

TRUTH, FREEDOM, TRADITION, FRONTIERS:
PRESENTATIONS ON AMERICAN CATHOLIC HISTORY
PART III: THE FAITH AND A RISING AND OPTIMISTIC PEOPLE
THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN AMERICA IN THE EARLY 19TH CENTURY

I. The Catholic Church grew rapidly in early 19th century America, with both natural increase and immigration. The Church began establishing new dioceses, schools, charitable organizations, and missions to the newly acquired lands. The two greatest challenges were dealing with the issue of anti-Catholic prejudice from the outside and the issue of the interaction of the laity and clergy within.

A. With both immigration and natural increase in population, the number of Catholics in America increased from about 100,000 in 1808 to about 300,000 in 1830. With the national population increasing from about 7 million to about 13 million in that time, the Catholic portion of the nation increased from about 1.5% to about 2.3%. Catholics were thus still very much a minority, but an increasing one. During this time, the number of priests increased from 68 to 232.

1. Until 1830, the immigration to the United States was not a large overall factor, with the estimated immigration was about 6000 per year from 1790 to 1830. However, with a substantial number of immigrants coming from Ireland, those numbers did bolster the small Catholic population of this country significantly. According to one estimate, of the about 250,000 people who immigrated to the United States by the 1820s, about 54,000 were Catholic.

2. There could be some tension between the increasingly Irish laity and more French clergy. Thus, in 1830, of the 10 American bishops, six were of French background, and four either Irish born or of Irish ancestry. Even in 1790, Bishop John Carroll wrote a letter, in which he asked immigrants to form “not Irish, nor English, nor French congregations and churches, but American Catholic ones.” In the early 1800s Bishop Carroll opposed the effort to establish specifically German parishes in his diocese, and even the appointment of a bishop for American Germans. On a related front, from about 1808 though the 1810s Father Vincent Harold, O.P. and his uncle Father James Harold made numerous efforts to establish a specifically Irish Catholic Church.

3. Gradually, Americans entered the clergy more, but it was a slow effort. Thus, for example, America’s first seminary St. Mary in Baltimore, was established in 1791. By 1829, there were 52 priests who had graduated from the seminary; of those, 21 of whom were native born, 13 from England or Ireland, and 18 from France or Germany.

4. There were conversions in both directions, with some Indians and a few Protestant Americans coming to the Catholic Church, but also with Catholics joining the more populous Protestant denominations.

B. The expansion of the United States and the frontier spirit led to opportunities for more evangelization, and also some challenges that the sparse population of the new lands presented.

1. The acquisition of the Louisiana Purchase in 1803 opened up new lands for missionary work, as well as expansion of the population. At first, the Vatican appointed the Dominican born and French educated Louis Dubourg as the bishop of the entire area. Needing to staff the missions, he invited many religious orders to send over priests. Some of them were heroic in their efforts, but there were also tensions with the American hierarchy, as exemplified by the Franciscan Antonio Sedella, who was very successful but clashed heavily with the bishops, often insisting on running his missions independently. There were some French settlers already in these lands, but the practice of the faith had declined, in part due to the lack of priests.

2. The establishment of a new diocese in Bardstown, Kentucky (later moved to Knoxville) turned out to be visionary, as that area west of the Appalachians would need a bishop who understood the frontier, and would be present to the people. The first Bishop Joseph Flaget was an exile from the French Revolution. He was reluctant to take over the diocese and almost immediately asked that it be divided, a request that was granted in 1821 with the creation of the Diocese of Cincinnati. This first bishop had few resources; even his residence was a total of 256 square feet. But three years later, in 1811, the seminarians themselves build the first cathedral in what is now the Midwest, which was 65 feet long, the beginnings of great missionary efforts.

3. The more sparsely populated areas were more difficult land for established churches such as the Catholic Church and Episcopalian Churches. Revivalist preachers were more successful.

a. The missionary work did appeal to the heroic spirit that has ever inspired missionaries. One advertisement in France read, "We offer you: No salary; No recompense; No Holidays; No Pension. But: Much Hard Work; a Poor Dwelling; Few Consolations; Many Disappointment; Frequent Sickness; a Violent or Lonely Death; and Unknown Grave."

b. The Catholic missions from Spain and France in these territories tended to allow more independence to the missionaries. This independence allowed for more flexibility; and the fact that religious prejudice was less common on the frontier also helped. But the American bishops sometimes struggled to maintain control of the church in these lands.

c. One notable example of an heroic missionary priest was Demetrius Gallizan, a Russian prince whose father was the Russian Ambassador to the Netherlands. Although he was raised with Enlightenment ideas, he joined the Catholic Church at the age of 17 in 1787. And, on a visit to the United States in 1795, he met Bishop John Carroll and agreed to enter seminary. After ordination, he went to western Pennsylvania, which was then the frontier, where he spent his fortune, and even borrowed money, to help establish settlements. With his generosity, learning and intellect he

helped make the Catholic faith more established in that area and prominent there to this day.

d. The Catholic Church also made some converts among the Indians in these lands. Saint Rose Philippine Duchesne was particularly notable in her mission to the Indians.

4. The acquisition of the new lands, along with the natural American tendency to move around, led to a state in which Catholicism in America was no longer centered on the mid-Atlantic.

II. Although not directly impacting the Catholic Church much, the Second Great Awakening changed the background in which the Catholic Church would grow.

A. From about 1800 to about 1825, there was a great increase in religious fervor in America, with a dramatic increase in church membership, Bible reading, and revivals.

B. The Presbyterian minister James McGready launched the first American camp revival meeting in Gasper River, Kentucky in 1800. With an estimated 10,000 to 20,000 in attendance and a great emotional outpouring, it was the first of a series of camp revivals throughout Kentucky and Tennessee that he and allied ministers would lead over the next few years. These camp meetings would collectively be called the Revival of 1800. This Revival of 1800 was central at the beginning of the Second Great Awakening, and set the precedent for revivals ever since.

C. There was also opposition to this very emotional and decentralized form of Christianity; and in fact James McGready and his allies broke from the overall Presbyterian Church to form their own branch.

D. The most famous preacher of this era was Charles Grandison Finney (1792 - 1875), who was a law clerk before his dramatic conversion in 1822. Although he was a Calvinist Presbyterian at first, he developed a more emotional and enthusiastic style of worship, as well as an affirmation that people could accept or reject the will of God. He emphasized more urban revivals and in fact wrote manuals on how to conduct them. Here as well, there were critics who raised: (1) the theological objection that the revivals emphasized human action too much as opposed to the centrality of the grace of God; and (2) the practical objection that they were too theatric. A Prominent Presbyterian theologian Lyman Beecher (1775 – 1863), who was the father of Harriett Beecher Stowe, at first opposed the revivals but then was more sympathetic to them.

E. The Methodist Church, founded by John and Charles Wesley, also often used intense revivals and the focus on human free will and perfectability. The American branch officially was formed in Baltimore in 1784; John Wesley agreed with the arrangement and appointed Francis Asbury and Charles Coke as the first two American Methodist bishops. The likes of Francis Asbury and later Peter Cartwright would also lead missionary work, especially on the frontier. The missionary work and appeal to

American optimism and emphasis on free will made the Methodism the most common form of Christianity in America by the mid-19th century.

F. There was also an increased emphasis on Bible reading, with the likes of the American Bible Society (of which Francis Scott Key was a member) aiming to put a Bible in every household. The call for more reading of the Bible also led to a call for more education for the general public.

G. The religious revivals had the positive effect of leading to more calls for moral reform, and calls for the abolition of slavery. Charles Grandison Finney was particularly prominent in the abolitionist movement. In 1808 Congress forbade the importation of slaves, and more states outlawed slavery. The northern states gradually abolished slavery; and, until the early 1830s that effort was promoted in many places in the south as well. It appeared that the Missouri Compromise of 1820 would allow only two more slave states (Missouri and what is now Arkansas) with a vast amount additional land as free territory.

H. The revivalist movement also emphasized such themes as temperance and purity of action and entertainment.

I. The Second Great Awakening was not directly an aspect of the Catholic faith, but it did impact the Church in several ways. For example, the Church in America took up the cause of education, which would become one of her crowning glories. Furthermore, Catholics in America placed a greater focus on Bible reading and more personal experience than Catholics elsewhere. On the negative side, the increased Protestant fervor stirred more anti-Catholicism as well. For example, Lyman Beecher often preached against what he (and others) called “popery” as contrary to the free and democratic American spirit.

III. The Catholic Church in America also established new schools, charitable organizations and religious orders.

A. The increasing Catholic population led to a situation in which the bishops had to rely on missionary priests sent in by religious orders and dioceses from other countries. Many of these priests served very well, but there could also be problems.

1. The Sulpician order in particular was very helpful in the training of new priests, establishing among other institutions Mount Saint Mary Seminary in Emmitsburg and Saint Mary Seminary in Baltimore. But some of these missionary priests could be some dubious characters whom the orders or dioceses wanted to get rid of.

2. The Dominican order established its first friary in the United States in 1806. When the Jesuits were restored in 1815, many of them likewise came to the United States and began to be very influential in university education, including running the first American university, Georgetown.

3. The Vincentian fathers moved into New Orleans, and one of their members Joseph Rosati would become the second bishop of New Orleans.

B. The number of women religious increased dramatically.

1. The Visitation Sisters came to this country in 1809. And, partially inspired by them, Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton established an American version, to be called the Sisters of Charity, in 1812. This order was to spearhead the establishment of the Catholic school system in the United States, which is to this day the largest private school system in America.

2. The Sisters of Loretto came to the United States in 1812, followed shortly thereafter by the Carmelite Sisters and Dominican Sisters during the next decade.

3. Saint Rose Philippine Duchesne brought the Sisters of the Sacred Heart to this country in 1818; and their missions here achieved great progress among the Indians.

4. In 1828, Mary Elizabeth Lange (1784 -1882), a Haitian immigrant from Cuba, founded the Oblate Sisters of Providence, the first order of black Catholic women. The order, which received official approval in 1831, was originally focused on the education of black children, but also expanded into service of the sick and orphanages. By 1882, the order had 50 sisters; and it has about 80 sisters now.

C. The laity in this country were also very active in establishing new projects such as publications and charitable endeavors.

1. For example, Matthew Carey (1760 – 1839) fled from Ireland to America in 1784 to avoid prosecution due to his publications critical of the British government. Starting in Philadelphia, he was very active in the publishing business and in political commentary. In addition, in 1789, he published the first American version of the Douay-Rheims Bible in 48 installments; the version was so popular that it became known as the Carey Bible. But he also reached out to others as well. For example, he also published the King James version of the Bible, which could likewise be purchased in installments. And he joined with Episcopalians, Quakers and Protestant leaders such as the Quaker Thomas Cope, the Episcopalian bishop William White, and the founding father Dr. Benjamin Rush to form the American Sunday School Society, an early effort at ecumenical cooperation.

2. The freed slave couple Pierre and Juliette Toussaint were instrumental in supporting charitable efforts to establish schools for blacks, arrange adoption for orphans, and alleviate the suffering of victims of sickness and flooding in New York.

3. In the frontier areas where priests were in short supply, the laity would lead prayer services on Sundays. And commissioned laity were even authorized to preach, baptize and preside at weddings, a rarity then as now.

D. The clergy, religious orders and laity cooperated together in the establishment of Catholic schools, beginning with Georgetown Academy (now University) in 1791. The first Catholic primary school was Mount St. Mary (now a university and seminary), which was founded in 1809. By 1840, there were over 200 Catholic schools in the country.

E. The Church in America benefitted from a very active laity, but also had to deal with the issue of how much power the laity would have in relationship to the bishops.

1. In many areas, the laity bought land, built churches, and formed local associations, which was a great benefit to the church. But these lay run associations also wanted to run the parishes, an arrangement that the bishops disagreed with.

- One classic example of the struggles occurred with the Irish priest William Hogan, who was incardinated in the Diocese of Philadelphia in 1819. He was a popular pastor, but Bishop Henry Conwell of Philadelphia thought he was engaged in too much social activity. When he refused to abide by Bishop Conwell's instructions, Bishop Conwell removed him as pastor; and, when he refused to leave the parish, he was excommunicated. There then ensued a multi-year struggle over the parish's property.

2. There were also proposals for the clergy and/or laity to elect nominees as bishops, following the example of the election of Bishop John Carroll. To a large degree also, the appointment of Archbishop Leonard Neale, the successor of Bishop John Carroll, was at the request of the public. However, the Vatican did not allow more elections of episcopal nominees.

3. Most bishops opposed lay trusteeism, the arrangement whereby a lay board would run parishes and select (or at least nominate) whom they wished to be the clergy. However, some bishops, such as Archbishop Marechal, a French immigrant and archbishop of Baltimore from 1817 – 1828, and Bishop John England, an Irish immigrant and Bishop of Charleston, South Carolina from 1820 – 1842, were more supportive of this concept.

4. The First Council of Baltimore in 1829 mandated that the bishops control all church properties. And bishops successfully lobbied many state legislatures, including in Virginia, to recognize this arrangement. However, the struggle over church properties would continue well into the 20th century. In addition, there was the issue of how much power lay run groups (e.g., schools, newspapers, charitable organizations) would have in the Church.

F. Catholics were also increasingly involved in public life. In addition to Matthew Carey, Robert Walsh, a Baltimore resident and one of the first graduates of Georgetown College, launched the quarterly Review of History and Politics, which became an

influential center of political thought. Such Catholics as Francis Cooper and Andrew Morris of New York, William Gaston of North Carolina, and even the French exile and priest Father Gabriel Richards of Michigan served in the United States Congress. And, in 1827, Charles Carroll came out of retirement at the age of 90 to help found the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad. The following year, he was given the honor of laying the first stone of the railroad, a symbol of this nation's transition from a young republic to a dynamic economic power.

IV. The expansion and challenges of the Catholic Church in this time is exemplified in the lives of four great American Catholics, Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton, Venerable Pierre Toussaint, Bishop John DuBois, and Saint Rose Durocher.

A. Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton demonstrated quiet perseverance in the face of illness, poverty and discrimination to form the first Catholic schools in America and the first religious order founded in the new nation.

1. Elizabeth Bayley was born in 1774 and raised by a devout Anglican family in New York City. Her parents, Dr. Richard and Catherine Bayley were well educated; Dr. Bayley father was the Chief Health Officer in New York City and a college teacher. After Catherine died, Dr. Bayley, left with two daughters, married Charlotte Barclay, who was active in the Episcopalian Church. Elizabeth received a good education, and was talented at music and poetry. She was also already drawn to prayer and read the Bible often. She was apparently very charming, gracious and humorous.

2. Her brief married life was at first promising and joyous, but soon afflicted with financial decline and the death of her husband. At the age of 20, she married William Seton, a merchant and the son of a merchant, who was also called William. William Jr. and his brother James were very active in the international trade business of the father. In 1788, while on a business trip, he met Fillipo Fellichi, a prominent Italian businessman, with whom they would develop an active trade. At the time, Elizabeth was very active in the Episcopalian Church and Rev. John Hobart was her spiritual director. She and her sister-in-law Rebecca Ann Seton. engaged in many charitable works and formed the Society for the Relief of Widows with Small Children in 1797. They were often called the Protestant Daughters of Charity, after the order founded by St. Louise de Merrilac and St. Vincent de Paul in France in the eighteenth century. The couple had five children between 1795 and 1802: Anna Marie, William, Richard, Catherine and Rebecca.

3. Due to the increasing conflict between Britain and France, and due to the piracy from pirates based in Tripoli, the business declined and the family filed for bankruptcy in 1801, losing their home. They moved for a time into Dr. Richard Bayley's home. However, he also died and the family faced financial hardship. Meanwhile, William, who had often suffered from tuberculosis, grew worse, and died when the couple made a trip to Italy for his recovery. But in Italy the devotion and hospitality of the Fellichi family was inspirational to Elizabeth. And, with their example and encouragement, she decided to join the Catholic

Church. When she returned to the United States in 1804 and told her family about her intention to enter the Catholic Church, they strenuously opposed this idea, and threatened to cut her off from support. But she persevered and entered the Church in 1805

4. To support the family, Elizabeth Ann Seton turned to teaching; and after great opposition, succeeded in establishing the first Catholic elementary school in America. The first efforts in New York faltered because of anti-Catholic prejudice. But, at the suggestion of Abbe Louis Dubourg, the president of Saint Mary's College in Baltimore, she started a school there, near St. Mary Seminary, which Abbe Dubourg was also founding. In 1809, the family moved to Emmitsburg and founded Saint Joseph Academy and Free School for Catholic girls near Mount St. Mary College, which had just been founded. A gift from a seminarian and Catholic convert at Mount St. Mary Seminary, and the purchase of a house and land, made the school possible. Elizabeth formed a group of consecrated women there in 1809. And, adopting the rule of the Daughters of Charity, in 1811, she formed the first American order the Sisters of Charity, receiving Vatican approval the next year..

5. The community taught with such fervor that many wealthy people sent their children there. They had 18 sisters by 1813; and poignantly, Elizabeth's daughter Anna made vows while dying of tuberculosis. Her sister-in-law Henrietta also entered the Catholic Church just before her death in 1809.

6. The religious community flourished even during her lifetime, establishing twenty communities for orphanages, hospitals and schools by her early death in 1821.

7. Saint Pope Paul VI canonized Elizabeth Ann Seton on September 14, 1975, on the Feast of the Triumph of the Cross. St. Elizabeth demonstrated the American traits of courage in standing up for one's beliefs, perseverance in the midst of trials, and the goal of universal education.

B. Coming from a very different background, the freed slave Pierre Toussaint (1766 – 1853) also demonstrated how the laity creatively used freedom for the service of neighbor and helped bring Catholicism into mainstream America.

1. Pierre Toussaint was born to a slave family in Haiti about 1766. His master Monsieur Berard did give him an education and access to the Catholic faith as he served the household. In 1787, as tensions were mounting in Haiti, the Berards moved to New York, which became their permanent residence when a slave revolt in Haiti made it impossible to return there. He was trained as a hairdresser, and had some independence as the family allowed him to keep much of his earnings from this trade, although the remainder went to the family.

2. Due to the French Revolution and the destruction of the estates in Haiti, the Berards lost their fortune in the 1790s; and soon thereafter Monsieur Berard died. Paradoxically, it was Pierre who supported the family through his work as a hairdresser. Madame Berard remarried but died shortly in 1811. At that point, her second husband Monsieur Nicholas gave Pierre his freedom. Now free, he married his beloved Juliette Noel, whose freedom he purchased with his savings. Being very sociable and talented as a hairdresser, he was able to earn a fairly good living. He was also able to earn enough to buy his sister Rosalie's freedom.
 3. Pierre and Juliette Toussaint used their increasing income to bring the sick to his home and care for them, as well as providing relief in times of sickness and flooding. They even took great risks ministering to victims of a cholera epidemic.
 4. While he and Juliette were not able to have children, he adopted his sister Rosalie's daughter Euphemia when Rosalie died. They also took several orphans into their home
 5. Pierre and Juliette Toussaint then were instrumented in founding the first school for blacks in New York, which became a model for the nation. They also helped in the fundraising for New York's first cathedral.
 6. The couple was very devout, being parishioners at St. Peter's Church until their deaths in 1851 and 1853. At their deaths, the New York newspapers greatly honored their charitable efforts.
 7. Cardinal John O'Connor, the Archbishop of New York, opened the cause for Pierre Toussaint's canonization in 1991 and had him and Juliette buried in the crypt at Saint Patrick's cathedral, the first lay people to receive this honor. In 1996, St. John Paul II declared him to be venerable. There has also been talk about opening the cause for Juliette Toussaint.
- C. Father, and then Bishop, John Dubois showed how the American Church grew through immigration from troubled lands, in this case revolutionary France.
1. John Dubois was born to a devout Catholic family in Paris in 1764. He entered seminary for the Archdiocese of Paris and was ordained a priest in 1787. His first assignment was both to a parish and a hospital in the city.
 2. When the new government of the French Revolution began demanding the complete submission of the clergy in 1791, many of them left the country. Along with a group of these exiles, Father Dubois came to Norfolk, Virginia with letters of recommendation from the likes of the Marquis de Lafayette. Some of the leading families of Virginia supported him and he was able to start a school in Richmond. Despite the religious differences, he quickly became friends with the leading religious figures in Virginia. For the time

being, he celebrated Mass in the courtroom of the new State House in Richmond.

3. In 1794, Bishop Carroll assigned him to new mission based in Frederick, Maryland. The mission would cover the Appalachian region, including the Shenandoah Valley, and even in principle go west to the Mississippi River. Here he served both the city of Frederick and the frontier for 12 years.
4. In 1806, Father Dubois joined the Sulpician order, which is dedicated especially to the education of seminarians and clergy. And in 1808, he founded Mount Saint Mary seminary in Emmitsburg, Maryland. Shortly thereafter, St. Elizabeth Ann Seton established the first Catholic girls school in America nearby, and then later formed the Sisters of Charity, America's first religious order. Father Dubois and his friend Fr. Brute
5. The seminary was located in that place both to avoid the anti-Catholic prejudice still common in many cities, and to be on a trans-Appalachian route. The seminary prospered greatly under his leadership.
6. In 1826, Father Dubois was consecrated as the Bishop of New York, which at the time covered the entire state and half of New Jersey; it consisted of 12 parishes served by 18 priests.
7. There were some struggles with both anti-Catholic prejudice from the outside and struggles with the non-French sides of the Church from within. In addition, the issue of trusteeism divided this and all of the American dioceses. Nevertheless, Bishop Dubois presided over the expansion of the Catholic faith in New York and New Jersey until his death in 1842. By his partial retirement in 1839, the Diocese had grown to include 38 parishes and 40 priests. He opened six parishes in New York City alone, and called for all of the parishes to dedicate their Christmas and Easter collections for the care of orphans.

D. Also from France, St. Rose Philippine Duchesne (1769 – 1852), led the effort to bring the Religious Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus to America and was a pioneer in missions to the Indians.

1. Rose Duchesne was raised in a wealthy family of 20 children in Grenoble France during the 1770s and 1780s. Starting in 1781, she was educated at a Visitation convent. And, in 1788, she entered the Visitation order despite her family's objections. However, the house and the order in France was dissolved in 1792 due to the French Revolution; and for the time Rose returned to her family's home, where she lived out as much of the Visitation rule as she could.
2. When Napoleon allowed Catholic practices to revive after 1801, she tried to reestablish the convent, but the effort faltered and she turned the convent over to the newly established Society of the Sacred Heart in 1805. At that point,

the situation improved and the convent thrived under the leadership of Saint Madeleine-Sophie Barat.

3. For the next 13 years, Rose Duchesne prepared for missionary work. During that time, she founded the first Sacred Heart convent in Paris.
4. In 1817, Bishop William Dubourg of New Orleans came to Paris, asking for missionaries to the newly opened lands; and Rose and several of her sisters asked permission to answer the call. And so, in 1818, she and four other sisters came to the newly acquired territories west of the Mississippi River. They established the first house (literally a log cabin) in Saint Charles, a settlement in what is now Missouri and established a free school there. Within 10 years, they established four new schools and two orphanages nearby with a total of six communities in Missouri and Louisiana.
5. In 1841, Jesuits asked the order for help in new missions in Kansas. Then aged 71, Mother Rose joined other sisters and moved yet further west. Due to ill health, she had to move back the next year to the original house in Saint Charles. But even in that short time, Mother Rose became known among the Indians as “the woman who prays always.” She lived a more contemplative life for the next 10 years until her death in 1852.
6. During and after her life, the Society of the Sacred Heart progressed in America, and established women’s colleges in Cincinnati, Grand Coteau, Louisiana, Lake Forest, Illinois, Newton, Massachusetts, New York City, Omaha, the suburbs of Philadelphia, Saint Louis, San Francisco, San Diego, and Seattle. The entire Society of the Sacred Heart now has about 2500 members worldwide, with about 320 in the United States and Canada.
7. Pope Pius XII declared Rose Philippine to be blessed in 1940. Saint John Paul II canonized her in 1988.