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Segregated Catholicism: The Origins of Saint Katharine's Parish, New Orleans

BY

DOUGLAS J. SLAWSON

During the ante-bellum period and the era of Reconstruction, the religious life of black Christians in New Orleans cast in sharp relief the general experience of their urban counterparts throughout the South, namely, the tendency toward separate Protestant churches for blacks versus the nearly universal practice of integration in Catholic ones. New Orleans highlights this contrast because there the demography of black denominationalism was reversed. In the South, the majority of black Christians, slave and free, belonged to the various Protestant denominations; only a handful belonged to the Catholic body. In the Crescent City, however, the majority of blacks were Catholics, while the minority were Protestants. Black Catholics in New Orleans attended racially mixed churches down through the first decade of the twentieth century. The city's first separate—and at first voluntary—Catholic church for blacks, Saint Katharine's parish, was founded in the 1890s, fully three decades after Protestant African-Americans belonged to their own independent churches. The coming of Jim Crow to New Orleans Catholicism merits study, therefore, to understand both the divergent paths taken by Protestantism and Catholicism in reaching the same end and how this change affected the African-American parishioners of Saint Katharine's.

Religious, Ethnic, and Political Background

The large-scale conversion of African-Americans to Christianity began during the Great Awakening, a religious revival that swept the colonies in the 1730s and 1740s and then alternately smoldered and flamed down through 1780s. Prior to the Awakening, white Protestants generally refused to catechize slaves for a variety of reasons,

primarily out of fear that baptism would necessitate emancipation or give blacks a claim to fellowship that would threaten the master-slave relationship. During the Awakening, however, southern blacks and whites alike caught the evangelical fever, and thousands of African-Americans became Baptists or Methodists. Initially, whites and blacks belonged to mixed congregations, though segregated in seating. The movement toward independent churches began in earnest only after the American Revolution when free African-Americans began to resent discriminatory pew assignments and the general white domination of church life. Despite repressive legislation enacted against separate black churches during the 1830s and 1840s, the persistence of African-Americans eventually drove enforcement of the laws into decay. On the eve of the Civil War, urban black Protestants attended their own churches, sometimes pastored by black preachers, though always under white surveillance, if not supervision.¹

The experience of black Catholics in the ante-bellum South differed from that of their Protestant counterparts in several respects. First, Catholics both white and black made up only a small portion of the southern population, though their numbers tended to be concentrated in certain locales, like southern and western Maryland, the Gulf Coast, and the Mississippi Valley, regions originally settled by Catholics. Second, unlike Anglo-Saxon Protestants, who resisted the conversion of blacks prior to the Great Awakening and even thereafter into the 1830s, French Catholics on the Gulf and in the Mississippi Valley were required by the colonial government to baptize their slaves and instruct them in religion. Similarly, the Spanish Church, and later the

¹Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven, Conn., and London, England: Yale University Press, 1972), 700-5; Ira Berlin, *Slaves Without Masters: The Free Negro in the Antebellum South* (New York: Vintage Books, 1976), 66-74, 284-303; Donald G. Mathews, *Religion in the Old South* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 185-200; Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South* (Oxford, England, and New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 128-210; Richard C. Wade, *Slavery in the Cities: The South 1820-1860* (London, England, and New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 160-72. The experience of black Methodists in Charleston, South Carolina, illustrates the difficulties that faced African-Americans. Until the early 1800s the Charleston Methodist Church had a mixed congregation. As the egalitarianism of the Revolution and evangelical religion waned, whites withdrew from the church, and blacks gained control of the finances and discipline and even won the right to elect officers to the quarter sessions. In 1815 whites reasserted their control over the quarter sessions. Three years later, seceding from both the Charleston church and regular Methodism, the blacks established their own separate congregation affiliated with the African Methodist Episcopal church, an independent denomination founded in 1816 by free blacks in Baltimore and Philadelphia. The Charleston AME church lasted only four years. Because two of the church leaders were also conspirators in the slave insurrection plotted by Denmark Vesey in 1822, civil authorities suppressed the congregation and had the church building dismantled. At the time of the Civil War black Methodists in Charleston belonged to a mixed congregation, though separate services were held for each race.

crown itself, mandated that masters in Florida catechize and baptize their slaves.² Parish records indicate a high degree of compliance with the expectation that slave children be baptized, but their further instruction in the faith often left much, or everything, to be desired. The number of practicing, adult, black Catholics in the ante-bellum period fell disproportionately below the number of those baptized.³ A final difference between southern Protestantism and Catholicism was the virtual absence of separate Catholic churches for the races. People of both races attended the same churches, though blacks usually had to sit in special pews or in galleries.⁴

New Orleans was the ante-bellum, black, religious experience writ large. The most cosmopolitan place in the South, boasting French, Spanish, and Anglo cultures, New Orleans consisted, until 1852, of

²*Code Noir* (1724) in Benjamin F. French, *Historical Collections of Louisiana*, 5 vols. (New York, 1851), 3:89-95; Winstanley Briggs, "Slavery in French Colonial Illinois," *Chicago History* 18 (Winter, 1989-1990): 75-78; Carl J. Eckberg, *Colonial St. Genevieve: An Adventure on the Mississippi Frontier* (Gerald, Missouri: Patrice Press, 1985), 204-233; Roger Baudier, *The Catholic Church in Louisiana* (New Orleans: Louisiana Library, 1972 reprint of 1939 original), 206; Michael V. Gannon, *The Cross in the Sand: The Early Catholic Church in Florida, 1513-1870* (Gainesville, Florida: University of Florida Press, 1965), 96-97, 110-11. Originally issued in 1685 for the French West Indies, the *Code Noir* was promulgated in Louisiana in 1724. Following the transfer of the Louisiana Territory to Spain in 1769, the first Spanish governor reconfirmed the *Code Noir*. In colonial Florida, diocesan statutes gave a master six months after purchase to instruct and see to the baptism of a black slave. In 1738 the governor of Florida established a town for free blacks, called Pueblo Gracia Real de Santa Teresa de Mose, and, with the approval of the Council of the Indies, arranged for a priest to catechize them. In 1789 the Spanish crown issued a *cédula* for Louisiana and Florida requiring chaplaincies for slaves on plantations and insisting that blacks be married in church. Though chaplaincies were never established, the number of slave marriages in the presence of a priest began to increase. The keeping of separate sacramental registers for blacks dates from this edict.

³Baudier, *Catholic Church in Louisiana*, 75-206 throughout; John Carroll, "The First American Report to Propaganda on Catholicism in the United States, 1 March 1787," in *Documents of American Catholic History*, ed. John Tracy Ellis (Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing Company, 1962), 149; Cyprian Davis, O.S.B., *The History of Black Catholics in the United States* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1990), chapter 3; Eckberg, *Colonial St. Genevieve*, 223-33; William Henry Elder to the Society for the Propagation of the Faith in Paris, 1858, *Documents of Catholic History*, 326-29; Randall M. Miller, "The Failed Mission: The Catholic Church and Black Catholics in the Old South," in *Catholics in the Old South: Essays on Church and Culture*, ed. Randall M. Miller and Jon L. Wakelyn (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1983), 39-44; John Marie Odin, C.M., to the Director of the Seminary in Lyons, France, 2 August 1823, "Letters Concerning Some Missions of the Mississippi Valley," *Records of the American Catholic Historical Society* 14 (1903): 189; James J. Pillar, O.M.I., *The Catholic Church in Mississippi, 1837-65* (New Orleans: Hauser Press, 1964), 36-42, 115-21; Stafford Poole, C.M., and Douglas J. Slawson, *Church and Slave in Perry County, Missouri, 1818-1865* (Lewiston, New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1986), chapters 4 and 5.

⁴Baudier, *Catholic Church in Louisiana*, 365; Miller, "Failed Mission," 44; Pillar, *Catholic Church in Mississippi*, 40; Michael J. McNally, "A Peculiar Institution: A History of Catholic Parish Life in the Southeast (1850-1980)," in *The American Catholic Parish: A History from 1850 to the Present*, 2 vols., ed. Jay P. Dolan (New York and Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1987), 1: 131. In 1856, a separate chapel for free mulattoes was erected at Bois Mallet near Washington, Louisiana. In northern Louisiana, the colored Creole colony at Isle Brevelle also had its own chapel, a mission parish of Saint Francis church in Nachitoches (Baudier, *Catholic Church in Louisiana*, 421; Davis, *Black Catholics*, 74-77). Davis notes that because of the significantly large, black, Catholic population in Washington, D.C., churches there had no segregated seating arrangements (*Black Catholics*, 90).

three semiautonomous political entities. The First and Third Municipalities, both down river from Canal Street, were home to the Creole population, while the Second Municipality, uptown from Canal, was predominantly Anglo. Although strictly referring to people descended from French or Spanish colonists, the term "Creole" eventually came to embrace the French émigrés from Saint-Domingue and even France itself, persons originally labeled the "foreign French," who arrived on the Gulf Coast after 1790. New Orleans's sizable black community reflected the residential and cultural diversity of the white community. Of the city's 25,000 blacks in 1860, nearly 11,000 were free, almost all of them colored Creoles, that is, Afro-French people, whose roots extended back to the free blacks of colonial Louisiana or to those who had fled the revolution on Saint-Domingue. Calling themselves *les gens libres de couleur*, colored Creoles lived in the Latin First and Third Municipalities in integrated neighborhoods. The most prestigious of the free persons of color were businessmen possessed of wealth in property and slaves. The culture of colored Creoles was European in flavor, Catholic in religion, and French in tongue. On the bottom of the city's social ladder were the slaves. Most of them in the Creole municipalities also spoke French, and many undoubtedly practiced the Catholic faith. In the Anglo Second Municipality, the English language and Protestantism held sway.⁵

Besides being ethnically and religiously diverse, New Orleans was one of the few places in the United States that recognized the tri-level racial structure characteristic of the Caribbean and Latin America, with whites on top, free persons of mixed-blood in the middle, and black slaves at the base, a virtual caste society in which each group was forbidden by law to intermarry with either of the other two. In contrast to this system stood the North American model, a two-tiered structure based solely on race, with whites on top and blacks, whether slave or free, underneath. Though denied full citizenship after Louisiana passed into American hands in 1803, colored Creoles retained

⁵Robert C. Reinders, "The Churches and the Negro in New Orleans, 1850-1860," *Phylon* 22 (February 1961): 241-42, especially note 5; Paul F. Lachance, "The Foreign French," in *Creole New Orleans: Race and Americanization*, eds. Arnold R. Hirsch and Joseph Logsdon (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1992), 101-130; Joseph Logsdon and Caryn Cossé Bell, "The Americanization of Black New Orleans, 1850-1900," in *ibid.*, 206-07; John W. Blassingame, *Black New Orleans, 1860-1880* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1973), 2, 9-13, 17; Berlin, *Slaves without Masters*, 108-28, 278-79; Davis, *Black Catholics*, 73-74. Though the term "colored Creole," used throughout this article, is jarring to modern sensitivities, it is the historically accurate name for Gulf Coast people of Afro-French descent. It was also the term employed by the people themselves, who used it with pride.

important rights, such as the abilities to testify against whites in court and to travel freely throughout the state without carrying proof of freedom. Moreover, following Spanish law and local custom, courts presumed mulattos to be free rather than slaves in cases questioning their legal status. Colored Creoles jealously guarded their middle position, however ambiguous it might be, and self-consciously emphasized their French heritage, even more so than their white counterparts. Too, in the decade preceding the Civil War, their thinking on race took its cue from the Second Republic of France, which in 1848 ended slavery in the French West Indies and granted full political rights to all blacks on the islands.⁶

Catholicism in the Creole First and Third Municipalities of New Orleans appears to have been even more integrated than elsewhere in the South. At Saint Augustine's parish, colored Creoles helped pay for construction of the church and rented half the pews in the main body; slaves sat on benches along the side aisles. In Saint Louis cathedral, all worshiped together. "Within the edifice," reported the English traveler Harriet Martineau in 1835, "there is no separation. Some few persons may be in pews; but kneeling on the pavement may be seen a multitude, of every shade of complexion from the fair Scotchwoman or German to the jet black African."⁷ Ten years later, American traveller Thomas Low Nichols witnessed the same. "Never have I seen such a mixture of conditions and colours. A radiant Creole beauty, with . . . the complexion of the lily . . . knelt on the pavement, and close at her side was a venerable descendant of Africa, with devotion marked on every feature. White children and black, with every shade between, knelt side by side. In the house of prayer they made no distinction of rank or colour."⁸ Nothing had changed by the mid-1850s when

⁶Berlin, *Slaves without Masters*, 108-32; Logsdon and Bell, "Americanization of Black New Orleans," 201-09.

⁷Harriet Martineau, *Retrospect of Western Travel*, 2 vols. (London: Saunder and Otley, 1838), 1:259; Baudier, *Catholic Church in Louisiana*, 365; Blassingame, *Black New Orleans*, 16. Martineau was unsympathetic both to Catholicism and to the capacity of blacks to participate in it intelligently. "Several Protestants spoke to me of the Catholic religion as being a great blessing to the ignorant negro, as a safe resting-place between barbarism and truth. Nothing that I saw disposed me to agree with them. I saw among Catholics of this class only the most abject worship of things without meaning and no comprehension whatever of symbols. I was persuaded that, if ritual religion be ever a good, it is so in the case of the most, not the least, enlightened [259-60]."

⁸T. L. Nichols, *Forty Years of American Life*, 2d ed. (London: Longmans, Green & Company, 1874), 129-30. Nichols was more impressed by the Catholicism of blacks than was Martineau. "Three-fourths of the congregation were females," he noted; "a large proportion were of African blood; and the negroes seemed the most demonstrative in their piety. The negro women . . . not only appeared to attend to the services with great devotion, but their children, little boys and girls, nine or ten years old, showed a docility which, I fear, not many of our Northern children exhibit in religious service [130]."

Frederick Law Olmsted visited the city. "[O]n the [cathedral's] bare floor, here are the kneeling women—'good' and 'bad' women—and, ah! yes, white and black women, bowed in equality before their common Father."⁹ Black and white Catholics sang in the same choirs and received communion at the same altar rails. Matters were different, however, beyond the church walls, as Martineau carefully observed. "There are groups about the cathedral gates, the blacks and whites parting company as if they had not been worshipping side by side."¹⁰ Indeed, religious authorities encouraged separate black benevolent societies and provided separate schools for black children, ones that provided no more than a minimum education. Moreover, the Irish churches located in the Anglo Second Municipality required blacks to use special entrances and sit in segregated pews.¹¹

In contrast to the Catholic experience, black Protestants in New Orleans worshiped almost exclusively in separate churches in the Second Municipality. By 1850 most of the city's Protestant slaves were either in the four black Baptist churches or in the three separate chapels erected by the Methodists. Few free blacks in the Second Municipality attended the slave churches. Rather, they belonged to the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church, an independent black denomination, whose Saint James parish was just inside the First Municipality near Canal Street.¹²

The 1850s witnessed events of immense political and religious significance for black New Orleans. In 1852 the three municipalities were fused into one, depriving colored Creoles of the ability to shelter their privileged world, while opening it to assault by Anglo-Americans. Shortly thereafter, the state legislature restricted Creole free persons' rights of manumission and removed enforcement of the law from the local to the state level. Repressive measures touched more than the Creole community. Beginning in 1857 the city of New Orleans began to clamp down on independent black congregations in order to

⁹Frederick Law Olmsted, *A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States in the Years 1853-1854, with Remarks on their Economy*, 2 vols. (New York and London: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1856; reprint, Knickerbocker Press, 1904), 2:230.

¹⁰Martineau, *Western Travel*, 1:259.

¹¹Reinders, "Churches and Negro in New Orleans," 242-43; Baudier, *Catholic Church in Louisiana*, 364-65; Logsdon and Bell, "Americanization of Black New Orleans," 234.

¹²Blassingame, *Black New Orleans*, 8, 13-14; Reinders, "Churches and Negro in New Orleans," 243-46; Mathews, *Religion in the Old South*, 200; Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, 204-05; H. E. Sterkx, *The Free Negro in Ante-Bellum Louisiana* (Rutherford, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University, 1972), 259-60.

force them under the care and surveillance of white parishes or out of existence altogether.¹³

The effect of such measures was short lived because of the Civil War. In the wake of that catastrophe, black Protestants in New Orleans quickly reasserted their religious autonomy from white parishes.¹⁴ The drive toward separatism in the city's Protestant churches was part of a larger movement within Protestant denominations during Reconstruction. Throughout the South, blacks and whites separated to form racially distinct churches. In part, this resulted from the unwillingness of whites to offer blacks equal station in parishes; in part, from the desire of blacks for self-determination and from their resentment at discrimination. Ultimately, the drive toward separatism escalated to the denominational level, largely at the instigation of whites, who wanted to sever all ties with blacks.¹⁵

Despite Protestant attempts at conversion, most colored Creole and black Catholics in New Orleans remained within the Church after the Civil War. "It is becoming more and more evident that the Roman Catholics (colored) are repelled from Protestantism by the wild, turbulent and distracting scenes of the colored churches," reported S. S. Ashley of the Congregational American Missionary Association in 1873. "Unless we can show them a better view we labor in vain."¹⁶ Moreover, while the city's few mixed, Protestant congregations still drew the color line tightly, the Catholic Church maintained its prewar policy. At the Second Plenary Council of Baltimore (1866), Archbishop John Mary Odin, C.M., of New Orleans noted that within his jurisdiction no discrimination existed against black Catholics. Hence, he opposed giving them special care or providing them with either separate services or separate churches. Non-Catholic sources have corroborated his claim. A Methodist minister, for instance, remarked: "In her most aristocratic churches in this city, lips of every shade, by hundreds press with devout kisses the same crucifixes, and fingers of as great variety in color, are dipped in the 'holy water,' to imprint the cross on as varied brows. In the renting of pews colored families have a chance, and we have seen them sitting as others in every part of the

¹³Reinders, "Churches and Negro in New Orleans," 246; Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, 194-95; Logsdon and Bell, "Americanization of Black New Orleans," 215; Sterkx, *Free Negro*, 267-68.

¹⁴Blassingame, *Black New Orleans*, 148-52.

¹⁵Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* (New York: Harper & Row, 1989), 88-95; Kenneth K. Bailey, "The Post-Civil War Racial Separations in Southern Protestantism: Another Look," *Church History* 46 (December 1977): 453-73.

¹⁶Quoted in Blassingame, *Black New Orleans*, 148-9.

house."¹⁷ A brief challenge to integrated churches occurred in 1875 as several priests openly supported the racist White League and introduced segregated seating in Saint Louis Cathedral. When black parishioners staged a boycott, the cathedral quietly resumed the practice of integrated pews. Despite a decree of the Third Plenary Council of Baltimore (1884) urging bishops to erect separate parishes for blacks, colored Creoles in New Orleans preferred to remain in mixed churches. "Distinct and separate churches are not advisable," reported the chancellor of the archdiocese in 1888; "experience has taught that the colored people prefer to come to mass and to the sacraments with their white brethren as it is done now in all the churches where French language is spoken."¹⁸ Nor did the French clergy desire to lose their colored Creole parishioners, but their reason was monetary rather than any special concern about equality. Colored Creoles financed the churches while white Creoles spent their money on fine clothes and entertainment.¹⁹

Indeed, the colored Catholic Creoles abhorred segregation in any aspect of life and led the political charge for black suffrage after the Civil War. During Reconstruction they joined with the city's American blacks and fought hard, with considerable success, for equality. By the mid-1870s they had managed to integrate the opera house, all street cars, some railroads, and a number of soda fountains, saloons, and theaters. The color line held fast, however, in hotels and fine restaurants. Despite the collaboration to end racial discrimination, important differences divided the black community in New Orleans. Like white Protestants, black ones held the Catholicism of colored Creoles in disdain and scorned their Latin lifestyle with its gambling, drinking, dancing, and sensuality. Ideological differences also separated the Creole from the American black. As Rodolphe Lucien Desdunes expressed it, the colored Creole was philosophical, hopeful, always striving for equality, and willing to forget being a negro in order to remember he is a man; on the other hand, the American black was practical, doubtful, always striving for identity, and willing to forget being a man in order to think he is a negro. Moreover, colored

¹⁷Quoted in Blassingame, *Black New Orleans*, 199-200 (quotation on 200); Edward Misch, *The American Bishops and the Negro from the Civil War to the Third Plenary Council of Baltimore, 1865-1884* (Rome: Pontifical Gregorian University, 1968), 42.

¹⁸Quoted in Dolores Egger Labbé, *Jim Crow Comes to Church: The Establishment of Segregated Catholic Parishes in South Louisiana* (New York: Arno Press, 1978), 18-19 (the quotation is on 19) *Acta et Decreta Concilii Plenarii Baltimorensis III . . . cap. II, no. 238*; Blassingame, *Black New Orleans*, 201.

¹⁹Labbé, *Jim Crow*, 18.

Creoles harkened back to French radicalism, and some even gave institutional expression to such liberalism by joining the city's French-speaking Scottish Rite Masonic lodges where they found political and spiritual support from radical, white, French émigrés.²⁰

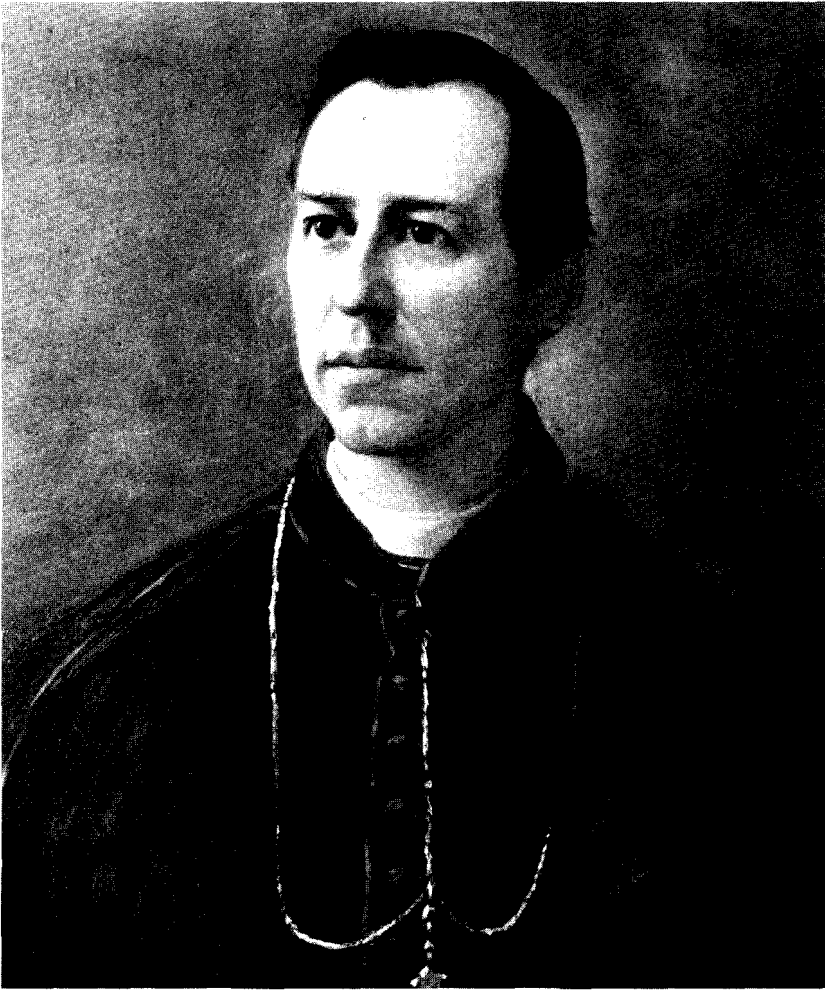
The distinction between the two groups of New Orleans blacks became readily apparent when Reconstruction ended in 1877. In that year white Democrats resegregated the city's schools and public accommodations. Colored Creoles brought suit under the state's 1868 constitution. The whites responded by passing a new constitution (1879) that sanctioned segregation. While colored Creoles opposed the new constitution on principle, the city's American black leaders took a pragmatic, practical view, accepting segregation of the public schools in return for the establishment of the all-black Southern University. Increasingly thereafter, American blacks sought racial accommodation with whites. Colored Creoles, however, refused to bend the knee. When, in 1890, the state legislature mandated segregated railroad cars, colored Creoles challenged the law in federal court and formed the *Comité des Citoyens*, with the financial help of the old colored Creole radical Aristide Mary, to protect the rights of blacks through litigation. A member of the Comité, Louis Martinet, founded *The Daily Crusader*, which became the mouthpiece of the organization. Heady with success at overturning the law in the lower court (1893), colored Creoles stood virtually alone in the fight against white supremacists.²¹ These Creoles were the blacks who would go head to head with the archbishop over the establishment of Saint Katharine's parish for black Catholics.

The Archbishop and His Decision

The man responsible for setting up Saint Katharine's parish was Francis Janssens, fifth archbishop of New Orleans (1888–1897). Born in Holland and educated at Louvain, Janssens spent his entire ministry laboring in the southern United States, first as a priest in Virginia, then

²⁰Blassingame, *Black New Orleans*, 173-201; Logsdon and Bell, "Americanization of Black New Orleans," 201-03, 234-37.

²¹Logsdon and Bell, "Americanization of Black New Orleans," 251-56; Charles Barthélemy Rousseve, *The Negro in Louisiana: Aspects of His History and His Literature* (New Orleans: Xavier University, 1937), 128-29. On the southern capitulation to racism, see C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*, 2d ed. rev. (London and New York: Oxford University, 1966), chapter 3. For the intellectual aspects of white racism, see George M. Frederickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817-1914* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), chapters 8-10.



Francis Janssens, Fifth Archbishop of New Orleans (1887-1897)
Courtesy, Archives of Archdiocese of New Orleans

as bishop of Natchez, Mississippi, and finally as archbishop of New Orleans. His years of labor in the South had instilled in him a deep interest in caring for blacks already in the Church and converting those outside the fold. As bishop of Natchez, he came to an awareness of two things: the need for black priests and the need for separate black parishes. A year before his transfer to New Orleans, Janssens publicly, though anonymously, set his ideas before American Catholics. In an article published in *The Catholic World*, he raised the question

of how the Church could reach black people and answered it with another question: "But may not and should not the colored man himself be the instrument in the hand of God to evangelize his colored brethren?" Definitely so, in Janssens's view.

The colored race, though living harmoniously with the white race, mistrusts anything carried on for their benefit by the whites, unless the colored men are themselves allowed to act the principal parts. They think they can manage their own affairs; they are free now and reject anything whatever that bears any semblance of tutelage of the white race over them. And this spirit manifests itself principally in things intellectual and spiritual—education and religion. This is the feeling of the bulk of the colored people at present. They do not want white preachers, and I do not know of any white preacher (outside the Catholic Church) who has ever exercised any religious influence over them.

Janssens recommended the erection of a Catholic normal school for black boys, where Latin would be taught while they were educated to be teachers. Those students who showed signs of a priestly vocation would thus be prepared for theological study.²² While focusing on the advocacy of a black priesthood, the article also stated in muted form Janssens's belief that blacks must control their own religious affairs, their own parishes. He was reaching the conclusion that Catholicism would make few black converts until they had a church exclusively to themselves.²³

Within two years of his arrival in New Orleans, Janssens found two more reasons for establishing a separate parish for blacks: leakage from the Church and white prejudice. He held that in 1890 there were 75,000 black Catholics in the archdiocese, down 25,000 from an almost certainly exaggerated figure of 100,000 in 1865. Puzzled at how Janssens

²²[Francis Janssens], "The Negro Problem and the Catholic Church," *Catholic World* 44 (March 1887): 724-26; Annemarie Kasteel, *Francis Janssens, 1843-1897: A Dutch-American Prelate* (Lafayette, Louisiana: University of Southwestern Louisiana, 1992), 1-142. Later in the same year, Janssens warmly supported the Josephite Fathers in the establishment of a seminary to educate both white and black priests for work among African-Americans. He believed, however, that the immediate admission of black candidates might prejudice the scheme (Kasteel, *Francis Janssens*, 143-47; Stephen J. Ochs, *Desegregating the Altar: The Josephites and the Struggle for Black Priests, 1871-1960* [Baton Rouge, Louisiana, and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1990], 69-70).

²³Kasteel, *Francis Janssens*, 150-51.

had arrived at the figure 75,000, historians have since estimated that in 1865 there were probably no more than 50,000.²⁴ Although the departure of blacks from the Church never approached the number that the archbishop's questionable figures suggested, both he and his clergy correctly saw that some defection was taking place. Janssens attributed the loss to multiple causes. Protestant denominations had built three colleges for blacks in New Orleans, which many Catholics attended. "They are there indoctrinated with a false religion, and with prejudices against the Church," noted Janssens, "so when they go out they acquire, by their better secular education, an influence over their race to the detriment of the Church." Too, increasing prejudice among white Catholics gradually eroded the traditional practice of integrated seating, especially in rural areas of the archdiocese. A contrary practice was taking hold whereby one of the front doors of a church, together with its corresponding aisle and pews, was designated for black use only, an act of discrimination deeply resented by colored Creoles, some of them citing this practice as a pretext for staying away from church. Finally, and perhaps as a result of the foregoing, once colored Creoles learned English, they joined the black Baptist or Methodist churches. To stem the outflow of black Catholics, Janssens planned to multiply the number of Catholic schools for them and experiment with a separate parish.²⁵

His plan for black Catholic schools received warm support and financial aid from a wealthy Philadelphia heiress, Blessed Katharine Drexel, who had recently founded the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament for Indians and Colored People. The daughter of Francis Anthony Drexel, a partner of J. Pierpont Morgan in the banking firm Drexel, Morgan & Company, Katharine and her two sisters had inherited a trust fund valued at more than \$15 million. Continuing the benevolence that marked the life of her father, Katharine generously donated the funds that enabled Janssens to build a string of small educational

²⁴Labbé, *Jim Crow*, 32-33; Gillard, *Colored Catholics*, 88-94; Kasteel, *Francis Janssens*, 275.

²⁵"Seventh Annual Report of the Episcopal Commission on Colored and Indian Missions," *St. Joseph's Advocate* 10 (April 1894): 536-37 (the quotation appears on 536); Kasteel, *Francis Janssens*, 275 n. 2, 279-80. Janssens had made the same point to the Vincentian provincial, Father Thomas Smith, C.M.: "The longer I am here, the more I am impressed with the necessity of a separate church. . . . I see & observe how many leave the Church to join the Baptist & Methodist denominations. A separate church may counteract this evil. . . ." (Francis Janssens to Thomas Smith, 16 August 1893, DeAndreis-Rosati Memorial Archives, Perryville, Missouri [hereinafter cited as DRMA], II-C(LA)-3, box 1).



Blessed Katharine Drexel (1858-1955),
Foundress of the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament.
Courtesy Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament.

facilities for black children.²⁶ He would also look to her for monetary help in establishing his separate church for blacks.

Within a year of his arrival in New Orleans, Janssens had written to Archbishop William Henry Elder of Cincinnati, who served twenty-three years as bishop of Natchez, to ask advice about establishing separate parishes for blacks. Familiar with the colored Creoles' traditional opposition to separation, Elder advised against the idea in the belief that the fewer the distinctions the better. Yet he offered a suggestion that Janssens would eventually follow, namely, giving the blacks freedom of choice by creating a parish for them which they could either attend or not.²⁷ In 1892 Janssens decided to take the plunge. One of his priests had already approached the Assumptionist Fathers, a French missionary order, about working with blacks in the archdiocese. In August of that year, the archbishop laid before his consultors the question of establishing a separate parish and bringing in the new order to handle it. Regarding the first matter, whether or not to establish a separate parish for blacks, the consultors engaged in a "very lively" discussion about the best method of evangelization. Despite their serious concern about the repugnance of colored Creoles to segregation, the advisers decided to try a special parish for blacks. The consultors then weighed the pros and cons—mostly the cons—of introducing a new religious order to take charge of this work. Even though Janssens promised never to give the Assumptionists any jurisdiction over whites, the consultors argued that there were already enough religious orders in New Orleans, and these habitually acted like "suction pumps on neighboring parishes" by drawing all to themselves. The advisers also warned that conflicts would arise between white and black parishes. In a split vote, with two stalwarts holding out to the end, the consultors agreed to permit the Assumptionists to come, but their jurisdiction was to extend only over the blacks.²⁸

With the plan approved, Janssens began negotiations. In February 1893 he met in New Orleans with an Assumptionist priest, Father Marcellin Guyot, who was in the United States on a preaching tour. Janssens detailed his proposal for the Assumptionists. Accordingly,

²⁶Kasteel, *Francis Janssens*, 282-94; Katherine Burton, *The Golden Door: The Life of Katharine Drexel* (New York: P. J. Kennedy & Sons, 1957), 3-153; Felicity O'Brien, *Treasure in Heaven: Katharine Drexel* (Middlegreen, Slough, United Kingdom: St. Paul Publications, 1991), 9-40.

²⁷Labbé, *Jim Crow*, 39-40.

²⁸Séance du 23 août 1892, Diary of the Archdiocese of New Orleans, 1888[1897], Archives of the Archdiocese of New Orleans (hereinafter cited as AANO); Kasteel, *Francis Janssens*, 313-15.

the community was to work exclusively with blacks. Its headquarters was to be located in a colored section of New Orleans, where it would rent a residence and a hall to serve as a chapel whose pews could be let only to black people. The Assumptionists were also to establish similar parishes for blacks in the rural areas of the archdiocese. Mother Katharine Drexel pledged \$3,000 in support of the Assumptionists and the project. When Guyot presented the proposal in Paris, his superiors refused to sign it because the apostolate dealt solely with blacks. In August 1893 Janssens and the Assumptionist superiors reached a compromise whereby the order's priests would be permitted to hear the confessions of whites throughout the archdiocese. To the priests of the archdiocese this concession probably seemed like the first sputtering of the suction pump feared by the consultors. The city's French clergy objected to the newcomers even before their arrival.²⁹

Blacks opposed the archbishop's plan for reasons of their own. Jealous of their traditional place in society, eager for equality, and more proud of their French than their African ancestry, the colored Creoles deeply resented the idea of a separate church because it seemed to be a capitulation to racism, reducing them to the status of freed persons, that is, former slaves. "Our colored Catholics, creole colored, as they are called, are in language, manners, and ways of thinking quite different from the colored people elsewhere," Janssens reported to the Commission for Catholic Missions among the Colored People and Indians. "They look with disfavor on separate churches, imagining that we wish to draw the line of white and colored upon them."³⁰

Scarcely had Janssens concluded arrangements with the Assumptionists, when he approached the Vincentians, who had been in the archdiocese of New Orleans since 1838 and in the city itself since 1849. Perhaps because of the resistance of the colored Creoles, the archbishop's plans were in a state of flux. Rather than establish the new segregated parish in the heart of the city's Creole quarter, he would place it outside that district where black Americans predominated, a people much more amenable to separation. If a church succeeded there, colored Creole resistance might lessen, and a second

²⁹Labbé, *Jim Crow*, 42-46; Kasteel, *Francis Janssens*, 315-19.

³⁰Quoted in Gillard, *Colored Catholics*, 122.

parish could be opened in the Latin quarter.³¹ The Vincentians had a building available in the old Anglo Second Municipality. In 1858 Archbishop Antoine Blanc had given them title to Saint Joseph's church and rectory on Tulane Avenue between Villere and Marais Streets as long as they served the people of that parish, while also acting as chaplains at Charity Hospital.³² By 1893 the Vincentians had built a new church and rectory, with no immediate plans for the old, dilapidated structures.

On 7 August, Father Thomas Abbott, a Vincentian, chanced upon Janssens, who was visiting his sick vicar general in Charity Hospital. Saying that he was receiving \$3,000 to establish a church exclusively for blacks (but not mentioning that the money was pledged for the Assumptionists), Janssens wondered if the Vincentians would be willing to use the old Saint Joseph's church and supply the priests to form a congregation of colored people. Abbott replied that only the provincial, Father Thomas Smith, C.M., could make such a decision. The archbishop then asked if the Vincentians would give him the church for use by a religious congregation (the Assumptionists) invited to the archdiocese to take charge of the blacks. Again, Abbott begged off but immediately informed Smith of Janssens's intention.³³

Moving quickly and purposefully to block the Assumptionists from entering New Orleans, Smith had Abbott inform Janssens that the Vincentians desired to undertake the work with blacks. As the provincial later expressed his reasoning to Father Francis Nugent, C.M., the new superior of Saint Joseph's, "We were obliged to undertake the formation of a colored congregation in our old church in order to keep out a strang [*sic*] community who had offered it seems to do the same and whom the Archbishop was disposed to introduce."³⁴ Just why Smith wanted the Assumptionists kept out of the city is unknown. Having served at Saint Joseph's himself for a number

³¹On this point, see Kasteel, *Francis Janssens*, 316 and 321. In November 1894 Janssens explained to Drexel why the Assumptionists were not yet in the archdiocese. "I have been delayed in my calculations," he wrote. "I wanted the Lazarists [Vincentians] to start first, but they have been unavoidably delayed;—then when our French speaking negroes see that no harm comes from a separate church, they will not make so much opposition to the work of the Assumption." Quoted in *ibid.*, 316.

³²Deed of Transfer of Title, 28 December 1858, copy in Archives of the Southern Province, formerly in Houston, Texas (hereinafter cited as ASP), now at Saint Mary's of the Barrens, Perryville, Missouri, St. Katherine's Parish File.

³³Thomas Abbott to Thomas Smith, 8 August 1893, ASP, St. Katherine's Parish File.

³⁴Smith to Francis Nugent, 11 September 1893, DRMA, II-C(LA)-3, box 1.



Reverend Thomas Smith, C.M., Provincial of the American Province of the Vincentian Community (1879-1888), provincial of the Western Province (1888-1905).

Courtesy DeAndreis-Rosati Memorial Archives

of years, he may have shared the secular clergy's fear of the suction-pump effect. On the other hand, he may have feared losing the old Saint Joseph's church to the Assumptionists. In any case, his willingness surprised and pleased Janssens, who confessed, "I was under the impression somehow or other that you had not the men nor perhaps

the inclination of undertaking the work. . . ." In order to avoid conflict with any of the city's pastors, the archbishop laid down the same principles under which the Assumptionists were to have operated. (1) "The colored people will continue the right, they now possess, to go to their own [territorial] parish. In other words, they are not to be forced to belong to this one colored congregation." (2) The priests of the new parish would have jurisdiction over blacks throughout the city. (3) They could hear the confessions of Caucasians who came to the church, but no whites could rent pews.³⁵

The Vincentians, the Heiress, and the Colored Creoles

Once Smith accepted these stipulations, Janssens sent the Vincentians begging for funds. "If the Father [Nugent] in N.O. explains matters to Mother Katharine Drexel and asks assistance to fix up the church & presbytery," the archbishop wrote to Smith, "she will no doubt help."³⁶ The \$3,000 mentioned by Abbott was not forthcoming because it had been pledged for the Assumptionists, though Smith did not know that. Understandably, he felt that Janssens was now "disposed to shift the repairs etc. on ourselves." The provincial told Nugent to get a "strong letter" from the archbishop "recommending and urging" the plan upon her and then go to Philadelphia to see her personally, which he did in September.³⁷ Apparently, Drexel wanted an estimate before she would commit herself to anything, so Nugent returned to New Orleans and got one from the construction firm of O'Neill & Koch. For the sum of \$5,675 the company agreed to straighten all the brick work on the church, re-floor everywhere except under the altar, put in new rain gutters, repair the tin work and slate work on the roof, replaster where needed, refurbish all the wood and ironwork, restore door frames and window frames complete with new sashes and glass, install wainscoting throughout, and shore up the concrete foundation. Once repaired, the church would seat 850 and be equivalent in worth to a new building that cost \$40,000. Though the estimated cost of repairs may seem slight by present-day standards, the sum was equivalent to approximately \$91,000 in 1988 dollars and was

³⁵Francis Janssens to Smith, 16 August 1893, DRMA, II-C(LA)-3, box 1.

³⁶Janssens to Smith, 3 September 1893, DRMA, II-C(LA)-3, box 1.

³⁷Smith to Nugent, 11 September 1893, DRMA, II-C(LA)-3, box 1.

practically twelve-times more than what the average person earned in 1893 (\$485).³⁸

No doubt because of the sum involved, Nugent felt obliged to sell the project to Drexel. After getting Janssens's approval of the estimate, Nugent sent it to her stating that the archbishop was "very anxious to have the church opened as soon as possible." The priest assured her that after repairs, the church would be "one of the most beautiful in the city . . . a most desirable feature . . . [because] the negroes will be attracted to it on that account." To be sure, there would be additional expenditures for such items as an organ, vestments, and a chalice, but Nugent intended to make the colored people themselves pay for those. Assuring Drexel that the Vincentians would spare no effort to make the parish a success, he said that Janssens hoped its opening would be "but a step ahead of a foundation of your Sisters in connection with it." No doubt hinting at what that connection might be, Nugent informed her that the old rectory was already being renovated for use as a school for black children. Moreover, a black man from Galveston, Texas, wanted to start a newspaper for people of his race in connection with the new congregation. Nugent intended to encourage that venture because "a well conducted paper would be a strong power in the organizing & building up of the parish."³⁹ However much his letter may have moved Drexel, she deeply regretted being able to offer only \$2,000 and encouraged Nugent to make up the rest by conducting an appeal to both black and white Catholics.⁴⁰

Her response disappointed both Nugent and Janssens, each of whom pleaded the case. "The prejudice of the whites," Nugent told Drexel, "does not permit the hope that they would give anything worth mentioning, for such a project." The Vincentians had learned that lesson by experience when they had appealed for assistance to start a school for black children. Nor would the black Catholics offer aid, for they "look with some suspicion on the movement as an attempt to draw the color line in the Catholic Church." "It is only after time has worn away this suspicion, and they see their own church has come to stay," said Nugent, "that the negroes can be expected to rally

³⁸O'Neill and Koch to Nugent, 10 October 1893, DRMA, II-C(LA)-3, box 1; Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States: Colonial times to 1957* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1960), 92.

³⁹Nugent to Mother Katharine Drexel, 14 October 1893, DRMA, II-C(LA)-3, box 1.

⁴⁰Drexel to Nugent, 29 October 1893, DRMA, II-C(LA)-3, box 1.

enthusiastically to its support." Given the present state of things, he simply saw no hope for the project.⁴¹ "We are really in a very embarrassing dilemma," Janssens told the heiress. "Colored Catholics" were abandoning the faith because the whites no longer wanted indiscriminate seating in church; "real negroes" (American blacks as opposed to colored Creoles) were abandoning the faith because they preferred to have their own churches. White Catholics refused financial support for black churches or schools, while "many of the influential negroes, especially mulattos, are opposed to special colored churches, not because they go to church themselves, but because they imagine the different churches will tend to a greater social separation." If one separate Catholic church for blacks were to succeed, however, the next one would be far easier to establish. If a separate church failed after a fair trial, the idea could be abandoned.⁴² The important thing was to try.

Try Nugent would. He wrote to Archbishop Patrick Ryan of Philadelphia, Drexel's trusted spiritual adviser. Ryan spoke to her favorably of the project and found her willing to do something good for the blacks of New Orleans. She liked Janssens because he gave her "detailed & satisfactory accounts of his work in favor of her sable pets."⁴³ Indeed, Drexel informed both Nugent and Janssens that she was increasing her previous offer to \$5,000, "provided however a document be signed [by Nugent] agreeing that in the event of said church being abandoned for Colored purposes, the five thousand now given by us shall revert to other Colored works in the diocese of New Orleans."⁴⁴ Although this proviso would come to be resented by Smith as suspicion about Vincentian honesty, it seems that Drexel had no more in mind than ensuring that her sizable donation would benefit the people she intended. This stipulation, however, tangled negotiations for months.

As stated by Drexel, the proviso was unacceptable to Nugent. In a diplomatic letter, he informed her that the work for blacks would be "a great burden and labor," undertaken by the Vincentians solely "for the glory of God, the salvation of souls, and the carrying out of a

⁴¹Nugent to Drexel, 9 November 1893, DRMA, II-C(LA)-3, box 1.

⁴²Quoted in Kasteel, *Francis Janssens*, 296-97.

⁴³Patrick Ryan to Nugent, 5 December 1893, DRMA, II-C(LA)-3, box 1.

⁴⁴Drexel to Nugent, 24 November 1893 (the quotation is from here); Drexel to Janssens, 24 November 1893—both in DRMA, II-C(LA)-3, box 1.

cherished wish of our Most Rev. & dear Archbishop." Promising conscientiousness, perseverance, and zeal on the part of his confreres, Nugent denied that Drexel could oblige the Vincentians to refund the money if the endeavor were to fail through no fault of their own. "To require us to do so would, it seems to me," he said, "be a gratuitous penalty imposed on us without cause, a forfeit without a consideration, as we give both our property and our services without compensation." Nugent proposed an alternative. If the venture failed, and if because of the improvements made with Drexel's money, the property sold at a higher price than it might have in a dilapidated condition, "then we would feel in conscience bound & do hereby bind ourselves to pay over to the diocese an amount equal to the increased value of the property." In such a case, the archbishop would be the judge of the amount to be paid.⁴⁵ Drexel agreed but wanted the proviso adjusted to read that "in the event of the failure of the work through any lack of interest on the part of those in charge, the amount now given will revert to the other Colored work and that the archbishop is to be the arbiter in the case."⁴⁶

Because Janssens was to become the arbiter in any such dispute, Nugent showed Drexel's letter to him. The archbishop shared none of her reservations about the zeal or earnestness of the Vincentians, but he did have serious questions about the successful outcome of the parish for "lack of interest on the part of the colored people, insufficiency of means to keep it up, even owing to the very peculiar position of our colored Catholics, the separate work might prove detrimental to the political or social condition of the colored people." Without any prompting from Nugent, Janssens suggested the very same wording the priest had already offered to Drexel.⁴⁷ Nugent forwarded the archbishop's letter to Drexel carefully noting that the exception Janssens took to her proviso was "entirely his own, as I made no comment whatever on this or any other part of your letter." If the apostolate were to continue only during the life of the present archbishop, said Nugent, he himself would have had no objection to her wording because Janssens was "a man of sound practical judgment and eminently just." His successor, however, might interpret such a clause as

⁴⁵Nugent to Drexel, 13 December 1893, DRMA, II-C(LA)-3, box 1.

⁴⁶Drexel to Nugent, 23 December 1893, DRMA, II-C(LA)-3, box 1.

⁴⁷Janssens to Nugent, 9 January 1894, copy, DRMA, II-C(LA)-3, box 1.

meaning that the success or failure of the work depended entirely on the zeal of the Vincentians, and a difficulty might arise over what constituted sufficient zeal.⁴⁸ Nugent also sent copies of Drexel's and Janssens's letters to Smith, the provincial.

The latter was not at all amused and ordered Nugent to make the agreement on the terms suggested by Janssens, in other words, the very terms Nugent himself had proposed to Drexel. "The proposition of Mother Catherine [*sic*] and her Advisers I regret to say implies a distrust in us and suspicion of our sincerity [*sic*] and honesty in undertaking the formation of the Colored Congregation and a doubt of our discharging our duty to them faithfully unless the forfeiture of that 5000 was held in *terrorem* [in terror] over our heads," he wrote Nugent. "This unworthy and undeserved as well as unjust insinuation we must repudiate and resent." Like Janssens, Smith, who had once pastored Saint Joseph's himself, foresaw the real possibility of failure, not on the part of the Vincentians, but "on the part of the Colored people themselves, e.g., the fear of being deprived of 'Social Equality' which they have been fighting for so long in being excluded from the Churches of the White people & from having their Baptisms & Marriages registered on the same books." Janssens's letter greatly heartened the provincial. "He has a clear view of the situation," concluded Smith.⁴⁹ Within months, the attitude of the colored Creoles and Drexel would make the provincial want to abandon the entire project.

Drexel was quite willing to accept the Nugent-Janssens wording of the proviso, so Nugent sent her a holograph agreement to that effect signed by himself and binding his successors. Because of miscommunications between Drexel and Janssens, Nugent heard nothing from her for a month. Finally replying, she asked Smith to have the agreement drawn up in legal form and signed in the presence of witnesses. In a separate reply, her lawyer questioned Nugent's ability to bind his successors to any agreement unless he was vested with title to the church as a corporation sole. The attorney wanted the agreement signed by whoever held the deed to the property.⁵⁰

⁴⁸Nugent to Drexel, 11 January 1894, DRMA, II-C(LA)-3, box 1.

⁴⁹Smith to Nugent, 19 January 1894, DRMA, II-C(LA)-3, box 1.

⁵⁰Drexel to Nugent, 24 January 1894; Nugent to Drexel, 12 February 1894, with enclosure of holograph agreement; Nugent to Drexel, 7 March 1894; Drexel to Nugent, 10 March 1894; Nugent to Drexel, 27 March 1894; Walter George Smith to Nugent, 9 April 1894—all in DRMA, II-C(LA)-3, box 1.

While these vexing negotiations with Drexel were taking place, the resistance of colored Creoles to the project became public. As late as February 1894, Janssens reported to Drexel, "Everything is doing pretty well, though some few hightoned colored mulatto persons are stirring up strife against a colored church in the city." The majority of blacks favored the idea of such a church, said the archbishop, and eventually the rest would too, once they saw it was meant for their benefit.⁵¹ The Comité des Citoyens did not intend to give the proposed church that chance. It sent a subcommittee of "leading negro Catholics" to Janssens to protest against the establishment of a "Jim Crow" church as "an insult to their race, uncatholic and unchristian." Receiving them cordially, the archbishop promised nothing and still clung to the idea of a separate church for blacks.⁵² The Comité reported on the meeting in its official organ *The Daily Crusader* and served notice that when the appropriate time came, it would "call on the Catholics and all the people to protest against the un-Christian, un-Catholic institution—the Jim Crow church." Meanwhile, it directed Janssens's attention to the Saint Patrick Day's address of Archbishop John Ireland of Saint Paul, Minnesota.

"The Catholic Church," said Archbishop Ireland, "As far as she wears a national aspect, must be American in America." If this be true in regard to foreigners, how much more true it must be with Negroes, who are Americans.

"To make her (the church) Irish," continues Monseigneur Ireland, "is to make her unfit for America." And to make her Negro, or Jim Crow, is to bebase [*sic*] and degrade her and make her unfit for Americans, we add, and so said Archbishop Ireland, too, when called upon to dedicate a Negro church in St. Paul against his approval.

Again, says the Archbishop of St. Paul: "Segregation of one body of Catholics from another on foreign lines (on Negro or race lines likewise) is wrong." Yes it is wrong, utterly wrong; un-Catholic and un-Christian.

⁵¹Quoted in Kasteel, *Francis Janssens*, 302.

⁵²Clippings from the New Orleans *Daily Crusader* and the Baton Rouge *Republic* in DRMA, II-C(LA)-3, box 1. Quotations are taken from both.

The Comité hoped that Janssens would take Ireland's words to heart, see the enormity of the offense about to be perpetrated, and repent of his present purpose.⁵³

Though the Comité gave no hint about the form its future protest might take, the Baton Rouge *Republic* reported that if a separate church was established, "all chances are that it will be boycotted; that the negroes will refuse to attend it or use it in any way, and will boycott those of their race who go there." The paper added that a number of colored Catholic Creoles were threatening to "leave the church rather than to submit to what they deem an indignity." Despite that threat, everything indicated that Janssens intended to go forward with the project, which blacks ridiculed as "the Church of St. Jim Crow."⁵⁴

Indeed, the archbishop did proceed with the project, with ridicule of his own to heap. "I am in a pickle just now," he told Drexel. "Some of our colored people are up in arms against me & the proposed colored churches. The leaders are bright mulattoes who never set foot in the church, some of them Freemasons, who imagine that it will bring about a greater social distinction." Janssens denied that such a church would. He contended that the "regular negroes" (meaning American blacks) favored the idea. These were the people he had at heart. "It is the poor darkey that is led astray from the Church to the Baptist and Methodist shouting houses," he wrote; "the mulatto would believe himself contaminated to go to such places. We must reclaim the poor dark negro & lead him back to the church."⁵⁵

Within weeks, the colored Creoles struck at the core of the project with an unwarranted allegation against the Vincentians that infuriated Smith. In *The Daily Crusader*, the Comité des Citoyens ran an article entitled "The Uncatholic Church," noting that the old, deserted Saint Joseph's parish was to be set apart for the exclusive use of blacks, something that no black Catholic wanted. "Besides," said the paper, "it diverts money given by Sister Catharine [*sic*] (Miss Drexel), for work among the colored people, from its legitimate use. We have been informed that the *real* purpose in establishing the church, and one that does not speak well for the authorities, is to get possession of Miss Drexel's money by purchasing the church from themselves, turn it over to the colored people, and take the proceeds resulting from the

⁵³Clipping in DRMA, II-C(LA)-3, box 1.

⁵⁴Clipping in DRMA, II-C(LA)-3, box 1.

⁵⁵Quoted in Kasteel, *Francis Janssens* 303.

sale to extinguish the debt on the new St. Joseph Church. And this is to be done under the guise of Christian charity." The article went on to quote Janssens's annual report to the Commission on Colored and Indian Missions, in which he admitted that the project might widen the division between blacks and whites. "A church for the colored people alone," said the archbishop, "may deepen ill feeling and separate still more the two races, which now meet on common ground in the church. On the other hand, such is the prejudice and feeling of the white people that we cannot prudently extend the same privileges of indiscriminate pews, of rank in procession, etc., and some of the colored Catholics use this as a pretext not to come to church." Because Janssens himself admitted that a separate church would increase racial hatred, the *Crusader* concluded that the only thing "self-respecting colored people could do is stay away. Give the new concern a wide berth, for it will not be a house of God, but rather a temple dedicated to the perpetuation of prejudice."⁵⁶

Smith, who had apparently been sent a clipping of the article, forwarded it to Nugent and called attention to its "ugly disreputable charge" against the Vincentians. The idea of restoration now had to be abandoned. Smith wanted Nugent to impress on Janssens the necessity of building "a neat tasty attractive new frame church" somewhere else for the blacks because Saint Joseph's "would always be looked upon as an abandoned old church as they call it now." The paper's allegation that the Vincentians were in the project only for the money had to be dispelled. "We cannot be under the imputation of dishonesty," said Smith. "To deny it is useless. It only spreads the charge. A new Church will show our disinterestedness. It will equally sustain the Archbishop's course & rather emphasize it."⁵⁷

Scarcely had Smith reacted against the false accusation in the *Daily Crusader* than came word from Nugent that Drexel wanted the agreement with the Vincentians in proper legal form, signed by the appropriate party, and witnessed. The provincial was understandably disgusted. "Mother Catharine [sic] seems to think like the Colored people of N.O. that we are disposed to use her money for our own benefit & is determined to bind us to refund it," he told Nugent. If she wanted self-interest, he would give her self-interest. Smith now in-

⁵⁶Clipping (emphasis in original) in DRMA, II-C(LA)-3, box 1; "Seventh Annual Report of Commission on Colored and Indian Missions," 537.

⁵⁷T. J. Smith to Nugent, 16 April 1894, DRMA, II-C(LA)-3, box 1.

tended to sell the old Saint Joseph's and use the proceeds to erect new school buildings near the new church. Nugent should inform her that the Vincentians "have discovered that a colored Church in the centre of our large school properties would render them almost worthless." She should give her money to Janssens to build a new church for the blacks somewhere else. "The Archbishop will own the Church & she will be freed from the annoyance of securing guarantees for the honest disposition of her money." Smith thought Janssens would see the reasonableness in this course. Besides, a new church for the blacks would counter the current charge that while the old Saint Joseph's was not good enough for the whites, it "is good enough for the Colored people."⁵⁸

Janssens failed, however, to see the reasonableness of this course and urgently pleaded that the Vincentians proceed with the apostolate for blacks. "By the advice of the confreres," Smith reluctantly agreed, although he wanted Nugent to make it clear to Drexel that the Vincentians were already doing more than their share by devoting the old church and rectory (used as a school) to the blacks while "subjecting our surrounding property to great depreciation."⁵⁹ Nugent so informed Drexel's attorney, not Drexel herself. Two weeks later, the lawyer sent the legal agreement to be executed, with word that Drexel wanted the matter settled as soon as possible. "The Reverend Fathers have had so many trials," she told her attorney, "that I do not wish to place the least obstable [*sic*] in their way to doing the good work for souls."⁶⁰

The document, however, bound the Vincentians "to form a congregation or parish for the 'Colored People of New Orleans' . . ." Smith wanted the wording altered to read something like "*to labor zealously & earnestly to form a congregation or to form if practicable a congregation, etc.*" In his view, it was doubtful, given the seemingly general opposition of the black community, that any colored congregation could be established at all, so the Vincentians would "be binding ourselves to do the impossible." Smith's reading of another passage in the contract caused him to return to the idea of a new church for the

⁵⁸T. J. Smith to Nugent, 18 April 1894, DRMA, II-C(LA)-3, box 1.

⁵⁹T. J. Smith to Nugent, 12 May 1894; Nugent to W. G. Smith, 28 May 1894—both in DRMA, II-C(LA)-3, box 1.

⁶⁰Nugent to W. G. Smith, 28 May 1894; William Rudolph Smith to Nugent, 12 June 1894 (the quotation is from here)—both in DRMA, II-C(LA)-3, box 1.

blacks as “the most judicious” course because if it were to fail, the building “could be made a fine Colored School which would obviate all this haggling about refunding money.”⁶¹ In any case, Smith wanted Nugent to stress to Drexel the bitter and organized opposition of the blacks to any such church.⁶²

Nugent adjusted the wording of the agreement according to Smith’s wishes, and Father Anthony Verrina, C.M., president of the corporation of the Congregation of the Mission in Louisiana, which owned the old Saint Joseph’s, signed it. Nugent sent the contract to Drexel’s lawyer with an explanation of the change in wording. “The most influential element of the Colored people are decidedly and earnestly opposed to a separate church,” he explained. “How far this opposition may be effectual in hindering or defeating the movement, can only be ascertained when a trial has been made.” Drexel had been fully informed of this situation, noted Nugent, and Janssens was open in confessing it. As for the Vincentians, and quoting the words inserted into the agreement, the priest declared: “We will ‘labor zealously’ to make the undertaking a success. More than this we cannot promise.”⁶³ At long last, an agreement was reached.

Even so, repair of the old Saint Joseph’s was delayed for nearly six months because of human error, illness, and absence. In late July Nugent requested half the donation from Drexel in order to begin work. More than a month later she sent the desired \$2,500 with the explanation that she had mislaid both Nugent’s letter and the contract. “It seems as though the fates are against us,” she commented.⁶⁴ Indeed they were. Because her response was so long in coming, Nugent had put the repairs on hold. When her check finally arrived, he placed it in the parish vault for safekeeping. Beset by illness, he delayed acknowledging receipt until mid-September and then sheepishly confessed being “puzzled just what to write,” for “we dropped the matter and we cannot take it up again just now on account of other things claiming our attention.” Besides, Janssens, who had departed New

⁶¹[Agreement between Drexel and Anthony Verrina, president of the corporation of the Congregation of the Mission in Louisiana], ASP, St. Katherine’s Parish File; T. J. Smith to Nugent, 22 June 1894, DRMA, II-C(LA)-3, box 1.

⁶²T. J. Smith to Nugent, 8 July 1894, DRMA, II-C(LA)-3, box 1.

⁶³[Agreement between Drexel and Anthony Verrina, president of the corporation of the Congregation of the Mission in Louisiana], ASP, St. Katherine’s Parish File; Nugent to W. R. Smith, 12 July 1894, DRMA, II-C(LA)-3, box 1.

⁶⁴Nugent to Drexel, 23 July 1894; Drexel to Nugent, 29 August 1894—both in DRMA, II-C(LA)-3, box 1.

Orleans in May for his *ad limina* visit to Rome, was expected home in several days, and Nugent wanted the archbishop's approval before undertaking repairs. In fact, Janssens did not return until early November.⁶⁵

Meanwhile, the Vincentians were perplexed by another problem: a deeply indebted school for black children in the old Saint Joseph's rectory. For several years the Vincentians had conducted an educational facility for blacks and the enrollment had risen from 100 in 1889 to 180 in 1894. In the latter year, the school was \$650 in debt and without prospect of future funds. Smith asked Nugent to lay the matter before Janssens to see "if it would be proper to make a statement of the difficulty to Mother Catherine [*sic*] & ask if you could not apply out of what you received enough to settle the present indebtedness."⁶⁶ In mid-November both Janssens and Nugent appealed to Drexel for school funds, the archbishop asking her for \$650 annually for the facility. Replying that her funds for the current year were totally depleted, Drexel urged Nugent to renew the request in early 1895.⁶⁷

The difficulty of funding the school made Smith very cautious about the extent and quality of the renovations of the old Saint Joseph's. He was clearly concerned that the black community's inability to support the school might portend a similar incapacity for maintaining a church. In a letter that can be described only as stream-of-consciousness, Smith first directed Nugent to begin repairs if Janssens insisted, but to do them "in a moderate inexpensive way, so in case it fails he will not be tempted to use it still as a church for other people." A little farther on, the provincial told Nugent that for the honor of the Vincentians and the archbishop he had better begin repairs at once and should be "fussing and talking & making preparations till I get down when we will see what is essential & necessary and cheap & showy." If money were left over, Nugent might be able to use it to buy "some cheap vestments" and pay the school bill. "Show zeal and willingness & readiness to begin at once," reiterated the provincial. "And it will not be but the truth because we are all that. With prudence for the interests of the Congregation [of the Mission]."⁶⁸

⁶⁵Nugent to Drexel, 17 September 1894, DRMA, II-C(LA)-3, box 1; Kasteel, *Francis Janssens*, 304-310.

⁶⁶T. J. Smith to Nugent, 11 September 1894, DRMA, II-C(LA)-3, box 1; Annual Reports for the years 1889-1894, AANO, St. Joseph's Files; Kasteel, *Francis Janssens*, 310.

⁶⁷Drexel to Nugent, 7 December 1894, DRMA, II-C(LA)-3, box 1; Kasteel, *Francis Janssens*, 310.

⁶⁸T. J. Smith to Nugent, 5 January 1895, DRMA, II-C(LA)-3, box 1.



Reverend Francis Nugent, C.M. (1855-1918).
He negotiated the establishment of Saint Katherine's parish.
Courtesy of DeAndreis-Rosati Memorial Archives

Probably without waiting for the arrival of Smith, who had gone to Chicago on business, Nugent began repairs according to the original plans in the second week of January 1895. Informing Drexel that work was underway and would be hurried as speedily as possible, he added that the Vincentians had hesitated about beginning the project at all until the future of the school had been assured. "We have however decided to make a start & trust to Providence for the maintainance [*sic*] of church & school in so worthy a cause." Nugent again asked Drexel if she could provide the \$700 necessary to retire the school's debt.⁶⁹ Two months later, after she failed to reply, he asked her for the second \$2,500 for the renovation of the church and informed her that the school debt had now reached \$800. Reminding her that she had previously said that she might be able to offer aid in early 1895, Nugent concluded, "Any assistance you could extend us in this line will be gratefully received." Within a week Drexel sent the final installment for the church without a word regarding the school.⁷⁰ Nugent never brought the matter up again. Rather, he thanked her for the \$2,500 and reported that the renovations were practically complete. By the time all was finished, the \$5,000 would be expended, "no matter how much we economize." Still, he noted, the church was "one of the most beautiful in the city—perhaps *the most*, for its size."⁷¹

Indeed, according to newspaper accounts, unless a person knew that the church had been renovated, one "would never recognize the fact from an observation of either its interior or exterior." Although lacking in paintings, pictures, and statuary, the interior was striking. Its dazzling white walls were bordered by pale gold fresco design work, described as "especially beautiful." The pews had been altered, enlarged, and refurbished. The work around the altar was "elaborate in conception and finish." To judge by the newspaper reports, the refurbishing was not cheap and showy, as Smith had suggested. Rather, it was tasteful and elegant, if stark. The dedication of the edifice was scheduled for 19 May 1895.⁷²

Even the black community seemed to be coming around. To be sure, in mid-February the Comité des Citoyens had fired a final salvo

⁶⁹Nugent to Drexel, 23 January 1895, DRMA, II-C(LA)-3, box 1.

⁷⁰Nugent to Drexel, 8 April 1895; Drexel to Nugent, 13 April 1895—both in DRMA, II-C(LA)-3, box 1.

⁷¹Nugent to Drexel, 23 April 1895, DRMA, II-C(LA)-3, box 1.

⁷²New Orleans *Times Democrat*, 20 May 1895; New Orleans *Daily Picayune*, 20 May 1894. The quotations are from the *Times*.

in the form of a resolution published in *The Daily Crusader*. Protesting against the use of the old Saint Joseph's "as a separate place of worship for any class of the faithful," the Comité hoped that "the colored Catholics will better show their disapproval of the same by abstaining from the dedication services and from any subsequent frequenting of said church."⁷³ At the end of April, however, Nugent noted a shift. "The Colored people themselves have opposed the church in every way," he told James Whelan of the Tabernacle Society, "but now that they see it a fact, they are putting on a more favorable front and the situation looks hopeful."⁷⁴

If affairs with the blacks were improving, matters with Janssens were otherwise. Smith had developed deep suspicions about what the archbishop was up to with regard to Saint Joseph's. Janssens was weakening on excluding whites from the parish. Under the original conditions laid down by him, the Vincentian priest in charge of the colored apostolate was to be permitted to administer no sacrament except confession to white people. In their final form (after the opening of the church), the conditions stated that "the priest in charge is not allowed to administer the Sacraments to white people, except to hear their confessions & give H. Communion in the Church."⁷⁵ Apparently, Smith came to know of this change beforehand and suspected that Janssens was planning, at the very least, to use white people to support the church. As early as 3 April, Smith wrote Nugent: "But let the white people be excluded absolutely from the beginning weekdays as well as Sundays. No admission of anybody[,] would be benefactors or anyone else. Let everybody bear in mind that the Church is expected to be self sustaining [*sic*] from the start."⁷⁶ The provincial certainly knew of the altered conditions by the end of that month. "He [Janssens] is evidently hedging," Smith told Nugent. "He fears a failure if he is not sure of it. And he either wishes to have the white people support the Church or eventually carry it on as a white Church. I think I am not rash in my suspicions. As for the honesty of the matter, well—. We must take care of ourselves & whilst we honestly & honorably carry out our agreement, frustrate such designs. It will however require great prudence and secrecy." Secrecy was necessary because

⁷³Quoted in Roussève, *Negro in Louisiana*, 158-59.

⁷⁴Nugent to James Whelan, 30 April 1895, DRMA, II-C(LA)-3, box 1.

⁷⁵Diary of the Archdiocese of New Orleans, 188-[1897], 30 May 1895, AANO.

⁷⁶T. J. Smith to Nugent, 3 April 1895, DRMA, II-C(LA)-3, box 1.

Smith was ordering his men not to follow the archbishop's instructions, indeed not to let any white person in the church. "Hear no confessions of white people," he told Nugent. "Let them go to their own church. And so you can make it practically exclusively Colored from the beginning without saying anything about it to anybody. . . . Say nothing to the Archbishop or any outsiders about this plan, and among ourselves only to those who can be trusted not to talk about it. Let the sexton keep the pews locked & open them for the Colored people only. Let the whites feel at once they are not wanted."⁷⁷ If Janssens was hedging his bet by seeking the admission of whites to the parish to ensure its financial success, Smith was hedging his own by excluding them. The parish would succeed or fail with black support alone. If it failed, the Vincentians would be free to sell the property and the value of their surrounding holdings would be enhanced.

On 19 May 1895, Archbishop Janssens formally dedicated the new Saint Katharine's Church, so named in honor of Mother Katharine Drexel. In the sermon, Janssens made it clear that the opening of the new parish was in no way intended "to convey the idea that there is a religion for the white people and one for the colored people." Noting that there had been serious opposition to the church, he informed his listeners that it had been removed by his "earnest talk to these colored people, who were laboring under the mistaken idea that I intended to discriminate against them by opening this new church." His intention was that Saint Katharine's be a place where "the colored people will be at home . . . a church for their own special benefit and occupation." None, however, would be compelled to attend it; all were free to remain in their own parishes. No matter what blacks chose to do, Janssens wanted them to know that Saint Katharine's was "for them at all times."⁷⁸

Whether or not Janssens had actually convinced the Comité des Citoyens of his position may never be known. Even if he had not, their opposition quickly disappeared. In 1896 their challenge of Louisiana's law to segregate railway cars reached the United States Supreme Court. In the case of *Plessy v. Ferguson*, the high bench validated the principle of "separate but equal," thereby opening the way to blanket segregation. Disheartened and disillusioned, the colored Creole leaders disbanded the Comité and ceased publication of the *Crusader*.⁷⁹

⁷⁷T. J. Smith to Nugent, 26 April 1895, DRMA, II-C(LA)-3, box 1.

⁷⁸New Orleans *Daily Picayune*, 20 May 1895.

⁷⁹Logsdon and Bell, "Americanization of Black New Orleans," 258-59.

Saint Katharine's Parish

The appointment of Saint Katharine's first pastor had the character of an act of panic. Apparently, Father Abbott—the Vincentian whom Janssens had initially approached about using old Saint Joseph's as a church for blacks—expected the job. Smith, however, had deep reservations because Abbot gave "signs of peculiar notions for the management of the colored people." In the first of two letters sent on 15 May 1895, the provincial told Nugent to place the elderly Father Martin V. Moore in charge of the black people, with the warning to let Abbott "have nothing to do with them at all." Smith was even considering the transfer of Abbott elsewhere and bringing in Father Charles Remillon from Saint Stephen's parish in uptown New Orleans to help with confessions in French. Born in Alsace-Lorraine, Remillon had begun his studies for the priesthood in Europe but completed them in Philadelphia where he was ordained.⁸⁰ The second letter of 15 May was brief and decisive. "I have thought it better to make the change at once for reasons you will approve of," wrote Smith. "Father Abbott goes up [to Saint Stephen's] & Father Remillon comes down for Sunday next."⁸¹ That was that—no further explanation. Neither Abbott nor Moore, but Remillon became the first pastor of Saint Katharine's. Although a distinct parish, Saint Katharine's was not a separate Vincentian house; Remillon belonged to the Vincentian community at the new Saint Joseph's.

Almost nothing but statistics have survived to indicate how the parish fared under him.⁸² Evidence indicates that few colored Creoles ventured into Saint Katharine's during its early existence. Rather, they remained in their territorial parishes.⁸³ Even so, Remillon started with the American blacks inherited from Saint Joseph's. Their number, however, is impossible to estimate. From 1889 through 1892 there were between eighty and a hundred black children baptized at Saint

⁸⁰T. J. Smith to Nugent, 15 May 1895 (first of this date), DRMA, II-C(LA)-3, box 1; *Church of St. Katharine of Sienna: Golden Jubilee, 1895-1945* (New Orleans, 1945), 2.

⁸¹T. J. Smith to Nugent, 15 May 1895 (second of this date), DRMA, II-C(LA)-3, box 1.

⁸²Remillon left one letter, written at Smith's request, to explain the apostolate to the Vincentian superior general. After much talk about how proud Saint Vincent de Paul would be of the work being done for the poor blacks, Remillon lapsed into quoting from an unknown source that recounted in several brief paragraphs the material contained in the previous section of the present article (Charles Remillon to Alfred Milon, secretary general of the Congregation of the Mission, 11 February 1901, *Annales de la Congrégation de la Mission* 66 [1901]: 271-74).

⁸³Labbé, *Jim Crow*, 56; John B. Alberts, "Black Catholic Schools: The Josephite Parishes of New Orleans During the Jim Crow Era," *U.S. Catholic Historian* 12 (Winter 1994): 84.



Reverend Francis Remillon, C.M.,
First Pastor of Saint Katherine's Church (1895-1902)
Courtesy De Andreis-Rosati Memorial Archives

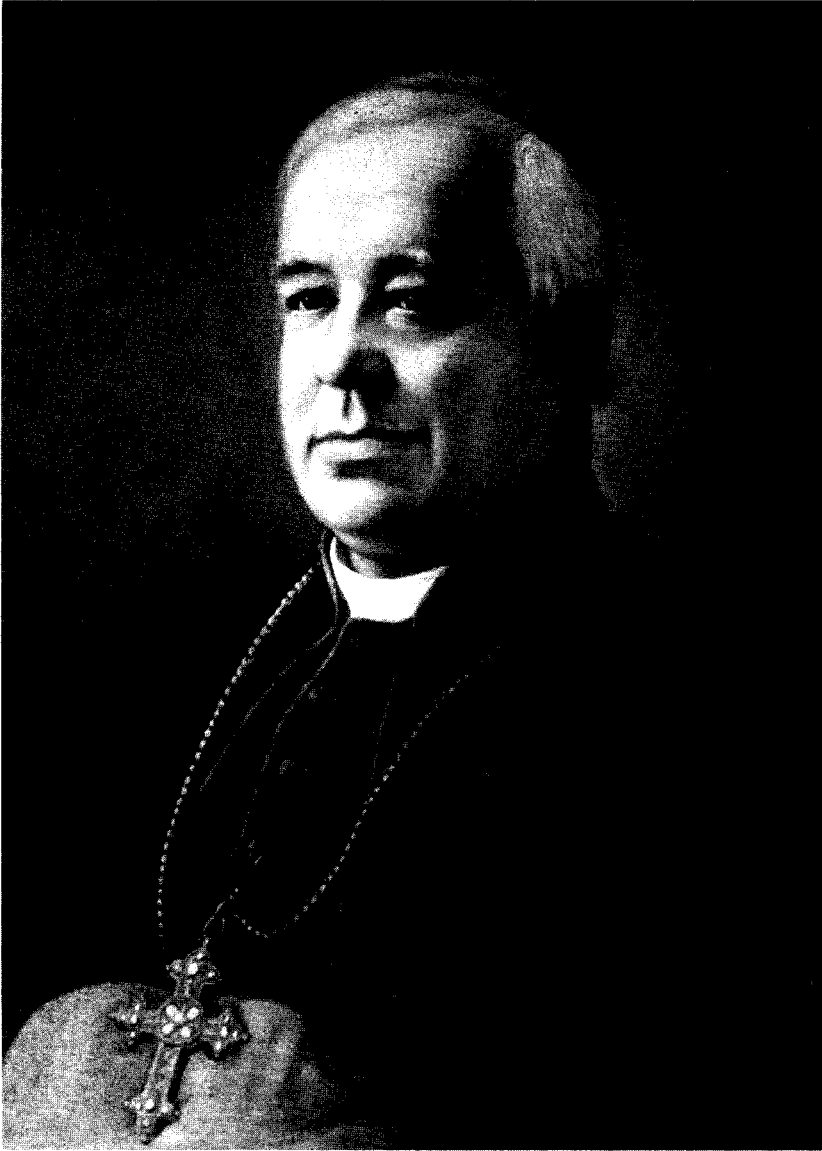
Joseph's each year, figures that declined by half in the two years prior to the establishment of Saint Katharine's. During the new parish's first two years, Remillon baptized just under forty children each year and thereafter averaged about sixty-five. Through the first five years of his pastorate, the number of marriages averaged about forty and then climbed to sixty in the two years before his death.⁸⁴ The number of baptisms and marriages, however, are an unreliable indicator of church practice. Agents of the archbishop, who visited Saint Katharine's twice in the early decades of the twentieth century, reported that the Vincentians baptized the children of non-practicing Catholics in hope of getting the parents to repent and return to church. The agents also noted that marriages and funerals commonly took place outside of mass, despite the pastor's urging the contrary.⁸⁵ This evidence suggests that many, if not most, of the blacks who appear in the parish records were the type of cultural Catholics whose formal religious practice was confined to the celebration of major life events: birth, marriage, and death. It is not unreasonable to infer that such practices existed in the parish from the start. Perhaps a better standard for estimating congregational size is the number of annual communions. During Remillon's tenure, these rose from 678 the first year to a high of 1,518 the year before his death.⁸⁶ If parishioners received communion on the average of once or twice a month, then the number of communicants rose from between twenty-six and fifty-six per Sunday in 1896 to between fifty-eight and 126 in 1901. While such figures indicate a rise in church participation, they tell nothing about the consistency of congregational membership, especially in view of the fact that the parish potentially drew from the entire city. In short, there is no way of knowing how many of the *same* people attended mass and received communion each Sunday.

In August 1902 Remillon died of Bright's disease, a kidney disorder known in present-day medicine as glomerular nephritis. His body was waked at Saint Katharine's but taken to Saint Joseph's for the funeral mass, which was attended by Archbishop Placide Chapelle of New Orleans. The black community, too, turned out in force. "He had done faithful work among the colored people for nearly eight years," reported Father Thomas Weldon, Remillon's superior, "and the out-

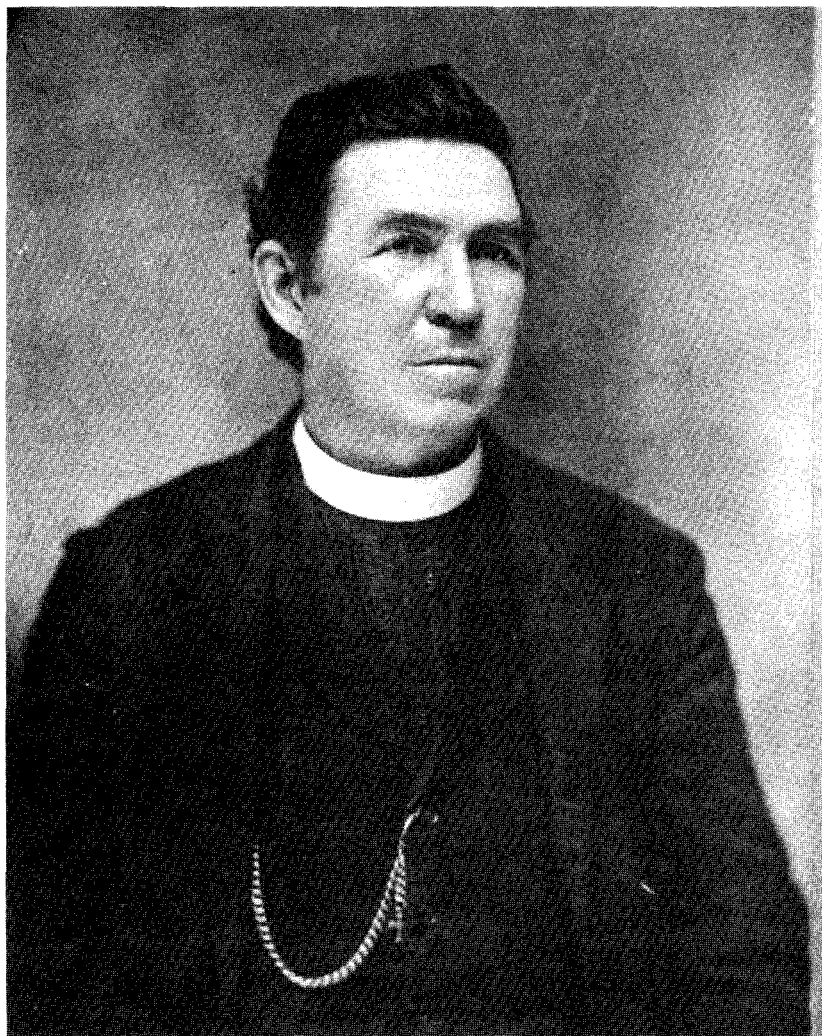
⁸⁴Annual Reports of St. Joseph's, 1891-1895; Annual Reports of St. Katharine's, 1895-1902, both in AANO, Parish Records: St. Joseph's File and St. Katharine's File.

⁸⁵Visitation Reports, 21 May 1912 and 28 December 1922, AANO, St. Katherine's File.

⁸⁶Annual Reports of St. Katherine's, 1896-1901, AANO, St. Katherine's File.



Placide Louis Chapelle, Sixth Archbishop of New Orleans (1898-1905).
Courtesy Archives of the Archdiocese of New Orleans.



Reverend Peter Cuddy, C.M., Second Pastor of Saint Katherine's Church (1902-1919).
Courtesy DeAndreis-Rosati Memorial Archives

pouring of these grateful poor people to his funeral was a revelation to the dominant white race, and made of his obsequies a veritable triumph."⁸⁷ An article in the *Daily Picayune* paid him equally high tribute: "In his church and school he has been both priest and coun-

⁸⁷Thomas Weldon to Antoine Fiat, 19 November 1902, microfilmed correspondence to the Vincentian General Curia from the United States of America (hereinafter cited as GCUSA), 35mm reel 4, no. 305.

selor. In addition to directing the affairs of his people, he trained them in manual lines of labor and counseled them as to their daily lives. . . . The work he has done has been little short of marvelous."⁸⁸

During Remillon's term, events were taking place in and outside the Catholic Church that would shape the future of the parish. Saint Katharine's had proven successful enough by 1897 that Janssens planned to open in the city's Latin quarter another parish for colored Creoles pastored by the Assumptionists. The latter were to have charge of the blacks in the French-speaking area of the city, while the Vincentians were to have charge of those in the English speaking area. Before the new parish could be erected, however, Janssens perished at sea. Bound for Europe via New York City, Janssens died of heart trouble aboard the steamship *Creole* while still in the Gulf of Mexico. His body was packed in ice and transferred to a vessel headed into New Orleans. The administrator of the archdiocese halted further segregation, largely at the insistence of pastors who continued to fear the suction-pump effect. The new archbishop, Louis Placide Chapelle, reversed his predecessor's course and maintained integrated parishes in New Orleans at a time when the social position of blacks was deteriorating rapidly both in the state and throughout the South.⁸⁹ In 1898, the year Chapelle took office, Louisiana disfranchised African-Americans and thereafter extended segregation to streetcars, railway waiting rooms, housing, hotels, theaters, circuses, tent shows, and even prostitution.⁹⁰

Within this context of expanding segregation, Father Peter Cuddy, C.M., succeeded Remillon as pastor of Saint Katharine's. A fifty-four year old Irishman with a thick brogue, a speech impediment, and an amazing capacity for work, Cuddy was charitable, humble, and good-humored. During the first year of his tenure, the number of baptisms shot up from sixty-seven to 137 and rose to 302 by 1906. The number of marriages showed a similar rise, climbing from sixty-five to 104 in 1903 and then to 122 by 1906. The annual number of communions too nearly doubled from 1,240 to 2,300. Enrollment in the parish school, which was housed in the old rectory, rose from 145 in 1903 to 450 in 1906.⁹¹ The next year, Cuddy arranged for the purchase of the old

⁸⁸Quoted in *Church of St. Katherine*, 3.

⁸⁹Labbé, *Jim Crow*, 56-57; Alberts, "Black Catholic Schools," 84.

⁹⁰Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*, 84-85, 97-102; C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951), 212-13, 333-34.

⁹¹Annual Reports, 1903-1906, AANO, St. Katherine's File.

boys' school of the new Saint Joseph's parish to accommodate the needs of his pupils, and he brought in the Sisters of the Holy Family, a black religious order, to replace the lay staff.⁹²

Not only was the parish becoming more vibrant, but resistance to it by the colored Creoles seems to have weakened. In Lent of 1908 Father Ambroise Vautier, a French Vincentian who had done missionary work in Beirut, Lebanon, before becoming professor of moral theology at Saint Louis Seminary in New Orleans, preached a parish mission in French at Saint Katharine's. He reported that the mission was remarkably well attended, despite torrential rains the first two days of the eight-day affair. Apparently, colored Creoles came from all parts of the city because Vautier remarked that although he had heard "a great number of general confessions," there were "more confessions than communions . . . because a good many [*plusieurs*], on account of the distance, have been to communion in [their] parish churches."⁹³ In 1909 Vautier himself became Cuddy's assistant pastor in order to care for "a certain number" of French-speaking blacks in the parish. With Vautier's transfer to Saint Katharine's, the rectory, which was no longer needed as a parish school, became the home of the two priests, though they still remained subject to the Vincentian superior at Saint Joseph's.⁹⁴

Despite the upsurge in numbers under Cuddy, the religious life of the blacks was not all that good. Vautier described Saint Katharine's as "a floating parish" without "very many regular parishioners." Those who came to church were "superstitious"; they loved "to burn candles" but did not often attend mass. Whenever there was "something extraordinary," however, a big feast or celebration, blacks flocked to Saint Katharine's from other parishes around the city. Many children of eligible age had yet to make their first communions because their parents refused to send them to preparation classes. Those children who did make their first communion often quickly abandoned the practice of the faith. As mentioned above, both marriages and funerals took place outside of mass. Cuddy and Vautier baptized the children of non-practicing Catholics in hope of bringing the parents back to active church life. Apparently, they enjoyed considerable

⁹²Thomas Finney to Fiat, 16 September 1908, GCUSA, 35mm reel 4, no. 503; *Church of St. Katherine of Sienna*, 3; Alberts, "Black Catholic Schools," 85.

⁹³Ambroise Vautier to unknown, 1908, *Annales* 73:512-13; Vautier to Fiat, 1 April 1908, GCUSA, 35mm reel 4, no. 321. The Quotation is taken from the former.

⁹⁴Vautier to Alfred Milon, secretary general, 14 December 1908, *Annales* 74:289 (the quotation is from here); Vautier to Fiat, 5 April 1909, GCUSA, 35mm reel 4, no. 322.

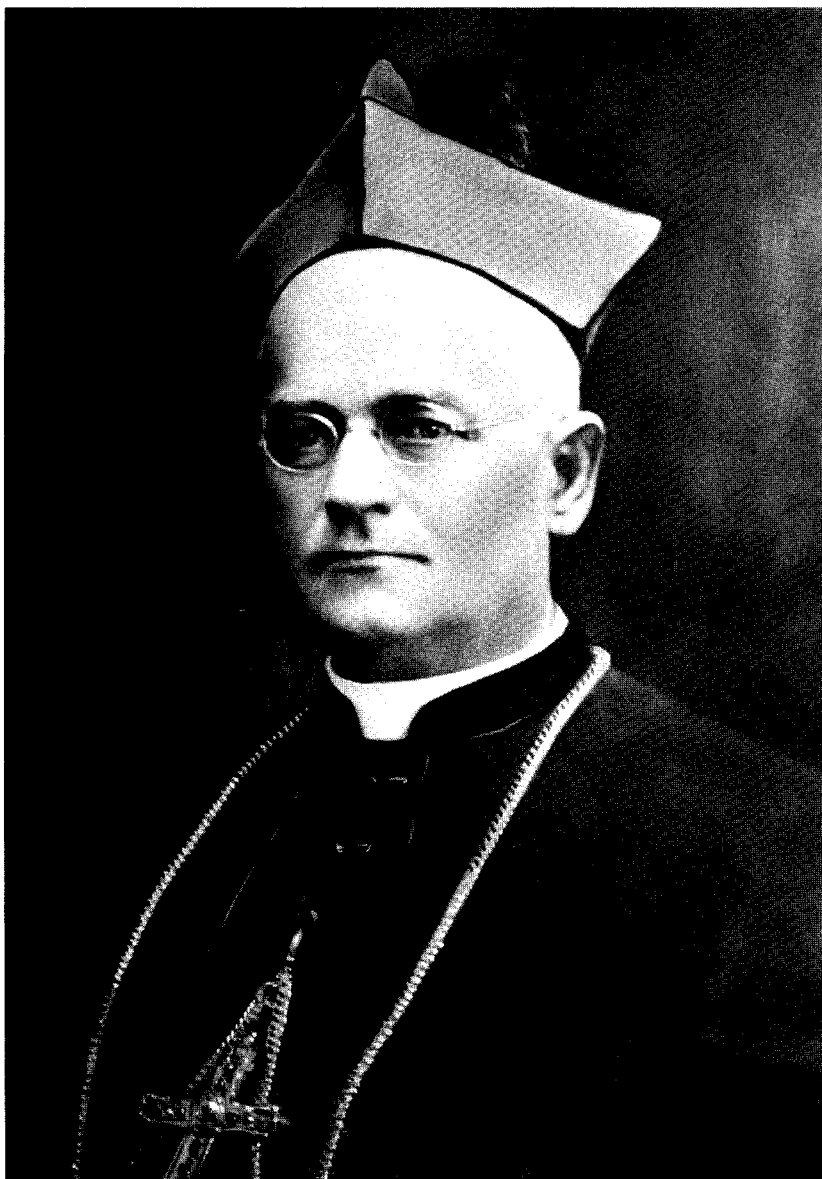
success, for the number of annual communions rose from 5,725 in 1909 to 7,800 in 1912, despite the opening of a second black parish, Saint Dominic's, in uptown New Orleans in 1909, the first in a new wave of such churches begun by Chapelle's successor, Archbishop James Hubert Blenk.⁹⁵

Blenk became archbishop of New Orleans in 1906, and it was under his administration that segregated Catholicism fully arrived in the city. Saint Dominic's became a separate parish in a manner similar to Saint Katharine's. The white people of Mater Dolorosa parish in uptown New Orleans built a new church and voted to exclude the black parishioners from it. With the help of Blenk, Father Peter LeBeau, a Josephite, purchased the old church for use by the deserted black parishioners. Rechristened as Saint Dominic's, the old church of Mater Dolorosa was the first black territorial parish in New Orleans. Others soon followed. Blenk opened Blessed Sacrament in 1915, Corpus Christi in 1916, and Holy Redeemer in 1919. Later in the last-mentioned year, Blenk's successor Archbishop John Shaw established All Saints and in 1920 Saint Peter Claver. With the advent of these new segregated parishes, Saint Katharine's itself became a territorial parish for blacks, with boundaries fixed by 1920 that made its jurisdiction a stretched out rectangle, a mile wide and four miles long. These limits remained stable down through the Second World War.⁹⁶

The increasing segregation of black Catholicism mirrored the Jim Crowism rampant in secular society in the South. As social and entertainment facilities in the city closed their doors to blacks, Cuddy opened the doors of Saint Katharine's parish to them. With the help of a faithful committee known as the "Old Willing Workers," he provided music festivals, plays, motion picture shows, and dances. Apparently in 1916, Archbishop Blenk outlawed parish dances. Asking for special permission to rent out Saint Katharine's hall to the various parish societies for their own amusements, Cuddy explained: "All the places which are open to white people are closed to them. They are not allowed to go to Spanish Fort to see the picture and join in other amusements. Mostly all the places, if not all, are closed against them

⁹⁵Vautier to Fiat, 5 April 1909, GCUSA, 35mm reel 4, no. 322; Vautier to unnamed Vincentian, 1908, *Annales* 73:512 (the quotations are from both of Vautier's letters); Visitation Reports, 21 May 1912 and 28 December 1922, AANO, St. Katherine's File; Annual Reports, 1909-1912, AANO, St. Katherine's File; Alberts, "Black Catholic Schools," 86-87; Labbé, *Jim Crow*, 63-64

⁹⁶Alberts, "Black Catholic Schools," 86-93; Labbé, *Jim Crow*, 63-69; *Church of St. Katherine of Sienna*, 4-5.



James Hubert Blenk, Seventh Archbishop of New Orleans (1906-1917).
Courtesy Archives of the Archdiocese of New Orleans

on Canal St. The only places they can go, and to which they should not go, are the Cabarets to which they are always welcome. It was for this reason that I gave them pictures and a dance of a few hours of a Sunday in order to avoid greater evils. . . ." Blenk was adamant. He expected Cuddy "to comply not only with the letter, but also with the spirit of the law, with regard to dances in connection with Church affairs."⁹⁷ Without doubt the priest did.

Cuddy died in January 1919 at the age of seventy. An all-night wake was held for him at Saint Katherine's (sometime between 1910 and 1919 the spelling had changed, altering the second *a* to an *e*). The next day, the Vincentian provincial, Thomas Finney, said the funeral mass, with Archbishop John Shaw, Blenk's successor, in attendance. The church was too small to accommodate all the mourners, most of whom accompanied on foot the horse-drawn hearse in a three-mile procession to the cemetery on Soniat Street.⁹⁸

With Cuddy's death, Finney decided to make Saint Katherine's—already a well-defined territorial parish in its own right—a completely independent Vincentian house by removing it from the jurisdiction of the superior of Saint Joseph's parish. His reasons were twofold. First, the black apostolate had increased under Cuddy; second, the parish was in a satisfying financial state.⁹⁹ With this separation of the last tie with Saint Joseph's, Saint Katherine's entered its second quarter century of existence as an entirely distinct parish. As the parish's fiftieth-anniversary booklet remarked, those next twenty-five years "were much the same as those of any other colored parish in the city."¹⁰⁰ Segregation had become an accomplished fact of life in New Orleans both in the Church and in the community at large.

Conclusions

Certainly the two most important factors in explaining why segregation took so long in coming to Catholic New Orleans were tradition and the character of the colored Creole community. The Church

⁹⁷Peter Cuddy to James Blenk, 21 June 1916, AANO, St. Katherine's File; Jules Jeanmard (chancellor) to Cuddy, 23 June 1916, AANO, St. Katherine's File.

⁹⁸*Church of St. Katherine of Sienna*, 4.

⁹⁹Finney to François Verdier, 1 May 1919, Archives of the General Curia of the Congregation of the Mission, Rome, Italy, États-Unis Occidentaux.

¹⁰⁰*Church of St. Katherine of Sienna*, 4.

of that city had a long-standing custom of integration, at least within the confines of the church building. Added to this feature was the temperament of colored Creoles. Afro-French in heritage, they identified more with French culture than with African. Thus, they laid great stress on liberty and equality, two values stressed by both the French and American Revolutions. Unlike African-American Protestants in New Orleans, who sought separation from their white co-religionists so that they could avoid discrimination, control their own affairs, and enjoy a style of worship appropriate to themselves, colored Creoles cherished the traditional integration accorded them in the Catholic Church, strove ardently for equality, and resisted any diminution of their status.

Unfortunately, the traditional racial arrangement within New Orleans Catholicism faced increasing pressure in the last decade of the nineteenth century from a rising tide of white supremacy that swept all before it. The racism that coursed through Louisiana was not peculiar to that state. Rather, it raged throughout the South, ultimately issuing by the First World War in a full-blown system of statutory segregation. Like other denominations, the Catholic Church was not immune to the disease. White Catholics wanted to end the traditional pattern of integration within the Church and relegate blacks to an inferior status. This was the reality that faced the colored Creoles and Archbishop Janssens. How to meet it was the problem.

Janssens was a man on the horns of a dilemma. On the one hand, the colored Creoles demanded that he stand firm for equality and integration within the Church. On the other hand, he faced the problem of defections from the Church by African-American Catholics, who preferred the separatism and/or style of worship afforded in black Protestant churches. The middle ground between these two positions was the solution he chose, namely, to erect a segregated parish that blacks were free to attend or not. While an honest attempt to do justice to both sides, the plan was bitterly denounced by the colored Creoles as a capitulation to racism. Certainly, Janssens's experience prior to becoming archbishop of New Orleans had already disposed him toward establishing separate parishes for blacks. His concern over what historians consider to have been an exaggerated number of African-American departures from the Church was a principal motive for his experimenting with such parishes in New Orleans. Although Janssens doubtlessly acted sincerely on the figures available to him, it is tempting to wonder what he might have done if

he had possessed more accurate information about the number of defections from the Church. The what-might-have-beens of history, though tantalizing, are unknowable.

One thing does appear clear: Janssens, Smith, and Drexel all had doubts that a strictly segregated parish would succeed, and each hedged his or her bet. Drexel demanded that the Vincentians refund some portion of her donation if the new church proved a failure. At the last moment, Janssens reneged on his earlier rules and opened the parish, at least for mass and confessions, to whites, something that Smith probably correctly interpreted as a bid for white monetary support for the church. Almost from the start, Smith seemed to feel that the project was doomed and wanted out of it, especially after the tangled negotiations with Drexel and the public accusations of dishonesty leveled by the Comité des Citoyens. He demanded that the contract with Drexel be worded in such fashion as to protect the Vincentians if the parish failed. When he discovered the archbishop's apparent ploy to supplement the parish's income by permitting whites to attend mass there, Smith countered by ordering his men rigidly to exclude them. The parish was to succeed or fail solely as a segregated church. Given all the negativity and doubt surrounding the establishment of Saint Katherine's, it is a testament to its first Vincentian pastors and the African-Americans and colored Creoles of the congregation that the church survived and eventually flourished.