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## Politics and Parochial Schools in Archbishop John Purcell's Ohio

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POLITICS AND PAROCHIAL SCHOOLS  
IN  
ARCHBISHOP JOHN PURCELL'S OHIO

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POLITICS AND PAROCHIAL SCHOOLS  
IN ARCHBISHOP JOHN PURCELL'S OHIO

JAMES A. GUTOWSKI

**ABSTRACT**

This study chronicles the contentious relationship between advocates of public schools and those promoting Catholic education in Ohio during the career of Archbishop John Purcell of Cincinnati. Using information culled from qualitative research into primary resources such as personal correspondence, published proceedings and newspaper articles of the time, this monograph reconstructs a history of philosophical and political conflict accompanying the parallel development of two burgeoning school systems. The years from 1833 to 1883 saw the development of an equilibrium between the two systems that helped to define Thomas Jefferson's concept of the "wall of separation" between church and state. Public schools did not have to share tax-generated funding with parochial schools which, in turn, were irrefutably protected from taxation themselves. Furthermore, the history of competing school systems exhibits the paradox of religious liberty in America and uncovers an evolution in the nature of opposition to Catholicism in the United States.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

In a small way the task of any historian is essentially to play God - to make order from chaos or, more accurately, to *find* order in where none is immediately apparent. The history of education in the United States, with its intimate connection to the development of American culture, offers a worthy (if daunting) stage for anyone who wishes to play God in this way. Any study of history necessarily requires lenses which serve both to focus and to limit the scope of that study to some size that is manageable for both writer and reader. This dissertation will use four such lenses, all of which appear in the title: politics, parochial schools, John Purcell, and Ohio.

Ohio in the 19<sup>th</sup> century provides an excellent framework within which to study the parallel development of public and parochial school education. Its heritage as the Western Reserve of Connecticut made the state a natural gateway to the Midwest for the innovations of Horace Mann *et al.* that were developing in New England. The Buckeye State also became the destination for many of the immigrants who expanded the ranks of the Catholic Church in the United States and became a source of grave concern for many native-born citizens. Finally, as evidenced by the election of a string of native sons to the White House,

Ohio became an important proving ground after the Civil War for issues of national importance.

Archbishop John Purcell led the Roman Catholic Diocese of Cincinnati for almost fifty years. In the span of those decades he witnessed the transformation of a frontier outpost into a major American city. The length of his tenure allowed Purcell to participate directly in two fairly distinct epochs of American history which are separated by the War Between the States. He inherited a diocese of sixteen parishes and four schools and supervised its growth into three separate dioceses with 462 parishes and 244 schools at the time of his death. Throughout his career he was an active and persistent advocate of education as a means of passing on the Catholic faith and inculcating healthy American values. In some ways, John Purcell represented the best hope for a spirit of cooperation to develop between Catholic authorities and advocates of free public education in the United States. Unfortunately, those hopes died quickly, to be replaced by the fortress mentality that typified most of the bishops of his generation.

The development of parochial schools in Ohio is fairly paradigmatic of the evolution of Catholic schools across the United States. Though the machinations of Archbishop John Hughes in New York and the school-related violence in Charlestown and Philadelphia tend to garner more attention from historians, the Ohio story is actually more typical of the rest of the nation. From their meager beginnings on the American frontier, parochial schools in the Buckeye State multiplied as the Catholic population grew. Under the leadership of Archbishop Purcell (and later Bishop Richard Gilmour of Cleveland), Catholic pastors in the state were assiduous in establishing parochial schools wherever possible. Both prelates actively directed Catholic parents to enroll their children in parochial schools wherever possible. Also, during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the parochial schools of Ohio reflected the ethnic

diversity of Catholicism itself in the state though they also served as a means for students to assimilate themselves into American culture.

Politics is part of education because people are so much a part of education. Within the context of this dissertation the term “politics” is used to refer to the normal process of human interaction that leads to the development of policy as well as to the more formal process that affects actual legislation. Both types play an active and important role in shaping the parallel development of public and parochial education in the State of Ohio.

This dissertation consists of six chapters which, it is hoped, will provide an orderly and logical explanation of the historical significance to be found in the evolution of parochial schools during the career of Archbishop John Purcell. The first chapter sets the stage for a more specific discussion by laying out the larger historic issues that provided the subtext for the various discussions and controversies that eventually played out in 19<sup>th</sup> century Ohio. The second chapter fulfills a similar purpose but in a more specific vein. It details the more spectacular examples of parochial school-related controversy that both color our perception of history today and provide a context for appreciating the relative civility of the events that unfolded in Cincinnati at around the same time. The third chapter tells the story of Bishop John Purcell’s arrival in Cincinnati and his initial encounters with those who took responsibility for making education policy for the local common schools. The fourth chapter serves a bridge connecting the events of the previous chapter with those of the one to follow. This chapter provides a cultural context for 1870 by explaining the effects of the Civil War decade on Ohio’s people and politics. The fifth chapter returns to the more specific discussion of Ohio state politics in the 1870s and how they were affected by the continuing growth of parochial schools across the state. The final chapter chronicles the bitter end of Archbishop Purcell’s career and discusses the historic importance of the event

explained in previous chapters. Though it may not merit consideration for becoming a major motion picture, the story contained herein has had a real and lasting effect on the state of education in Ohio today. To understand it is to know ourselves better.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF THE CATHOLIC/Common SCHOOL CONTROVERSIES IN 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY UNITED STATES**

The relationship between Catholicism and the common schools developing in 19<sup>th</sup> century America is replete with personal, political and popular conflict. Figures like Lyman Beecher and Bishop John Hughes, events such as the Philadelphia Bible riots and political phenomena like the rise of nativism all made manifest in a concrete way the ongoing conflict between Catholic leaders and those who promoted free public education across the United States. These realities, however, were underpinned by deeper philosophical conflicts that would have erupted somehow, somewhere during that time no matter who the principal characters might have been.

At the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Catholic Church in the United States was in a state of retrenchment by expansion. When the thirteen colonies won their independence from Great Britain, Catholics in America were a minority led by priests who maintained an identity rooted in the recent English experience of Catholicism that fostered authentic religious practice without attracting unwanted attention from the very powerful forces that were arrayed against it. For this model of American Catholicism, the religious freedom espoused by the newly-formed United States represented an opportunity to develop without

harassment. That opportunity quickly became a challenge as the growing numbers of Catholic laity quickly outstripped the capacity of the priests available to serve them and the influence of a more continental form of European Catholicism became more prevalent in the new nation.

With the influx of French clerics into the American hierarchy, the religious freedom that had originally appeared to be an opportunity to flourish began to look to the Catholic leadership suspiciously like the lack of any belief in God whatsoever. As more Irish-born bishops emerged the suspicion of irreligion transmogrified into something even more insidious: a belief that the claim to religious freedom was really a ruse to allow the cultural infiltration of a generic form of Protestantism.

The emergence of a more European form of Catholicism in the United States of the 19<sup>th</sup> century also brought with it a residue of the Reformation creating a hermeneutic of suspicion through which Catholic leaders greeted several elements of the common school movement. What looked fresh, innovative and democratic to education reformers looked frighteningly familiar, innovative and democratic to American Catholic bishops steeped in the tradition of religious strife in mainland Europe. These fundamental differences preordained the Catholic/common school conflict that would follow.

### **From American Catholic Church to Catholic Church in America:**

In 1821, the people of Baltimore gathered to dedicate a new church built on a hill overlooking the city's inner harbor. Designed by Benjamin Latrobe, America's first professional architect, the church shared many similarities of design with Latrobe's larger and more famous project: the United States Capitol. Both buildings featured the large domes, columned porticoes and clean lines of the neoclassical architecture fashionable in the

United States at the time.<sup>1</sup> The use of Greco-Roman architecture became popular in early America as a way of symbolizing the connection between the new republic and its ancient forbears.<sup>2</sup>

The new church would be first cathedral of the Catholic Church in the United States, today known as the Basilica of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary. When he was first commissioned to design the church, Latrobe offered two choices to diocesan authorities. The first was a traditional Gothic design commonly found throughout Europe, and the neoclassical model which received the strong approval of diocesan trustees. Once the basic plan was approved, John Carroll, the first Bishop of Baltimore, worked closely with Latrobe on the final design and details of the church much as Thomas Jefferson had done when working with the architect on the Capitol's design.<sup>3</sup> Though the resemblance of their roles was probably unintentional, president and prelate shared other similarities as well. Both were from established landed Southern families directly involved in the foundation of the new republic. While Jefferson's role in the American Revolution was well-known, the future bishop made his own contribution as part of failed mission to Canada in 1776 trying to enlist that colony in the American cause. Though the mission was a failure, Carroll earned the lasting gratitude of Benjamin Franklin, another member of the mission, who fell ill in Canada and was nursed back to health by the priest, who stayed with Franklin until he was healthy enough to travel.<sup>4</sup>

Though he didn't live to see its dedication, Carroll's cathedral reflected the style of Catholic Church that he both envisioned and embodied for the United States. While its purpose was to be the center of a religious tradition that traced its roots back through centuries of Old World history back to the time of Jesus Christ, the basilica's design with its clean lines, clear windows and plain white furnishings represented the simplicity and classical

heritage of the American Experiment. Similarly, Carroll's vision of Catholicism in America was of a church thoroughly rooted in the spiritual and intellectual traditions of Rome but manifesting a lack of the pomp and ostentation commonly associated with the Church in Europe and which, for many, represented all that was wrong with "Romanism".

In 1858, another cathedral began construction; this one in the largest city in the United States. Like that first cathedral in Baltimore, this one was started by the most prominent Catholic prelate of his era who chose his architect with a particular vision in mind. Like in Baltimore, too, this bishop would not live to see his vision finished but his legacy would live on in an edifice that came to represent the Catholic Church in America under his particular regime. There the similarities ended.

This second cathedral was Saint Patrick's in New York City, started by Archbishop John Hughes and fitting into the American landscape was not part of his plan. Seeking to build "a cathedral of suitable magnificence for the Church of New York," Hughes laid the cornerstone for what is still the largest Catholic church in North America. Built of white marble in the Gothic style complete with intricate carvings and stained-glass windows, Saint Patrick's would not look out of place in any of the great cities in northern Europe. An immigrant himself in a city which witnessed several outbreaks of nativist violence, the archbishop wanted to create a visible symbol of the magnificence of the Catholic Church and the power of those who comprised it.

Though Archbishops Carroll and Hughes were separated only by a generation, their personal histories are almost a study in complete contrasts. A scion of Maryland's Catholic aristocracy, John Carroll was sent to France to be educated in a more refined culture where his type of religious faith was the rule rather than the exception. Attracted to the Jesuits, Carroll spent the first years of his life as a religious traveling Europe as the private tutor for



the son of an English nobleman.<sup>5</sup> John Hughes, on the other hand, was born the son of a poor farmer in Ireland. After emigrating to the United States in 1817, Hughes worked as a laborer in the area of Chambersburg, PA. When he decided to enter the seminary at St. Mary's in Emmitsburg, MD, he was initially rejected because of his lack of education. He chose to stay on the grounds, working as a gardener until the rector finally consented to admit him as a student.<sup>6</sup>

A member of that social class that came closest to being aristocracy in America, John Carroll understood that Catholicism could grow comfortably in the United States given the proper circumstances. Led by a native clergy who understood both, their religion and their nation, and downplaying as much as possible the connection to a foreign potentate, the Church could keep a low profile and expect to prosper in the new nation. All of this was alien to John Hughes, an “outsider” through and through. For the Irishman, struggle had been an essential part of anything that he had achieved and it was only natural that he would see this as part of his episcopal responsibilities as well. Each man formed the Catholic Church of the United States in his own image and, for better or worse, it was Hughes who left the bigger footprint.

Catholicism as it existed in America during the Hughes era was markedly different than the church that Carroll had led a few decades before. At the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the majority of Catholics in the United States were native-born and demographically concentrated in Maryland and Pennsylvania, two colonies noted for their religious toleration. Several Catholics, most notably the Carrolls, played important roles in shaping the early republic. The practices of the local Church had begun to assume a distinctly American cast. There was a spirit of cooperation with Protestant religions. Members of different denominations attended each other's services and contributed to the building of different

churches. In his survey of American Catholic life, Jay Dolan reported an incident which typified the easy ecumenism of the era. In 1810 a new Catholic church was dedicated in Lebanon, PA. A Jesuit priest preached to a congregation which included a Moravian, three Lutheran, and three Reformed ministers. After the ceremony, all of the clergy dined together at the home of one of the Lutherans.<sup>7</sup>

The Catholic Church in the new republic also began to show signs of growing democratization. This happened most commonly at the local level where congregations elected lay members to govern the temporal affairs of the parish. This system of trustees helped to spread Catholicism by enabling the laity to establish and maintain churches without resident clergy. The system first began in urban centers like New York and Philadelphia but quickly spread to frontiers like Kentucky and the Old Northwest.<sup>8</sup>

John Carroll's own election as bishop was unusually democratic. During the colonial era, Catholics in North America were under the jurisdiction of the Bishop of London. With political independence won at the end of the Revolution, the priests in the United States (mostly ex-Jesuits who had become *de facto* diocesan priests<sup>9</sup> when the Society of Jesus was suppressed by Pope Clement XIV) sought to break the ecclesiastical tie to England as well. John Carroll organized a meeting of the priests in America to be convened at Whitmarsh, the Jesuit plantation in Maryland. The meeting composed a constitution by which the clergy could govern themselves and sent a petition to Rome asking that Rev. John Lewis, who had been serving as superior of the former Jesuits, be appointed as superior of the entire American mission. The primary reason put forth for this request was that the new government of the United States would find it intolerable that American Catholics would be under the jurisdiction of a bishop from another country. Rome was amenable to the Whitmarsh petition but wanted to consider candidates other than Lewis for the

appointment. As it happened, Benjamin Franklin was in Paris at the time serving as the American ambassador to France. Because of the close relationship between the French monarchy and the papacy, Franklin was able to use his influence in court to push Rome in the direction of choosing John Carroll to be the first Superior of the Mission in the thirteen United States. With his appointment in June of 1784, Carroll was able represent the American Church to Rome while enforcing at home the constitution developed by the clergy at Whitmarsh (for which they had neither requested, nor received, any official approbation from Rome).<sup>10</sup>

While his new position gave him ecclesiastical jurisdiction over the Catholic Church in the United States, it did not give John Carroll the independence of authority enjoyed by an actual bishop. As Superior of the Mission, Carroll was under the authority of the Sacred Congregation *de Propaganda Fide*, that branch of the Vatican government responsible for missionary territories. As their agent, the superior was bound to operate within whatever parameters of power that were set by the functionaries at the Congregation. On the other hand a bishop, even in a mission territory, operated with much more independence and was answerable to the pope alone. Carroll and his clergy quickly resolved that, to nurture the growing spirit of their ecclesiastical community, it would be necessary to establish the United States as a diocese. Moreover, they wanted to preserve the nascent democratization of the American Church by electing their own bishop. Surprisingly enough, Pope Pius VI acceded to proposal sent from the former colonies and, in May of 1789, the clergy elected John Carroll as the first Bishop of Baltimore.<sup>11</sup>

Nobody could foresee it at the time, but Carroll's election would be the high-water mark of this new form of democratic American Catholicism. Though he established St. Mary's Seminary in Baltimore as a means to replace his aging ex-Jesuit confreres with more

American priests, the numbers produced were not sufficient to the need. The growing church was forced to rely on priests from Europe with decidedly mixed results. While many who came were good men with a genuine zeal for their ministry, others were renegades, rejects and shysters sent across the Atlantic by superiors ridding themselves of problematic personnel. Whatever their personal qualities, all of these men had been inculcated in ecclesiastical customs foreign to what they found in the United States. Only a minority were able to adapt capably to their new circumstances.<sup>12</sup> Trained in attitudes of obedience to authority, democracy would not be a high priority for most of them.

Lay trusteeship of local parishes quickly proved to be a mixed blessing. While the practice was effective in establishing the Catholic Church far beyond what the clergy could serve, trustees began to assume the right to hire and fire the priests who would serve them. Given the motley crew of priests available, several local parishes quickly found themselves in long conflicts with Bishop Carroll about who had the authority to appoint pastors. One example of this was Holy Trinity Church in Philadelphia, founded in 1787 by German immigrants who were unhappy with the priests who spoke English only at nearby St. Mary's. While the establishment of a German-speaking parish was against the spirit of what John Carroll wanted to develop in America, he raised no objections until the trustees hired two itinerant priests (John and Peter Heilbron) to serve as pastors. The bishop refused to give the men permission to preach or to administer the sacraments in his diocese. Instead, Carroll sent his own appointee, a German ex-Jesuit named Lawrence Graessl, to serve as pastor. The people of Holy Trinity refused to accept the bishop's choice and a stalemate ensued for several years thereafter.<sup>13</sup> The end result of the trustee controversies was that Carroll and his successors fought hard to win back much of the local control that had previously been granted to parish congregations.

Finally, the democratic nature of John Carroll's own appointment as bishop was never to happen again. In 1807, after Rome had approved the division of the United States into several smaller dioceses, Carroll recommended the establishment of episcopal seats in Boston, Philadelphia and Bardstown, Kentucky. For each seat he nominated his own choice for bishop, without consulting the clergy, and each choice was ratified by Pope Pius VII. Another blow to Carroll's American model came at the same time, when Pius created an additional diocese in New York and appointed as bishop an Irishman who had never set foot on American soil. Richard Luke Concanen had been recommended for a missionary diocese by the Irish hierarchy. He died without ever reaching America and his replacement was another Irishman with similar qualifications.<sup>14</sup> This new development signaled the end of the independence from foreign influence that Carroll and his American priests had hoped to establish. When John Carroll died in 1815, the Catholic Church in America was beginning to take shape as a church of immigrants led by imperious bishops who would dominate its image for the next century and more. By 1840 there were fifteen Catholic dioceses in the United States and only three were governed by native-born bishops.

The appointment of John Hughes as coadjutor bishop<sup>15</sup> in New York in 1838 was not so much a harbinger of things to come as it was evidence of the change that had already begun decades earlier. An immigrant himself, Hughes was coming to a city which had seen its immigrant population double in the previous two censuses. As an Irishman, the new bishop was part of the largest ethnic group emigrating to America at the time. Between 1820 and 1840, more than 260,000 people migrated from Ireland to the United States<sup>16</sup>, and this was before the great surges precipitated by the Potato Famine. The influx to New York City was so strong that Hughes' predecessor as Bishop of New York, John DuBois, saw the

appointment of an Irish successor as the only way for the institutional Church to maintain any control over its followers in the city.<sup>17</sup>

John Hughes also represented a new reality for the Catholic Church regarding other denominations. The new bishop brought with him a reputation for not shrinking from a fight. As a priest in Philadelphia he delighted in fighting with those he perceived to be anti-Catholic. In 1830, Hughes published a series of articles in a local journal entitled *The Protestant: Expositor of Popery*. Writing under the pseudonym of Cranmer<sup>18</sup> he attacked various aspects of Catholicism. After several months, Hughes revealed his true identity and showed how he had exposed the uncritical anti-Catholicism of the paper's editors (whom he described as "the clerical scum of the country) by packing his articles with patent lies about the Church.<sup>19</sup> As bishop, Hughes gained the nickname "Dagger John", ostensibly because of the cross that he added to his signature but his combative personality made the sobriquet especially appropriate.<sup>20</sup> Perhaps emboldened by the burgeoning numbers of church membership that made Catholicism the largest single denomination in the United States by 1850<sup>21</sup> and because of his own hardscrabble history, John Hughes was not given to accommodation with those who did not serve what he perceived to be the interests of the Church.

### **The French Connection:**

The evolution from Carroll's Catholicism to that of John Hughes was neither sudden nor direct. The transitional period saw Catholic leadership in the United States assume a distinctly Gallic cast as the result of two circumstances: the perennial shortage of native-born American clergy and an influx of priests fleeing the French Revolution. As well-intentioned as these refugees may have been, the ecclesiology that they brought with them would be

antithetical to the American sense of republicanism that Carroll was hoping to inculcate in his diocese.

The Church's first direct taste of what was called "democracy" came with the French Revolution and the experience was far from pleasant. Though the United States had been functioning as a sovereign nation for several years before the downfall of Louis XVI, America was separated from Rome geographically by several thousands of miles of ocean and philosophically by having been colonized by Anglicans and their dissenters. France, on the other hand, had been known as "the eldest daughter of the Church" from the baptism of King Clovis I in 498 AD.

What happened in France was keenly felt in the Vatican and Revolution of 1789 was no exception. The passage of the *Civil Constitution on the Clergy* in 1790 caused a severe rift in what had been a close relationship between church and state. Condemnation of the document by Pope Pius VI triggered violence against the Church in the streets of France as mobs looted convents and defaced churches throughout the city.<sup>22</sup> As the idealism of the Revolution degenerated into the Reign of Terror the sentiment against the institutional Church widened to become an attack on the general practice of religious faith. The revolutionary government passed laws to replace the "superstition" of Christianity with a cult of the Republic. The National Convention, France's ruling body, ordered the promulgation of a new calendar that replaced the celebration of saints and feast days with an emphasis on the twin bases of Nature and Reason. Churches throughout the countryside were converted into temples of reason while newborns were given the names of revolutionary heroes rather than those of saints.<sup>23</sup>

The rise of Napoleon restored a measure of order to the French Church. Recognizing the social utility of a healthy Church, the First Consul negotiated a concordat

with the Holy See in 1801 which restored most of the rights and privileges the Church held before the Revolution. The restoration came at a price, however, as the same document nullified all previously existing episcopal appointments. In other words, all French bishops were swept out of office to be replaced by men nominated by Napoleon and approved by the pope. Pope Pius VII could not have the “eldest daughter of the Church” restored without this concession and so acquiesced to giving the French government an unprecedented measure of control over ecclesiastical affairs in France.<sup>24</sup>

Whatever reservations Pius might have had about the concordat with Napoleon, the fact remains that the agreement measurably improved conditions for the Catholic Church in France. The institution of democracy there, however tenuous its hold, had been disastrous for the Church. In the hands of “the people”, Catholicism in France faced near annihilation. This hard lesson was made more painful by the fact that it was delivered by the hands of a strongly Catholic nation. According to Rene Remond, a political scientist at the University of Paris, the Church’s experience in the Revolution of 1789 “was long to burden its [the Church’s] future; in the eyes of the majority of Catholics the very idea of democracy remained identified with militant hostility to religion, and its applications seemed incompatible with loyalty to the faith.”<sup>25</sup>

By the beginning of the nineteenth century, while the Catholic Church’s experience with democracy had been recent, brief and awful, the institution’s experience with education was ancient, long-lived and often glorious. When the spread of the Reformation forced the Church to reassess its place in the world, education emerged as important tool for winning back the common folk who had left and maintaining the loyalty of the young who might be tempted to desert the Barque of Peter. The seventeenth century witnessed the emergence of a new generation of religious communities dedicated to teaching such as the Vincentians



(1625), Daughters of Charity (1633), Sisters of Saint Joseph (1650), and Brothers of the Christian Schools (1684). The spread of the teaching orders throughout the Church led to the establishment of many of the first school systems in Europe.<sup>26</sup> Indeed, it was the Jesuit Order's dedication to education that saved it from extinction when Pope Clement XIV ordered the community's suppression in 1773. Because she didn't want to lose her Jesuit schools in Poland and Lithuania, Empress Catherine II of Russia ignored Clement's decree and the remnant of the community that she preserved would provide a canonical nucleus around which the order could reestablish itself when restored by Pope Pius VII in 1814.

Though Catherine the Great inadvertently did the Catholic Church a favor by preserving one of its greatest religious orders, the independence exerted by other European rulers manifested the challenge of nationalism to the authority of the pope. Leaders looking to reduce the influence of the Church in their nations often saw education as a means of liberating their people from the "superstition" of religion. In the middle of the eighteenth century Frederick the Great used schools as a means to spread the values of humanism among his subjects. Shortly thereafter, Joseph II of Austria introduced a program of compulsory secular education that led to his nation having the highest rate of school attendance in Europe.<sup>27</sup> Though Napoleon had restored much of the power and prestige that the Church had had before the Revolution of 1789, Catholics in France during his regime found themselves compelled to fight for freedom of education so that religious schools could coexist with the state-sponsored program established by the First Consul.<sup>28</sup>

Even as John Carroll was struggling to establish an American version of the Catholic Church he found himself hampered by the lack of native-born clergy. Of all the Christian religions, Catholicism is the most dependent on ministerial leadership. Any religious activity that is distinctively "Catholic" requires a priest and, in post-Revolution America, there were

simply not enough available. As a result, the American bishop was forced to rely on foreign-born clergy. When Carroll called his first synod<sup>29</sup> in 1791, eighty percent of the clergy who attended were foreign-born and the largest majority of these were French. Furthermore, in his quest to establish a native-born clergy, Carroll founded a seminary in Baltimore and gave it into the care of the Society of St. Sulpice, a French community specializing in the education of future priests, thus assuring a Gallic influence on future generations as well.<sup>30</sup>

According to Jay Dolan, the French model of Roman Catholicism did not blend well with the American version. The republican spirit of the United States, with its high regard for constitutional process was antithetical to the European monarchical view of authority. This conflict is clearly related in a letter from William Dubourg, Bishop of New Orleans, to officials in Rome. He wrote:

It is scarcely possible to realize how contagious even to the clergy and to men otherwise well disposed, are the principles of freedom and independence imbibed by all the pores in these United States. Hence I have always been convinced that practically all the good to be hoped for must come from the Congregations or religious Orders among which flourish strict discipline...<sup>31</sup>

While the number of clergy coming from France to the United States was never large, the stream of such immigrants remained steady through the end of the eighteenth century. When the Catholic Church in the United States failed to grow into the uniquely American form envisioned by John Carroll, French Catholicism filled the resultant void until overwhelmed by Irish immigrants who began to appear in large numbers after 1820. As late as 1840, 25 percent of American Catholic dioceses were controlled by French bishops. Given the bitter memory left by the Revolution of 1789, the French influence on the

American Church would not produce fertile ground on which the seeds of the Common School movement could fall.

### **The Spread of the Common School Movement:**

For a church with over sixteen centuries of history, the transition of Catholicism in the United States over the span of fifty-odd years was phenomenally quick but in the context of developing American culture, such evolution was fairly typical. Another institution undergoing a similarly rapid development was that of the American school. Though public education in America could trace its roots back to the “Old Deluder Satan” Law of 1647, the antebellum decades of the nineteenth century brought the emergence of a new form of such education; a school intended to serve all levels of society by teaching a common curriculum “to ensure a literate and unified public.”<sup>32</sup>

According to Carl Kaestle, opportunities for schooling were available to most white Americans in the North by 1830 but it was during the decade that followed that a system of common schools, publicly funded and regulated at the state level, became widespread across the Northeast and Midwest.<sup>33</sup> This new development was the result of a nexus of circumstances and personalities that quickly spread this new form of education across the northern half of the United States. By 1840, Massachusetts and New York would see half of all people under twenty years of age enrolled in common schools. By 1860, Michigan, Wisconsin, Iowa, Illinois and Ohio could make the same claim. By then New Jersey and Pennsylvania would be at the bottom end of the northern tier states with enrollment rates at about 40 percent.<sup>34</sup>

During the 1830s the nation was undergoing a socio-economic transformation that made formal education of the young not only more feasible but also more desirable. Canals

and railroads tied the nation more closely together. Steam power and other technologies led to the growth of cities as manufacturing centers. The native-born American population, which had already been growing on its own, was supplemented by the aforementioned surge in immigration.<sup>35</sup> These and other factors combined to create a society that was much more interdependent at several levels. Wealthy and poor, native and immigrant, Protestants Catholics and others were forced by circumstance to coexist more closely than ever before. For many, education promised to provide a common bond that would sew the disparate threads of American society into a diverse but cohesive fabric.

The same decade brought the emergence of a generation of reformers such as Horace Mann in Massachusetts and Henry Barnard in Connecticut who established norms in classroom administration, teacher training, and other elements associated with educating the young. These reformers shared a common vision of public education and a common philosophy for their vision as well. That philosophy was founded on several foundational beliefs. First, they shared a belief that government was duty-bound to play an active role in promoting the welfare of society. Second, they saw a need to mold an increasingly diverse population into a common understanding of citizenship. Third, they believed that Protestantism, with its emphasis on the cultivation of individual character, as the means of instilling a sense of morality that would be relevant on factory or farm, in Springfield Massachusetts and in Springfield Illinois. Finally, there was a common understanding that America was blessed with a special destiny unique among the family of nations.<sup>36</sup>

The Protestant ethos of the early common school movement sprang from several sources. With its beginnings in New England the movement was rooted in the Puritan tradition of valuing education as a means of promoting and perpetuating proper religious values. When the American Institute of Instruction (a group of professional men who

described themselves as “friends of education”) established itself in Boston in 1830, the movement had its first organized force. The Institute was comprised primarily of academy teachers from across New England but most of the prominent Protestant ministers around Boston were members as well. Though Puritanism as a distinct religious tradition had long been moribund, the members of the Institute saw the virtues of the Puritan ethic as an important component of classroom instruction for instilling virtue in America’s youth.<sup>37</sup> In 1837, when Horace Mann took office as Secretary of the State Board of Education in Massachusetts, one of his first acts was to join the American Institute of Instruction whose members would become his advisors and supporters.<sup>38</sup> As Mann’s reforms gained widespread acceptance, they carried with them a strong appreciation for the value of Bible-based moral instruction.

The shared ideology of the promoters of the common school system allowed these reformers to develop a well-detailed understanding of how the typical classroom should be. Funded by tax dollars and headed by a teacher with formal credentials, that classroom would (with considerable help from the Bible) train students to be sober and industrious workers, law-abiding citizens and God-fearing human beings with a thorough understanding of the Ten Commandments. The classroom would be available to all students regardless of creed, social status, or nation of birth. It would take comers, free of charge, and produce good Americans.

### **The Rise of Anti-Catholicism:**

When approaching John Carroll’s cathedral in Baltimore, one can tell immediately that it is a church. With its dome and portico the Basilica of the Assumption resembles the Pantheon in Paris and other houses of worship built in the classical style. There is, however,

no architectural detail that identifies the building as a *Catholic* house of worship. The external Romanesque architecture is plain and unadorned by statuary. The original windows were clear glass instead of the more typical stained glass variety. As a manifestation of John Carroll's vision of the Catholic Church in America, his cathedral was obviously a house of prayer but it did not proclaim its connection to Rome. Its clear windows invited the curious to see for themselves that the services held within were not as exotic or sinister as the more florid anti-Catholic literature would have them believe. The basilica offers a vision of a Church that is as American as it is Catholic.

In New York City, John Hughes' cathedral cannot be mistaken for anything but a Catholic church. The overall style of the building mimics the architecture of the great Gothic cathedrals of Rheims, Amiens and Cologne. For those who might miss the cues of the overall design, the statues of Mary and Joseph flanking the main doors should dispel any doubts about denominational affiliation. Above the doorway, etched in granite, is a heraldic crest bearing a bishop's miter between the Keys of Saint Peter. Upon completion of the cathedral's initial stages of construction, a reviewer in the *American Architect and Building News* wrote that: "The Roman Catholic Church is the only body which would have dared attempt such a structure among us."<sup>39</sup>

Dagger John's vision for his cathedral was as unapologetic in its Catholicism as was his own public life. As the Archbishop of New York, John Hughes was probably the most prominent member of the largest wave of immigrants who had come ashore in the antebellum United States. Though the peak of Irish migration came during the Potato Blight (1846-51), more than 260,000 (Hughes among them) had come to America between 1820 and 1840.<sup>40</sup> Though the Irish had been coming to these shores since colonial days, the

migrants arriving in the 19<sup>th</sup> century were notably different than those who had preceded them. In a word, the vast majority of the new generation were Catholic.

There had been a steady migration to America from Ireland during the 1700s but these tended to be Scotch-Irish who were largely Protestant. The small portion of Irish Catholics who arrived then came over as indentured servants. After 1803, the British government grew worried about the rate of Irish migration and sought to direct the flow to British territories by imposing quotas that effectively doubled the price of passage to the United States in comparison to fares for Canada. This had the effect of channeling poorer migrants, usually Catholic, to Quebec and New Brunswick while the largely Protestant gentry went onto Philadelphia and New York.<sup>41</sup>

By the 1820s, faced with a decaying economy in their homeland, a new wave of migration came from Ireland to America. Attracted by the possibility of letting the Irish poor become someone else's problem, London had eased its restrictions and the new immigrants included more people from the lower economic classes, most of whom were Catholic.<sup>42</sup> These new migrants tended to cluster in the urban areas of the eastern seaboard where they found work as unskilled labor in the newly emerging industrial environment.<sup>43</sup> Circumstances surrounding this new influx made it almost inevitable for anti-Catholic nativist tensions to arise between long-time Americans and the new arrivals.

The roots of anti-Catholicism can be traced back to the earliest days of the Pilgrims at Plymouth and its importance as a social force in America waxed and waned over the years in response to the circumstances of the day. The second and third decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century found circumstances ripe for a resurgence. In her history of the antebellum Protestant encounter with Catholicism, Jenny Franchot finds these two forms of Christianity confronting each other at several levels. With the forcible removal of the Indian to the

frontier, Catholicism takes on a greater role as the “other” against which American culture can define itself. The immigrant Irish begin to arrive just in time to replace the Indians as a foreign threat to American civilization. Popular preachers like Lyman Beecher depict the Catholic Church as “holding, ‘in darkness and bondage nearly half the civilized world.’”<sup>44</sup>

For their part, Irish Catholics coming to America from an environment where anti-Catholicism was recently resurgent. The incorporation of Ireland into the United Kingdom in 1800 provided an opportunity for Protestant missionaries to evangelize the Irish peasantry as a way of bringing political peace through a common religion. Supported by Protestant landlords who had everything to gain from a return to civil order, this counterrevolutionary religious revivalism did not meet much resistance from Catholic authorities largely because the Pope was looking to Britain to contain the Napoleonic threat to Europe. Once the emperor was exiled, authorities at the Vatican urged Irish Catholics to fight back. In 1819, barrister and politician Daniel O’Connell stepped forward to organize a Catholic response mobilizing the masses to use the machinery of constitutional government to gain more civil rights for members of the Church. The passage of the Catholic Relief Act of 1829 was the culmination of several years of organized effort but left the country polarized with Catholics on one side and evangelical Christians and their landlord supporters on the other.<sup>45</sup>

The close alignment of religious and political affiliation led to a battle for the hearts and minds (and souls) of the Irish people that would last for over a decade. Protestant propaganda in sympathetic newspapers and journals trumpeted the victories of the evangelical crusade while enthusiastically condemning the persecution of Protestant missionaries. Clergy on both sides organized public debates intended to win the support of the listening public.<sup>46</sup>



Responding to the evangelical propaganda, Irish Catholic authorities mounted their own campaign intended to keep the majority faithful to the Church. Priests and nuns promoted good behavior and a strict moral code in response to accusations of sexual license. The bishops established schools and charitable institutions to prevent the faithful from having to get help from Protestants. Religious communities such as the Christian Brothers and the Sisters of Mercy were established to run these institutions.<sup>47</sup>

Irish Catholics who began to migrate to the United States in the 1820's (and continuing through the Famine years) came from this milieu of religious controversy in which their religious heritage was virtually inseparable from their ethnic identity. For most, to be authentically Irish was to be unapologetically Catholic. Their faith had been tempered in the crucible of religious controversy in their homeland and confronting anti-Catholicism in America was not new, nor particularly intimidating. In the same vein, a new generation of bishops, Irishmen themselves and formed in the same conflict, were appointed to lead dioceses in major cities. John Hughes in New York would become the most famous but his steady insistence on his people getting their due was echoed by John Purcell in Cincinnati and Francis Kenrick in Philadelphia.

In addition to the politicized form of Catholicism that they brought, the arrival of Irish immigrants facilitated economic changes that heralded the beginnings of the Industrial Revolution in the United States. According to David Noel Doyle, the large number of new arrivals provided a ready pool of cheap labor for industrialists who recognized the economy of breaking down skilled crafts into piecework that could be done by unskilled workers for much lower pay. American workers found themselves displaced by immigrants who needed less training and worked for less pay.<sup>48</sup> This displacement caused tensions that were much more immediate and volatile than the rhetorical anti-Catholicism of men like Lyman

Beecher. Nonetheless, when anti-Catholicism erupted into violence it almost always contained a nativistic element aimed at the Irish.

### **Anti-Catholic Violence:**

Probably the most famous example of anti-Catholic violence before the Civil War is the burning of the Ursuline convent in Charlestown, MA in 1834. The fire was the result of a “rescue attempt” by Protestant locals spurred on by rumors that young women were being held against their will within the building. Closer examination reveals that working class nativism was an important factor contributing to the violence. Evidence indicates that most those involved in the actual destruction of the building were workers from a local brickyard. In addition, Charlestown and nearby Boston already had a history of violence between Irish Catholics and nativists.<sup>49</sup> Of lesser certainty is whether evangelical anti-Catholicism played any role in the riot. A day earlier, Lyman Beecher himself happened to be visiting Boston and had preached three sermons before three different congregations in which he exhorted his listeners to act against popery.<sup>50</sup> It is not known whether any of his listeners had the taken advice literally the next night in Charlestown but, when the event came to light, Beecher was quick to condemn the mob action.<sup>51</sup>

Even before the rise of the Know-Nothings as a political entity, any violence directed against specifically against Catholics contained a nativist element aimed at the Irish.

### **When Worlds Collide:**

The emergence of the Common School movement came at a time when circumstances in the American Catholic Church were particularly unripe for such innovation.

By the 1830s, John Carroll was dead and his vision for the Church all but forgotten. French influence made the active clergy suspicious of American republicanism and anything that it might produce. The burgeoning number of poor Irish immigrants on the East Coast provided just the clientele that Mann and his disciples hoped to reach. In the twenty years from 1831 to 1850 over a million immigrants from Ireland landed on America's shores, with the vast majority settling in the cities of the northeast.<sup>52</sup> These masses would be the common ground for conflict between the liberal reformers and Catholics who distrusted what was not familiar.

In his history of the New York City public schools, Carl Kaestle divided the differences between common school advocates and their Catholic opponents into three categories: textual, catechetical and cultural. The textual issue focused on which translation of the Bible would be used to teach Catholic children in the common schools. The King James Version, the definitive English version at the time for most Protestant denominations, was almost universally used. Catholics, on the other hand much preferred the Douay translation.<sup>53</sup> For the Catholic Church, this choice had political and theological implications that stretched back to the Reformation.

The King James Version (KJV) was first published in 1611 under the authority of King James I of Great Britain. The monarch had authorized the new translation to be the definitive text of the Church of England, which had broken with Rome in 1534. Though scholars had used the Douay Version as a source in developing the KJV<sup>54</sup>, the provenance of the British translation and its popularity with Protestant denominations tainted it in the eyes of the militant Catholic Church.

As a Protestant translation, the KJV was also theologically problematic for Catholics. One of the hallmarks of the Reformation was that the Bible should be directly accessible to

everyone. Accordingly, Martin Luther published a German translation in 1534. In this new translation he rearranged the order of books in both, the Old and New Testaments, placing at the back of each section books that he did not consider to be divinely inspired. At the end of the Old Testament, Luther placed a collection that he labeled "Apocrypha: these are books which are not held equal to the Sacred Scriptures and yet are useful and good for reading."<sup>55</sup> Similarly in the New Testament, Luther changed the traditional order by placing a group after those that he considered to be "true and certain."<sup>56</sup> Later Protestant translations, including the KJV, continued the Lutheran organization of the Bible and this would be a source of much dispute among biblical scholars still battling about the Reformation.

By doubting the divine inspiration of the apocryphal books, Luther kicked out the theological underpinnings of any Catholic beliefs and practices that derived their authority from these texts. Probably the most important example of this would be the Catholic belief that faith and action are both necessary for salvation. This belief is based on the *Letter of James* which states:

What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works?

Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister has nothing to wear and has no food for the day, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, keep warm, and eat well,"

but you do not give them the necessities of the body, what good is it? So also faith of itself, if it does not have works, is dead. Indeed someone might say, "You have faith and I have works." Demonstrate your faith to me without works, and I will

demonstrate my faith to you from my works.<sup>57</sup>

One of the basic tenets of evangelical Protestantism, articulated by Martin Luther himself, is that salvation comes *sola fide*, through faith alone. By casting doubt on the divine inspiration

of the *Letter of James*, Luther effectively gutted the scriptural authority of the Catholic position while his own position was supported by Saint Paul's *Letter to the Romans*<sup>58</sup> which both sides accepted undoubtedly canonical.

Though the poor Catholic children in nineteenth century America were probably unaware of the political and theological history of the KJV, the leaders of their church knew it all too well. When they gathered at Baltimore in 1843, the Catholic bishops of the United States issued a pastoral letter in which they expressed their alarm about public education acclimating children to sectarian biases<sup>59</sup> Objections to the use of the KJV would be at the heart of the controversies in New York, Philadelphia and Cincinnati to be examined in later pages.

The catechetical dispute between common school advocates and Catholic leaders also centered around the use of the Bible in the classroom. While most Protestants used the KJV as their biblical text, interpretation of that text varied widely among the various denominations. While fundamentalists favored a very literal interpretation (e.g.: God really did create the universe in six days as detailed in Genesis), other groups saw the stories of the Bible more as allegory than actual fact. To avoid conflict on this account, most public schools advocated reading the Bible “without note or commentary.”<sup>60</sup> By concentrating on the text only, teachers could allow the students to interpret the meaning of the words in whatever way that they wished. The no comment policy was an excellent compromise for most Protestants, but for Catholics it meant acquiescence to another fundamental tenet of Reformation theology.

One of Martin Luther's criticisms of Roman Catholicism was that the Church restricted how ordinary people could use the Bible, thereby restricting their experience of God's revelation as well. Indeed, Luther himself produced the first translation of the Bible

into the German language so that ordinary people could read it on their own.<sup>61</sup> The Council of Trent, which was institutional Catholicism's primary response to the Reformation, formalized the Church's restriction on individual interpretation of the Bible. The Council decreed that: "in order to restrain petulant spirits... no one, relying on his own skill, shall...presume to interpret the said sacred Scripture contrary to that sense which holy mother Church,...hath held and doth hold."<sup>62</sup>

As late as 1824 Pope Leo XII was exhorted his bishops: "Do everything possible to see that the faithful observe strictly the rules of our Congregation of the Index. Convince them that to allow holy Bibles in the ordinary language, wholesale and without distinction, would on account of human rashness cause more harm than good."<sup>63</sup> For Catholic bishops, forcing students to read the King James Bible was bad enough, denying them a legitimate interpretation of those scriptures was adding heinous insult to grievous injury.

According to historian Timothy Walch, the cultural issue was really the main concern that Catholics had about public education. Critics worried that the public school's mission to create good Americans would alienate students from their own national backgrounds thus creating a generational rift between the Americanized students and their immigrant parents. Furthermore, the process would wean students away from cultures that had long been Catholic into a new one that was irreligious (from the Catholic perspective) if not actually Protestant.<sup>64</sup> Secular education had been a means of establishing national independence from the Church. For Catholics transplanted from the politics of Europe, the common school agenda here was too close to that for comfort.

**Conclusion:**

The timing of the emergence of the common school movement just as the Catholic Church in the United States was being defined by massive immigration was an unfortunate coincidence in the respective histories of both entities. The vision of Catholicism manifested by John Carroll, with its preference for emphasizing points of common value, would probably have been able to make common cause with the democratizing goals of the emerging public school system. As it happened, the growing dominance of European Catholicism in the American Church created a hermeneutic of suspicion by which the innovation of free education for all students was seen by bishops more Roman than American as yet another ploy by an irreligious government to subvert the role of religion in forming proper adults. This theoretical prejudice was exacerbated by the nativistic tendencies of the first public schools which furnished proof positive of religious antipathy to church leaders for whom loyalty to faith and homeland were inextricably intertwined.

While the disagreement about bible use was the most common cause for outright controversy, it was only the tip of an iceberg comprised of much deeper and more fundamental differences. To use a biblical metaphor, the emergence of the American common school system for a national Church becoming more European was a case of putting new wine into old wineskins.

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- <sup>1</sup> Pamela Scott. "Latrobe, Benjamin Henry"; <http://www.anb.org/articles/17/17-00506.html>; *American National Biography Online* Feb. 2000. Access Date: Nov 13, 2006
- <sup>2</sup> Jeffrey Meyer, *Myths in Stone: Religious Dimensions of Washington, DC* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 48.
- <sup>3</sup> Scott.
- <sup>4</sup> Thomas W. Spalding. "Carroll, John"; <http://www.anb.org/articles/08/08-00239.html>; *American National Biography Online* Feb. 2000. Access Date: Nov 13, 2006
- <sup>5</sup> Jay Dolan, *The American Catholic Experience* (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1985), 103.
- <sup>6</sup> Charles R. Morris. *American Catholic: The Saints and Sinners Who Built America's Most Powerful Church* (New York: Random House, 1997), 5.
- <sup>7</sup> Dolan, 102.
- <sup>8</sup> *ibid.*, 110.
- <sup>9</sup> A diocesan priest is tied to a particular geographical location (diocese) under the jurisdiction of the bishop of that area. Priests who belong to religious orders are primarily obedient to their religious superiors.
- <sup>10</sup> Dolan, 104-105.
- <sup>11</sup> *ibid.*, 106-107.
- <sup>12</sup> James Hennesey, *American Catholics: A History of the Roman Catholic Community in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 90-92.
- <sup>13</sup> John Tracy Ellis. *American Catholicism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956), 49.
- <sup>14</sup> Dolan, 112-113.
- <sup>15</sup> A coadjutor bishop is a type of assistant sometimes given to a bishop who is close to retirement, usually with the understanding that the coadjutor will be that bishop's eventual successor.
- <sup>16</sup> Dolan, 128.
- <sup>17</sup> John DuBois to John Purcell, 29 September 1833, Archdiocese of Cincinnati Collection, University of Notre Dame Archives.
- <sup>18</sup> A reference to Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury under King Henry VIII, who assisted the king in establishing the Church of England.
- <sup>19</sup> Hennesey, 120.
- <sup>20</sup> Though a colorful nickname, it appears that "Dagger John" was not uniquely applied to Hughes. The epithet was also applied as early as 1830 to John England, also an Irishman, who was the Catholic bishop of Charleston, South Carolina.
- <sup>21</sup> Dolan, 160-161.
- <sup>22</sup> Christopher Hibbert, *The Days of the French Revolution* (New York: Morrow Quill Publications, 1981), 117-118.
- <sup>23</sup> *ibid.*, 230-222.
- <sup>24</sup> Alec R. Vidler, *The Church in an Age of Revolution* (New York: Penguin Books, 1971), 19-21.
- <sup>25</sup> Rene Remond, "The Case of France," in *The Church and Christian Democracy*, ed. G. Baum, John Coleman, and Marcus Lefebure, 73 (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1987).
- <sup>26</sup> Thomas Groome, "Catholicism and Education" in *The HarperCollins Encyclopedia of Catholicism* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1995), 266.
- <sup>27</sup> Gerald R. Cragg. *The Church and the Age of Reason* (New York: Penguin Books, 1981), 219-221.
- <sup>28</sup> Vidler, 72-72.
- <sup>29</sup> from the Greek word for "assembly", a synod is an ecclesiastical assembly, usually of priests or bishops.
- <sup>30</sup> Dolan, 118.
- <sup>31</sup> *ibid.*, 121.
- <sup>32</sup> William J. Reese, *America's Public Schools: From the Common School to "No Child Left Behind"* (Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 3.
- <sup>33</sup> Carl Kaestle, *Pillars of the Republic: Common Schools and American Society 1780-1860* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983), 62-63.
- <sup>34</sup> *ibid.*, 106-107.
- <sup>35</sup> *ibid.*, 62-63.
- <sup>36</sup> For a more detailed explanation of the shared ideology of the promoters of the common school system, see Chapter Five of *Pillars of the Republic*.



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- <sup>37</sup> Mary M. Gordon, "Patriots and Christians: A Reassessment of Nineteenth-Century School Reformers," *Journal of Social History* (1978), 556-559.
- <sup>38</sup> *ibid.*, 566-567.
- <sup>39</sup> *American Architect and Building News*, 31 May 1879.
- <sup>40</sup> Dolan, 128.
- <sup>41</sup> David Noel Doyle, "The Irish in North America" in *Making the Irish American: History and Heritage of the Irish in the United States*, ed. J. Lee and M. Casey, 179 (New York: New York University Press, 2006).
- <sup>42</sup> *ibid.*, 179-180.
- <sup>43</sup> *ibid.*, 193-194.
- <sup>44</sup> Jenny Franchot, *Roads to Rome: The Antebellum Protestant Encounter with Catholicism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 99-100.
- <sup>45</sup> Irene Whelan, "Religious Rivalry and the Making of Irish-American Identity" in *Making the Irish American: History and Heritage of the Irish in the United States*, ed. J. Lee and M. Casey, 271-273 (New York: New York University Press, 2006).
- <sup>46</sup> *ibid.*, 273.
- <sup>47</sup> *ibid.*, 276.
- <sup>48</sup> Doyle, 194.
- <sup>49</sup> Ray Allen Billington, "The Burning of the Charlestown Convent," *New England Quarterly* 10 (1937): 6.
- <sup>50</sup> *ibid.*, 12.
- <sup>51</sup> Theodore M. Hammett, "Two Mobs of Jacksonian Boston: Ideology and Interest," *Journal of American History* 62 (1976), 853.
- <sup>52</sup> Roger Daniels, *Coming to America: A History of Immigration and Ethnicity in American Life* (New York: HarperCollins, 1990), 128.
- <sup>53</sup> Carl Kaestle, *The Evolution of an Urban School System: New York City: 1750-1850* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973), 151.
- <sup>54</sup> Owen Chadwick, *The Reformation* (New York: Penguin Books, 1982), 224.
- <sup>55</sup> James C. Turro and Raymond Brown, "Canonicity" in *The Jerome Biblical Commentary*, ed. Raymond E. Brown, 524 (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1968).
- <sup>56</sup> *ibid.*, 531.
- <sup>57</sup> James 2:14-18, New American Bible.
- <sup>58</sup> "For we consider that a person is justified by faith apart from works of the law." – Romans 3:28, New American Bible.
- <sup>59</sup> *Pastoral Letter of the Fifth Provincial Council of Baltimore, Fifth Sunday of Easter, 1843.*
- <sup>60</sup> Timothy Walch, *Parish School: American Catholic Parochial Education from Colonial Times to the Present* (New York: Crossroad Herder, 1996), 28.
- <sup>61</sup> Chadwick, 73.
- <sup>62</sup> *Decretum de Editione et Usu Sacrorum Librorum*, 8 April 1546. *Decree Concerning the Edition and the Use of the Sacred Books*. Council of Trent. 15 January 2007.  
<http://www.bible-researcher.com/trent1.html>.
- <sup>63</sup> *Ubi Primum*, 5 May 1824. *On His Assuming the Pontificate*. Encyclical. Leo XII. 15 January 2007.  
<http://www.ewtn.com/library/ENCYC/L12UBIPR.HTM>.
- <sup>64</sup> Walch, 28-29.

### **CHAPTER III**

#### **CAUGHT IN THE MIDDLE: EDUCATION, NATIVISM AND CATHOLIC MILITANCY IN ANTEBELLUM AMERICA**

At the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century American culture and the American Catholic Church were headed in different directions. The culture continued to evolve from its European roots into a society that proclaimed the values of democracy and egalitarianism. For the Catholic Church in America, independence from Great Britain opened the doors to European immigration which quickly drew the nascent national church into a closer orbit with the values, politics and prejudices of the Old World. American culture and American Catholicism were growing more dissimilar and the one core value that both shared - an appreciation of education as a means of self-perpetuation - would provide a flashpoint for conflict over the next two centuries.

As flashpoints went, however, the education controversy produced more smoke than fire. Of the several examples of anti-Catholic violence that erupted around the United States before the Civil War, only a few were about education. Furthermore, those few included other mitigating factors that raised tensions to the point of violent outbreak. As a solitary

issue, the Catholic/common school conflict never generated enough of its own heat to cause violence.

This chapter will examine two notable examples of the Catholic/common school conflict: John Hughes' battle with the Public School Society in New York City and the Philadelphia Bible Riots. These constitute the largest and most famous examples of the school conflict degenerating into actual violence. They are important here for two reasons. First, they provide an important context for how the Catholic/common school conflict will unfold for the rest of the century. When the conflict resurfaces in Ohio politics in the 1870s, Catholic supporters are quick to find connections to what they saw as nativist persecution in the pre-war era. Second, these incidents are helpful as contrast to how the controversy played itself out in Ohio before the Civil War. Though Bishop John Purcell of Cincinnati knew his counterparts in New York and Philadelphia, shared a common heritage with them and maintained a regular correspondence with Bishop Hughes in New York, his leadership of the Catholic Church in Ohio differed notably from that of his counterparts in the East and might have been responsible for sparing his diocese the trauma related in this chapter.

### **New York City:**

While the first stages of the common schools/Catholics dispute were broad-based and theoretical, it did not take long for the controversy to gain a more focused intensity at the local level, primarily in urban centers with large immigrant Catholic populations.

The first major battleground was New York City, where John Hughes had become coadjutor bishop<sup>1</sup> in 1838. Hughes did not wait long after his episcopal ordination to make

school funding an issue. At that time, the common schools of New York City were funded with public monies and administered by the Public School Society (PSS), a private organization of wealthy men dedicated to local philanthropy while shunning partisan politics. The group had been providing free education to the poor since 1806<sup>2</sup> hoping “to diminish the pernicious effects resulting from the neglected education of the children of the poor.”<sup>3</sup> According to Diane Ravitch, the generosity of the endeavor was tempered by a healthy dose of self-interest inasmuch as the organization hoped to stabilize the society in which its members held such prominence by using education to eradicate poverty and crime.<sup>4</sup>

As it expanded its enrollment throughout the city, the PSS had already been effective in eliminating competition from sectarian schools for the public funding provided by the state legislature. In 1820 a local Baptist church opened its own school for poor children and, a year later, began receiving state funds for education. As Bethel Baptist’s operations expanded, other churches in the city followed suit. As the competition grew, the PSS adopted the position that no public monies should go to sectarian operations and pressured the state legislature to withdraw its support of the church schools. In response, the legislature directed the city’s governing body, the Common Council, to assume responsibility for distributing the school fund. As a result, the Council drafted an ordinance denying public funds to any sectarian institution thus making PSS policy into that of the city as well.<sup>5</sup> As a result, church schools lost their public funding.

At this point it should be noted that the Public School Society’s prescription against sectarian education did not apply to a more generic form of Christianity. The trustees of the society believed the practice of religion to be an important part of attaining a good life. Accordingly, students of the PSS were required to assemble at their schools every Sunday to be led to their respective churches by adult monitors. The daily curriculum included Bible

reading and working through a nonsectarian catechism. By incorporating what they viewed to be elements common to all Christian sects, the members of the Public School Society believed that they were thus inclusive of all religions.<sup>6</sup>

Having battled theological heterodoxy for centuries, the Catholic Church did not share this sunny view of generic Christianity. In its most benign form, this generalized faith smacked of *indifferentism*, the erroneous belief that one religion is as good as the next. As practiced by the Public School Society, it also contained a sour dose of anti-Catholic and anti-Irish rhetoric which, for many immigrants, were one and the same.

In 1829, recognizing the inhospitable nature of most common schools, the American Catholic hierarchy began to advocate for the establishment of schools where the children of the faithful could be educated without any danger to their faith and morals.<sup>7</sup> Given the impoverished nature of most American Catholics, however, the resources to establish this alternate system were scarce. Recognizing the opposing horns of his dilemma, Bishop John Dubois of New York (Hughes' predecessor) made a proposal to the Public School Society in 1834 that could make at least one of their schools<sup>8</sup> more acceptable for Catholic children. He suggested that:

1. he be permitted to suggest one Catholic teacher for the school, subject to the usual personnel policies of the Society,
2. he be permitted to use the school after hours for religious instruction to apprentices and servants,
3. textbooks be edited to remove anything that promoted Protestantism or defamed Catholicism,
4. an empty portion of the building be used temporarily as a school for girls,

5. he be permitted to visit on occasion and make suggestions to the Society for the schools' improvement, and that
6. Catholic children receive religious instruction from a priest that he would appoint.

If this was objectionable, Dubois asked that the Society sell him one of its discontinued buildings. The Society responded by offering to edit its textbooks but refused to allow any denominational instruction within its facilities. The bishop never responded to their offer and the Society, for its part, did not make any changes to make the growing Catholic population feel any more welcome in the common schools of the city.<sup>9</sup> Thus, the stage was set for the far more aggressive tactics of Dubois' former student and eventual successor.

The battle that would eventually doom the Public School Society began when the governor of New York, William Henry Seward, learned of the large number of poor Irish children who were not getting an education in the state's largest city. In January of 1840, during his annual report to the legislature, Seward proposed:

The children of foreigners, found in great numbers in our populous cities and towns, and in the vicinity of our public works, are too often deprived of the advantages of our system of public education, in consequence of prejudice arising from differences of language or religion. It ought never to be forgotten that the public welfare is as deeply concerned in their education as in that of our own children.

I do not hesitate, therefore, to recommend the establishment of schools in which they may be instructed by teachers speaking the same language with themselves and professing the same faith. There would be no inequality in such a measure, since it happens from the force of circumstances,

if not from choice, that the responsibilities of education are in most instances confided by us to native citizens, and occasions seldom offer for a trial of our magnanimity by committing that trust to persons differing from ourselves in language or religion. Since we have opened our country and all its fullness to the oppressed of every nation, we should evince wisdom equal to such generosity by qualifying their children for the high responsibilities of citizenship.<sup>10</sup>

Bishop Hughes was on a fund-raising tour of Europe at the time of Seward's speech, but his vicars interpreted it as an offer of public support for sectarian schools. Fr. John Power, one of the priests that Hughes had charged to run the diocese in his absence, assembled the trustees of all the city's parishes and together they drafted a proposal to the city's Common Council requesting a portion of the funding allotted by the state for public education. This proposal was soon followed by similar ones from a Presbyterian school and a Hebrew congregation.<sup>11</sup> It was obvious that any consideration of the Catholic proposal would open doors for others as well.

The Common Council referred the petition to one of its constituent bodies, the Board of Assistant Aldermen who, in turn, assigned the issue to its Committee on Arts and Sciences and Schools. After hearing testimony from representatives of both sides of the issue, the Committee issued a verdict that, while Catholics were entitled to the benefit of their taxes, such benefit came from the equal protection of all people under the Constitution. Any special consideration of a particular sect would violate the rights of others. With this in mind, the Committee recommended that there be no division of the common school funds and, in addition, directed the PSS to remove any books that might offend Catholics or any other sect. The Board of Assistant Aldermen accepted the Committee's recommendation

and considered the matter finished, but the committee who made the original proposal continued planning for a next step.<sup>12</sup>

Bishop Hughes returned to the city in July and lost no time assuming command of the Catholic forces. According to Ravitch, Hughes took the issue beyond school funding and made it a fight to gain respect for the Catholic presence in America; and this respect would be earned when members of the Church flexed their political muscle for the nation to see.<sup>13</sup> With Hughes at its helm the Catholic committee determined to go over the heads of the assistant aldermen to the Board of Aldermen (the other half of the Common Council).

In late September of 1840 the committee presented a new appeal, directed to the aldermen, arguing that the common school education offered by the PSS violated the conscience of Catholic children in its attacks on the Church. To hear both sides, the Board of Aldermen sponsored a debate to be held over two nights in late October. Bishop Hughes spoke first and, in three hours, dismantled the Society's claims of non-sectarianism as well as its credentials to run the common school system.<sup>14</sup> The PSS responded through two attorneys who laid out a defense of generic moral education and attacked Hughes for descending into the arena of politics.<sup>15</sup>

Once the debate was finished, the Board of Aldermen referred the issue to its own committee, which spent ten weeks trying to reconcile the claims of the Catholics and the PSS. When the committee conceded that no compromise could be made, they decided to inspect the schools of both organizations and came away with the judgment that the common schools were far superior to whatever the Catholics had to offer. As a result, the committee urged the Board of Aldermen to reject the Catholic petition and their recommendation was adopted by a vote of 15-1.<sup>16</sup>



Having exhausted its local options, the Catholic committee decided to appeal to Albany. Bishop Hughes began this next step with a meeting at Washington Hall convened in February of 1841. After comparing the members of the Board of Aldermen to “Siamese twins” in their relationship to the Public School Society, the bishop proclaimed that: “though a whole Board should be found to bend a knee to the Baal of bigotry, men will be found who can stand unawed in its presence, and do right.”<sup>17</sup> Though such a statement could be interpreted in more ways than one, Hughes was proposing to take the issue to the next level of government. His followers subsequently formed the Central Executive Committee on Common Schools, whose task was to organize protest meetings across the city and to collect signatures for a petition to the state legislature. When the Committee’s work was done, they had attached almost 7,000 signatures to a document entitled “Memorial of Citizens of New York for an amendment of common school laws.”<sup>18</sup>

Once the memorial was read to the senate in Albany it was passed on to John Spencer who, as Seward’s secretary of state, had overall responsibility for education policy. After deliberating for a few weeks, Spencer issued a response that allowed him to avoid ruling for or against the Catholics and taking the issue in a new direction altogether. The politician proposed that the real issue at hand was bigger than just religion, it was about who should control the public schools altogether. Spencer concluded that the PSS did not share the values common to most people in New York and, therefore, control of the common schools in the city should be turned over to the public, specifically by treating each ward in the city as an independent school district. Furthermore, any school that educated the poor should be given a share of the public fund while the state studiously avoided any interference with regard to religious practices in those schools.<sup>19</sup>

Hughes was pleased with the Spencer Report because he saw it as a death blow to the Public School Society, a necessary step to win any public support for parochial schools. For its part, the Society argued that the control of their funding by the Common Council constituted a direct form of accountability to the public and condemned the redistricting of the city as being too chaotic and leaving the schools vulnerable to partisan politics. When the legislature considered the bill to make Spencer's recommendations law, both sides weighed in vociferously but anti-Catholic forces won the first round by getting the senate to table any discussion of the proposed law until the next legislative session beginning in January of 1842.<sup>20</sup> Faced with Albany's reluctance to do what he considered to be right, Daguer John decided to make democracy work to his advantage.

1841 was an election year for the state legislature where New York City was represented by a block of thirteen seats in the assembly and two in the senate. Having garnered so much public attention, the education issue would be the chief issue of the campaign. Though Governor Seward, a member of their own party, had opened the door to the Catholic initiative; the Whigs in the city were adamantly opposed to any change in the current system and nominated a slate of candidates who would hold firm on the issue.<sup>21</sup>

While the Whigs could afford to be unequivocal, the primary opponents could not hazard such clarity. The Democrats claimed the political allegiance of most Catholics, but could not afford to alienate party members who opposed the division of school funds. Therefore, the party's candidates for the legislature tried to steer a middle course in the schools controversy so as to avoid alienating either side.<sup>22</sup> Bishop Hughes, not one for half-heartedness, likened their lack of commitment to the example of a candidate with a red-hot iron. Seeking clarity from the Democrats, the bishop exhorted his supporters:

But suppose you ask him, what he means to do with that red hot

iron? He will be sure to evade the question. He will tell you of a glorious liberty and equality and the sovereign authority of the people and all that; but press him for an answer. Tell him you want to know what he intends to do with that red hot iron. “Oh,” he will say, “I am a liberal man; I intend to do whatever is right. My friends, you know me, do you not? I belong to the party.” But still press him for an answer, and make him tell you what his ideas are about the red hot iron.<sup>23</sup>

Subsequently, Catholic representatives quizzed the different candidates about their respective positions on the school issue and received answers of varying satisfaction.<sup>24</sup>

On 29 October 1841, Hughes called a public meeting at Carroll Hall in the city and announced his own list of candidates to run for the thirteen legislature seats from New York City. Ten of these “Carroll Hall” candidates had already been nominated by the Democrats. While some of these were thought to have opposed Hughes’ bid for state funding, the bishop proclaimed his own assurance that all would support “the justice” of his claims. The remaining three Democratic nominees were deemed to be unacceptable by the bishop, who proposed three new candidates to run as independents.<sup>25</sup>

Public reaction to the bishop’s political endeavors was generally negative, even from some Catholic quarters. As could be expected, the nativist press saw the Carroll Hall slate as proof positive of a Catholic plot to dominate American politics. However, the sharpest denunciation came from another prominent New York Catholic, James Gordon Bennett, publisher of the *New York Herald*. Like the nativists, Bennett took a very dim view of church leaders wielding political power. The newspaperman accused the bishop of “sully[ing] his garment with political dirt” and trying to “control politics by the force of religious sentiment.”<sup>26</sup> Bennett’s objections are notable because they are representative of a small but

important contingent of Catholics who were active in American politics and faithful to the Church but critical of what they saw as the ham-handed and inappropriate political meddling of the Catholic hierarchy.

The general election in 1841 brought a resounding Democratic victory throughout the Empire State. In New York City, all ten Democrats approved by Bishop Hughes won seats in the General Assembly while the three that he had rejected all lost. It was true that none of the bishop's independent candidates were elected but, in a city where the electorate was fairly evenly divided between Democrats and Whigs, Daguer John had demonstrated the power of the Catholic vote. Soon after the election, New York Catholics assembled again and warned the Democrats that, if the party didn't use its newfound control of the legislature to act on the bishop's demands, the Carroll Hall scenario would be repeated for the city's upcoming mayoral and council elections.<sup>27</sup>

When the newly configured legislature convened in January of 1842, the Democratic majority faced a problem familiar to those who had come from New York City: how to appease the Catholics without losing the support of Protestant voters. The formation (a year earlier) of the American Protestant Union, a nativist group led by Samuel F. B. Morse to fight the Catholic issue<sup>28</sup> indicated that the schools issue had grown into something more than politics as usual. The legislature's first step in steering a idle course was to appoint William B. Maclay as Chair of the assembly's Committee on Colleges, Academies and Schools. Maclay was a New York City Democrat whose position on the school issue had been ambiguous enough to win him endorsements from Bishop Hughes and the American Protestant Union.<sup>29</sup>

A month after its formation, Maclay's committee produced a bill entitled "An Act to Extend and Improve the Benefits of Common School Instruction in the City of New York."

The Maclay Bill was generally similar to the one that had come from the John Spencer's report a year earlier. Instead of addressing the sectarian issue directly, the new bill condemned the PSS as a monopoly with a success rate far lower than anywhere else in the state. While the state in general could boast a 96% student attendance rate, that of New York City was below 60%. The only solution, therefore, was to extend the common school system of the rest of the state to the city itself. Each ward should be treated as a separate committee, to elect its own trustees and to administer its own allocation of state education funds.<sup>30</sup>

Supporters of the Public School Society found many ways to criticize the Maclay proposal, finding fault with the tabulation of attendance in rural districts and criticizing the district system (similar to the one proposed for New York) as it existed in Brooklyn. Indeed, the Commissioners of Common Schools of Brooklyn voiced a desire to revise its own operations to be more like those of the Public School Society. Other PSS advocates circulated petitions and even organized a rally that went off disastrously because of the attendance of a large number of Catholic hecklers.<sup>31</sup>

On the other side of the issue, Hughes forsook the arena of public to focus more on the principals who could get things done. In March the bishop wrote Governor Seward to congratulate him on the passage of the bill through the General Assembly. Hughes also took the opportunity to point out that any opposition to the bill by the Whigs would only drive the Catholic vote back into the arms of the Democrats. As the spring election day (April 12) grew closer with little movement in the senate for passing the bill, Hughes decided to turn up the heat on the Democrats. On April 7, Hughes and his followers again gathered at Carroll Hall to nominate their own candidates for mayor and the Common Council. City Democrats pressured their cohorts in Albany to speed things along and, on April 8, the

senate passed the bill by a vote of 13-12 with Governor Seward signing it into law a day later. On April 11 the bishop's ticket withdrew from the election and threw its support to the Democrats.<sup>32</sup>

The next day Mayor Robert Morris, a Democrat was reelected while the Whigs won a slight majority (9-8) on the Common Council, but the voting was marred by sectarian violence. Fights between nativists and Catholics broke out round the city and one mob went so far as to break into Hughes' home to smash up the place. For whatever reason, the bishop and his staff were not at home, so no one was harmed but the mayor felt compelled to call out the militia to protect the cathedral from any further such violence.<sup>33</sup>

Though he had won the battle, Bishop Hughes ultimately lost the war. The state legislature transferred control of New York City's schools away from the Public School Society to a newly formed Board of Education, but several members of the Society gained appointments to the board and were able to reinstate daily Bible reading.<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, as a means of making the Maclay Bill more palatable to its opponents, the state senate had amended the principle of nonintervention on religious matters specifically to forbid any type of sectarian instruction in the public schools, thereby ending any possibility of cooperation with the Catholic Church within the system.<sup>35</sup> Thereafter, Hughes turned his attention to developing a Catholic alternative to the public school system. His advice to "build the school-house first, and the church afterwards" would become gospel for many parochial school advocates across the nation.<sup>36</sup>

With no schools to operate, the Public School Society eventually died from lack of purpose, but Hughes' defeat of New York's social elite contained a strong pyrrhic element. While he had proven the power of the Catholic vote, the bishops also gave the nativists a genuine reason to fear and hate the "Whore of Babylon." Long after popular prejudice

against Catholics began to abate, the fear of their political clout would provide fodder for political rhetoric. On a larger scale, many historians blame John Hughes and those who followed him with molding the Catholic Church in America into a self-selected ghetto turning a distrustful eye to anything not of “the Faith.” In his history of the Catholic Church in the United States, Charles Morris writes:

The Irish diaspora brought a militant and bureaucratic style of Catholicism and touched off nativist riots in most major cities. A new breed of Irish bishop – the archetype is John Hughes of New York – imposed order and discipline on fractious urban dioceses and started building the vast network of Catholic institutions that reinforced religious/ethnic identity and protected lay people from the virus of freethinking...Ethnic assimilation would be on Irish terms, and the Church was to retain a distinctively Irish rigorist style long after Irish Americans had become a minority of American Catholics.<sup>37</sup>

### **Philadelphia:**

While “Dagger John” chose to fight other battles, school funding issues would continue to flare up around the nation over the next decade, sometimes accompanied by violence. Like New York, the Diocese of Philadelphia was led by a transplanted Irishman who, unlike his compatriot, was more diplomat than fighter. Francis Kenrick was born in Dublin and educated in Rome, where he was invited to Kentucky to teach theology in the American wilderness. When confronted by American Protestant culture, Kenrick began to produce a steady stream of articles and lectures to persuade a hostile public about the truth of Catholic belief. His erudition and intellect made him stand out among a body of priests

known more as doers than thinkers and he was appointed coadjutor bishop of Philadelphia in 1830.<sup>38</sup> Like Hughes in New York, Kenrick set out building the institutions necessary to accommodate the burgeoning immigrant Catholic population in his city. Also like Hughes, Kenrick had to contend with a public school system whose daily practices were deemed to be inhospitable to Catholic children.

By the early 1830s, Philadelphia had a functioning common school system and had even moved to eliminate the use of texts that could be construed as sectarian. As in New York, reading from the Bible was considered to be non-sectarian, though the Philadelphia board required that there be no editorializing to accompany the actual reading.<sup>39</sup> The King James Version was commonly used for this daily practice but Catholics made no formal objection to the practice despite that translation's Protestant tone.<sup>40</sup> That changed in 1838 when the Pennsylvania legislature passed a law stipulating that the Bible be used as a reading textbook. Hearing the Bible read by the teacher was one thing, requiring students to read the Protestant version as part of the curriculum was quite another and the Catholics of Philadelphia began to complain.<sup>41</sup>

Chief among the complainants was one who wrote letters to the *Catholic Herald* under the pseudonym of "Sentinel." Writing in the *History of Education Quarterly*, Vincent Lannie argued that Sentinel was actually Bishop Kenrick himself. According to Lannie, Kenrick frequently wrote for the newspaper but never under his own name. In addition, the editor of the *Herald* regularly wrote in support of Sentinel's opinions and recommendations for action. Finally, one of the duties if the bishop is to be the sentinel of Catholic doctrine and practice in his diocese.<sup>42</sup>

Whatever the writer's identity, Sentinel published several objections to developments in the Philadelphia public schools. He saw the new law as a Protestant attempt to dominate



public education and force Catholic students to commit to memory a translation that the Church had disdained for centuries. Sentinel also claimed that the Sunday School Union, a local Presbyterian organization, was working to have *Conversations on the Bible*, one of their own publications, added to the public school curriculum. In view of such adverse conditions, the writer would favor the separation of religion and education. This would respect the rights of conscience for Catholic children as well as for those of non-believers. For its part, the *Herald* seconded the writer's views and even prodded local pastors to increase the availability of parochial education, but the issue did not garner much attention from the public. Within a few years, the controversy in New York would occupy the attention of those interested in the religion/education issue, but things were also heating up in the City of Brotherly Love.<sup>43</sup>

On June of 1841 the *Catholic Herald* again wrote of the growing Presbyterian influence in Philadelphia's public schools and Sentinel again put pen to paper. While praising the efforts of "our brothers in New York," the writer chose a more moderate route to gain what he saw as justice for Catholic students in the public schools. Instead of arguing for public funds for parochial schools, Sentinel laid out a very logical argument that nondenominational Christianity was, in fact, another form of sectarianism. While reading the Bible without comment might seem to be inoffensive, its implied endorsement of private interpretation went against the Catholic biblical tradition that put the responsibility for interpretation on the hierarchy. Thus, any participation in the public school practice was a form of Protestant religious observance. To prevent this, Sentinel recommended that Catholic parents remove their children from any school where such reading occurs.<sup>44</sup>

This time, other Catholics took notice and one wrote to the *Herald* urging that every Catholic parish in the city send a representative to organize a committee for the purpose of

urging the legislature to amend the Bible reading requirement. Sentinel responded strongly against this recommendation and urged the people to work merely for more even-handed administration of the current law against sectarian education.<sup>45</sup>

Aside from Sentinel's efforts, other events in Philadelphia put the school issue in relief. In April of 1842 a veteran teacher was fired by a local school board for refusing to read the King James Version to her students. Children, too, were punished for refusing to read from that version or for bringing a Douay version (a translation accepted by Catholics) to school. The religion of candidates became an issue in local school board elections.<sup>46</sup>

Late in 1842 Bishop Kenrick took a more direct role in the growing controversy by writing to the City Board of Controllers (who had overall control of the public schools in the city) with a list of complaints from the Catholic perspective. Many of these echoed the complaints in New York such as required use of the King James Bible, use of Protestant hymns and prayers, anti-Catholic textbooks and library books, and an overall Protestant tone to the schools in general. Kenrick's proposed solution, however, required only two changes in the current system: allow Catholic students to read from Douay (others could still use the King James), and enforce the already extant provision in the school law that "the religious predilections of the parents shall be respected." The Board responded in a similarly moderate fashion with two resolutions that parents who objected could excuse their children from bible reading and those children who did participate could use any version of the Bible which did not include editorial comment. In fact the latter resolution effectively barred the use of the Douay translation because of its footnotes that constituted editorial comment but Kenrick was nonetheless pleased by the board's attempt at compromise.<sup>47</sup>

While board and bishop were pleased with the compromise, not so other citizens concerned about the issue. Before the end of the year a group of over ninety ministers from

many denominations gathered to form the American Protestant Association with the avowed purpose of awakening “the attention of the community to the dangers which threaten the liberties, and the public and domestic institutions, of these United States from the assaults of Romanism.”<sup>48</sup> The leaders of the association were united in the belief that all Protestants agreed on the necessity of the Bible in American life. In light of this, Kenrick’s objections posed a threat not only to the public schools but to the American way of life itself.<sup>49</sup>

The next year, another anti-Catholic group formed, this one with a more political focus and named the American Republican Association. The ARA advocated a twenty-one year residency requirement for naturalization, the prohibition of non-native citizens from holding office, and the rejection of any church-state union. Like the APA, the Republican Association promoted Bible reading as part of the academic curriculum. Such was the local popularity of the ARA that, within four months of its establishment, the organization had units established in every ward in Philadelphia and its surrounding suburbs.<sup>50</sup>

The two new groups used podium, pulpit and publication to proclaim the growing influence of Catholic perfidy. The Reverend Walter Colton, a Congregationalist minister, lectured in many local churches about the “Bible in Our Public Schools.” When the lecture was produced in pamphlet form, a copy was given to every public school teacher in the city. Colton charged that Kenrick’s complaints against sectarianism in the schools was really a ruse to remove all Christian influence from public education. Furthermore, the minister argued, the majority of ordinary Catholics were satisfied with present conditions in the schools and that the bishop was following orders from Rome to stir things up.<sup>51</sup>

As the rhetoric turned ugly, the controversy took a more personal turn in March of 1844, making it more real to the ordinary citizens who would eventually take matters into

their own hands. On the last day of February, a school director in Kensington (a district adjacent to Philadelphia) took issue with what he saw as Catholic meddling in the public schools. Henry Moore publicly accused fellow director Hugh Clark, a Catholic, of ordering a teacher at Kensington School to refrain from reading the Bible to her students. The teacher, Louisa Bedford, chose to resign her position rather than acquiescing to such “Popish dictation.” Moore demanded that Clark resign and that Bedford be commended for her courage. Upon hearing the charge, Clark offered a more innocuous version in which, while he visited Kensington, Miss Bedford complained about the disruption caused by Catholic children exiting the room before the Bible was read. In his own account, Clark merely suggested that she could avoid the entire issue by forgoing the daily reading altogether. For her part, Miss Bedford testified that Clark had never actually urged her to drop the Bible reading but assured her that he would take responsibility if she chose to pursue such a course of action. In the end, Henry Moore admitted that Bedford had dropped the practice of her own accord but reiterated his own objections to her course of action.<sup>52</sup>

In early March a crowd of approximately six thousand people gathered at Independence Square in Kensington. They resolved to petition the state legislature to mandate the direct election of public school officials, which would allow the Protestant majority to ensure that their own kind would maintain control of the education system. The meeting featured several speakers who supported the place of the Bible in the classroom and denounced the evils of the “Romish Church.”<sup>53</sup>

As popular outrage grew, both Bishop Kenrick and the Board of Controllers worked to maintain a civil dialogue. The day after the Kensington meeting, the bishop published a statement which was printed in many newspapers throughout the city. In it he emphasized

that Catholics did not want to remove religion from the schools but were merely asking that the current regulations against sectarianism be enforced. On the same day the bishop wrote a letter to the Board of Controllers reiterating his position on Catholic children and use of the King James version. This was accompanied by a letter from fifty prominent Catholic laymen who were writing in support of their bishop, but their demands went a step further than what Kenrick wanted. As mentioned earlier, because the Douay version contained commentary appearing on the same page as Scripture, the translation was effectively banned from the schools by the “without commentary” clause. The laymen suggested that the clause be interpreted to mean “without commentary by the teacher,” which would then allow Catholics to use their own Bible in the public schools.<sup>54</sup>

Now feeling pressure from both sides, the Board of Controllers sought to defuse the situation by postponing any further investigation of the religious issue. Instead, the board opted to send copies of the relevant regulations to all school boards and principal teachers and warned that any violation of these would result in dismissal. While the Controllers still refused to allow the use of the Douay version in school, they did address an ancillary issue raised by the laymen by excusing Catholic teachers in the system from having to read the King James version as part of their duties.<sup>55</sup>

Soon after the board’s meeting, another crowd gathered in Kensington, mostly members of the American Republican Association to protest again against the removal of the Bible from the common schools. This time the speakers compared Kenrick’s tactics to what Bishop Hughes was doing in New York and suggested that, perhaps, a larger conspiracy was afoot. Removing the Bible from public schools could be only the first step in gaining a broader authority to ban any book that might be deemed to be offensive to the Catholic Church. If so, the Church was warned that patriotic Americans would not stand

idly by watching their cherished democratic institutions ground into dust by the demands of a foreign priest.<sup>56</sup>

With the battle lines now clearly drawn, the Board of Controllers tried to stay in the middle and ended up pleasing neither side. Since no satisfaction was forthcoming from the school directors, the opposing sides moved ever closer to direct confrontation. The smoldering tensions sparked into the open flame of violence with yet a third meeting held at Independence Square. As nativists gathered in Kensington on May 3<sup>rd</sup>, they were greeted by a gang of Irish Catholics who dispersed the meeting using the unsubtle persuasion of wooden clubs. Not to be cowed by aliens and foreigners, the nativists assembled again three days later and this time they were ready for trouble. As soon as the speakers began, Catholics disrupted the proceedings by running carts loaded with dirt into the crowd. Fistfights broke out which eventually led to gunplay. The sound of shooting attracted larger crowds which quickly joined the fray. The Protestants gained their first martyr when eighteen year-old George Shiffler was killed by a bullet. Soon the disorder spread to a Catholic neighborhood nearby where homes were damaged or destroyed. When the nativists tried to burn a Catholic schoolhouse, several were wounded and two killed by gunfire from neighboring Catholic homes.<sup>57</sup>

The next day brought more trouble. Bishop Kenrick issued a circular advising Catholics to avoid places and occasions which might cause trouble. The nativist press, on the other hand, called for another mass meeting in Independence Square. A mob of approximately six thousand gathered to be stirred by fiery oratory into destroying over thirty more Catholic homes. When fire companies arrived to extinguish the blazes that had been set, the mob prevented them from fulfilling their duties.<sup>58</sup>

May 8<sup>th</sup> brought more trouble when a new mob formed in Kensington demanding vengeance for the death of Shiffler and others. The destruction of Catholic homes began again, alarming even some Protestants in the area. In an oddly appropriate attempt to avoid the biblical wrath sweeping their community, many Catholics and Protestants posted signs on their doors proclaiming themselves to be “Native American” in the hope that this would make the plague of violence pass over their homes. When the military arrived to protect the homes under attack, the mob turned its attention to St. Michael’s parish where they managed to burn both the church and its schoolhouse.<sup>59</sup>

The violence in Philadelphia that night was not limited to Kensington but it may have been limited by ethnicity. Though the rhetoric of the controversy might have addressed the Catholic Church as a whole, the hostilities may have been focused against only Irish Catholics. Writing anonymously a few years after the events in question, one eyewitness claimed that the mob that had burned St. Michael’s ignored another Catholic church nearby because it belonged to a German Catholic congregation. The writer explained that: “the congregation was composed of ‘ignorant Papists,’ but they were not ‘Irish Papists.’”<sup>60</sup> More recently, historian Dale Light presented evidence that the violence was more the result of class conflict than religious difference. He cited the example of wealthy Protestants turning out to stand guard around Philadelphia’s more affluent Catholic churches during the spring riots.<sup>61</sup>

Other mobs developed throughout Philadelphia with one heading to St. Augustine’s Church hoping to put it to the torch. There the mob found the city’s mayor, John Morin Scott, supported by police and concerned members of the community who tried unsuccessfully to protect the church. The nativist crowd scattered the defenders and set the building ablaze, along with the adjacent rectory and seminary. Having destroyed the

complex, the mob moved on to St. Mary's to repeat the process. There they met a contingent of marines and sailor from the USS Princeton who quickly dispersed the crowd using pikes and cutlasses. Reassembling in another part of the city, the gang headed for St. John's Cathedral only to be greeted by local militia who were similarly effective in preventing further damage to property. The trouble died down as the Governor of Pennsylvania, David Porter, ordered additional militia to the city to keep the peace.<sup>62</sup>

Though order was restored, peace was slow in coming. The local press, whatever their politics, condemned the violence and many people were embarrassed when Bishop Kenrick ordered all Catholic churches closed on 12 May, the Sunday following the riots. Ashamed that freedom of religion had been thus hindered, many groups urged the bishop to reconsider but he stood firm, not wishing to provide occasion for renewed hostilities. Though some nativists decried Kenrick's move as a ploy to gain sympathy but that Sunday did pass quietly nonetheless.<sup>63</sup>

Up in New York City, the ever-pugnacious John Hughes was dismayed that Philadelphia's Catholics did not take a firmer hand in defending what was theirs. He wrote: "They should have defended their churches since the authorities could not or would not do it for them. We might forbear from harming the intruder into our house until the last, but his violence to our church should be promptly and decisively repelled."<sup>64</sup> Worried that the violence might spread north from Philadelphia, city officials in New York warned the bishop that they could not assure the safety of diocesan property. Hughes responded by assuring them that the Church could take care of its own, but worried aloud that, if a single church did burn, the city "would become a second Moscow."<sup>65</sup> His meaning wasn't lost on the officials, who managed to find a military unit or two to protect against any local violence.<sup>66</sup>



A grand jury was convened to determine who was at fault for the disorder. Its verdict laid the blame squarely at the feet of those who would exclude the Bible from the public schools. No one seemed to be surprised by the judgment and it only encouraged the debate to continue. The nativists celebrated their vindication while the Catholics explained (yet again) that their goal was not to eliminate the Bible from the classroom.<sup>67</sup> In short, the grand jury solved nothing.

Though the dispute had become again a war of words, there was a common feeling that violence could erupt again at any time. As Independence Day approached, city authorities prepared for more trouble. General George Cadwalader, commander of the troops that had saved the cathedral in May, was ordered to be ready to deploy if needed.<sup>68</sup> He was needed.

The holiday brought a massive outpouring of patriotic spirit. The American Republican Association organized a massive parade in which thousands marched carrying banners proclaiming: “The Bible is the basis of Education and the safeguard of Liberty,” and “Our Fathers gave us the Bible – we will not yield it to a Foreign hand.” Other banners were more artistic, with pictures of Liberty herself using a Bible to instruct a child and of an American eagle holding an open Bible in its talons. Once the parade was finished, some twenty thousand people picnicked across the Schuylkill from Philadelphia. As they ate, they were treated to patriotic oratory and a display of fireworks.<sup>69</sup>

The day ended peacefully enough with some people choosing to spend the night in a nearby grove of trees instead of returning to their homes. It was here that trouble started. During the night, some of those asleep were attacked and severely beaten. Rumor made the attack much larger and identified the villains as Irish Catholics. Having feared that Independence Day could lead to more trouble, Catholics in Southwark (another district

adjacent to Philadelphia) had planned ahead for the protection of their parish. The pastor of St. Philip Neri, Fr. John P. Dunn, had permitted his brother to store guns in the church and to organize volunteers from the parish for the defense of the building. Protestants in the neighborhood had witnessed the collection of weapons and, when nativists gathered to avenge the attacks of July 4<sup>th</sup>, the largest crowd gathered at St. Philip's. Sheriff Morton McMichael arrived before any violence broke out and persuaded Fr. Dunn to surrender the weapons. The mob was not satisfied with such negotiations and demanded that sheriff search the premises. Conceding to their wishes, McMichael discovered even more guns and a few armed men inside the church building. Once these were removed, the crowd died away without doing any damage.<sup>70</sup>

The next evening another mob gathered and grew beyond the sheriff's control. When he called for reinforcements, a contingent of militia arrived with cannon in tow. This incited the mob to violence and they attacked the soldiers with stones and anything else that could be easily thrown. When the unit's commander ordered his troops to fire, the mob melted away in short order. The soldiers arrested approximately twenty protestors and imprisoned them in the church. One of those arrested was Charles Naylor, a former member of Congress, who had intervened to prevent the unit from firing on the mob.<sup>71</sup>

As word spread of Naylor's arrest, yet another crowd gathered on Sunday morning to demand the immediate release of the prisoners. The nativists brought two cannons of their own to give the demand a bit more strength. Upon arriving at the church, the mob also learned that most of the militia had gone home leaving only three units, one of which was the Montgomery Hibernian Greens (an Irish-Catholic unit), to guard the church and the prisoners. Outnumbered and outgunned, the soldiers released their prisoners but the mob was not satisfied and demanded that the Greens leave the area as well. Reluctantly the

Hibernians complied and left the church escorted by the other units. Trouble soon followed as members of the crowd began to throw stones at the departing soldiers. The Greens retaliated with gunfire and order dissolved as the soldiers were chased through the streets by the mob. Those who couldn't outrun their pursuers were beaten and, in one case, killed.<sup>72</sup>

Back at the church, leaders of the mob proclaimed St. Philip's to be under the protection of native Americans but this proved to be more fantasy than fact. Finding the building to be locked, some boys used a log to batter a hole in a newly constructed wall which members of the crowd then used to wander in and out of the church for the next several hours. At one point, a fire broke out but was quickly extinguished by the nativists on hand.<sup>73</sup>

By Sunday evening, General Cadwalader arrived with reinforcements and set about restoring order in Southwark. While they regained possession of the church in short order, the battle for the neighborhood raged into the night with the mob using spikes, broken glass, any available guns and even cannon. By morning the troops were so outnumbered that Cadwalader was forced to order a withdrawal. The nativists continued to control the area until Governor Porter was able to assemble enough troops to let Cadwalader regain the upper hand. By the end of the troubles, five thousand troops were under arms in the area.<sup>74</sup>

As order returned to the city, the press began to assign blame for the recent violence. Nativist papers were divided with some blaming the heavy hand of the military while others pointed at the arming of St. Philip's as the catalyst for trouble. The *Catholic Gazette* pointed out that the only churches to be damaged in the May riots were those which fell into nativist hands so, in light of the militant rhetoric leading up to Independence Day, the Catholics of Southwark were only being prudent in taking steps to protect their church from potential trouble.<sup>75</sup>

For his part, Bishop Kenrick was horrified by the violent consequences of the debate about Bible reading in the public schools. Fearing further violence, he never raised the issue again while he led the Diocese of Philadelphia. After becoming Archbishop of Baltimore in 1851, Kenrick would convene the First Plenary Council of Baltimore gathering all of the Catholic bishops in the United States to develop policy for the Catholic Church in America. One of the results of the Council was to recommend the establishment of parochial schools in every Catholic parish in the nation.<sup>76</sup> The recommendation took what heretofore had been a matter of local preference and made it a concern for all Catholic bishops in the United States. A subsequent plenary council would make that concern a priority by turning the recommendation into a requirement.

Though his tactics had been less confrontive than those of John Hughes in New York, the consequences of Francis Kenrick's actions had been far more damaging and, in the end, the results had been the same: each man resigned himself to the necessity of developing an alternate form of education for Catholic children.

### **Conclusion:**

The events in New York and Philadelphia are arguably the best known examples of the Catholic/common school controversy eliciting direct action by ordinary citizens but they are not the only ones. The attack on the Ursuline convent/school mentioned in the previous chapter and the events in Ohio to be chronicled in the next chapter all fall into the same category.

The Hughes conflict and the Philadelphia Bible Riots share several common characteristics that are notable for the discussion here. In both cases the bishops at the center of the controversy were Irish-born and leading congregations with significant

populations of Irish immigrants. Both bishops took a stand in which they demanded rights for their people. Both men also chose to work outside of the systems that were in place. By promoting his Carroll Hall slate John Hughes sidetracked the conventional two party process in New York City while Kenrick appealed to the court of public opinion by writing newspaper editorials to argue his case. Both men chose to fight the *status quo* as outsiders and their efforts were perceived by many citizens as a intrusion upon American culture from a foreign potentate. Though both men appealed to justice and to the American value of religious liberty, the popular perception was that they were doing exactly the opposite. Though John Purcell would not get much further in his own fight, his approach as chronicled in the next chapter at least had the effect of forestalling any public disturbance.

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- <sup>1</sup> A “coadjutor” appointment is best described as a sort of apprenticeship/regency position. The actual bishop of the diocese is approaching the end of his administration and a coadjutor is appointed with the expectation that he will eventually succeed the sitting bishop. As coadjutor, appointee gradually assumes the reins of administration as the sitting bishop eases into retirement.
- <sup>2</sup> At the time, the organization was known as the Free School Society, changing its name to the Public School Society in 1826.
- <sup>3</sup> Diane Ravitch. *The Great School Wars* (New York: Basic Publishers, 1974), 10-11.
- <sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, 10.
- <sup>5</sup> *ibid.*, 20-22.
- <sup>6</sup> *ibid.*, 19.
- <sup>7</sup> *Decreta Concilii*, First Provincial Council of Baltimore, XXXIV, 1829.
- <sup>8</sup> PSS No. 5, near St. Patrick’s Cathedral.
- <sup>9</sup> Bourne, William O. *History of the Public School Society of the City of New York* (New York: William Wood & Co., 1870), 160-163.
- <sup>10</sup> William Henry Seward, *Annual Address* (January 1840): quoted in George E. Baker, ed., *The Life of William H. Seward with Selections from His Works* (New York: Redfield, 1855), 212-213.
- <sup>11</sup> Ravitch, 40.
- <sup>12</sup> *ibid.*, 42-43.
- <sup>13</sup> *ibid.*, 46.
- <sup>14</sup> John Hughes, “On the Claim of the Catholics to a Portion of the Common School Fund, Before the Board of Aldermen of the City of New York, on Thursday and Friday, the 29<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> of October, 1840,” in Lawrence Kehoe, ed., *Complete Works of Most Reverend John Hughes, D.D., Archbishop of New York* (New York: Edward O. Jenkins, 1866), 125-147.
- <sup>15</sup> Theodore Sedgewick, “Special Meeting of Common Council to Hear the Petitioners and Remonstrants,” in William O. Bourne, *History of the Public School Society of the City of New York* (New York: William Wood & Co., 1870), 224-239.
- <sup>16</sup> Ravitch., 56-57.
- <sup>17</sup> John Hughes, “Meeting in Washington Hall, February 11<sup>th</sup>, 1841,” in Lawrence Kehoe, ed., *Complete Works of Most Reverend John Hughes, D.D., Archbishop of New York* (New York: Edward O. Jenkins, 1866), 244-245.
- <sup>18</sup> Ravitch, 60.
- <sup>19</sup> *ibid.*, 61-63.
- <sup>20</sup> *ibid.*, 64-66.
- <sup>21</sup> *ibid.*, 67.
- <sup>22</sup> Shaw, 166.
- <sup>23</sup> John Hughes, *Truth Teller* (5 June 1841): quoted in Richard Shaw, *Dagger John: The Unquiet Life and Times of Archbishop John Hughes of New York* (New York: Paulist Press, 1977), 166.
- <sup>24</sup> Shaw, 166.
- <sup>25</sup> Vincent P. Lannie. *Public Money and Parochial Education: Bishop Hughes, Governor Seward, and the New York School Controversy* (Cleveland: The Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1968), 172.
- <sup>26</sup> Ravitch, 69.
- <sup>27</sup> *ibid.*, 70.
- <sup>28</sup> *ibid.*, 67.
- <sup>29</sup> *ibid.*, 71.
- <sup>30</sup> “Report of the Committee on Colleges, Academies and Common Schools, on so much of the Governor’s Message as relates to the Common Schools in the City of New York,” in William O. Bourne, *History of the Public School Society of the City of New York* (New York: William Wood & Co., 1870), 501-506..
- <sup>31</sup> Ravitch, 72-73.
- <sup>32</sup> *ibid.*, 74-75.
- <sup>33</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>34</sup> Hennessey, 173.
- <sup>35</sup> Benjamin Justice. *The War That Wasn’t* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), 33.
- <sup>36</sup> Jay P. Dolan, *The American Catholic Experience* (Gaeden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1985), 263.

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- <sup>37</sup> Charles Morris, *American Catholic: The Saints and Sinners Who Built America's Most Powerful Church* (New York: Vintage Press, 1998), viii.
- <sup>38</sup> Sandra Yocum Mize, . "Kenrick, Francis Patrick"; <http://www.anb.org/articles/08/08-00802.html>; *American National Biography Online* Feb. 2000. Access Date: Oct 7 2006
- <sup>39</sup> Vincent P. Lannie and Bernard C. Diethorn, "For the Honor and Glory of God: The Philadelphia Bible Riots of 1844," *History of Education Quarterly* (Spring 1968), 44-48.
- <sup>40</sup> Protestant versions of the Bible exclude several books that Catholics believe to be divinely inspired, including the Second Epistle of James, which provides the scriptural basis for the Catholic belief that salvation requires faith and good works (thus contradicting the Protestant belief in salvation by faith alone).
- <sup>41</sup> Lloyd P. Jorgenson. *The State and the Non-Public School: 1825-1925* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1987), 77.
- <sup>42</sup> "For the Honor and Glory of God," 49.
- <sup>43</sup> *ibid.*, 50-51.
- <sup>44</sup> *ibid.*, 51.
- <sup>45</sup> Jorgenson, 77-78.
- <sup>46</sup> *ibid.*, 78.
- <sup>47</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>48</sup> "Constitution of the American Protestant Association," In *Documents of American Catholic History*, ed. John Tracy Ellis (Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing Company, 1962, 263-264.
- <sup>49</sup> "For the Honor and Glory of God," 60-61.
- <sup>50</sup> *ibid.*, 62
- <sup>51</sup> *ibid.*, 63-64.
- <sup>52</sup> *ibid.*, 65-66.
- <sup>53</sup> *ibid.*, 67.
- <sup>54</sup> *ibid.*, 68-69.
- <sup>55</sup> *ibid.*, 70.
- <sup>56</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>57</sup> *ibid.*, 73.
- <sup>58</sup> *ibid.*, 74-75.
- <sup>59</sup> *ibid.*, 75.
- <sup>60</sup> Anonymous, *The Truth Unveiled; or, A Calm and Impartial Exposition of the Origin and Immediate Cause of the Terrible Riots in Philadelphia, on May 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup>, A.D. 1844* (Philadelphia: M. Fithian, 1844), 23.
- <sup>61</sup> Dale B. Light, *Rome and the New Republic: Conflict and Community in Philadelphia Catholicism between the Revolution and the Civil War* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1996). 292.
- <sup>62</sup> "For the Honor and Glory of God," 75-76.
- <sup>63</sup> *ibid.*, 77-78.
- <sup>64</sup> *ibid.*, 77.
- <sup>65</sup> an allusion to the fires that greeted Napoleon when he reached the Russian capital in 1812.
- <sup>66</sup> Hennesey, 173.
- <sup>67</sup> "For the Honor and Glory of God," 80.
- <sup>68</sup> *ibid.*, 82.
- <sup>69</sup> *ibid.*, 83.
- <sup>70</sup> *ibid.*, 83-84.
- <sup>71</sup> *ibid.*, 84.
- <sup>72</sup> Jay A. Sekulow and Jeremy Tesdesco, "The Story Behind Vidal V. Girard's Executors: Joseph Story, The Philadelphia Bible Riots, And Religious Liberty," *Pepperdine Law Review* (2005), 637.
- <sup>73</sup> "For the Honor and Glory of God," 84-85.
- <sup>74</sup> *ibid.*, 85.
- <sup>75</sup> *ibid.*, 86.
- <sup>76</sup> Dolan, 268.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **EDUCATION, JOHN PURCELL AND OHIO BEFORE THE CIVIL WAR**

For many reasons, the events discussed in the previous chapter are well known to and well chronicled by historians of education. Understanding the events in New York and Philadelphia is fundamental to any discussion of the relation between Catholics and common schools in the United States of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Though education was only one of the issues involved, the incidents characterize the complex and uneasy relationship between Catholicism and mainstream American society at the time. The events were spectacular enough to be well-documented on all sides and occurred in large cities that were important centers of the national culture. From the Catholic perspective, it is difficult to overestimate the importance of John Hughes in shaping the outlook of the church's leadership in the antebellum era and beyond. Though he wasn't the first Irish bishop to lead an American diocese, he garnered the most attention and, for the many who would follow, he set a tone that was both proud and protective of what he perceived to be the rights and responsibilities of "Holy Mother Church."

By way of contrast, the story of the parallel development of common and Catholic schools in Ohio would seem to be less dramatic or of minor importance. At the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century most of Ohio was still a wilderness, part of the frontier into which the



former colonies were expanding. The presence of the Catholic Church in the region was similar in nature. When the original diocese of Baltimore (which had comprised the entire territory of the United States) was divided in 1808, ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the State of Ohio was transferred to the newly founded diocese of Bardstown in Kentucky. As the century unfolded, however, the Buckeye State developed at a dramatic pace. During the first half of the nineteenth century, Cincinnati became the most important American city west of the Appalachians with an ethnically diverse population growing by leaps and bounds. By 1850 the state itself had become the third most populous in the entire country.<sup>1</sup> The last three decades of the century would see three American presidents elected from Ohio, an icon of the Industrial Revolution emerge from the old Western Reserve and both Cleveland and Cincinnati counted among the ten largest cities in the United States. Catholicism in the state would also experience unprecedented progress and would become an important part of the national Church.

As in the stories of New York and Philadelphia, Cincinnati was led by a strong-willed Irishman who would become a force in local affairs. It is the career of this particular bishop, John Baptist Purcell, which gives the story of Catholics and common schools in Ohio much of its historical importance. What distinguishes Purcell from his compatriots is the longevity of his career. He arrived in Cincinnati as a newly-appointed bishop in 1832 and would lead the diocese for the next fifty years. During his administration the general population of Ohio would grow from approximately 600,000 to a total of almost 3.2 million. When new bishop took office, his diocese covered all of Ohio and claimed 35,000 Catholics served by sixteen parishes with four schools. By the time Purcell died in 1883 his diocese had spawned two others (Cleveland and Columbus) and the state was home to over 260,000 Catholics served by 462 parishes with 236 schools. John Baptist Purcell presided for five decades over

a period of unparalleled growth in state and diocese. He was running the diocese when the travails of his compatriot bishops in New York and Philadelphia defined the public perception of American Catholicism in the antebellum era and he would continue to lead the Catholics of the state well into the postwar era when Ohio became an integral part of the political process in the United States.

The story of Purcell's administration is not a story of numbers alone. Given the length of his tenure, the bishop guided the Catholic Church in Ohio through two distinct historical epochs. The antebellum era was markedly different from that which followed the Civil War. The earlier period was a time of transition from largely wilderness to settlement. The population of pioneers was supplanted by later waves of settlers including large numbers of immigrants. Educational institutions and other hallmarks of "civilized" society were taking root. Population centers were small but growing. Soon after the end of the war Ohio politics became an important influence on the national scene, industries in the state were on the cutting edge of the new era and citizens did not have to look "back East" for society and culture. One constant to both eras was John Purcell's leadership of the Catholic Church in Ohio. Given the monarchical nature of ecclesiastical administration at the time, this constancy is significant. Though he did make use of advisors, most notably his brother Edward (also a priest and, as long-time editor of the *Catholic Telegraph*, a mouthpiece for his brother), John Baptist Purcell operated effectively<sup>2</sup> as the ultimate authority of all Church matters in Ohio for the duration of his episcopal administration. Though his views on the relationship of Catholicism and the common schools evolved over the years, Purcell's perspective provides a stable foundation from which to examine the development of that uneasy relationship as it unfolded in Ohio.

## **The Environment:**

John Baptist Purcell was born on 26 February 1800 in County Cork, Ireland. He migrated to the United States at age eighteen and earned a teaching certificate from Asbury College, a Methodist school in Baltimore. After spending two years as a private tutor on the eastern shore of Maryland, Purcell began his studies for the Catholic priesthood at Mount Saint Mary's in Emmitsburg, MD. Once he was ordained a priest, Purcell joined the seminary faculty and was eventually named President of the school in 1829.<sup>3</sup> In 1832, Pope Gregory XVI appointed John Baptist Purcell the second Bishop of Cincinnati.

When the steamship *Emigrant* gave the newly arrived bishop a first look at his episcopal headquarters in late 1832, he found a city expanding almost exponentially. In 1830 the city's population was reported at 24,831. Ten years later that number had almost doubled to 46,388 and almost tripled to 115,435 by 1850.<sup>4</sup> Besides growing larger, the population was also becoming more diverse. By 1850, almost half of the residents in the Queen City (47.5%) were foreign-born. Statistics for 1840 show that first generation Germans comprised 19.5% of the city's workforce that year with newly arrived Irish adding another 7.5%. Ten years later, these numbers would jump to 47.2% for Germans and 15% for the Irish.<sup>5</sup> Many of the emigrants would be Catholic and, therefore, Purcell's responsibility.

The new bishop inherited a diocese that comprised the entire state of Ohio, over 44,000 square miles of territory. Across these many miles were scattered sixteen churches attended by fourteen priests serving approximately 35,000 Catholics.<sup>6</sup> During the administration of the first Bishop of Cincinnati, Edward Fenwick, Catholic education in the diocese had developed in fits and starts. Schools opened and closed due to lack of funding and qualified personnel but, when Fenwick died in 1832, the diocese could boast four

schools and a seminary.<sup>7</sup> Such was the growth of the Catholic population in Ohio that, by 1880, the state had been divided into three dioceses with a total of 236 parish schools across what had been Purcell's original jurisdiction.<sup>8</sup> In the fifty years of his administration John Baptist Purcell would preside over a period of expansion unparalleled in the history of the diocese. Purcell would take the reins of a fledgling diocese and leave to his successor one of the largest organizations in the Catholic Church world-wide.

While the growth of Catholicism in the Old Northwest would essentially be a happy problem for Purcell, other citizens of Cincinnati took a much darker view. Taking up residence in the city at about the same time as the new bishop, Rev. Lyman Beecher had been a leader in the evangelical "No Popery" movement that accompanied the Second Great Awakening which swept across the United States in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>9</sup> In 1835, Beecher published *A Plea for the West* in which he recognized the great potential of that land

extending from the Alleghany to the Rocky mountains, and from the Gulf of Mexico to the Lakes of the North; and it is the largest territory, and most beneficent in climate, and soil, and mineral wealth, and commercial facilities, ever prepared for the habitation of man, and qualified to sustain in prosperity and happiness the densest population on the globe.<sup>10</sup>

Beecher went on to acknowledge that the key to prosperity in the West would be universal education and moral culture which would give the region the stamina and vitality necessary to overcome whatever defects may develop.<sup>11</sup> At the time the author was president (since 1832) of Lane Theological Seminary, a Presbyterian school in Cincinnati whose purpose, as Beecher saw it, was to train ministers to proselytize and teach on the frontier.

Though Lyman Beecher had high hopes for the expansion of America into the west, he also worried that this new land of opportunity would be overrun by European emigrants,

of whom “three-fourths...are, through the medium of their religion and priesthood, as entirely accessible to the control of the potentates of Europe as if they were an army of soldiers, enlisted and officered, and spreading over the land...”<sup>12</sup> While their individual intentions may have been pure, Beecher worried that the sheer number of such migrants would subvert the democratic processes of the young republic. He wrote:

The simple fact, that the clergy of the Catholic denomination could wield in mass the suffrage of their confiding people, could not fail, in the competition of ambition and party spirit, to occasion immediately an eager competition, for their votes, placing them at once in the attitude of the most favored sect; securing the remission of duties on imported church property, and copious appropriations of land for the endowment of their institutions; shielding them from animadversion by the sensitiveness of parties on account of their political ends; and turning against their opponents, and in favor of Catholic, the patronage and the tremendous influence of the administration, whose ascendancy and continuance might, in closely contested elections, be thought to depend on Catholic suffrage.<sup>13</sup>

The Beecher family would figure prominently in the ongoing tensions between the Catholic and Protestant communities in Cincinnati. When Henry Ward Beecher became editor of the *Cincinnati Journal* in 1834 he used the newspaper to decry the growing number of Catholics in the area and saw in the migration a Roman plot to expand papist political influence.<sup>14</sup> On the other side, after a mob burned the Ursuline convent in Charlestown, Edward Purcell’s *Telegraph* published articles blaming Lyman Beecher for striking the rhetorical spark that led to a fire that was all too literal.<sup>15</sup>

Like its Catholic counterpart, free public education in Ohio experienced a series of fits and starts in the 1820s. In February of 1825 the Ohio legislature passed a law

authorizing a county tax for the purpose of funding common schools. Unfortunately the monies resulting therefrom were only enough to allow schools to operate only a few weeks per year.<sup>16</sup> While an assortment of schools tried to eke out an existence in rented buildings with very short sessions, progress toward a more systematic approach to education took an important step forward with the establishment in 1831 of the Western Literary Institute and College of Professional Teachers. This organization worked for the advancement of education in the West and promoted such forward-thinking ideas as graded schools and the establishment of a state superintendent of instruction. In 1837, the State of Ohio would appoint Samuel Lewis as its first Superintendent of Schools.<sup>17</sup> In his first annual report on the state of education in Ohio, Lewis estimated that there were 550,000 school age children in Ohio served by 4,386 public schools scattered across the state. Only a quarter of those children, however, attended school in 1837 and half of those went for less than two months.<sup>18</sup> So, like the diocese which shared its territorial boundaries, Ohio in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century underwent a rapid expansion of its educational system but still fell short of serving all who required its services.

### **A Hopeful Beginning:**

When he first arrived in Cincinnati, John Purcell's attitude toward the developing system of public education was critical but hopeful. Having been a teacher himself even before ordination, he considered education to be a priority second only to that of religion in his own ministry as a bishop.<sup>19</sup> It did not take long for the new bishop to find fault with the education provided in the local common schools, however. He complained in his diocesan newspaper that the free schools exploited the desire of Catholic children to learn by giving them sectarian tracts to read which undermined the religious foundations of such tender

minds.<sup>20</sup> Yet Purcell also joined the Western Literary Institute and College of Professional Teachers soon after his arrival in the city.

In 1836 Bishop Purcell attended his first meeting of the College of Teachers. The membership of the organization included many notable public figures in the community and beyond. Lyman Beecher was a member along with his son-in-law Calvin Stowe.<sup>21</sup> William McGuffey of *Eclectic Reader* fame and Samuel Lewis were also members. His involvement in this organization would bring Purcell face to face with the “movers and shakers” of the developing public school system. Though he had spoken publicly on education before, the bishop’s participation here represented his first chance to influence directly those who actually formulated education policy at the local level. Coming, as it did, well before the controversies in New York and Philadelphia, the meeting probably represented American Catholicism’s best chance to establish a harmonious and productive relationship with the developing public schools.

The annual meeting of the College of Teachers convened at the First Presbyterian Church in Cincinnati on Monday, October 3, 1836. Once the minutes from the previous year’s meeting were read and various members reported on the state of education in their home regions, the assembly listened to an introductory lecture by the Rev. Joshua L. Wilson, pastor of the church hosting the gathering. In the course of his address, Wilson made reference to the Bible as containing within it the best system of universal instruction. According to the Presbyterian pastor, the Bible:

gives us the most pure, sublime, and rational conceptions of our Creator.

It makes us acquainted with the very best system of cosmogony extant.

It teaches us the origin and end of our being. It fixes the highest standard and purest laws of morality. It discloses disobedience as the prolific source

of all evil, and unfolds to transgressors the remedial system by grace. It describes every civil and social relation, and defines the responsibilities and duties of each. It furnishes practical lessons and powerful motives to human happiness, both for a present and future state of existence. It lays a foundation for the best system of human government, by furnishing the soundest principles of justice and equity. It instructs the ignorant, comforts the sorrowful, succors the tempted, and saves the lost. In the Bible are to be found the most certain chronology — the most authentic history — the most edifying biography — the most sublime poetry — the soundest philosophy — the best specimens of eloquence — and above all, a religion which gives, "glory to God in the highest, peace on earth, good will to men!" The simplicity of the Bible is milk for babes — its grandeur is meat for strong men — its wonderful details of redeeming mercy, through Him who was dead and is alive, and liveth forevermore, "the angels desire to look, into!" This is the Book of Books — the text book of "a thorough system of universal instruction."<sup>22</sup>

Though Wilson may not have been saying anything new here, this statement would represent the opening argument in a long and increasingly rancorous debate between proponents of public and parochial schools in Ohio.

Later in the day John Purcell delivered his address to the assembly, on the philosophy of the human mind. The speech must have been somewhat impromptu because the bishop mentioned that he had been invited to speak only that morning.<sup>23</sup> Before turning to his prepared text, Purcell began his time at the podium by commenting "at considerable length" on Reverend Wilson's talk from that morning, and asked about which version of Bible should be used as a textbook.<sup>24</sup> Wilson responded once the bishop had finished his remarks and this sparked an "animated discussion" between Wilson, Purcell, Alexander



Kinmont (a founding member of the College) and the Rev. Alexander Campbell, a leading figure in the Second Great Awakening and founder of Bethany College in what is now West Virginia.<sup>25</sup>

Though the official minutes don't go into further detail about the discussion following Purcell's speech, it apparently provided the catalyst for a much publicized debate between Alexander Campbell and John Purcell held in January of the following year. In his opening remarks at that debate Campbell complained that:

the gentleman [Purcell] arose, and in that Protestant house, and before a Protestant assembly, directly and positively protested against allowing the book which Protestants claim to contain their religion, to be used in schools. He uttered a tirade against the Protestant modes of teaching, and against the Protestant influence upon the community. This was the origin of the dispute. Had it not been for the assertions made by the gentleman on that occasion, we should not have heard one word of a discussion.<sup>26</sup>

The Campbell-Purcell debate would be a long, formal and very public affair that ultimately accomplished very little aside from proving again just how irreconcilable the differences were between Protestant and Catholic forms of Christianity. In light of the current discussion, however, the confrontations between Campbell and Purcell highlights an important point. Alexander Campbell's explanation of how the debate originated clearly indicates that, while the professed purpose of the College of Teachers may have been to promote public education, at least one of its members equated "public" with "Protestant". Moreover, his claim that Purcell objected to the use of the Bible in the classroom probably paints the bishop's position with too broad a brush. Given his conclusions presented at the

1837 meeting, it is likely that Purcell was not protesting the use of the Bible as much as he was protesting the *manner* of its use in the classroom.

Ironically, while John Purcell and Alexander Campbell were fortifying the battle lines about Bible use in the classroom that would be at the heart of the controversy for the next fifty odd years, another member of the College (who was also a Catholic priest) proposed an alternative solution at that same meeting in 1836 which could have provided a way out of the impasse. Stephen H. Montgomery was a Dominican friar who had first come to Ohio seventeen years earlier when it was still mission territory. In 1829 Montgomery had been appointed by Purcell's predecessor to be the first rector of the newly established diocesan seminary.<sup>27</sup> As was the case with his bishop, the 1836 meeting of the College of Teachers seems to have been Fr. Montgomery's first experience with the organization and the two men were paired together on two occasions: when Purcell spoke, Montgomery opened the session with a prayer and, when the latter spoke, the bishop returned the favor.

On Thursday morning, October 6<sup>th</sup>, Stephen H. Montgomery delivered a lecture on the necessity and importance of education. The content of the address was, for the most part, irenic and conventional, stressing the need for quality teachers and warning against pedagogical faddism. Toward the end of the talk, however, Montgomery turned his attention to the issue of using the Bible as a textbook and carefully built a case against it. In presenting his argument, the friar avoided taking the standard Catholic tack of condemning usage of the King James Version and merely acknowledged that the use of sacred scripture in the classroom stood in the way of universalizing education because it so often raised sectarian objections from parents. His ultimate for objection was motivated by the exalted nature of the book itself. Cannily quoting Jonathan Edwards that Scripture is a text "where more is understood than expressed," Montgomery argued that the message of the Bible was

so rich and complex that teachers could not be expected to interpret it properly nor for students to have the proper appreciation. The speaker likened it to throwing pearls before swine.<sup>28</sup>

As an alternative to using the entire Bible, Montgomery proposed that a book of appropriate biblical excerpts be compiled instead for classroom use.<sup>29</sup> From a contemporary perspective, the proposal seems to present an ingenious solution to the Bible in the classroom controversies that would dog the development of public education for the next fifty years. Creating a book of excerpts would effectively remove the political and theological implications of biblical usage from the texts chosen. A book of excerpts would be clearly recognized by all factions involved as derivative and, therefore, not Sacred Scripture itself. By not being a complete version, a book of excerpts would not be obligated to meet all of the necessary requirements of an official translation of the Bible. The primary purpose, then, of the excerpts would be classroom utility rather than dogmatic conformity. The choice of translation would matter less. The question of which books to be excerpted would be less important because there need be no expectation that all books be represented. In addition, there would certainly be enough text common to both groups (Ten Commandments, gospels, Pauline letters, etc.) that could provide useful moral instruction and pedagogical value without sectarian bias. All sides could understand that this book of excerpts was more akin to any geography book or reader than to the Bible itself. Though the proposal did not show much consideration for any students who were not Christian, a compilation of biblical excerpts could have helped to bridge the gap between Protestants and Catholics.

The College of Teachers thought highly enough of Montgomery's suggestion that they formed a committee to study further the possibility a book of excerpts from the Bible

for use in the classroom. The committee consisted of two members: Bishop Purcell and the Rev. Benjamin P. Aydelott, who were to explore the possibilities and report back to the College at the next annual meeting in October of 1837.<sup>30</sup>

From one perspective the selection of Purcell and Aydelott for the excerpion committee made a certain sense. Purcell had certainly made it clear from the very beginning of his participation in the College that he objected to the current practice of using the Bible in the classroom. Aydelott, an Episcopalian minister and President of Woodward College in the city, had just presented the report of a committee to which he had been appointed the previous year to study the manner in which the Bible should be used in schools.<sup>31</sup> In presenting his report Aydelott recognized that excerpts from the Bible were already used well in the classroom, most notably in William McGuffey's reader, but concluded that nothing short of a complete version could convey the power of the Bible as presented in its entirety. His conclusion aside, Aydelott had seen some benefit in the use of a book of excerpts but worried that the process of selecting which passages to include would occasion accusations of sectarian bias.<sup>32</sup> Perhaps because the current suggestion had come from a Catholic, using a book of excerpts might now be a bridge, instead of a barrier, to cooperation among denominations.

Whatever the reasons for their selection, the appointment of Purcell and Aydelott to the excerpion committee probably doomed the proposal from the outset. In reading the addresses each man delivered at the 1837 meeting it seems as if they agreed very early on that any consensus would be impossible, yet both men shared the same conclusion: that excerpion was not feasible.

For his part, John Purcell did not seem to understand the task for which he had been commissioned. Indeed he claimed as much when he reports back to the College of Teachers

in their 1837 meeting. In that address Purcell explained that he did not truly comprehend the purpose of his committee until a month previous when he received the agenda for the current meeting.<sup>33</sup> Archival evidence indicates that Purcell was, indeed, operating under a miscomprehension. In preparing for the 1837 meeting the Bishop of Cincinnati turned for help to two fellow Irish priests: John Hughes and John England. Purcell wrote to each man inviting them to come to Cincinnati to address the College of Teachers. Both men turned him down, each conveying their own pessimism about reaching any compromise with Protestants.

At the time, John Hughes was a pastor in Philadelphia though within the year he would be appointed as successor to the position in New York that would earn him his place in history. The tone of Hughes' response to the Bishop of Cincinnati was friendly but he declined the invitation, though he was willing to reconsider if Purcell thought it of sufficient importance. As his initial reason for refusing, the Philadelphia priest pleaded ignorance of the particular situation under discussion. As he warmed to his topic, Hughes laid out an argument listing six reasons why Catholics were at a disadvantage when trying to cooperate with Protestants. He concludes by dismissing the use of the Bible as a textbook for largely the same reasons that had been listed earlier by Stephen Montgomery at the October meeting.<sup>34</sup>

John Purcell's other invitation had gone to John England, Bishop of Charleston, SC. By this time England has been a bishop for fifteen years and had become an avuncular influence on his younger counterpart in Cincinnati. Like Hughes, England did not see much potential in cooperating with "those who do not love us" and even doubted that the College of Teachers was sincere about its stated purpose in the first place. Making reference to the

debate with Alexander Campbell, England closed his letter with what can best be classified as faint praise that Purcell “got out of it better than I [England] could have imagined.”<sup>35</sup>

Once he received England’s refusal, John Purcell apparently wrote him again asking that the older man at least write a paper to be read at the meeting. The Bishop of Charleston again refused and Purcell was left to make his own case in 1837.<sup>36</sup>

Purcell’s decision to extend invitations to his compatriots opens the door to some interesting speculation. While the idea to write may have been his alone, the bishop seems to have done so with some permission from the College. In his first letter of refusal, John England asked Purcell to pass along his (England’s) regrets to “Mr. Talbott,”<sup>37</sup> probably David Talbott, recording secretary of the College of Teachers.

More importantly, while John Purcell had been commissioned to explore the feasibility of excerpting the Bible for the classroom, the wording of John Hughes’ letter implies that he had been invited to discuss the use of the Bible as a textbook. Given that Hughes’ objections to such usage were so similar to those that Stephen Montgomery had voiced about using the entire Bible, it must be that the Philadelphia priest either overlooked the idea of excerption or that the idea wasn’t mentioned at all in the first place. Since, by 1837, John Hughes had already established himself as an able and aggressive apologist for the Catholic religion it is highly unlikely that he would have overlooked an important concept like excerption in the context of conversation with a non-Catholic group. The likely conclusion, then, is that Purcell was not considering the possibility of excerption and focused, instead, on the more common issue of using the Bible itself in the classroom.

If the 1836 appointments of Aydelott and Purcell sounded the death knell for the excerption proposal, their presentations in 1837 buried the idea with conviction along with any real possibility of ecumenical cooperation. On the morning of October 4<sup>th</sup>, the third day

of the meeting, each member of the excerption committee presented his own report with Purcell explaining that he and Aydelott: “having foreseen their inability to agree on the subject referred to them, have resolved to present separate reports.”<sup>38</sup>

A close examination of each man’s address reveals that they agreed on most points but the one most crucial to each. Both men emphatically rejected the idea of using a book of biblical excerpts in the classroom rather than the Bible itself. Moreover, they rejected the idea for largely the same reasons: no human was capable of producing a suitable adaptation, any group of selections would necessarily contain sectarian bias and that no condensation could adequately capture the essence of the Word of God in its entirety. Purcell and Aydelott both acknowledged a useful role for biblical excerpts in limited circumstances and both also agreed that the Bible played a valuable and irreplaceable role in the classroom.<sup>39</sup>

It was in the conclusion of each man’s address that their real differences emerged, and these differences would represent the opposing poles of the controversy that would dominate public/parochial education tensions until after the Civil War. Purcell began his conclusion by echoing many of the objections that Stephen Montgomery had voiced a year earlier about using the Bible in the classroom. In the present address, however, Purcell was arguing *in favor* of using the Bible but in a particular manner. In his conclusion the bishop suggested that each school set aside a time where students could be divided according to their respective religious affiliations and each group could study the Bible with a minister of their own faith.<sup>40</sup>

While Benjamin Aydelott was willing to allow students who did not speak English to use Bibles written in their own languages, he concluded that all students should benefit from “the daily, practical, devout reading of our common version”<sup>41</sup> which he had earlier specified as the King James Version of the Bible.

Once both men had finished, the College voted to accept both reports and then voted unanimously to accept the following resolution:

That this Convention earnestly recommend the use of the Bible in all our schools, to be read as a religious exercise, without denominational or sectarian comment, and that it is the deliberate conviction of this College, that the Bible may be so introduced in perfect consistency with religious freedom, and without offence to the peculiar tenets of any christian sect.<sup>42</sup>

The 1837 meeting of the College of Teachers would be the high-water mark for Catholic-Protestant cooperation in education in Ohio during Purcell's career. He certainly anticipated future participation in the work of the College by being appointed to a committee of seven to prepare a report on "emulation" for the next annual meeting. Other members of this committee included Benjamin Aydelott (again), William McGuffey, Calvin Stowe and Lyman Beecher.<sup>43</sup>

A few weeks after the 1837 meeting, the Bishop of Cincinnati sent a report of his progress to Rome. He wrote:

Everyone seemed to like my proposal that neither teachers, nor anyone else, should ever speak *about doctrine*; but that the students of each sect should be gathered, separately, two or three times a week, in a special room, there to be instructed in their religion by their own ministers. If this were done, our schools would be a great benefit for this country, where there is so much vice and ignorance.<sup>44</sup>

The bishop probably felt further vindicated when, that same year, the Cincinnati school board issued a list of approved textbooks which specified the use of the Bible "without notes or commentaries..."<sup>45</sup>



Upon closer examination, however, the resolution in which Purcell found his triumph also nourished the seeds of future discord. The words that John Purcell interpreted as an approbation of his position were ambiguous enough that Benjamin Aydelott could vote to approve them as well without seeing any contradiction to his own arguments. More importantly, the resolution could also be seen as a ratification of an address given a day earlier than the Purcell-Aydelott exchange by Calvin E. Stowe, who presented the College with the initial results of his fact-finding trip to Europe. In his report, Stowe painted a glowing picture of Prussian teachers using the most common translation of the Bible to teach morality while scrupulously avoiding any hint of sectarian influence.<sup>46</sup> Later that same year Stowe would present a more thorough report to the Ohio state legislature in which he stated:

I inquired of all classes of teachers, and men of every grade of religious faith...of rationalists and enthusiasts, of Protestants and Catholics; and I have never found but one reply that to leave the moral faculty uninstructed was to leave the most important part of the human mind undeveloped, and to strip education of almost every thing that can make it valuable; and that the Bible, independently of the interest attending it, as containing the most ancient and influential writings ever recorded by human hands, and comprising the religious system of almost the whole of the civilized world, is in itself the best book that can be put into the hands of children to interest, to exercise, and to unfold their intellectual and moral powers. Every teacher whom I consulted, repelled with indignation the idea that moral instruction is not proper for schools; and spurned with contempt the allegation, that the Bible cannot be introduced into common schools without encouraging a

sectarian bias in the matter of teaching; an indignation and contempt which I believe will be fully participated in by every high-minded teacher in christendom.<sup>47</sup>

Stowe's report was so well received that the legislature ordered it published and distributed to every school district in the state. Other states like Pennsylvania, Michigan and Massachusetts followed suit.<sup>48</sup> The widespread acclaim given to Stowe's report probably did more to set the standard for Bible use in the common schools than anything issued by the College of Teachers itself.

The real irony of this entire episode is that the one issue on which both sides saw eye-to-eye was the quick and emphatic dismissal of perhaps the best possible way to bypass the festering controversy that would follow: compiling a book of excerpts. Benjamin Aydelott and John Purcell both killed the excerption proposal with almost identical arguments. Moreover if Purcell did not understand the true purpose of his assigned task (as he claimed at the opening of his address) until just a month before he presented his report, then it is highly unlikely that he gave the idea much serious consideration at all. Adding to that irony, by 1837 the man who proposed the excerption idea in the first place, Fr. Stephen H. Montgomery, had become *persona non grata* in the Diocese of Cincinnati and moved across the Ohio River to Kentucky to continue his priestly ministry.<sup>49</sup> There is not enough evidence to indicate what specifically caused the estrangement between Purcell and Montgomery but it appears that the Dominican never worked again in Ohio.

Looking back at John Purcell's work with the Western Literary Institute and College of Teachers, it becomes apparent that the hopefulness he felt in 1837 would not last much beyond the end of the decade. Though appointed to another committee, it does not appear that Purcell attended in 1838. He did make a presentation in 1839 but the College of Teachers may have already started to decline by then. The 1840 meeting was the last to

publish minutes; annual fees collected were no longer sufficient to underwrite the expenses of the College and it finally ceased to function in 1846.<sup>50</sup>

After 1839 John Purcell's communications with those running the public schools took on a more formal air. There seems to have been less personal contact between the bishop and public school leaders, perhaps because the College of Teachers chose to hold its annual meetings in Kentucky from 1842 through 1844.<sup>51</sup> In any event, Purcell's communications with public school officials after 1840 would become more formal and focused specifically on issues related to Catholic students rather than the promotion of education in general. John Purcell's retreat to the Catholic ghetto had begun.

### **Hope Becomes Caution:**

The 1840s were marked in Cincinnati by a growing rift between the bishop and the school board. In 1842 Purcell asked the local school board to address what he saw as problems created by the Protestant tone of the city's common schools. His complaint was three-fold: Catholic students were being made to read the King James Version of the Bible, textbooks used in classrooms contained passages that were offensive to Catholics, and students were given access to libraries that contained objectionable books.<sup>52</sup>

The complaint about the King James Version indicates that the discussions and resolutions of 1837 had borne no real fruit in the ordinary operation of the public schools. Similarly, the textbook question was not a new one either. The same booklist published in 1837 that specified bibles without commentaries be used also approved the continued use of *Parley's First Book of History*,<sup>53</sup> a history primer that was often critical of the Catholic Church. For example, the textbook described Hernando Cortez in Mexico thusly:

Now Cortez was a Catholic, and these things [Aztec sacrifices] shocked him very much. He could make war on defenceless people, slay them by the thousands, plot the destruction of their government, and pursue his schemes by falsehood, treachery, and violence. All these things were consistent with his notion of religion; but the sacrifice of human victims to idols appeared to him very wicked and absurd. It may seem to us very strange, that the Mexicans could imagine the horrid practices of their religion were right, but it is still more strange, that Cortez could believe his conduct was agreeable to the peaceful doctrines of Christianity.<sup>54</sup>

The specific details of Purcell's third complaint, offensive books in school libraries is more difficult to track because the available evidence doesn't include mention of any specific examples.

Purcell conveyed his concerns personally to James Perkins, president of the board and, in so doing, managed to avoid making it a public issue. Initially, the personal approach seemed to work. Soon after Purcell's meeting the school board passed resolutions that addressed the issues raised by the bishop. First, the board invited the bishop to examine all textbooks used in the system to identify those passages that were offensive. Second, students in the city's common schools would be excused from bible reading upon parental request. Finally, parental permission would be required at the beginning of each session to allow students to borrow books from district libraries.<sup>55</sup>

As accommodating as the Cincinnati board may have appeared to be, nothing seems to have changed. Evidence indicates that, despite the change in official policy, pan-Protestant practices in the city's common schools continued unchanged. In 1847 the *Catholic Telegraph* published a report of a teacher telling Catholic students that they must obtain Protestant editions of the New Testament. Official documents produced by the schools also

indicated that Bible reading remained part of the daily curriculum.<sup>56</sup> Whatever changes may or may not have happened in the public schools, the school board later charged that Purcell did not accept, or even acknowledge, its invitation to examine and edit their textbooks.<sup>57</sup> For whatever reason it happened, the lack of implementation would further sour relations between the bishop and the public school board and lead to more trouble in the future.

Though his interactions with public school leaders had grown less cordial, the bishop did not seem to rule out all cooperation. By 1842 Purcell's friend and fellow bishop John Hughes was already fighting hammer and tong with the Public School Society in New York. Hughes had already made his battle very public and wielded his influence on the electoral process not once, but twice. In contrast, Purcell communicated his concerns personally to the president of Cincinnati's school board and, judging from the subsequent annual report, had gotten some results. Though it is unclear why Purcell didn't continue the dialogue that he had initiated, the fact that he started it at all in the manner that he did is proof that he still held some hope for effective interaction. While Hughes managed to kill the Public School Society, he did not make New York's public schools any more accommodating to Catholics. So while Purcell's approach was no more effective than Hughes, at least the Bishop of Cincinnati could not be accused of causing public riot.

### **Caution Becomes Confrontation:**

The 1850s brought yet another shift in the relationship between Catholic and public school leadership. The cautious formality of the 1840s that had replaced the irenic spirit of the previous decade would itself be superseded by a more contentious, politicized and public hostility between the two sides. Changes on both sides of the argument contributed to a general escalation in tensions.

For its part, the Diocese of Cincinnati underwent a dramatic period of growth during the first fifteen years of Purcell's tenure. What had been had been sixteen churches and fourteen priests in 1832 had become seventy churches with seventy-three priests in 1847. At that time, Rome carved the Diocese of Cleveland out of the northern half of the state and designated Cincinnati as an archdiocese which, in turn, elevated Purcell's title to that of archbishop.<sup>58</sup> Further proof of dramatic growth can be seen in the parochial school statistics. In 1848 the city of Cincinnati was home to eight parochial schools serving 2,527 pupils. Three years later the number of students had almost doubled to 4,494 enrolled in thirteen parochial schools.<sup>59</sup> Common school attendance for Cincinnati in 1850 was reported at 6,740.<sup>60</sup>

As evidenced in Lyman Beecher's *Plea for the West*, the rising number of Catholics in the United States precipitated a rising fear among native-born Americans of being overrun by "papists." This growing concern coincided with a political vacuum left by the fading strength of the national Whig Party and an economic downturn that affected many working-class citizens across the nation. Historian Michael Holt sees the combination of these three factors as the driving force behind the emergence of a political anti-Catholicism that would come to be known as the Know-Nothing movement.<sup>61</sup> The Know-Nothing Order was established in 1849 and reached the peak of its political importance in 1854 at which time it renamed itself the American Party. Though generally stronger in the East, the party also established a strong presence in Ohio. In June of 1855 the Order would claim a membership of over 130,000 in the Buckeye State.<sup>62</sup> The anti-Catholicism that had begun with the evangelical No-Popery movement had spilled over into the politics of the day and the result would heighten tensions on both sides.

This new era for Ohio began inauspiciously when, in August of 1850, a mob attacked a Catholic school in Chillicothe run by the Sisters of Notre Dame. Though an investigation was made, no arrests followed, much to the disappointment of the local Catholic community.<sup>63</sup> Outside of this there was relatively little anti-Catholic violence in Ohio at the time and this was the only episode that had any direct connection to education.

Classroom use of the King James Bible became an issue again in Cincinnati in the summer of 1852 when Dr. Jerome Mudd, a Catholic member of the Cincinnati public school board, tried to address the bible issue again by proposing a series of resolutions to the board that would allow students and teachers to use personal preference in choosing a translation of the Bible for use in the classroom. The board sent the resolutions to a committee on textbooks for further examination. On August 31, the seven members of the committee reported back that they were split three ways over the issue. A majority of the committee preferred the *status quo*, arguing that the board had already tried to accommodate the Catholics in 1842 and that Purcell had not followed through on that agreement by censoring offensive passages from textbooks. For this majority, the Mudd resolutions were merely another Catholic attempt to undermine the effectiveness of the common schools.<sup>64</sup>

As a member of the textbook committee, Dr. Mudd constituted a dissenting minority of one. Taking issue with the majority report, he argued that Catholics were not alone in their objections to the King James Version of the Bible. Jews, and even some Protestant sects, did not like the book either. For him, using the KJV was tantamount to imposing the will of one religious denomination on all others. Two other committee members, comprising a second minority, proposed a compromise measure in which parents would choose which version of the Bible their students would use in school.<sup>65</sup>

After several inconclusive discussions, the Cincinnati board was finally able to reach a compromise at their meeting on 8 November. With a vote of fifteen to ten, the board resolved to allow parents to choose which translation of the Bible their students would use in the classroom with the stipulation that any notes or comments contained in those translations may not be read in public. While there was some predictable outcry in the religious press, there was little reaction by the general public.<sup>66</sup> When describing the Bible issue in its annual report, the board voiced frustration at what it perceived as the intransigence of the bishop. The report complained that, in the ten years since Purcell had first complained in 1842, the board had done all that it could to address his concerns and received no response or reciprocation. The section concluded by stating that if certain children in the city are deprived of a free education, it is not the fault of the school board.<sup>67</sup> While it may have seemed that the Bible issue had been resolved (again), it was becoming obvious that tempers were beginning to fray.

1853 brought more controversy, this time at the state level. The state legislature hammered out a new bill to reorganize public education across the state. The new law would impose a new state tax to fund public education, raise the standard of qualifications for new teachers, and authorize the establishment of local boards of education in each township.<sup>68</sup> The fundamental purpose of the bill was to provide a more regular and systematic foundation upon which to build a public school system across the state. During the course of deliberations an amendment was proposed and rejected that would fine parents of children between the ages of eight and fourteen who did not attend school at least three months per year.<sup>69</sup> In response Purcell addressed a petition signed by 800 Catholics to the Ohio legislature requesting an amendment to the state's school law that would acknowledge the right of parents to educate their own children.<sup>70</sup>



At about the same time, the archdiocese sent another petition to Columbus legislators asking that a portion of the state funding for education be allotted to religious schools that sponsored their own schools as an alternative to the public system.<sup>71</sup> Coming, as it did, at the same time as similar proposals were made in other states, the petition aroused much comment from Cincinnati papers, all of it negative. Purcell weighed in by issuing a pastoral letter in March of 1853 in which he assured the public that Catholics were not opposed to the public schools and would willingly pay school taxes if their students would be treated fairly. The strategy of issuing a pastoral letter, a communication directed at all Catholics in the bishop's jurisdiction, assured the widest audience at Purcell's disposal. The letter would have been read to the faithful from the pulpit and would have been available to newspapers as well.

Purcell's letter, issued in March of 1853, contained a scathing indictment of what he saw as the abuse of Catholic citizens by the current state of the public schools. After acknowledging the value of such a system and the desire of Catholics to be part of it, the Archbishop went on to list the various abuses and humiliation that the current system heaped upon his flock. He began by mentioning the continued use of the King James Version of the Bible but also mentioned examples of local schools inviting the use of anti-Catholic tracts in the classroom, teachers justifying the verbal abuse of students on account of their religious beliefs, and the recently failed attempt to compel common school attendance<sup>72</sup>

While the particular examples may be new the general nature of the charges was nothing that hadn't already been leveled in previous decades. As he concluded the letter, however, Purcell opened a new chapter in the Cincinnati story by taking a page from his colleague in New York. The Archbishop of Cincinnati suggested that the solution to the

long-standing persecution of Catholics in the public schools might lay in electoral politics. He exhorted members of the Church to use their privilege as American citizens to elect candidates to office “who will fairly represent the wishes and requirements of their constituents in the halls of legislation, the Council Chamber and the School Board.”<sup>73</sup> Although he didn’t present a list of candidates like Hughes’ Carroll Hall slate, Purcell did mention by name three current legislators<sup>74</sup> as examples of “being on the right side of the questions at issue.”<sup>75</sup>

Archbishop Purcell ended the letter on an ambiguous note that would allow readers a broad latitude of interpretations. He stated that “We are only beginning to agitate these questions” and, a few lines later, averred that “We have never sought to influence the votes of Catholics.”<sup>76</sup> The use of the first person plural is confusing. At the beginning of the letter Purcell referred to himself in the first person singular which would seem to rule out the later uses of “we” as examples of *pluralis majestatis*. If that is the case, however, then to whom does “we” refer? Though Purcell was obviously trying to avoid charges that Lyman Beecher was right, that priests control the political will of the Catholic people, the bishop’s confusing use of pronouns created fodder for anyone who feared the political power of the Catholic Church. Critics could legitimately ask: “Who is this ‘we’ and how much power does it wield?”

Coming as it did when the Know-Nothing movement in Ohio was growing, Purcell’s initiative provoked strong reactions across the state. The local press expressed outrage at his meddling with the institutions of the republic for sectarian purposes.<sup>77</sup> The Spring 1853 elections in Cincinnati quickly focused on this one issue: school funding for non-public schools. The traditional parties, Whigs and Democrats, tried to steer clear of the issue but two separate groups with Protestant backing fielded Free School tickets that drew a

significant portion of the electorate away from their traditional loyalties. When the polling was done the Democrats had won more contests, including the mayoral race with 40% of the vote. Between them the Free School tickets drew 42% of the mayoral votes with the Whigs finishing far behind.<sup>78</sup>

Both sides of the school tax issue claimed victory in the process. Supporters of the Church were happy to see the Whigs, who tended to be vocally anti-Catholic (with the exception of William Seward), lose their races while opponents were pleased that the men elected did not favor any division of the school fund.<sup>79</sup> According to Michael Perko:

“...everyone lost the election. A community which had thus far avoided overt public religious controversy was now plunged into sectarian rivalry of the most strident variety.”<sup>80</sup>

The tax funding issue would continue to fester for years until the Civil War raised more urgent concerns, but the election did publicize a growing link between the Democratic Party and American Catholics which would fuel the fires of controversy for the next generation in 1875. More immediately, that 1853 election sounded the death knell for the Whigs in Cincinnati. The specter of growing Catholic political power drove many former party members to swell the numbers of the Know-Nothing Order.

John Purcell's role in this controversy reflects an important development in his own attitude toward the coexistence of public and parochial schools. What had distinguished him in the early years of his administration from other Catholic bishops was his willingness to work together with leaders of the public schools. His overt political language before the 1853 election was out of character for him but very similar to what his friend and compatriot John Hughes had done in New York City when he mobilized the Catholic electorate to elect to Albany legislators who, if not exactly friendly to his request for state funding for parochial schools, were not vehemently opposed to it either. Purcell's emulation of his confidant in

New York can be construed to be concession that cooperation had failed. While he did not prove to be as masterful as Hughes at manipulating electoral politics, the Archbishop of Cincinnati could at least take consolation that his election did not contribute to any civil unrest like that which followed Hughes' efforts in New York City.

By the end of the decade, Archbishop Purcell's alienation from the public school system was complete. After gathering the bishops in his jurisdiction in a provincial council, Purcell issued another pastoral letter to publicize the decrees made at that council. He again mentioned the injustice of taxing Catholics to support public schools that were deleterious to their religion. If public schools could be made more hospitable, then Catholics should receive a share of the state funds to finance their own system. He then made it the duty of every Catholic parent to send their children to Catholic schools "and not another."<sup>81</sup> While the pastoral letter made clear the obligations of parents, the actual decrees of the Second Provincial Council of Cincinnati were more severe toward pastors, who were obligated under pain of mortal sin<sup>82</sup> to provide a Catholic school in every parish in their charge.<sup>83</sup>

John Purcell's activity in the third decade of his administration indicates an acquiescence to the hard line views of John Hughes. In previous years Purcell had worked directly with secular authorities in trying to make public schools more hospitable to Catholic children. In the 1850s the Archbishop eschewed the personal approach and took his case to the public forum with petitions, pastoral letters and decrees. Given that such public battles had been unproductive for Hughes or Kenrick in earlier years, it is unclear what Purcell could realistically have hoped to accomplish with this tactic.

The Second Provincial Council of Cincinnati provides an interesting ending to a story that began with Purcell's participation in the Western Literary Institute and College of Teachers. At the beginning of his administration Purcell attempted to effect school policy

by working with those civic leaders in the forefront of the effort to build a public school system but who may have had little direct experience with Catholics. By the end of this first period in his career Purcell was effecting school policy with Catholics who may have had little direct experience with education.

### **Conclusion:**

The story of John Purcell's first three decades in Cincinnati is one of optimism turned sour. Unfortunately, the newly-appointed Bishop of Cincinnati probably represented the best hope anywhere of a Catholic bishop achieving a good working relationship with secular school authorities. As one who was a teacher before he became a priest, Purcell manifested an appreciation for education as an important foundation for a developing culture that transcended the narrow focus of a bishop protecting his flock alone. An immigrant himself, the bishop could understand the plight of the uprooted but was hopeful about working with native-born citizens who did not necessarily appreciate Catholicism and what it would bring to America. More importantly, Purcell was willing to attribute good will to those who directed common school education in Cincinnati and was initially optimistic that this could provide an avenue to happy cooperation and coexistence. Purcell's good will is made more appreciable by the dark view of non-Catholics communicated in the 1837 letter from his friend, schoolmate and, eventually, fellow bishop: John Hughes.

From the secular perspective, Purcell brought more credibility to the table when discussing education than did other Catholic leaders. Having a teaching certificate from a non-Catholic school probably made Purcell unique among his fellow bishops. Joining the Western Literary Institute after the organization had been ridiculed by his predecessor's

administration would have been fairly dramatic proof of the bishop's own good will in trying to foster cooperation.

The timing of Purcell's initial overtures for cooperation is also somewhat important. In the 1830s, public and parochial education were both still very much in their formative state. It was early enough that the prospect of cooperation between secular and religious authorities would not seem impossible. Though some post-war Catholic bishops attempted to foster cooperation, their efforts the history of conflict developed in the 1840s and 1850s; a conflict muddled and magnified by issues of class, ethnicity, philosophy and religion. John Purcell had not had this obstacle to overcome, but his failed efforts helped to raise further a hurdle that would frustrate bishops seeking cooperation in the future.

Though asking "what if" can never be more than speculation, it is an interesting exercise to ponder what would have happened if the initial meetings with the Western Literary Institute had created a productive spirit of cooperation. Would John Hughes have been so strident with his own efforts in New York? Given his combative nature, the answer would probably still be affirmative. With a precedent of acceptable Bible use in Cincinnati, would the Philadelphia Bible Riots have broken out? Probably not. Though speculation can be enjoyable, it is the task of the historian to address what was, not what could have been. In this case, what was is a story of disappointment, lost opportunity and cultural separation.

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- <sup>1</sup> Eric Foner, "Ohio and the World: The Civil War Era," in *Ohio & the World: 1753-2053: Essays Toward a New History of Ohio*, ed. Geoffrey Parker, Richard Sisson, and William Russell Coil (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2005), 74.
- <sup>2</sup> In canonical terms, the current pope would be the ultimate ecclesiastical authority in any jurisdiction of the Catholic Church but any intervention from the Vatican in an established diocese was highly unusual at the time. Such intervention did occur near the end of Purcell's career when the archdiocese was rocked by a financial scandal and Pope Leo XIII appointed a coadjutor bishop to assist the failing archbishop.
- <sup>3</sup> John H. Lamott, *History of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati: 1821 - 1921* (New York: Frederick Pustet Company, 1921), 73-75.
- <sup>4</sup> Steven J. Ross, *Workers on the Edge: Work, Leisure, and Politics in Industrializing Cincinnati, 1788- 1890* (New York: Columbia University Press), 1985, 72.
- <sup>5</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>6</sup> Roger Fortin, *Faith and Action: A History of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati 1821-1996* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2002), 51-52.
- <sup>7</sup> *ibid.*, 39-44.
- <sup>8</sup> Jay P. Dolan, ed. *The American Catholic Parish, Volume II* (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 382-383.
- <sup>9</sup> Ray Allen Billington. *The Protestant Crusade 1800-1860: A Study of the Origins of American Nativism* (Chicago: Quadrangle Paperbacks, 1964), 70.
- <sup>10</sup> Lyman Beecher. *A Plea for the West* (Cincinnati: Truman & Smith, 1835), 34-35.
- <sup>11</sup> *ibid.*, 13.
- <sup>12</sup> *ibid.*, 56.
- <sup>13</sup> *ibid.*, 59-60.
- <sup>14</sup> Margaret C. DePalma, *Dialogue on the Frontier: Catholic and Protestant Relations, 1793-1883* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2004), 83-84.
- <sup>15</sup> *ibid.*, 85.
- <sup>16</sup> Thomas W. Harvey and E. E. White, eds. *A History of Education in the State of Ohio* (Columbus: Gazette Printing House, 1876), 94-95.
- <sup>17</sup> *ibid.*, 95-96.
- <sup>18</sup> William Alcott, ed. *American Annals of Education for the Year 1838* (Boston: Otis Broaders & Company, 1838), 136.
- <sup>19</sup> *Transactions of the Sixth Annual Meeting of the Western Literary Institute and College of Professional Teachers Held in Cincinnati, October 1836* (Cincinnati: Executive Committee, 1837), 67.
- <sup>20</sup> DePalma, 115.
- <sup>21</sup> In 1836, Stowe was preparing his landmark *Report on Elementary Education in Europe* that would offer the schools of Prussia as a model for the emerging education system in the United States. One recommendation in that report was that the Bible could be taught in the schools without resorting to sectarian influence. See: *Tenth Annual Report on the Condition and Improvement of the Common Schools and Education Interests of the State of Wisconsin for the year 1858*, pp. 252-254.
- <sup>22</sup> David L. Talbott, ed., *Transactions of the Sixth Annual Meeting of the Western Literary Institute and College of Professional Teachers Held in Cincinnati, October, 1836* (Cincinnati: Executive Committee, 1837), 62-63.
- <sup>23</sup> *ibid.*, 68.
- <sup>24</sup> *ibid.*, 69.
- <sup>25</sup> *ibid.*, 10.
- <sup>26</sup> *A Debate on the Roman Catholic Religion* (Nashville: McQuiddy Printing Co., 1914), 10.
- <sup>27</sup> Fortin, 39.
- <sup>28</sup> Talbott, 157-158.
- <sup>29</sup> *ibid.*, 159.
- <sup>30</sup> *ibid.*, 21.
- <sup>31</sup> *Transactions of the Fifth Annual Meeting of the Western Literary Institute and College of Professional Teachers Held in Cincinnati, October, 1835* (Cincinnati: Executive Committee, 1836), 29.

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- <sup>32</sup> Talbott, 199.
- <sup>33</sup> *Transactions of the Seventh Annual Meeting of the Western Literary Institute and College of Professional Teachers Held in Cincinnati, October, 1837* (Cincinnati: James R. Allbach, 1838), 118.
- <sup>34</sup> John Hughes to John Purcell, 27 June 1837, Archdiocese of Cincinnati Collection, University of Notre Dame Archives.
- <sup>35</sup> John England to John Purcell, 1 July 1837, Archdiocese of Cincinnati Collection, University of Notre Dame Archives.
- <sup>36</sup> John England to John Purcell, 10 August 1837, Archdiocese of Cincinnati Collection, University of Notre Dame Archives.
- <sup>37</sup> England to Purcell, 1 July 1837.
- <sup>38</sup> *Transactions of the Seventh Annual Meeting*, 118.
- <sup>39</sup> *ibid.*, 118- 128.
- <sup>40</sup> *ibid.*, 120.
- <sup>41</sup> *ibid.*, 127.
- <sup>42</sup> *ibid.*, 13.
- <sup>43</sup> *ibid.*, 19.
- <sup>44</sup> John B. Purcell to the Society for the Propagation of the Faith (27 October 1837): 5, quoted in Margaret C. DePalma, *Dialogue on the Frontier: Catholic and Protestant Relations, 1793-1883* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2004), 118.
- <sup>45</sup> *Ninth Annual Report of the Trustees and Visitors of Common Schools, to the City Council of Cincinnati, for the School Year ending June 30, 1838* (Cincinnati: Daily Times Office, 1838), 7.
- <sup>46</sup> *Transactions of the Seventh Annual Meeting*, 215-216.
- <sup>47</sup> C. E. Stowe, *Report on Elementary Public Instruction in Europe, Made to the Thirty-Sixth General Assembly of the State of Ohio, December 19<sup>th</sup> 1837* (Boston: Dutton & Wentworth, 1838), 19.
- <sup>48</sup> Elwood P. Cubberly, *Public Education in the United States: A Study and Interpretation of American Educational History* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1919), 125.
- <sup>49</sup> Guy Chabrat (co-adjutor Bishop of Bardstown, KY) to John B. Purcell, 28 June 1837, Archdiocese of Cincinnati Collection, University of Notre Dame Archives.
- <sup>50</sup> Henry Barnard, ed. "The Western Literary Institute and College of Teachers," in *The American Journal of Education* XIV (1864), 746.
- <sup>51</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>52</sup> F. Michael Perko, *A Time to Favor Zion: The Ecology of Religion and School Development on the Urban Frontier, Cincinnati, 1830-1870* (DeKalb, IL: The University of Illinois Press, 1988), 125-126.
- <sup>53</sup> *Ninth Annual Report*, 7.
- <sup>54</sup> Samuel G. Goodrich, *Parley's First Book of History* (Boston: Jenks, Palmer & Co., 1849), 177.
- <sup>55</sup> *Fourteenth Annual Report of the Trustees and Visitors of Common Schools, to the City Council of Cincinnati, for the School Year ending June 30, 1843* (Cincinnati: Chronicle Office, 1843), 25.
- <sup>56</sup> Perko, 127-128.
- <sup>57</sup> *Twenty-fourth Annual Report of the Trustees and Visitors of Common Schools, to the City Council of Cincinnati, for the School Year ending June 30, 1853* (Cincinnati: Cincinnati Gazette, 1853), 12.
- <sup>58</sup> Fortin, 66.
- <sup>59</sup> *ibid.*, 114.
- <sup>60</sup> Perko, 67.
- <sup>61</sup> Michael F. Holt. "The Politics of Impatience: The Origins of Know Nothingism" *The Journal of American History* (1973), 322-325.
- <sup>62</sup> William E. Gienapp. "Salmon P. Chase, Nativism, and the Formation of the Republican Party in Ohio," *Ohio History* (1984), 9.
- <sup>63</sup> Fortin, 107.
- <sup>64</sup> Perko., 131-132.
- <sup>65</sup> *ibid.*, 133-134.
- <sup>66</sup> *ibid.*, 137-138.
- <sup>67</sup> *Twenty-Fourth Annual Report*, 12.
- <sup>68</sup> James W. Taylor, *A Manual of the Ohio School System* (Cincinnati: H. W. Derby, 1857), 197, 385.



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- <sup>69</sup> *ibid.*, 218.
- <sup>70</sup> DePalma, 254.
- <sup>71</sup> Fortin, 114-115.
- <sup>72</sup> “Free Schools in Ohio - Address of the Catholic Archbishop,” *New York Times*, 31 March 1853, 3.
- <sup>73</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>74</sup> Purcell mentions a Mr. Roedter, Mr. Ross and Mr. Lytle. The membership of the legislature in that session included Henry Roedter, Ogden Ross and William Haines Lytle, none of whom seemed to be Catholics themselves.
- <sup>75</sup> “Free Schools in Ohio”
- <sup>76</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>77</sup> DePalma, 206-207.
- <sup>78</sup> Anthony G. Carey, “The Second Party System Collapses: The 1853 Maine Law Campaign in Ohio,” *Ohio History* (1991), 135-136.
- <sup>79</sup> *ibid.*, 206-207.
- <sup>80</sup> Perko, 153.
- <sup>81</sup> “Article II. – Pastoral Letter on the Decrees of the First Provincial Council of Baltimore,” *Brownson’s Quarterly Review* (1859), 325-326.
- <sup>82</sup> In Catholic belief at the time, “mortal sin” was very serious and anyone dying in a state of mortal sin was assumed to be consigned to the fires of Hell in perpetuity.
- <sup>83</sup> J. A. Burns, *The Growth and Development of the Catholic School System in the United States* (New York: Benziger Bros., 1912), 185.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **THE CULTURAL CONTEXT OF OHIO IN 1870**

War, the locomotive of history, arrived on America's shores in April of 1861 and, in four bloody years, carried the nation to a new reality. The Civil War was indisputably the watershed event of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in the United States. An ancient but peculiar institution was ended though its legacy would continue until the present day. Social groups that had been viewed as marginalized upstarts a mere decade earlier had become, by 1865, securely ensconced in the nation's socio-political firmament. Old immigrants grew acculturated while new immigrants continued to change the composition of American society. Problems that had plagued the United States in the antebellum era continued to exist but took on a different complexion in the light of a new day.

The institution of slavery, which had existed in the Americas since the days of Christopher Columbus, was abolished with the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution of the United States. President Andrew Johnson required each of the defeated Confederate states to ratify the amendment as a condition for regaining representation in Congress.<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, even as they acknowledged a constitutional basis for abolition, many states established "black codes" that would limit the freedom of African-Americans for well into the next century.<sup>2</sup> The abolition of slavery, however, effectively negated the

most pressing social issue of the day and allowed others, which had taken a back seat to the growing sectional crisis, to return to the fore.

The myriad developments of the 1860s, many of which were obscured or accelerated (or both) by the frenzy of the Civil War, significantly changed the cultural landscape between 1859 and 1869. This chapter will attempt to bridge the gap between the events of antebellum Ohio related in the previous chapter and the postwar years in the one to follow by looking at those developments that had a significant impact on the parallel development of public and parochial schools.

### **American Catholics and the Civil War:**

The complexity of the Civil War experience for the nation as a whole was mirrored in that of the American Catholic community at the time. Lay Catholics fought for both flags at all ranks. Priests and bishops supported troops and their local governments, secession or not. Participation in the war effort allowed Catholics to assert their distinctive identity while, at the same time, being drawn more into the mainstream of American society.

The role of the institutional Catholic Church during the war showed a great deal of flexibility. Unlike the three chief forms of institutional Protestantism in America (Methodists, Baptists and Presbyterians), all of which had officially split north and south by 1845 because of slavery<sup>3</sup>, the Catholic hierarchy never considered any regional division. There were certainly strong differences of opinion over the issue of slavery. Archbishop John Purcell of Cincinnati was an outspoken opponent of slavery<sup>4</sup> while his fellow Irishman and archbishop, Peter Kenrick of St. Louis, was himself a slaveowner.<sup>5</sup> Once the war broke out, bishops on both sides rallied to their respective flags. Archbishop John Hughes of New York encouraged Catholics to enlist while his friend (and compatriot) Patrick Lynch, the

Bishop of Charleston, presided at a solemn Mass of Thanksgiving when Confederate forces captured Fort Sumter at the outset of the war. More notably, both bishops undertook diplomatic missions at cross purposes. At the behest of his old political ally William Seward, now Lincoln's Secretary of State, John Hughes journeyed to France in the autumn of 1861 to convince Napoleon III of the legitimacy of the Union cause. From there the aging archbishop traveled to Rome to meet Pope Pius IX for the same purpose. In the spring of 1864 Patrick Lynch received an official appointment as a commissioner to Rome and went to the Vatican with the hope of convincing the pope to extend official diplomatic recognition to the Confederate States of America. When the confederacy fell a year later, Lynch was unable to return to the United States until northern bishops obtained a pardon for him from President Andrew Johnson.<sup>6</sup>

Eighteen months after Appomattox, forty-five Catholic bishops from both sides of the conflict gathered in Baltimore for a plenary council to establish uniform operating policies for all of the dioceses in the nation. Aside from discussing how to care for those who had been recently emancipated there seems to have been little official reference to the hostilities recently ended. Ironically, it was Augustin Verot who emerged from the council as the hierarchy's most effective advocate for new ministries to African-Americans. As Bishop of Savannah, he had been moved by Georgia's secession from the Union to publish *A Tract for the Times* providing a rationale for slavery from the Catholic theological perspective.<sup>7</sup> After the council Verot recruited nuns from his native France to open schools in his diocese specifically intended for the education of freed slaves.<sup>8</sup> Though circumstances may have compelled bishops to work for opposing sides, the experience of the Civil War showed that the Catholic hierarchy in the United States maintained a theoretical separation

of church and state that allowed members to disagree without sundering the bonds of baptism.

For lay Catholics, the Civil War presented an opportunity to assert their distinctive identity while showing the rest of the nation that they were not so different from other Americans. Irish-Americans garnered both positive and negative attention during the war. Late in 1861 Simon Cameron, Abraham Lincoln's first Secretary of War, authorized the formation of the Irish Brigade, an assembly of five regiments comprised primarily of Irish-Americans. The core of the Irish Brigade was the 69<sup>th</sup> Regiment of the New York State Militia. When war broke out the "Fighting 69<sup>th</sup>" was embroiled in controversy because the unit had refused to march in a parade in New York City honoring the visiting Prince of Wales. Several members of the regiment, including commanding officer Col. Michael Corcoran, were exiled nationalists who did not want to honor the future leader of the nation that they viewed as oppressing their own. As a result, Col. Corcoran was in the process of being court-martialed even as Fort Sumter was attacked. With the outbreak of hostilities, however, legal proceedings were forgotten as Corcoran was restored to command and the 69<sup>th</sup> mobilized into the Union army.<sup>9</sup> The Irish Brigade fought in every major engagement in the eastern theater until, ground down by death and injury to the size of a regiment, it was disbanded in the spring of 1864. The Brigade suffered its heaviest losses in late 1862 at the Battle of Fredericksburg during a frontal assault on a stone wall defended, in part, by the Lochrane Guards, an Irish-American unit from Georgia.<sup>10</sup>

German-Americans made their presence felt in the war as well. One source estimates that almost 10% of all Union soldiers claimed German heritage. At least 15,000 of them served in one of thirty regiments scattered throughout the army whose primary language was German.<sup>11</sup> Carl Schurz, a refugee from the failed Revolution of 1848, earned a

general's stars as a commander of German speaking troops, became a prominent Republican after the war and served as Secretary of the Interior in the cabinet of Rutherford B. Hayes.<sup>12</sup>

Though immigrant Catholics acquitted themselves well enough on the field of battle, the Irish earned a fair amount of ignominy in the New York Draft Riots. In March of 1863 President Abraham Lincoln signed a conscription act which rendered as eligible for military service all men between the ages of twenty and forty-five. A draftee, however, could be exempted from duty either by paying \$300 or providing a substitute who would enlist for three years. African-Americans were also exempted from the draft and coming to New York City where they competed with other laborers for low-paying jobs. On July 13 rioting broke out among New York City's working class, many of whom were Irish. African-Americans were targeted and several lynched. Horace Greeley, editor of the *New York Tribune* and a long-time antagonist of John Hughes, blamed the violence on the Irish and urged the archbishop to get control of "his people."<sup>13</sup> Enfeebled and less than a half year from his own death, the aging prelate appeared on his balcony to urge faithful Catholics to restore civic order. Never one to keep his opinions to himself, Hughes advocated peace even as he criticized the inherent injustice of the conscription law.<sup>14</sup>

Whatever points the old archbishop made, it was the points of bayonets that finally restored peace to the streets of New York. Veterans of the recent battle in Gettysburg were brought to the city to restore order. By July 17 an uneasy peace had settled over the streets but only after more than a hundred people had died in the worst rioting in American history.<sup>15</sup>

Aside from those ethnic groups that served under arms, several prominent figures on both sides of the war were active Catholics. Union troops were commanded by General William Rosecrans whose brother was John Purcell's auxiliary bishop in Cincinnati. In his

first wartime assignment as colonel of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Ohio Infantry regiment, Rosecrans commanded two future presidents: Rutherford B. Hayes and William McKinley. General Philip Sheridan, who ended the war as the fourth ranking general in the Union army, was also a Catholic. On the other side, General Pierre G. T. Beauregard (both a Catholic and a Freemason) commanded the troops that fired on Fort Sumter while Raphael Semmes, whose patrician Maryland roots were similar to those of Archbishop John Carroll from an earlier generation, gained fame as captain of a Confederate raider, the CSS *Alabama*.<sup>16</sup>

Those members of the Catholic community who had arguably the most positive effect on the war effort were women belonging to religious orders. Over six hundred sisters from at least a dozen different orders served as nurses on both sides of the conflict.<sup>17</sup> For many non-Catholic soldiers, their first personal experience of a “papist” was of a woman in strange garb caring for them after the trauma of battle. In 1862, when New York City officials gave to the federal government a large building to be used as a military hospital, they requested that the facility be staffed by the Sisters of Charity, “the most faithful nurses in the world.”<sup>18</sup> Congress recognized the contribution of the Catholic nursing sisters in 1918 when it approved the erection of a suitable memorial on public ground in Washington, DC.<sup>19</sup>

While the Civil War provided an opportunity for Catholic people to work themselves into the fabric of American society, it also allowed that portion of the Church which remained most “other” to become even more suspect. The leader of the Catholic Church during the war was Pope Pius IX who reigned from 1846 until his death in 1878. During his time in office, the longest of any papacy, “Pio Nono” underwent a radical ideological transformation that gave rise to the joke that he became known as Pio Nono because he said “no, no” to everything. When first elected, Pius was a darling of Italian nationalists and seen as a reformer who might have presided over the establishment of a federation of Italian

states. The experience of 1848 changed that when Rome fell into the hand of revolutionaries and the pope was forced to flee the city.<sup>20</sup> As he grew older, Pius became more conservative and authoritarian. In 1864 he issued the *Syllabus Errorum* which condemned most ideals of modern society including rationalism, naturalism, separation of church and state, liberty of the press and freedom of religion.<sup>21</sup> The document was an embarrassment to American bishops who felt compelled to minimize the effect of the document without actually dismissing it.<sup>22</sup>

During the American Civil War, both Union and Confederacy actively solicited the support of Pius IX. As mentioned earlier, each side sent a bishop to Rome to gain the support of the Catholic Church for their respective cause. John Hughes had not received a friendly reception but it is unclear whether that was because of his own controversial history or because he was working for a political entity (the government of the United States) that the Vatican perceived as “liberal”, a connotation that put it in the same category as the Germans and Italians who threatened the interests of the Church in Europe. Though Pius never explicitly embraced either side he was the only foreign ruler to address Jefferson Davis formally (in a letter) as President of the Confederate States of America.<sup>23</sup> Though opinions vary as to whether Pius IX actually intended to recognize the sovereign status of the Confederacy, those who were already critical of the Catholic Church certainly added that interpretation to their arsenal of complaints.<sup>24</sup>

While the publication of the *Syllabus of Errors* and the Vatican’s friendly demeanor toward the Confederacy occurred during the time of the Civil War, Pio Nono’s most dramatic gesture, and probably the most embarrassing from the perspective of the American bishops, happened a few years later. In 1869, when the Papal States were crumbling to the nationalist armies of King Victor Emmanuel, Pius convened a plenary council of bishops at



the Vatican to develop a comprehensive statement of Catholic teaching. As nationalist forces moved inexorably toward Rome, it became apparent that the Vatican Council would not be able to fulfill its original purpose so the assembly focused its attention on one task: resolving the question of papal infallibility.<sup>25</sup> The idea that the pope, as successor of Peter, was somehow infallible stretched back more than a millennium but had never been clearly explained or applied. With his temporal power waning by the day, Pius IX pushed the Vatican Council to define specifically the infallible nature of the papal office.<sup>26</sup>

Most of the American bishops at the Vatican Council were less than enthusiastic about proclaiming a dogma of infallibility, worrying that it would rekindle the American nativism that had lost its much of its heat with the coming of the Civil War. Of the forty-nine bishops from the United States who attended the Council, twenty-five voted in favor of the document confirming papal infallibility, one voted against it and twenty-two left Rome before the vote could be taken.<sup>27</sup> As it turned out, their worries were well-founded. When viewed in tandem with the *Syllabus of Errors*, the proclamation of infallibility confirmed for many Americans that the Catholic Church was reactionary, authoritarian and anti-democratic. In July 1871 editorial condemning a recent civil disturbance, the *New York Times* laid blame at the feet of Irish Catholics thusly:

It would be easy to show that the Irishmen of this city who arm Themselves with pistols and bludgeons to prevent by force the parade of an Orange procession through our streets, are the only logical and consistent Catholics we have among us. Less than a month ago the present Pope of Rome, in addressing a deputation of French Catholics, ...utterly repudiated the doctrine that Governments should allow all religious sects equal rights and that “no distinction should be established between Catholic and Protestant.” The “Encyclical Letter” issued to the churches by the

present Pope in 1864 is full of the same kind of teachings.... The Catholics of this country cannot escape from those teachings or their legitimate consequences; for it is a remarkable as it is an anomalous fact, that American Catholics ... unanimously subscribe to the most illiberal teachings, and the most extravagant pretensions of the present Pope, including his preposterous claim to infallibility. These, then, are the issues that the American people have eventually got to meet. They are the issues which underlie the riots and disturbances by Irish Catholics, that we are called on so frequently to record ; and until there is an entire change of programme in the objects and purposes avowed by the Catholics of the United States, it will be useless to call upon the people to ignore or forget them, or to prevent their being made the basis of political action.<sup>28</sup>

In many ways, the career of Archbishop John Purcell of Cincinnati during and just after the Civil War reflected many of the ambiguities reflected in the American Catholic Church at the time. To begin, Purcell was strongly, vocally, and consistently against slavery, much to the chagrin of his neighboring bishop across the Ohio River, Martin Spalding of Louisville, who complained to Rome of the archbishop's partisanship.<sup>29</sup> At the same time, with famous anti-Catholics like the Beecher family embracing the fight to end slavery, Purcell would have been loathe to identify himself as an abolitionist.<sup>30</sup> Similarly, when the Vatican Council began to focus on the issue of infallibility, Purcell became one of most vocal of the Americans arguing against any sort of official declaration. The archbishop's particular concern was that the pope might speak infallibly against some values held in high esteem by American society.<sup>31</sup> Considering what had already been condemned in the Syllabus of Errors, Purcell certainly had some reason to worry. When it became obvious that the Council was going to approve the doctrine, Purcell joined fifty-four other bishops who

signed a protest against the dogma and left Rome to avoid being part of the formal vote.<sup>32</sup> Upon his landing in New York City, the archbishop was published in the *New York Herald* making several remarks that were interpreted by many as critical of the new dogma.<sup>33</sup> When he returned to Cincinnati, the aging prelate wasted no time in making a public affirmation of the Council's decree and communicated it again in a letter sent to Pius IX.<sup>34</sup> Though the pontiff responded graciously to Purcell's acquiescence, at least one historian believes that the archbishop's initial resistance may have kept him from becoming America's first cardinal, an honor which went instead to John Hughes' successor in New York: Archbishop John McCloskey, a man who had voted with the majority at the Council.<sup>35</sup>

### **The Political Parties:**

Although the United States had developed a two party political system from as early as 1796, it was the Civil War that established the two parties which dominate the system to this day. The Democrats could claim a heritage stretching back to Thomas Jefferson, but the forces that split the Union in 1860 also splintered the party and forced it to adapt to new circumstances that would also shape the nation during and after the war. The Republicans, on the other hand, benefited from the divided loyalties of the Democrats to win the White House in 1860 with a minority of the popular vote. The drama of the Civil War would confer iconic status on Abraham Lincoln, the first Republican president, and provide the party with a steady supply of war heroes to follow him into the White House, though not to historic immortality.

By 1860, the controversy about slavery had heated national politics to a steady boil. As early as 1820 Thomas Jefferson had recognized that growing tensions about the South's "peculiar institution" would bring the undoing of the nation<sup>36</sup> and, forty years later, his

prophecy was becoming reality. As the only party that could claim a national constituency at the time, the Democrats had traditionally tried to steer a middle course on the slavery issue, maintaining the *status quo* without alienating either North or South. When the party nominated Senator Stephen Douglas of Illinois as its presidential candidate in 1860, the middle course failed. Southern Democrats broke away and nominated their own candidate, Vice-President John Breckinridge of Kentucky on a platform that explicitly endorsed the protection of slavery.<sup>37</sup> The rift in the party was wide enough to let Abraham Lincoln win through to victory with less than 40% of the popular vote.<sup>38</sup>

With Lincoln's election came secession and, eventually, war. The majority of southern Democrats followed their respective states into the Confederacy and many served in the government of the Confederate States of America. When the cannons blazed, northern Democrats were faced with a choice of their own. Some, including the recent candidate Stephen Douglas opted to work closely with the Republicans to present a united front as part of the war effort. Others found benefit in operating as a sort of loyal opposition to Lincoln and his policies. This latter group became known as the Peace Democrats and their opponents derisively called them "Copperheads." Led by Congressman Clement Vallandigham of Ohio, the Peace Democrats argued for national unity above all and criticized abolitions for destroying the union in their single-minded pursuit of ending slavery. Though he lost his bid for reelection in 1862, Vallandigham continued to be highly critical of the Lincoln administration and this eventually earned him a forced deportation to the Confederate States of America.<sup>39</sup> The legacy of both, the southern Democrats and the Peace Democrats, would continue to haunt the party long after the Civil War was over. With the war ending in the unconditional surrender of the Confederacy, Republicans liked to remind voters of the Copperheads who would have been content to

settle for peace without victory. If that didn't work, the party of Lincoln could "wave the bloody shirt," blaming the Democrats for starting the war in the first place.<sup>40</sup> Both strategies would prove to be effective in postwar elections.

Even as they sought to reestablish their identity at the national level, the Democrats were finding local success in the growing cities of the North. As early as the 1840s, when famine at home produced a spike in Irish emigration to America, the Democratic Party made a place for the new arrivals. Attracted to the party of Andrew Jackson, whose own parents were from the "old sod" and repulsed by the anti-immigrant and anti-Catholic elements of the Whigs and their successors, the large numbers of Irish coming to the United States allied themselves politically with the Democrats. For its part, the party provided jobs, charity and cultural recognition for the new arrivals and their votes.<sup>41</sup>

As the tide of migration shifted from Ireland to the mainland of Europe subsequent groups of Catholic newcomers continued to find their way into the ranks of the Democratic Party. After the Civil War the party was criticized for its close relationship with urban Catholics and, for many within the Church, when Republicans made this criticism it brought back memories of the Know-Nothings who filled the interim between the death of the Whigs and the rise of the party of Lincoln.<sup>42</sup>

Whatever prejudice may have been present in Republican criticism, the urban Catholic/Democratic alliance did have a stink of corruption about it. Perhaps the best known example involved William Marcy "Boss" Tweed of New York's Tammany Hall who, before being convicted of fraud in 1873, managed to steal millions of dollars from the public coffers. Recognizing the importance of Catholic voters to his power base, Tweed was assiduous in directing hundreds of thousands of tax dollars to organizations affiliated with the Church. Serving on the state's Senate Committee on Charitable and Religious Societies

he managed to allocate \$900,000 to Catholic charitable organizations while all other similar groups in the state received a combined total of \$303,000.<sup>43</sup> Tweed's most egregious accomplishment in this vein came in 1869 when he managed to steer tax dollars into parochial school coffers but this will be addressed later in the narrative.

While the Civil War dealt a severe blow to the nation's oldest party, it had quite the opposite effect on the recently-formed Republican Party. Born in the ferment of the slavery debate, the Republicans were swept into the White House by the maelstrom of events that first shattered the Democrats and then the nation. Controlling both the executive and legislative branches of the federal government, the party of Abraham Lincoln oversaw a Union victory that completely realized their anti-slavery agenda in just twelve years after their foundation. The successful outcome of the war also established a power base for the Republicans that allowed them to win all but four presidential elections between 1868 and 1928. All of their successful presidential candidates for the remainder of the 19<sup>th</sup> century would share two important qualifications: each would be a veteran of the war and would hail from a mid-western state.

In many ways, the first years of Republican leadership at the federal level established a vision for the party that the power of government must be used to strengthen the bonds of union across the nation. In addition to restoring the Union itself, wartime Republicans reestablished a national banking system and tied the east and west coasts more closely together by instituting a plan to populate the huge void between them known as the Great Plains as well as by starting a transcontinental railroad.<sup>44</sup> After the war, public education became a pillar of the party's push for national unity. As industrialization and immigration transformed the nation, the Republicans came to see a strong system of public schools as a way of fostering cultural unity. Immigrants in northern cities and former slaves in the

southern countryside alike would be steeped in the cultural norms of Protestant New England, birthplace of both the public school and the abolitionist movement.<sup>45</sup>

Given its roots in antebellum Whiggism, the Republican Party had little hope of attracting Catholics or immigrants to its rolls. Many of the first generation of Republicans brought with them a history of anti-Catholicism from their days in the Whigs. Furthermore, at the beginning, the Republicans achieved their earliest electoral success through a close association with the anti-Catholic anti-immigrant Know-Nothing party whose popularity crested in the same year that the Republicans were established and whose members eventually moved into the newer party when slavery surpassed immigration as the most urgent issue facing the nation.<sup>46</sup> Similarly, the close association of Republicanism and abolitionism would also be problematic for Catholics. The Church never officially took a position against slavery, though Pope Gregory XVI had condemned the slave trade in 1838. As a result, American Catholics tended to fall on both sides of the issue, generally in conformance to where they lived. For Irish-Americans who occupied the lowest rungs of the economic ladder in northern cities, freed slaves meant new competition for the few poor jobs that available to an immigrant. Middle-class and educated Catholics were put off when vocal anti-Catholics like Lyman Beecher and his family claimed prominent roles in the abolition movement.<sup>47</sup> As a result, even those Church members who did oppose slavery would not have considered themselves as abolitionists.

### **The Changing Demographics of Immigration:**

Despite four years of civil war, the United States continued to take in large numbers of immigrants throughout the 1860s, just over 2.3 million in all.<sup>48</sup> While Irish immigration had peaked in the previous decade when almost a million came to America the numbers

which came in the 1860s and 1870s were still significant, averaging approximately 436,000 per decade.<sup>49</sup> Those who had been in America for a while began to prosper, benefiting from both urban growth and political ties to local governments. As the burgeoning cities of the northeast developed infrastructure, the Irish and their descendants were there to become police and firemen, to lay track for public transportation, and to operate the first horsecars and trolleys to use those tracks.<sup>50</sup>

Like that of the Irish, German immigration to the United States came close to a million. The two subsequent decades, however, saw much less drop-off with numbers exceeding 700,000 in the years 1860-1869 and 1870-1879.<sup>51</sup> Though only about a third of these were Catholics they comprised a significant minority in the American Church and, in areas where they commanded sufficient numbers preferred to maintain an identity separate from English-speaking Catholics. In Cincinnati, Archbishop John Purcell developed a high regard for the German Catholics in his diocese and allowed them to develop their own parishes and schools.<sup>52</sup>

The end of the 1860s also brought a decidedly Catholic tilt in the demographics of immigration to the United States. Germans continued to come over in large numbers but Otto von Bismarck's *kulturkampf*, a campaign to reduce the influence of the Church in the newly united Germany, emerged as a new push factor sending Catholics across the Atlantic. In addition, the number of Italians emigrating to America jumped from 11, 725 during the 1860s to 55,759 in the decade to follow. Like the Germans, Italian Catholics were uncomfortable in the Irish-dominated parishes of the United States and preferred to establish their own sacred institutions when possible. Unlike the Germans, however, the immigrants from the Mediterranean were not strong proponents of a parochial school system. A standard joke of the day was that Italians attended church only three times – to



be hatched, matched and dispatched. While this is clearly hyperbole, it did speak to a basic truth that this ethnic group was more casual about its relationship with the Church than were other immigrants.<sup>53</sup>

The upsurge in Polish migration to the United States in the 1870s also contributed to the influx of Catholics to America. The 1850s saw 1,164 Poles cross the Atlantic while, during the 1860s, that number jumped to 42,927. The next decade saw that number almost triple to over 120,000.<sup>54</sup> As with the Germans and Italians, the Polish brought their own brand of Catholicism with them to the New World which did not fit comfortably into a Church dominated largely by the Irish. The discomfort continued and grew to the point where schism occurred and disgruntled Poles formed the National Polish Catholic Church centered in Scranton, PA.<sup>55</sup>

Though the Polish immigrants proved to be the most radical in this regard the newcomers, despite their varied nationalities, shared a common characteristic: they did not appreciate the Irish flavor of the Catholicism in America. Like the Germans before them, Italian, Polish and other immigrant communities preferred to start their own parishes and schools. While this was generally permitted where the immigrant communities were large enough to underwrite their efforts, not all bishops welcomed this growing phenomenon. John Ireland, Archbishop of St. Paul and one of the more outspoken bishops of the postwar era, worried that such ethnic enclaves would slow down the process of cultural assimilation and perpetuate the image of the American Catholic Church as largely foreign. For their part, the ethnic groups returned that spirit of wariness and eventually rebelled (in the 1890s) against what they called “the hibernarchy,” the fact that most bishops in the United States at the time were either Irish-born or of Irish descent. Several groups appealed to Rome,

requesting that episcopal appointments in America reflect more accurately the demographics of the immigrant Church.<sup>56</sup>

This growing diversity of the Church in the United States is important for several reasons. Though American Catholicism was never as monolithic as many detractors would have believed, the expanding demographic made it even less so. Part of the authority that Archbishop John Hughes wielded in antebellum New York came from his ethnic identity. His appointment from the pope gave him a canonical authority from Rome and a legal authority as custodian of the properties belonging to the Archdiocese of New York, but the power that allowed him to sway the elections of 1841 and undermine the prestigious Public School Society was the moral authority sprung from his being an Irish transplant leading his compatriots to their place in the American sun. Though subsequent bishops would be active in electoral politics, none have ever been as effective as he was. It could also be argued that, had Hughes come to New York in another time, he could never have made the Carroll Hall stratagem work because a more diverse community of faith could not have been so focused on one issue.

The diversity of nationalities coming to the American Church also brought a diversity of attitudes about the role and importance of parochial education. Many of the Germans who migrated to the United States, regardless of religious affiliation, came with a strong sense of the superiority of their native culture and sought to preserve *Deutschum* (Germanism) in their new world. German enclaves in 19<sup>th</sup> century America tended to look, taste and sound German as their citizens tried to transplant their culture on a new continent. In this context the classroom played a crucial role in passing *Deutschum* on to a new generation who had not known the *vaterland*.<sup>57</sup> As a result German-American communities, again regardless of religious affiliation, committed large portions of their resources to

schools whose mission ran exactly counter to what common school advocates wanted from public education in America.

For German Catholics in the United States the parochial school had a dual role: to preserve faith and fatherland, and this gave them a mixed agenda regarding the fight for parochial schools. Like the American bishops, German Catholics were assiduous in promoting and supporting parochial schools but, unlike the bishops, wanted to use those schools to resist any assimilation into American culture that might diminish their German identity. Furthermore, German Catholics were not adverse to crossing denominational lines and cooperating with their compatriots outside the Church on matters of common interest.<sup>58</sup> As will be seen in the next chapter, the Republican Party would make effective use of this phenomenon in the Ohio elections of 1875.

In contrast to the Germans, immigrant Italian Catholics did not exhibit much preference for parochial schools at all. For most Italians coming from territories where the pope reigned as a civil ruler, the institutional Church represented an authoritarian regime resistant to Italian national aspirations. As immigration historian Roger Daniels describes it: “A strong anticlerical tradition was part of the intellectual baggage that many Italians brought with them.”<sup>59</sup> This anticlericalism, coupled with the fact that public education was free in America, translated into little support for parish schools. In 1910 there were 73,000 first and second generation Italians living in Chicago yet they supported only ten parishes and only one of those parishes maintained a school. A 1908 study issued by the federal government reported that there were almost 60,000 Italian children in the public schools of New York City and only 8,300 in local parochial schools.<sup>60</sup>

### **Catholic Bishops and Parochial Schools:**

While the topics of slavery, states' rights and reconstruction occupied much of the nation's attention in the years surrounding the Civil War, education, both public and parochial, continued to evolve with various issues emerging that would inform the renewal of the public/parochial controversy in the postwar era.

As early as 1829, at the First Plenary Council of Baltimore, the Catholic bishops in the United States began to develop an official policy on education for the American church. The pronouncement of that council was more exhortatory than compelling, encouraging the foundation of schools where students "may be taught principles of faith and morality, while being instructed in letters."<sup>61</sup>

Plenary councils included all bishops across the United States and were only convened three times in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Provincial councils were more limited in focus, involving an archbishop as head of an ecclesiastical province and any bishops attached to that province. In the first years of his episcopacy, Bishop John Purcell was a member of the Province of Baltimore. As the American church grew in numbers the Province of Baltimore was further divided into three more ecclesiastical provinces with their respective seats in New York, Cincinnati and New Orleans. Subsequently the bishops in those dioceses, John Hughes, John Purcell and Anthony Blanc became archbishops with some administrative jurisdiction over the dioceses in their provinces. This subdivision of the original Archdiocese of Baltimore allowed the new archbishops a greater degree of autonomy within their own provinces. One result was that the archbishops could convene provincial councils to determine policies which would be enacted within all of the member dioceses. For a prelate like John Purcell this represented an opportunity to instill a shared sense of purpose and resolve beyond the boundaries of his own diocese. The smaller number of bishops

involved representing a more homogeneous portion of the nation would also allow a more focused approach to particular issues.

If the Second Provincial Council of Cincinnati is any indication, by 1858 Archbishop Purcell had given up any hope of cooperation with public school authorities. At that council he and his suffragan bishops decreed that pastors must, wherever possible, provide a Catholic school for every congregation in their care.<sup>62</sup> The fact that pastors were bound to do this under pain of mortal sin<sup>63</sup> indicates that the bishops considered this a very important matter. That this decree was issued at a provincial council made it a matter of church procedure across the states of Ohio, Kentucky, Michigan and Indiana. Interestingly enough, when all of the bishops from across the nation gathered at the Second Plenary Council of Baltimore in 1866 they also issued a decree commanding the establishment of Catholic schools but did not include a similar consequence for those who failed to comply, thereby reducing the gravity of the injunction.<sup>64</sup>

Despite the fact the plenary council chose to tread more lightly than did the Province of Cincinnati, several midwestern bishops used their local authority to coerce the faithful into supporting parochial schools. In a pastoral letter issued in 1872, Archbishop Purcell intimated that parents who willfully neglected to send their children to Catholic schools could not be worthy of receiving the sacraments.<sup>65</sup> A year later, Bishop Richard Gilmour of Cleveland went a step further and specifically authorized his priests to refuse the sacraments to any parent who deprived his/her children of a parochial education without good reason. A few years after that, Bishop William McCloskey of Louisville prohibited any children who had not spent at least two years in a Catholic school from making either their first communion or confirmation.<sup>66</sup>

By the time that the Third Plenary Council of Baltimore convened in 1884, the issue of parochial education had gained enough urgency that almost a quarter of the legislation produced pertained to Catholic schools. Pastors would be required to open a school within two years or risk removal from their assignment. Parishes were obligated to support such schools or face sanctions from their respective bishops and parents were compelled to send their children to these schools.<sup>67</sup> Though the timing of the Third Plenary Council puts it beyond the scope of the current discussion, it certainly continued the trajectory of growing antipathy toward public education among the Catholic bishops of the era.

Even as the Catholic bishops' opinions were hardening against public schools, one politician's attitude toward parochial schools was growing soft. That politician, however, was William Marcy (Boss) Tweed whose increasing boldness fueled a growing sense of outrage among the citizens of New York. According to Ward McAfee, it was Tweed's excesses which rekindled the national debate over school funding that would rage throughout the 1870s. In 1869 Tweed himself introduced a bill that passed through the state legislature of New York which granted state funding to any private school which enrolled two hundred or more students. While some other denominational schools met this criterion, the vast majority of those which benefited were Catholic. Republicans were outraged by what they interpreted as a transparent attempt to cater to Tweed's urban Irish-Catholic constituency and mobilized to plug this first breach in the wall of separation that had been built to protect public funding from being diverted to sectarian schools.<sup>68</sup> It was this particular incident which occasioned the creation of one of Thomas Nast's most famous cartoons, *The American Ganges*. The illustration depicts a public school teacher, Bible tucked at his breast, valiantly protecting his students from crocodiles emerging from a river. Upon closer examination, the crocodiles turn out to be Catholic bishops, complete with vestments

and toothsome miters, emerging to menace the children. While the teacher stands firm, his efforts are undermined by politicians (Boss Tweed can be recognized directly above the teacher's head) pulling students and other teachers up a small cliff to be led off to the gibbet. The background features St. Peter's Basilica (labeled "Tammany Hall") flying flags featuring the keys of St. Peter and an Irish harp. The glorious image of the church stands, in stark contrast, adjacent to the ruins of a public school with the American flag flying upside down as a signal of distress.

In a recent article where he contextualized the education-related cartoons of Thomas Nast, historian Benjamin Justice made special mention of "The American River Ganges." The cartoon was first published after the New York City Board of Public Instruction banned textbooks published by *Harper's* from public school classrooms.<sup>69</sup> The cartoon would be published again in May of 1875, after Tweed was behind bars and as Ohio Republicans were preparing to make the Geghan Bill a school funding issue.

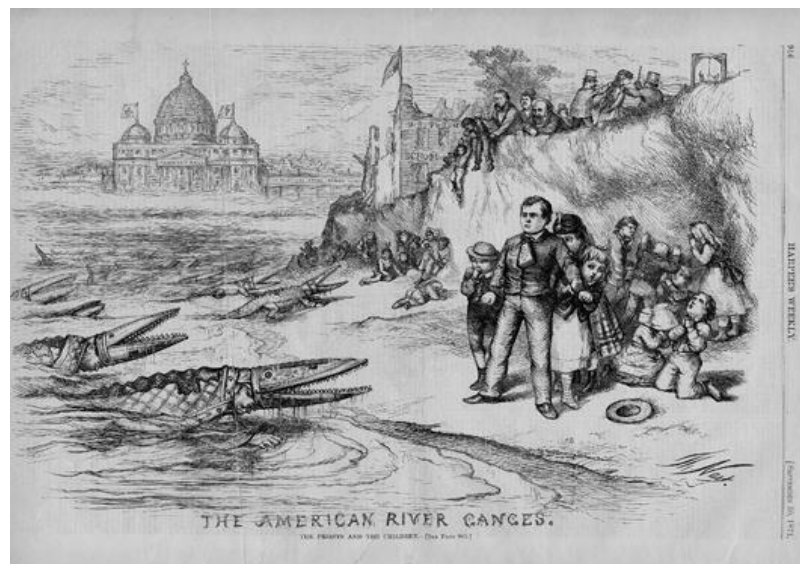


Fig. 1: *The American River Ganges* by Thomas Nast<sup>70</sup>

While Tweed's controversial law did not long outlive his eventual arrest and conviction for political corruption, it did serve to mobilize Republicans across the nation in

an effort to prevent other states from seeing their funding diverted in the same way. In 1872 the legislatures of both Iowa and Illinois amended their respective state constitutions to prevent any tax monies from going to sectarian institutions.<sup>71</sup>

At the national level, prominent Republicans began to call for the formation of a national education policy that would promote the strength and welfare of the United States. Senator Henry Wilson of Massachusetts, in remarks published in the *Atlantic Monthly*, issued the first call for such a policy in 1871. He pointed to the recently-ended Franco-Prussian War in which the German states, acting together, dominated their “ignorant, priest-ridden and emasculated” French foe.<sup>72</sup> The surprising victory had destroyed the Second Empire in France and facilitated the establishment of the Second Reich in Germany.<sup>73</sup> Wilson, who credited the victory to the German emphasis on education, had been a Know-Nothing before the war. Many Catholics, having already fought for decades against state-sponsored education that excluded Catholic religion, interpreted his remarks as an escalation of the education controversy by someone who had already proven his anti-Catholic bias.<sup>74</sup>

By 1876, Henry Wilson was Ulysses Grant’s vice-president and Republicans with presidential aspirations were using the protection of state education funds from Catholic schools as a staple of campaign rhetoric. The first salvo of the upcoming campaign was fired in Des Moines, Iowa on 29 September 1875. President Ulysses Grant addressed a reunion of the Army of the Tennessee and gave what would become the most publicized speech of his presidency.<sup>75</sup> He proclaimed the need for: “the more perfect security of free thought, free speech and free press, pure morals, unfettered religious sentiments, and of equal rights and privileges to all men irrespective of nationality, color or religion.” The way to safeguard these values was to encourage free schools and to protect their funding from being appropriated for the support of any sectarian schools.<sup>76</sup> At the time, Grant was



considering the possibility of running for an unprecedented third term. His administration, however, had been riddled with scandal and corruption and the school funding issue had gained enough heat that he hoped to use it to distract the Democrats as well as those within his own party who would oppose his reelection.<sup>77</sup>

A few months later, Grant continued this tack in a message to Congress in which he asked for the development of a constitutional amendment that would prohibit both the teaching of religion in public schools and any use of public funds for schools operated by “any religious sect or denomination.”<sup>78</sup>

Ironically, Grant’s thunder would be stolen by another Republican aspiring to the White House: James G. Blaine. As a member of the House of Representatives, Blaine was able to do what Grant could only recommend. A week after Grant’s message, the Speaker of the House proposed a constitutional amendment outlawing the use of public funds for education by any religious sect or denomination.<sup>79</sup> His proposal became known as the “Blaine Amendment” and, though it never passed, managed to link the Speaker’s name to similar legislation in various states of the Union even to this day.

Ultimately, the man who did win the Republican nomination in 1876, and was subsequently declared the victor in one of the most controversial elections in American history, already had experience riding the Catholic school funding issue to electoral victory. Further exploration of Rutherford B. Hayes, however, fits more appropriately into the story of Ohio politics. Suffice it to say that his experience in state politics served him well in his quest for the nation’s highest office.

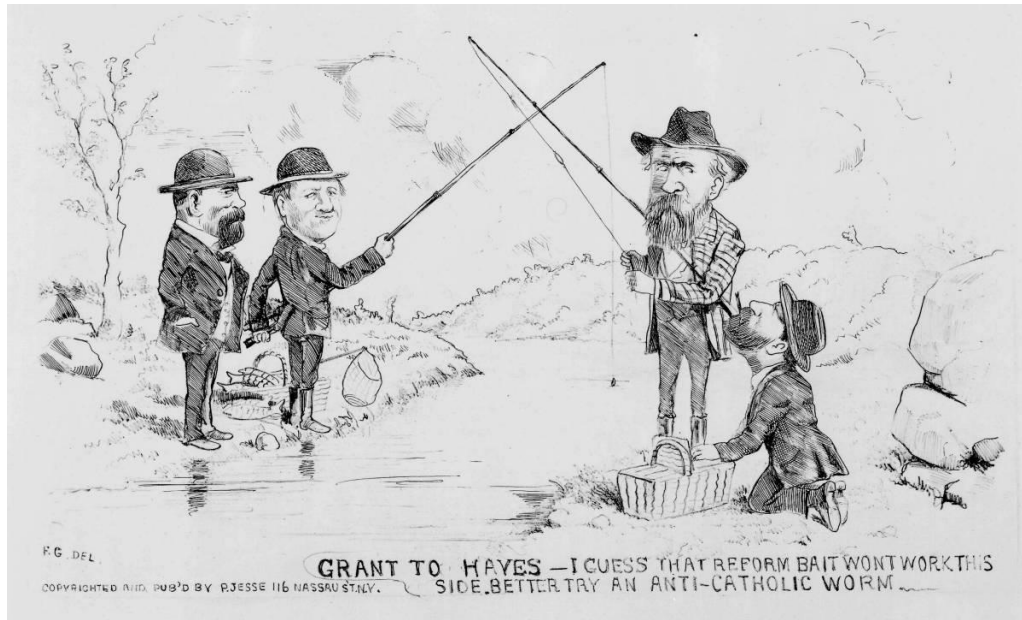


Fig. 2: A political cartoon of the 1876 Presidential campaign.<sup>80</sup>

The national debate about public funding for parochial schools was not confined to electoral politics. In the decade after the Civil War, several Republican journalists devoted much ink to exposing what they perceived as the “Catholic threat”. E. L. Godkin of the *Nation*, Joseph Medill of the *Chicago Tribune* and the editors of the *New York Times* all worried that Catholicism could hinder national unity and hinder scientific and intellectual progress.<sup>81</sup> While their concerns were broader than just that of education, the schools issue was certainly prominent among their arguments.

Among the national media, *Harper's Weekly* seems to have been the most vocal opponent of Catholic interests. Throughout the 1870's, editor Eugene Lawrence regularly railed against what he saw as Catholic interference in American life. His editorials were usually supplemented by the clever and vicious illustrations of Thomas Nast, considered by many to be the father of the American caricature.

An immigrant himself, Nast did not share the nativist bigotry common in American politics. Indeed, his politics seem to have been formed by the liberal leanings of his father, a

refugee from Germany who fled the failed revolutions of 1848. Though he favored the Republicans, the cartoonist often criticized the party for its failure to promote full citizenship for marginalized groups such as freed slaves, Indians and Chinese immigrants to the West Coast.<sup>82</sup>

In the same vein, Nast viewed the Catholic Church as did many of the failed revolutionaries of 1848. For them, the Church had been superstitious, reactionary and anti-democratic. Nast feared that “Romish” influence in the United States would slow the progress of American culture and further divide an already fragmented population.<sup>83</sup> Though he was critical on many fronts, the issue of public funding for parochial schools seemed to typify, for Nast, the insidious nature of Catholic influence in America. Accordingly, the Church and its adherents were regular targets of his pen.

Another issue adding heat to the national debate about public and parochial schools was the so-called “Gray Nuns Act” which, like the funding issue, had its origins in the Empire State. In 1871 the state legislature passed a bill that let members of a Catholic order of women religious teach in New York’s public schools without having to go through the normal certification process required of other teachers.<sup>84</sup> Though the new provision had nothing to do with funding, opponents saw it as opening the door to undue Catholic influence in the public schools. When the Gray Nuns Act was renewed in 1875 with the approval of Governor Samuel Tilden, who was a year away from being the Democratic candidate in the presidential election of 1876, it became political fodder for his opponents who argued that the party was under the influence of the Catholic Church. Thomas Nast illustrated that criticism with a cartoon showing a wolf (with a collar labeled “Democrats” and tag bearing the Keys of St. Peter) breaking into a public school classroom. While a

racially diverse group of students hold the door against the wolf, Uncle Sam is seen getting his gun (presumably the proposed Blaine Amendment) to make matters right.



Fig. 3: *Tilden's Wolf at the Door* by Thomas Nast<sup>85</sup>

Both the funding debate and certification controversy will play important roles in setting the stage for the public/parochial school issues that will unfold in Ohio in the 1870s.

### Postwar animus toward Catholics:

Though nativism as a driving political force was short-lived in the 1850s, it did not disappear completely in the maelstrom of the Civil War. It did, however, grow more complex and mingled with legitimate political concerns about the Catholic Church and the influx of immigrant groups that made it the fastest growing religious denomination in the postwar United States.

As was mentioned earlier, the Germans comprised the highest number of immigrants to the United States in the 1860s and 1870s. These new arrivals were greeted with mixed feelings by the people already here. On one hand, many Americans admired Germany for its progressive stance toward state-sponsored education, Bismarck's ability to

create a modern nation and (not coincidentally) his efforts to diminish the influence of the Catholic Church through *kulturkampf*.<sup>86</sup> On the other hand, the Germans who came were intent on preserving their language, culture and customs in the new world. Some of those customs included the beer garden, card-playing and the celebration of Sunday as a day of leisure and recreation, all of which grated on the Calvinistic sensibilities of most native-born Americans.<sup>87</sup>

Irish immigrants continued to encounter the critical attitudes that had persisted before the war. They were often perceived as slovenly, quick to fight and too much in the thrall of their Catholic pastors.<sup>88</sup> The cartoonist Thomas Nast was expert at illustrating most negative perceptions of the Irish at the time. His drawings portrayed members of that nationality with simian features and often clutching a club or liquor bottle. Nast's Irish were often fighting or subverting the social order in other ways.

The Catholic Church as an institution continued to receive a fair amount of opprobrium in the postwar era, some for legitimate political reasons and other stemming from long-lived prejudice. The growing activism of bishops in promoting denominational schools certainly provided fodder for Republican protests against the Catholic Church trying to subvert the First Amendment though the amount of protest led one Democrat to suggest that the opposition, having wrung the "bloody shirt" dry, were looking for a new beast to slay and that the Pope looked to be next on the list.<sup>89</sup> Whether this assessment was accurate, Pope Pius IX gave his American critics plenty of ammunition with his issuance of the *Syllabus of Errors* and the declaration of papal infallibility at the First Vatican Council, both of which painted the Church as an enemy of progress.<sup>90</sup>

While there were no clear boundaries in the various types of antipathy toward Catholicism in the postwar United States, the term "anti-Catholic" is a brush that paints too

broad a stripe to be useful here. For the sake of clarity it may be helpful to classify those who opposed the Church into three broad categories: political, professional and personal.

Political anti-Catholicism tended to focus on more on theory than on people. The typical political opponent of the Church would have been a Republican, which is hardly surprising given the close ties between Catholics and the Democratic Party. Much of the anti-Catholic rhetoric from this group was also anti-Democratic and revolved around the pertinent political debates of the day, not least of which was school funding. At a more abstract level this group also viewed the Church as the enemy of most of those values that Americans held dear: democracy, freedom of belief and the preference for a more generic form of Christianity. While they were critical of the institution, members of this group could mingle comfortably with the individuals and communities who actually comprised the Church.

Rutherford B. Hayes and James A. Garfield, the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> presidents of the United States, typified the political variant of anti-Catholicism. Both men used attacks against the Church as part of their respective campaign strategies, though the former tended to be more assiduous about it than was his successor in the White House.<sup>91</sup> Though his 1875 stump speech for the gubernatorial campaign was highly critical of the Church in Ohio, Hayes' personal diary from later in his life gives a very positive review of a sermon by Bishop Richard Gilmour who had led the Diocese of Cleveland during the ongoing school controversy.<sup>92</sup> While campaigning for Hayes in 1875, James Garfield recorded in his own diary a real fear that the Catholic Church posed a danger to "modern civilization."<sup>93</sup> While he worried about the institution Garfield was able to maintain a personal friendship with individual Catholics, most notably General William Rosecrans whose brother Sylvester served as the Bishop of Columbus.<sup>94</sup>

Professional antipathy toward the Catholic Church was more the realm of those in the newspaper business and tended to be farther reaching than the political variety. While editors and cartoonists addressed political issues they also included attacks on the personal qualities of Catholics both, particular individuals and members of the Church as a social group. The cartoonist Thomas Nast has already been mentioned but he was certainly not alone in this regard. Edwin Cowles, long-time editor of the *Cleveland Leader*, was a perennial foe of the Catholic Church and gleefully skewered institution and individuals alike in the pages of his paper.

Any cursory examination of the newspapers of the era reveals an active and ongoing consciousness of what the “competition” was doing. Cowles and his competitors regularly commented, rebutted and responded to what each other wrote. This resulted in regular debates, diatribes and wagers. Cowles, a Republican, fought regularly with the *Plain Dealer*, a Democratic paper, and the *Catholic Universe*, which was published by the Diocese of Cleveland. Though these two newspapers did not march in lockstep, they often took the same side but from different perspectives, reflecting their respective points of view. In one notable example of his craft, Cowles managed to bait his counterpart at the *Universe* while spreading the alarm of the international Catholic menace. He wrote:

Will the *Universe* explain the necessity of the Romish Church having a secret order, consisting of 60,000 Jesuit priests, all sworn under blood-curdling oaths to oppose Protestantism by fair or unfair means, to blindly obey the will of their superiors, to employ all kinds of underhanded methods to accomplish their purposes, to resort to all manners of intrigues, in obedience to the maxim that ‘then end justifies the means,’ to advance the interest of the Church, even regardless of the rights of others.<sup>95</sup>

Though this type of anti-Catholicism was certainly lurid, there is some question as to its effect in the public forum. Historian Mark Summers warns:

The partisan press did more than define the issues. It created a cant of politics, trying to make it the center of people's lives and, perhaps, deceiving later chroniclers into thinking that it actually was. Press distortion and sensation could set the tone for a campaign. Newspapers could rouse enthusiasm or at least testify to its existence where there was none, or give certain issues privilege over others simply by how they covered them.<sup>96</sup>

The final category of anti-Catholicism was that of the personal variety. While the prejudice of the ignorant affects all generations, the post-Civil War era was marked by an antipathy toward the Catholic Church that was shared by people of means and education. The decades following the Civil War saw a proliferation of groups that continued the nativist tradition of the Know-Nothings. Organizations abounded such as the Order of United Americans, American Patriotic League, the Patriotic Daughter of America and the Red, White and Blue Organization ("Red to Protect Protestantism, White to Protect the Purity of the Ballot Box, Blue against the Domination of Dictation by Foreign Citizens"). While these varied in size and scope, at least one (the Patriotic Order of the Sons of America) claimed over 500 local affiliates across eighteen states.<sup>97</sup>

While the Know-Nothings had been both anti-immigrant and anti-Catholic, at least one subsequent group distinguished between the two. The Order of the American Union (OAU) was formed some time around 1870 and its sole purpose was to stop the incursion of the Catholic Church into American life. The Order welcomed to its membership any Protestant, regardless of national origin.<sup>98</sup> The stated purpose of the organization provides a systematic and detailed statement of what was perceived as the Catholic Church's



interference in the political life of the nation. In 1875 the Order publicly espoused these principles:

1. We accept the Bible as the basis of all moral, religious, government and educational undertakings.
2. We yield an unhesitating support to the Constitution and Government of the United States and to the several States.
3. We urge that the present system of our general unsectarian free-school organization shall be maintained inviolate.
4. We claim that no part of the public funds shall ever be used for the support of any sectarian school or institution whatever.
5. We are opposed to any interference in political affairs by any man or any body of men acting in behalf, or by direction of, any ecclesiastical body or powers; yet we make no war upon any man's religious creed.<sup>99</sup>

Though the OAU hit its peak around this time with forty chapters in New York and twenty more in Ohio (the two states where church/school issues were the most prevalent) it soon withered when the New York *Herald* published an expose about the organization in 1878. The president of the OAU at that time was *Leader* editor Edwin Cowles.<sup>100</sup>

### **Conclusion:**

The United States and the Catholic Church in America both emerged from the Civil War era as stronger entities. The nation had endured a bloody test of its Constitution and had survived with a stronger sense of union and a more urgent sense of the need to preserve that union at whatever price. Free public education played an important role in this new awareness, it would serve as the glue that would bind together a society still healing from the

wounds of internecine strife. Anything that hindered public education was liable to be viewed as an enemy of the Republic.

The Catholic Church was growing stronger because of demographics and as a result, in terms of cultural impact. The perception of that strength, however, was somewhat deceptive. Though numbers were growing, new populations brought new ideas of what it meant to be Catholic and new challenges to bishops trying to govern the growing diversity. The bishops themselves were forced to balance the demands of several constituencies: native-born and immigrant laity and religious, philosophical divisions among the bishops themselves, and the apparent conundrum (to the Vatican anyway) of a national Church prospering in a climate of religious freedom which was viewed with increasing suspicion by a papacy growing more shrill in its efforts to claim authority in a world growing more secular.

For Catholic bishops in the United States the parochial school provided a forum in which the various conflicting constituencies could be brought into some semblance of balance. The parochial school could create good *American Catholics*. Unfortunately, for many outside the Church that combination was oxymoronic and would set the stage for the local conflicts to be discussed in greater detail in the chapter to follow.

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- <sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, 199.
- <sup>3</sup> C. C. Goen. "Broken Churches, Broken Nation: Regional Religion and North-South Alienation in Antebellum America," *Church History* (1983), 21.
- <sup>4</sup> James Hennesey, *American Catholics: A History of the Roman Catholic Community in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 148.
- <sup>5</sup> Charles R. Morris. *American Catholic: The Saints and Sinners Who Built America's Most Powerful Church* (New York: Random House, 1997), 79.
- <sup>6</sup> Hennesey, 149-152.
- <sup>7</sup> David T. Gleeson, "'No Disruption of Union': The Catholic Church in the South and Reconstruction," in *Vale of Tears: New Essays on Religion and Reconstruction*, ed. Edward J. Blum and W. Scott Poole (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2005), 166.
- <sup>8</sup> Hennesey, 162.
- <sup>9</sup> Susannah U. Bruce, *The Harp and the Eagle: Irish-American Volunteers and the Union Army, 1861-1865* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 42-45.
- <sup>10</sup> *ibid.*, 130-132.
- <sup>11</sup> Walter D. Kamphoefner and Wolfgang Helbich eds. *Germans in the Civil War: the Letters They Wrote Home* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 20.
- <sup>12</sup> *ibid.*, 486.
- <sup>13</sup> Hennesey, 150.
- <sup>14</sup> Morris, 78.
- <sup>15</sup> James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 610.
- <sup>16</sup> Hennesey, 154-155.
- <sup>17</sup> Robert J. Miller, *Both Prayed to the Same God: Religion and Faith in the Civil War* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2007), 91.
- <sup>18</sup> *ibid.*, 92.
- <sup>19</sup> Kathryn A. Jacob, *Testament to Union: Civil War Monuments in Washington, DC* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 126.
- <sup>20</sup> Alec R. Vidler, *The Church in an Age of Revolution* (New York: Penguin Books, 1961), 148.
- <sup>21</sup> *ibid.*, 151.
- <sup>22</sup> Hennesey, 164.
- <sup>23</sup> *ibid.*, 156.
- <sup>24</sup> see William Butler, *Mexico in Transition from the Power of Political Romanism to Civil and Religious Liberty* (New York: Hunt & Eaton, 1892), 196.
- <sup>25</sup> Vidler, 155.
- <sup>26</sup> Richard P. McBrien, *Lives of the Popes: Pontiffs from St. Peter to John Paul II* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997), 346.
- <sup>27</sup> Morris, 72.
- <sup>28</sup> "The Underlying Issue," *New York Times*, July 19, 1871, 4.
- <sup>29</sup> Hennesey, 154.
- <sup>30</sup> *ibid.*, 145.
- <sup>31</sup> Roger A. Fortin, *Faith and Action: A History of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati, 1821-1996* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2002), 122.
- <sup>32</sup> Gerald P. Fogarty, *The Vatican and the American Hierarchy from 1870 to 1965* (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1985), 4.
- <sup>33</sup> Patrick W. Carey, *Órestes A. Brownson: American Religious Weathervane* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2004), 312.
- <sup>34</sup> Fortin, 124.
- <sup>35</sup> Fogarty, 9-10.
- <sup>36</sup> Thomas Jefferson to John Holmes, April 22, 1820.
- <sup>37</sup> McPherson, 216.
- <sup>38</sup> Paul Johnson, *A History of the American People* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997), 450.
- <sup>39</sup> Jules Witcover, *Party of the People: A History of the Democrats* (New York: Random House, 2003),

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- 217-223.
- <sup>40</sup> *ibid.*, 235-236.
- <sup>41</sup> Kerby A. Miller, *Immigrants and Exiles* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 329.
- <sup>42</sup> McGreevy, John T. *Catholicism and American Freedom: A History* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2003), 108-109.
- <sup>43</sup> Maureen Fitzgerald, *Habits of Compassion: Irish-Catholic Nuns and the Origins of New York's Welfare System, 1830-1920* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 113.
- <sup>44</sup> Lewis L. Gould, *Grand Old Party: A History of the Republicans* (New York: Random House, 2003), 29.
- <sup>45</sup> Ward M. McAfee, *Race, Religion and Reconstruction: the Public School in the Politics of the 1870s* (Albany, State University of New York Press, 1998), 5.
- <sup>46</sup> Gould, 18-19.
- <sup>47</sup> Hennessey, 147-150.
- <sup>48</sup> Roger Daniels, *Coming to America: A History of Immigration and Ethnicity in American Life* (New York: HarperCollins, 1991), 124.
- <sup>49</sup> *ibid.*, 129.
- <sup>50</sup> *ibid.*, 142.
- <sup>51</sup> Frederick C. Luebke, *Germans in the New World: Essays in the History of Immigration* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 95.
- <sup>52</sup> Fortin, 94-95.
- <sup>53</sup> Daniels, 189-197.
- <sup>54</sup> *Emigration and Asylum*, eds. Matthew J. Gibney and Randall Hansen (New York: ABC-Clio, 2005), s.v. "Polish Diaspora."
- <sup>55</sup> Dolan, 184.
- <sup>56</sup> Thomas J. Shelley, "Twentieth-Century American Catholicism and Irish Americans," in *Making the Irish American: History and Heritage of the Irish in the United States*, ed. J. J. Lee & Marion Casey (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 576.
- <sup>57</sup> Leonard Dinnerstein and David M. Reimers, *Ethnic Americans: A History of Immigration* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 44-45.
- <sup>58</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>59</sup> Daniels, 197.
- <sup>60</sup> Dolan, 280.
- <sup>61</sup> James A. Burns, *The Growth and Development of the Catholic School System in the United States* (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1912), 182.
- <sup>62</sup> *ibid.*, 186.
- <sup>63</sup> In Catholic parlance "under pain of mortal sin" indicates that failure to comply is serious enough to merit eternal damnation in the afterlife.
- <sup>64</sup> Burns, 188.
- <sup>65</sup> Fortin, 118.
- <sup>66</sup> John J. Keane, "Should Americans Educate their Children in Denominational Schools," in *Journal of Proceedings and Addresses* (Topeka: National Education Association of the United States, 1889), 134.
- <sup>67</sup> Dolan 271-272.
- <sup>68</sup> McAfee, 57-58.
- <sup>69</sup> Benjamin Justice, "Thomas Nast and the Public School of the 1870s," *History of Education Quarterly* 45.
- <sup>70</sup> "The American River Ganges". In Celebrating Thomas Nast's Contributions to American History and Culture. [cited 6 July 2004]. Available from [http://www.lib.ohio-state.edu/cgaweb/nast/images/the\\_american\\_river\\_ganges50.jpg](http://www.lib.ohio-state.edu/cgaweb/nast/images/the_american_river_ganges50.jpg).
- <sup>71</sup> McAfee, 58.
- <sup>72</sup> Henry Wilson, "New Departure for the Republican Party," *Atlantic Monthly*, (January 1871) 114.
- <sup>73</sup> J. M. Roberts, *History of the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 602.
- <sup>74</sup> McGreevy, 114.
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- <sup>76</sup> Ulysses S. Grant. Speech to the Army of the Tennessee, 29 September 1875. *Documents of American Catholic History*, Vol. 2 (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1987), 396.
- <sup>77</sup> John T. Ellis, ed. *Documents of American Catholic History*, Vol. 2 (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1987), 395.
- <sup>78</sup> Ulysses S. Grant. Message to Congress, 7 December 1875. *Documents of American Catholic History*, Vol. 2 (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1987), 397.
- <sup>79</sup> James G. Blaine. Proposed Amendment, 14 December 1875. *Documents of American Catholic History*, Vol. 2 (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1987), 397.
- <sup>80</sup> "Better Try the Catholic Worm". In American Political Prints 1766-1876 from the Library of Congress [database online]. [cited 1 July 2004]. Available from [http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/i?pp/app:@field\(NUMBER+@band\(cph+3b37090\)\):displayType=1:m856sd=cph:m856sf=3b37090](http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/i?pp/app:@field(NUMBER+@band(cph+3b37090)):displayType=1:m856sd=cph:m856sf=3b37090).
- <sup>81</sup> McGreevy, 93.
- <sup>82</sup> Morton Keller, "The World of Thomas Nast," Paper presented as part of the symposium Celebrating Thomas Nast's Contributions to American History and Culture at The Ohio State University, Columbus, OH, 7 December 2002. Available from: <http://www.lib.ohio-state.edu/cgaweb/nast/keller.htm>.
- <sup>83</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>84</sup> McAfee, 59-60.
- <sup>85</sup> "Tilden's Wolf at the Door." In The Presidential Elections 1860-1912. [cited 16 February 2009]. Available from <http://elections.harpweek.com/1876/cartoon-1876-Medium.asp?UniqueID=22&Year=1876>.
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- <sup>87</sup> John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism 1860-1925* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1994), 25.
- <sup>88</sup> *ibid.*, 26.
- <sup>89</sup> *ibid.*, 28-29.
- <sup>90</sup> John Tracy Ellis, *American Catholicism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), 115.
- <sup>91</sup> Allan Peskin, *Garfield: A Biography* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1978), 401.
- <sup>92</sup> Hayes diary, 30 April 1882, *Diary and Letters of Rutherford Birchard Hayes*. [database online] [cited 19 February 2009]; available from: <http://www.ohiohistory.org/onlinedoc/hayes/Volume04/Chapter40/April30.txt>.
- <sup>93</sup> McGreevy, 92.
- <sup>94</sup> Peskin, 170.
- <sup>95</sup> Editorial, *Cleveland Leader*, 4 January 1876, 4.
- <sup>96</sup> Mark W. Summers, *Party Games: Getting, Keeping, and Using Power in Gilded Age Politics* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 82-83.
- <sup>97</sup> David H. Bennett, *The Party of Fear: From Nativist Movements to the New Right in American History* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 170.
- <sup>98</sup> Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 853.
- <sup>99</sup> *Annual Cyclopaedia and Register of Important Events of the Year 1875* (New York: D. Appleton & Company, 1877), 745.
- <sup>100</sup> Higham, 30.

## **CHAPTER VI**

### **BIBLES, BALLOTS AND BILLS: A TRIPTYCH OF CONTROVERSY**

The state of Ohio would provide the stage on which the drama of public versus parochial school education would play out during the 1870s. Though New York grabbed the early headlines with the school funding controversy of 1869 this was linked to the corrupt administration of Boss Tweed and lost its currency when his political career ended in arrest and subsequent imprisonment. There were, however, three incidents in Ohio during the course of that decade that had ramifications at the national level: the Cincinnati Bible War, the Geghan Bill controversy and a series of attempts at taxing church property which effectively established that sectarian schools do not constitute taxable real estate.

The so-called Bible War, the title of which involves some hyperbole since there was no actual violence involved, was the result of an attempt to remove Bible reading from the public schools of Cincinnati. Though Archbishop Purcell did not initiate the attempt, much of the opprobrium that resulted was heaped at his door. Similarly, the Geghan Bill involved a proposal to allow Ohio inmates access to ministers from their own respective denominations but much of the outcry that ensued was directed at the Catholic Church. The attempts to tax church property were portrayed as ways of enhancing religious liberty but, upon closer examination, could be seen as measures designed to impede the progress of

the Catholic Church in Ohio. This chapter will examine all three of these incidents in detail and explain their respective roles in shaping education policy in the United States.

### **The “Bible War”:**

During the middle decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the city population of Cincinnati grew almost exponentially and a large proportion of the new arrivals were Catholic. In 1850 there had been approximately 2000 children enrolled in the city’s parochial schools. Twenty years later, that number had surpassed 12,000.<sup>1</sup> Cincinnati’s public school population in 1870 was 19,000 (a significant portion of these students were also Catholic) and school officials feared that the Catholic schools would surpass their enrollment within the next decade.<sup>2</sup>

In the summer of 1869, Archbishop John Purcell was away from the city and his brother Edward was charged with the daily administration of the archdiocese. F. W. Rauch, a Catholic newly elected to the public school board met with Fr. Purcell and broached the idea of consolidating public and parochial schools into one system. When the archbishop’s brother proved to be receptive, Rauch collaborated with nine other Catholic board members to develop a proposal incorporating the two systems. When finished, the document was signed by twenty-seven members of the school board and presented to Fr. Purcell for his brother’s consideration when the archbishop returned.<sup>3</sup> The plan initially specified that the newly consolidated schools would be used for no religious purpose whatsoever but Edward Purcell asked for, and received, an amendment prohibiting religious purposes during the school day though allowing the use of the buildings on weekends for religious instruction. At this point, both parties were in agreement about the possibility and conditions of such a union.<sup>4</sup>

With this tentative agreement in hand, the school board began the process of formalizing the arrangement, the first step being to form a committee to explore the consolidation in more detail. This is where the plan went sour. The resolution to form a committee was introduced at a meeting on 6 September 1869. At the same meeting, Samuel A. Miller, a board member apparently unattached to the consolidation plan, introduced a second resolution to prohibit the use of any religious books (including the Bible) in the common schools of Cincinnati. His professed purpose was to “allow the children of parents of all sects and opinions in matters of faith to enjoy alike the benefits of the common school fund.”<sup>5</sup> While the two resolutions were (at least technically) independent of each other, their common birthplace united them in the public’s eye and would spark the Bible War of 1869.

Samuel Miller’s role in this in this process is one that bears a closer look. His suggestion was attached to a resolution designed to unite the public and parochial schools of Cincinnati. Though the possibility of such a union died pretty quickly, his contribution hung on to fuel the flames of religious controversy. Various researchers have speculated about Miller and what his motives might have been. Bernard Mandel of Fenn College suggested that Miller was another Catholic member of the school board, possibly basing this claim on a contemporary account from a local newspaper, the *Cincinnati Gazette*.<sup>6</sup> Writing several years later, Harold Helfman found conflicting evidence from newspaper accounts of the day with the *Cincinnati Commercial* explicitly stating that Miller was not Catholic.<sup>7</sup>

The matter of Miller’s faith is somewhat important because it might explain his motivation for making an addition that sparked the ensuing controversy. Was he a Catholic who sought to remove a long-standing irritation but reignited old animosities instead? Or could he be a non-Catholic who spotted a moment of religious cooperation and used the opportunity to promote his own agenda. In all likelihood the second possibility is closer to



the truth. There is circumstantial evidence that points to the person in question being Samuel Almond Miller (1837-1897), a Cincinnati attorney who was active in local politics. He is remembered today as an avid paleontologist, one of the earliest members of the Cincinnati School of ichnology (the study of trace fossils) and editor of two scientific journals.<sup>8</sup> If, indeed, this is the Samuel A. Miller from the Cincinnati school board, his passion for science may explain his initiative to remove the Bible from the public school curriculum. At a time when most religious Christians would have interpreted the Bible very literally, those people who shared a more rationalist view of the world would have been just as troubled by the use of the Bible in the classroom as any Catholic was by the use of the King James Version. The irony would be that, while his suggestion was indeed controversial, it directed the backlash almost entirely toward the Catholics, who had had nothing to do with this Bible proposal in the first place.

When the media had first heard of the consolidation plan, reaction was mixed with some editors seeing yet another Catholic plot to take over the schools while other recognized the practicality of combining resources. Once the resolution banning the Bible was made public, however, the response became more negative. On 11 September, one newspaper published a long list of Protestant preachers who planned to speak against the resolution in their Sunday sermons. The preachers' most common complaint was that the Bible was a necessary component of teaching morality in the schools.<sup>9</sup>

While much of the city reacted, Archbishop Purcell had returned from abroad and was more circumspect in his response. In a letter to the board, he indicated a willingness to discuss consolidation though he also mentioned that he was satisfied with the parochial system already in place. Despite the prelate's tepid response, the board established a committee to explore the question further. A week later, on September 20, the committee

reported back to the board with a letter from Purcell laying down his conditions for continued negotiations. They were:

1. Public schools for “Christian Youth” cannot be wholly administered by civil authorities.
2. Catholics could not approve a system of education divorced from religious instruction.
3. Teachers found objectionable by Catholic authorities could not be employed.
4. All textbooks used must be free of material offensive to Catholic faith or sentiment.<sup>10</sup>

These effectively killed any further consideration of consolidation though the archbishop did extend some small hope at the end of his letter by offering to consider any proposal that the school board might make which would emulate the systems in England, France or Prussia;<sup>11</sup> all systems which included sectarian schools in a proportional division of public funds.

Recognizing the implications of Purcell’s conditions, the school board disbanded the exploratory committee. One proposal, however, remained active and it would prove to be much more controversial than the possibility of consolidation.

Samuel Miller’s proposal to eliminate the Bible from the curriculum was still on the table and continued to generate public controversy. In late September of 1869, two hundred people gathered in a public hall to rally in favor of the Miller proposal. The assembly adopted a resolution demanding removal of the Bible from the public schools to make the United States a more homogeneous nation. That rally was followed two days later by a much larger one demanding that the Bible be retained, some arguing that they would rather have no public school than a godless one.<sup>12</sup>

The role of the Catholic Church in this Bible controversy is somewhat unclear. Some pro-Bible advocates felt that Purcell was blameless in this controversy, pointing to the assertion in his recent letter to the school board that religion could not be taken out of the classroom. Others linked Purcell to Rev. Thomas Vickers, pastor of Cincinnati's liberal Unitarian church and a leader of the anti-Bible forces. Though Purcell and Vickers had clashed publicly before, one editor wrote: "Pilate and Herod made friends before the crucifixion of Jesus, why should not Vickers and Purcell – who were recently in debate – join hands in banishing the lord from the schools?"<sup>13</sup> Ironically enough, Archbishop Purcell was probably away from Cincinnati as the controversy heated up. In late 1869 the prelate travelled to Rome for the opening of the Vatican Council that would cause its own set of problems for him. He would not return to the United States until the following August.<sup>14</sup>

The Bible case became a legal issue on 3 November 1869 when a group of citizens petitioned the Ohio Superior Court to issue an injunction preventing the enforcement of Miller's resolution.<sup>15</sup> The complainants claimed that the actions of the school board violated the Ohio constitution, which recognized and supported Christianity as the foundation of moral education. Elimination of the Bible would be the first step on a slippery slope that could lead to the removal of all Christian references from the McGuffey's readers (produced in Cincinnati and commonly used in the city's schools) and ultimately result in the moral bankruptcy of American society.<sup>16</sup>

The injunction was granted that very day and a hearing date scheduled to determine whether that injunction should be made permanent. The judges selected for the hearing were Bellamy Storer (who had granted the preliminary injunction), Marcelus Hagans and Alphonso Taft.<sup>17</sup> The legal case caught the attention of national journals, especially *Harper's*

*Weekly*, which portrayed it as another example of the Catholic Church trying to hinder the progress of American democracy.<sup>18</sup>

Opening arguments in *The Board of Education of the City of Cincinnati v. John D. Minor et al.* began in Cincinnati's Superior Court began on 29 November 1869.<sup>19</sup> Three months later, the panel of three judges ruled against the school board. The lone dissenter was Judge Taft, a liberal Unitarian who argued that Bible reading in the schools violated the rights of students who did not share the values of the Protestant majority. Taft's objection would soon come back to haunt him.<sup>20</sup>

If Archbishop Purcell's opinion about the Bible case had been unclear at first, an editorial in his diocesan newspaper should have cleared things up. The *Catholic Telegraph* called the decision "a victory of popular prejudice over religious liberty..."<sup>21</sup> Though John Purcell was in Rome, his brother's opinion was consonant with the bishop's views on the Bible in the classroom that had been expressed to the College of Teachers thirty-three years earlier.

The case was appealed to the Ohio Supreme Court which eventually washed its hands of the issue by ruling that the courts had no lawful authority to determine such matters. According to this decision, the courts had no authority to determine what books were, or were not used, in a classroom. This was a decision left to each local school board. The interpretation of "religion," however, as mentioned in the Ohio constitution should not be construed to mean Christianity because this would be a violation of the First Amendment. The effect of the decision was to allow each school district to determine for itself whether the Bible should be used in the classroom. This decision was generally greeted positively by both sides of the issue. Those who favored the use of the Bible in the classroom accepted as their duty the responsibility of electing like-minded people to shape

the local curriculum. Opponents (including the *Telegraph*) welcomed the explicit disassociation of Christianity as a form of state religion.<sup>22</sup>

### **The Geghan Bill:**

The story of the Geghan Bill really begins with the election of its sponsor to the Ohio state legislature. The details of John J. Geghan's life are somewhat sketchy, coming from an account so laudatory that it could have been written by the man himself. According to *The Biographical Encyclopedia of Ohio of the Nineteenth Century*, published within months after the controversy put its namesake in the national press, John Geghan was born in Ireland in 1845 and emigrated to the United States nine years later. After a few years in the common schools, he forsook formal education to support his family and entered the tobacco trade in Cincinnati. It was in this that he first showed his penchant for organizing when he established the 'Tobacconists' Association of Cincinnati in 1864, of which he was appointed as president.<sup>23</sup>

Geghan's biography claims that he organized a troop of men in 1866 to participate in the Fenian raids on Canada, was elected to be their captain and participated in the battles of Ridgeway and Fort Erie.<sup>24</sup> Though there seems to be no direct evidence either to confirm or deny this claim, the circumstantial evidence weighs against it in a number of ways. Firstly, the Fenians were largely comprised of Irish-American veterans of the Civil War. It seems unlikely that such a group would choose someone with no military experience as their leader. Secondly, while several histories of the Fenian movement include lists of leaders, heroes and men captured during the conflict, none of these mention Geghan at all. Finally, Geghan's biography mentions that the tobacconist began to organize his military unit in May of 1866.<sup>25</sup> The battles at Fort Erie and Ridgeway, however, occurred on 1 and 2 June 1866 respectively.

It seems highly unlikely that Geghan could have gotten his troops recruited, organized, trained and relocated to the Niagara peninsula in time to participate in the two attacks. On the other hand, the idea of joining the Fenians that late in the game does seem to fit a pattern of opportunism that manifests itself repeatedly in Geghan's career.

Whatever the truth may be about John Geghan's work with the Fenian movement, his biography puts him back in Cincinnati pretty quickly where he resumed his career in the tobacco trade and began to dabble in politics. In 1868 he was credited with organizing an Irish political club to support the presidential campaign of Ulysses S. Grant. Four years later he threw his energies in the other direction and served as president of a Greeley and Brown Club in the sixth ward of Cincinnati.<sup>26</sup> At this time, there is no evidence to determine whether Geghan had changed parties in 1872 or was part of a dissident movement in the Republican Party that had become disenchanted with Grant.

From the evidence available, it looks as if his election to the Ohio state legislature in 1873 was John Geghan's first attempt to run for office. The statewide elections that year marked a return to power for the Democratic Party for the first time since the Civil War. The party's candidate for governor was 70 year-old William Allen who had begun his political career during the presidency of Andrew Jackson. Allen is credited with having coined the slogan "Fifty-four Forty or Fight" while serving as chairman of the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee. He left politics in 1848 when Free Soil Democrats in the Ohio legislature shifted their support to Salmon P. Chase for Allen's Senate seat. Allen's temporary retirement from politics would ultimately work in his favor because, in 1873, his candidacy for the governorship could avoid the Copperhead stigma associated with other Ohio Democrats such as Clement Vallandigham. Running against incumbent Edward Noyes, Allen won by a mere 817 votes from over 400,000 cast.<sup>27</sup>

Though William Allen (aka “the Foghorn”) brought his own qualifications to the table, he also benefited from larger trends that hurt the chances of the heretofore dominant Republican Party. Still smarting from a liberal schism the previous year<sup>28</sup> in reaction to Grant’s nomination for a second term, Ohio Republicans also felt a backlash from the various scandals attached to the Grant administration as well as some fallout from the onset of economic depression in 1873. All of these factors helped to tip the electoral balance in favor of the Democrats in November of 1873.<sup>29</sup>

Like much of his life, the details of John Geghan’s election to the legislature in 1873 are difficult to uncover. The electoral process for legislative representatives from Hamilton County was a rather generalized affair at that time. In the 1873 election, thirty candidates from Hamilton County ran for election to the Ohio General Assembly with the top ten vote-getters winning the election. When the results were first announced, Geghan had placed thirteenth, behind another Democrat and a Republican.<sup>30</sup> The next day a cryptic and ambiguous announcement appeared in *The Cincinnati Daily Telegraph*, the city’s Democratic paper, which read: “A mistake in the official count elects Geghan. This gives Hamilton County nine Democrats and one Republican in the House.”<sup>31</sup> With that, the Queen City tobacconist became a legislator.

John Geghan’s biography credits him with introducing several pieces of legislation during his time in office including a bill to reshape the Ohio Militia and a failed amendment to the Adair Law.<sup>32</sup> This law, passed in 1870, held tavern owners responsible for damage done by their drunken patrons.<sup>33</sup> During his first year in the legislature, Geghan introduced the bill amending the Adair Law and, though the proposed amendment failed, its history shares many similarities with the later bill that would give their common author his brief moment in the national limelight.

Geghan proposed his amendment in March of 1874 requiring that tavern keepers be served official notice, in the presence of witnesses, before the terms of the Adair Law could be enforced.<sup>34</sup> Though Democrats had largely opposed the original law when it was first passed, they did not show strong support for this proposal that would bowdlerize the law.<sup>35</sup> Despite the lukewarm support from his own party, there was evidence of a popular groundswell in favor of the bill when delegations from Cincinnati, Cleveland, Dayton and Toledo came to Columbus to demonstrate in support of Geghan upon his return from a visit to his constituents.<sup>36</sup> Whatever the people's outcry, the bill was voted down twice the next day with a full third of the Democratic contingent among the disapproving majority.<sup>37</sup>

In light of the Protestant-Catholic controversies, the amendment episode is important because the similarities that it shares with the more famous Geghan bill indicate a possible *modus operandi* on the part of their common author. Firstly, both bills address issues that were important to Irish Catholics (temperance and religious freedom). Secondly, evidence indicates that both bills encountered resistance from other Democratic legislators which triggered the third similarity: that Geghan appealed to popular support to put pressure on the resisters. The similarities end there because, in the first case, popular pressure didn't work but in the second case it did - with results that were to prove disastrous for the Democratic Party.

Rep. John J. Geghan introduced House Bill 615 at the afternoon session of the General Assembly on 17 February 1875. On its surface, his proposal had nothing to do with education. Its stated objective was to grant access for inmates of Ohio institutions to clergy from their own religious denominations.<sup>38</sup> At the time, the prevailing practice in state prisons was to celebrate the Sabbath with one Protestant service for all inmates.<sup>39</sup> Though it



required some revision by its author, the bill was passed by the lower house on 25 March and sent on to the senate.<sup>40</sup>

The senators did not have it for long before the bill ran into serious trouble back in the General Assembly. Richard Ramsey, an assemblyman from Adams County who had initially voted in favor of the bill, asked to change his vote. In addition to being a legislator, the representative was also a Methodist minister and decided that he could not countenance opening a door to let the error of Romanism insinuate itself into the state's institutions. Though the rules prohibited such indecision, opponents of the bill used the opportunity of Ramsay's request to pass a motion to reconsider the bill and sent word to the senate to return the proposal to the lower house. When the *Cincinnati Daily Enquirer* first reported this story, it concluded that the bill was dead.<sup>41</sup> Two days later, that same newspaper announced that the bill had passed with a flurry of other laws as the legislature's final session drew to a close.<sup>42</sup>

Public protest against the Geghan Law began to emerge even while it was still under discussion in Columbus. Edwin Cowles, editor of the *Cleveland Leader* and a long-time opponent of the Catholic Church, complained that the bill extended the insidious tentacles of Rome ever deeper into American life and accused the Democrats of pandering favor to attract votes.<sup>43</sup> Both of these themes were expanded in other papers. Cincinnati's *Gazette* worried that the law would give Catholics the opportunity to proselytize a captive audience while the Sandusky *Register* prophesied that the order would go forth from Catholic pulpits across the state to vote the Democratic ticket.<sup>44</sup>

Democratic and Catholic newspapers both praised the new law as a step forward for religious liberty. *The Cincinnati Daily Enquirer*, an ardent supporter of the Democratic Party, scoffed at reactions of competitors who worried about predatory Romanism creeping into

American institutions. According to the *Enquirer's* editors, the Geghan Bill actually discouraged establishmentarianism by opening the doors of Ohio's prisons to *all* religions, not just that favored by state officials.<sup>45</sup> Cleveland's Catholic newspaper, *The Catholic Universe*, amplified that same sentiment thusly:

The text of this bill, which we publish elsewhere in our columns, claims the attention of our readers. It will find a response in the breast of every man who is not hopelessly a bigot. It draws its inspiration from the American Constitution, and is in strict accordance with the spirit and the letter of our own Bill of Rights. The liberty of conscience which these instruments guarantee in words, it would secure in fact for all the people of this commonwealth. Here we should have no State-favored religion, and this bill asks nothing for the professors of one creed which it would not extend to the adherents of all other creeds.<sup>46</sup>

To this point, the debate over the Geghan Bill had been fairly typical of any issue that touched on the larger "Catholic problem" with Republicans opposing anything that might be seen as giving power or legitimacy to the Church (what they called "kissing the pope's toe"). Proponents of the Catholic position tended to see their own side as fighting for religious freedom and equality, and not trying to gain special favor. The opening arguments for and against H.B. 615 started out following the traditional lines of debate until the *Catholic Telegraph*, the official newspaper of the Cincinnati archdiocese, published an article in its issue of 11 March 1875. The *Telegraph's* publisher and brother of the archbishop, Fr. Edward Purcell, had already spoken out in favor of H.B. 615. The edition of 11 March, however, published a letter from John Geghan to a friend in the city.

While building a case for his bill, the author made several immoderate statements that undermined the bill's professed disestablishmentarianism and that provided the foundation for the Republican campaign against the bill, and, more importantly, against the Democrats in the upcoming gubernatorial election. Geghan began by explaining that the bill was "really a Catholic measure" because it allowed priests the same rights as clergy from other denominations. This directly contradicted the prevailing argument made by Democratic supporters that the bill served all religions. He urged Catholics to "assert their rights as citizens and look after their own interests." Geghan then went on to claim that:

We [Catholics] have a prior claim on the Democratic party. The elements composing the Democratic party in Ohio to-day -- fully two thirds of said party -- are made up of Irish and German Catholics, and they have always been loyal and faithful to the interests of the party. Hence the party is under obligations to us, and we have a perfect right to demand of them....they should as a party redress our grievances.<sup>47</sup>

The letter concluded with an exhortation to all Catholics to push their representatives in the Ohio legislature to support the bill.<sup>48</sup>

As if the fire started by Geghan's letter wasn't enough, the editorial page of the same issue threw on a generous dose of gasoline. Picking up the letter's theme of latent Catholic political power, an editorial takes what had been an exhortation and turned it into a none too subtle threat by stating:

The political party with which nine tenths of the Catholic voters affiliate...now controls the State. Withdraw the support which Catholics have given to it, and it will fall in this city, county and State as speedily as it has risen to its long lost position and power. That party is now upon its trial...if they persist in their opposition, it will be

the duty of Catholic citizens to teach them that there is method in their supposed insanity.<sup>49</sup>

Both of the articles in that edition of the *Telegraph* would provide plenty of fodder for Republican speeches and editorials over the next several months, but the most iconic catchphrase of the entire episode would appear in the paper three weeks later as it celebrated the passage of the controversial bill. In a column listing short blurbs about various current events the *Telegraph's* editor announced: "The unbroken, solid vote of the Catholic citizens of this State will be given to the Democracy at the Fall election."<sup>50</sup> In hindsight, it seems as if the Republicans couldn't have invented a better battle cry if they had written it themselves.

The Ohio legislature passed John Geghan's bill on the final day of their session in 1875, months before the gubernatorial race took sufficient shape to make the new law a campaign issue. In this early stage of the Geghan controversy, the battle was fought on the editorial pages of a partisan press. Ohio editors gave the issue almost daily coverage until the November elections.

Before the *Telegraph's* April 1<sup>st</sup> issue, there had been the two aforementioned positions on H.B. 615 with the Republicans arguing that the bill was the first step toward Catholic domination of Ohio politics while the Democratic and Catholic papers agreed that the bill promoted only religious freedom. The publication of Geghan's letter coupled with the *Telegraph's* intemperate editorial remarks effectively drove a wedge between the latter two groups and left the embarrassed Democrats walking a fine line of trying to dissociate themselves from the Catholic press without alienating Catholic voters.

The *Telegraph's* pledge of the "unbroken, solid vote of the Catholic citizens" was awkward enough for the Democrats in its implication of a *quid pro quo* arrangement for the passage of the Geghan bill, but the timing of the pronouncement exacerbated the situation

appearing, as it did, only four days before the spring elections. The *Cleveland Leader* reprinted the pledge in large capital letters before using it as proof of Catholics in the city taking orders from the Archbishop of Cincinnati who, in turn, had been commanded by Rome to overthrow the public school system.<sup>51</sup> Though this seems to have been the first Republican citation of the *Telegraph's* pledge, it would by no means be the last. Both, the *Leader* and the *Cleveland Daily Herald*, would repeat the “unbroken, solid vote” passage on an almost weekly basis throughout the campaign. That they would often reprint it without any further comment indicates that the editors were confident that the statement had enough intrinsic inflammatory appeal to their readers that it needed no further explanation.

The Democratic editors of *The Cincinnati Daily Enquirer* also recognized the political potential of the *Telegraph's* pledge and lost no time trying to distance their party from the implications contained therein. Commenting about the *Telegraph's* editor, the *Enquirer* complained:

He makes it a point to always saddle some indiscreet, idiotic utterance upon the Democratic party on the eve of the election. If he was [sic] the open enemy of the organization he couldn't do more injury. The Democratic party is the party of liberalism and the foe of intolerance. The Catholic Church receives at its hands just what all other churches and religions receive. It asks the suffrages of all people who believe in religious liberty. It doesn't crave the blessing of the Catholic Church and doesn't ask that Catholics shall be ordered to vote its ticket. We would like to see one election in Hamilton County when the Democratic Party wasn't handicapped with the religious issues begotten by the zealots of the *Catholic Telegraph* and the Presbyterian infidels of the *Gazette*.<sup>52</sup>

With the *Enquirer's* excoriation, the battle lines between the three major institutional players on this issue were set. The Republicans would draw a picture of the Democrats being under the sway of Catholic influence. The Democrats would continually pledge their commitment to religious equality and the protection of the public schools from sectarian influence. The Catholic press would muddy the waters of debate by promoting the division of the public school funding as an expression of both religious liberty (when everyone else seemed to interpret such a move as exactly the opposite) and supporting the interests of the Democratic Party while accusing Republicans of resurrecting old Know-Nothing tendencies.

One of the most constant critics of the Geghan law was Edwin W. Cowles, long-time publisher of the *Cleveland Leader*. Cowles was an ardent Republican and party leader in Cleveland for almost as long as he published his paper. Having started the *Leader* in 1854, he was a major force in calling for the first Republican National Convention, held in Pittsburgh in 1855. Edwin Cowles was an equally ardent nativist and a local head of the Order of the American Union, one of several anti-Catholic organizations to sprout up around the country after the Civil War. The *Leader* was Cowles' bully pulpit and he used it daily to lambaste Catholics and/or Democrats with equal gusto.<sup>53</sup>

Edwin Cowles' role in the Geghan controversy is important because he did much to keep it in the public eye, but he also amplified some implications of the bill that shape the political controversy as it played out in Ohio during that election year. Cowles was the first to take the threats implied in the *Telegraph* articles and link them to the local votes that were being held on 5 April 1875 with descriptions of obedient Catholics marching to the polls from their parishes, where they had been instructed from the pulpit to vote Democrat.<sup>54</sup> He was also the first to link the ongoing attempts by some Catholics to gain access to public funds for education with the Geghan Law which was, after all, about prisons.<sup>55</sup>

It was after the Spring campaigns brought Democratic victories in Cleveland and Cincinnati that Edwin Cowles seemed to discover a larger potential in the seemingly harmless bill apparently meant to bring religious comfort to Ohio's prisoners. In an editorial published two days after the April election, the *Leader* explained away the unhappy results by attributing them to the recent influx of foreigners in the state's urban areas - foreigners who voted Democratic and brought with them a moral blight that turned Ohio's fair cities into stains upon the land. Citing the New York State as an example, where the Republican faithful in the countryside "fought against the vicious political tendencies of the city wherein [Boss] Tweed was for years supreme" Cowles called on the rural citizens of Ohio to save their cities in a similar fashion.<sup>56</sup>

In his editorial of 7 April, Edwin Cowles hit upon the key difference between the Geghan bill and the other Catholic controversies in Ohio. Purcell's efforts and the Cincinnati Bible War (as well as later efforts to tax parochial school property in Cleveland) were all local issues confined either to Hamilton or Cuyahoga Counties, both of which did had sizeable Catholic populations. Because the Geghan bill was the product of the state legislature, however, it represented the first encroachment of "the Pope's toe" at a statewide level. The transition from local to state politics also shifted the balance of political power surrounding "the Catholic issue" because the rural counties of Ohio brought more Republicans to the fray than Democrats.<sup>57</sup> This would not be lost on Republican leaders as they laid their plans for the fall campaign.

The two months separating the spring elections and the Republican state convention found the partisan papers spilling gallons of ink debating the nature of the Geghan bill. The Republican papers of Cleveland, Cowles' *Leader* and the *Cleveland Daily Herald*, rarely let a day pass without some jab at the Catholic Church with the most common example being a

multi-faceted critique of the Geghan bill. The *Herald's* strategy was somewhat complicated by its support of Judge Taft to be the Republican nominee for governor.

Alphonso Taft's achilles' heel in 1875 was, of course, his minority opinion in the superior court decision about Cincinnati Bible War case. Taft had argued that compulsory use of the Bible in public schools violated the civil rights of students who did not wish to use it. While he had no special regard for Archbishop Purcell or Catholic concerns, the conclusion he reached in the case happened to agree with the "Romish" position. When Taft emerged as a frontrunner to lead a campaign where the "Catholic issue" would be especially hot, his earlier decision could be problematic and, indeed, it was. Edwin Cowles wasted no time in pointing out that Taft's judicial history on this point would make the judge problematic for Republican voters.<sup>58</sup>

Cleveland's other Republican paper took a different tack by blaming the candidate's troubled reputation on the minions of the Pope. The *Herald* argued that Taft's belief that the public school should be free of sectarian influence was the best defense possible for protecting the school fund but was tainted by its apparent similarity to the position of Catholics who wanted more, not less, sectarianism in the classroom. Accordingly, the *Herald* supported Taft's candidacy as the best way to protect the integrity of the school fund.<sup>59</sup>

Aside from the issue of Alphonso Taft, the Republican papers were united in their constant attacks on Democrats and/or Catholics and usually both in tandem. In this time before the state campaign took shape, Democratic and Catholic editors commonly denied any collusion between party and church. Even the *Telegraph*, a week after pledging the "unbroken, solid vote" of Catholic citizens to the Democratic Party, announced that:

We have no politics; we are no partizan; we know nothing of parties



except when Catholic interests are involved, when Catholic rights are endangered.

As American by birth, we even abstain from voting, that

no one may impute in our office any political bias or prejudice.<sup>60</sup>

Cleveland's *Universe* issued a similar statement two days later.<sup>61</sup> The *Plain Dealer* wasted no time reprinting quotes from both articles for a larger, more secular audience.<sup>62</sup>

As the journalists continued to worry the Geghan issue on an almost daily basis, the politicians prepared for their upcoming state conventions. Of several potential Republican nominees for the governorship, former governor Rutherford B. Hayes seemed to have the widest support but he had steadily discouraged any efforts to nominate him to run for a third term.<sup>63</sup> With Hayes out of the picture, Alphonso Taft became the frontrunner but his opinion in the Cincinnati Bible case made him too soft on the religious issue for many of his fellow Republicans. Evidence indicates that many of those who were not convinced of Taft's viability as a candidate continued to work behind the scenes lobbying Hayes to reconsider his refusal. William D. Bickham, editor of the *Dayton Journal*, tried to persuade the reluctant potential candidate that a successful run for governor could lead to the White House in 1876. For his part, Hayes did not think that his chances for victory were very good and he pleaded that he was too involved in establishing the financial security of his family to consider a return to politics at this time.<sup>64</sup>

Despite his objections, Hayes was still listed among the potential nominees when the Republican convention opened on 2 June 1875. In fact, his name was the second one to be put forth for consideration, just after Judge Taft's. Four other names, including another William Allen (whose successful nomination would have made for an interesting campaign) joined the list, but these were dismissed by a correspondent to the *New York Times* as being merely "side shows."<sup>65</sup> When the first ballot was taken, Hayes received 325 of the 547 votes

possible while Taft was a distant second with 186. When the results were announced, William Bickham, who had been acting as one of the leaders of the Taft contingent at the convention, requested that nomination of Hayes be made unanimous. After the remainder of the statewide slate had been assembled, Charles P. Taft (son of the Judge) acted on behalf of his father to fulfill Bickham's request.<sup>66</sup>

The diary of Rutherford B. Hayes offers additional details about the nomination process. Hayes considered Taft (whom he labeled the "leading other candidate") a good man whose chances were ruined by the opinion in the Bible case.<sup>67</sup> Despite this, the former governor continually refused to be considered a candidate as long as the Judge was in the running and sent a telegraph to that effect to the Taft camp. Even when he was nominated on the first ballot, Hayes wrote, he was prepared to decline but changed his mind when informed of what Charles Taft had done.<sup>68</sup>

While awaiting word of their nominee's acceptance, the Republican state convention strategized about a platform for the upcoming campaign. This election was a crucial one for the party for a number of reasons. The Democrats had been making steady progress in the state, having won thirteen of twenty Ohio congressional seats a year earlier and control of the state house in 1873. Congress had just passed the Resumption Act legislating the redemption of paper money (greenbacks) with gold. Resumption was unpopular with the general public, still suffering from the Panic of 1873, who complained that a reduction in the money supply would depress the economy even further. The Ohio election, occurring in an important state with large agricultural and industrial interests, would be a good indicator of whether the Republicans could run a "hard money" candidate in the presidential election of 1876.<sup>69</sup> The party needed to run a campaign that promoted a complex economic policy but

still would provide an issue that could arouse passion and allegiance from the electorate. A liberal dose anti-Catholic outrage might make the bitter pill of resumption easier to swallow.

When the Republican platform of the 1875 campaign in Ohio was finished, it featured twelve planks. These made several oblique references to national issues such as the ongoing Reconstruction (with a call for equal protection for all citizens under the law), the scandals of the current presidential administration (by approving the zealous prosecution of fraud), and Ulysses Grant's consideration of running for a third term (by lauding Washington's example of stepping aside after two terms an "unwritten law of the Republic.") The two most pertinent state issues were contained in planks two through five. The second plank addressed the greenback issue by advocating a gradual finance policy that would equalize the purchasing power of the coin and paper dollar. Plank four advocated no division of the school fund while the fifth plank reiterated the benefits of church/state separation.<sup>70</sup>

Back in Fremont and away from the convention, Rutherford Hayes was free to develop his own thoughts about the campaign and, according to his diary, his first choice was to attack the Democratic Party for its "subserviency to Roman Catholic demands."<sup>71</sup> The next day he elaborated a bit more, mentioning the corruption of the opposing party, its effect on state institutions and the Catholic issue.<sup>72</sup> The other potentially major issue of the campaign, greenbacks, didn't merit a mention in Hayes' journal during the first few days of his candidacy.

At the end of August, when the gubernatorial campaign of 1875 began in earnest, it proceeded along three distinct but overlapping lines: the public rhetoric of the politicians, the same group maneuvering behind the scenes, and the editorial jousting of the newspapers. Governor Hayes began his own campaign efforts with a speech at Marion, OH on the last

day of July and this seems to have served as the model for the more than fifty campaign stops that would follow. After the campaign Hayes would write to a friend in Texas that he had had time to prepare only his first speech and that the majority of those which followed emphasized the same two topics: money and the schools.<sup>73</sup>

The speech at Marion established a pattern in which the majority of the speech, from the beginning, stressed the greenback issue. While there was some personalization of the speech for the crowd at the very beginning, the substantial portion began with a long diatribe against paper money and intentional inflation. Approximately two-thirds of the way through the speech Hayes shifted his focus to the schools issue despite having said, near the beginning of the speech, that finances is the only part of the Democratic platform “which receives or deserves much attention.”<sup>74</sup>

Like all Republicans, Hayes made the necessary connection between the Geghan Bill and the need to protect public school funding from sectarian purposes. Unlike Republican editors, however, Hayes was quite circumspect in identifying the villains in this issue. He was very careful not to point directly at either the Democratic Party or the Catholic Church as a whole. While the candidate happily blamed the Democrats for many other problems, on this issue he was careful to refer only to the “sectarian wing of the Democratic Party”.<sup>75</sup> Regarding Catholics, Hayes was even more cautious. As he began on this topic he explicitly disavowed any wish to attack any person on account of their religious convictions<sup>76</sup> and thereafter refers to the culprits only as sectarians. The only time that he uses the word “Catholics” with this issue is when quoting the infamous passages directly from the *Catholic Telegraph*. While actual texts of his later speeches are not available, his personal notes used to make those speeches follow this same policy of circumspection.<sup>77</sup> While using the schools

issue to rally popular support from his Republican base, he did not wish to isolate Catholics and Democrats who might vote for him

Republican speakers who operated in the national arena spent most of their time, like Hayes, discussing the paper money issue. Senator John Sherman, who shared the podium with Hayes at Marion, waved the “bloody shirt” a bit but devoted the remainder of his speech to the financial issue alone.<sup>78</sup> A week later, Republican Senator Oliver P. Morton of Indiana followed his fellow legislator’s tack in a speech at Urbana.<sup>79</sup> Congressman James Garfield had been hampered by poor health at the outset of the campaign, but when he finally took to the stump in late August he, too, followed Hayes’ example of focusing firstly and mostly on the paper money issue. Also like Hayes, Garfield was careful to distance the Catholic laity and the Democratic Party as a whole from the Geghan Bill issue. The congressman also came out in favor of what would become the next important Catholic education issue in the state: taxing parochial schools like all other private real estate.<sup>80</sup>

Republicans who worked more at the state level were less careful about making fine distinctions about either the Democrats or the Catholic Church. Congressman James Monroe, speaking in his hometown of Oberlin, painted the picture of a Democratic Party willing to do anything to survive the devastating blow to its prominence caused by secession and the aftermath of the war, even to the point of colluding with those who would undermine Ohio’s public school system.<sup>81</sup> The then-current lieutenant governor of Ohio, Alphonso Hart,<sup>82</sup> portrayed the Democrats more as victims than collaborators. Describing the voting for the Geghan Bill, Hart explained that:

...Catholic forces gathered in the corridor and halls of the General Assembly, and that body with meekness and submission yielded to the command, and the bill became law. When the roll was called, these Democrats, like lambs led to the

slaughter meekly answered “aye”...The command of the Church was to them absolute law.<sup>83</sup>

The man whose own ambitions for the governor’s mansion were thwarted by his history with the religion/schools issue played the good soldier during the 1875 campaign. Alphonso Taft made at least two speeches to support the Republican effort. In his first, at Marietta, the judge spoke exclusively on the currency issue<sup>84</sup> but it was his second contribution that earned him the most ink in newspapers on all sides of the issue.

On the evening of 23 August, at Brainard’s Opera House in Cleveland, Taft spoke specifically and exclusively to the public schools question. His treatment of the issue began by dismissing Democratic claims that there was no issue in this regard. He then acknowledged the innocuous nature of the content of the Geghan Bill but pointed out that the real danger lay in the manner of its passage. After discussing the Republican and Democratic state platforms on the issue, Taft asserted that the Democratic Party, in its current state, should not be trusted to protect the freedom of Ohio’s public schools. After making the distinction between the Catholic laity (generally good) and the Catholic clergy (meddlers), the judge made his case for the secularization of Cincinnati schools as the fairest way of respecting all religions and claimed that Archbishop Purcell was not satisfied with such equity. After quoting extensively from various documents in the Cincinnati Bible Case, letters from Archbishop Purcell, and even the *Syllabus of Errors*, Taft returned to the issue of the current campaign. The judge closed his speech by stating:

Now, the Democracy must bear the responsibility of encouraging this sectarian war upon our schools. If it will court a priesthood by such a means, let it bear the odium. We may only hope that both parties to this transaction may receive such a lesson in October as will discourage any further traffic of this kind.<sup>85</sup>

Taft's Cleveland speech elicited more reaction from newspapers around the state than any other speech given by either side for the rest of the campaign yet the Republican strategy seemed to stay focused on speaking about financial issues first and foremost.

If Hayes was careful to tread lightly around the schools issue in his public speaking, he showed no such compunction in his campaign activities happening behind the scenes. As was mentioned earlier, even before accepting the nomination the once and future governor recognized the political capital inherent in the Geghan Bill. As the new nominee, Hayes acknowledged to James Garfield that he (Hayes) would lose Republican votes on the currency issue but was consoled by the "almost wholly favorable" response to the "Catholic question."<sup>86</sup>

In the planning stages of the campaign, the candidate urged the immediate publication of a pamphlet, in German and English, about the Geghan Bill and the school question.<sup>87</sup> Ten days later, such a pamphlet was in his hands and Hayes requested that they be distributed at Republican gatherings across the state.<sup>88</sup> It is uncertain whether any of these documents are still extant but they certainly excited the outrage of the Democratic press which accused them of trying to stimulate a new "Know-Nothing crusade" as part of the current Republican strategy.<sup>89</sup>

Publishing the pamphlet in German may have been part of a broader strategy to target an ethnic group with a significant Catholic population whose loyalties to Irish-American bishops was lukewarm at best. Carl Schurz, the German-born journalist, general and Republican senator from Missouri spent late September on the stump for the party around Ohio. Though his speeches focused almost exclusively on the financial issue the ultimate purpose may have been to woo German voters, including Catholics, away from the

Democratic fold. Schurz certainly worked to this end a year later in the Hayes presidential campaign.<sup>90</sup>

Targeting the Germans was a canny move on the part of the Republicans because, of all the ethnic groups with a large concentration of Catholics, their ties to the mainly Irish-American hierarchy were among the loosest. In his sociological study of the Catholic Church in America, Jay Dolan contrasted the role Catholicism played respectively in Irish and German immigrant culture. Once the floodgates of migration opened for the Irish, the vast majority who came to the United States were Catholic and they eventually comprised the largest part of the Catholic Church in America. In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the Church's hierarchy was dominated by men with names like Gibbons, O'Connell, Ireland, Keane and McQuaid. Those Irish who took their religion seriously had the confidence of knowing that their own were guiding the barque of Peter in America.

German Catholics who came to the United States, on the other hand, were a minority in both, their church and their ethnic group. According to Dolan, no more than thirty percent of the Germans coming to America were Catholic and they found themselves beset with compatriots who were Protestants, agnostics, atheists and freethinkers.<sup>91</sup> Caught between the Scylla of anti-Catholic Germans and the Charybdis of anti-German Catholics, Catholic immigrants from Germany embraced faith and culture inseparable as the means to preserve their identity in a strange and inhospitable land. While many Irish-American bishops promoted assimilation into an American Church the German parishes preferred to hold themselves apart. When Catholic members of the public school board in Cincinnati tried to effect a union between public and parochial schools in that city, the German parishes were quick to protest the possibility of any such merger for fear of losing "their unique German Catholic character." Though negotiations quickly fell apart (as explained in



the previous section of this chapter), the *Catholic Telegraph* used the incident to castigate the protestors for their reluctance to join the mainstream of American society.<sup>92</sup>

The Republican strategy of promoting Carl Schurz around the state, then, was a wise one. Cincinnati comprised the eastern corner of the so-called “German Triangle” formed with Milwaukee and Saint Louis. Cleveland had its own sizeable population of German immigrants as well.<sup>93</sup> Courting this particular ethnic group could win many votes including many Catholics who were not enamored with the political shenanigans of their Irish co-religionists.

For the Republican newspapers, the onset of campaigning did little to change the steady diet of sniping at the Democrats, exposing the latest “Romish” outrages and feuding with opposing editors. Considerable amounts of space were devoted to publishing the entire text of stump speeches considered to be important. For the most part, however, the editors preferred to hammer away at what they portrayed as the two “Catholic” issues of subverting the school fund and domineering the Democratic Party. One slight crack in party unity came when an editorial in the *Cleveland Daily Herald* complained that both sides were focusing too much on the finance issue and that this, on the part of the Republican leadership, was a mistake. While acknowledging the national import of the currency question, the editor argued that local concern about the integrity of the common schools was much more urgent for those who would actually be voting in October.<sup>94</sup>

At the national level, *Harper's Weekly* weighed in against the Geghan Bill and its perceived implications in both word and image. Editor Eugene Lawrence commented on the Ohio election in almost every issue after the nominations were announced. In his 1 May issue, Lawrence published an editorial cartoon of a Catholic priest holding a whip in one hand and, in the other, a writ of excommunication. Over his arm is a shackle chaining



The illustration is full of smaller drawings offering additional critical commentary on the state of political affairs in the Buckeye State.



**Fig. 5: Thomas Nast's portrayal of "The (foreign) Governor of Ohio."**<sup>96</sup>

On the other side of the campaign, the Democratic strategy seemed to be more diffuse, or less focused, depending on one's perspective. Their state convention opened on 17 June. William Allen was quickly nominated to run for a second term. At that time in Ohio politics, candidates for the lieutenant governor position were elected separately from the governor's and the convention gave clear indication of its primary political concern by nominating Samuel F. Cary of Cincinnati. Cary was a former congressman and a leading proponent of greenbacks. In 1876 Cary would run for national office as the vice presidential nominee on the inflationist Greenback Party ticket with Peter Cooper.

The convention also fashioned a platform of fourteen planks, most of which were critical of current Republican practices. The first twelve planks focused on national issues and give some insight into Democratic concerns for the national election coming a year later. The second plank called for an end to Reconstruction while planks four through seven addressed some of situation then current in the Grant Administration (reforms, reduction of opportunities for corruption, etc.). Planks eight through eleven called for an overhaul of federal fiscal policy including the reversal of contraction and eliminating the requirement for payment *in specie*.<sup>97</sup>

The thirteenth plank addressed the issue of the Geghan Bill and shared many similarities with the Republican platform by reaffirming the Democrats' support for separation of church and state as well as their opposition to any division of the school fund. Any similarity between the two parties' positions ended with the plank's denunciation of the Republican platform as "an insult to the intelligence of the people of Ohio, and a base appeal to sectarian prejudices."<sup>98</sup>

In many ways, the thirteenth plank of the 1875 Ohio Democratic platform would seem to characterize the party's campaign that year; more for its methodology than content. The schools issue would be significant for both sides of the election, but the plank's tone of reaction to opposing opinions seems to be the most common characteristic of the Allen campaign. Governor Allen himself chose to focus primarily on the money issue and but also drew attention to the general corruption of the government that he then blamed on the Republican Party.<sup>99</sup>

Two weeks after the Republican Oliver P. Morton visited Ohio to campaign for Hayes, the Democrats brought in Indiana's other senator who happened to be from their own party, Joseph E. McDonald. While Morton followed the Republican pattern of

concentrating mostly on currency McDonald focused primarily on refuting Morton.

Although this meant that both men talked largely about the issues, the Democrat did differ slightly by addressing the schools issue. There, too, he preferred to react to the Republicans (accusing them of resurrecting Know-Nothingism) rather just explaining his party's own position.<sup>100</sup>

Ohio's own Democratic senator, Allen G. Thurman, was Governor Allen's nephew and spoke on his uncle's behalf in Mansfield on the same day that former governor Hayes was beginning his own campaign in Marion. Again, while both men talked mostly about money, the Senator also managed to talk about Republican abuses in Reconstruction state governments, corruption in the Grant administration and the revival, again, of Know-Nothingism.

Away from the stump, the Democrats seem to have emulated their opponents by publishing literature devoted to the Geghan Bill. Though nothing is certain about who actually produced the document, the Library of Congress contains a broadside which seems to have been published in Ohio during the campaign. The front consists of quotations from the Ohio state constitution, the actual text of the Geghan Bill the thirteenth plank of the Ohio 1875 platform. The back side explains the bill and condemns the Republicans for trying to restrict religious liberty.<sup>101</sup>

The various Democratic newspapers picked up on the same themes as the actual campaigners. Through most of June the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* accused the Republicans of reviving Know-Nothingism and even published an anonymous letter claiming that a secret anti-Catholic Republican organization had been meeting every Monday at the Knights of Pythias lodge in Cleveland.<sup>102</sup> Edwin Cowles responded in the *Leader* by offering \$500 for the *Plain Dealer* to substantiate its claims with proof.<sup>103</sup> The *Plain Dealer* responded by

implying that it had no evidence as of yet but was confident that the truth would come out before the elections.<sup>104</sup>

Across the state, the *Cincinnati Daily Enquirer* found itself in the middle of the controversy surrounding the Geghan Bill. On one side, the Democratic paper supported the new law as an exercise of the religious freedom guaranteed by the First Amendment. On the other side, the editors were forced to disassociate the party from the immoderate claims of John J. Geghan himself and of Edward Purcell, editor of the *Catholic Telegraph*.

The *Enquirer's* cause was not helped when the Most Rev. Bernard McQuaid, the Catholic Bishop of Rochester, NY came to Cincinnati to address the Catholic benevolent associations just a month before the Democratic state convention. McQuaid had been a tireless builder of parochial schools and, over the last few years, had established a national reputation as an advocate for sharing public education funds.<sup>105</sup> True to form, the bishop made his case again and included an exhortation for Catholics to rise up and carry the issue to the ballot box to make known the will of the people. In reporting this event, the *Enquirer* was careful to report the bishop's speech in respectful and objective manner.<sup>106</sup> In the same issue, however, Washington McLean published a short editorial gently admonishing Catholics that the current system was best and that one of its benefits was allowing them to operate their own schools independently of the system.<sup>107</sup> McQuaid's presence in Cincinnati at this time may be the best evidence of Archbishop Purcell's participation in the Geghan controversy. It is protocol in the Catholic Church that one bishop does not make a public appearance in another diocese without that bishop's permission, if not invitation.

One of the more interesting developments of the campaign was how the editors of the *Enquirer* tried to distance John Geghan from the Democratic Party. For most of his term in office, the paper portrayed the legislator in a positive light. This held true even as late as

the June convention when the *Enquirer* reported that “the gorgeous Geghan [a regular nickname the paper used] is in Columbus asking to be put on the Committee on Resolutions.”<sup>108</sup>

By the end of the summer, however, the editors had decided that they had seen enough of the former tobacconist. Something seems to have happened at the Republican convention in Hamilton County in late August because it was after that that the *Enquirer* suddenly withdrew any support for Geghan. McLean announced that the Republicans were trying to have Geghan nominated for reelection to use it as proof of the Catholic-Democratic alliance.<sup>109</sup> When he actually was nominated, the editors called it “a serious and lamentable blunder” and made it the “duty of every man who loves the Democratic party to put the seal upon him at the polls.”<sup>110</sup> After that, the paper had nothing good to say about Geghan again. The *Enquirer* accused him of having become a Democrat just for the election of 1873<sup>111</sup> and, in an attempt to turn the rhetorical tables, interpreted his second nomination as proof that it was the Republicans who were consorting in unholy alliance with the Catholic Church.<sup>112</sup> When that tack didn’t work, the editors began to publish that Geghan was actually not a Catholic and that, if he died, could not be buried in consecrated ground.<sup>113</sup> When Father Purcell of the *Catholic Telegraph* demanded a public apology from the *Enquirer* for its treatment of Geghan, McLean responded with a blistering indictment of the legislator as a “narrow-minded, bigoted zealot, an idiotic or insane enemy of his Church and of the party...” and told Purcell that if “the Roman Catholic voters believe that they can find sweeter waters and better pastures and more comfort and liberty in the Republican party, of course they will vote the Republican ticket.”<sup>114</sup> Clearly, tempers were frayed as Democratic newspapers threw Geghan under the wheels.

October 12th, Election Day, finally arrived and brought with it beautiful weather and a large turn-out of voters.<sup>115</sup> When the polls closed, Rutherford Birchard Hayes had won an unprecedented third term as Governor of Ohio and was poised to make his run for the White House a year later. The “Foghorn”, William Allen, as well as John J. Geghan went down to defeat and both left electoral politics behind forever.



**Fig. 6: Thomas Nast celebrates the Democratic defeat in Ohio.<sup>116</sup>**

Democrats at the national level had mentioned William Allen, if he managed to win reelection as a potential candidate for the upcoming presidential race. How likely, or practical, such a nomination would have been is questionable considering that Allen would have been 73 years old in 1876. In any event, after losing the election of 1875, the old Democrat returned to his farm in Chillicothe where he would die four years later.<sup>117</sup> Today, his image is one of the two statues representing the State of Ohio in Statuary Hall at the U.S. Capitol Building.



John J. Geghan dropped out of the public eye for a while, only to emerge as a Republican again in 1884 when he was elected as Secretary of the Committee on Permanent Organization of the Irish-American Republican League, which apparently had developed to support James Blaine's presidential campaign.<sup>118</sup> Two years later, Geghan received an appointment as one of two assistant dairy commissioners in Ohio. His selection, by Governor Joseph B. Foraker, was greeted less than enthusiastically by the farming community. In its announcement of the two new officials, *The Ohio Farmer* wrote: "We know nothing of St. Geghan's qualifications for the position, but we do know he is a politician, and particularly obnoxious to the Democratic party."<sup>119</sup> After this curt dismissal, the article waxed eloquent about the other newly appointed commissioner, a farmer from Ashtabula County, describing his many qualifications and twenty years of experience in dairy work.

The details of John Geghan's later life are somewhat murky and the two sources available disagree on particular dates involved. The sources do, however, agree on several facts. In 1887 the former legislator relocated to Wood County where he helped to organize the North Baltimore Bottle Glass Company. After five years as secretary of the company he parted ways with the company and began to speculate in other area businesses before disappearing into the mists of history sometime in 1897.<sup>120</sup>

The fateful Geghan Bill itself did not long survive the installation of the new legislature. On 22 January 1876, the General Assembly voted to repeal the law. When Democrats tried to motion for reconsideration but it was easily voted down by the Republican majority that had just been installed.<sup>121</sup> A week later, the state senate followed suit and the Geghan Bill became a thing of the past.<sup>122</sup> Commenting on the repeal, the *Plain Dealer* twitted a state senator from Cuyahoga County (who happened to be a physician) by

noting that: “After the bill repealing the Geghan law passes the Senate, [Julius C.] Schenck will drop his title – ‘chiropodist.’ The Pope’s toe will require no more attention at his hands.”<sup>123</sup> As the comment so cleverly put it, the bill was dead and would soon fade into relative obscurity. The parochial schools issue, however, would live to fight another day...in fact, several days.

### **Taxation of Parochial School Property:**

The third and final controversy involving parochial and public schools shares some general similarities with the first two but was longer-lasting and involved two different branches of government. Like the Bible War, the taxation controversy was ultimately resolved by the courts. Like the Geghan Bill, the taxation issue involved the state legislature and so reached beyond Cincinnati. Unlike the other two, however, the attempt to tax parochial school property represented an attempt by Republicans in the government to launch a counterattack against what they saw the Catholic Church making progress in the American education system.

In 1873 a pair of Republican officials Walker M. Yeatman, county auditor, and John Gerke, county treasurer officially placed the parochial schools of Cincinnati on the Hamilton County tax rolls. Thirty-five schools were included on their list of delinquents and forfeitures. Archbishop Purcell, through his attorneys requested an injunction against collection of the taxes and this was granted in short order,<sup>124</sup> thus beginning a legal battle that would set an important legal precedent still being cited as tax law today.<sup>125</sup>

In the case that ensued, the attorneys representing Hamilton County argued that parochial school property was taxable because it did not fit into any of the categories specified for exemption in the tax code. Exemptions for schools used the adjectives

“public” and “common” obviously referring to schools funded by tax revenues. As property of the archdiocese, the parochial schools were privately owned and since they were not open to everyone they weren’t common either. As a result, buildings used in Catholic education did not qualify for exemption as schools and, since they weren’t used for worship they did not merit the exemption for churches either. The attorneys asserted that, while Catholics certainly had a right to build their own schools, they could not expect them to be tax-exempt.<sup>126</sup>

Archbishop Purcell’s attorneys built their case on the interpretation of the word “public,” arguing that the tax codes used the word in the same spirit when referring to “public worship” and “public charity.” Thus, when talking about a “public school” the codes meant those schools available for public use. In addition, the idea of public ownership, as presented by the county’s lawyers, was a misnomer. All school buildings were owned by some entity, not the public as a whole, so the private ownership of parochial school buildings was not relevant to the current case.<sup>127</sup>

The case was tried in the Superior Court of Cincinnati where a panel of three judges did not find either argument particularly compelling. In June of 1873, the judges decided that parochial schools were indeed exempt from taxation but did not base their decision on any interpretation of the word “public.” Instead, the judge ruled that, since they benefited the general welfare through education and were not intended to earn a profit, parochial schools constituted a public charity and, as such, were tax exempt. Purcell’s temporary injunction was made permanent and thus a legal precedent was established.<sup>128</sup>

Even as the courts were interpreting the law to establish that parochial schools were exempt from taxation, Ohio politicians went to work changing that law to remove the exemption. James Garfield, a long-time Ohio congressman and eventual (though short-

lived) president of the United States, favored taxation of all religious institutions. Soon after the decision was handed down in *Gerke v. Purcell* Garfield addressed the issue on the floor of the US House of Representatives stating that:

The divorce between Church and State ought to be absolute. It ought to be so absolute that no Church property anywhere, in any state or in the nation, should be exempt from equal taxation; for if you exempt the property of any church organization, to that extent you impose a tax upon the whole community.<sup>129</sup>

During the 1875 gubernatorial race, when he was campaigning for Rutherford B. Hayes, the congressman spoke to a crowd in Warren, Ohio. While the Republican platform pledged to defend public funds from sectarian schools, Garfield took the offensive and urged that such schools be taxed themselves.<sup>130</sup>

Garfield's views on church taxation made their way into Ohio state politics even as the legislature began the process of repealing the Geghan Bill. In January 1876, the Sixty-Second General Assembly of Ohio met for the first time. Senator Andrew Burns of Richland County initiated proceedings to repeal HB 615 (aka the Geghan Bill). That same day in the House, Cuyahoga County legislator Orlando J. Hodge introduced a bill to allow the taxation of church property.<sup>131</sup> Hodge was a Republican who had long been active in local Cleveland politics before being elected to the state legislature in 1873. Before beginning his political career, Hodge had been a classmate of James Garfield's at the Geauga Seminary, known today as Hiram College.<sup>132</sup>

Though this attempt at taxation died with little notice, it does bear closer examination to see what the larger implications might be. At face value the bill seemed to be ecumenical in its scope, taxing all religious congregations, but those who spoke out in favor of it certainly offered more specific targets. A few weeks after the bill was introduced a

Unitarian minister in Cleveland, the Rev. T. B. Forbush, addressed the topic in a sermon. Taking as his text a passage from the biblical Book of Proverbs,<sup>133</sup> Rev. Forbush addressed the problem of rapidly growing “ecclesiastical corporations” which aggregate valuable property without any responsibility for taxes. While conceding this problem was not as bad in America as in other parts of the world, the minister worried that “the State is nourishing in its bosom an evil which will inevitably cause it much trouble and bitter repentance hereafter.”<sup>134</sup> Later on in his sermon Rev. Forbush became more specific and pointed to the Catholic Church as being particularly abusive of tax exemption, with each bishop grabbing quantities of property far in excess of what any Protestant denomination might need. He concluded the sermon by exhorting his congregation:

Let us demand that the State cease to aid by exemption in the building up of a mighty and dangerous ecclesiastical power. Let us demand that the hard working citizen shall not be forced to pay the taxes of the rich religious corporation. Let us have done with this indirect union of church and state. Let us insist that all who enjoy public protection shall share in the public expense, and let us commit the great State of Ohio, heartily and unreservedly to the truly Republican principle of equal taxation and no exemption.<sup>135</sup>

Orlando Hodge has his own opportunity to promote the bill when it was discussed on the floor of the Ohio House of Representatives in March. He stated that the State of Ohio was, through tax exemption, contributing \$750,000 to its churches each year. While these churches accumulated vast estates tax free, poor men were losing their meager properties to the sheriff’s sale for non-payment of taxes. Like Rev. Forbush, Representative Hodge grew more specific as he warmed to his subject, complaining of the vast holdings being assembled by the Catholic bishops of Cleveland and Cincinnati. Furthermore, he

complained that “the Atheists, the Deists, the Jesuits, the Buddhists, the Jacobites, the Mohammedans, the Jumpers, the Dancers, the Libertines, and all other so-called religious sects” enjoyed the privileges of tax exemption out of proportion to what they contributed to the general welfare.<sup>136</sup> Though the legislator cast a wider net than did the minister, he nonetheless targeted groups that were outside the mainstream of Protestantism. The Jesuits, of course, constituted a miniscule part of Catholicism as a whole but were often targeted as the driving force of the Church.

Edwin Cowles of the Cleveland *Leader* also weighed in on the issue with accolades for Hodge and belittling those who opposed him. While conceding that the proposal was an unusual one, the editor also recognized its merit. Though he didn’t actually mention the Catholic Church, Cowles pointed to the Spain, Mexico and Italy (all Catholic nations) as examples of the problem that Hodge’s proposal was trying to forestall.<sup>137</sup> The editor also mentioned that Hodge did not hope to pass such radical bill in one session but only wanted to begin a discussion that might eventually move the legislative body in the right direction.<sup>138</sup>

While Republican forces in Columbus were working to repeal the Geghan Bill and to consider changing the law to allow taxation of Church property, party forces at the local level decided to test the legal possibilities again of taxing parochial school property. L. D. Benedict and Frederick W. Pelton were both Republicans and, respectively, the auditor and treasurer of Cuyahoga County. In 1875 they had sent Richard Gilmour, the Catholic Bishop of Cleveland a tax bill in the amount of \$3,930 assessed against the parochial schools in the county. When Gilmour refused to pay, Benedict listed the properties as delinquent and offered them for public sale.<sup>139</sup> In January of 1876 the bishop took legal action, asking the Court of Common Pleas for an injunction against the assessment. The bishop’s lawyers, Stevenson Burke and William B. Sanders, argued the schools were exempt because they were

used for charitable purpose of providing a free education to any youth of the city who saw fit to attend.<sup>140</sup>

Richard Gilmour became the Bishop of Cleveland in 1872. Scottish-born and a convert from Presbyterianism, he had been ordained to the priesthood in 1853 and served in parishes across Ohio until his episcopal appointment. In many ways Gilmour seems to have assumed the mantle of leadership in the promotion of Catholic schools in Ohio during the 1870s. As mentioned in the last chapter, when Archbishop Purcell suggested that priests withhold the sacraments from parents who refused to send their children to Catholic schools, Gilmour went a step further and instructed the priests of his diocese to do so. The bishop also published a widely-used series of primers designed to be the Catholic alternative to the McGuffey series.<sup>141</sup> While the aging archbishop was occupied with other issues during this decade, Gilmour would take up the fight for parochial schools.

In the legal battle precipitated by Gilmour's petition, attorneys for the county had to mount an argument for taxation that superceded the decision made in *Gerke v. Purcell* which had been confirmed by the Ohio Supreme Court only a year earlier. Samuel E. Williamson and Jonathan E. Ingersoll represented the county and argued that parochial schools were *not*, in fact, a public charity because they were operated in a spirit of hostility toward the public schools of the state. Furthermore, they were intended to prevent Catholic children from being exposed to the spirit of toleration which the state's constitution had intended to establish. Therefore, because they were designed to strengthen the Catholic Church in "open antagonism" to the public policy of the state of Ohio, parochial schools did not merit designation as public charities.<sup>142</sup>

At a hearing held in July of 1876, Bishop Gilmour and several priests of the diocese were called to the stand and questioned by Williamson and Ingersoll who raised as proof of

compulsory attendance the bishop's instruction to his priests to deny the sacraments to any parent who refused to send their children to parochial school.<sup>143</sup> The judge hearing the case, a J. Jones, eventually ruled that there was no substantive difference between the current case and that of *Gerke v. Purcell*. In light of that, Gilmour's injunction was made permanent thus reaffirming the tax-exempt status of the parochial schools.<sup>144</sup>

Once the decision was handed down, Pelton and Benedict immediately made an appeal to the district court and, in the meantime, demanded an interim payment from the diocese in the event that the appeal overturned Jones' decision. Gilmour refused to make the interim payment and turned to Auditor of State James Williams for help. Williams, though he was a Republican, was surprised that Pelton and Benedict were being so insistent in light of *Gerke v. Purcell* and assured the bishop that he would not be liable for any such taxes until a court ruled to that effect. In 1880 a panel of three judges upheld the original decision by Jones and, three years after that, the Supreme Court of Ohio did the same.<sup>145</sup> The resolution of this case ended the last attempt to tax parochial schools in Ohio.

### **Conclusion:**

When compared to the antebellum era, the events of the 1870s highlight several new developments in the saga of the ongoing relationship between public and parochial schools in Ohio. The most notable of these is the relative passivity of Archbishop John Purcell. Although he played a small role in the Bible war, the Geghan controversy and the lawsuits, he was by no means in the thick of the fray as he had been before the Civil War. In all three issues his role was peripheral at best and he did nothing to initiate events. In the case of the Bible war Purcell effectively ended his role when he listed his conditions for consolidation. He had had nothing to do with Samuel Miller's initiative and wasn't even on the continent



when the issue reached its peak of controversy. Similarly, the John Geghan's controversy did not elicit much action from the archbishop. While Edward Purcell fought the good fight on the pages of the *Telegraph*, his brother maintained a steady silence about the whole proceedings. As mentioned earlier, Bishop McQuaid's appearance in the diocese to advocate state support for parochial schools would have required at least the tacit permission of the local archbishop, but this is the only indication that John Purcell played any role at all. Finally, regarding the taxation of Church property, the archbishop did what was necessary to protect the assets of his diocese but did nothing to engage the issue in the larger arena of public opinion where he had fought so many battles before.

Although John Purcell was no longer a young man (he had been born in 1800), indications are that he was still fairly vigorous at least at the beginning of the decade in question. In 1869, as the Bible battle heated up, he was able to travel to Rome and play an active role in the deliberations of the Vatican Council. He may have, however, left a clue as to his disengagement in the letter that he had written about the possibility of consolidating schools. In it he mentioned that he was perfectly satisfied with the parochial school system as it already existed in 1869. It may well be that Archbishop Purcell had resigned himself to the separation of Catholic education that had developed in Cincinnati during his episcopate. Having tried to prevent it in his earlier days, he may have come to the realization that American Catholics had a better chance of preserving their religious tradition if they maintained some distance from the mainstream culture of the United States. It was a decision that his friend John Hughes had reached in New York earlier but, given his long life, Purcell witnessed its steady development.

Related to Purcell's disengagement is a second important development: the emergence of Richard Gilmour, Bishop of Cleveland, as an advocate for parochial schools.

Gilmour was vocal in his support for Catholic education from very early in his career as a bishop. Because of this he began to garner the attention of those who worried about the growing influence of the Catholic Church. Though there is no indication that Orlando Hodge had Gilmour in mind when he proposed the taxation of church property, the fact that both men were from Cuyahoga County would mean that Hodge's experience of Catholicism would have come from Gilmour's diocese.

The nature of Gilmour's education advocacy is also of interest. When Purcell was at a similar stage in his early career as bishop, his interest was in finding ways that religious and secular interests could work together to educate the youth of Cincinnati. Gilmour, on the other hand, devoted his efforts to bolstering the parochial school system alone, through his compelling parents to enroll their children and by authoring textbooks that could be both pedagogically effective and doctrinally safe. It seems clear that Gilmour's efforts represented those of a new generation of bishops which had conceded the impossibility of Catholic/secular cooperation and chose, instead, to devote their energies to the development of a vigorous subculture that merged the best qualities of American culture with the essential characteristics of Catholic faith and practice.

The third and final important trend to emerge from the story of parochial and public education in 1870s Ohio is that of the popular fear of Catholicism on the part of other Americans. In the story of the Bible war, much of the anger generated by attempt to exclude the Bible from the classroom was directed at the Catholic Church, despite that fact that the Church had little or no direct involvement in the attempt. While Samuel Miller's initiative was lumped together with the proposal to consolidate public and parochial school systems, there was no organic connection between the two ideas. When the consolidation idea died a quick death, Miller's proposal took on a controversial life of its own and some of the

accompanying ire was directed at the Catholic Church as one of the “usual suspects” in controversies such as this one. This points to an underlying fear that existed among some Americans about the Catholic Church and what intentions that it might have had for the nation.

The examples of the Geghan controversy and the attempt to tax church property are further evidence of such a fear among Americans. At a time when the administration of President Ulysses Grant, a Republican, was under fire for multiple examples of corruption and malfeasance, this innate fear of the Catholic Church held the promise of offering an issue with enough emotional heat to divert popular attention from the problems of the Party. Add to that the political sort of anti-Catholicism practiced by Republican politicians such as James Garfield, Rutherford B. Hayes and James Blaine and the trend becomes clear. The Geghan Bill and the initiative to tax church property represented opportunities to the Republican Party to garner popular support for an issue that held real political promise at the time. Though it is difficult to measure the real impact of the anti-Geghan strategy in the 1875 Ohio campaign, the fact that similar initiatives appeared quickly thereafter indicates that the Republicans themselves thought that the “anti-Catholic worm” would hook some votes.

By the time that the Ohio Supreme Court had rendered its decision on *Gilmour v. Pelton*, the political value of opposition to the Catholic Church had already been on the wane. In a twist of irony that even Archbishop Purcell could appreciate, it would be an Ohio Republican who, one hundred twenty years later, would set the precedent for diverting state funds to parochial schools.

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- <sup>1</sup> Jay P. Dolan, ed. *The American Catholic Parish, volume II* (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 264.
- <sup>2</sup> Ward M. McAfee, *Race, Religion and Reconstruction: the Public School in the Politics of the 1870s* (Albany, State University of New York Press, 1998), 27.
- <sup>3</sup> Margaret C. DePalma, *Dialogue on the Frontier: Catholic and Protestant Relations, 1793-1883* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2004) 130.
- <sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, 130-131.
- <sup>5</sup> *ibid.*, 132.
- <sup>6</sup> Bernard Mandel, "Religion and the Public Schools of Ohio," *Ohio State Archaeological and Historical Quarterly*, 58 (1949), 191.
- <sup>7</sup> Howard M. Helfman, "The Cincinnati 'Bible War,' 1869-1870," *Ohio State Archaeological and Historical Quarterly*, 60 (1951), 371.
- <sup>8</sup> William Miller, ed. *Trace Fossils: Concepts, Problems, Prospects* (New York: Elsevier, 2007), 27-28.
- <sup>9</sup> DePalma., 132-133.
- <sup>10</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>11</sup> Helfman, 377.
- <sup>12</sup> DePalma, 134.
- <sup>13</sup> *Western Christian Advocate*, 20 October 1869, quoted in Margaret C. DePalma, *Dialogue on the Frontier: Catholic and Protestant Relations, 1793-1883* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2004), 135-136.
- <sup>14</sup> Roger Fortin, *Faith and Action: A History of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati 1821-1996* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2002), 123.
- <sup>15</sup> DePalma, 136.
- <sup>16</sup> McAfee, 30.
- <sup>17</sup> DePalma, 269-270.
- <sup>18</sup> McAfee, 29
- <sup>19</sup> DePalma, 136.
- <sup>20</sup> *ibid.*, 31.
- <sup>21</sup> Editorial, *Catholic Telegraph*, 17 February 1870.
- <sup>22</sup> DePalma, 138.
- <sup>23</sup> *The Bibliographical Encyclopedia of Ohio in the Nineteenth Century* (Cincinnati: Galaxy Publishing Company, 1876), 524.
- <sup>24</sup> *ibid.* The Fenian Brotherhood was an Irish republican organization established in the United States. After the Civil War, a group of Irish-American veterans attempted to invade Canada with the hope of occupying and exchanging it for Irish independence but were quickly defeated through the concerted efforts of the Canadian and American militaries.
- <sup>25</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>26</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>27</sup> Jean H. Baker. "Allen, William," In American National Biography Online [database online] (February 2000 [cited 29 July 2005]); available from: <http://www.anb.org/articles/04/04-00016.html>.
- <sup>28</sup> A group of Republicans, disenchanted with the incompetence and scandal of the Grant administration, broke ranks to support the Greeley-Brown ticket. John J. Geghan may well have been among this group.
- <sup>29</sup> Harold M. Helfman. "Edward F. Noyes," In Ohio Fundamental Documents [database online] (April 1999 [cited 29 July 2005]); available from: <http://www.ohiohistory.org/online/doc/ohgovernment/governors/noyes.html>.
- <sup>30</sup> "Election Results," *The Cincinnati Daily Enquirer*, 21 October 1873, 4.
- <sup>31</sup> *The Cincinnati Daily Enquirer*, 22 October 1873, 4.
- <sup>32</sup> *Biographical Encyclopedia*.
- <sup>33</sup> John Kobler, *Ardent Spirits: The Rise and Fall of Prohibition* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1974), 126.
- <sup>34</sup> "Ohio Legislature," *The Cincinnati Daily Enquirer*, 27 March 1874, 4.
- <sup>35</sup> "The Commerical says.," *The Cincinnati Daily Enquirer*, 28 March 1874, 4.
- <sup>36</sup> "The Gay Geghan," *The Cincinnati Daily Enquirer*, 27 March 1874, 4.
- <sup>37</sup> "The Commercial says,."

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- <sup>38</sup> “Ohio Legislature,” *Cleveland Daily Herald*, 18 February 1875, 1.
- <sup>39</sup> “The Infamous Geghan Law,” *Catholic Universe*, 22 May 1875, 3.
- <sup>40</sup> “Ohio Legislature,” *Cleveland Daily Herald*, 26 March, 1875, 1.
- <sup>41</sup> *Cincinnati Daily Enquirer*, 27 March 1875, 4.
- <sup>42</sup> “Columbus,” *Cincinnati Daily Enquirer*, 30 March 1875, 1.
- <sup>43</sup> “Sectarianism in Prison – Mr. Geghan’s Substitute,” *The Cleveland Leader*, 26 March 1875, 4.
- <sup>44</sup> “The Geghan Iniquity,” *The Cleveland Leader*, 2 April 1875, 4.
- <sup>45</sup> “Since the Geghan Bill has Passed,” *The Cincinnati Daily Enquirer*, 1 April 1875, 4.
- <sup>46</sup> “The Geghan Bill,” *The Catholic Universe*, 6 March 1875, 4.
- <sup>47</sup> “Representative Geghan,” *Catholic Telegraph*, 11 March 1875, 1.
- <sup>48</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>49</sup> “The Removal of a Grievance,” *Catholic Telegraph*, 11 March 1875, 4.
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- <sup>57</sup> See Appendix 1 for a table showing results of the 1870 census listing the total population for each county in Ohio and the total number of Roman Catholic “sittings” (church capacity) by county as well.
- <sup>58</sup> “Judge Taft’s Opinion, Again,” *The Cleveland Leader*, 7 May 1875, 4.
- <sup>59</sup> “Wanted, a Man Without a Record,” *The Cleveland Daily Herald*, 7 May 1875, 4.
- <sup>60</sup> “Our Protestant and ‘Liberal’ Catholic Contemporaries,” *Catholic Telegraph*, 8 April 1875, 4.
- <sup>61</sup> “Cleveland Elections,” *The Catholic Universe*, 10 April 1875, 4.
- <sup>62</sup> *Plain Dealer*, 9 April 1875, 4 and 11 April 1875, 4.
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- <sup>64</sup> Rutherford B. Hayes to W. D. Bickham, 14 April 1875, *Diary and Letters of Rutherford Birchard Hayes*, (Columbus, OH: The Ohio State Archaeological and Historical Society, 1924), 269.
- <sup>65</sup> “Ohio Republicans,” *New York Times*, 2 June 1875, 1.
- <sup>66</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>67</sup> *Diary and Letters of Rutherford Birchard Hayes*, (Columbus, OH: The Ohio State Archaeological and Historical Society, 1924), 269.
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- <sup>69</sup> Samuel DeCanio, “State Autonomy and American Political Development: How Mass Democracy Promoted State Power,” *Studies in American Political Development*, 19 (Fall 2005), 125.
- <sup>70</sup> “Ohio Republicans,” *New York Times*, 2 June 1875.
- <sup>71</sup> *Diary and Letters of Rutherford Birchard Hayes*, 274.
- <sup>72</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>73</sup> Rutherford B. Hayes to Guy M. Bryan, 1 November 1875, *Diary and Letters of Rutherford Birchard Hayes*. [database online] [cited 24 January 2006]; available from: <http://www.ohiohistory.org/online/doc/hayes/Volume03/Chapter32/FREMONTNovember11875.txt>.
- <sup>74</sup> J. Q. Howard, *The Life, Public Services and Select Speeches of Rutherford B. Hayes*. (Cincinnati: Robert Clarke & Co., 1876), 243.
- <sup>75</sup> *ibid.*, 250.
- <sup>76</sup> *ibid.*, 251.
- <sup>77</sup> Notes and Speeches, Rutherford B. Hayes Papers, Rutherford B. Hayes Presidential Center.
- <sup>78</sup> “Sherman,” *Cleveland Daily Herald*, 2 August 1875, 4-5.
- <sup>79</sup> “Morton,” *Cleveland Daily Herald*, 9 August 1875, 2.
- <sup>80</sup> “Garfield,” *Cleveland Daily Herald*, 1 September 1875, 2.
- <sup>81</sup> “Monroe,” *Cleveland Daily Herald*, 9 September 1875, 2.
- <sup>82</sup> For much of the state’s history, the election for lieutenant governor was held separately from the

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- gubernatorial election, so it was not uncommon for the two offices to be held by members of different parties.
- <sup>83</sup> "Hart," *Cleveland Daily Herald*, 17 September 1875, 2.
  - <sup>84</sup> "Taft," *Cleveland Daily Herald*, 10 September 1875, 2.
  - <sup>85</sup> "Taft," *Cleveland Daily Herald*, 24 September 1875, 2.
  - <sup>86</sup> Rutherford B. Hayes to James A. Garfield, 28 June 1875, *Diary and Letters of Rutherford Birchard Hayes*. [database online] [cited 30 January 2006]; available from:  
<http://www.ohiohistory.org/online/doc/hayes/Volume03/Chapter31/FREMONTJune281875.txt>.
  - <sup>87</sup> Rutherford B. Hayes to A. T. Wickoff, 8 July 1875, *Diary and Letters of Rutherford Birchard Hayes*. [database online] [cited 30 January 2006]; available from:  
<http://www.ohiohistory.org/online/doc/hayes/Volume03/Chapter31/FREMONTJuly81875.txt>.
  - <sup>88</sup> Rutherford B. Hayes to A. T. Wickoff, 19 July 1875, *Diary and Letters of Rutherford Birchard Hayes*. [database online] [cited 30 January 2006]; available from:  
<http://www.ohiohistory.org/online/doc/hayes/Volume03/Chapter31/FREMONTJuly191875.txt>.
  - <sup>89</sup> "A Lying Document," *The Cincinnati Daily Enquirer*, 4 August 1875, 4.
  - <sup>90</sup> McAfee, 215.
  - <sup>91</sup> Dolan, 168.
  - <sup>92</sup> Fortin, 120.
  - <sup>93</sup> The Census of 1870 reported 19,934 persons of German birth living in Cuyahoga County, second in the state only to the 55,273 living in Hamilton County.
  - <sup>94</sup> "The Republican Peril," *Cleveland Daily Herald*, 14 August 1875, 4.
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  - <sup>98</sup> *ibid.*
  - <sup>99</sup> "The Ohio Canvass," *Cincinnati Enquirer*, 25 September 1875, 1.
  - <sup>100</sup> "Grand Mass Meeting," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, 23 August 1875, 4.
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  - <sup>104</sup> "The wealth capitalist of the *Leader*," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, 22 June 1875, 1.
  - <sup>105</sup> Dolan, 270-271.
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  - <sup>119</sup> "Governor Foraker has appointed..." *Ohio Farmer*, 12 June 1886, 24.
  - <sup>120</sup> *Commemorative Historical and Biographical Record of Wood County, Ohio; Its Past and Present* (Chicago: J. H. Beers & Co., 1897), 724-725.
  - <sup>121</sup> "Ohio Legislature," *Cleveland Daily Herald*, 22 January 1876, 1.
  - <sup>122</sup> "Ohio Legislature," *Cleveland Daily Herald*, 29 January 1876, 1.

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- <sup>123</sup> “Our Columbus Letter,” *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, 25 January 1876, 4.
- <sup>124</sup> John H. Lamott, *History of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati: 1821-1921* (New York: Frederick Pustet Co., 1921), 279-280.
- <sup>125</sup> Though Archbishop Purcell was the plaintiff and John Gerke the defendant, the case is known as *Gerke v. Purcell*, a misnomer acknowledged in the official description of the case.
- <sup>126</sup> *Gerke v. Purcell*, 25 Ohio State 225 (1874).
- <sup>127</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>128</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>129</sup> Congressional Record, 43<sup>rd</sup> Cong., 1st sess., 1874, 2, pt. 6:5384
- <sup>130</sup> “Garfield,” *Cleveland Daily Herald*, 1 September 1875, 2
- <sup>131</sup> “Ohio Legislature,” *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, 4 January 1876, 2.
- <sup>132</sup> Harriet T. Upton, *History of the Western Reserve* (New York: The Lewis Publishing Company, 1910), 720.
- <sup>133</sup> To do justice and judgment is more acceptable to Jehovah than sacrifice - *Proverbs*, 21:3.
- <sup>134</sup> “Church Taxation,” *Cleveland Leader*, 24 January 1876, 4.
- <sup>135</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>136</sup> Orlando J. Hodge. “Church Taxation” (Speech delivered to the Ohio House of Representatives, 25 March 1876).
- <sup>137</sup> “The question,” *Cleveland Leader*, 4 March 1876, 4.
- <sup>138</sup> “Hodge’s Church Taxation Bill,” *Cleveland Leader*, 4 March 1876, 4.
- <sup>139</sup> Paul Hallinan, *Richard Gilmour, Second Bishop of Cleveland 1872-1892*” (Ph.D. diss., Western Reserve University, 1963), 295.
- <sup>140</sup> *Gilmour v. Pelton*, 5 Ohio Dec. (Rep.) 447.
- <sup>141</sup> “Gilmour, Richard” In The Encyclopedia of Cleveland History [database online] (13 May 1998 [cited 3 March 2009]); available from: <http://ech.case.edu/ech-cgi/article.pl?id=GR1>.
- <sup>142</sup> *Gilmour v. Pelton*.
- <sup>143</sup> Hallinan, 297.
- <sup>144</sup> *Gilmour v. Pelton*.
- <sup>145</sup> Hallinan, 298-299.

## CHAPTER VII

### CONCLUSIONS

The resolution of *Gilmour v. Pelton* signaled the end of a chapter in the twin stories of public and parochial education in Ohio. A wall of separation had effectively been established between the two entities that would last until 1996. With few exceptions, most of which were assiduously contested, public funding for education was reserved for the public schools of the State of Ohio. Parochial schools, for their part, have enjoyed tax exemption based on the precedent established by *Purcell v. Gerke*. In 1996 the Republican Governor of Ohio, George Voinovich established the Cleveland Scholarship and Tutoring Program which allowed selected parents to use tax dollars to pay for their childrens' tuition at private schools, including those run by the Catholic Church. A subsequent court case made its way to the US Supreme Court, which ruled in *Zelman v. Simmons-Harris* that the Cleveland program did not violate the wall of separation because state funds were given to parents, who chose to direct them to parochial schools, rather than to sectarian schools themselves. In a bit of historical irony, a Republican governor of Ohio managed to accomplish exactly what his forbears a century earlier had fought so vociferously against. That, however, is a story beyond the scope of the present narrative.



### **The last years of Archbishop Purcell:**

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Archbishop John Purcell did not live to see the ultimate resolution of *Gilmour v. Pelton*. He died in 1883 under a cloud of financial scandal that embarrassed him and left him vulnerable to the taunts of his critics. Soon after the onset of the Panic of 1837, young Bishop Purcell had allowed some members of the diocese to deposit their savings with him, in effect establishing a diocesan bank. When Edward Purcell was ordained to the priesthood in 1838, his brother turned over to him responsibility for the bank. Over the years the bank continued to grow. When several local banks failed in 1842, more members of the diocese deposited funds with Edward Purcell. The deposits helped the bishop to fund construction of the Cathedral of Saint Peter in Chains and the 4-6% interest rate offered to investors was competitive with other local banks.<sup>1</sup> This informal banking operation continued for over forty years until events connected with a local financial panic in 1878 produced a run on the Purcell bank that left it penniless. The failure left Edward Purcell over \$100,000 in debt and his brother appealing to Rome for help. Worn with age and mortified by his financial problems, Archbishop Purcell also tendered his resignation as head of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati. Various members of the Catholic laity raised money to help the Purcells but their efforts produced only about \$40,000 to repay debts that eventually surpassed \$3,000,000. To make matters worse, diocesan trustees who attempted to audit the bank discovered that Edward Purcell's records consisted merely of an unbound stack papers and notes. Creditors assailed the archbishop's residence demanding restitution. Local priests argued among themselves as to whether the diocese was at fault or was the failure Edward's personal responsibility alone. John Purcell's fellow bishops were sympathetic but did not see his plight as their problem.<sup>2</sup>

When a response from Rome finally came, the embattled archbishop found himself in an even worse predicament. Pope Leo XIII had refused to accept Purcell's resignation. Instead the pope appointed a coadjutor bishop, Bishop William Henry Elder of Natchez, who would actually direct the affairs of the archdiocese while Purcell retained the title only. As it turns out, Elder was not the pope's first choice. Two other bishops turned down the appointment because they didn't want to inherit Purcell's fiasco. As the archbishop watched another man take his place the financial scandal continued to escalate. After a number of creditors filed suit the courts appointed attorney J. B. Mannix, a Catholic, to handle Purcell's financial affairs. When Mannix filed a petition asking permission to sell 211 diocesan churches, schools, convents and orphanages to liquidate the debt, the priests of the archdiocese retained their own set of lawyers to fight the petition.<sup>3</sup> This would be another lawsuit that Purcell would not outlive.

Archbishop John Baptist Purcell died on July 4, 1883. He had led the Roman Catholic Church of Cincinnati for almost fifty years. In that time he had seen Catholicism in Ohio grown from 16 parishes to 462, from four parochial schools to 244, and from approximately 35,000 Catholics to over 281,000.<sup>4</sup> At one point in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the two largest school systems in the State of Ohio could trace their roots back to those parochial schools that he had worked so assiduously to develop. His legacy is one that shapes the Buckeye State to this day.

### **The lessons of history:**

In many ways, the story of the uneasy relationship between public and parochial schools in 19<sup>th</sup> century reflects the essential paradox of religious liberty in America. When the United States was established one of the more revolutionary elements of the new nation

was the First Amendment permitting the free exercise of religion. While its intent was liberal, the actual effect of religious liberty was to let into America many Old World values that, in other circumstances, had to be left at the door. Although it was not unique in this regard, Catholicism is a good example of religion as a carrier of old values to the New World. To a nation that professed to be egalitarian the Catholic Church brought a sense of classism. The Church believed that there were those who would go to heaven (observant Catholics) and all others who would not, though some of those could be saved through conversion. To a nation that proclaimed that all people are entitled to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness the Catholic Church brought the dictum of St. Thomas Aquinas that “error has no rights.” To the first modern republic the Church brought a system of government that fell just short of being an absolute monarchy.

The contradiction in values that Catholicism brought to the United States was exacerbated by the sheer number of Catholics coming to this country in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Though the lurid pictures of “papists” drawn by the likes of Lyman Beecher and Edwin Cowles contained more salacity than substance, they were right in recognizing that Catholicism was something “other” as defined by Jenny Franchot.

Progressive Catholics like John Carroll and the young John Purcell recognized the complexity of the Catholic tradition and understood that it was a combination of the sacred and secular, the religious and political. Carroll and the young Purcell could recognize that the line between those who were saved and those who were not was not so clearly delineated as many traditionalists might believe. As republicans, Carroll and the young Purcell could believe that error has no rights but that people in error do. Finally, while recognizing the hierarchical nature of authority in the Church, both Carroll and Purcell tried to exercise leadership in a collegial manner, at least at the beginning of their respective administrations.

In other words, both men believed that enough of the Old World values extant in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Church could be stripped away to fit comfortably in the American milieu without losing any of the essential identity of Catholicism. Unfortunately, as they encountered resistance from other Americans both men fell back into a more traditional and authoritarian style of leadership that accepted Catholic “otherness” and even made it a virtue.

Though the American style of democracy and the European model of Catholicism were diametrically opposed in many ways, there was one point on which both were in complete agreement and this, ironically enough, provided the locus for most of their conflict. Both entities recognized the importance of education as a means of perpetuating the values of their respective institutions and so, as each worked to make such education possible, the parallel development of public and parochial schools provided the most frequent point of contact at which the clash of values could (and did ) occur.

The ongoing conflict between public and parochial education that unfolded during Archbishop Purcell’s career in Cincinnati also established a sort of equilibrium between the two sides. The archbishop’s prewar career was characterized by his attempts to find an acceptable place for Catholic students within the system of American education. In his first years at Cincinnati, Purcell tried cooperation as a means of finding a place for his students. When that failed, the prelate resorted to complaint and, later, political action like his colleague in New York City. Unlike John Hughes, however, John Purcell did not have the energy or the constituency to have much effect at the ballot box. By the end of the war, the Archbishop of Cincinnati seems to have concluded that proper education for Catholic students could only happen without state support and directed his flock toward the parochial school system that had been developing over the years. Purcell’s initial openness to and then his quick dismissal of the possibility of a merger in 1869 is evidence that he might still have

accepted state support if offered but recognized the futility of anything at all to make it happen.

On the other hand, the efforts of John Gerke, Orlando Hodge and Frederick Pelton to limit what they characterized as the growing influence of the Catholic Church indicate a push in the other direction. While Purcell had worked to gain state support to cultivate Catholicism, postwar Ohio Republicans tried to use the power of the state to limit the growth of the Church. Both sides draped their efforts in the banner of religious freedom and, despite the patriotic garb, neither side achieved success. Just as John Purcell could not move the people of Ohio to support Catholic schools, Ohio Republicans could not get the legislature or judiciary to remove from those same institutions any tacit support from the government that was rendered in the form of tax exemptions. The parallel development of public and parochial schools in Ohio from 1830 to 1880 seems to have developed a natural equilibrium that neither side could upset.

Another interesting development that characterizes the Purcell era in Ohio is the evolution of anti-Catholic resistance. While such resistance existed before and after the Civil War, its essential nature had changed. Before the Civil War, anti-Catholicism seemed to be much more of a popular pursuit. Part of this was probably due to the nature of those who led the movement. The most vocal antebellum opponents of the Catholic Church were ministers like Lyman Beecher and Alexander Campbell, men who made their living by moving others to follow their (the ministers') view of reality. The debate between Campbell and Purcell was not only a theological exchange, it was a spectacle designed to draw crowds to one of the largest churches in the city. In fighting what he perceived to be anti-Catholicism, Purcell also appealed to the masses in his pastoral letter of 1853 when he alluded to the power of the Catholic vote. Both sides appealed to popular action which

sometimes led to violence, such as in Charlestown, New York and Philadelphia. Aside from the 1850 attack on the Catholic school in Chillicothe, Ohio did not experience any violence related to sectarian education but the public was certainly involved in the ongoing contest between Catholics and their opponents.

Once the Civil War had passed the Catholic Church still encountered considerable resistance in the United States but the nature of that resistance had changed. While there was still much popular prejudice and anti-Catholicism remained common among Protestant ministers, the mantle of leadership in the fight against the Church seems to have passed to political professionals. While preachers like Thomas Vickers in Cincinnati and T. B. Forbush in Cleveland continued to thunder against the expanding influence of the Catholic Church, it was politicians like Orlando Hodge and Frederick Pelton who represented the greater threat to Catholicism. Though using politics to fight the Church was nothing new, this new generation of opponents focused less on popular politics than political processes to make their mark. While both Hodge and Pelton had to appeal to the masses to get elected and part of their appeal was the anti-Catholic stance, once elected both men used the power of their respective offices to work against the Church. Hodge sponsored in the Ohio legislature a bill to tax church property while Pelton challenged the legal precedent set by *Purcell v. Gerke* to exempt parochial schools from taxation. While neither attempt was successful, together they represent a new stage in the struggle, an attempt to use the system itself to make American society less hospitable to the Catholic Church rather than merely appealing to the masses.

While the nature of resistance to Catholicism seemed to evolve in one direction over the five decades of Purcell's career in Cincinnati, the archbishop himself seemed to move in an opposite track. At the beginning of his time in Cincinnati the newly ordained bishop

made an effort to be part of the group established to direct the growth of common education in the city even though such an effort required him to interact amicably with others who made no secret of their antipathy toward the Catholic Church. When this tack did not bear fruit, Purcell grew steadily more insular in his approach and took his flock in the same direction. During the archbishop's administration his diocese successfully established a system of churches (with their associated devotional and leisure activities), schools, charities, and even the ill-fated bank that allowed Catholics to have an existence that was largely separate from that of the rest of American society. Though the barriers encouraging such isolation were already in the process of breaking down when he died, Purcell's administration did much to make a ghetto of Catholic life in Ohio during that century and beyond.

By the time that he died, John Purcell was something of a dinosaur among the Catholic bishops of the United States. He had come to Cincinnati at a time when a majority of new bishops were Irish-born, immigrants bringing an ancient faith to new nation. When he died, John Purcell was a relic of a bygone time. While the new generation of bishops still had Irish surnames like Gibbons, McCloskey, Ireland and O'Connell, they had been born in the United States and, though they didn't share the same politics or ecclesiology, they understood the value of working within the "system." That, however, must be a topic for another paper.

On 15 March 2009, Bishop Richard Lennon of Cleveland announced the closure of Saint Peter's Church located at Superior Avenue and 17<sup>th</sup> Street. The parish had been established in 1851 for a community of German immigrants. The founding pastor was Rev. John Luhr, himself a German immigrant who had been sent by Archbishop Purcell to establish the new parish. As the archbishop would have wished, Father Luhr immediately

built a combined church and school to be followed by more permanent structures within a few years. The current Saint Peter's Church has served the congregation since 1859. In many ways the parish reflects the evolution of the Catholic Church in Ohio since the days of Archbishop Purcell. The descendants of the German founders have assimilated and moved to the suburbs. The elementary school closed in the 1960s while the high school was continued until 1971 when it merged with two other parish high schools to form Erievue which lasted another twenty years until it, too, closed its doors. The congregation that gathers at Saint Peter's today is neither united by ethnicity, nor by the geographic boundaries that delineated the Catholic parishes of the past. The people who gather at Saint Peter's each Sunday, in the shadow of Cleveland State University, come for the same reason that brought the young John Purcell to Ohio in 1833. They perpetuate the ancient tradition of the Catholic Church, negotiating its byzantine mélange of the sacred and profane, in a culture whose very secularity both challenges and nourishes any religious tradition. While John Purcell would not condone the parish's decision to contest the bishop's order, he might appreciate that the community is following in his footsteps and fighting to assure the survival of the Church in Ohio for future generations.



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- <sup>1</sup> Roger Fortin, *Faith and Action: A History of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati 1821-1996* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2002), 60-64.
- <sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, 152-154.
- <sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, 155-156.
- <sup>4</sup> Jay P. Dolan, ed. *The American Catholic Parish, Volume II* (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 382-383.

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## **APPENDIX**

## APPENDIX A

US Census: Ohio in 1870		
County	TOTAL POPULATION	ROMAN CATHOLIC SITTINGS
ADAMS	20,750	0
ALLEN	23,623	1,200
ASHLAND	21,933	0
ASHTABULA	32,517	500
ATHENS	23,768	600
AUGLAIZE	20,041	2,800
BELMONT	39,714	500
BROWN	30,802	3,000
BUTLER	39,912	3,000
CARROLL	14,491	800
CHAMPAIGN	24,188	800
CLARK	32,070	900
CLERMONT	34,268	1,800
CLINTON	21,914	300
COLUMBIANA	38,299	1,000
COSHOCTON	23,600	2,000
CRAWFORD	25,556	2,500
CUYAHOGA	132,010	8,400
DARKE	32,278	1,700
DEFIANCE	15,719	600
DELAWARE	25,175	1,200
ERIE	28,188	1,600
FAIRFIELD	31,138	1,500
FAYETTE	17,170	300
FRANKLIN	63,019	3,000
FULTON	17,789	600
GALLIA	25,545	400
GEAUGA	14,190	0
GREENE	28,038	1,500
GUERNSEY	23,838	500
HAMILTON	260,370	40,800
HANCOCK	23,847	500
HARDIN	18,714	400
HARRISON	18,682	0
HENRY	14,028	400
HIGHLAND	29,133	800
HOCKING	17,925	1,000
HOLMES	18,177	800
HURON	28,532	2,000
JACKSON	21,759	0
JEFFERSON	29,188	800
KNOX	26,333	1,100

LAKE	15,935	1,200
LAWRENCE	31,380	1,100
LICKING	35,756	600
LOGAN	23,028	1,100
LORAIN	30,308	2,000
LUCAS	46,722	4,500
MADISON	15,633	800
MAHONING	31,001	600
MARION	16,184	1,000
MEDINA	20,092	900
MEIGS	31,465	600
MERCER	17,254	6,000
MIAMI	32,740	2,000
MONROE	25,779	600
MONTGOMERY	64,006	3,500
MORGAN	20,363	800
MORROW	18,583	200
MUSKINGUM	44,886	2,500
NOBLE	19,949	700
OTTAWA	13,364	800
PAULDING	8,544	500
PERRY	18,453	4,200
PICKAWAY	24,875	800
PIKE	15,447	500
PORTAGE	24,584	1,000
PREBLE	21,809	500
PUTNAM	17,081	1,500
RICHLAND	32,516	1,600
ROSS	37,097	1,500
SANDUSKY	25,503	3,000
SCIOTO	29,302	2,600
SENECA	30,827	3,500
SHELBY	20,748	2,500
STARK	52,508	5,500
SUMMIT	34,674	1,100
TRUMBULL	38,659	0
TUSCARAWAS	33,840	1,100
UNION	18,730	0
VAN WERT	15,823	300
VINTON	15,027	800
WARREN	26,689	800
WASHINGTON	40,609	1,600
WAYNE	35,116	1,100
WILLIAMS	20,991	600
WOOD	24,596	500
WYANDOT	18,553	500
<b>STATE TOTALS</b>	<b>2,665,260</b>	<b>160,700</b>