

TRUTH, FREEDOM, TRADITION, FRONTIERS:  
PRESENTATIONS ON AMERICAN CATHOLIC HISTORY  
PART V: THE FAITH, WAR, LIBERTY AND INDUSTRY:  
THE CATHOLIC CHURCH, THE CIVIL WAR AND LATE 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY AMERICA

I. During the Civil War and the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Church continued to expand her presence in the United States. She grew in numbers, as well as organizations, and dealt with the increasingly industrial society.

II. Catholics were on both sides of the slavery question and the Civil War, but the issues did not divide the Church. And, after the war, the heroism of Catholics, and especially the charity of Catholic nuns who worked as nurses, made the faith more a part of American life.

A. On the issue of slavery, Catholics in America, like the Protestant churches, held a broad range of views. However, unlike the Protestant churches, which often divided over these and other questions (e.g., between Presbyterian Church USA and Presbyterian Church of America, Southern and other Baptists), the Catholic Church was united in her doctrine and sacraments.

1. Popes had condemned slavery in such works as Pope Paul III's 1537 decree Sublimus Deus and Pope Benedict XIII's 1839 constitution In Sublime. However, here as elsewhere, many people argued for a distinction between the teaching in principle and the practical application in a given situation and to civil law.
2. To avoid interference in their pastoral work, bishops generally avoided political issues that did not directly impact the Church.

B. During the Civil War, Catholics fought on both sides of the conflict, often with great distinction.

1. About 70 Catholic priests were chaplains in the Civil War, distributed about two thirds to the North and one third to the South, which roughly reflected the armed forces of both sides. Perhaps the most celebrated Catholic member of the northern Army was the chaplain to the Irish brigade Fr. William Corby of the Holy Cross fathers. He famously gave general absolution to the brigade just before its critical charge at Gettysburg and then told them that the Church denies burial to anyone killed while fleeing the battle. He later became president of Notre Dame University. In that role, he sponsored such things as the establishment of its law school and the building of its current chapel, and thus helped make it a central force in American Catholic education.
2. Religious sisters likewise gained great fame by their ministry to the wounded and ill during the war. About 640 of the 3200 official nurses during the war were religious sisters from twenty one Catholic communities. Their care for injured armed forces and affected civilians on both sides won them great renown, and helped establish the very good reputation that American Catholic sisters enjoy to this day. The future women's rights leader Mary Livermore

was a member of the United States Sanitary Commission and wrote at the time, "I am neither Catholic nor an advocate of monastic institutions. . . . But I can never forget my experience during the War of the Rebellion. . . . Never did I meet these Catholic sisters in hospitals, on transports, or hospital steamers without observing their devotion, faithfulness, and unobtrusiveness. They gave themselves no airs of superiority or holiness, shirked no duty, sought no easy place, broke no mischiefs. Sick and wounded men watched for their entrance into the wards in the morning, and looked a regretful farewell when they departed at night."

3. Orestes Brownson (1803 – 1876), probably the greatest Catholic American intellectual of his day, argued strongly in favor of the North and in fact perceived the war as the great opportunity for abolitionism. Other Catholic Northern bishops supported the Union cause on the grounds of the American democracy, but tended to avoid the issue of abolitionism.
  4. On the other hand, as the secession crisis was developing in early 1861, Bishop Jean Pierre Verot of Savannah, Georgia, preached a sermon in favor of secession that was distributed throughout the South. Even here, however, the Southern Catholic leaders mostly focused their attention on whether slavery could be legal, rather than whether it was right.
  5. Both North and South sent bishops to the Vatican to persuade Pope Pius IX to take their side. Bishop John Hughes of New York and Bishop Patrick Lynch of Charleston took up this cause for the two governments. The Vatican never took sides, although Southern leaders argued that by receiving Bishop Lynch Pope Pius IX was recognizing their government. Pope Pius IX instead proposed a mediated solution.
  6. The loyalty of Catholics (to both sides) and their suffering with other Americans, along with the heroic service of the nuns, helped make the Church a more accepted part of American society.
- C. During the Reconstruction Era, the Catholic Church was able to build upon her increased prestige from the war to expand her presence and build upon the new opportunities.
1. In his 1866 book The American Experience, Orestes Bronson argued that, with her defense of universal moral principles and human rights, the Catholic Church could and should play an expanded role in the renewal of a freer American society. To accomplish this end, he encouraged American Catholics to be more involved in society and to develop a more intellectual faith.
  2. On the practical side, Archbishop Martin Spalding of Baltimore called to American bishops to the Second Council of Baltimore in 1866 to unify the Catholic Church in this nation.

- a. The first Council of Baltimore had been in 1859, and had promoted, among other things, a greater focus on Catholic schools and on religious education programs for Catholic children in public schools.
  - b. The Second Council of Baltimore reiterated even more strongly the call for Catholics and the duty of parents to educate their children in these schools if possible.
  - c. The Second Council of Baltimore also addressed the concern for the freedmen, 150,000 of whom (about 4% if the total) were Catholic. Unfortunately, there was no coordinated effort on this front, and so there were no Catholic colleges to help the freedmen. However, the Saint Joseph Missionary Society (the Josephites) was founded in England in 1871 to assist the African communities in America as well as England. And that order has been central in mission work to African Americans ever since. And in the 1890s there would be greater efforts along these lines, particularly with the efforts of Saint Katherine Drexel.
3. The British born New York biographer James Parton argued in an 1868 article in *The Atlantic* that Catholics had been a “despised minority” before the war, but that the Church “was now well on its way to complete acceptance in Protestant American Society.”.

III. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Church continued to expand, both through native growth and immigration.

- A. Immigration to the United States continued at a rapid pace in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The increasing prosperity of America was a central factor. With the development of the steam engine, travel across the seas also became much safer and easier, which also encouraged immigration to the United States.
- B. Immigration continued from Western Europe, especially Ireland and Germany. But an increasing number of people were also immigrating from Southern and Eastern Europe, leading to an increasing Italian and Slavic presence in America.
- C. From 1860 to 1880, the Catholic population in this countries almost doubled, from about 3.5 million about 6 million Catholics in America. Because the nation’s general population also increased dramatically, the portion of Americans who were Catholic expanded, but not by as much, from about 11% to about 12%.
- D. The increase in both Catholic and national population was partially due to heavy immigration. Of the 1.3 immigrants from 1860-1880, about half of them were Catholic.

- E. Until 1875, the states were often the ones who dealt with immigration and any restrictions on it. After a Supreme Court ruling that it was a federal responsibility, the federal government gradually took over this field. But even then, there were generally no numerical limits until the 1920s; there was, however, an anti-Chinese prejudice, which led to a virtual prohibition on Chinese immigration after 1880.
- F. At first, the immigration from Ireland and Germany continued apace, with about 70% of the 1.3 million Catholic immigrants from those countries. But immigration was increasing from the rest of Europe as well. (There was also increasing immigration from China, but the missions had not yet established a large Catholic presence there.) After 1880, more of the immigrants began coming from southern and Eastern Europe, and particularly from Italy, Poland and the Austro-Hungarian Empire. With the ease of travel and the mostly peaceful and prosperous situation in America, immigration to this country rose to about 500,000 a year after 1880.
- G. The American episcopacy continued to be largely foreign born, but was more diverse. From 1867 to 1884, there were 67 new episcopal appointments in this nation. Of the episcopal appointments, 22 were native born, 14 from Ireland, 14 from Germanic nations, and 7 from France. There was some tension among the groups, and the German Catholics tended to form their own associations. For example, a former German officer Monsignor Joseph Jessing established the Pontifical Academy of Saint Joseph (Josephinum) in Columbus, Ohio, which would be a seminary for German speakers. He made sure that it was directly under the authority of the Vatican so that the mostly American and Irish bishops could not interfere.
- H. The increasing Catholic population led to the creation of 24 new dioceses between 1867 and 1884 and large building projects, both for the new pastoral needs (e.g., parish churches, schools and hospitals) and also to establish a clear presence in the cities. Many dioceses built large mansions for the bishops to show loyalty to them and confidence about their place in America.
- I. The new immigrant populations and the economic changes also led to the establishment of many new institutions and groups, such as the Catholic Knights of Columbus and the secular Knights of Labor, both of which defended the rights of workers in an increasingly industrial society. There was some concern about Catholics joining other social groups or workers groups that were run mostly by Protestants.
- J. Likewise, the dioceses began establishing more and more Catholic schools to help with education and to promote the faith.
  - 1. The Catholic Church promoted ever more strongly the Catholic schools system, although there was some disagreement about whether to cooperate with public schools or whether to keep aloof from what was mostly a Protestant system.

2. In 1875, the Vatican Congregation on the Propagation of the Faith wrote, in response to a request from the American bishops, a letter strongly supporting the creation of Catholic schools and the duty of parents to have their children educated in the faith, preferably at Catholic schools.
3. Particularly with the Third Plenary Council of Baltimore in 1884, bishops told parents that they should send their children to Catholic schools, and that parishes should make the tuitions were very affordable. The council also called for the writing of a national catechism. That project was completed the next year, leading to the first edition of what has been called ever since The Baltimore Catechism. That catechism (and future editions both for younger and older students) became the basis for all other religious education until the mid-1960s. Under a more recent edition, it has also made a comeback recently.
4. Before the War, Bishop John Hughes of New York spearheaded an effort to push for public funding for schools. The effort was mostly unsuccessful. And in fact, many states adopted the Blaine amendments (named after Maine congressman and 1884 Republican presidential nominee James Blaine.) Those amendments, which were promulgated in all but 10 states, limited or prohibited the use of public money for religious institutions.

K. The Catholic influence in American became clear in the Presidential election of 1884, which the Democrat Grover Cleveland won with heavy Catholic support.

1. James Blaine was the Republican candidate , but was trying to convince Catholics that he was sympathetic to Catholicism after all. He was making some progress, and seemed likely to win the election.
2. However, soon before the election, a Presbyterian minister named Samuel Burchard gave a pro-Blaine talk in which he condemned Democrats as the party of “rum, Romanism and rebellion.” Although Blaine denounced the remark, it was taken as a sign that the Republican party was still anti-Catholic.
3. Cleveland won New York by 1149 votes and the popular vote by less than two tenths of one percent. New York’s 36 electoral college votes gave Cleveland the election.

IV. The experience of the Catholic Church during this time is exemplified in the lives of Venerable Father Michael McGivney, Saint Marianne Cope, Father Isaac Hecker, and Venerable Father Augustus Tolton

- A. Venerable Father Michael McGivney (1852 – 1890) was a priest from an immigrant Irish family who combined the Catholic faith with practical concerns to form the Knights of Columbus.
  1. Fr. McGivney was the oldest son of an Irish immigrant family with 13 children, 6 of whom sadly died in infancy. Although he had to take a break

from studies for a time to help support the family, young Michael McGivney excelled academically and entered seminary at the age of 16. However, when his father died in 1873, he had to take another break from studies again to support the family. With some support, he was eventually able to resume studies and was ordained a priest in 1877.

2. Fr. McGivney was assigned as the associate pastor at Saint Mary Church in New Haven, Connecticut. His own experience gave him compassion for the needs of working class Catholics and especially immigrants, and the need to care for widows and orphans. At the time, fraternal groups were increasing and the idea of life insurance for the general public was just getting started. He joined the two needs together to form the Knights of Columbus, which was initially just planned for his parish and then for a few neighboring parishes.
3. The Knights worked so well that the organization quickly expanded throughout the country is now the largest lay group in America and (depending on how one counts its membership and the Legion of Mary) possibly the largest lay Catholic group in the world.
4. The Diocese of Hartford opened the cause for Father McGivney's canonization in 1996. In 2008, the Vatican concluded that he lived a life of heroic virtue; and with Pope Benedict's approval, he was then declared "Venerable." The Vatican is awaiting the confirmation of a miracle to proceed with a beatification.

B. Saint Marianne Cope (1838 – 1918) was a religious sisters from a German immigrant family who pioneered medical advances and used her skill to carry on the work of Saint Damian de Veuster for the lepers in the island of Molokai

1. The oldest child of German immigrants to New York, she was financially supporting her family by the age of 13; but was then able to join the Sisters of Saint Francis of Syracuse at the age of 24.
2. Her compassion and talent for administration soon became clear. She helped establish St. Elizabeth Hospital in Utica and St. Joseph Hospital in Syracuse in 1866 and 1869 respectively. These hospitals admitted all patients, regardless of race or religion, which was considered progressive for the era. She took over as administrator of St. Joseph Hospital in 1870 and advocated patient's rights, including the need for cleanliness and treating alcoholism as a disease.
3. Later elected as a provincial, she responded to the call of the church in Hawaii, supported by its king, to help St. Damian de Veuster with the leper's colony he ministered to and effectively ran. In 1885, she and 34 other Franciscan sisters came to Hawaii and took over the care of the lepers, making the colony astonishingly progressive.

4. Not one of the sisters caught leprosy; and their example helped establish the reputation of American religious sisters even more.
  5. In 2005, Pope Benedict XVI declared Marianne Cope to be a blessed, the first beatification he announced as Pope. An in 2012, he canonized her as a saint.
- C. Servant of God Isaac Hecker (1819 – 1888) was a deep thinker from a working class Protestant background, who both became very learned and a Catholic leader in America.
1. Isaac Hecker was born to German Methodist working class immigrants in New York City. His formal education ended at the age of 12 so that he could work at the family bakery with his two older brothers. However, he continued to be an avid reader, particularly of works of philosophy and social reform.
  2. He met Orestes Brownson in 1841 and, after a deep conversion experience, joined Transcendentalist movement. And, in 1843, he became a member of the utopian Brooks Farm, which was a social experiment of simple communal living that thrived in the 1840s. He stayed there only six months, but was deeply moved by the members' devotion and peace.
  3. In 1844 he discerned a called to enter the Catholic Church and was baptized by Bishop John McCloskey of New York. He joined the Redemptorist order in 1845 and was ordained a priest in London in 1849. The Redemptorists sent him back to New York in 1851, where he worked as a missionary in upstate New York.
  4. Isaac Hecker became convinced that the Redemptorists, with their fervent preaching style, could be a great force in America; and he tried to convince the Rector Major (leader) of the Redemptorists to launch a novitiate in America. The Rector Major was suspicious and not only refused the request, but wanted to expel Fr. Hecker from the order.
  5. To resolve the issue, Cardinal Alessandro Barnabo allowed Fr. Hecker to form a new order The Missionary Priests of Saint Paul the Apostle (The Paulist Fathers) to evangelize America. In 1858, he returned to America with the first five priests of the order and was welcomed by Bishop John Hughes of New York.
  6. In 1865, he launched a month Catholic periodical The Catholic World, which would appeal to the general public. And in 1870, he launched The Young Catholic, a magazine for teenagers. Between those two times, he went on 56 lecture tours all around America explaining how the Catholic faith brings out the best of America's love of nature, hard work, adventure, and the like.
  7. In 1871, Fr. Hecker came down with some version of leukemia. He survived, but his strength was diminished. He continued giving talks as he could and

died in 1888. But shortly before his death, in 1887, he issued a famous letter saying that the revival of Thomistic scholasticism, with its joining of faith and reason, would be a central way of promoting an American version of Catholicism.

8. In 2008 Cardinal Edwin Egan opened the cause for the canonization of Isaac Hecker.

D. Venerable Father Augustus Tolton (1854 – 1897) was a freed slave who became the first black American priest.

1. He was born in Missouri to a couple who were slaves with four children. They had their children baptized and raised as infants.
2. According to the family history, Augustus' parents fled from slavery during the Civil War, with his father joining the Union cause, and his mother escaping to Illinois.
3. After the War, a local priest Fr. Peter McGirr provided the means so that Augustus could go to the parish school. There were some objections from parishioners against racial integration, but the parish held its ground.
4. Augustus excelled and attended St. Francis Solanus College in Illinois, which was run by Franciscans. Fr. McGirr encouraged him to apply to seminary, but all of the American seminaries rejected his application. And so Fr. McGirr arranged for him to study at the Urbianum University in Rome, which was (and still is) designed to train missionary priests. He was ordained in 1886 and sent back to the United States to serve the Diocese of Alton (now Springfield) Illinois. His first assignment was to his home parish in Quincy, Illinois. However, there was resistance from whites to having a black pastor. He tried to start a new parish that would have both blacks and white, but ironically some blacks did not want him to welcome white Catholics.
5. He eventually was assigned to Chicago where he founded the very successful Saint Monica Church. It was designated a "national parish," which was usually the term for a parish of immigrants from a particular country (German, Italy, etc.) In this case, the term meant that it would be racially integrated. Although that church also did not succeed in that goal, it won the praise of even the secular press for its beautiful liturgies and community. And some white and non-Catholics did attend services there, a first promise of integration.
6. Fr. Tolton died at the age of 43. But in his short life, he had made Saint Monica parish a nationally known pilgrimage site.
7. In 2010, Cardinal George opened the cause for Fr. Tolton's canonization. The Vatican took up the cause in 2016; and in 2019 the Congregation for Saint concluded that he had lived a life of heroic virtue; that conclusion, with Pope



Francis' approval, meant that he is be called Venerable for Catholic purposes. The Congregation is now awaiting a confirmed miracle to move forward toward beatification.