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# WALKING ON A CHESSBOARD: OHIO CATHOLICISM AND THE CHALLENGES OF SLAVERY AND IMMIGRATION

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WALKING ON A CHESSBOARD: OHIO CATHOLICISM AND THE CHALLENGES  
OF SLAVERY AND IMMIGRATION

An Essay Submitted to the  
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By  
Corrigan M. Irwin  
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Historical research is an unpredictable business. No first plan of research survives the first exploratory investigations into the appropriate literature. This project was initially undertaken to identify Catholic clerical participation in the abolition movement. What has been uncovered instead is that care for immigrant communities mattered even in the early years of the United States Catholic Church. The national debate over slavery and its abolition, according to the Catholic hierarchy, was a secondary concern. Bishops like John Baptist Purcell of Cincinnati (1800-1883) and Louis Amadeus Rappe (1801-1877) of Cleveland were concerned with balancing church growth with the waves of immigration, which occurred in two major waves: 1831 to 1858, and 1862 to 1877. At the same time, the church was confronting nativism outbreaks like Cincinnati's Bedini Riots and Know-Nothing Riots of 1855, and anti-Catholic rhetoric like the speaking tour of Alessandro Gavazzi. Also, they were negotiating external and internal political challenges, such as bibles in schools, funding for parochial schools, control over poor aid institutions, and the debate around ethnic parishes. Archbishop Purcell and Bishop Rappe had significant disagreements with Cleveland and Cincinnati's German and Irish communities in this regard that completely superseded the national issue of slavery. As in a chess game, both clerics' decisions were implemented with the desire to preserve their freedom of public mobility, for themselves and their wider communities.

The German and Irish communities of Cleveland and Cincinnati consumed the chief attention of Ohio Bishops Louis Amadeus Rappe of Cleveland and John Baptist Purcell of Cincinnati because of the demands of developing charity infrastructure and the fundraising and building of parish churches for these two growing groups. Further, they

were obliged to aid two demographic groups with two different sets of needs. According to the research of sociologist John Moffat Mecklin, the nineteenth-century United States absorbed four waves of immigration. They began with a wave from 1837-1851, peaked in 1855, continued from 1862-1877 with a height in 1873 and again from 1878-1897 with a climax in 1888, and ended with the years of 1898 to the start of World War I.<sup>1</sup> The migrants to America in the first wave were either from the British Isles or Germany. The causes of the first wave of nineteenth-century immigration to America had been two notable historical events, which included the Revolutions of 1848, and the Irish Potato Blight (1845-1840). In the American Midwest and Northeast, German and Irish immigration eclipsed all other immigrant backgrounds. According to the statistics cited by Patrick W. Carey by the time of the census of 1860, Irish Americans, by a 63 percent, of the whole Catholic population of the country. By the census of 1870, there were also 600,000 Catholics from Germany.<sup>2</sup> Catholic German Americans began in national parish pockets in New York City, Pennsylvania, and Maryland, but blanketed the Midwest and Northeast en masse after the Revolutions of 1848, with concentrations in what Carey calls the “German Triangle” of the cities of Cincinnati, Milwaukee, and St. Louis. If you add on the extra context of river travel through the Ohio Erie Canal and the National Road, Cleveland can also be added into this list.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Sister Mary Cecilia Paluszak C.P.P.S, “The Opinion of the Catholic Telegraph on Contemporary Affairs and Politics, 1831-1871.” 1940. 12.

<sup>2</sup> Patrick W. Carey, *Catholics in America : A History* (Lanham: MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008), 30.

<sup>3</sup> David Van Tassel and John J. Grabowski, *The Encyclopedia of Cleveland History s.v. “Germans”* (Indiana University Press in association with Case Western Reserve University and the Western Reserve Historical Society, 1996), 473.

Most of Cleveland's German community was comprised of settlers who came from states with already established communities like Pennsylvania, New York, and Maryland. Their ancestors were immigrants to the eastern seaboard before the revolution. As Cleveland's German population grew from the 1830s on, their neighborhoods grew up along Lorain St. in Brooklyn and Superior and Garden (now renamed Central Ave.). The rapid establishment of the nation's railroad lines accelerated German immigration to Cleveland, especially in the 1840s. These immigrants, after the 1848 Revolutions, in a broad sense, were pro-democracy and well educated. They were as a bloc pro-union and anti-slavery during the years before and during the Civil War. By 1840 and 1846, Cleveland's German community expanded from 6,000 to 10,000 citizens.<sup>4</sup> For the Germans that were Catholic, Cleveland was served by missionary circuit priests, and in 1835 Cleveland Catholics welcomed their first permanent priests. The earliest Catholic church in Cleveland, St. Mary on the Flats, had a significant German population. Cleveland's German Catholics were zealous in their advocacy of parochial schools, parishes with their ethnic majority and other cultural enterprises that passed on the languages and traditions of their nation of origin.

Parallel to the story of Cleveland's Germans is the story of Irish Cleveland. The Irish of Cleveland did not reach a significant numerical presence until the migrations that originated from the 1840's Potato Blight. Unlike the firmly established Irish communities of New York City, Boston, Newark, Baltimore, etc..<sup>5</sup> Most of Cleveland's Irish were for-

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> David D. Van Tassel, and John J. Grabowski, *The Encyclopedia of Cleveland History*, 576.

mer farmers who converted themselves into assorted laborers in the various mills, factories, steel and ironworks, and dockyards along Cleveland's section of the Cuyahoga River, and in what is now Newburgh Township. The Irish of Cleveland developed their neighborhoods around the east and west banks of the mouth of the Cuyahoga River, with an epicenter at a bend of the Cuyahoga now known as The Angle. Its boundaries were the parish church of St. Malachi, an area north of Detroit Ave, east of West 28 St., to downtown Washington Avenue, to Whiskey Island. When Louis Amadeus Rappe arrived as the inaugural Bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Cleveland, he found the first migrants from the Irish Potato Blight in ghetto level conditions, ripe for diseases. Calling in all possible connections and favors from his native France, his earliest efforts as Catholic Cleveland's first Bishop were the establishment of a hospital and orphanage to minister to the orphans of migrants of the Potato Blight, and a children's hospital run by the first communities of women religious in Cleveland. After St. Mary on the Flats was disbanded with the completion of Cleveland's Catholic cathedral, Rappe established St. Patrick and Holy Name as the two parishes for Cleveland's Irish, each on Cleveland's respective East and Westside. By the census of 1870, 10 percent of the City of Cleveland was Irish.

The Catholic Irish and Germans of Cincinnati resided south of Cleveland and Cuyahoga County, along the Ohio River in Hamilton County. The difference as previously explained was that Cincinnati was one of the principal cities of the US-German Triangle of immigration, the others being Milwaukee and St. Louis. They arrived in two waves, the first between 1830-1849 and from 1849 to 1865. The first wave came in a broad sense due to political instability in Germany in the years after the Napoleonic Wars.

They assimilated into American society quickly. The migrants of the second wave were the famous “forty-eighters,” migrants of all kinds from the Revolutions of 1848. As Cincinnati’s Germans put down roots in their adopted city, their neighborhoods germinated in the city’s northern districts.<sup>6</sup> In matters of employment, most of these immigrants from two waves were skilled laborers who founded many different businesses, such as butchers, grocers, barkeepers, etc. Because of their location in the German Triangle, their presence in comparison to Cleveland’s German and Irish better favored the Germans of the city. They were usually denied employment in enterprises led by native Cincinnatians. Germanic customs often rubbed America’s Protestant majority the wrong way. “New” fellow citizens and families who enjoyed theaters, taverns, music, and singing societies on Sundays were considered questionable in their patriotism, morality, and their ability to assimilate. German Cincinnati provided compatriot newcomers with an extensive charitable network to adjust into their adopted city. Hospitals, schools, and four German newspapers were available to new migrants to put down roots in their new home. In the year 1841 the German population of Cincinnati was calculated to be 14,163 citizens.<sup>7</sup>

While the Germans of Cincinnati had the strongest immigrant plurality of presence in the city’s life, it was not a complete one. 1851 statistics show that after Cincinnati’s German representation of 28 percent was Cincinnati’s Irish with a representation of 12 percent. The chief reason for their migration was the Irish Potato Blight of the 1840s. Like the Irish of Cleveland, there were former farmers turned to unskilled laborers. They

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<sup>6</sup> Roger A. Fortin, *Faith and Action: A History of the Catholic Archdiocese of Cincinnati, 1821-1996*. (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2002), 78.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 4.

worked along Cincinnati's riverfront and dockyards. Their neighborhoods budded in Cincinnati's first, third, and fourth wards on its southeastern edge, and along its waterfront.<sup>8</sup> John Baptist Purcell, Cincinnati's second bishop and then first Archbishop, was involved in the care of the city's Irish and German Catholics. For the Germans, it meant mediating numerous national parish disputes. For the Irish, it meant aid to the city's Irish community, for instance advocacy for Irish employment through his diocesan newspaper, and advising them to discard cultural practices (for example, wakes) that would impede full assimilation.

In the first decades of the American Catholic Church, its position on slavery was articulated by Charles England, the inaugural Catholic Bishop of Charleston, South Carolina. His position was if there were to be any changes in the United States slavery system and culture, change must come from the nation's legislative institutions.<sup>9</sup> Francis Patrick Kenrick, an American moral theologian, Bishop of Philadelphia, and then the Archbishop of Baltimore during the Civil War, composed a moral theology textbook used in seminaries at this time in which slavery was discussed as an existing institution, not a practice to be condemned or abolished. In this textbook, published in 1841 and titled *Theologia Moralis*, Kenrick articulates that slavery as a whole did not abolish a man or woman's intrinsic dignity. Slavery gave a master a right to use slaves for labor, but that came with a specific duty to honor enslaved people's right to knowledge and practice of religion, permanent families and marriages, and adequate food, shelter, and clothing to

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<sup>8</sup> Roger A. Fortin, *Faith and Action*, 90.

<sup>9</sup> Patrick W. Carey, *Catholics in America*, 41.

their specific needs.<sup>10</sup> Carey acknowledges that these “guidelines” within the broader story of United States slavery were rarely followed. The United States Catholic Church was preoccupied from the beginning with absorbing the continual waves of immigration that came to America, then immediately establishing permanent arms of church government and charitable outreach. If there were to be any changes in the United States slavery system and culture, their position was that change must come from the nation’s legislative institutions. The church’s stance was people-oriented, not system-oriented.

As the Catholic communities grew during the Antebellum years and the Civil War, and they developed their charitable institutions and organs of internal government, they had to minister to their congregations, while looking over their shoulder should any storm clouds of Nativism arise.

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 5.

## Nativism

In the general context of United States history, Nativism means an active suspicion of anyone, anywhere, and in any walk of life what was not an ethnic Anglo-Saxon and Protestant Christian.<sup>11</sup> On top of this general definition, Nativism in the United States took a robust anti-Catholic angle, along with a teaspoon of conspiracy theory. They believed in a broad sense that any Catholic of any background in the United States, was somehow, in some way, a foreign agent with the explicit goal of overthrowing the United States and establishing a despotic monarchy and eradicating all protestant Christianity. The early history of the United States had a strong vein of anti-Catholicism. In the colonial era, it was not uncommon for some of the original 13 states to have anti-catholic codes on their books, limits on church building, civil liberties, etc. Massachusetts, before and after the Revolution, still celebrated Guy Fawkes Day or as it was alternatively referred to, Pope's Day — a holiday that originated from the discovery of a Catholic plot to assassinate King James I of England. While the immediate years after the Revolution saw no observable outbreaks of Nativism, the 1830's and 40's saw the first major resurgence of these sentiments in the United States historical record.

During the height of the nineteenth-century Nativist Movement, there was a niche in the print market for anti-Catholic literature, for instance, convent captivity narratives. These works and other anti-catholic narratives were popular. A work by Maria Monk *Awful Discourses of the Hotel Dieu Nunnery (1836)* had a sale tally of 300,000 copies, another work by Rebecca Reid, *Six Months in a Convent (1835)* in one month sold 200,000

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<sup>11</sup> Kevin F. Kern and Gregory S. Wilson *Ohio: A History of the Buckeye State* (Malden MA: Wiley Blackwell, John Wiley & Sons, Inc, 2014), 140.

copies.<sup>12</sup> The goal of the convent captivity narrative was to show the lax and immoral sexual ethics of Catholic clergy and women religious.

Nativism's climax in nineteenth-century America was with the short-lived American/Know-Nothing Society / political party. Several years after its founding lodge was established in New York City in 1843 the Know-Nothings had chapters in thirty-five of the then states and territories in the nation.<sup>13</sup> Their original name was the Order of the Star-Spangled Banner. Meetings were strictly closed, and members were forbidden to discuss these meetings or disclose their or anyone else's membership in the organization, or even its very existence.<sup>14</sup> If a person of any stripe would ask about the order, a member's taught response would be "I know nothing" hence the origin of their informal name. In the specific context of Ohio, during the 1855 gubernatorial election the Ohio Know-Nothings allied with the some Fusionists (the first name for Republicans) that gave Salmon Chase the election, thus elevating nativist political influence in the midwest.<sup>15</sup>

As the Nativist Movement spread across the United States, Catholic leaders' responses varied. Archbishop of Cincinnati John Baptist Purcell adopted a peaceful resistance approach: to use a contemporary analogy "When they go low, we go high." Or, as he explicitly explained it himself in a public speech: "We will not resist persecution with

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<sup>12</sup> Amanda M. Cavanagh, "The Catholic Threat: Nativism in Cleveland during the 1850's". John Carroll University 2010, 13.

<sup>13</sup> Sister Mary Cecilia Paluszak, C.P.P.S, "The Opinion of the Catholic Telegraph," 56.

<sup>14</sup> Amanda M. Cavanagh, "The Catholic Threat," 39.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 4.

the weapon of our persecutors. We will not stir up civil war.”<sup>16</sup> According to Roger Fortin, this was the moderate line that any of the Catholic bishops at this time could take. In contrast, Bishop Francis Patrick Kenrick, Bishop of Philadelphia, and then the first Civil War Archbishop of Baltimore did not take a documented stand on Nativism Movement at all, even when a Philadelphia church was torched to the ground along with some of Philadelphia’s Irish neighborhoods in 1844. At the other end of the spectrum, Archbishop Purcell’s close friend and fellow Irish immigrant John Hughes, New York City’s fourth Bishop and inaugural Archbishop, chose the direct and militant path. He ordered all his parish priests and lay families of those parishes to arm themselves to protect their local properties.<sup>17</sup>

It did not help Purcell’s peaceful resistance approach that Cincinnati had an active chapter of the American Protestant Association (the non-political and strictly polemical predecessor of the Know-Nothing Society), and a Nativist leaning newspaper active in the city called the *American Protestant*.<sup>18</sup> In response, the Archdiocese of Cincinnati’s newspaper *The Catholic Telegraph* served as Purcell’s mouthpiece. *The Catholic Telegraph* was a pro-immigration publication (with a particular emphasis on Irish immigration), which included data on recent arrivals, notices on places for settlement, and copies of nativist arguments and rebuttals to them. For example, the following passage comes

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<sup>16</sup> Roger A. Fortin, *Faith and Action*, 108.

<sup>17</sup> Roger A. Fortin, *Faith and Action*, 109.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, 6.

from a long counterpoint against the argument that too many poor migrants were being allowed into the United States:

...many helpless strangers land on our shores, but to call them paupers, and treat them as such because they have not means of immediate subsistence, or to consider them so because they may have been paupers in a country with an overcharged population...<sup>19</sup>

The kindling both direct and indirect for the escalation into violence such as Cincinnati's Bedini and 1855 Know Nothing Riots, originated with the Revolutions of 1848. In summary, the Revolutions of 1848 were assorted attempted revolutions in France, Germany, the Austrian Empire, and Italy to bring about various degree of liberal republican democracy in their respective countries.<sup>20</sup> For French, German, Austrian, and Italian Catholics there was a general hope that the Catholic hierarchy would cooperate in their respective countries in democratic reform. The election of the new Pope Pius IX in 1846, plus his early policy moves, raised liberal hopes. These measures consisted of chiefly amnesty to prisoners and a constitutional government for the Papal States.<sup>21</sup> However, ultimately, the Revolutions of 1848 did not receive Catholic support because their baseline attitude to the church was anti-Catholic and anti-clerical. The nail in the coffin for any papal support of the 1848 revolutions was the assassination of Pius IX's Prime Minister, Count Pellegrino Rossi. Pius fled to safety and when he returned, it was as an arch-reactionary. Most disappointed revolutionaries, named or unnamed, melted into the legions of immigrants that fled to countries such as the United States and established

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<sup>19</sup> Sister Mary Cecilia Paluszak C.P.P.S., "The Opinion of the Catholic Telegraph," 14.

<sup>20</sup> Amanda M. Cavanagh, "The Catholic Threat," 27.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

communities in cities like Cincinnati. From 1849, then, American anti-Catholicism was informed by a view of the papacy as demonstrably militant, the presence of former revolutionaries angry at Catholic actions during the Revolutions of 1848.

Up North in Cleveland, while research could not detect any civil unrest in regards to Nativism, what was uncovered was a media culture assisting in Nativism becoming politically active by playing on the paranoia of a Catholic invasion. In the middle of the nineteenth century Cleveland's homogeneity as a town of WASP settlers gave out, and the foundation of an urban city was prepared. When Cleveland was finally chartered as a city in 1836, the city's religious makeup consisted of 10 English speaking Protestant churches where the parishioners were descendants of New England settlers, two German Protestant congregations, and no Catholic churches or Jewish synagogues. By 1850, New England-originated Protestant predominance was frayed. The Protestant churches of New England origin had grown to nineteen, three German Protestant churches, and one Catholic Church and Jewish synagogue respectively. By the year 1860, there were nine Catholic parish churches, and Catholics in Cleveland's general population had increased by 30 percent.<sup>22</sup> This growing presence in the life of the city was tinder to Cleveland's Nativist sympathizers and active Nativists wanted to turn paranoia, suspicion, and religious intolerance into raw propaganda.

One notable event that combined the aftermath of the 1848 Revolutions with rising anti-catholicism to stoke this fire was the speaking tour of Alessandro Gavazzi. Gavazzi was a former Catholic priest turned radical polemical speaker. He dedicated

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<sup>22</sup> Amanda M. Cavanagh, "The Catholic Threat," 18-19.

himself daily to (in his militant language) “stripping the romish harlot of her garb.”<sup>23</sup>

With a tour starting in New York City, he arrived in Cleveland to speak on the 5 November 1853 at Cleveland’s Melodeon Hall. Amanda Cavanaugh cites a quotation from the *Cleveland Forest City Democrats’* coverage of Gavazzi’s lecture:

The Melodeon was filled on Saturday evening to hear the Italian patriot, notwithstanding the inclemency of the weather. He was enthusiastically received and his discourse elicited constant and loud applause from all sides of the hall.<sup>24</sup>

Gavazzi roared to his Cleveland audience that republican liberty could only put down roots in strictly Protestant countries. He asserted that the United States owed its freedom to anti-catholic measures, for from the priests, to bishops, to cardinals, to the pope, the Catholic Church was intrinsically hostile to any democratically structured government. Gavazzi went further and explained that Catholicism or Popery attacked United States liberties through the Jesuits, priests, and convents. He hammered home that the entire Catholic clergy was committed to manipulating his host nation’s electoral system. He was in favor of increasing the citizenship process from five to 10 years so “until these hordes of Catholics had learned the duties of a citizen and the nature of a free government, and had become Americanized at heart.”<sup>25</sup> Monsignor Geatano Bedini was mentioned at a point in Gavazzi’s Cleveland speech, Gavazzi placed the responsibility of the execution of Bolognese revolutionaries in 1848 at the feet of Bedini “Butcher of Bologna” responsible for executions in Bologna during the 1848 Revolutions. Gavazzi

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<sup>23</sup> Amanda M. Cavanaugh, “The Catholic Threat.” 33.

<sup>24</sup> Amanda M. Cavanaugh, “The Catholic Threat.” 34.

<sup>25</sup> Amanda M. Cavanaugh, *The Catholic Threat*, 35.

stressed with all of his oratory that Bedini was “a formidable foe bent on undermining the foundations of American liberty.”<sup>26</sup> Alessandro Gavazzi’s Cleveland speech agitated Nativist sympathies in the United States to such a degree, that they lit the match of open Nativist violence in Cincinnati.

In December of 1853, only a few weeks after Gavazzi’s Cleveland speech Archbishop Purcell welcomed to his cathedral rectory in Cincinnati Monsignor Bedini, who was sent on an inspection excursion by Rome to investigate lay trusteeship among German Catholics of Philadelphia, Buffalo, and St. Louis. Every prelate who welcomed him for visitations was terrified for his safety. This passage comes from an issue of *The Catholic Telegraph* commenting on an attempt on Bedini’s life in New York, before his arrival in Cincinnati. Its message is an appeal to the reasonable to people of the nation, for the anyone even a visitor to the United States to be guaranteed police safety during their travels:

The feelings of every American who has regard for civilized protection and intercourse between nations should revoke against it; and the man who will permit his religious particularities or antipathies to justify such treatment, shows thereby he is destitute of religious principle as of honorable treatment.<sup>27</sup>

The night of the Christmas service at St. Peter in Chains Cathedral, while Bedini was giving a bilingual in French and German, a mob of Cincinnati’s German citizens, who were supporters of the German 1848 radicals flared up. As the demonstration grew from 800 to 1000 marchers, they stormed up from Free Men’s Hall, along the city streets

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 6.

<sup>27</sup> Sister Mary Cecilia Paluszak, C.P.P.S. *The Opinion of the Catholic Telegraph*, 62.

of Mercer and Vine, and marched toward the Arch-episcopal residence itself,<sup>28</sup> with torches and effigies of Bedini. In Archbishop Purcell's account in a letter to his friend Archbishop Antoine Blanc,

The Nuncio has been here. And at this peaceful season his visit has made the occasion of death, and bloodshed, and riot and lawsuits."<sup>29</sup> ... "On Christmas night "500 to 1000 (German) freemen marched in procession to within a square of the cathedral, with execrable charivari music, transparencies, a gallows, an effigy stuffed and ready for hanging the nuncio, mottoes infernal, clubs, dirks, and pistols."<sup>30</sup>

The Cincinnati police as Purcell described were already stationed and ready, a tense standoff lasted only briefly. A shot was fired and in the wording of Purcell's description, the police "pitched into them."<sup>31</sup> One German was killed, fifteen were wounded (including a policeman), and sixty-five arrests were made. But all charges had to be dropped because public sympathy was on the side of the 1848 German sympathizers and very anti-police. *The Catholic Telegraph* placed the blame for the riots directly at the prejudice stirred up by the speaking tour of Gavazzi. Its editors declared it "the first public fruit of Cincinnati, of Gavazzi's calumnies against the Papal Nuncio Monsignor Bedini."<sup>32</sup>

The aftermath of the Bedini Riots did not go Purcell's way at all. After he co-dedicated the new parish of Holy Trinity with Purcell, Bedini left the United States out of

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 9.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 9.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 9.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, 9.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 15.

New York harbor. Before he left, he went on the record saying that Purcell and his colleagues did not come to his defense enough and did not ensure his safety. Purcell was forced into a defensive position. He made sure that his communications with the Vatican made it known that he praised Bedini and had been on his side at all times:

I put myself a dozen times between him and death while here...I covered him as well as I could with my little person to protect him from the dagger of the assassin when...visiting German Churches and Schools.<sup>33</sup>

Purcell depicted himself as a tangible reminder of the Catholic Church's moral authority. In his eyes he had imitated the suffering of Jesus of Nazareth by his calm handling of the protestors abuse and ensuring Bedini got to his next location.<sup>34</sup> In both his journalistic fight against Nativism and in his experience in the Bedini Riots Purcell was absorbed not with the national debate over slavery, but with defending his parishioners, and himself against increasingly violent anti-Catholicism.

Less than two years after the Bedini Riots, Nativists escalated public violence in Purcell's archdiocese in the context of a local election. In April of 1855, the citizens of Cincinnati mustered out to their polling places to pick their next mayor. Their choices were between two newspaper editors, for the Democrats, James J. Faran, editor of the *Cincinnati Enquirer*, and Anti-Catholic Free School candidate James Taylor editor of the *Cincinnati Times*. Taylor had stepped up his paper's anti-immigration attacks in the election countdown, and sporadic fits of violence at the polls broke out on Election Day. The day after the election, a mob of Cincinnati Nativists stormed in the German neighborhood

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 9.

<sup>34</sup> Andrew Mach, "Transatlantic Tales and Democratic Dreams: Archbishop Gaetano Bedini, Alessandro Gavazzi and the Struggle to Define Republican Liberty in a Revolutionary Age, 1848-1854." 2014. 61.

of the city, Over-The-Rhine, and proceeded to ransack the area and attack its inhabitants. Several were killed. The mob also destroyed several ward ballot boxes in an attempt to deprive the Democrats of the Mayor's Office.<sup>35</sup> (Mr. Faran nonetheless won the mayoralship and served from 1855 to 1857). William Gienapp argues that the escalated violence of the antebellum years against Catholics by Nativists grew out of the paranoia of a Catholic takeover of the U.S. government, and their perceived lack of desire to quickly assimilate.<sup>36</sup> But whatever the reason for the escalation, Nativist violence in all its forms and Purcell's actual experience was the primal fear of every Catholic prelate in nineteenth century America.

### **Building Institutional Infrastructure**

By the mid nineteenth century, the United States Catholic Church was still fairly new in terms of the hierarchy of bishops. The bishops were either former missionaries turned inaugural prelates or the successors to a founding bishop. The two Bishops of Cincinnati and Cleveland faced particular challenges as the leaders entrusted with building the institutional infrastructure of Catholicism in their cities. It is one thing to be a missionary and establish a religious community, but it is another to consolidate this said community, help it grow, mediate external and internal social and political challenges, and minister to their flocks. Both Purcell and Rappe faced particular challenges as leaders entrusted with building the institutional infrastructure of Catholicism in their respective cities. One man's decisions led to his resignation, while the other managed to maintain

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<sup>35</sup> William E. Gienapp, *The Origins of the Republican Party 1852-1856* (New York: Oxford University Press), 196.

<sup>36</sup> William E. Gienapp, *The Origins of the Republican Party*, 95.

cordial internal relations with his flock. In external matters, both had to fight for their communities in a social and political culture consciously and subconsciously dominated by Protestant Christianity. In Archbishop Purcell's case, he publicly entered the debates over bibles in public schools. For Bishop Rappe, it was the scope and control of poor relief for Catholic Clevelanders.

A National Parish is defined as a Catholic community specifically identified with the ethnic background of the parishioners. The debate over national parishes is the most well documented historical question in the history of Catholicism in the United States.

Patrick Carey states on this point,

...though the United States Catholic Church was united in doctrine, institutional structure, and sacraments, the communities of the United States Catholic church were distinct from the neighboring communities and how they acted within internal parish life, and outside in public.<sup>37</sup>

The paradox of Archbishop Purcell's ministries to his city's Irish and German flocks was that while he was always concerned over the place of Catholics in American life, he never, through *The Catholic Telegraph* or other public statements, stressed full assimilation to Cincinnati's Catholic immigrants. He wrote, "Here there is work enough for all Catholics of all nations to do for their country and religion."<sup>38</sup> Bishop Rappe of Cleveland confronted the national parish debate fully with Cleveland's Catholic Irish and Germans. Internal disputes around separate churches, schools, and pastors all came to his desk. To understand the place of Cincinnati and Cleveland's Irish and German communi-

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<sup>37</sup> Patrick W. Carey, *Catholics in America*, 29.

<sup>38</sup> Roger A. Fortin, *Faith in Action*, 94.

ties in the national parish debate, their relationship with their church needs to be understood. To condense the research of Roger Fortin, both nationalities placed the parish church as central to their cultural life, but while German Catholics had a broad and established history of various degrees of lay influence in church governance, Irish Catholic culture was much more priest-and bishop- led, and the laity in church government matters were extremely deferential.<sup>39</sup> Both the cities of Cleveland and Cincinnati had vocal proponents for national parishes in their Catholic populations that were both clerical and lay. The best argument for ethnic parishes was articulated by a Jesuit priest, Fr. Francis X. Weninger S.J., who was active in the Archdiocese of Cincinnati, as well as the Diocese of Cleveland. Among the Ohio German Catholics he ministered to, he worked to achieve as much ethnic autonomy as possible. His mantra to his congregants was “Language Saves the Faith.” Weninger and his supporters believed that, while it was important for immigrant children to learn English, their parish church and school should be able to pass on the faith and specific cultural traditions in their immigrant language.<sup>40</sup> Opponents of ethnic parishes countered by saying that separate immigrant parishes would impede wider community unity, give credence to Nativist narratives, and overextend resources that were dependent on the ability of parishioners to contribute to the collection plate.

Archbishop Purcell’s experience with the national parish debate was dominated chiefly by Catholic Cincinnati’s German majority. Purcell, through his public statements or ones printed in *The Catholic Telegraph*, praised his territory’s German Catholic adher-

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<sup>39</sup> Fortin, *Faith and Action* 91.

<sup>40</sup> Henry B. Leonard, “Ethnic Conflict and Episcopal Power: The Diocese of Cleveland, 1847-1870.” *Catholic Historical Review* 62, no. 3 (1976): 393.

ents for giving their parishes strong financial bases, and taking the initiative to establish charitable aid institutions and cultural societies to reinforce their cultural heritage (language chiefly). Purcell, throughout his tenure as Archbishop of Cincinnati, pressed as often as he could for a balance of power in the languages utilized in Catholic Cincinnati's religious life. In regards to the Catholic parishes where English and German-speaking families existed as neighbors, Purcell declared "the language of the instructions should be only that spoken by the generality of the congregation." When the topic changed to sacraments, they should "be administered by English to English, by German to German."<sup>41</sup> If German families understood English, they had "a right if they choose, to attach themselves to English Congregations." If an English speaking family understood German, they were "inexcusable for depriving themselves of the advantage of instruction, which they can enjoy only in their churches."<sup>42</sup>

Where conflicts began to be recorded with the Archbishop of Cincinnati and the city's Catholic Germans was the around the deeds to church property, in the context of lay trusteeship. Lay trusteeship means that in order to assist in the planning, construction, decoration, and financial management of parishes, the laymen of the parish would form a board of trustees to assist the parish priest. This form of lay involvement in parish government was extremely popular in the eastern seaboard Catholic communities, for it was deemed applicable to the nation's republican values.<sup>43</sup> Lay trusteeship sometimes went

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid, 10.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, 10.

<sup>43</sup> Patrick W. Carey, *Catholics in America*, 25.

too far when they felt it was within their jurisdiction to own all administrative documents regarding church property. Archbishop Purcell had to ascertain in regards to who should own the deeds to church properties. Would it be the individual lay boards in his territory, or the Archdiocese, which by extension, was himself?

The case studies of this conflict, as retold by Roger Fortin, involve Purcell's exchanges with the German Catholic Cemetery Association and the St. Peter's Cemetery Association. In 1842, Purcell purchased a block of land, consisting of 19 acres, to merge with Old St. Joseph Cemetery. That next year, one-half of the 19-acre tract was deeded to a board of German laymen called The German Catholic Cemetery Association. The association bought more property and established St. Peter's Cemetery. In 1853, Purcell completed another land transaction of sixty-one acres and christened it as another St. Joseph Cemetery. In 1880, both merged into the present St. Joseph Cemetery Association.<sup>44</sup> After his 1842 land purchase, Archbishop Purcell learned of opposition to diocesan control over church properties. A faction of the German Catholic Cemetery Association of Cincinnati and St. Mary's parish believed in complete lay control over parochial fiscal concerns. To press their position, they collected signatures and lobbied the statehouse in Columbus. The following year, there was a counter-protest meeting at St. Mary's parish against fully lay incorporation. After this meeting, the plans by the German Catholic Cemetery Association of Cincinnati never materialized.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Roger A. Fortin, *Faith in Action*, 98.

<sup>45</sup> Roger A. Fortin, *Faith in Action*, 100.

After this disagreement was settled, another one took its place. The St. Peter's Cemetery Association openly defied Purcell's explicit orders to not allow people who were not in communion with the church to be buried in Catholic cemeteries. He placed the entire cemetery under interdict. The command was read out to all German parishes in Cincinnati, and full obedience was eventually achieved. In spite of these conflicts, Archbishop Purcell and Cincinnati's Catholic German citizens co-established a tradition of parish autonomy and lay influence in parish government. Which in turn meant the Archbishop of Cincinnati could focus on advocating for his Catholic flock in the public sphere, now his internal political affairs were settled.

While in the Diocese of Cleveland, Bishop Louis Amadeus Rappe fully confronted the national parish debate in his territory, but from an opposite direction. Unlike the Archbishop of Cincinnati, the first Bishop of Cleveland consistently affirmed Americanism to his flock. At one point Rappe wrote, "a spirit of nationalism" would be "quite fatal to the Catholic cause."<sup>46</sup> During his tenure as Cleveland's first bishop, Rappe's guidelines for parochial schools were that all homilies and religion classes were to be in English and English alone so that immigrant children could be assimilated as quickly as possible.<sup>47</sup> The first Bishop of Cleveland viewed the German demographic of his flock with a considerable degree of suspicion. He did not speak any German, and being a native Frenchman, held the culture of his birth to a subconscious standard of superiority to Germanic culture. He refused all their requests for separate parochial schools. He argued

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<sup>46</sup> Henry B. Leonard, "Ethnic Conflict and Episcopal Power," 391.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, 20.

that it would impede community unity, and give credence to Nativist propaganda that espoused the idea that Catholic Christians were unpatriotic. In addition, Rappe believed that separate facilities for all Catholic ethnic groups would put unnecessary strains on the resources of the still growing dioceses.

In regards to his Irish faithful, Rappe appreciated their ability to learn and speak English. But in Leonard's analysis, Rappe's positive attitude towards the Irish's English capacities was tempered with the documented perception that the Irish were impoverished, improvident, and ignorant. In a letter to the Vatican Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, Purcell said that the Irish's drinking habits "produced quarrels, public battles, the breakup of families, divorce {and} profanation of the sabbath."<sup>48</sup> Though Rappe was confident in his Irish faithful's capacity to assimilate, they could be too much attached to "nationalistic prejudice."<sup>49</sup> Bishop Rappe's conflicts with Cleveland's Catholic Irish centered around their complaints about having non-Irish priests lead their parishes.

Bishop Rappe crossed paths with Fr. Weninger over the use of German in parochial schools in the predominantly German Catholic areas of Sandusky and Toledo. He appeased them by giving them St. Mary's parish for their exclusive use. They were not happy and sent further complaints to the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, even when he made a prominent German proponent of national parishes his vicar-general. After this match was settled, he had to fight over the question with the rural St.

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<sup>48</sup> Henry B. Leonard, "Ethnic Conflict and Episcopal Power," 398

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, 22.

Philip Neri Church in Stark County, Ohio, about whether it should be Irish, German, or both. After the St. Philip Neri row, the scholarship of the first Bishop of Cleveland does not document further disagreements with the German demographic in the Diocese of Cleveland. This was replaced by fights with the Irish communities of the diocese. They in broad terms did not approve of mixed congregations, Irish priests being sent to non-Irish congregations, and the preference for French priests who could speak English, German, and French. The Irish priests of the diocese made their grievances known at the 1865 Synod, where Rappe attempted to dismiss them. The Irish priests, led by the rector of his seminary, complained further to the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith. After an investigation by Rappe's metropolitan, John Purcell of Cincinnati, most of the grievances were found to be unreasonable, and Rappe was advised to find native-born Americans in his search for future seminarians. Eventually, for the sake of religious order in Cleveland, The Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith ordered Rappe to draw up and submit his letter of resignation.

While the debate over national parishes was the absorbing internal topic of discussion in Catholic Cincinnati and Cleveland, external political challenges also arose. In Archbishop Purcell's case he added his voice to the debate around bibles and public schools. For Bishop Rappe in Cleveland, it was the scope of poor relief for Clevelanders, as in the case of the city's Ragged School. To understand the Catholic challenge to public education, it is important to know what Professor Jon Djerde called "The Protestant Conundrum" as well as the writings of Horace Mann. In his research Djerde explains that the mindset among nineteenth U.S. Protestants was that while the first amendment's reli-

gious freedom clauses were applauded, they at the same time believed that their style of Christianity was vital to preserving these constitutional values. This was personified by the jurisprudence of Associate Supreme Court Justice Joseph Story. He believed that Article VI of the Constitution meant to “cut off forever every pretense of any alliance between church and state and the national government.”<sup>50</sup> In addition, Story declared

“there will probably be found few persons on this or any other Christian country who would deliberately contend that it was unreasonable or unjust to foster and encourage the Christian religion generally as a matter of sound policy as well as of revealed truth.”<sup>51</sup>

Inferred from these two quotes is that Justice Story, like most Protestant Christians at that time, would have believed that Protestant Christianity best fostered republican principles. Adding onto this baseline is the teaching principles of Horace Mann. Mann wrote that state public schools could at the same time be non-sectarian, teaching generic Christian principles like the Ten Commandments.

In his writings, Horace Mann contrasted Catholic with Protestant approaches to education.

“When Protestantism arose, freedom of opinion for each, tolerance for all, were the elements that gave it vitality and strength. The avowed doctrine of Catholicism was, that men could not think for themselves.”<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Jon Gjerde, and S. Deborah Kang, *Catholicism and the Shaping of 19th Century America*. (New York : Cambridge University Press, 2012), 20.

<sup>51</sup> Jon Gjerde, and S. Deborah Kang, *Catholicism and the Shaping of 19th Century America*, 22.

<sup>52</sup> John T. McGreevy, 2004. *Catholicism and American Freedom : A History*. (New York: W.W. Norton, 2004), 39.

Mann had special objections to Jesuit educational institutions which he believed chose “quicken the mental vision” over the “painted glass of a creed.”<sup>53</sup> Into this view of public education stepped the Catholic challenge. Catholic leaders argued several key criticisms of the public education movement as it stood in the mid-nineteenth century, in regards to its thinkers like Mann. Using the King James Bible in schools they argued set up a preferential facade for Protestantism, or in constitutional language, violated the first amendment’s establishment clause. Secular textbooks, they argued, were usually composed with explicit or implied Protestant bias. Catholic leaders disagreed with Mann that a common set of moral ethics implied no religious stance. The mass, devotional exercises, and prayer were all vital to morality in their eyes.<sup>54</sup> While the Catholic challenge to nineteenth-century public schools is best documented among eastern seaboard communities, Purcell also took a well documented historical stand in this cause, working alongside the Western Literary Institute on the question of bibles in public schools.

In an 1837 speech to the Western Literary Institute, the Archbishop of Cincinnati voiced his opposition to the use of the bible in parts or the whole in public schools. He did not want to place Protestant-composed bibles in the hands of Catholic children. This came as a shock because Purcell was on a committee dominated by Protestants that decided whether or not to permit the whole or selections of the Bible in Woodward High School.<sup>55</sup> His proposed alternative solution was to offer separate days for students of dif-

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid, 22.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, 22.

<sup>55</sup> Roger A. Fortin, *Faith in Action*, 110.

ferent creeds to receive instruction from their pastors. He explained that “If this were done, our public schools would be a great benefit for this country.”<sup>56</sup>

While the institute never mentioned Purcell’s proposal, and he continued to express concerns over bibles in public schools, Purcell felt he was maintaining a cordial relationship with Cincinnati’s educational authorities. He at all times wanted to present the Catholic community under his charge as conciliatory and non-threatening. As the result of a successful petition in 1842, The Cincinnati School Board ordered that all Catholic children were to be excused from reading the King James Bible.

While the Diocese of Cleveland had no documented clashes over bibles in public schools, the case of the Cleveland Ragged School showed how Bishop Louis Amadeus Rappe had to confront a civic poor relief system where aid was mixed with proselytizing, and inequitable support.<sup>57</sup> As the Cleveland city government took on more responsibility in benevolence facilities, assistance became slanted toward Protestants and against Catholics. The Cleveland Orphan Asylum is the best case study for this point. Spearheaded by the city’s First Presbyterian Church, the Orphan Asylum had members across Protestant aligned denominations. Cleveland’s city council gave the asylum 150 dollars a year to take in boys and girls from the wholly city-run infirmary. The city’s two Catholic orphanages received no public aid.

In 1853, Cleveland’s First Methodist Church established a mission school for indigent children. In the city, it became known as the Ragged School. Cleveland’s Catholic

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<sup>56</sup> Roger A. Fortin, *Faith in Action*, 111.

<sup>57</sup> Michael J. McTighe, *A Measure of Success: Protestants and Public Culture in Antebellum Cleveland*. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 88.

community believed this as another venue for Protestants to maintain control over public life, who were beginning to lose the public school battles, as in the case of Archbishop Purcell and the Western Literary Institute. In the words of Michael McTighe “benevolent activities were directed towards efforts to shape the values, behavior, and institutions of the public culture...their aid began to reflect their desire to shape the direction of the new commercial economy through systematic measures which would inculcate their preferred values.”<sup>58</sup> Cleveland’s City Mission resolved that

no continued and permanent relief shall be granted to any family from the relief fund that is or will not become connected with some Protestant Church or Sabbath School or congregation..<sup>59</sup>

McTighe also declares that

the proselytizing aspects of benevolence aimed to guarantee if nothing else, that public culture would not be Catholic. Anti-Catholicism pervaded much of the city’s benevolence.<sup>60</sup>

Bishop Rappe’s solution to institutional prejudice was to provide aid to institutions in all categories to provide for needy Catholics. Protestant benevolent facilities had taken in, for example, Catholic children in the case of orphanages, but the children were forbidden to practice Catholicism in any way. In 1851, Rappe successfully opened Cleveland’s first orphanage for Catholic girls. In the next year, he established St. Joseph’s Hospital, which in 1856 changed to St. Vincent’s Orphanage for Boys. Bishop Rappe had to

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid, 22.

<sup>59</sup> Amanda M. Cavanaugh, “The Catholic Threat,” 24.

<sup>60</sup> Michael J. McTighe, *A Measure of Success*, 89.

cultivate in the Diocese of Cleveland a strictly Catholic poor relief system, in the place of biased Protestant system semi supported by city government.

The Catholic bishops of Cincinnati and Cleveland had to deal with tumultuous nineteenth-century internal political struggles around national parishes, and external political issues in their respective cities. But the time came when slavery and Abolitionism could not be ignored, and after the Civil War finally began, both prelates of the state of Ohio had to make a stand. By the late 1840s to 1850s, when slavery, the abolition movement, and the Civil War were the chief topics of public discussion, the hierarchy of the antebellum United States Catholic Church came to conclusions by region and individual prelate. Through their individual decisions, they were presenting the patriotism of their communities as well as their ability to assimilate into the greater national society. For Bishop Louis Amadeus Rappe of Cleveland, the historical record can provide no private thoughts or public statements. In the case of Archbishop Purcell, the historical record confirms that he was anti-slavery, therefore if compared to bishops who took other documented stances, a minority. Then, when the Civil War finally came, he was fiercely pro-union.

What could be found on Cleveland, slavery, and its abolition, is just a general secular historical framework that would have been active at the time of Louis Amadeus Rappe. Cuyahoga County did elect at one point an anti-slavery congressman, Joshua R. Giddings who served throughout the 1840s. Although Cuyahoga County was gerrymandered out of his district after the 1850 census, his successor, Edward Wade, whose own brother became one of Ohio's senators, was just as reform-minded as Giddings. Cleve-

land newspapers were on the observable whole conservative on the slavery debate. *The Plain Dealer* itself was pro-slavery and Democratic-leaning. *The Cleveland Leader* was the reform-minded publication, but with a much smaller readership base than the *Dealer*.<sup>61</sup> Other than this thin frame of secular data, this is all that can be said per this investigation on Cleveland and slavery.

Catholic Cincinnati's response to slavery is well documented. Though Ohio was a "free" state at the time, statewide opinions on slavery were divided. Cincinnati's mayor at one point sponsored anti-abolitionist meetings in the city because their course of action would "spread desolation and murder throughout the peaceful borders of our sister states."<sup>62</sup> On the topic of slavery, Cincinnati's Catholic Germans and Irish were both heavily prejudiced against the city's African American community, mainly because they did not want any competition in the job market.<sup>63</sup> Nonetheless, Purcell denounced and condemned any attack on Cincinnati's African Americans that had any Catholic participation. Archbishop Purcell and his staff used *The Catholic Telegraph* to warn his flock and readers about what was called by anti-slavery advocates "the slave power":

We have said and we will now repeat it, that slavery and the Catholic Church could never get along well together." "...when the slave power predominates, religion is nominal. There is no life in it."<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> David D. Van Tassel, and John J. Grabowski, *The Encyclopedia of Cleveland History*, 1-2.

<sup>62</sup> Roger A. Fortin, *Faith in Action*, 141.

<sup>63</sup> David J. Endres, "Rectifying the Fatal Contrast: Archbishop John Purcell and the Slavery Controversy among Catholics in Civil War Cincinnati" *Ohio Valley History* 2, (2002): 25.

<sup>64</sup> Carl C. Creason, "United, Yet Divided: An Analysis of Bishops Martin John Spalding and John Baptist Purcell during the Civil War Era" *American Catholic Studies* (2013): 58.

That being said, Purcell could not be an outspoken prelate without taking on some criticism. Martin Spalding was the second Bishop of Louisville, and the second of the two Archbishops of Baltimore during the Civil War years. He at numerous times in their correspondence would write curtly to him over aggravating abolitionists in Kentucky. He wrote to him in language that was civil but clearly agitated on one occasion in 1862, and said, “we already have plenty of political newspapers such as they are, of all complexions.” In the previous year, Spalding wrote to Purcell about his aggravation over that week's *Catholic Telegraph*. He was “not prepared...to see something...favoring civil war against our southern brethren or the bidding of black Republicans.”<sup>65</sup> Bishop Spalding's documented stance on slavery was to stress to his priests complete non-involvement in this issue. When Fort Sumter was surrendered, and the Civil War finally came, Spalding did his best to remain neutral as long as possible. He wrote “My diocese is cut in two by this unhappy war, and I must attend to souls without entering into the angry political discussion.”<sup>66</sup> Though he helped Kentuckians on both sides, Spalding's private writings reveal that he was an ardent opponent of the Lincoln Administration's war effort, and articulated that Kentuckians had the right to defend themselves from a northern invasion. In contrast, in the aftermath of Fort Sumter, Archbishop Purcell was pro-union until the end of the war. He visited all Ohio and Cincinnati military camps, and even flew the flag on the spire of St. Peter in Chains Cathedral.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid, 25.

<sup>66</sup> Carl C. Creason, “The Whole World Seems to Be Getting out of Joint”: The Catholic Response to the Start of the Civil War in the Border South” *U.S. Catholic Historian* 35, no. 3 (2017): 42.

<sup>67</sup> William B. Kurtz, *Excommunicated from the Union : How the Civil War Created a Separate Catholic America*. The North's Civil War (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016), 43.

As has been explained in this investigation, the national debate over slavery and its abolition, according to the Catholic hierarchy, was a secondary concern. Bishops like John Baptist Purcell and Louis Amadeus Rappe were concerned with balancing church growth with the waves of immigration. When slavery and the impending Civil War were the only topics of public discussion, the Catholic Hierarchy made individual stances in the context of their times to show their flock's assimilation and patriotism. The words of Patrick W. Carey will conclude this investigation:

Catholic ambiguity regarding slavery revolved around the distance between the moral code they themselves accepted, and the actual practices that they and their culture observed.<sup>68</sup>

In the metaphor of the chessboard, to survive turbulent times, leaders make their decisions around their desire to ensure that their communities have freedom of mobility.

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<sup>68</sup> Patrick W. Carey, *Catholics in America*, 42.

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