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CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS AND AMERICAN CATHOLIC IDENTITY: 1880 - 1900

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Preface

Prior to embarking on a consideration of Catholic identity we should remember the millions of native peoples of the Americas who, because of the European invasion of this hemisphere, lost their personal and historical identities. In the context of the Quincentennial, there are those who call for a period of lamentation not celebration. Tonight's presentation is neither, rather it is an attempt to penetrate the perceptions of Columbus held by American Catholics during the Quadricentennial celebrations. There were critics of Columbus then but Catholics tended to view them as anti-Catholic bigots who applied a double standard: The critics of the 1890s said that Columbus' enslavement of the Caribbean peoples should preclude celebration, but at the same time they said that it is only patriotic to celebrate the U.S. founding fathers who fostered the slavery of African Americans as they established a government based on equality under the law.

Introduction

Jacques Maritain captured a salient feature of American identity.

Americans seem to be in their own land as pilgrims, prodded by a dream. They are always on the move - available for new tasks, prepared for the possible loss of what they have. They are not settled, installed... This sense of becoming, this sense of the flux of time and the dominion of time over everything here below, can be interpreted, of course, in merely pragmatist terms. It can turn into a worship of becoming and change. It can develop a cast of mind which, in the intellectual field, would mean a horror of any tradition, the denial of any lasting and supra-temporal value. But such a cast of mind is but a degeneration of the inner mood of which I am speaking. In its genuine significance this American mood seems to me to be close to Christian detachment, to the Christian sense of the impermanence of earthly things. Those now with us must fade away if better ones are to appear. 1

We are pilgrims, always on the move. Ours is not a pilgrimage to a sacred space, but we have invoked metaphors to illuminate our country as a sacred space. One puritan divine spoke of the establishment of a "New Jerusalem." Patriots of the Enlightenment spoke of nature's laws as the foundation of our new republic. As Maritain remarked, we have no strong attachment to tradition. We are continually renewing: New World, New England, New York, New Orleans, New Madrid, New Freedom, New Deal, New Frontier, new social order and finally new Old Dutch Cleanser. It is almost a truism to say that families, clans, tribes and modern societies locate their identities in historical renderings, particularly those about the foundation, the source and the origins of peoples. Anthropologists, such as Victor Turner, study the ritual process and elaborate on the role of metaphor in mediating meaning.² Throughout the 19th century, Christopher Columbus was incorporated into our storied life to illuminate our self understanding as a new people on the move. Catholics emphasized the religious significance of the foundation story to deepen the meaning of what it means to be Catholic and American. Tonight's presentation opens with a focus on the role of Columbus in the formation of national identity during the Tricentennial of the landing on San Salvador. To trace Catholic identity requires an exploration of Columbus day parades, Columbian fraternal and sororal societies, and how bishops' perceptions of American culture affected the character of their Columbianism. The latter entails an episcopal struggle that involves Michael Augustine Corrigan, Archbishop of New York, and Bernard McQuaid, Bishop of Rochester, two former presidents of Seton Hall University, and John Ireland, Archbishop of St. Paul, popularly known as "the consecrated blizzard of the Northwest."³ Hence, this is not a paper on Columbus but rather the ways in which Americans and Catholics appropriated Columbus.

In a recent study of Columbus, Leonard I. Sweet, a Protestant Church historian, focused on Columbus's religious perspective and motivation. Noting the strongly millennial theme in American history that has been consistently attributed to a Protestant ethos, particularly of a Puritan strain, Sweet suggests that this theme actually originates with Columbus. He concludes that the ultimate goal of the great navigator was "the vision of a liberated Jerusalem."⁴ In that sense he was the last crusader.

But Sweet's Columbus is also impelled "by fame and fortune." Indeed, he agrees with another scholar's rendering of the explorer's personality as a "curious coordination of the celestial and the crass." He also focuses on the meaning of the name "Christopher Columbus," "Christbearing dove," as symbolic of Columbus's "self image as a man of providential destiny." However, it was his notion of sacred history that led Columbus to envision the imminent liberation of Jerusalem as the sign of the millennium or Christ's reign on earth, based on the book of Revelation (XX.1-5), a period according to one interpretation that would be ushered in by an age of the Holy Spirit.⁵ Since Columbus was influenced by this interpretation, it was he who introduced the millennial motif into the character of America history.

The Puritans articulated a millennial vision that was later popularized in such phrases as the "city on the hill" and the "new Jerusalem." References to scripture have studded public rhetoric proclaiming the divine destiny of America from colonial times to the present. Jonathan Edwards, the evangelical preacher identified with the "Great Awakening" in Protestant life, commented on the millennial character of America "...this new world [was] ... probably no discovered [so] that the new and most glorious state of God's church on earth might commence there; that God might in it begin a new world in a spiritual respect, when he creates the new heaven and the new earth."⁶

Concurrent with this notion of America as a "sacred space" was a tendency to define collective belief in democracy itself as a kind of "faith." Robert N. Bellah and others have referred to this as "civil religion." Bellah observed that much of civil religion "has been derived from Christianity," but that it "clearly is not itself Christianity ... The God of civil religion is ... on the nature side, much more related to order, law and right than to salvation and love ... We have seen ... from the earliest years of the republic a collection of beliefs, symbols and rituals that convey the collective and individual obligation to carry out God's will on earth." In the Declaration of Independence, in the preamble to the Constitution, and in the general political rhetoric, God is viewed "as actively interested and involved in history, with a special concern for America." Anti-monarchist sentiment, the Enlightenment, and the War for Independence engendered a civil religion that extolled the universality of America's mission. According to Bellah, the meaning of U.S. independence is that "will redeem one quarter of the globe from tyranny and oppression and consecrate it the chosen seat of truth, justice, freedom, learning and religion."⁷ Founded on religious liberty, the separation of church and state, and pluralism, civil religion provided diverse peoples with a sense of unity.

Columbianism first entered the consciousness of the American people as an element in civil religion. As the people of the 13 colonies were shifting from colonial to national identity they harkened back to the origins of the "New World" and adopted "Columbia," a latinized form of Columbus, as the symbolic name for the nation.

Two anonymous poets referred to Columbia but such references were prior to the political movements of the 1770s. Mercy Warren, wife of General James Warren and sister of James Otis Jr., colonial patriots in the War for Independence, was the first to invoke Columbia in the context of the American revolution. Published in the Boston Gazette of February 13, 1775, the poem identifies Columbia as a land "where Liberty, a happy Goddess reigned/where no proud Despot rules with lawless sway/ Nor orphans' spoils became the Minion's prey."⁸

Albert J. Hoyt, the scholar who discovered this poem, was responding to George H. Moore's claim that Phyllis Wheatley, a freed slave and poet, coined the term "Columbia." Hoyt's discovery was first published in 1886, but because little is known of his research, Phyllis Wheatley is still identified as the name's original source. Though she may not have been the first to use the name her poetry placed it in the popular parlance.

Wheatley, the first-known Black poet, was born in Africa, the slave of a Boston businessman who granted her manumission in 1773. After she received her freedom, Wheatley visited England where she published her first book of poetry. Benjamin Franklin and other notables visited her, and Voltaire admired her poetry.¹⁰

Wheatley's Columbia was included in her poem, His Excellency General Washington. "Fixed are the eyes of Natives on the Scales, for in their hope Columbia's arm prevails." Washington was so gratified by the poem that he invited Wheatley to his headquarters in Cambridge. The poem achieved popularity when Thomas Paine published it in his Pennsylvania Gazette. In a 1776 poem Wheatley placed Columbia on an "Olympus" of pseudo-mythological figures representing European nationalities: Britannia, Gallia, Germania, Scotia and Hibernia.¹¹

The direct link between Columbus and Columbia is found in a 1778 poem of Joel Barlow. Apparently familiar with the Wheatley poem, Barlow recited his poem, The Prospect of Peace, as a commencement address at Yale College. A year later Barlow stated that "The discovery of America made an important revolution in the history of mankind. It served the purpose of displaying knowledge, liberty and religion."¹²

Barlow's 1787 epic poem in nine books, The Vision of Columbus, identified Columbia as the land of liberty; he saw the American Republic as the culmination of a new era inaugurated by Columbus. The poem is replete with biases imbedded in the Black Legend that portrayed Catholic Spain in terms of the cruelties of the Inquisition, but described Columbus as a man who transcended the Catholic superstition of his era. ¹³ The identification of Columbia with liberty had already achieved some popularity prior to Barlow's poem when New York's King's College was renamed Columbia in 1784.

Thomas Jefferson, James Madison and the three commissioners charged with responsibility for the capital, informed Pierre L'Enfant, its first architect, that the home of the federal government would be entitled Washington in the federal territory of Columbia. One may infer that the commissioners' rationale

went along these lines: Hope guided Columbus to the "New World; Columbia had severed itself from Britannia; Columbia symbolized the hope of the new nation and a new liberty. Hence the residence of the federal government was free from the onus of power, but rather it was to be perceived as the protector of freedom.

As mentioned earlier these manifestations of Columbianism illustrate Robert Bellah's notion of civil religion, i.e., that creed, code and cult uniting diverse people into a common sense of their American identity through sacred texts - the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, The Bill of Rights, the Gettysburg Address, etc., and with special "feast days" - Thanksgiving, July 4, Memorial Day, etc. All of these were accompanied by patriotic hymns, flag-raising rituals, and prayers affirming the nation's particular place in God's providential design.

The first monument to Columbus reflected an earlier phase of this civil religion. According to tradition, the idea for the monument originated at a dinner party hosted by the French Consul in Baltimore, Chevalier Charles-Francois Adrien Le Paulmier D'Annemours. Amid the dinner conversation, a guest lamented the absence of a monument to Columbus for commemorating the tricentennial of his landing at San Salvador. Chevalier D'Annemours, so the story goes, decided then and there to erect such a monument on his property about a mile north of the city boundary. Designed as a simple obelisk, the monument, inscribed, "sacred to the Memory of Christopher Columbus," was erected in a grove of cedar and ash trees about 100 yards from D'Annemours's home. Though it was nearly 50 feet in height this first monument represented a private not public tribute. Several of Lafayette's officers had settled in Baltimore; D'Annemours eventually adopted America as his permanent home. To the French absorbed in the Independence movement the monument represented loyalty to Columbus and to the land "Columbia," as symbolic of the American ethos of liberty.¹⁴

In commemoration of the tricentennial Jeremy Belknap composed an Ode to Columbus and Columbia that was sung in a Boston Celebration of Columbus Day, 1792; characteristic of the times, the Ode also struck the discordant notes of the Black Legend replete with anti-Catholicism. But again, Columbus transcends the superstition of his Spanish patrons.

Black Superstition's dismal night
 Extinguished Reason's golden ray;
 And Science, driven from the light
 Beneath monastic rubbish lay
 The Crown and Mitre, close allied
 Trampled whole nations to the dust
 Whilst Freedom, wandering far and wide
 And pure Religion, quite was lost.
 Then, guided by th'almighty Hand
 Columbus spread his daring sail,
 Ocean received a new command
 And Zephyrs breathed a gentle gale.
 ... Sweet Peace and heavenly truth shall shine
 on Fair Columbia's ground
 There Freedom and Religion join
 And Spread their influence all around.¹⁵

In 1792 Catholics formed a tiny minority of about 30,000. A century later there were 8.6 million Catholics. With a sizable middle class, many of whom were descendants of the three million immigrants who had arrived between 1840 and 1860, the Catholic community had achieved new levels of social acceptance and political power. It was characterized by a vast array of educational and charitable institutions, by a proliferation of parish, diocesan and national associations, by several fraternal and sororal societies, and by a lively network of communication through Catholic newspapers and periodicals. Second- and third-generation Catholics had rooted themselves in the mainland of America. These Catholics played prominent roles in the Catholic Congress at the Chicago Columbian Exposition, a world's fair to honor the Quadricentennial of Columbus' landing on San Salvador.

John Lancaster Spalding, Bishop of Peoria, associated with the founding of the Catholic University of America, composed a poem, replete with liberation themes, in honor of Columbus as another Moses, patriarch of the land of liberty.

My men and brothers, westward lies our way;
 So spoke Columbus, looking on the sea
 Which stretched before him to infinity;
 And while he sailed he wrote these words each day,
 As though, 'West lies thy course,' he heard God say
 With promise of the blessings which should be
 When a new world had borne young liberty,
 As fair and fresh as flowers in the month of May.
 O God-appointed man! All hail to thee!
 Thou other Moses of a chosen race,
 Who out of darkness and captivity
 Ledest the people from the tyrant's face

To where all men shall equal be and free,
And evil life alone shall be disgrace.¹⁶

Addressing the Catholic Columbian Congress, Dr. R.A. Clarke of New York, a scholar of Columbus, also drew a parallel between Columbus and Moses. "Both were living patriarchs of living races of men believing in the true God ... both reached the promised land and saw it. Moses was never permitted to enter it, Columbus never reached or saw or entered the Indies which he sought, but, unlike Moses, he raised up new kingdoms and empires to Christ, planted the seeds of faith over continents, and in his tracks followed knowledge, faith, centralized free republics and human liberty."¹⁷ We can relate this Moses metaphor for Columbus to the origins of American civil religion. On July 4, 1776, when Franklin, Jefferson, and Adams were designing a seal for the United States of America, Franklin proposed the image of Moses dividing the Red Sea with the inscription "Rebellion to Tyrants is Obedience To God."¹⁸

President Benjamin Harrison broke tradition by designating the Quadricentennial Columbus Day on October 21 according to the changes in the calendar since 1492. Pope Leo XIII decreed that a "Solemn Mass of the Holy Trinity shall be celebrated in all Cathedral and Collegiate Churches ... in Thanksgiving to God for the blessings which have come to us from the discovery of this continent."¹⁹ Because October 21 was on a Friday the Pope granted a dispensation from abstinence. Archbishop Francisco Satolli (later appointed Apostolic Delegate) was the Pope's official representative at the Columbian Exposition where the Vatican exhibit featured Columbus documents from its archives.

A source of pride to all Catholics was the Catholic Education Exhibit, intended not only to edify the faithful but to dispel popular prejudice that portrayed the mythological "little red school house" as the sole source of the rite of passage to citizenship. Such was the impassioned rhetoric of the American Protective Association then gaining national momentum on a campaign of nativist resentment and anti-Catholic venom.²⁰

The school issue had been a periodic source of Protestant-Catholic tension throughout the latter half of the 19th century. Catholic nativists such as Orestes Brownson joined the fray by decrying the un-American character of Irish immigrants while their episcopal spokesman, Bishop John Hughes, condemned the public school as dominated by a Protestant ethos and later as anti-religious agencies of secularism. Amid the heat of the 1890s the predominant Catholic position, shared by conservative bishops such as Frederick Katzner of Milwaukee, Bernard McQuaid of Rochester, Michael A. Corrigan of New York and Winand Wiggers of Newark, and joined by liberals such as John L. Spalding and Patrick Riordan of Peoria and San Francisco respectively, was to champion the Catholic school within the Church's role as the harbinger of civilization. The liberals, led by John Ireland, stressed the positive features of American culture while the conservatives urged a defense against anti-Catholicism and materialism endemic in American society.²¹

During the celebrations of the Quadricentennial, three forms of Columbianism, civic, ethnic and religious, were manifested in the parades. There were dioceses in which Catholic Columbianism incorporated all three forms. Reflecting the interfaith tendencies of Cardinal James Gibbons, Columbus festivities in Baltimore were "under management of Catholics but they are receiving the aid and cooperation of the Italian societies and a number of Protestants, who are quite enthusiastic" wrote a reporter of the Catholic News out of the District of Columbia. One of the principal floats in the parade featured Columbus, a native American chief and the Goddess of Liberty "representing the America of today."²² It is interesting to note that Corpus Christi parish in the fashionable Bolton Hill area "produced the 'Goddess of Liberty'."²³ The Italian Americans honored the Genoese navigator with a monument in Druid Hill Park; their most significant tribute was the Columbus Monument in New York City's Columbus Circle.²¹

Among the pervasive national characteristics of the Quadricentennial parade was the grand march of the school children intended to imbue in them a deep sense of the patriotism attached to the origins of the nation. In New York, the Catholic parochial schools chose to have their own parade, as did Bishop Wiggers in Newark. Just as Baltimore's fête reflected the expansive spirit of Gibbons so the New York parade revealed all the religious defensiveness of Michael A. Corrigan. The Catholic Herald, edited by a layman but under the strong influence of Corrigan, opened its article on the school parade with the barb "The parade of the Catholic parochial schools, in honor of Columbus, was a revelation to the friends and enemies of Christian education..."²⁴ With 36,000 students in the parochial schools, the Herald vented its deeply felt sense of injustice at the double "taxation" for their own schools and for those of the public sector. To substantiate those scholars who focus on the power dimension of parades, the Herald referred to the school children's parade, as a "demonstration" one which should "open the eyes of our rulers to the injustice done to Catholics in the matter of education, and lead them to make an equitable provision for these schools."²⁵

In Quincy, Illinois, parochial schools were to join public schools in honoring the Quadricentennial but, according to a report in the New York Herald, "Superintendent McFall of the public schools, said he has his orders from the National Education Association to exclude the Catholic schools."²⁶ A Father Weiss invited the Lutherans of the city to join the Catholics in their own parochial school celebration. The Connecticut Catholic also reported that throughout the nation Catholic schools "generally did their share, where permitted, in the general school celebration ... at some few points a spirit of bigotry was indicated, but we are proud to say that nowhere was it shown by Catholics." Owned by laymen but in the service to the archdiocese of Hartford, this newspaper considered that the Catholic display of religious Columbianism ought to dispel any "lingering idea that to be a foreigner was a menace to American institutions and to be a Catholic was the enemy of free thought and free will." It then asserted the basis of Catholic citizenship: "Catholics are an integral part of the American population, and they are not here by sufferance. They are here by right of discovery and by right of colonization. They have a share in the glory of American freedom, for it was Catholics who first planted the banner of equal rights and free conscience in America."²⁷

The Catholic school issue not only riveted divisions in society but as noted earlier it was also a divisive factor among Catholics. John Ireland addressed a meeting of the National Education Association in the summer of 1890. Because the Archbishop of St. Paul had explicitly endorsed education as the proper sphere of the state and the public school as a manifestation of the state's responsibility, he alienated those bishops who had prohibited Catholics to attend public schools where parochial schools were available.²⁸

Michael Corrigan and Bernard McQuaid joined the German bishops who considered Ireland's address as a direct attack upon their school policy in which ethnicity and religious formation in the German language were essential to the religious and cultural integrity of the parish. The relationship between the school question and Columbianism is that Corrigan, who understood the Catholic role in society as defensive against anti-Catholicism and nativism and was only moderately accommodationist to the predominantly Protestant culture, appropriated Columbus as simply the basis for Catholic legitimacy.

In his address to the Catholic Congress at the Columbian Exposition, Corrigan noted three principles dominating Columbus; dedication to scientific knowledge, a deep sense of patriotism and a love of the Holy Faith. So we American Catholics according to Corrigan, must be motivated by these same three principles.²⁹

On the other hand John Ireland, who insisted that Catholicity and American constitutionalism are founded upon the dignity of the human person, said the Church must not merely accommodate American culture; Catholicism must absorb the spirit of the age. While Corrigan was an Americanizer in the sense that Catholics should have modern up-to-date schools and foster a healthy patriotism, John Ireland was an Americanist, one who viewed America in almost millennialist terms as he placed American Catholicity in a providential interpretation of history. The Church is a liberating presence in a free society and the American Church will liberate European Catholicity from the shackles of fear, defensiveness, and old world traditionalism. For Ireland, Columbus is symbolic of the virile, courageous layperson who initiated the conversion process; American Catholics of 1892 should develop a new mission to America. Hence the way one perceived that the school issue reflected one's view of religion and culture and the character of one's Catholic Columbianism. The conflict between Corrigan and Ireland was a clash of ecclesiologies; the way they perceived Columbus was dependent on their perception of the role of Catholicity in American culture.

In his address at the dedication of the Chicago Exposition, John Ireland spoke of the Catholic conversion of America. "We love America because there is here a country great and glorious, offering to the zeal and faith of the Church a promising and fertile field ... He said that Catholics "would not convert the world by argument but rather by evidence; we must reveal the gospel in daily life ... this is an age of humanity ... our country is filled with good works, charities of all kinds. Asylums are built for the poor and the blind, the mute and the imbecile. The American state is essentially, in its instincts and aspiration Catholic. Let us take hold of these instincts and aspirations and show that they have all been perpetrated by our Church in the past.³⁰ Columbus should be an inspiration for the initiative and responsibility of the laity. As John Ireland said at the first Catholic Congress of the Laity in 1889, "the laity are not anointed in confirmation to the end that they must save their souls and pay the pew rent. They must think, work, organize, read, speak out as circumstances demand ... In America in the present age, lay action is particularly needed for the Church."

This was a portion of Ireland's major address on the Catholic conversion of the nation. Never has there been a more impassioned plea for Catholic evangelization of the nation; "our work is to make America Catholic ... we cannot but believe that a singular mission is assigned to America, glorious for ourselves, and beneficent to the whole human race, that of bringing a new social and political order, based ... upon the common brotherhood of man. The Church triumphant in America, Catholic truth will travel on the wings of American influence, and with it encircle the universe. America is at heart a Christian country."³²

According to Ireland, the Protestant basis of this Christian country was floundering on the rocks of individualism and sectarianism. He said that the Catholic Church "is the sole living and enduring Christian authority [in the nation]. She has the power to speak; she has an organization by which her laws may be enforced. The American people must look to her [i.e., the Church] to maintain for them in the consciences of citizens the principles of natural equity and of law ... the Church of America must be of course, as Catholic as ever in Jerusalem or Rome, but (because) her garments assume colors from local atmosphere she must be American."³³

John Ireland admitted that there were many Catholics who did not share his optimism. There were preservationists who believed that American culture was antithetical to the faith. Ireland said that they were only concerned with "the preservation of the little flock in the faith [and will not join] our efforts to convert our fellow citizens ... they await in silence and prayer for the return of God's vivifying breath upon the nations."³⁴

In contrast to the preservationists John Ireland was convinced that by absorbing the best in American culture Catholics would transform society. According to him Catholics must be in touch with the burning social questions of the day. Ireland was not an uncritical patriot; he said that we must "let labor know that [our] religion will ward off the oppression of capital and teach capital that its rights are dependent upon its fulfillment of duties."³⁵

In his work *Our Country, Its Progress, Its Crisis*, the Reverend Josiah Strong, identified Protestant civil religion with progress, and Catholicism as the crisis. "In republican and Protestant America it is believed that the Church and state exist for the people who are to be administered by them - our fundamental ideas of society, therefore, are as radically opposed to vaticanism as imperialism Strong responded to John Ireland's mission "to make America Catholic by simply stating that such a goal was impossible because 'every romanist who remained obedient to the Pope would necessarily be disloyal to our free institutions."³⁶ According to Strong, American Catholic citizenship is, therefore, an oxymoron. Ireland, who seldom engaged in interreligious strife, did not respond to Strong. John Ireland's call to convert America was in a sense a way of calling Catholics to conversion; like Columbus, they should be Catholic activists representing the Church's adaptation to the spirit of the times.

The Black Catholics held their Fourth Black Catholic Congress in conjunction with the Columbian Exposition. Unlike the white laymen at the congress, who were underscoring Catholic legitimacy in American society, Black Catholics were asserting their legitimacy within their church. Accordingly, they did not focus on Columbus, but rather they identified with the Black saints. They wrote: "we show our devotion to the Church ... and our love for her history ... above all things, we rejoice that our Church ... has not failed to stand by her historical record. For did not holy Church canonize Augustine and Monica, Benedict the Moor and Cyprian?"³⁷ However, the *Catholic News* in Washington D.C. reported that "Father D. J. McGoldrick of Georgetown College gave :

stirring Columbus Day sermon at St. Augustine's parish; the finest church for colored Catholics in the land discovered by Columbus. The reverend preacher opened with an allusion to the Columbus celebration, explaining its nature ... the lessons to be drawn from it ... (and) the honest pride which we as Catholics cherish for the discovered.³⁸

Daniel Rudd, a former slave from Bardstown, Kentucky, was the leader of the Black Catholic Congress. He made an impassioned plea for Catholic leaders to evangelize the Black community. Some 25 years later, when racism prevented Blacks from joining Catholic fraternal and social societies, the Black Catholics established the Knights and Ladies of St. Peter Claver, once again asserting African-American legitimacy in the Catholic Church.

Despite severe racial discrimination throughout the American Catholic community, the entire Black Congress did meet one afternoon with the white delegates at their congress. Archbishop John Ireland had responded to a motion to ask for a Black delegation by stating, "let us show our thorough Catholicity and in God's name invite them all. I have but one regret - that they are not 100 fold more numerous."³⁹ Ireland's seminary in St. Paul was the only integrated seminary in the nation and he was close to Joseph Slattery, the superior general of the Josephites, a religious community of priests dedicated to the mission of the Black community.

Some 10 years before John Ireland made his plea for Catholic mission to America, Father Michael J. McGivney founded the Knights of Columbus, a society dedicated to the promotion of Catholic citizenship. The Order's Columbianism was born on February 6, 1882, when a small group of New Haven laymen chose Columbus as the patron of their fraternal society. One of those present at this meeting invoked the cause of Catholic civil liberty when he asserted that, as Catholic descendants of Columbus "[We] were entitled to all rights and privileges due to such a discovery by one of our faith."⁴⁰ In short, the founders perceived Columbus as a source of identity for Catholics of all ethnic groups; the Catholic discoverer was a cultural symbol infused into their sense of American Catholic peoplehood. The term Knight conveyed a commitment, as Catholic gentlemen, to struggle against nativism and anti-Catholicism.

For the first 10 years the order was primarily a Connecticut organization. In 1890, Thomas H. Cummings of Boston became the first national organizer, hired to promote new-council development. From New England the Order expanded throughout the nation; by 1905 the Knights were in every state in the union, five of the provinces in Canada, Mexico, the Philippines and were poised to enter Cuba and Puerto Rico. The causation for this enormously successful period of expansion was the way in which the Knights conveyed their strong Columbianism that animated their Catholic identity.

Besides establishing a united front in defense of the Church, the Knights cultivated deep patriotic sentiments based upon the Catholic component in the American heritage. The initiation ceremonies were dramatic renditions of the heroic faith of Columbus, of the Catholic baptism of the American continent and of the nobility of religious liberty and American democracy. In a sense, the ceremonials provided the candidates for Knighthood with a rite of passage from old world ties to loyalty to the new republic. Though the leaders were all second-generation Irish Americans they were realists on the ethnic issue. Hence, in Boston they allowed the establishment of the Teutonia Council for German-American Knights and Ansonia Council for the Italian-Americans.

Thomas Cummings wrote of the Order's idealism in ways that reflect the thought of John Ireland. He predicted that if the Knights "honorably practiced their beliefs" then it would mean the creation of a "new type of Catholic manhood" a new spirit of lay activism in the Church.

Under the inspiration of him whose name we bear, and with the story of Columbus's life, as exemplified in our beautiful ritual, we have the broadest kind of basis for patriotism and true love of country ... but by drawing close the bonds of brotherhood, we make for the best type of American citizenship. For the best American is he who best exemplifies in his own life, that this is not a Protestant country, not a Catholic country, nor a Hebrew country, any more than it is an Anglo-Saxon or Latin country, but a country of all races and all creeds, with one great, broad, unalterable [sic] creed of fair play and equal rights for all.⁴¹

Daniel P. Toomey, who succeeded Cummings as editor of the Columbiad, the Order's monthly journal, wrote on the theme of Catholic evangelization that was in harmony with Ireland's home-missionary zeal. Toomey wrote "Orthodox Protestantism, so called, is dying or dead. Instead we are confronted with ... a specimen of cold agnosticism ... antagonism to the Church of which we are members breaks out sporadically in various forms with more or less bitterness." The new voice of Columbianism was optimistic. He was encouraged by signs that there were "sincere hearts on every side ... groping towards the lights." He urged the members to assume their duty as Knight of the Church militant, and to instruct the ignorant "with the powerful weapon of intelligence inspired by Christian love."⁴²

Some years later, Toomey urged Knights to convert "our separated brethren" by living the Catholic and Columbian ideals by promoting social reform and by struggling against capitalistic greed "with its clinging commercial tentacles and its cold resounding din regarding commercial success."⁴³

The Catholic evangelization of America has been a persistent theme in several of the Order's programs throughout its history. It has sponsored a periodic national lecture series to explain the Catholic faith, while its commission on religious prejudices (1914-1917) was characterized by an implicit respect for

Protestants and Jews. In the 1920s the Knights of Columbus historical commission sponsored such publications as *The Jews in the Making of America* by George Cohen, *The Germans in the Making of America* by Frederick F. Shrader and *The Gift of the Black Folk* by W.E.B. Dubois. These works were intended to establish the historical contribution of all ethnic groups and to illustrate the Knights' commitment to the inherent value of American pluralism.⁴⁴

Some Catholic women's groups also took on the Columbian identity. In the mid 1890s the Ladies Auxiliary of New Haven's Russell Council of the Knights of Columbus evolved into circle No. 1 of the Daughters of Isabella. Columbian themes were incorporated into this women's organization, particularly in the ceremony dramatizing Isabella's pledging her jewels to support Columbus's voyage. Almost concurrent with this development, a circle of the Daughters of Isabella was independently founded in Utuca, New York, that became The Catholic Daughters of the Americas.⁴

Conclusion

Perhaps the title of this exploration should have been "American Catholic Identities." The origins of Columbia were forged in the heat of the polarization between the colonies and Great Britain. In this meaning Columbus was perceived as transcending Italian and Spanish cultures with their traditional ignorance and Catholic superstition. Italian Americans who built the elegant monument in Manhattan's Columbus Circle invoked the Genoese navigator to illuminate the deep meaning of what it means to be Italian and American. Michael Corrigan, Bernard McQuaid and other preservationists invoked Columbus to underscore their strong patriotic loyalties, but their religious self-understanding inhibited them from a total immersion into American life with its nativism, anti Catholicism and excessive materialism. John Ireland and the Knights of Columbus extolled Columbianism as a symbol of religious transformation. The Catholics in the new republic are free from the traditional entanglements of crown and altar; the Mosaic imagery of John Lancaster Spalding envisions this as a promised land, a sacred space where Catholicity will flourish because, like the U.S. Constitution, the Church is based upon human dignity, free will, reason and natural law. The Catholic Columbianism of the Americanist bishop and the Americanist fraternal society is a blend of liberal and evangelical Catholicism. It is as if by returning to the Columbus story Catholics renewed the foundation story of Jesus in the old Jerusalem. For most Catholics, Columbus provided social legitimacy. Legitimation manifested itself in the assertion that Catholics have a strong claim to participate fully in the social, economic and political life of the nation. As more and more Catholics entered the middle classes they became increasingly conscious of the positive features of American nationality.

For the Americanists the year 1892 represented a great Catholic awakening, a new Pentecost in a new Jerusalem. It was in a sense the Catholic displacement of civil religion with their own rendering of religious Columbianism. To claim the soul of the nation as Catholic and to promote the American Catholic Church as the model for Catholicity's adaptation to modernity achieved some popularity among progressive Catholics in Europe but within the reigning conservatism of the Church, it was not understood. For John Ireland and the Knights of Columbus, American and Catholic were identified as dwelling in a spiritual symbiosis; for the anti Catholics of the APA and the European Catholics extolling the unity of crown and altar American Catholicism was an impossibility, an oxymoron.

Columbianism is still dominant in the Knights of Columbus as a spirit animating their pride in being Catholic and American. Many Americans, including American Catholics, have lost much of the idealism and cultural innocence associated with the gilded age celebrations of the Quadricentennial. As recently as February 13, 1992, reflections on the decline of American identity appeared in an article in the *Baltimore Sun*. There was a fear that multiculturalism and particularism may preclude a sense of a unified self understanding of what it means to be an American. As we celebrate diversity and pluralism and as we grope for new metaphors to mediate our meanings it is crucial that we not lose sight of the one virtue that has been historically at the essence of our identity as Americans and as Catholics, the virtue of hope.

Footnotes

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