listed against the Catholic Church. After repeating the public challenge, Purcell accepted it.5

The Purcell-Campbell debate was the first time an American Catholic bishop held an oral debate with a Protestant minister. A few years earlier John Hughes, then a parish priest in Philadelphia, had engaged in two public debates with Reverend John Breckinridge, a Presbyterian minister. The Purcell-Campbell debate began on Friday, January 13, 1837, at the Baptist Church, ending on Saturday afternoon, January 21. It continued for seven
days, Sunday not included. There were two sessions each day: a three-hour session in the morning that began at 9 A.M. and a two-hour session in the afternoon that began at 3 P.M. Proceeds from the printed debate went to the Protestant and Catholic orphanages. Campbell’s propositions were published in the *Gazette* in December, giving Purcell about a month’s time to prepare his general line of defense. Though familiar with the anti-Catholic literature of the day, Purcell had the difficult job of responding to the various specific charges and factual data that Campbell would present. Purcell pictured himself as David fighting Goliath. “I have only to say,” he wrote, “that, however low of stature, . . . I shall be found more than a match for this vaunting Goliath.”

The debate was held before a packed audience. Though at times it proved entertaining and provided an opportunity for both contestants to inflate their language, it was generally conducted on a high level. In terms of scholarship, both men were impressive. They demonstrated much scriptural and historical information. Purcell, who had a flair for oratory, was recognized as an authority not only on matters of religious doctrine, but also on classical and literary subjects. He had a quick mind, retentive memory, and a good command of the primary sources of Catholic Church history.
Campbell, on the other hand, more often quoted from secondary sources. The *Cincinnati Philanthropist*, which generally proved hostile to the bishop, acknowledged that Purcell “is evidently a well read man, especially in the history of the Roman Church, and his mind is handsomely enriched with the current literature of the day.” The self-confident, assertive Purcell was diplomatic, witty, and possessed the necessary oratorical skills to win the audience. He proved himself a skillful and worthy opponent for the more experienced Campbell.

The proposition that received the most attention and proved most controversial dealt with papal infallibility. Purcell strongly expressed his reservations, if not outright denial, of infallibility. “No enlightened Catholic,” he said, “holds the pope’s infallibility to be an article of faith. I do not; and none of my brethren, that I know of, do. The Catholic believes the pope, as a man, to be as liable to error, as almost any other man in the universe. Man is man, and no man is infallible, either in doctrine or morals.” As Campbell kept pressing on the seat of infallibility and asked the bishop to name the “infallible expositor,” Purcell countered that it was a “general council, or the pope, with the acquiescence of the church at large.” Purcell argued that the “pope is the head—the council is the heart—and I have no objection to . . . [Campbell] calling the laity the members. . . . The true theory of the church, like that of the human body,” he said, “is union. Ask not, does the heart alone, or the head, alone, or the members alone contain the vital principle . . . , they live and move and have their being together.” On the matter of jurisdiction he denied the temporal power of the pope. He encouraged as much local autonomy as possible. Somewhat imaginatively, Purcell compared the Catholic Church with the planetary system. “The see of Rome,” he said, “is as the sun and centre of the system . . . which gives us all, our proper impetus and coherency. But like the planets, we are not absorbed by it. We know its excellence, its usefulness, its destination, its limits.”

The debate received considerable national publicity both in the Protestant and Catholic papers. Most of the secular press of Cincinnati declared Purcell the victor, acknowledging his able defense of the Catholic doctrines. The lawyer and editor of the *Cincinnati Gazette*, Charles Hammond, pointed out that as a consequence of the debate “Protestantism gained nothing, Catholicism suffered nothing.” To the *Catholic Telegraph*, “an event more propitious for Catholics could not have occurred.” In February 1837 a committee of lay Catholics presented Purcell with gifts, including two large silver pitchers, as a testimonial of their gratitude for his performance. By summer the Congregation of Propaganda Fide in Rome congratulated him on his debate. The Cincinnati prelate had proven to be a brilliant and eloquent defender of the faith."
Though Purcell’s reputation doubtlessly benefited from his success, not all his fellow bishops were pleased by his participation in a public oral debate. Bishop England, whom Purcell greatly admired, was less than enthusiastic. “I have read with deep interest,” he wrote, “the book of your controversy. . . . You had a formidable antagonist & were in a bad position & got out of it better than I could have imagined. I would not for anything that I could say be so placed.” Purcell himself later expressed reservations about public debates. “I did not seek the controversy,” he wrote a month after the debate, and “I am now, as I have ever been, averse to such exhibitions. Religion is not in need of them.”

NATIVISM

As a religious leader Purcell had made his presence known in Ohio. During the first few years of his administration, he had established solid relations with both German- and English-speaking Catholics throughout the diocese. He had also earned the respect of non-Catholics. Charles Peabody, a Protestant minister, who in 1846 rode a short distance with Purcell in a stagecoach on a trip to Louisville, found him to be a pleasant traveling companion. Purcell “is a scholar,” Peabody wrote in his diary, “understands all the departments of literature well—has read almost everything—is familiar with history and poetry, and science—knows what is now going on in the literary, political and religious world. He understands the character of the population here better than almost any [one]. . . . Such men are to be feared in their influence.” Three decades later Purcell was still “held in great esteem by all, even by those of different faiths,” a French-speaking pastor from Northwestern, Ohio, wrote. “He likes to speak French as well as English. One feels at home with him at once so we were not lacking in conversation.”

On his diocesan visitations, the outgoing Purcell, who wanted Catholics to be accepted as full-fledged Americans, often gave public addresses in courthouses, public schools, and Protestant churches, where he defended the American tradition of religious freedom and the Catholic doctrines. His stance revealed how he thought about the relationship between Catholicism and American society. Purcell’s debate with Campbell, along with his conciliatory approach and effective dealings with community leaders at the Western Literary Institute, helped elevate his status as a leader in the community. Moreover, he was becoming better known by his confreres in the West. Cincinnati’s geographic position on the Ohio River was a natural stop for western bishops on their way to and from Baltimore and Europe. The national publicity given to the debate also helped enhance Purcell’s status as the church leader in the Midwest.
Like most of his colleagues in the American hierarchy, Purcell steered a neutral course in politics. His interest was in building strong community relations and remaining politically neutral. The editorials on voting in the Catholic Telegraph were also nonpartisan. Though some of Purcell’s personal friends such as William Henry Harrison and Dr. Daniel Drake, founder of the Medical College of the University of Cincinnati, were Whigs, Purcell chose to remain noncommittal. “My time is too much occupied with the interests of a ‘Kingdom which is not of this world’ to admit of my devoting any portion of it to ‘decided opposition’ to any of the candidates for popular favor. . . . I have never that I am aware of,” he said, “attempted to influence the vote of a single individual of my flock and in this course I am determined to persevere.” When Harrison was elected president in 1840, Purcell was careful to continue his policy of neutrality. He regarded his attendance at a local dinner in honor of the president-elect as a civic function.18

One of the earliest political and social issues that Purcell and archdiocesan Catholics in pre-Civil War America faced was nativism. Although nativism subsided somewhat in the late 1830s, it was revived in the 1840s. The increased Catholic immigration in the 1840s and 1850s, which swelled the number of Catholics to record numbers, stimulated anti-Catholic and antiforeign sentiment. Expressing concern about a papist takeover, some Protestants and the Cincinnati press harangued against Catholics for their alleged “undemocratic” practices. Because many Catholic immigrants, especially the Irish, were poor, some people regarded them as an economic threat. They were seen as either taking jobs away from native-born citizenry or draining the coffers of public charity. In 1843 a branch of the American Protestant Association was formed in Cincinnati. Three years later the American Protestant, a No-Popery newspaper, was also started in Cincinnati. In August 1850 a mob in Chillicothe attacked the Notre Dame Convent, which had been established for the education of young girls. The convent had been attacked eight previous times and, to the disappointment of the 1,500 Catholics in the community, no arrests had been made. “Chillicothe,” the Catholic Telegraph wrote, “is notorious for its hostility” to Catholics. Though most residents disapproved of the animosity, “there were enough people there,” the diocesan paper editorialized, “to smile at the doings of the mob and to conceal the perpetrators.” Chillicothe Catholics eventually passed a resolution pledging “not to vote for candidates who were not known to be favorable to an equality of rights.” Though reluctant to mingle religion with politics, they saw no alternative.19

In the 1850s there were a few outbreaks against the Catholic churches in the archdiocese. Occasionally stones were thrown at the cathedral. In one instance, vandals shattered some stained glass in a window. On a more serious note,
on August 20, 1855, the newly built Holy Angels Church in Sidney was blown up. A full keg of gunpowder had been placed under the small frame church and ignited by a string of powder leading nearly half a block away. Even though the mayor of the town offered a three-hundred-dollar reward for the apprehension of the perpetrators, they were never found. Within two years the congregation of Sidney rebuilt a larger church. In most communities, fortunately, there was no such violence. A good number of Protestants realized that Catholics were law-abiding citizens, shared important moral values, especially in charitable work, and were as much opposed to any form of European despotism as they were. At times Protestants even contributed to the building of Catholic churches, as they did in the erection of St. James Church at Wyoming in Cincinnati in the late 1860s.\(^{15}\)

In light of the nativist frenzy, most American church leaders were understandably defensive. Their responses varied widely to the tension between American identity and the definition of the church. Bishop John Hughes of New York was the most well-known fighter. When New York City parishes were threatened, he urged pastors to arm themselves with muskets for the defense of parish properties. But he was not typical of the American hierarchy. When nativists burned churches and Irish homes in Philadelphia in 1844, Bishop Francis Patrick Kenrick was conspicuously silent. Purcell took more of a middle-of-the-road stance. Though critical publicly of anti-Catholic outbreaks, under no circumstance did Purcell sanction physical force. “We will not resist persecution with the weapon of our persecutors,” he declared in an address before the Young Men’s Catholic Literary Institute, “we will not stir up civil war.”\(^{16}\)

The most dramatic expression of anti-Catholicism in the archdiocese was Cincinnati’s reaction in December 1853 to the visit of Archbishop Gaetano Bedini, the pope’s nuncio, or ambassador, to the Imperial Court of Brazil. Sent by the pope to visit the United States, he was “to observe,” the Propaganda wrote, “the state of religion . . . , the conduct of the clergy and the abuses that have crept in,” and to investigate cases of trusteeship among German groups in Philadelphia, Buffalo, and St. Louis. On his tour Bedini was subjected to several anti-Catholic demonstrations. What doomed his journey from the start was the fact that Alessandro Gavazzi, a former priest, came to the United States at the same time as Bedini did. Gavazzi falsely condemned the archbishop for his alleged role in the suppression of the nationalist revolution in Italy and labeled him the “Bloody Butcher of Bologna.”\(^{17}\)

In mid-December Bedini arrived in Cincinnati. On Christmas day he preached in French and German in St. Peter in Chains Cathedral. That night a riot broke out. Some 800 to 1,000 German radicals marched from Free Men’s Hall at Mercer and Vine Streets toward Purcell’s residence near
the cathedral, where Bedini was staying. Five days later Purcell described the incident to Archbishop Anthony Blanc of New Orleans. “Well! The Nuncio has been here. And at this peacefu season his visit has been made the occasion of death, and bloodshed, and riot & lawsuits. On Christmas night,” he wrote, “from 500 to a 1000 [German] ‘Freemen’ marched in procession . . . to within a square of the Cathedral, with execrable charivari music, transparencies, a gallows, a stuffed & ready for hanging Nuncio, Mottoes infernal, clubs, dirks, [and] pistols” with the purpose of killing Bedini. The police, who were waiting for them, Purcell noted, “pitched into them.” One German was killed, fifteen were wounded, including a policeman, and sixty-five were arrested.\(^{18}\)

In spite of the riot and threats of personal violence to Bedini, there was not enough evidence to prosecute the rioters. The charges against them were dropped. The general public was sympathetic to the marchers and against the police. Area newspapers, with the exception of the Catholic Telegraph, defended the marchers on the grounds that they had been exercising their rights to free speech and assembly. Catholics, on the other hand, concurred with their archbishop that the demonstration had threatened Bedini’s life. Both Purcell and the Catholic Telegraph viewed the Christmas night episode as one largely perpetrated by Gavazzi and German immigrants, who sympathized with the 1848 revolutions in Europe.\(^{19}\)

While in Cincinnati Bedini, in the company of Archbishop Purcell, visited a number of Catholic institutions. On Sunday, January 1, he participated in the dedication of the new Holy Trinity Church. About a year earlier, Holy Trinity Church and the parish school had been destroyed by fire. All German parishes in the city had assisted in the rebuilding program. Two days after the dedication Bedini left Cincinnati for New York. Before leaving the country Bedini criticized some of the American bishops for not coming to his defense better than they did. Purcell felt hurt when he learned of Bedini’s comments. Not only had he personally praised Bedini to the Vatican but had in fact publicly defended him. “I put myself a dozen times between him and death, while here,” he wrote. “I covered him as well as I could with my little person to protect him from the dagger of the assassin when . . . visiting German Churches and schools.”\(^{20}\)

Less than two weeks after Bedini’s departure, there was another anti-Bedini demonstration. About two thousand citizens marched through the streets of Cincinnati. They carried banners with such mottoes as “Down with Bedini!” and “No Priests, No Kings, No Popery.” On a vacant lot they successfully burned the nuncio in effigy. The police broke up the rioters. A week later a demonstration in neighboring Covington, Kentucky, again successfully burned Bedini in effigy. Through all these anti-Catholic demonstrations,
Purcell observed, the Catholics had acted with “moderation, wisdom and firmness.” By the middle of the decade the anti-Catholic demonstrations had subsided and Purcell was pleased to write that “[a]ll is quiet now.”

CATHOLIC EDUCATION

An important issue to Cincinnati Catholics in the nineteenth century was public education. As early as 1835 Lyman Beecher in *A Plea for the West* hoped that the Catholic children attending public schools would free themselves from the shackles of Roman despotism. As the public schools increasingly reflected Protestant teachings and values, the clergy, religious, and lay people, especially the German-speaking Catholics, who thought these values were subversive of Catholic faith and morals, committed themselves to Catholic education. This affected relations between Catholics and non-Catholics in the community.

As the head of the diocese, Purcell responded to the challenge. At the October 1836 meeting of the Western Literary Institute, Purcell criticized parts of Reverend Benjamin P. Aydelott’s address on the study of the Bible in the public schools. Aydelott, a local physician, Episcopalian minister, and head of Woodward High School, recommended that the Bible itself, not selections from it, be the textbook in the schools. In light of the interest in the matter, the Institute put Purcell and Aydelott on a committee to report on it the following year. This was the first time that the issue of Bible usage in Cincinnati’s public schools entered public discourse. Though Purcell realized that he was not among a friendly group, he faced the school question optimistically. In June 1837 he asked Bishop John Hughes of New York, who was gaining a national reputation for defending Catholic rights, to join him in a collaborative effort to determine the best use of the Bible in the public schools. Taking into account that the Western Literary Institute was “likely to prove a powerful engine for good, or for evil, I think we should take in hand, ourselves & work it,” he wrote. “We could purge out much of the old leaven, if we mixed more with the mass. The only difficulty is how to mix with it & retain our religious identity.” Purcell was hopeful that a compromise could be reached. But Hughes was skeptical of the whole matter. He felt a religious coalition in education would not work.

At the 1837 meeting of the Institute, Purcell strongly opposed both the use of the whole Bible and a book of biblical selections. He did not want to place Protestant Bibles in the hands of the Catholic youth and disapproved of the “common-school teachers” influencing the pupils with their “sectarian bias.” What he suggested, instead, was that separate days be set aside in the schools for the pupils of various faiths to be assembled together to be instructed by
their own pastors. "If this were done," he thought, "our public schools would be a great benefit for this country." After considerable discussion, the Institute unanimously recommended that the Bible be read in all the schools as part of "a religious exercise, without denominational or sectarian comment." When attempts were made to affix amendments, giving the teachers opportunities to interpret the meaning of the Scripture, Purcell, Lyman Beecher, and other ministers rejected them. By allowing teachers to interpret the Scripture, Purcell argued, "would be to make religion a football and expose the youth frequenting these schools to change their religion as often as their teachers changed."23

Purcell was pleased with the October meeting. He detected no bigotry "as had been," Purcell wrote, "long the custom." Though the meeting went well, no real consensus was reached. Bible reading remained part of the curriculum in the public schools. The members of the Western Literary Institute, moreover, made no mention of Purcell's proposal to set aside separate days in the schools for students of various faiths to be instructed by their own teachers. Echoing the bishop's concerns, the Catholic Telegraph editorialized that the children should read the Bible "at home, under the eyes and direction of their parent, pastors, or circumspect tutors." Though Purcell continued to express concern over the policy of Bible reading in the public schools, an attitude that over time contributed to the secularization of public schools, he was pleased overall with the working relationship with public school authorities in Cincinnati.24

During this period Purcell and Hughes were the most vocal church leaders for Catholic schools. Their communities far outdistanced the other dioceses in the country in the percentage of children attending parochial schools. But unlike Hughes, who was abrasive and openly hostile to the public schools and clashed with city leaders, Purcell had a much more conciliatory policy toward them. Hoping to reach compromises with the public schools and their Protestant supporters, Purcell did not make a public issue of the school question. Though the Cincinnati public schools had a Protestant bias, as evident in the continuing use of the King James Bible and Protestant prayers and hymns in opening exercises, Catholics continued to work with public school officials. They believed that for the Catholic children to receive an education in the public schools was better than not receiving an education at all. "[H]alf a loaf," the Catholic Telegraph wrote, "is better than no bread." Purcell was also motivated partially by the desire to make Catholicism more acceptable and less threatening to non-Catholics. In 1840 Purcell was pleased to inform Hughes that the Cincinnati School Board "employed a Catholic Schoolmistress, the first, in one of the Com[mon] Schools." Besides, in some rural communities in Northwestern Ohio, like at Minster, public school
funds in the 1840s were made available to St. Augustine parish boys’ and girls’ schools. Functioning as school directors, the parish trustees administered the funds. Because the instruction of the three Sisters of the Precious Blood, who had taken charge of the education of the girls of the parish in 1848, was entirely in German, the sisters were sent to receive tutoring in English from the Notre Dame Sisters at Dayton. This was done because the sisters were paid with public funds and the state then required instruction in English.  

In the early 1840s Purcell’s conciliatory position enabled Catholics to make some progress in their relations with school board officials. Largely in response to the bishop’s petition, the Cincinnati school board in 1842, at the same time that Hughes was battling the public school system in New York City, unanimously excused Catholic children from reading the King James Bible. Catholics were allowed to have separate readings from the Catholic Douay Version of the Bible. The board also made the children’s visit to the school library, which contained anti-Catholic literature, dependent on parental consent. But Catholics soon learned that the policy was not forcefully implemented. There were contradictions in school practice. In 1847 a teacher in the public schools directed his students to bring their Bibles with them to class. When the Catholic students brought the Catholic edition, they were told to supply themselves with the Protestant edition. Most of the public school teachers at the time were Protestants, some being Protestant ministers or former ministers.  

The bishop’s pragmatic and conciliatory attitude was clearly manifested at the diocesan synod of 1848. Purcell and his clergy did not want the school question “publicly agitated.” Catholic parents were advised not to send their children to bigoted schools and to avail themselves of all the advantages that may be obtained in less bigoted districts, while “we quietly learn the state of public opinion and seek to obtain a change in the laws.” The synod further recommended the appointment of Catholic teachers to public schools where possible.  

Cincinnati Catholics also complained about placing Catholic charitable institutions on the tax list. What especially irritated them was the policy of double taxation. The collection of taxes “from the Roman Catholic Asylum,” the Catholic Telegraph editorialized, “has been a subject of astonishment for some years. It is an exhibition of bigotry.” By midcentury the diocese had spent about one million dollars building churches, schools, and asylums, without receiving any public assistance. When the Catholic institutions in 1843 petitioned for public funds, they were denied on the grounds of sectarianism. Yet the Cincinnati Orphan Asylum, which was largely a Protestant institution, did receive public assistance. The diocesan paper repeatedly
protested against a policy of double standards. At one point it urged Catholics not to vote for any politician who would not “pledge himself to remove the injustice.”

In the summer of 1852, Dr. Jerome Mudd, a Catholic school board member, decided to force the issue of Bible use in the public schools. After consulting with local church authorities, Mudd proposed that the Catholic children and teachers use the Catholic Bible rather than simply to be exempted from using the Protestant Bible. Though the majority of the members on the board preferred the King James Bible, arguing that the United States was “essentially a Protestant country,” they settled on a compromise. In November the board agreed on a new policy for Cincinnati’s public schools. It allowed the use of Catholic editions of scripture as long as notes and commentary were not read publicly. Though the King James Bible was still the norm, Catholics were now free to use their own edition of the bible. Purcell’s diocesan weekly praised the board’s decision. After a “display of anti-republican intolerance,” it editorialized, “a respectable majority . . . has passed the resolution. . . . This is certainly a compliment to the Catholic population.”

By the middle of the century 80 percent of the parishes in the diocese had Catholic schools. At first these schools were usually in the damp basements of the churches. The absence of Catholic schools was more evident in the small towns and in rural areas. From the beginning, the diocese of Cincinnati tried to erect and maintain parochial schools for the education of its children. Immigrant Catholics and Purcell built upon that tradition. By the 1850s Purcell became the force behind Catholic schools and helped establish an alternative school system. A vast and inclusive parochial system was built primarily to teach children the tenets of the Catholic faith and provide a basic education similar to that of the public schools. It helped preserve the faith of young boys and girls of the parish who otherwise would attend the public schools. There was a deep suspicion of the public schools in the Catholic consciousness. Rather than try to change them, Purcell and his episcopal colleagues in the Midwest, unlike some of their counterparts in the East, spent their time and energy building parish schools. By building a separate school system, the local church also helped insure its unity in a pluralistic society. The parochial schools in the diocese became solidly united under Catholic rule. By 1860 there were sixty-one schools. Ten years later the number had increased to 103. The entire parish community, and not just the pupils’ parents, bore the cost of educating the children. As Catholic children attended Catholic schools, they segregated themselves socially from the rest of the community. Furthermore, just as Catholic families were divided among themselves, most notably the English- and German-speaking families, their children were segregated from one another.
In 1848, the first year that parochial school statistics became available, the six German schools and two English schools in Cincinnati had a combined enrollment of 2,527 pupils. Three years later there were thirteen parochial schools in Cincinnati with an enrollment of 4,494 students. In 1864 the parochial schools enrolled 9,544 students, constituting forty-one percent of pupils taught in the city. These figures do not include the students taught in the day and boarding academies run by the various sisterhoods. By 1870, due in part because of the substantial German-speaking population in the Queen City, between 12,000 and 15,000 children, whose numbers were equivalent to one-third of the city's total school population, attended the German and English Catholic schools. Four-fifths of the Catholic children of school age attended Catholic schools. The Catholic Telegraph could proudly boast "that there is not a city in the whole country where, in proportion to the Catholic population, there are so many parochial and select Catholic schools." Whenever Catholic parishes and churches were established, Catholic parochial schools were soon to follow. At that time the cathedral parish had four separate schools: a boys' school taught by lay teachers and three for girls under the guidance of the Sisters of Notre Dame, of Mercy, and of Sacred Heart. St. Xavier parish had three schools, and St. Patrick's and many of the German parishes had two.\footnote{11}

Some of the anti-Catholic sentiments in the archdiocese spilled over into education and politics. In 1853 the Ohio legislature debated a school bill that, if passed, would have required all school-age children to attend the public schools for a minimum of three months of the year. It threatened the existence of parochial schools. Purcell presented Ohio legislators with a petition, signed by eight hundred Catholics, arguing that parents have the right to educate their own children. "The school question is thickening on us," the archbishop wrote to Blanc. "We are in the midst of all manner of threats from all manner of Sects & infidels. . . . No one knows," he said, "how soon they may ripen into open, violent and prolonged persecution." Opposed to sending Catholic children "by force to the common schools," the Catholic Telegraph criticized the legislation for infringing on parental rights.\footnote{12}

During this same period Cincinnati Catholics, like some of their contemporaries in the East and Midwest, particularly in New York and Detroit, also petitioned the legislature for a share of the school fund. Consistently arguing that true education had to be based on religion, the archdiocese wanted each religious group to have its own schools. Throughout the remainder of Purcell's administration, the local church proposed that the state channel tax funds to the religious schools. There was also a practical side to the proposal. "We have sometimes thought," the Catholic Telegraph argued in 1850, "that if we were to close all our schools for a month, and send the thousands
of Catholic youth to the ‘District Schools,’ the inspectors of the law-established institution would be a good deal puzzled what to do.” Arguing that parents had the right to educate their own children and should be free to send their children to any school they chose, the local church presented its own plan for state aid to parochial schools. The proposal was a primitive form of the voucher system in which payments would be made to the school on the basis of the number of pupils enrolled.\textsuperscript{31}

In the spring of 1853 Purcell published a forceful pastoral on the school issue. “Because we have asked for our share of the School Fund,” he wrote, “we have been charged with a conspiracy to put down the Common Schools.” He reminded the faithful that the local church was not opposed to the public schools. Catholics paid taxes for their support. In response to the legislative proposal to compel parents and guardians, under a penalty of $20 for every offense, to send their children to the public schools for three months in every year, Purcell became more defiant. “For ourselves,” he declared, “we can only say, as Guardian of some three hundred orphans, that we pray God to permit that our life be trampled out by a mob in the streets of the Queen City before we obey it, if it ever sought to be enforced.” The concerted efforts by Catholics proved successful. The Ohio bill was defeated and subsequently dropped.\textsuperscript{32}

Mounting a campaign against mandatory attendance of public schools, Purcell’s pastoral focused on the April 1853 elections and the issue of public funds for Catholic schools. Like in the diocese of Detroit the same year, the local elections centered on the propriety of state funding and developed into a significant confrontation between immigrants and “native Americans.” The Cincinnati ordinary recommended an aggressive political course of action. Purcell’s conciliatory attitude on the school issues changed. He gave up any efforts to gain accommodation. If Catholics “value their privileges as American citizens,” he wrote, “they will assert them . . . in the selection of candidates who will fairly represent the wishes and requirements of their constituents” in the state legislature, city council, and school board. Though he did not want to sway Catholics away from any one political party, he made it clear that “if those parties value their support, and deserve to receive it, they will pledge themselves to redress the grievances of which they so justly complain. And if they refuse to do so, they cannot complain if Catholics are equally independent and refuse” to vote for them.\textsuperscript{33}

Protestant and secular papers responded sharply and angrily to Purcell’s pastoral. Even the Cincinnati Enquirer, the city’s pro-immigrant paper, accused him of threatening the public school system. From the time of Purcell’s pastoral to the election a week later, the area’s newspapers, with the exception of the Catholic Telegraph and the labor paper, Nonpareil, endorsed
the new mandatory legislation on public schools and urged the citizenry to let reason alone guide them on election day. The *Cincinnati Enquirer* referred to the Democratic slate as “the Pope’s Ticket.” By using the school question to mobilize voters, Purcell had helped make religion and schooling the principal issue of the election.16

The 1853 election marked the first time that an election hinged on the central issue of religion. The ideological dispute that had been brewing for some time between Protestants and Catholics on the development of schools was finally out in the open. The outcome of the election was not clear, as both Catholics and Protestants claimed victory. Religious newspapers like the *Western Christian Advocate* interpreted the election as a “Defeat of the Pope in Cincinnati,” arguing that both Democrats and Whigs “forgot their peculiarities and voted for the schools.” But some Catholics derived satisfaction knowing that the defeated Whigs in the election were among the most anti-Catholic of the candidates. In the end, though sixteen of the twenty persons on the regular Democratic ticket were elected, largely because the anti-Catholic vote was split among several candidates, anti-Catholics had outvoted Catholics for every major office.17

The heated election also took its toll on Purcell. He feared for his life. A month after the election Purcell sent his will to Archbishop Francis Kenrick of Baltimore. “Being frequently admonished that I may be put to a violent death,” he wrote, “I have thought it my duty to make my will anew.” A year later he again reiterated concern for his life. “For many years,” he wrote, “I have never felt secure of my life, in this city, a single night.”18

Throughout the decade there were renewed charges that Purcell interfered in local politics. In 1854 one newspaper ridiculed the Democratic Party with a mock “Holy Church Democratic State Ticket” and listed Purcell as a candidate for the board of public works. The following year the *Daily Gazette* published an article accusing the archbishop of controlling political votes. William F. Johnson, running on the Democratic ticket as a candidate for the state legislature and a former member of the Know Nothing Party, accused Purcell of controlling 6,200 votes in Hamilton County. Purcell denied the allegation. Johnson admitted later that he had spoken “from a rumor” that he had heard. Though the *Catholic Telegraph* became solidly identified with the Democratic Party on the education issue in the 1853 election, on most occasions the diocesan paper was neutral. It urged the faithful to vote on the issues and not to become identified necessarily with one political party. The political parties “love us,” it reminded its readers, “where we have many votes.”19

By midcentury Purcell had emerged as the Midwest champion of parochial schools. The elevation of the diocese of Cincinnati to a metropolitan
see in 1850 doubtlessly increased the confidence of Catholics in the diocese. It also helped intensify their school policy. When Cincinnati hosted three provincial councils in 1855, 1858, and 1861, the archbishop, his suffragan bishops, and the superiors of the various priests and religious orders helped lay a solid foundation for a competitive system of Catholic education. In the process, they helped generate interest in the national movement toward parochial school education. Providing parochial schools became a matter of church legislation.40

At the 1855 and 1858 councils the Council Fathers passed a number of decrees on education. They wanted to see a parochial school in connection with every Catholic church in the province. In their pastoral the Council Fathers emphasized the importance of promoting the religious instruction of the children. In this “money seeking, and money making age,” they wrote, there was need for religious education. They also emphasized the important roles parents had in shaping the values. Reflecting the sentiments of the church hierarchy, the Catholic Telegraph argued that “Catholic homes must contribute to the training of our children more than Catholic schools. The children must learn truthfulness, obedience, self-denial, cleanliness, politeness, and fear of God, at their own firesides.” Schools could never “supply the place of home teaching and example,” it continued, “or make Christian gentlemen and ladies out of the scholars they send forth into the world.” At the second council the ordinaries issued a decree obligating the pastors, “under pain of mortal sin,” to establish a parochial school wherever conditions made it possible. This legislation was more rigorous than any previously passed by the dioceses in the United States. Throughout the archdiocese some pastors also began to deny the sacraments to parents who did not send their children to parochial schools, without prior approval by the bishop.41

Though in 1866 the Second Plenary Council at Baltimore benefited by the deliberations of the Cincinnati councils and emphasized the indispensability of parochial schools, its position on education was less stringent than the one issued by Cincinnati’s second council. The Baltimore council merely recommended that in every diocese a school be built next to every church. It is clear that the majority of bishops were not prepared at the time, as were Purcell and Hughes, to launch a major campaign for parochial schools. That initiative came at the Third Plenary Council of Baltimore in 1884.42

At the Third Provincial Council of Cincinnati in 1861, the ordinaries attributed much of the “progressive demoralization” of the youth of the country to the public school educational system. “The system,” the bishops wrote in their pastoral, “is well calculated to raise up a generation of religious indifferentists, if not practical infidels.” Purcell maintained that the only public policy that would help correct the situation and would “be fair and
equitable to all, would be that which would make education, like religion and like all other important pursuits, entirely free.” He again argued that religious schools had a right to a share of the school fund. “If the State . . . will let us have our own money to make our own experiments, in our own way,” he wrote, “we hope to succeed.” He was also convinced that the proposed system would stimulate “competition,” lessen the cost of education, and would “render the Schools,” Purcell wrote, “really Public and Common—which they certainly are not at present except in name.”

Efforts to prevent Catholic children from attending the public schools were an uphill battle in a number of parishes. “Notwithstanding all that I have said to the people of this congregation to dissuade them from sending their children to these godless schools,” the pastor of St. Patrick Church in Bellefontaine wrote to Purcell, “they still continue to set at naught all that I say, and send them there.” Purcell saw the need to reinforce the hard-line tactic of compelling parents to send their children to a Catholic school. He reiterated the seriousness of the offense of those parents who neglected that duty. “The Catholic school is the nursery of the Catholic congregation,” he wrote in his Lenten pastoral of 1872. “The one should stand under the protecting shadow of the other. . . . We see not how they, who wilfully [sic] and deliberately neglect this duty can worthily approach, or be conscientiously admitted to, the sacraments.” William Bigot, pastor of St. Michael Church at Fort Loramie, could not have agreed more. “A school without religion is like food without salt and pepper. About this principle nothing more need be said for the results of the parochial schools are clear to all reasonable people. In these days the spirit of the age . . . is . . . for slackness in religion and free thinking so all states and parishes must help themselves.”

But warning parents against sending their children to public schools was not enough. Purcell saw the proliferation of the rival public schools and programs as a threat to the parochial school system. He wanted the Catholic schools to be as thorough and extensive as the public schools. Uppermost on his mind was the deplorable student-teacher ratio in the parochial schools. In 1850 the ratio of students to teachers in the public schools of Cincinnati was 88-1, dropping to 62-1 in 1858. In the same period the student-teacher ratio in the Catholic schools was 94-1 and 100-1, respectively. In 1863 Purcell founded a diocesan school board. He hoped that it would help bring unity and uniformity in Catholic education in the diocese. It was empowered to improve academic standards in the schools, review credentials of teachers, and supervise the selection of textbooks. The German influence in the creation of the board was evident. All the appointed board members were German except the president, Sylvester Rosecrans, auxiliary bishop of Cincinnati.
from 1862 to 1868. Under the school board's auspices the diocese began teacher certification for the first time. To attract more competent teachers, the school board urged parishes to pay the teachers higher salaries, thus inducing them "to persevere in their profession, and not merely regard it as a stepping stone to something better." The archdiocese needed schools that "will be of such grade and character," the Catholic Telegraph wrote, "as will neutralize the inducements offered by the district schools. This character belongs not to our Catholic schools at present. They are not controlled by professional skill and experience of competent teachers."

To rectify the situation, Purcell attempted to establish a normal school or teachers' college that would help train a much-needed corps of competent teachers. In August 1863 clergy, teachers, and delegates from several parishes attended a meeting for the foundation of a normal school. Opponents of the concept were probably Germans, as they more than likely viewed the school as a threat to their control of the parish school. For whatever reason, plans for a teachers' college were eventually dropped. The diocesan school board, moreover, was short-lived, as there are no records of its existence by the mid-1860s. The diocesan school board was a Midwestern innovation, the first permanent one being established by Bishop Joseph Dwenger at Fort Wayne in 1879. Though the above efforts for a teachers' college and a school board could not be sustained in the archdiocese, they point toward the eventual establishment of a highly centralized system of parochial education in the early twentieth century.

One of the decrees issued by the diocesan synod in 1865 instructed the pastors to "work earnestly" to have the schools under their jurisdiction "excel the public schools not only in discipline but in secular instruction as well." The 1865 synod was the first formal synod of which there is record in the archdiocese. In the history of the archdiocese of Cincinnati there have been a few diocesan synods, meetings of ecclesiastics who come together with ecclesiastical authority to discuss and decide upon matters related to discipline and liturgy for their territory.

In 1859, shortly before Purcell's attempt to establish the teachers' college, German Catholics proposed the establishment of the Catholic Institute. Through its educational programs and athletic facilities they hoped to serve the entire Catholic community. An association was formed and issued stock at fifty dollars per share. The Institute was entirely the work of Catholic laymen. Though most of the directors and officers were German, a significant minority was Irish. Purcell happily endorsed the project. He described the idea as "a noble one." Shortly after purchasing a lot at Vine and Longworth Streets, the association opened the three-story Catholic Institute in November 1860. In addition to providing a hall for public meetings, it had a library,
museum, conference rooms, and a gymnasium. The Institute's most ambitious undertaking was the establishment of a Polytechnic School. 18

Notwithstanding the initial enthusiasm over the Institute and its school, they did not last long. Though the Wahrheitsfreund, a strong supporter of the Institute, did not comment on its demise, which was sometime in 1864, the Catholic Telegraph speculated that it was due in part to opposition to it by the Catholic community. "We never could understand the motive of this opposition," the Catholic Telegraph editorialized. Because of it, however, "the Catholic Institute has ceased to be what it was intended to be. It is no longer identified with our faith or people." Dedicating a new faculty building for the Jesuits in the spring of 1867, Purcell told his audience that the Catholic Institute had proven "a grand failure" and that he had "lately signed a paper by which it was concluded that the entire concern should be sold. It has proved unworthy of our support. On Good Friday," he further explained, "there was performed in its hall a scandalous piece in which religion was ridiculed and scoffed at." He therefore concluded that he "would not have [his] name associated with it." 19

When in 1869 several members of the Cincinnati board of education, led by R. W. Rauch, a Catholic, considered a plan to consolidate the public school system with the Catholic schools, German Catholics defended their parish schools from outside interference. The plan would have handed over control of the Catholic schools to the public school system with the understanding that the parochial school property would eventually be sold to it. In return, the archdiocese would have been permitted to use the buildings on the weekends for religious instruction. Toward this end the board opened discussions with vicar general Edward Purcell. In light of the close relationship of the two Purcell brothers, it is improbable that the archbishop did not approve of the meeting. What makes the discussions most unusual was the fact that it was inconsistent with the ordinary's opposition for more than thirty years to the integration of secular learning and religious values. 20

In addition to anti-Catholic groups in Cincinnati who strongly opposed consolidation, German Catholics were quick to respond. In August 1869 twenty-four German priests, echoing the opinions of their respective parishes, signed a petition opposing any union of the Catholic schools with the public schools. They feared the schools would lose their unique German Catholic character. Moreover, they argued that valuable school property was being handed over at too low a price. The Catholic Telegraph, on the other hand, took issue with the conservative German clergy. Abandoning its usual anti-common school bias, it argued that Catholics "can not push back Niagara, and if we cannot all be of one religion, we can, which is the next best thing, be of one nation." Despite the diocesan paper's efforts, the pressures on
Archbishop Purcell and his staff proved too great. In September Edward Purcell acknowledged defeat. “A little coquetting took place of late between
the board of school directors and a few friends of the Catholic parochial
schools,” he wrote. “We were in hope that it would ripen into real affection.
. . . In the meantime some of our German friends excited themselves terri-
ably for fear this union would come to pass! When both parties forbid the
banns there is no danger of marriage.” Three weeks later Archbishop Pur-
cell issued a public statement on the matter. “The entire government of the
public schools in which Catholic youth is educated cannot be given to the
civil power,” he wrote. “We, as Catholics, cannot approve that system of edu-
cation for youth which is apart from instruction in the Catholic faith, and
teaching of the Church.”

During the course of discussions concerning possible union of the two
school systems, the Bible controversy in Cincinnati was revived. In 1869 an
attempt was made to make Cincinnati’s public schools more acceptable to
Catholics by de-Protestantizing its curriculum. A coalition of Jews, Catho-
lics, and a few Protestants argued that because of the religious diver-
sity in Cincinnati religion had no place in the public schools. That year Cincin-
nati’s board of education decided to exclude Bible reading, religious
instruction, and hymn singing from the public schools. At the time one-
fourth of the members of the board were Catholics, a sign that Catholic polit-
cial power had grown considerably in Cincinnati. The school board’s
decision caused a bitter feud among religious groups in the community and
fueled a nationwide debate. About four years later the Supreme Court of
Ohio upheld the board’s decision as constitutional. The so-called “Bible
War” further strained relations between Protestants and Catholics and
helped hasten the secularization of public education.

In 1873 the Catholic parochial school system encountered another chal-
lenge. The treasurer and auditor of Hamilton County attempted to collect
taxes on thirty-three Catholic school properties. They charged that the
parochial schools were not public schools, but denominational in nature, and
therefore should not be exempt from taxation. Society “compels us to pay
tax[es] for the support of common schools [and] conscience imposes a tax on
us to build and support Catholic schools,” the Catholic Telegraph argued, and
“the State Auditor gives another turn to the screw and tells us that we must
pay tax for having a conscience at all.” In January 1873 Purcell filed a peti-
tion for an injunction against the treasurer and auditor from collecting the
taxes. For three days in March, both sides presented their cases to the Su-
perior Court of Cincinnati. In June the court decided for the plaintiff, prevent-
ing Hamilton County from imposing any taxes upon any of the school
properties in the archdiocese.
PURCELL AT THE FIRST VATICAN COUNCIL

An important development in the life of the church in the nineteenth century was the papacy’s unprecedented assertion of authority over the internal life of national and local churches. In 1869 Purcell, who made his last of four trips to Rome in the decade, attended the First Vatican Council that reasserted the authority of the Catholic Church and defined the infallibility of the pope when speaking with authority on matters of faith and morals. The church became increasingly centered in Rome. A year before the council convened, the New York Tribune portrayed a growing struggle between conservatives and a more traditionalist element led by Purcell, Bishop Bernard J. McQuaid of Rochester, and Archbishops John McCloskey of New York and Peter Richard Kenrick of St. Louis. When the American ordinaries convened at the American College in Rome on December 8, they began working on a petition to the pope not to permit the subject of his infallibility to come before the council. Purcell played a prominent role in the deliberations. He and his American colleagues insisted that a definition of the infallibility of the pope would be inopportune. By reason of his seniority in the American hierarchy, Purcell was regarded as dean of the American bishops. The American bishops feared that assertion of the pope’s infallibility would impede the work of the American church, diminish the role of the bishops, and possibly revive anti-Catholic sentiments of nativist days. Purcell, whose opposition to the doctrine dates back to his debate with Alexander Campbell in 1837 and his public criticism in the 1850s of Orestes Brownson’s strong defense of the pope’s temporal power, drafted the petition. It was submitted on January 15, 1870, with the signatures of twenty-seven English-speaking bishops. All of them but three were Americans. About half of the forty-eight American bishops and one abbot at the council, including William Henry Elder, bishop of Natchez, favored the definition. In light of the fact that more than 500 fathers at the council wanted the definition, the subject remained on the agenda.

On the last day of May 1870, Purcell delivered a learned address in Latin. Objecting to the lack of clarity and confusion on the doctrine, he cogently argued that the pope was not necessarily infallible unless he spoke in his official capacity as teacher of the church on matters of doctrine or morality. He argued that not every papal utterance was to be taken as infallible. Agreeing with some of his colleagues, Purcell sought to limit the authority of the church and pope to spiritual matters. He was particularly concerned over the consequences in the United States if a pope were to speak infallibly against republicanism. “I believe,” he said, “that kings are nothing but representatives of the people; I believe that the king is established for the people, and not the people for the king.”
The responses to his address were mixed. One of the delegates expressed surprise that Purcell had "preserved intact amid the distracting missionary" work of forty years "the elegance of deep scholarship." Bishop James Goold of Melbourne, Australia, on the other hand, was not impressed by Purcell's talk. He noted in his diary for May 31 that the Cincinnati ordinary had "addressed the council feebly and incoherently." Writing to a friend in Germany on June 2, Lord John Acton of England reported that he found Purcell's speech interesting, especially his defense of popular sovereignty. Building upon Purcell's line of argument, he suggested that perhaps the pope existed for the church and not the church for the pope.65

The Council Fathers accepted the pope's infallibility and jurisdictional primacy. Shortly after the close of the council, the major focus of interest among the returning ordinaries was on the inopportunist who had challenged the definition and had been allowed to leave Rome to avoid casting negative votes. Purcell was the first to draw attention. A few hours after he arrived in New York City on August 10, 1870, he agreed to an interview with a reporter from the Herald. "The Archbishop declared himself an anti-infallibilist," the reporter wrote, "... [and] expressed himself to the effect that the Roman Catholic mind in America is not prepared to accept the doctrine of infallibility." During the next week some of Purcell's episcopal colleagues expressed concern over his alleged position expressed in the interview. Bishop Patrick Lynch of Charleston urged Purcell to consider his position carefully and to weigh the potential harm of his remarks. He pleaded with him to subject his "own opinions and if need be personal judgments ... to the yoke of Faith." Sylvester Rosecrans, his longtime friend and bishop of Columbus, also suggested to his metropolitan that he accept the definition. It should be noted, however, that in the American tradition of episcopal collegiality, some ordinaries, such as Bishop McQuaid of Rochester, believed that the bishops, as they did at the Second Plenary Council at Baltimore in 1866, acting in unison with the pope could teach infallibly.67

On August 21, three days after his return to Cincinnati, the seventy-year-old Purcell read the decree on papal infallibility at a public ceremony. All the Catholic societies of the city and adjoining suburbs were present. "[N]o one," the Catholic Telegraph wrote, "expected such an outpouring of citizens, Protestants as well as Catholics, old and young, that gathered in thousands around the Cathedral, and Railroad Depot, and along the line of march, crowding the streets." Purcell began his address by praising American political liberties. As he did throughout his administration, he argued that the United States had "the best form of human government." A longtime proponent of the separation of church and state, he pointed out that the U.S. Constitution "grants perfect liberty to every denomination of Christians." That
was, he insisted, “infinitely better for the Catholic religion, than were it the special object of the State’s patronage and protection.” What Catholics want, he argued, “is a free field and no favor. Truth is mighty and will prevail.”

Purcell then tried to undo the confusion surrounding his remarks in the *Herald* interview. He denied the allegation that he was insincere in his acceptance of papal infallibility. “I am here,” he said, “to proclaim my belief in the Infallibility of the Pope.” But when he tried to explain his initial position as stemming from certain theological distinctions on papal pronouncements that had been made over the centuries, he inadvertently added to the confusion. Purcell ended his talk by declaring his unswerving loyalty to the pope and to the church. “I am,” he said,

a true Roman Catholic, as I said in Rome. . . . I have vindicated the rights of the Pope, and the infallibility of the Church in the strongest language I was capable of using in Rome, and I am not going back on this. . . . I want the editors of newspapers and reporters to send it on the wings of the press, North, South, East and West, that John B. Purcell is one of the most faithful Catholics that ever swore allegiance to the Church. Let them say what they please of me and my course in Rome; for that I have received the thanks of those who do not think exactly as I do. It is by free discussion that much is elicited, and without such discussion it can not be.

The audience appeared content with their archbishop’s proclamation of loyalty to the pope and the church.  

Though Purcell made public his approval of the decree on papal infallibility, Cardinal Alessandro Barnabò, prefect of the Propaganda, nonetheless advised him to communicate his acceptance directly to the pontiff as an example to other bishops. In his December 5 letter to the pope, Purcell acknowledged the primacy of the Roman See and the infallibility of its occupant in matters of faith and morals when speaking *ex cathedra*. The following month the pope expressed his appreciation of the archbishop’s support.

At the same time that he affirmed the mission of the Catholic Church and acknowledged the infallibility of the pope, Purcell during the next decade continued to promote strong community relations. Since the earliest days of his administration, the ordinary had proven sensitive to educational and social issues by adopting a pragmatic and conciliatory stance. During this time the archdiocese further enhanced its image in the community by becoming steadily involved in social and charitable programs that benefited non-Catholics and Catholics alike.