

TRUTH, FREEDOM, TRADITION, FRONTIERS:  
PRESENTATIONS ON AMERICAN CATHOLIC HISTORY  
PART VI: THE CHURCH IN AN EXPANDING NATION  
THE LATE 19<sup>TH</sup> AND EARLY 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURIES

I. The late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century was a time of great growth in the Catholic Church and the country as a whole.

A. As with previous periods in American history, a combination of immigration and natural growth led to a further rapid increase in the country's population, and even more so in the Catholic population.

1. Immigration from Ireland and Germany continued, but immigration from Southern and Eastern Europeans nation increased dramatically. These immigrants were largely Catholic, but the new immigration also brought in an increasing numbers of Jewish and Orthodox believers to the country. In addition, within the Catholic Church, the eastern traditions began to take hold. Thus, for example, in 1913 the Ukrainian Catholic Church established a diocese in the United States. The Greek Catholic Church established her first American diocese in 1924.

2. Immigration was about an average of 500,000 a year between 1880 and 1920. A combination of sizeable families, increasing life expectancy, and the substantial immigration over doubled the country's population from about 50 million to about 106 million in those years. The Catholic portion of the population increased from about 12% of the country to about 17% during that time.

3. There was a tension as the increased immigration caused a backlash among Americans generally, and also against the Catholic Church in particular. For example, the so-called American Protective Association was founded in 1887 to oppose Catholic influence in this country as a sort of heresy against the American spirit. By the mid-1890s it claimed 2.5 million members, although the actual number was probably much smaller. That society declined in number after that time, and ended in 1911. However, the anti-Catholic and anti-immigrant views it represented continued and in fact would increase after 1920.

4. Even within the Catholic Church there was a question of how much to have ethnic parishes for the different groups or how much to emphasize the universality of the Church in each parish.

a. For example, in 1886 Father Peter Abbelen, the vicar general of the Diocese of Milwaukee, wrote to the Vatican arguing for more rights for German American Catholics, including German speaking parishes, equal to the more Irish run churches. By contrast, Bishop John Ireland of Saint Paul and Bishop John Keane of Dubuque, Iowa argued that, while there should be outreach to immigrant groups, English should be the dominant language.

b. For the most part the ethnic groups stayed loyal to the Church, but there were some groups such as the Polish National Church that broke off from the official Church while still calling themselves Catholic.

B. The popes appointed bishops of extraordinary administrative skill such as John Farley of New York, James Quigley of Chicago, John Glennon of St. Louis, Edward Hanna of San Francisco and Dennis Dougherty of Philadelphia. They emphasized building and fundraising projects, such as large cathedrals and schools; and those efforts were assisted by an eagerness of Catholics to show their pride and confidence.

C. The Catholic Church continued increasing its emphasis on education.

1. The building of parochial schools continued apace, with the goal of every parish having a school.

2. At the specific request of Pope Leo XIII, the United States bishops established Catholic University of America in 1887 to emphasize the centrality of the Church in education; after a difficult start, it became well founded and organized by the 1910s. Other Catholic universities such as Notre Dame also began to take on a more prominent role in society at large.

3. There was some debate about views towards public schools. Some bishops were very skeptical of them as promoting anti-Catholic views. Others bishops such as Cardinal James Gibbons of Baltimore and John Ireland of Saint Paul, Minnesota wanted to cooperate with public schools. Those two bishops gave talks in 1889 and 1890 respectively to the National Education Association promoting cooperation between the two school systems; and in fact Bishop Ireland let public schools use church buildings virtually for free.

D. Religious orders continued advancing and establishing educational institutions. Missionary efforts also increased, reflecting the change from America as mission country to America as a launching point of missions. Thus, for example, in 1896, the Paulist fathers established the Catholic Missionary Union. And in 1911, the bishops of Boston and Raleigh founded the Catholic Foreign Mission Society of America (generally known today as Maryknoll.)

E. The Catholic Church was also expanding her outreach to American Indians.

1. Father Jean Baptiste Brouillet and the Belgian Father Jean Pierre DeSmet had helped pioneer missions in the American West.

2. In 1874, Archbishop James Bayley (a distant relative of Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton) and Civil War General Charles Ewing established the Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions. Likewise, General Ewing's sister Ellen Sherman (wife of General William Sherman) established the Ladies' Catholic Indian Missionary Society in 1875 to help fund missions to Indian areas. The Canadian Bishop Augustin Blanchet was very helpful in this effort, especially when he became the bishop of Oregon.

3. Initially, when President Grant established the Board of Indian Commissioners, all 10 of the Commissioners were Protestant. They divided up Indian lands and assigned only one denomination to each area to evangelize. Catholics ended up with 7 of the 94 appointments, covering only 21,000 of the estimated 106,000 Indians who were Catholic; the other Catholics were for a time deprived of Catholic priests. After a few years, this partitioning system ended and Catholic priests were able to get into all of the territories.

4. At that time, the federal government sponsored private schools in the Indian lands. The Catholic missionaries were successful, and about half of those schools were sponsored by the Catholic Church. The federal funding ended in the 1890s, but many of the Catholic schools persevered.

5. Such efforts increased the percentage of American Indians who are Catholic from about 5% in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century to about 20% (an estimated 580,000 out of 2.9 million) in 2008.

E. There was also the issue of how to reach out to rural America at a time when America, and the entire world, was becoming more urban. In 1905, Francis Kelly established the Catholic Church Extension Society to provide help for churches in rural areas.

II. The issue of how best to incorporate the Church into American culture led to the controversy over what came to be known as Americanism.

A. There was a debate about a number of issues, such as: (1) how much control the laity should have over parishes and the assignment of clergy; (2) how much parishes should be defined by ethnic groups; (3) whether the American system of separation of Church and state is the ideal; (4) how much to be involved in ecumenical dialogues and cooperation; and (5) how much to support secular organizations such as labor unions.

B. Such factors as the rise of labor unions and the ecumenical movement in America (including the gathering of religious leaders at the World Columbian Exposition in Chicago) brought these issues to the forefront. Some bishops, such as John Ireland of Saint Paul, favored dialogue with other religions, including participation in common prayers at the World Columbian Exposition. They argued that such dialogue and cooperation would give the Catholic Church an opportunity to present her teachings and practices to the world in a positive way. But other bishops, and especially the Vatican, were worried about religious indifferentism.

C. Different ethnic groups tended to want to run their own parishes. Bishops were often willing to allow ethnic parishes, sometimes leading to several Catholic churches very near to each other. However they insisted that they retained final control over the parishes, including title to parish properties.

- For the most part the bishops succeeded in retaining control, although the disputes did lead to some splinter groups such as the Polish Catholic Church.

- D. Some bishops such as Cardinal Gibbons of Baltimore and John Ireland of St. Paul, Minnesota, along with the Paulist order and the Sulpicians, favored more accommodation and lay control of the parishes. Other bishops, such as Michael Corrigan of New York, and most of the Jesuits, favored more of a centralized approach.
- E. In 1893, Pope Leo XIII sent Archbishop Francesco Sartoli to the United States as his apostolic delegate. Pope Leo and Archbishop Sartoli at the same time both admired the growth and creativity of the Church in the United States, but were also concerned about what they perceived as a willingness to make excessive compromises and accommodations. Some American bishops favored this appointment so that there would be more communication between the United States and the Vatican. But other bishops opposed the appointment, both out of opposition to more Vatican control and for fear that it would increase nativist opposition to the Catholicism.
- F. In 1895, Pope Leo XIII published the encyclical Longinqua Oceani, in which he praised the practical effects of the American system and the increasing activity of the American church, but warned that the American system of separation Church and state was not to be considered the ideal around the world. He still favored official government support of the Church and a more Catholic society.
- G. In 1899, Pope Leo XIII sent a letter to Cardinal Gibbons, and effectively to the entire Church in the United States, entitled Testem Benevolentiae, in which he commended the efforts of the American Church, but condemned what he called Americanism.
1. The propositions condemned involved views that the Church should play no role in politics, that the government should not support the Church at all, that each nation can rightfully define a different faith, and that it is not of central importance whether a country is Catholic or not.
  2. Those in favor of more accommodation with America argued that the propositions that the Pope condemned were held by very few American Catholics, and that his advisors were misinforming him about the real situation here.
  3. Nevertheless, the letter slowed dramatically the willingness of the Church in America to accommodate trends in society and be involved in ecumenical efforts.

III. There were debates among Catholics about disputed political issues, such unions, women's suffrage and Prohibition.

A.. Until World War I, the bishops tended to avoid commenting much on these and other controversial political issues unless they directly affected the Church. But then the bishops gradually began to favor progressive legislation, such as minimum wages, social insurance, worker rights, and the regulation of monopolies. And in 1919 they established the National Catholic Welfare Council to promote Catholic interests in public life, including education and immigration.

B. The Church's social teachings were gradually developing, most prominently with Pope Leo XIII's 1891 encyclical Rerum Novarum, which set forth the basic principles of economic and social justice, and the rights of enterprise, workers and individuals. Both before and after that encyclical American bishops tried to navigate the issues of social justice.

1. For example, in 1887, Cardinal James Gibbons of Baltimore successfully persuaded the Vatican that the Knights of Labor, a broad group that represented the interests of workers and called for social reform, was legitimate and that Catholic should be able to join.

2. Likewise, there was an active debate about whether the works of Henry George, and especially his 1879 book Progress and Poverty, should be condemned as contrary to the rights of private property. Henry George and his allies were not socialist, but wanted much more government control over property, including charging people "rent" for the land they were on. Cardinal Gibbons and others persuaded the Vatican not to issue a condemnation, although some American bishops such as Archbishop Michael Corrigan of New York were very opposed to such views.

C. Many Catholic bishops supported the general focus on reducing alcohol consumption and thus favored certain efforts of temperance societies. For example, the Catholic Total Abstinence Union was established in 1872 to persuade people not to drink alcohol; and in the 1880s it began lobbying for restrictions on saloons and similar establishments. But Catholics were generally very opposed to the 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment, which led to Prohibition beginning in 1920.

D. Catholics were divided as well on the issue of women's suffrage. For example, Cardinal James Gibbons of Baltimore initially opposed the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment, which gave women the right to vote. But once it was passed, he encouraged women to use this right.

E. Catholics also tried to engage society in intellectual ways. For example, in 1896, the Paulists founded the Catholic Missionary Union in an attempt to present the faith to the United States through dialogue.

F. Two prominent Catholic thinkers of this era were Father John Ryan and Daniel Rudd.

1. Father Ryan (1869 -1945) was a priest of the Diocese of Saint Paul and a professor of moral theology at Saint Paul seminary in that diocese from 1902 to 1915, and then at Catholic University until 1939. With such books as Distributive Justice and The Living Wage, he outlined how Catholic social teachings could be applied in America. In particular, he opposed the consumerist ideal and the emphasis merely on producing more. He opposed socialism, but favored such things as wealth redistribution, minimum wages, and guaranteed worker rights and safety.

2. Daniel Rudd (1854 – 1933 ) was a layman and the son of freed slaves from Kentucky. He launched the American Catholic Tribune, one of the first black sponsored magazines in America. The magazine combined commentary on

religious and social issues and argued for a greater integration in American society. He also promoted more ecumenical dialogue among the religions and denominations to promote justice; and he went on international speaking tours to promote the rights of minorities at such events at the Catholic Congresses in Belgium and France in the 1890s.

IV. During World War I, the Catholic Church at all levels was supportive of the war, and in fact in some cases, rather uncharitable to Germans and Austrians.

A. The United States bishops established the National Catholic War Council in 1917 to organize patriotic and relief efforts.

B. The bishops were also very willing to send priests as chaplains during the brief time America was in the war.

C. Overall, there was a strong desire to show that Catholics were as patriotic as others.

D. The eager support of the war effort is somewhat ironic, given that Pope Benedict XV warned both sides against engaging in the war with the accurate prediction that it would be much worse than any of the nations involved expected it to be.

V. Four Catholics who exemplified the Church in America during this era were Servant of God Rose Hawthorne, Saint Katherine Drexel, Saint Francis Xavier Cabrini, and the Indian holy man and convert Black Elk.

A. Rose Hawthorne (1851 – 1926), the daughter of Nathaniel and Sophia Hawthorn, joined the Catholic Church and founded the Hawthorne Dominicans, a religious order dedicated to the care of the elderly.

1. Rose Hawthorne grew up in a literary family with a strong education and an international environment, living in New England, London, Paris, Rome, Florence and Germany in her early years. She met Blessed Pope Pius IX when she was seven, and was impressed by Catholic culture generally. Tragically, her father Nathaniel died when Rose was 13, and her mother Sophia died when she was 20.

2. Rose Hawthorne married author George Lathrop in 1871. They had a son Francis, but he died young. The couple joined the Catholic Church in 1891 and was involved in helping parochial schools.

3. Unfortunately, George was alcoholic and became worse over time to the point where the couple separated in 1895. Rose then studied nursing and took up service of the poor. In particular, inspired by the suffering of a nurse who had cared for her, Rose started the Saint Rose Home to serve the poor who had cancer, as well as their families.

4. After George died in 1898, Rose became a third order Dominican. And in the following year, Bishop Michael Corrigan of New York gave approval for her to form a new branch of the Dominicans, the Servants for the Relief of Incurable Cancer, which would care for cancer patients. Rose, now named Mother Mary

Alphonsa, was the first Mother Superior, a position she very actively held until her death in 1926. The order quickly attracted new members and soon opened new homes in Philadelphia and Rosary Hill, New York.

5. This branch, which is generally called the Dominican Sisters of Hawthorne, has declined in numbers but still has 53 sisters who provide care for cancer victims in their establishments in Philadelphia, Atlanta, and Rosary Hill, New York.

6. In 2003, Cardinal Edwin Egan of New York opened her cause for canonization, and thus Rose Hawthorne is now called a servant of God.

B. St. Katherine Drexel (1858 – 1955) established the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament to provide education and service to African and Indians in the United States.

1. She was the heiress to the wealthy Philadelphia banker Francis Drexel and his wife Hannah. Hannah died shortly after Katherine's birth, and Francis then married Emma Bovioir. Of this second marriage was born Louis Drexel, who with her future husband General Edward Murrell would establish schools and associations for the assistance of black and Indian Americans.
2. Katherine was devout from a young age, and her family was very active in works of charity. When she travelled West in 1884, she saw the plight of the American Indians.
3. When her father died in 1885, Katherine sensed a desire for religious life and in particular wanted to enter a contemplative order. Due to an inheritance she had the right to one third of the income from her father's \$15 million estate (about \$400 million in today's value), with any children of hers having absolute the right to one third of the estate. As a result she was sought after by suitors, who did not realize her desire for religious life.
4. Katherine and her sisters visited Pope Leo XIII in 1887 and asked him to send missionaries to the American Indians. Pope Leo XIII recommended that Katherine herself establish missions for this purpose. At first, to the great astonishment of Philadelphia society, she joined the Sisters of Mercy to learn about religious life. Soon, she made the decision to join the Sisters of Mercy, but with the understanding that she would form a new order for service of the American Indians.
5. And so, in 1891, with 14 other sisters, she established the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament in Santa Fe, New Mexico. She guided the sisters and used her fortune and donations well to build missions, mostly for African and Indian Americans. Over the next 40 years, the order founded 23 rural

schools, 50 missions for Indians and 40 other mission centers. And in 1913, it received final approval from Pope St. Pius X.

6. After a heart attack, St. Katherine Drexel spent most of her last 18 years in contemplative life, which was her desire when she first started considering being a nun.
7. In 2000, Pope John Paul II canonized her, especially recognizing her love for the Eucharist, her dedication to education, her resolve to overcome inequalities and racial segregation, and her self-sacrificing nature.

C. St. Francis Xavier Cabrini (1850 – 1918) established the Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart to minister to immigrants.

1. Francesca Cabrini was born to a large family in a small town of Italy. Because she was born two months premature, she was very small of stature. But she always had a vivacious and indomitable personality and she was very devout and dreamed from an early age of joining the missions.
2. When several orders would not take her due to her ill health, she took charge of an orphanage and formed a community of women around it. In 1877, she took religious vows before the bishop of Piacenza, Cardinal Giovanni Scalabrini. The next year he was elected as Pope Leo XIII. And in 1880, he authorized this group to become the Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart and to found a new house in Rome. When they became an order, she took the name Francis Xavier after the great missionary. During the next five years, the order spread rapidly and established seven homes and a free school.
3. In 1877, she had asked Pope Pius IX about her plans to be a missionary to China as Saint Francis Xavier had been. He had replied famously, “Not to the East, but to the West.” And so, responding to a call from Bishop Michael Corrigan of New York, and upon the advice of Pope Leo XIII, she and six sisters came to New York in 1889. When she arrived, the initial donations for a new house had been cancelled and Bishop Corrigan told her that they should return. But she was determined, and got the donations back again.
4. The order spread and established schools, orphanages and hospitals throughout the United States and Latin America. By the time of St. Cabrini’s death in 1918, the Sisters of the Sacred Heart had 67 establishments with 1500 members in eight countries.
5. Pope Pius XII canonized her in 1946 and she is considered the patron saint of immigrants.

- D. Black Elk (1863 – 1950) was a convert to Catholicism who joined his native traditions to the Catholic faith in a creative fashion.
1. Black Elk was born to the Lakota tribe in modern day Wyoming; his father was a medicine man and his family and the tribe believed in the native Indian religions. When he was 9 years old, he sensed a vision of what he later described as six grandfatherly figures, from north, south, east, west, above and below “kind and loving, full of years and wisdom.” He believed that they showed him the essence and unity of all things. He went on to experience such visions a number of times. When he reported these visions to the tribe’s medicine man 10 years later, the medicine man approved of them.
  2. Black Elk fought for his tribe and was at the Battle of Little Big Horn when he was 13. He was also injured at the Wounded Knee Massacre in 1890, when federal troops killed and wounded about 300 Indians, who were mostly unarmed, thinking that the so-called Ghost Dance was a conspiracy.
  3. As the Indian tribe declined, he joined Buffalo Bill’s show called The Wild West, as well other similar western themed shows, which were popular in the era after the Western frontier was settled. Black Elk was highly valued as a representative of the Indian traditions, although people tended to see them only in a very showy and superficial way.
  4. In 1892, he married Katie War Bonnet, with whom he would have three children. She soon joined the Catholic Church and, with his approval raised the children Catholic. When she died in 1903, Black Elk himself joined the Catholic Church and took the baptismal name Nicolas. He then married again in 1905 and had two more daughters.
  5. As a Catholic, Black Elk was a catechist who was known for his dynamic speaking and astonishing memory for Scripture. But he also tried to maintain many of the Lakota traditions such as the language, dress and dance. In addition, he described his original visions when he was younger and maintained that they were authentic. He also combined Indian customs with his Catholic faith. For example, he would smoke his old native pipe while praying the rosary. He also referred to rejecting sin as the “spiritual scalping” of evil.
  6. In 1930 he gave a series of interviews to the prairie writer John Neihardt and the Indian historian Joseph Brown. John Neihardt used those interviews to compose the 1932 book Black Elk Speaks, which is considered a classic report of the old Indian way of life and its conflicts with the modern world. Black Elk argued that his visions as a youth were helpful to his faith and that most of Indian culture is consistent with, and helpful to, the Catholic Church.
  7. In 2017, Bishop Robert Gruss of Rapid City, South Dakota began research for the canonization of Black Elk.