

NOTES

CARDINAL GIBBONS AFTER THIRTY YEARS¹

It is a tribute both to his own enduring quality and to the competence of his biographer to say that this new life changes the traditional picture of James Gibbons but little. The figure which emerges from the mass of expertly handled documentation is neither new nor strange. We see the leader of the American hierarchy in action through four decades, a churchman whose sagacity enabled him to rule a relatively large archdiocese wisely while he gave unobtrusive leadership to many Catholic endeavors of national scope. We see a citizen who received all an American ecclesiastic may ambition in the way of the approval and praise of his fellow citizens. Above all, we have the proof that the great majority of his contemporaries were right when they looked upon the Cardinal as the greatest man the American Catholic Church had yet produced.²

I

Gibbons' reputation rests only in small part on his activity as priest in Baltimore (1861-68), missionary bishop in North Carolina (1868-77), Reconstructionist bishop in Richmond (1872-77), and incumbent of the premier American see (1877-1921). After devoting due consideration to Gibbons' early life and education, Dr. Ellis studies each step of this career.

The sixteen years between Gibbons' ordination and his promotion to Baltimore constitute a relatively brief period. The tasks assigned the young priest and prelate were numerous and too difficult to permit of extraordinary results. Dr. Ellis' researches show, however, that Gibbons' promotions were merited. Everywhere his work was competent, his outlook conservative, his understanding with his superiors complete.

The incumbency at Baltimore was, on the contrary, extraordinarily long and the tasks to be accomplished were not exceptional. Dr. Ellis devotes comparatively little space to the Archbishop of Baltimore as such. One reason for this is the fact that soon after his advancement the Third Plenary Council of Baltimore gave Gibbons leadership in the American

¹ John Tracy Ellis, *Life of James Cardinal Gibbons, Archbishop of Baltimore, 1834-1921*. 2 vols. Milwaukee: Bruce, 1952. Pp. xix + 707; vii + 735. \$17.50.

² For estimates of Gibbons written thirty years ago see, in addition to his early biographers, Bishop Thomas Shahan, in *Catholic Historical Review*, VII (1921-22), 86-89; Shane Leslie, in (London) *Tablet*, CXXXVIII (1921), 425-27; M. F. Egan, in *Catholic World*, CXVI (1922-23), 467-75. The most important churchman who has disappeared from the American scene since Gibbons was probably George Cardinal Mundelein of Chicago (1872-1939).

Church and won him elevation to the cardinalate. From that time on he was willy-nilly in the forefront of American Catholic affairs, first as the more or less official representative of Rome and, after the establishment of the Apostolic Delegation, as the best-known American prelate and the one to whom his colleagues and at times the American government turned in matters affecting the Church for counsel and direction. Another reason was the Cardinal's mastery of the situation in Baltimore, which obviated anything like a crisis in the Archdiocese. Gibbons was at times called to other parts of the country to arrange matters where someone had blundered. There was never need of anything of the kind in his own see. This was due less to the reputation of the Cardinal Archbishop than to his gifts as an ecclesiastical ruler and to capable subordinates.

Some perhaps would like to see more attention given to these aides, Bishop Alfred Curtis and Bishop Owen Corrigan, the vicars general, and other archdiocesan officials. Even in the case of such influential personages as Gibbons' Sulpician advisers and Msgr. Signourey Fay little information is furnished. Yet in a picture which remains crowded after many omissions, it was inevitable that these men, despite their meritorious service and the considerable place they occupied in the Cardinal's life and counsels, should be passed over. They served the Church and their prelate well but in matters of secondary importance. They deserve a larger place in the history of the Archdiocese; but to have given them more attention in this biography than they have received would have meant lengthening the already extensive account of the see which its occupant so easily eclipsed.³

II

Cardinal Gibbons' reputation as a churchman is based on his comprehension of the American scene. He lived through the Civil War and the Reconstruction period. He led the Church when the Americanization of millions of immigrants was a problem of decisive importance. He lived to see America emerge as a leading world power and himself a leading prelate in the English-speaking Church when that Church began to play an increasingly active role in the Church universal.⁴

It is to Gibbons' credit that he clearly perceived that the danger for the Catholic Church in the United States during his lifetime had nothing to do with Old Catholicism or Modernism, however serious their threat in Europe.

³ These men unquestionably deserve credit. We know that the Cardinal was accustomed to trust his subordinates—on one occasion, in the matter of the finances of Catholic University, to his discomfort. There is no evidence that he ever had to regret the trust placed in his archdiocesan officials (cf. Ellis, II, 148 ff.).

⁴ Cf. *Catholic Historical Review*, VI (1920-21), 535 f.

The peril here was that the Church would, by useless and harmful condemnations, surround herself with iron curtains and show herself impervious to progress and impotent to continue the real work of her apostolate. Gibbons' greatest insight was the realization that the American Constitution affords the Catholic Church sufficient protection and guarantees her what she needs to prosper and flourish. He understood also that there were many thousands of honest Americans genuinely convinced that Catholics were alien in spirit. The Cardinal threw all the weight of his influence into the balance on the side of charity and tolerance. He preached mutual respect and mutual service. He emphasized at all times the ties which bind Americans in unity rather than the lines which denote their separate and particular interests. From an inner citadel of Catholic conviction he looked out with affection on his fellow citizens. He was ever more concerned with healing their ills and ending their woes than with stern denunciations of causes and conditions. He refused to be embittered by anti-Catholic fanaticism or to lose faith in the midst of the attacks of the Know-nothings, the A.P.A., or the Ku Klux Klan. On the other hand, his conviction never led him into the exaggerations which compromised some of his co-workers in the struggle.⁵

The remarkable thing is that honest but prejudiced Americans came to believe the Cardinal. A few professional Protestants, it is true, continued to accuse him of insincerity in his presentation of the Church as the support of American institutions. But the great body of the population was open to conviction to such an extent that even the close relationship between the Cardinal and several Presidents, notably Grover Cleveland, Theodore Roosevelt, and William Howard Taft, caused no alarm. The people felt that Gibbons would not use his influence unduly—a fact which also impressed and exasperated not a few Catholics, among them some bishops who, without much success, endeavored to make up for what they considered the Cardinal's remissness.^{5a}

The truth is that Gibbons was aiming at something of far greater importance than an ephemeral success through pressure in some crisis or other. He was bent on making the Catholic Church an integral part of the American scene and winning for her clergy the deference which men accord to those who take a balanced view of things and do not try to force their convictions on others. If the Catholic Church has been naturalized in the

⁵ In his *Modernisme dans l'Eglise* (Paris, 1929) Jean Rivièrè considers *Americanismus* as a prelude to the Modernist crisis in the Church (p. 117).

^{5a} William W. Sweet, in a review of Ellis' work, believing wrongly that Gibbons' brand of Americanism was condemned by Rome and that Gibbons despaired of any real understanding of America by the Vatican, exclaims: "These perilous times call loudly for another Gibbons" (*American Historical Review*, LVIII (1952-53), 956).

United States, and if the Catholic priesthood is generally looked upon with respect, this is due to no one more than to James Gibbons. If he had to sacrifice some minor diplomatic triumphs to achieve this, surely the price was not too high.⁶

This sane Americanism brought Cardinal Gibbons into disagreement with many American Catholics. No one can blame the Germans, the Italians, and the Poles for desiring to perpetuate the traditions of their own races in a country with few traditions of its own and those unacceptable because of English origin. It was against the sincerity of these people that Gibbons had to take position. He did so firmly but in a kindly and pacific spirit. His associates in the battle might arouse hostility by their enthusiasm and their bluntness.⁷ In the Cardinal's case the struggle left no scars. Personally he was not sensitive. His affections were limited to a small circle of friends. All other men, whether friendly or unfriendly in their attitude to himself, he honestly regarded as his neighbors in Christ. There was nothing emotional about this but its sincerity was unquestionable.

It should not be forgotten that, if Gibbons called on the Germans and others to make sacrifices for America, he was ready to and did curb his natural affection for Ireland. Born in Baltimore of Irish immigrants, he grew up and received his early education in Ireland. Although he always retained a devotion to the land of his fathers and was interested in seeing the Irish people win political freedom, he did not hesitate to condemn the use of violence in the effort to obtain it. Again he warmly commended John E. Redmond, leader of the Irish Nationalist Party, for pledging support to the crown at the outbreak of World War I. When Gibbons died, the *London Tablet* asserted: "It will be a long time before England finds an American Archbishop as friendly as Gibbons." Toward the end of his life, the old Cardinal ruefully remarked that the intransigence of the British government on the Irish question was forcing him into the arms of Sinn Fein.⁸

Another point of importance is that Gibbons did not hesitate to proclaim his love of American institutions publicly in the Eternal City itself as well as in Milwaukee, the center of opposition to Americanization. That he did

⁶ It might perhaps be argued that this restraint of Gibbons was a *de facto* attitude springing from weakness and not from conviction. Considered carefully, however, it seems rather to have been the shrewd Cardinal's clear perception of the weakness of an ecclesiastical appeal to the civil government in America.

⁷ It is pleasant to note that the sincerity of John Ireland's convictions in this controversy was admitted as time went on; cf. the letter of Archbishop Sebastian G. Messmer of Milwaukee in 1911, in J. H. Moynihan, *The Life of Archbishop John Ireland* (New York, 1953), p. 78.

⁸ Cf. (London) *Tablet*, CXXXVIII (1921), 427.

so is a tribute to his sincerity and courage. That he was able to do so without unpleasant consequences reveals his moderation and vision. This clear insight into the nature of true Americanism made Gibbons the ambassador of Christ to his native country. It also enabled him to save the situation when some of his less prudent supporters went beyond the bounds.⁹

A second capital issue and one which receives due study in Dr. Ellis' work was the labor question. In the eighties and nineties Cardinal Gibbons led the democratic van in the counsels of the Church. In the United States, with the assistance of Archbishops Ireland and Keane, he was able to lean the tiller of the Church toward the rising power of labor. His alliance with Henry Edward Cardinal Manning, who was following in the footsteps of Bishop Wilhelm Emmanuel von Ketteler, opened the gates of the Church universal to organized labor.¹⁰ It must, of course, be admitted that Manning was the guiding spirit and that Archbishop Ireland had to bring pressure to bear on the American Cardinal. But Gibbons had the sagacity to follow the lead and undergo the influence. It is true, too, that most of the Cardinal's pronouncements on labor, when read today, seem far from radical. But they were so regarded in their day, despite the fact that the prelate did not neglect his duty of impressing on employee as well as employer the need of following the maxims of the Gospel rather than the selfish principles of avarice and ambition.

III

It is unnecessary to examine here Gibbons' leadership in other important undertakings and struggles, the account of which in Dr. Ellis' pages makes such interesting reading.¹¹ But something remains to be said of the talents of the man. Gibbons' personality had a curious and unmistakable appeal and was one of his major assets.

A rather spare man, never strong but with a constitution sufficiently sound to meet the demands made upon it, Gibbons guarded his health by strict care of diet and exercise. Intellectually he was not considered the match of some other members of the hierarchy in his day. If this judgment

⁹ Cf. Ellis, I, 308, 376 ff. "Over twenty years later Gibbons himself said the Milwaukee sermon was one of the most audacious things he ever did and he remarked at the time, 'When I finished they were aghast but I think the lesson had its effect.'"

¹⁰ Cf. Ellis, I, 544.

¹¹ Dr. Ellis gives lengthy treatment to the Third Plenary Council, Catholic University, Secret Societies, Dr. McGlynn, the Apostolic Delegation, the School Controversy, the Spanish-American War and its aftermath, and World War I. Each of these subjects is handled separately, which makes some repetition unavoidable but from the viewpoint of history is quite acceptable. It would be the work of a novelist, not of a scientific historian, to endeavor to reconstruct the complete picture as it occurred.

is true, he made up for the deficiency by assiduous consultation. Moreover, he was an unusually shrewd observer of trends and events.¹²

As a priest, not only was his propriety never called in question but Gibbons impressed all by his awareness of his sacred calling. This priestly quality attracted many who were comforted by the religious and otherworldly temper of his mind. As a prelate in high position, he lived and looked his part, thoroughly enjoying ecclesiastical functions and ceremonies. In his selection and support of candidates for high offices in the Church, on the contrary, the Cardinal was not always felicitous. Dr. Ellis admits that two of his more prominent choices (Foley and Chapelle) made somewhat erratic prelates. It was this lack of ability to pick the right man which explains his failure, despite his long career and the confidence of at least Leo XIII, to surround himself in the hierarchy with friends and supporters; in other words, to give unity to the episcopate. Indeed, the impression was sometimes given that other ecclesiastics were using the Cardinal's ascendancy for their own ends. This, however, was only an impression. No matter how pliable Gibbons might seem, he had a hidden steel-like quality of resistance when called upon to advance beyond the bounds of discretion. The laments of his friends, Archbishop Ireland especially, over the Cardinal's lack of fortitude show this quite clearly.¹³

¹² Perhaps the reflections on Gibbons' intellectual capacities were due not only to the report, which Dr. Ellis shows to have been false (I, 41 f.), that he had not made an impressive record in the seminary, but also to the fact that the Cardinal had no facility in French or Italian. His friends, Ireland, Keane, and Denis O'Connell, had an advantage in this respect. Perhaps if Gibbons had had direct contact with French thought, he might have had less respect for their intellectual attainments. Indirectly, of course, his Sulpician advisers kept him informed. That he never fell into the mistake of considering a man like Alfred Loisy to be the best exegete of the Church was due also to his native sagacity. Moynihan (*op. cit.*, p. 244) credits Denis O'Connell with this view.

¹³ Cf. Ellis, II, 454 ff. The opinion was abroad in 1891 that Gibbons allowed himself to be taken in, in recommending candidates for the episcopal dignity. As the years went on, the Cardinal seemed to be ready to follow the opinion of others in this important matter. Even in choosing members of the episcopate as aides in matters concerning the welfare of the American Church, Gibbons was not felicitous, as the choice of Bishop Joseph Dwenger seems to show (cf. Ellis, I, 257 ff.). Gibbons' early influence with Leo XIII is shown by the appointment as papal legate to the Third Plenary Council and by his advancement to the cardinalate. In 1889 Bishop William G. McCloskey complained that there had been too much of "I like Gibbons" in Rome, but was convinced that the situation was changing. Very probably McCloskey was right; Gibbons' influence did decline during the last years of Leo XIII's reign. Ellis (I, 475) puts the first major reverse in 1895. Under Pius X and Benedict XV there was, perhaps, a reversal of this trend. Archbishop Ireland remarked to Bishop Denis O'Connell in 1892: "Gibbons is exactly the weak man we have imagined him but good at heart" (Ellis, I, 692). Ireland described as follows the fate of his proposal

As a preacher Gibbons was pleasing, interesting, effective. His discourses, which had a clearness and crispness of composition, were delivered in an unusually engaging tone of voice. In *The Faith of Our Fathers* he produced, as a young bishop, a most popular work of apologetics, a book which sold more than two million copies, easily outdistancing any other similar work and, indeed, most works of any kind.¹⁴

In both public and private life no one was more chary than the Cardinal of laying blame or using harsh expressions. Always kind and generous in his reception of ideas and people, it was almost impossible to draw a stern remark from him. He had a dread of hurting the feelings of adults and was considerate of children.

Gibbons' discretion was altogether exceptional. Although he regularly cast his ballot on election day, even the members of his household did not know how he voted. Critics did not fail to attempt to bait him. But the Cardinal was a master in avoiding direct attack and proffering the glancing blow. Even professional controversialists failed to draw him into discussion. In addition he never strove for the petty pleasure of a victory over an adversary, never worked to put his enemies to shame. Then, too, in the midst of all the honors which came to him, he remained the most unassuming of men. To the end his favorite exercise was walking and for many years he preferred the tram to the carriage. If his opportunities were great, it must be said that he used them greatly.¹⁵

This frail prelate, who at thirty-four was the Church's youngest bishop, lived to be the last survivor of the archbishops appointed by Pius IX, of the Fathers of the Vatican Council and the Third Plenary Council of Baltimore. He also became, toward the end of his life, the *doyen d'âge* of the College of Cardinals. Leader of the American hierarchy by 1884, he held that position to his death in 1921. His influence grew with the years, principally no doubt because of that perfect balance which enabled him to control his temper in disputes, as in those with Archbishop Michael Corrigan.

After twenty-five years as America's sole cardinal, Gibbons' leadership was not challenged when in 1911 the benign Farley and the dynamic

that the American Archbishops protest against the imputation of *Americanism* to the United States: "St. Paul tried to get a joint protest against the idea of the existence of error. Philadelphia almost joined in, but Baltimore cried, 'Peace, peace—even death for the sake of peace,' and nothing was effected" (Moynihan, *op. cit.*, p. 131).

¹⁴ Maurice Francis Egan regarded Gibbons highly as an orator: "His sermons will not stand in comparison with those of Bourdaloue, which, in spirit, they greatly resemble, but it seems to me that he was truly the most eloquent of all the orators of our time" (*Catholic World*, CXVI [1922-23], 475).

¹⁵ Cf. Ellis, II, 552.

O'Connell attained to the same dignity. Farley had long been a friend and admirer of the old Cardinal and, although a critical press contrasted the utterances and actions of Gibbons and O'Connell, the relations between the Archbishops of Boston and Baltimore lost nothing in cordiality. And the preeminence of Gibbons was only enhanced.¹⁶

Leaders of the state, too, vied with one another in sounding the praises of the kindly Cardinal. Theodore Roosevelt once spoke of him as America's most respected, venerated, and useful citizen. It was persistently reported, however, that President Woodrow Wilson had been discourteous to Gibbons when the latter called shortly after Wilson's election. The Democratic party, if not Mr. Wilson, was careful to deny this before the election in 1916.¹⁷

The Cardinal described his method on a certain occasion as one of vigilant, masterly inactivity.¹⁸ Some might be tempted to use this as his epitaph. Even when he spoke or acted, there was generally something noncommittal in his attitude. His adversaries were only too ready to characterize him as wily, slippery, weak. Judged by results, neither the Cardinal's description nor the judgment of those exasperated by his lack of forthrightness is satisfactory. It is a fact that Gibbons used his influence with the utmost discretion. Although he knew how to profit by public opinion and sentiment, he obviously had no idea how to arouse them synthetically. Even had he known the secret, it is doubtful if he would ever have made use of it. He was loath, also, even when urged by the very highly placed, to appeal directly to the President. This was perhaps the reason why his influence under Theodore Roosevelt and Taft was undoubted. Even under McKinley, if Rome had approached Washington through the Cardinal and he had consented to act, the war with Spain might have been avoided. Certainly it was Gibbons who was consulted by the American government on the measures

¹⁶ Archbishop Dennis Dougherty of Philadelphia, the future cardinal, was also a devoted friend (cf. Ellis, II, 425). The future Cardinal Mundelein preached at the celebration of Gibbons' golden jubilee as a bishop (cf. Ellis, II, 436). Leadership of the American hierarchy, in which the metropolitans are all quite independent of each other, and even bishops really have no superior but the Holy Father, is a question of influence rather than authority. Bishop Bernard McQuaid's protest (cf. Ellis, I, 327) against crediting Gibbons with being the head of the American Church is justified if there is question of authority; Gibbons' position in Baltimore as incumbent of the premier see gave him practically none. Considered as a protest against Gibbons' influence, it merely means that Bishop McQuaid was kicking against the goad; in 1887 no one could deny the Cardinal's influence.

¹⁷ For Roosevelt, see Ellis, II, 500. Wilson was quoted in 1916 as saying that the charge of discourtesy was preposterous: "He had not offered the cardinal a chair since diplomatic usage decreed that an ambassador be received by the President standing to imply their equality, and Wilson had treated Gibbons as one having that rank" (Ellis, II, 515-19).

¹⁸ Cf. Ellis, I, 452.

which saved the Church in Cuba and the Philippines. In 1896, with Cardinal Herbert Vaughan of Westminster and Cardinal Michael Logue of Armagh, Gibbons had called for and had obtained a peaceful settlement of the difficulties between Great Britain and the United States on the boundary of Venezuela. But in this instance the appeal was a public document.¹⁹

Probably Gibbons considered the application of pressure on the American government by American churchmen as generally unjustified and always dangerous. He would have been content if he had been able to avoid all such manoeuvres. His acquaintance with European Catholicism made him wary of multiplying links between Church and state in the United States.²⁰ He thought the Church should look to the people for support and not to the state. The Church in Europe seemed to him to have handicapped itself by accepting state tutelage. Friendly relations with the civil powers he welcomed, but he cherished ecclesiastical independence more.

IV

Dr. Ellis, writing what may be called the first independent biography of Cardinal Gibbons, has produced a historical work of the first importance.²¹ His two well-written volumes are not conceived from the conventional viewpoint, the bane of ecclesiastical biography. They contain appreciation in the true meaning of the word, not unreasoning eulogy. There is no effort at concealment and the edification given is of true alloy. Delicate questions are handled delicately, as they should be. It would, after all, be strange if the biographer of a man who was the soul of discretion indulged in indiscretion. Dr. Ellis succeeds in uniting truth and tactfulness. If he extenuates nothing, he sets down naught to malice. Like the Cardinal, he manages, without suppressing anything vital, to avoid personalities which might give pain or offense.

It is probable, nevertheless, that those who still espouse positions which the Cardinal opposed, or failed to support, will be disappointed with Dr. Ellis at times. Even the friends of Gibbons' friends will perhaps find that

¹⁹ Cf. Ellis, II, 98 ff. Moynihan states that early in the negotiations to prevent the war with Spain McKinley became "more careful in his relations with Archbishop Ireland" (*op. cit.*, p. 166).

²⁰ Cf. Ellis, I, 101. In 1870 Gibbons, on a visit to Annecy in Savoy, was much impressed by the remark of Bishop Claude Magnin, who received his guest in a splendid palace before which guards were marching up and down, that he could not build a sacristy without government approval.

²¹ The earlier works of John T. Reily (1890-1905), Allen Sinclair Will (1911 and 1922), Cornelius F. Thomas (1917), Albert E. Smith and Vincent de Paul Fitzpatrick (1921), Covelle Newcomb (1945), and of the Cardinal himself in his *A Retrospect of Fifty Years* (1916), have all been used by Dr. Ellis.

their heroes receive insufficient attention. One explanation of this is that the adequate historical spadework has not yet been done in the case of men like Archbishop Patrick Ryan of Philadelphia and Archbishop Michael Corrigan of New York. Another and important reason is that Dr. Ellis is writing a biography of Gibbons, not a history of the Church in the United States. It has been asserted by such an authority as Peter Guilday that "in one sense the history of the Church in the United States from 1870 to 1920 is largely a biography of Gibbons' episcopate." A writer less skilled than Dr. Ellis might have tried to turn this life into such a history. If Dr. Ellis had done so, his product would not yet be printed and it is doubtful if it would ever have the value of the present work. In a biography of Gibbons, the biographer necessarily sees events from Gibbons' viewpoint, even if he does not, as frequently happens in the present instance, accept his hero's judgment of them.²²

Open critics of the Cardinal in his lifetime had little to allege against him. Bishop Bernard McQuaid of Rochester used to reproach him with vanity—and Dr. Ellis admits some of the harmless variety. Archbishop John Ireland, as we have seen, lamented the Cardinal's lack of fortitude. Some Catholic editors detected a dangerous liberalism in his pronouncements; some of their Protestant colleagues thought they perceived dishonesty in the Cardinal's defence of the Church. Not a very considerable array of faults, certainly!²³

Dr. Ellis himself adds a few slightly more damaging indictments. He thinks he perceives a remissness in the Cardinal's promotion of the parochial school system in the Archdiocese. He also notes a failure to initiate new parishes when needed. Both of these defects in administration appeared as Gibbons grew older and might well have been provided against by the appointment of a vigorous coadjutor. But the Cardinal was decidedly cool to any suggestions in that line. Dr. Ellis also concludes that Gibbons was quite unoriginal. No great project, he thinks, owed its origins and completion to his initiative.²⁴

Dr. Ellis is disturbed by Gibbons' volte-face in the matter of the Apostolic Delegation. In the name of all the American Archbishops, Gibbons had

²² Cf. *Catholic Historical Review*, VI (1920-21), 535 f.

²³ Cf. Ellis, II, 645 ff.

²⁴ Cf. *ibid.* Originality, especially in questions of the magnitude of those which Gibbons faced, is a difficult thing to define. Gibbons certainly was conservative. Even in the matter of the safe and sane Americanism of which he was the leading exponent and for which he certainly depended on none of his contemporaries, he was, in the judgment of Peter Guilday, "a representative of the spirit which has always ruled the bishops since Carroll's day—a sincere and untroubled sympathy with the genius of the American Republic" (*Catholic Historical Review*, VI [1920-21], 546).

written on January 3, 1893 opposing the establishment of a permanent papal representative in the United States. The document was sent to his Roman agent for presentation to the Holy See. Then came the unexpected news that the Apostolic Delegation was a *fait accompli*. Gibbons, after hastily consulting his fellow Archbishops, recalled the protest which had not been presented and on January 30th wrote Leo XIII a letter heavy with commendation of the decision. Dr. Ellis thinks the Cardinal went too far and was "taking a liberty with the truth to which he was not ordinarily accustomed." This view may be correct but there are considerations which may save Gibbons' reputation for veracity. After all, as Dr. Ellis shows in not a few instances, Gibbons did not hesitate on occasion to oppose the Roman view, sometimes tenaciously.²⁵

The letter designed to prevent the establishment of the Apostolic Delegation was written by the Cardinal, it is true, but in the name of the Archbishops of the United States, who were for the most part opposed to a permanent representative. Gibbons, always one to observe the direction of the winds and the tides, was expressing the *communis opinio*. The letter which welcomes the Apostolic Delegation was written in Gibbons' own name. Now, there was a reason why the Cardinal should personally be glad that a papal representative would be in residence in Washington. As incumbent of the premier see, it had been his duty to transact not a little of the business of which the Apostolic Delegate would in the future have charge. Although of course they added to his prestige, we know that the Cardinal often found these tasks quite uncongenial. They sometimes meant that he, who was naturally so careful to avoid unpleasant issues and to put the best construction on disagreeable events, had to make and publish rather harsh decisions. He could, then, have been personally sincere in welcoming, after the event, a permanent representative of the Holy Father, even though he was convinced with the majority of the Archbishops that it was not the moment to send one. Furthermore, all but two of the American Archbishops had advised him to recall the original missive.²⁶

If in this case Dr. Ellis takes a stand against the action of the Cardinal, on another page he endeavors to refute the charge, which is still heard at times, that the prelate favored mixed marriages. That such a prudent man as Gibbons would ever have made, even in private, a pronouncement in favor of such marriages is difficult to admit. Neither is there any evidence that he ever did. What seems true is that in his early years as a bishop he was somewhat more lenient in dealing with them than later on. Dr. Ellis

²⁵ Cf., for example, Ellis, I, 477-85.

²⁶ Cf. Ellis, I, 630-35.

points out that so far was he from favoring them in his maturity that he would not assist at one of them even though the principals were a British Earl and an American heiress and he had been invited to do so by the Archbishop of New York.²⁷

v

The thirty years which have passed since his disappearance from the American scene would seem at first sight to constitute too brief a lapse of time to permit an accurate gauging of the historical proportions of Cardinal Gibbons. A historian writing fifty or a hundred years from now will have a vantage point that Dr. Ellis could not hope to have. Despite this, Ellis' *Gibbons* is not only timely but definitive. It is timely because in our day historians go along with armies instead of waiting for the documents to find their way into the archives. The healthy concern which many people feel with the events of the recent past made it imperative that a serious biography of Gibbons be attempted. Dr. Ellis' work is definitive because it is built on extensive and practically complete documentation.²⁸ In a restricted sense we can say that the more important preliminary work had also been done, at least for the events which happened before the present century. In addition, Dr. Ellis was singularly favored by his subject. Gibbons, for all his prudence and discretion, perhaps because of them, was not one who needed debunking. As far as the Cardinal himself was concerned, there was very little that a biographer had to reevaluate. As for the flattering judgment of Gibbons' contemporaries, one might perhaps be justified in finding it unfounded but one certainly cannot deny that it existed. It may be that in time the stature of Gibbons will shrink. Dr. Ellis has, without any special pleading, shown that up to the present it has not shrunk. Anyone who reads these volumes carefully will be rewarded by a greater and better founded esteem of the Cardinal.

It was inevitable that there should be some minor errors in such a long work. There may be, as some have suggested, a few lapses in interpretation and in the structure of the work. If there are, we owe it largely to Dr. Ellis

²⁷ Cf. Ellis, II, 467.

²⁸ There can be no doubt that Dr. Ellis has written a definitive biography. Prof. Ray Allen Billington has hailed its appearance. Prof. Arthur M. Schlesinger calls it "a landmark of American biography, readable, judicious and thoroughly documented." Fr. Thomas T. McAvoy, C.S.C., writes: "The present biography will not in all likelihood be replaced by any similar exhaustive study." *Commonweal* adds: "Father Ellis' book will henceforth be an indispensable reference."

that we are able to detect them. Although he has not written, nor tried to write, a history of the American Catholic Church during the half century when the figure of Gibbons dominated the scene, the author of this biography does give insights into men and movements which the historians of the Church in America will have to ponder. No more important book has yet been written by an historian of the American Catholic Church. John Gilmary Shea and Peter Guilday have in Dr. Ellis a worthy successor.

Woodstock College

EDWARD A. RYAN, S.J.