

lowest-paying and most dangerous jobs. They lived in the worst parts of the major cities, in disease-ridden ghettos. Great numbers of immigrants died from disease, bad liquor, and bitterly hard labor. Intolerance on the part of native Americans at times stirred the new immigrants to violent rioting.

While most Irish immigrants remained in the cities due to poverty, the more prosperous German and Scandinavian immigrants left the East for the frontier West, where they settled on the land and farmed. German immigrants, in particular, were unwilling to assimilate into American culture; many of them formed settlements where they spoke the German language and preserved German culture. Many of these settlements were religious in character, whether Catholic or Protestant. One such settlement was the German St. Nazianz in Manitowoc County, Wisconsin. The founder of St. Nazianz, the German Catholic priest, Ambros Oschwald, exemplified the religious motivations of many foreign immigrants to America. “We did not come to America to become rich,” Father Oschwald said, “but to save our souls.”

Religion in the North

In 1850, the United States was as it always had been—a predominately Protestant country. Yet, as we have seen, there had always been Catholics in English America, despite persecution. Maryland was the first English colony to grant freedom of religion to Catholics; and Catholics enjoyed religious freedom in Pennsylvania and Rhode Island as well. Though even after the Revolution, some states kept some anti-Catholic laws on the books, these eventually were expunged, and Catholics came to enjoy the same political rights as their non-Catholic fellow citizens.

This is not to say that Protestant Americans did not harbor anti-Catholic feelings or at times practice unjust discrimination against Catholics. Such injustices certainly occurred, and on account of them, in part, Catholics generally kept their religion to themselves and tried to get along with their neighbors. Too, the number of Catholics in the United States was so small that Protestants could feel Catholics posed no real threat to their Protestant religion and traditions.

This began to change in the 1840s, when large numbers of Catholics began to immigrate to the United States. Many of the German immigrants were or had been Catholic; but it was the mass immigration of the Irish that awakened the most bitter anti-Catholic feelings in America. Many Protestant Americans disliked and feared the Irish. They despised them as dirty and uncouth—and the Irish could give this impression, for they were more often than not very poor, forced to work at the lowest-paying jobs, and to live in the worst parts of the great cities of the North. What’s more, most of the Irish immigrants were Catholic. Some Americans feared that the Catholic Irish would overthrow America’s free political institutions; and this fear intensified when the Irish proved they had a certain talent for politics and began to dominate city governments in the North. The fact that some of the Irish politicians were none too honest (that is, they were very much like the native American politicians in the cities) did not endear them to Protestant hearts. Anti-Catholic bigotry at times inspired violence and riots on the part of Protestants and Catholics alike.

Anti-Catholic fears inspired a political movement that in 1849 coalesced around a secret patriotic society called the Order

An anti-immigrant cartoon depicting a Chinese immigrant and an Irish immigrant between them devouring Uncle Sam. In the end, the Chinese immigrant devours the Irish, thus “solving the problem.”



A short-lived nativist paper, called the *American Patriot*, from 1852. The text says the paper is “opposed to: Papal Aggression & Roman Catholicism; Foreigners holding office . . . Nunneries and the Jesuits.” It declares “We are burdened with enormous taxes by foreigners. We are corrupted in the morals of our youth. We are interfered with in our government. We are forced into collisions with other nations. We are tampered with in our religion. We are injured in our labor. We are assailed in our freedom of speech.” In the picture, Catholics are depicted as holding signs that say, “Americans shan’t rule us” and “We are bound to carry out the pious intentions of his holiness the Pope.”



of the Star-Spangled Banner. The Order’s goal was to get anti-immigrant and anti-Catholic politicians into public office. Members of the Order became known as “Know-Nothings” because, when asked anything about the order, they were told to reply, “I know nothing.” In 1854, the Know-Nothings formed a political party called the American Party, which began to win offices throughout the United States, in the South as well as the North.

Still, despite anti-Catholic sentiment, the Catholic Church in the United States grew in important ways throughout the 1840s and ’50s. New dioceses were formed in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; Little Rock, Arkansas; Chicago, Illinois; Hartford, Connecticut; and Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Older dioceses were elevated to archdioceses: Oregon City, St. Louis, Cincinnati, and New York. The period, too, saw the founding of Catholic colleges in the East, West, and South, as well as schools for younger people.

The Church was also attracting converts. Some Americans entered the Church because they married Catholics, but others were attracted by the witness and example of Catholic religious sisters in hospitals and schools. Intellectuals and some Protestant clergy, too, were entering the Church, drawn by her intellectual and cultural traditions. Two notable converts, Orestes Brownson and Isaac Hecker, entered the Church from Transcendentalism (see below). Hecker became a priest and the founder of the Paulists, a priestly congregation dedicated to the conversion of America, while Brownson figured as a writer and controversialist. Yet, while these and other converts were entering the Church, many of those who came to America as Catholics fell away from the practice of the Faith. It was easier to make one’s way in American society if one were not Catholic.

The ferment and bustle of the North had its effects on Protestantism in that section. Though in most places, the old Calvinist-influenced Protestantism of New England and revivalism still held sway, the period of the 1830s and 1840s especially saw the rise of new religious doctrines and groups. In 1830, Joseph Smith of New York published a book that he claimed contained a new revelation of Jesus Christ; and Smith and his *Book of Mormon* became the center around which grew the

Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (the “Mormons”). Among Smith’s new revelations was that God wanted to reestablish polygamy; and this, along with the doctrine that good Mormon men would one day become gods, won his church many converts. Unwelcome in New York, the Mormons migrated to Nauvoo, Illinois, where they eventually engaged in armed conflicts with neighbors who did not take kindly to the new doctrines. Eventually, under the leadership of Smith’s successor, Brigham Young, the Mormons migrated west and settled in the region around the Great Salt Lake in what they called Deseret but which today is Utah.

Other religious movements of the North had even less connection to traditional Christianity than the Mormon doctrines did. There was, for instance, Unitarianism, which rejected the doctrine of the Trinity as irrational and insisted on the unity of God. Then there was Spiritism, which claimed that the living could communicate with the spirits of the dead. By 1860, Spiritism was widespread throughout the North. Another movement, called Transcendentalism, popularized through the writings of a former Unitarian minister, Ralph Waldo Emerson, was barely Christian at all. In his widely-read writings, Emerson taught that every individual could be enlightened and improve himself by his own efforts alone; “God is in every man,” Emerson proclaimed. A disciple of Emerson, Henry David Thoreau of Massachusetts, preached a doctrine of human improvement without reference to God at all. In his famous work, *Walden* (1854), Thoreau argued that people had to simplify their lives to be aware of the world around them; only in this way could they find what is essential to human happiness.

Religion in the North thus displayed a great amount of variety—everything from traditional Calvinism to revivalism, to movements (like that of the “Shakers”) that condemned marriage, to the **pantheistic** tenets of Transcendentalism.

Reform and the Quest for Utopia

We have said that among the fruits of the Second Great Awakening was a desire to reform society of the evils that afflicted it. This reforming spirit became characteristic of those who followed the leadership of such ministers as Charles Grandison Finney and the Rev. Henry Ward Beecher. Under the inspiration of such men, Christians began to engage in crusades to right society’s wrongs, not only by bringing religion to the poor and unchurched, but by helping the poor take on the values of the middle class—industriousness, self-control, respectability, and cleanliness. Gradually, reform-minded Christians established movements and societies to address a whole host of ills they thought were holding America back from attaining the full measure of her greatness.

Among these movements were those that do not seem purely religious in character. These included the movement to abolish slavery (which we will discuss in the next chapter). Another was aimed at the consumption of alcoholic drinks. Americans, it seems, were quite fond of beverages such as whiskey, rum, beer, and wine. Because they thought their neighbors were perhaps too fond of these intoxicants, some zealous folk began to call for the outlawing of the production, importation, possession, and use of alcoholic drinks. Thus was born what became known as the Temperance movement.

Ralph Waldo Emerson



Henry David Thoreau

pantheistic: pertaining to pantheism, the belief that identifies God with the universe



Charles Grandison Finney



Henry Ward Beecher

Senate was equally split between North and South. The Senate, and thus, the entire federal government, so southerners argued, would be controlled by the North, if Wilmot's proposal were adopted.

President Polk, who, though a New Englander, was friendly to the South, suggested that a better plan than Wilmot's would be to extend the Missouri Compromise line to the Pacific. But Polk left office in 1849, and the new president, Zachary "Old Rough and Ready" Taylor, though a Virginian, was quite eager to admit California into the union as a free state. The new Congress, however, was bitterly divided over such a plan.

It was Senator Henry Clay who, in January 1850, came up with a compromise plan that could placate both sides. California, he said, should be admitted as a free state, while slave owners should be allowed to settle in the territories of New Mexico and Utah. (Oregon was already a free territory.) To please both slaveholders and antislavery folks, Clay added two more points. For southerners, he offered a law that would make it easier for slave owners to capture escaped slaves in the North. For antislavery people, Clay said that slavery would be abolished in the District of Columbia.

Clay's compromise bill, however, pleased neither side. Southerners objected that it did not treat the southern states as equal members of the union. Antislavery people contended that, if slavery is wrong, it should not be allowed to extend anywhere. Still, with the help of Illinois' Senator Stephen Douglas, Clay was able to push his compromise through Congress. This Compromise of 1850 was the last of its kind between North and South. It bandaged the union together for another ten years.

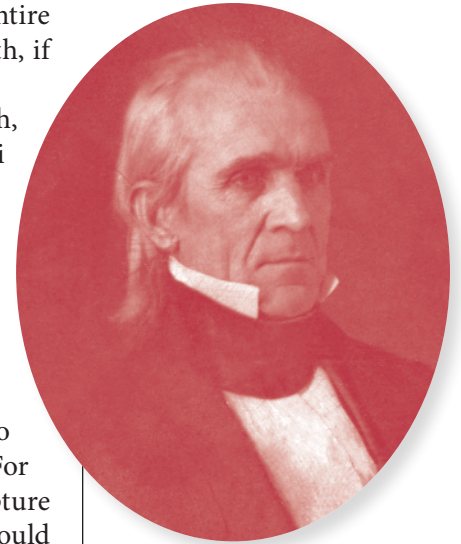
Slavery and Religion

What was the reaction of religious believers, particularly Christians, to slavery?

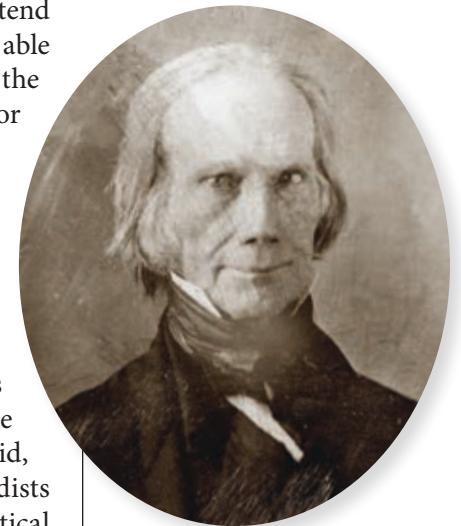
It might come as a surprise to us, but the reaction of most religious groups in the United States to slavery was tepid, at best. Some Christians were quite opposed to slavery; but most were either neutral or, as many in the South did, they defended slavery. For instance, both Congregationalists and Methodists rejected immediate emancipation. Presbyterians said slavery was merely a political issue, not a moral one; later, they would split into northern and southern branches over the question. Episcopalians and Lutherans also took a neutral stance.

Most American Catholics, too, even if they thought slavery an evil, looked upon emancipation as merely a political issue. Catholic theologians taught it was immoral to enslave a free man; but, they said, one is not necessarily bound to abolish an existing condition of slavery or to free people who were born into slavery, if doing so would lead to greater evils and seriously harm the common good. A master, however, had to treat his slaves humanely, not forbid them to marry, not divide their families, nor deprive them of the benefits of religion. Most Catholics in the United States thought immediate emancipation would lead to great social evils.

Though by the 1850s, the majority of American Catholics had little or nothing to do with slavery, this was not always so. Before the massive Irish and large-scale German immigration into the U.S., most Catholics lived in the South. Some Maryland Catholics, in particular, owned slaves to work their tobacco farms and plantations—among them the Carrolls, who gave the United States the patriot,



President James K. Polk



Henry Clay

Charles Carroll, and American Catholics their first bishop, John Carroll. Even the Jesuits in Maryland owned slaves, as did the Ursuline sisters in New Orleans as well as some bishops. The Dominicans in Kentucky used slave labor on their lands to free them for their pastoral work of preaching and teaching.

Though Catholic religious orders, priests, and bishops were noted for their kindness to their slaves, some did engage in the buying and selling of their slave “property.” In an 1807 letter, the founder of the Dominican order in the United States, Edward Fenwick, speaks of his attempt to sell a boy slave he had inherited from his family. Fenwick, however, notes that he did not sell the boy because the only way he could get a good price for him was if he sold him “to any heretic” or “sent [him] down the river.” In other words, Fenwick would not sell a Catholic slave to a non-Catholic or into the Deep South, where slavery was very hard and often brutal. That, he said, he thought “unlawful to do.” Fenwick may have had a change of heart about slavery after he became the first bishop of Cincinnati, Ohio. In an 1823 letter, he writes that Ohio was superior to Kentucky in part because “it is a free territory, not tolerating the slavery of Negroes.”

The head of the Maryland Jesuit Province, Thomas F. Mulledy, however, was not so conscientious. In 1838, to save Georgetown College from financial ruin, he sold 272 slaves for \$115,000 (about \$3 million today) to two planters in Louisiana. The sale split family members, and Mulledy could not assure that these slaves would be able to continue to practice their Catholic religion. This violated the terms Mulledy’s Jesuit superiors in Rome laid down for him when they had approved the sale, and they punished him by removing him from the United States for several years.

The violations of Catholic teaching on slavery by both clergy and laity led Pope Gregory XVI in 1839 to issue an apostolic letter, *In Supremo Apostolatus*, condemning the slave trade. He wrote:

We . . . do vehemently admonish and adjure in the Lord all believers in Christ, of whatsoever condition, that no one hereafter may dare unjustly to molest Indians, Negroes, or other men of this sort; or to spoil them of their goods; or to reduce them to slavery; or to extend help or favor to others who perpetrate such things against them; or to exercise that inhuman trade by which Negroes, as if they were not men, but mere animals, however reduced into slavery, are, without any distinction, contrary to the laws of justice and humanity, bought, sold, and doomed sometimes to the most severe and exhausting labors; and, moreover, the hope of gain being by that trade proposed to the first captors of the Negroes, dissensions, also, and as it were, perpetual wars are fomented in their countries.

This was not the first condemnation of slavery and the slave trade by a pope. In 1435, Pope Eugene IV had condemned enslaving the black people of the Canary Islands, and in 1537, Pope Paul III condemned enslaving Indians. Between 1591 and 1741, Popes Gregory XIV, Urban VIII, and Benedict XIV condemned slavery—and in 1815, Pope Pius VII tried to convince the European countries meeting in the Congress of Vienna to outlaw slavery.

Though these papal statements were in line with what Catholic tradition had always said about slavery—that it is a **material evil** resulting from sin—they did not go so far as to condemn the theological opinion



Father Thomas F. Mulledy, S.J.



Pope Gregory XVI

spoil: to despoil or rob

material evil: an evil other than a moral evil or sin. Material evils include sickness, poverty, natural disasters, hunger, and the like. Material evils may arise from moral evils—poverty, for instance, may arise from oppression and greed—but they are not themselves immoral.

of the time that an existing condition of slavery was not necessarily immoral. Several American bishops wanted to see an abolition of slavery; but they thought it could not be done immediately without serious harm to the common good and even to the slaves themselves. However, two southern bishops—Augustin Verot of Savannah, Georgia and, later, Florida, and Augustus Martin of Natchitoches, Louisiana—defended the institution of black slavery in the United States.

Bishop Verot was blunt in his defense of slavery. In *A Tract for the Times: Slavery and Abolitionism*, he condemned the “unjust, iniquitous, unscriptural, and unreasonable” assertions of abolitionists “who brand Slavery as a moral evil, and crime against God, religion, humanity, and society.” On the contrary, said Verot, slavery “is found to have received the **sanction** of God, of the Church, and of Society of all kinds, and in all governments.” Slavery, he said, can be “legitimate, lawful, approved by all laws, and consistent with practical religion and true holiness of life in masters”—who must, however, treat their slaves with justice.

In a pastoral letter he issued in 1861, Bishop Martin went so far as to say that the original enslavement of Africans by Europeans was for the Africans’ own good. The enslavement of black Africans, he said, was by the “manifest will of God” because it saved them from vices that they had as “children of the race of Canaan.” Martin’s language suggested that he thought black Africans an inferior race.

However, unlike, it seems, Verot’s tract, Martin’s letter attracted the attention of Rome. In 1864, the Dominican Vincenzo Maria Gatti of the Roman **Congregation of the Index**, penned a condemnation of Martin’s letter. In no way, said Gatti, are Black Africans naturally inferior to Europeans. Moreover, the “mistake” in Martin’s letter, the Dominican declared, “favors the preservation of slavery in the Southern States in opposition to the will of the Sovereign Pontiffs who . . . condemned not only the slave trade but slavery itself.” Gatti thus interpreted Pope Gregory XVI’s *In Supremo Apostolatus* as a condemnation of more than just the slave trade, but of the very institution of slavery itself. Gatti’s condemnation of Bishop Martin’s pastoral letter received the approval of the reigning pontiff, Pope Pius IX.

The Railroad to Disunity

Slavery was not the only issue to divide North and South. Another had to do with a railroad. By the mid-1850s, railroads had been built all over the eastern states, especially in the North—but now Americans wanted to build a transcontinental railroad to connect the eastern states with far-off California. The question was, where to build it?

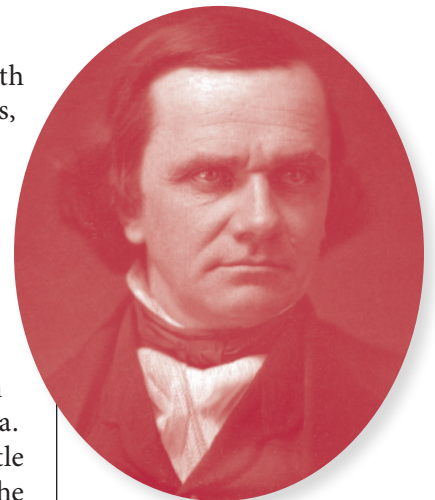
Jefferson Davis, a powerful politician from Mississippi, was the secretary of war for the new president, Franklin Pierce (elected in 1852). Davis, an owner of a large plantation with many slaves, dreamed of a great southern empire that would be built on slavery. New Mexico, he thought, would form part of this empire, and thus he favored a transcontinental railroad that would begin in New Orleans and run through Texas and New Mexico, and on into California. Davis’ opponent was Illinois’ senator, Stephen Arnold Douglas (called the “Little Giant” for his small stature but mighty political power). Douglas wanted the railroad to begin in St. Louis, Missouri and cross the central part of the country, with a terminus in San Francisco. This route, however, would favor the North



Bishop Augustus Martin

sanction: permission

Congregation of the Index: an official department of the Church that examined books and other published materials to see if they agreed with Catholic teaching



Stephen Douglas