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**"YOU HAVE MADE NO MISTAKE IN SEEKING TO SAVE SOULS  
AMONG US": CATHOLIC EVANGELIZATION AMONG BLACK  
NASHVILLIANS, 1898-1908**

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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Susan Alice Kennedy entitled "'YOU HAVE MADE NO MISTAKE IN SEEKING TO SAVE SOULS AMONG US": CATHOLIC EVANGELIZATION AMONG BLACK NASHVILLIANS, 1898-1908." I have examined the final electronic copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in History.

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**“YOU HAVE MADE NO MISTAKE IN SEEKING TO SAVE SOULS AMONG US”:  
CATHOLIC EVANGELIZATION AMONG BLACK NASHVILLIANS, 1898-1908**

A Dissertation Presented for the  
Doctor of Philosophy  
Degree  
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Susan Alice Kennedy

August 2019

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To the honor of Almighty God

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## ABSTRACT

In 1905, Catholic Bishop Thomas Sebastian Byrne of Nashville, Tennessee announced that the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament would open an academy and industrial school for black girls in a recently purchased mansion formerly inhabited by wealthy white Nashville banker Samuel J. Keith. Keith and hundreds of white Nashvillians protested the move, but Bishop Byrne and his collaborators refused to give up their plan and established Immaculate Mother Academy. Many black Nashvillians supported the new school, seeing Byrne's efforts as a challenge to racial prejudice. This study tells the story of the establishment of the first stable black Catholic institutions in Nashville and their reception by white and black Nashvillians. The history of Immaculate Mother Academy shows the complex interconnection of race, religion, segregation, education, and urbanization in Nashville in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The school's establishment was one step towards remedying the double bind in which black Catholics found themselves—required as Catholics by the Catholic bishops to educate their children in Catholic schools, they found the doors of most Catholic schools closed to black students. The school's founding took place at a time of serious discussion in Nashville and throughout the U.S. of models of black education and dispute as to whether black students should be denied avenues to higher education. It likewise took place at a time of rapid demographic change in the city of Nashville, as the city center was changed by the expansion of railroads, industry, and the advent of electric streetcars, while segregation became more pronounced. This study demonstrates that while anti-black prejudice trumped anti-Catholicism as a motivating factor for white Nashvillians such as Keith, Catholic efforts in the face of such prejudice served as an invitation to black leaders to consider the merits of the Catholic position, and to see Catholics as allies in challenging racial prejudice. The school once successfully established was painted by some white Nashvillians as doing good service in the training of future servants, but by many black Nashvillians as offering black students an opportunity for academic learning and musical education as well as industrial training.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

ADN	Archives of the Diocese of Nashville
Byrne Papers	Bishop Thomas Sebastian Byrne Papers
Drexel Box	Mother Mary Katharine Drexel Box
FP	Flanigen Papers, Aquinas College, Nashville, Tennessee
JOS	Josephite Fathers Archives, Baltimore, Maryland
SBS	Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament Archives, Bensalem, Pennsylvania

## INTRODUCTION

On an evening in late January 1905, Mother Mary Katharine Drexel, erstwhile Philadelphia debutante and heiress, now the superior of a growing Catholic religious community, stepped off a train in Nashville, Tennessee. Drexel had come to join Nashville's bishop, Thomas Sebastian Byrne, in evaluating a bit of South Nashville property she and Byrne wished to secure for the establishment of an academy for black girls. Byrne and Drexel drove out to the site—the Samuel J. Keith property—in a closed carriage and negotiated the purchase through a third party. No doubt both feared that a whiff of Drexel interest in the property would move Keith to increase the price. More seriously, Drexel's association with the purchase might alert Keith and his neighbors that the property would be used for outreach to African American Nashvillians.<sup>1</sup>

No sooner was the sale complete than the news swept Nashville of Mother Drexel's intention to open an academy and industrial school for black girls in the former Keith home. Keith, a prominent Nashville banker, and his neighbors protested vehemently. Keith publicly asserted that he knew nothing about the school when he sold the property. He entreated Byrne and Drexel to revoke the sale. Drexel and Byrne held their ground, insisting that the proposed academy would not be a detriment to the neighborhood. The angry neighbors attempted to have the city put a street through the middle of the Keith mansion. Nashville's Immaculate Mother Academy thus came into being amid controversy and racially motivated prejudice.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Mother Mary Katharine Drexel to Bishop Thomas Sebastian Byrne, January 31, 1905, telegram, Drexel Box, ADN; Drexel to Byrne, December 7, 1904, Drexel Box, ADN; "Fate of the Keith Home: Neighbors Think of Taking Up Old Street Grant," *Nashville American*, February 19, 1905, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>2</sup> Drexel to Byrne, February 13, 1905, telegram, Drexel Box, ADN; "For Colored Girls: Roman Catholic Academy Will Be Founded Here," *Nashville American*, February 14, 1905, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; "To Revoke the Deed: Samuel J. Keith Makes Offer to Catholic Order," *Nashville American*, February 18, 1905, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; "Fate of Keith Home;" "Mother Katharine Replies to Proposition Regarding Keith Residence," *Nashville American*, February 26, 1905, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; Samuel J. Keith to Byrne, February 15, 1905, Drexel Box, ADN; Byrne to Keith, March 19, 1905, Byrne Papers, ADN.

Bishop Byrne envisioned Immaculate Mother Academy as an extension of the mission of Holy Family, Nashville's first African American Catholic church, established in 1902. Byrne recruited the Josephite Fathers, a religious society dedicated to ministry among black Americans, to establish and staff the parish. Josephite Father Thomas J. Plunkett helped Byrne to found the parish and plan for the school. Drexel continued to support them financially, gave advice about the school, and eventually agreed to send Sisters from her community to staff the school.<sup>3</sup>

The story of Immaculate Mother Academy's founding constitutes a historical episode that is interesting in itself and that serves as an intersection of major areas of significance concerning race relations and religion, education, progressive reform, and urbanization in the New South. The story offers insight into efforts at segregation, control, and reform. It deeply intersects with questions about black education, including how schools were built and supported, who should teach, and what model for black education was most fitting. The Keith property's overnight transition from the mansion of a leading business man to a school for black girls highlights shifting demographics prompted by urbanization and industrialization that altered the texture of neighborhoods. The establishment of Catholic institutions for outreach to black people in an overwhelmingly Protestant city opens questions about the intersection of racial and religious prejudice. The history of Holy Family Parish and Immaculate Mother Academy offers new angles on this intersection of issues in the urban South at a time when race relations were particularly fraught.

The first two chapters put in place groundwork regarding the national situation and the more local situation in Tennessee and in the city of Nashville. The first chapter treats the broad

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<sup>3</sup> Mother Mary Katharine Drexel, "Notes from Tour of the South," *Writings* no. 2950, 1904, SBS; Byrne to Slattery, November 23, 1899, Byrne Papers, ADN; Byrne to Drexel, n.d., Byrne Papers, ADN; Drexel to Byrne, May 29, 1904, Drexel Box, ADN; Drexel to Byrne December 7, 1904, Drexel Box, ADN.

condition of the Catholic Church in the U.S., particularly with regard to Catholic teaching on race, efforts to evangelize African Americans, and Catholic education. The second chapter gives a history of Catholic efforts to evangelize African Americans in Tennessee, describes the dynamics of the city of Nashville, and argues that Bishop Thomas Sebastian Byrne brought an outsider's perspective when he became Bishop of Nashville in 1894.

The third and fourth chapters provide context for Bishop Byrne's move to establish a black Catholic school in Nashville. Chapter Three focuses specifically on Byrne's missionary efforts to gain and serve black Catholics in the city of Nashville by founding a church, with the collaboration of Josephite Father Thomas Plunkett and heiress turned religious foundress, Mother Mary Katharine Drexel. Chapter Four places the correspondence between Byrne and Drexel as they planned for a black Catholic school within the context of wider debates about models of education for African Americans. Byrne and Drexel saw the value of industrial education and included it as a major element of their school's curriculum, but not to the exclusion of liberal education.

The fifth chapter and sixth chapters explore the reactions to the projected school in the white and black elite communities. Chapter Five relates the details of the "Keith affair," analyzing in light of the city's changing demographics with increasing urbanization, industrialization, and segregation, white objections to the opening of a school for black girls in South Nashville. Chapter Six demonstrates that many black leaders of Nashville saw the school as a help to them and welcomed it as a challenge to racial prejudice and an advantage to the black students who would attend.

The seventh and final chapter relates the opening of Immaculate Mother Academy in Fall 1905 and its first few years of its operation, looking at enrollment and expansion. While many

white people chose to emphasize the school's manual training, many friends of the school took pride also in the academic and musical accomplishments of its students.

The story of the establishment of Holy Family Church and Immaculate Mother Academy offers a window into a complex combination of issues in turn-of-the-century Nashville. Situating these black Catholic institutions within the context in which they came into being not only gives a fresh angle on late nineteenth and early twentieth century Nashville, it also helps to explain the way that Nashvillians, black and white received these institutions.

**CHAPTER ONE**

**THE INTERSECTION OF U.S. CATHOLIC EDUCATIONAL NORMS AND THE  
BLACK APOSTOLATE**

On June 20, 1898, Eugene W. Bunn, a black man, a stove repairer from Nashville, took up his pen to address a dilemma that had been gnawing at his conscience. Bunn, a recent convert to Catholicism, wrote to his bishop, Irish American Thomas Sebastian Byrne, as follows:

I became a communicant of St. Mary's Church of this city at the last Confirmation. On that day I was very much struck with the awful responsibility to my children which my act in becoming a Christian had impressed upon me by a remark of yours and Father Morris'. The condition had never dawned upon me until you and he emphasized the absolute necessity of the parents rearing their offspring in the faith . . . my wife and the mother of my children is not Christian and my children (four in number) are under her constant care while I am away earning bread for them.

I told her that we must rear our children in the faith," and she remarked that she did not know the Faith." [*sic*] Then the condition of my absolute helplessness now dawned upon me. I had hoped to win my wife over to the Faith, but she said our children, being colored, cannot be educated in a Catholic school because there is no provision made for them . . . she said I cannot become a Catholic unless my children can have the opportunities given the children of other Catholic parents; if this is the only opportunity for their and my salvation I prefer to go down to torment with them. . . . How can I escape the consequences of a failure to educate my children in my faith. If I was not poor I would send them off to a Catholic school, but my poverty renders this impossible. I am surely perplexed.

Please show me what is my duty in the previous.<sup>4</sup>

Bunn was not the only one perplexed by the combination of issues his letter raised. The U.S. Catholic bishops' insistence on Catholic education for the children of Catholic parents combined with the reality of black exclusion from many Catholic schools to put black Catholic parents in a double bind. Reading Eugene Bunn's letter brought the Bishop of Nashville to consider again the tension between what his church taught regarding racial equality and human

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<sup>4</sup> Eugene Bunn to Thomas Sebastian Byrne, June 20, 1898, Holy Family Church and School History Folder, ADN.

dignity and what it practiced in the once slave-holding and increasingly racially segregated United States.

Bunn's letter and Bishop Byrne's subsequent response show black and white Catholics, clergy and laity, grappling with the question of Catholic education for black people in the late nineteenth-century American South. The exchange draws attention to the insistence of the Catholic Church in the United States on Catholic education, to the hopes and expectations of black American Catholics, and to the influence social norms had on decisions regarding whether and how black Catholic schools began.

In homing in on Catholic education, Bunn may have realized he was appealing to Bishop Byrne on a topic that would strike Byrne vitally. Few facets of the Catholic Church's life captured more of Byrne's attention than education. Here he was at his most zealous; here was where the naked ramifications of racial injustice would shock him most deeply. For the scholarly bishop, denying a child a Catholic education was tantamount to denying that child salvation. At an impasse, a perplexed Bunn, perhaps recognizing the power of his "helplessness" to foment change, presented his problem to Byrne. Bunn couched his letter in terms of seeking help to determine his own duty as a father, but in so doing, he likewise invited Byrne to reflect on Byrne's own duty to provide for all his spiritual children.<sup>5</sup>

### **Catholic Education in the U.S.: Educating Catholics in a Protestant Milieu**

The question of Catholic education was no new problem in 1898. Even before there was a Catholic bishop in what would become the United States, Catholics had taken measures for the doctrinal and moral formation of the young. Jesuits educated Catholic boys in Maryland in the

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<sup>5</sup> Byrne, "Series of Questions to be Answered by Applicants for Aid from the Commission for the Catholic Missions among the Colored People and the Indians," October 17, 1894, 88-DY-1, JOS; Byrne to William Henry O'Connell, September 8, 1919, Byrne Papers, ADN.

seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In New Orleans, the Ursuline Sisters opened a girls' academy in 1727. Especially when in a predominantly Protestant culture often suspicious of or hostile towards "popery," Catholics felt an acute need to provide strong formation that would prepare the young to live and defend their faith despite opposition or indifference. Catholic education was never merely a defensive measure, however.<sup>6</sup>

In the early years of the new republic, state governments began to direct deliberate public efforts towards the education of the young in schools that were not necessarily religiously affiliated. Many Catholics considered state control of education to be a usurpation of the rights and duties of parents to their children. Some opted to educate their children in a specifically Catholic environment. In the early decades of the nineteenth century, the Catholic parochial school system grew rapidly. Catholic schooling would become a point of some contention in the American context. As the numbers of European immigrants to the U.S. climbed first to hundreds of thousands and then to millions in the decades preceding the Civil War, common school advocates saw publicly-funded schools as a means by which the young could attain literacy while also being Americanized. Catholics detected in these schools a strong Protestant stamp. Though non-denominational, the schools nevertheless inculcated a Protestant morality, building instruction around a Protestant translation of scripture, the King James Bible, and readers that inculcated a Protestant worldview. Catholics continued to establish church-affiliated schools, but often more than half of the school-aged Catholic children attended the public schools. Anti-Catholic feeling waxed strong, sometimes peaking in one region or another. While Catholics

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<sup>6</sup> Margaret McGuinness, *Called to Serve: A History of Nuns in America* (New York: New York University Press, 2015), 7.

feared the influence of public schools on their children's faith and culture, many other Americans feared that Catholic schools would keep immigrants' children from Americanizing.<sup>7</sup>

Early in the nineteenth century, some states began to move to restrict public funding for religiously-affiliated schools; late in the century, many passed so-called Blaine Amendments to forbid any public funding of such schools. In New York State, various denominational schools, including Catholic ones, received a portion of the total public money allotted for schooling until 1825 when a New York City ordinance restricted common school funds from going to any church-related school. In the 1840s, Archbishop John Hughes of New York attempted to obtain a share of the state school tax paid by Catholics to fund Catholic schools. The effort raised tremendous political and social opposition and fed an already widespread popular suspicion of Catholics. The response was legislation that, while it did not fund Catholic schools, yet attempted to remove the sectarian stamp from New York State schools. While this mollified Catholics' fears of Protestant indoctrination in state-funded schools, it eventually gave rise to new concerns.<sup>8</sup>

In the American South, public education did not become the norm until much later than in the Northeast. Wealthy Southern families employed tutors or sent their children to private schools to be educated, and resented paying taxes to educate less-privileged children. By the 1850s, however, Southern states began to support publicly funded public schools. In Tennessee

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<sup>7</sup> Timothy Walch, *Parish School: American Catholic Parochial Education from Colonial Times to the Present* (Washington: National Catholic Educational Association, 2003), 24-32.

<sup>8</sup> Charles E. Rice, "The New York State Constitution and Aid to Church-Related Schools," *The Catholic Lawyer* 12, no. 4 (1966): 274-77, <http://scholarship.law.stjohns.edu/tcl/vol12/iss4/3>; Vincent P. Lannie, *Public Money and Parochial Education: Bishop Hughes, Governor Seward, and the New York School Controversy* (Cleveland: Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1968), 245-58; Carl F. Kaestle, *Pillars of the Republic: Common Schools and American Society, 1780-1860* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983), 166-71.

such public support was not mandatory until after the Civil War, and school attendance was not obligatory until 1913. Such legislation came later in some Southern states.<sup>9</sup>

With the secularization of the common schools, Catholic bishops complained of something worse in their eyes than Protestant teaching in public schools—religious indifference. As the nineteenth century progressed, Catholic bishops became ever more insistent on the need for Catholic schools to form the minds and morals of Catholic children and reduce the danger that the children might abandon the Catholic faith. Bishop Bernard J. McQuaid of Rochester, New York renewed Catholic efforts to direct public money to Catholic Schools in the “Christian Free Schools” movement he spearheaded in the 1870s and 80s. McQuaid allied with Protestants who wanted a Christian education for their children hoping to obtain state funding for schools of the parents’ choosing. In McQuaid’s view, public schools were godless, and the religious indifference there promoted was likely to turn Christian children into infidels. Though he never succeeded in obtaining public funds, McQuaid became the voice and pen of the renewed impetus for Catholic schools in the late nineteenth century.<sup>10</sup>

### **Catholic Education in the U.S.: The Third Plenary Council of Baltimore**

The hierarchy of the Catholic Church in the U.S. had increased in number from the solitary Bishop John Carroll of Baltimore, who, beginning in 1789, governed a diocese of vast proportions. The see of New Orleans was added with the Louisiana Purchase, and four more dioceses were carved out of Baltimore in 1808. Dioceses multiplied as U.S. territory became more extensive and Catholics in the U.S. became more numerous. In 1829, to insure uniform

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<sup>9</sup>Johann N. Neem, *Democracy’s Schools: The Rise of Public Education in America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2017), 70-75; Lester C. Lamon, *Black Tennesseans, 1900-1930* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1977), 75.

<sup>10</sup>Norlene M. Kunkle, “Christian Free Schools, A Nineteenth Century Plan,” *Notre Dame Journal of Education* 7 (1976): 18-27.

policy across the by then six dioceses of the U.S., the bishops gathered at Baltimore for a provincial council. Similar councils followed every few years, with more bishops attending as Rome created new dioceses. With the elevation of dioceses in addition to Baltimore to the status of arch-episcopal sees, two levels of councils emerged. Provincial councils continued to bring each archbishop together with his suffragan bishops<sup>11</sup> to discuss regional matters. The archbishops would then gather with one another to discuss affairs nationwide. Plenary councils—a less frequent measure—brought all the bishops together to discuss matters that affected their dioceses. The impetus for a plenary council for the U.S. could come from the pope or from the bishops themselves, and such councils were held in Baltimore. Three American plenary councils took place in the nineteenth century, in 1852, 1866, and 1884. Plenary councils exercised the authority to issue binding directives regarding particular matters as indicated by canon law.<sup>12</sup>

The impetus for Catholic schools, already strongly advocated by various provincial councils and by the First and Second Plenary Councils of Baltimore, found its most urgent formulation in the decrees of the 1884 Third Plenary Council of Baltimore. In 1884, roughly four in ten parishes, or 2,532 parishes in the U.S. had a parochial school. Two decades after the Third Plenary Council, in 1905, there were 4,235 parish schools, and nearly six out of every ten parishes had a school.<sup>13</sup> The meeting of bishops brought together advocates of numerous and

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<sup>11</sup> Suffragan is the term used to describe a bishop exercising his office vis-à-vis his archbishop.

<sup>12</sup> James Hennessey, S.J., *American Catholics: A History of the Roman Catholic Community in the United States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 113-14.

<sup>13</sup> Hennessey, *American Catholics*, 186; *Sadliers' Catholic Directory Almanac and Ordo for the Year of Our Lord 1884* (New York: D. & J. Sadlier & Co., 1884), 506, <https://archive.org/details/SadliersCatholicDirectory1884/page/n523> (accessed February 19, 2019); *Catholic Directory Almanac and Clergy List for the Year of Our Lord 1905* (Milwaukee: M.H. Wiltzius Co., 1905), 965, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uiug.30112082982593;view=1up;seq=1025> (accessed February 19, 2019).

strong Catholic schools including Bishop McQuaid of Rochester. The bishops were not of a single mind as to the best way to handle what became known as “the schools question,” and there would be controversy among them regarding the practical implementation of Catholic education in the early 1890s. Nevertheless, the 1884 Council produced clear legislation. Citing the public schools’ threat to Catholic children’s faith and morals, the bishops decreed:

Therefore we not only exhort Catholic parents with paternal affection, but we command them with all the authority we possess, that they procure for their beloved offspring given to them by God, regenerated to Christ in baptism, and destined to heaven, an education truly Christian and Catholic; and that during the whole period of infancy and childhood they defend and shield them all from the dangers of a mere secular education, and therefore they must send them to parochial schools, or to others truly Catholic, unless perchance, in some particular case, the Ordinary<sup>14</sup> shall judge best to permit otherwise.<sup>15</sup>

To make this a real possibility, every pastor of a church who did not already have a parish school would be required to build such a school within two years of the publication of the decrees. The council also called for standardized Catholic school curricula and catechism, examinations to ensure proficiency of Catholic school teachers, and a firm enjoinder to ensure that Catholic schools measured up to or exceeded public schools. Parents who lived at a distance from any Catholic school should send their children away to Catholic school when feasible.<sup>16</sup>

The bishops of the Third Plenary Council also wanted to improve Catholic higher education in the U.S. To this end, they discussed a plan for what would become the Catholic University of America. Though Catholic colleges and universities, generally conducted by religious orders, had existed in the U.S. since 1789, many Catholic ecclesiastical students

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<sup>14</sup> The Ordinary is a term used to refer to the local bishop.

<sup>15</sup> “The Decrees of the Third Plenary Council of Baltimore on Catholic Schools,” *The Sacred Heart Review* 6, no. 14 (August 29, 1891): 9, <https://newspapers.bc.edu/?a=d&d=BOSTONSH18910829-01.2.30>, (accessed March 18, 2019).

<sup>16</sup> Byrne, “Circular to Clergy and Laity of this Diocese,” November 13, 1896, Byrne Papers, ADN.

pursued higher studies in Europe. The bishops wanted the anticipated university in Washington, D.C. to provide the quality of education once found only in Europe. Some Catholic colleges, including the new Catholic University of America, initially admitted black students, but later reversed this policy. Black students seeking higher Catholic education in the U.S. had little recourse.<sup>17</sup>

### **Catholic Education in the U.S.: Catholic Schools**

Catholic schools for children in the U.S. typically fell into two categories. There were parochial schools, which operated at the expense of the parishes to which they were attached, and private Catholic schools, typically elite boarding academies, usually owned by the religious orders that founded and staffed them and supported by students' tuition. Such orders might also operate free schools or orphanages, thus serving both the elite and the very poor. Pastors of parishes had responsibility for the parochial schools, which were under the bishops' administration through their priests. All new building and opening of institutions in any of the parishes or religious houses required episcopal permission. Private schools had less direct oversight, but still fell under the bishop's authority in many respects.<sup>18</sup>

Parochial schools were typically staffed by communities of women religious, though lay people or men religious were sometimes employed to teach and administer schools. Salaries for lay teachers cost the parish more than the upkeep of a convent and minimal stipend provided for

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<sup>17</sup> Francis P. Cassidy, "Catholic Education in the Third Plenary Council of Baltimore," *The Catholic Historical Review* XXXIV (Oct. 1948): 258-90; Joseph C. Nuesse, "Segregation and Desegregation at the Catholic University of America," *Washington History* 9, no.1 (1997): 54-55.

<sup>18</sup> Marvin Lazerson, "Understanding American Catholic Educational History," *History of Education Quarterly* 17, no. 3 (1977): 297-305, doi:10.2307/367880; Tracy Schier, "Catholic Women's Colleges in the United States," in *Encyclopedia of Women and Religion in North America, Volume 1*, ed. Rosemary Skinner Keller, Rosemary Radford Ruether, and Marie Cantlon (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 883; Mary J. Oates, *The Catholic Philanthropic Tradition in America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 147-51.

religious cost. Building and operating Catholic schools burdened parishes financially; while many readily shouldered the cost as well worth it, others sought creative compromises with public schools. The demand for Sisters always outpaced the supply, despite the multiplication of religious orders of teaching Sisters sent from Europe or started in the U.S.<sup>19</sup>

In the years after emancipation, as separate churches for black Catholics were founded, separate schools on the parochial school model were founded as well. There appears typically to have been more willingness to allow mixed, though segregated, congregations in churches, with black worshippers relegated to back or side pews or balconies, than there was to allow black attendance in predominantly white Catholic schools. Though black Catholic schools were generally conducted by both priests and Sisters belonging to religious orders, the schools were typically attached to the church as a parish school would be. Black churches often did not receive canonical status as parishes but might remain mission churches that effectively functioned as parishes.<sup>20</sup>

One of the onuses of segregation was the inefficiency of operating parallel institutions for a single population. Southern public schools suffered from the perceived necessity of operating two schools in the same geographic area because of segregation. Even though the facilities and salaries were usually woefully unequal, the burden of running a double system still created financial and other difficulties, compromising the quality of education, not only for black children, but also for white children. Catholic schools in the South dealt with the same

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<sup>19</sup> McGuiness, *Called to Serve*, 68-80.

<sup>20</sup> Cyprian Davis, *The History of Black Catholics in the United States* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Co., 1991), 178-79, 230-37; Matthew J. Cressler, *Authentically Black and Truly Catholic: The Rise of Black Catholicism in the Great Migration* (New York: New York University Press, 2017), 162.

difficulty—separating black children from white children meant a second school building, a second staff of teachers, and sometimes even a second convent for the Sisters.<sup>21</sup>

For already poor dioceses, the financial expense of segregated schooling constituted a formidable obstacle, but some dioceses sought ways to make a Catholic education accessible to both black and white children. If bishops and pastors did not entirely exclude black children from Catholic education, they had to either run separate schools or integrate their existing schools. The cost of running separate schools was a serious obstacle. The obstacles to integration were, in the view of those making the decisions, even greater than the financial onus of running parallel schools. The cost of systematic injustice in the moral and spiritual realm remains incalculable. It is notable that some Catholics who worked to establish separate schools saw their efforts as offsetting the debt that the nation owed to black Americans for the injustice they had already suffered. From the perspective of those founding the schools, the separate schools they established would serve people who otherwise would be entirely excluded from Catholic education.<sup>22</sup>

In 1890, the Southern United States encompassed sixteen dioceses, including the densely Catholic centers of Baltimore and New Orleans, which were also home to communities of black religious women. Accepting that the self-reported numbers may be approximate, it appears that the South was home to 652 Catholic parochial schools and academies; eighty-seven of these (just over thirteen percent) educated African Americans. Outside of the Baltimore and New Orleans

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<sup>21</sup> Louis R. Harlan, *Separate and Unequal: Public School Campaigns and Racism in the Southern Seaboard States, 1901-1915* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1958), 5-44; Mother Mary Katharine Drexel, "Notes from Tour of the South," *Writings* no. 2950, 1904, 7, SBS.

<sup>22</sup> Shannen Dee Williams, "Forgotten Habits, Lost Vocations: Black Nuns, Contested Memories, and the 19th Century Struggle to Desegregate U.S. Catholic Religious Life," *The Journal of African American History* 101, no. 3 (Summer 2016): 242-43, <https://doi.org/10.5323/jafriamerhist.101.3.0231>; Byrne to Clergy and Laity of the Diocese on the Negro and the Indian, February 11, 1903, Negroes Folder, FP.

dioceses, the fifty-one black educational institutions constituted eleven percent of the 459 Catholic schools and academies. The diocese of Nashville, co-terminus with the State of Tennessee, included twenty-one Catholic schools and academies, only one of which was a school for black children. The city of Nashville had five Catholic schools and academies, none of which were for black students.<sup>23</sup>

### **Race in the Late Nineteenth-Century American South**

The Emancipation Proclamation of 1863 and subsequent 1865 Thirteenth U.S. Constitutional Amendment made slavery illegal and legally freed the approximately four million African Americans who had been in bondage in the United States. The State of Tennessee abolished slavery by a state constitutional amendment in 1865. More than ninety percent of freedpeople remained in the American South for decades after the Civil War. The 1868 Fourteenth Amendment extended citizenship to all born or naturalized in the U.S., including African Americans, and the 1870 Fifteenth Amendment extended suffrage to include African American men. In the years following the Civil War, many freedpeople sought to reunite with lost family members and many joined black Christian churches with preachers of their own race. African Americans seized new opportunities for education, migration, and political involvement. Republican ascendancy, federal military protection, and the temporary disfranchisement of former Confederates protected this exercise for a time, but white Southerners quickly reacted against efforts to foster black equality. Tennessee rejoined the Union without undergoing Reconstruction, but the end of Republican rule came early there, with the Democrats regaining

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<sup>23</sup> Megan Stout Sibbel, "Reaping the 'Colored Harvest': The Catholic Mission in the American South" (PhD diss., Loyola University, Chicago, 2013), Table 1, 55, [https://ecommons.luc.edu/luc\\_diss/547/](https://ecommons.luc.edu/luc_diss/547/) (accessed February 7, 2019); *Sadliers' Catholic Directory, Almanac, and Ordo for the Year of Our Lord 1890* (New York: D. and J. Sadlier and Co., 1890), 302-04, 407-08, <https://archive.org/details/SadliersCatholicDirectory1890/page/n429> (accessed February 7, 2019).

control of the state government in 1870. Determined to preserve white supremacy, many white Southerners objected to black education, land ownership, voting, and office-holding.<sup>24</sup>

Even in the years before the Democrats regained political control in Southern states and the 1877 removal of federal troops from the South, violence served as a mechanism for maintaining white dominance. Though no longer legally enslaved, black people could be beaten and even killed by white people, who rarely faced serious consequences for such crimes. At the same time, black men found their political influence hampered both by a unification of white voters against black participation and by physical measures to prevent black voting.<sup>25</sup>

Most African Americans in the Southern U.S. remained involved in agriculture. A sharecropping system entangled many rural freedpeople in debt to landowners or merchants. Increasing numbers of African Americans moved to cities. Even in urban life, upward mobility for black people was limited by racial barriers. Residential areas, businesses, and industrial workforces were bounded by often invisible but binding racial dividing lines. A stratum of black professionals generally emerged to serve the needs of black citizens. Well-educated, professionally trained Black people could achieve success in their fields and sometimes become entrepreneurs who used their wealth and business acumen to advance what they deemed progress

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<sup>24</sup> Robert J. Norrell, *The House I Live In* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 17-22; William Hardy, “‘Fare Well to All Radicals’: Redeeming Tennessee, 1869-1870” (PhD dissertation, University of Tennessee, 2013), [https://trace.tennessee.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=https://www.google.com/&httpsredir=1&article=2938&context=utk\\_graddiss](https://trace.tennessee.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=https://www.google.com/&httpsredir=1&article=2938&context=utk_graddiss) (accessed February 7, 2019); Randall M. Miller, “Slaves and Southern Catholicism” in *Masters and Slaves in the House of the Lord: Race and Religion in the American South, 1740-1870*, ed. John Boles (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1988), 150.

<sup>25</sup> Norrell, *The House I Live In*, 20-21.

for their race. They worked to promote black banking interests and developments in business, media, and the arts; they opposed Jim Crow legislation as it intensified segregation.<sup>26</sup>

White Southerners often perceived black people's achievement of financial success and professional status or land ownership as a threat. In the wake of Confederate defeat, the conquered Southerners emphasized the purity of their Anglo-Saxon blood and romanticized the Old South, developing the myth of the Lost Cause. Implicit in this mythology were racial attitudes that demanded white supremacy—what historian Robert Norrell dubs an ideology of white nationalism. While white Americans in general saw themselves as superior to African Americans, Southern white people also perceived black people as rivals who threatened to dispossess them of power and status. In this view, life pitted black and white Southerners in a zero-sum game, in which any social or economic advance for black people meant just such a reverse for white people. Black people and even some white people recognized that the frequent lynchings, which by some counts approached two hundred per year in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, had more to do with violent suppression of black upward mobility than they did with the black sexual aggression often alleged to justify them.<sup>27</sup>

African Americans and white Southerners alike recognized that education constituted a crucial key to improving the lives of African Americans. In the aftermath of war, the Freedmen's Bureau established many schools for freedpeople, funding them by means of confiscated

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<sup>26</sup> Martin Summers, *Manliness and Its Discontents: The Black Middle Class and the Transformation of Masculinity, 1900-1930* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 6-8; Gabriel Briggs, *The New Negro in the Old South* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2015), 4-5, 35-54.

<sup>27</sup> Robert J. Norrell, *Up from History: The Life of Booker T. Washington* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 48-49; Blair L.M. Kelley, *Right to Ride: Streetcar Boycotts and African American Citizenship in the Era of Plessy v. Ferguson* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 9-12; Stewart Tolnay and E.M. Beck, *A Festival of Violence: An Analysis of Southern Lynchings, 1882-1930*, (Champaign: University of Illinois, 1995), 17-19, 202; Norrell, *The House I Live In*, 24-25.

Confederate property. Northerners came South as religious missionaries to teach in many of these schools, and Northern missionary associations funded schools and teachers in the South. Public schools funded by the states replaced Freedmen's Bureau schools, but as Democrats regained power in the South, and Republicans eventually abandoned black interests, a disparity in spending left black schools sorely underfunded. Black school buildings were often dilapidated, books and equipment, when they existed, did not compare favorably with those in white schools, and black teachers' salaries were far lower than those of white teachers. Overall, a black student's education received about forty percent of the amount allotted for a white student's education in the separate schools of the South in 1900.<sup>28</sup>

### **U.S. Catholic Bishops and Racial Issues: Church Teaching on Race**

In the late nineteenth century, black Catholics and potential converts put great stock in the Church's teaching regarding racial equality. The Roman Catholic Church denied the existence of inherent racial inequality and insisted on the common origin of human beings. A cogent contemporary expression of this teaching is found in a teaching from the Holy See. Pope Leo XIII in his 1888 letter to the Bishops of Brazil on the abolition of slavery put it this way:

From the first sin came all evils, and specially this perversity that there were men who, forgetful of the original brotherhood of the race, instead of seeking, as they should naturally have done, to promote mutual kindness and mutual respect, following their evil desires began to think of other men as their inferiors, and to hold them as cattle born for the yoke. In this way, through an absolute forgetfulness of our common nature, and of human dignity, and the likeness of God stamped upon us all, it came to pass that . . . mankind, though of the same race, became divided into two sections, the conquered slaves and their victorious masters. The history of the ancient world presents us with this miserable spectacle down to the time of the coming of our Lord, when the calamity of slavery had fallen heavily upon all the peoples, and the number of freemen had become

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<sup>28</sup> Adam Fairclough, *A Class of Their Own: Black Teachers in the Segregated South* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 37-58; Norrell, *The House I Live In*, 35-36.

so reduced that the poet was able to put this atrocious phrase into the mouth of Caesar: "The human race exists for the sake of a few."<sup>29</sup>

Leo's letter frankly denied inherent racial inequality and recognized slavery as evil. It articulated the Catholic recognition of the common origin of men and their fundamental equality before God. While discussing ancient slavery, Leo nevertheless emphasized racial equality, tacitly acknowledging the race-based nature of contemporary slavery.

At the end of the letter, Leo described his hopes for the eradication of slavery in Brazil. In a manner characteristic of Catholic concern for social order, Leo offered advice for the pursuit of slavery's eradication:

whatever things have to be carried out, let all be done lawfully, temperately, and in a Christian manner. It is, however, chiefly to be wished that this may be prosperously accomplished, which all desire, that slavery may be banished and blotted out without any injury to divine or human rights, with no political agitation, and so with the solid benefit of the slaves themselves, for whose sake it is undertaken.<sup>30</sup>

This passage demonstrates the carefulness of Catholics even in the face of what they asserted to be unjust. Though slavery be evil, its eradication should nevertheless be temperate, without political upheaval. This clarity of teaching accompanied by cautious patience in overturning acknowledged evils would characterize the preaching of many white Catholic clerics who saw Southern race prejudice as immoral. Catholic clerics who knew the racial distinctions Southern mores had been built around to be unjust proved extremely cautious about challenging them.

That many American Catholics, including some bishops, failed to recognize or act against the immorality of racial discrimination that endured and intensified in the decades after emancipation demonstrates the degree to which Catholics were disconnected from the

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<sup>29</sup> Pope Leo XIII to the Bishops of Brazil, "*In Plurimis*" May 5, 1888, paragraph 4, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_l-xiii\\_enc\\_05051888\\_in-plurimis.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_05051888_in-plurimis.html) (accessed February 7, 2019).

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, paragraph 21.

theological truths they allegedly espoused. The Church held that all human persons belonged to one family without racial distinction. Catholic theology clearly defended the common origin of human beings, their common brotherhood and equality before God, and their unity, if baptized, in the mystical body of Christ. Catholics had no theological grounds to defend segregation or even argue against interracial marriage. Southern Catholics, however, tended to become imbued with the scriptural views of many around them who used the Bible to justify white supremacy. The nature of the Catholic Church, with its scriptural interpretations guarded by the Magisterium<sup>31</sup> kept the Catholic Church per se from the kind of local theological developments and scriptural interpretations that many Protestants subscribed to in the post-bellum South. Not all Catholics knew or understood the Catholic teaching on these matters, however, and many took on the attitudes and religious positions that were held by their non-Catholic neighbors. These Catholics may not have realized they were abandoning orthodoxy in giving the interpretations they gave to justify segregation and the systematic violence and oppression that attended it.<sup>32</sup>

Denying racial difference was not the same as condemning slavery as evil in itself.

Catholics in the U.S. had been accustomed to the practice of slavery even among fellow Catholics, including priests and religious orders. While various Protestant denominations in the

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<sup>31</sup> Catholics understand the deposit of faith to be contained in Sacred Scripture and in Sacred Tradition. Sacred Tradition includes that revelation which, while not written down, was complete with the death of the last of the twelve Apostles of Jesus. The Magisterium, the pope and the bishops in union with him, guided by the Holy Spirit, guard and interpret the deposit of faith.

<sup>32</sup> Fay Botham, *Almighty God Created the Races: Christianity, Interracial Marriage, and American Law* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 111-14; Maria Genoio Caravaglios, *The American Catholic Church and the Negro Problem in the XVIII-XIX centuries* (Rome: Tipografia delle Mantellate, 1974), 182-200. Botham explains that the Catholic Church understood marriage as a sacrament, and so saw the Church herself as governing the juridical impediments to marriage, among which race was not counted. This means the Church would not forbid interracial marriage, a position that flew in the face of the very deepest tenets of white Southern preoccupation with preventing interracial sex and guarding the purity of white women while both hyper-sexualizing black men and ignoring the blatant interracial liaisons, often forced, between white men and black women.

U.S. had split along sectional lines over the issue of slaveholding, Catholics looked to Rome for their unity, generally treating slavery as merely a political issue. In 1839, Pope Gregory XVI had condemned the slave trade in his encyclical *In Supremo Apostolatus*. Bishop John England of Charleston, South Carolina sought to allay popular American antagonism to the pope's stand by publishing in his diocesan newspaper eighteen substantial letters explaining the Catholic position in a way that justified American slaveholding. Other bishops joined England in providing theoretical justification for slavery; many were not so much pro-slavery as anti-abolitionist. Most neglected to explain the unjustifiability, by Catholic standards, of slavery that was race-based or that treated a human person as chattel. Catholic teaching could arguably be marshaled in a defense of slavery per se, but not of chattel slavery based on racial inequality. The U.S. bishops did not discuss the question of slavery at the First Plenary Council of 1852. Bishop Augustin Verot of Savannah noted the unchristian dehumanization of slaves by Catholic masters and even as he defended the institution of slavery, called for reforms in keeping with the slaves' humanity. While many Northern bishops sided with the Union, few Catholics—most notably Bishop John Purcell of Cincinnati and lay Catholic convert and thinker Orestes Brownson—voiced support for emancipation.<sup>33</sup>

Once slavery was prohibited in the U.S., bishops such as Verot called for immediate efforts to provide Catholic education for the freedpeople. Archbishop Martin Spalding of Baltimore referred to the moment as a “golden opportunity for reaping a harvest of souls, which

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<sup>33</sup> Joseph E. Capizzi, “For What Shall We Repent? Reflections on the American Bishops, Their Teaching, and Slavery in the United States, 1839-1861,” *Theological Studies* 65 (2004), 775-79, 788; William Kurtz, “‘This Most Unholy and Destructive War’: Catholic Intellectuals and the Limits of Catholic Patriotism,” in *So Conceived and So Dedicated: Intellectual Life in the Civil War-era North*, ed. Lorien Foote and Kanisorn Wongsrichanalai (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), 225.

neglected may not return.”<sup>34</sup> At the Second Plenary Council in 1866, on the docket was discussion of outreach to the recently freed slaves. The bishops were supposed to consider how to draw freedpeople into the Catholic Church, thereby affording them the opportunity to save their souls. The pastoral letter issuing from the Council lamented the sudden emancipation of the slaves as dangerous to social stability but argued that as much as possible should be done for the conversion of freedpeople. This was the talk of the 1866 Council, but little in fact resulted in terms of action concerning the former slaves.<sup>35</sup>

### **U.S. Catholic Bishops and Racial Issues: Freedpeople as “Foreign Mission”**

Within the framework of a universal church, leaders in the U.S. as in Europe saw the outreach to freedpeople as fitting into the already existing category of missionary work that attended European colonization. In the Catholic Church at large, the late nineteenth century was a time of great missionary endeavor, with the goal of establishing the church in Africa and Asia and cultivating a “native” clergy. For many Europeans, the people of African descent in the American South appeared to be another “native” population, to be converted and inculturated into the Church. This fostered a widespread attitude that any substantial evangelization of or service to African Americans required specialized missionaries and was outside the sphere of ordinary diocesan clergy. This not only made a ready excuse for lack of action if such

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<sup>34</sup>Martin J. Spalding to John McCloskey, October 9, 1865, cited by Cyprian Davis in *Black Catholics*, 118.

<sup>35</sup> Hennessey, *American Catholics*, 162. One must distinguish between the bishops’ stated intentions and the actual efforts they made on behalf of African Americans. Bishop Verot stands alone in terms of early earnest efforts along the lines indicated by the Second Plenary Council. In “Reaping the ‘Colored Harvest’: The Catholic Mission in the American South,” Megan Stout Sibel takes the bishops’ words and decrees at face value, as if they made the full effort and failed. Sibel tends to treat the hierarchy monolithically, taking for granted that the full effort of bishops backed the norms they issued. Far more talk than real effort came from the bishops. However, Sibel’s conclusion that the initiative ended in failure by the bishops to achieve their stated goals remains sound. See Megan Stout Sibel, “Reaping the ‘Colored Harvest’: The Catholic Mission in the American South” (PhD diss. Loyola University, Chicago, 2013).

missionaries could not be obtained, but also reinforced the sense that African Americans constituted a separate—and lower—priority when a bishop or pastor considered church affairs. Black Catholics, many of whom descended from families that had been in the New World for generations, at times voiced their objection to being classified as “foreign” by priests who themselves were immigrants.<sup>36</sup>

Archbishop Spalding pleaded with Rome after the Second Plenary Council, begging for religious communities to be sent to establish missions for outreach to freedpeople. Several congregations were being founded in Europe for work in the foreign missions—to send missionaries to European colonies or spheres of influence in Africa and Asia. Among these were the Mill Hill Fathers, founded by Herbert Vaughan in England for service in the African missions. With Pope Pius IX’s permission, in 1871, Vaughan sent his first group of missionaries not to Africa, but to the U.S., with the specific mandate to serve African Americans. The four original missionaries and those who followed them from Europe struggled with discouragement and lack of support as they worked to establish missions in Baltimore and Richmond. The English Mill Hill Fathers serving in the U.S. eventually established independence from their Motherhouse and became the Baltimore-based community known as the Josephite Fathers. A few other European missionary congregations followed in the ensuing half century, most notably the Society of the Divine Word, who took up missions to African Americans in 1905, and the Society for African Missions who did so in 1906.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> J. Bruls, “From Missions to ‘Young Churches,’” in *The Church in a Secularised Society*, ed. Roger Aubert (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), 393-97; Cressler, *Authentically Black and Truly Catholic*, 162; Diane Batts Morrow, “‘Undoubtedly A Bad State Of Affairs’: The Oblate Sisters of Providence and the Josephite Fathers, 1877–1903,” *Journal of African American History* 101, no. 3 (2016): 274.

<sup>37</sup> Bruls, “From Missions to ‘Young Churches,’” 393-97; Stephen J. Ochs, *Desegregating the Altar: The Josephites and the Struggle for Black Priests, 1871-1960* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990),

The rhetoric of the Second Plenary Council produced little in the way of substantial commitment of resources or personnel on the part of the U.S. bishops, and the hoped-for “harvest of souls,” which Archbishop Spalding had warned the participating bishops not to miss, went unrealized. The combination of letting other concerns take priority, fear of inciting social change that might destabilize a society where Catholics were already a despised and suspected minority, currying favor with the white elite, the foreign status associated with African Americans, and the ubiquitous shortage of personnel and resources resulted in a fairly indifferent response on the part of the bishops. Some few religious and priests, including communities of black religious women already in the U.S., continued making efforts to serve African American Catholics and bring others into the Church. Meanwhile, many black Catholics left the Catholic Church, and few African American converts replaced them.<sup>38</sup>

The Holy See instructed the Third Plenary Council of 1884 to revisit the topic of converting African Americans to the Catholic faith, noting that the bishops had thus far done little in this regard. The council’s tone continued in the paternalistic vein of the Second Plenary Council, but their actions went beyond those of 1866 with the institution of concrete measures that were normative throughout the entire United States. The principal of these was the establishment of a Sunday collection for the Indian and African American missions in all parishes annually on the First Sunday of Lent. The Council appointed a commission of bishops acting through Sulpician priest Father Edward R. Dyer to oversee this collection and the distribution of the funds it gleaned. The bishops hoped thus to spread the cost of the missions to

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43-48; Benjamin Keiley to Byrne, June 30, 1907, Byrne Papers, ADN; Drexel to Byrne, n.d., Byrne Papers, ADN; John Burke to Byrne, May 21, 1912, Byrne Papers, ADN.

<sup>38</sup> Cressler, *Authentically Black and Truly Catholic*, 162; Davis, *Black Catholics*, 118-22; Randall M. Miller, “Slaves and Southern Catholicism,” in *Masters and Slaves in the House of the Lord: Race and Religion in the American South, 1740-1870*, ed. John Boles (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1988), 150.

Indians and black people to the whole country, as the largest concentrations of these groups lived in very poor dioceses in the South and West. The collections for the Commission for the Catholic Missions among the Colored People and the Indians, however, remained small, never adequate to meet the needs of the missions.<sup>39</sup>

Some tensions within the American Catholic Church hierarchy were closely connected with pressures that came from establishing Catholic communities in a predominantly non-Catholic culture. It is hard to determine just how the desire to conform to American mores shaped the bishops' approach to African Americans. Some wanted to avoid making waves, while still upholding the truth of human equality before God. Thus, while admitting black people to churches and the sacraments, they upheld segregated seating, black exclusion from Catholic institutions of learning, and other degrading and exclusionary practices. A notable exception was Archbishop John Ireland of St. Paul, who thundered against the color line; but Ireland, assigned to a Northern diocese, and finding himself entangled in other matters, did not give his full attention to the problem of eradicating racial injustice.<sup>40</sup>

### **U.S. Catholic Bishops and Racial Issues: Other Concerns**

Most of the bishops who attended the Third Plenary Council were born in Europe. Some came to the U.S. as children, others as adults, but the majority grew up either in Europe or in immigrant homes in the U.S. Of those raised in the U.S., many received their seminary education in France, Belgium, or Rome. The assembly included the Georgia-born son of a slave, Bishop James Augustine Healy of Portland, Maine, who had studied in Boston and then in France. These

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<sup>39</sup> Davis, *Black Catholics*, 132-34.

<sup>40</sup> Ireland even preached on the legitimacy of interracial marriage. Marvin Richard O'Connell, *John Ireland and the American Catholic Church* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1988), 267-68.

bishops, though nearly all of European descent, were neither predominantly Southern, nor even American. They were closely connected to Europe, whence issued waves of immigrants to the U.S., most of them Catholic.<sup>41</sup>

Many dioceses poured resources and personnel into building and maintaining institutions for immigrants. Dioceses and parishes, churches and schools, hospitals and orphanages multiplied. In some cases, Catholics built quite large and beautiful buildings, perhaps to stake a claim for Catholic legitimacy in the often-hostile Protestant culture, perhaps simply to glorify God. Whether grand cathedrals or modest schools, building for a burgeoning European American Catholic populace absorbed a great deal of churchmen's time and attention as well as resources. Catholic lay organizations also arose to aid poor immigrant co-religionists. Little to nothing could be spared for the "missions," which appeared as a side bar to be attended to after higher priorities had been addressed.<sup>42</sup>

Many non-Catholic Americans looked askance at the Catholic newcomers and some loudly voiced their suspicion that Catholicism and American democratic ideals could not be reconciled. Catholics owed allegiance, they declared, to a foreign power and could not be good Americans. Suspicion peaked at particular times, as with the Know-Nothings of the mid 1850s

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<sup>41</sup> *Memorial Volume: A History of the Third Plenary Council* (Baltimore: Baltimore Publishing Company, 1885,) 82-111; James M. O'Toole, *Passing for White: Race, Religion, and the Healy Family, 1820-1920* (University of Massachusetts Press, 2003), 62, 127; Deirdre M. Moloney, *American Catholic Lay Groups and Transatlantic Social Reform in the Progressive Era* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 1-5, 205-07.

<sup>42</sup> Moloney, *American Catholic Lay Groups*, 1-7; Archbishop John Ireland constructed the Cathedral of St. Paul from 1904-1915 for just under three million dollars. See O'Connell, *John Ireland*, 503. Bishop T.S. Byrne of Nashville commented, "[I] was in St. Paul last Sunday at the laying of the cornerstone of Archbishop Ireland's new cathedral—which if built as designed will cost a couple of millions—I confess I do not approve of such costly structures when money is so needed for more important things. Mine will not cost \$100,000 at the outside." Byrne to Drexel, May 8, 1907, Folder H10Q6f22, SBS. Byrne explained to Joseph Pied, Pro Vicar Apostolic of Benin, that his people could not send money to the missions because, "they are already so harassed by appeals for money to pay for what they themselves owe and for what is necessary for their spiritual needs." Byrne to Joseph Pied, October 9, 1896, Byrne Papers, ADN.

and the American Protective Association (A.P.A.) of the 1890s. The American Protective Association was an anti-Catholic secret society that gathered a considerable membership, especially in the Midwest. The A.P.A. sought to put its members into political offices to combat Catholic influence in public schools and in city governments. The bishops and their immigrant flocks felt pressure to conform to American ideals not because they were thoroughly American, but precisely because they were not. Some resisted the pressure, maintaining the cultural identities with which the practice of Catholic faith was inextricably entwined. Others stretched the limits of Catholicity to try to accommodate all that was American.<sup>43</sup>

As the Church rapidly expanded, ethnic identity became a source of some polarization in the Catholic hierarchy in America. In particular, conflict arose between the Irish and the Germans. A progressive cadre of Irish American bishops championed the harmony between the American democratic-republican government with its separation of church and state and Catholicism. German-speaking bishops, who often governed heavily German dioceses with more traditional views of church-state relationships, were suspicious of this attitude. They wanted to preserve the language and culture of the immigrants, so closely tied to their Catholic faith.<sup>44</sup>

Many, though not all, English-speaking Irish American Catholic leaders opposed this preservation of languages and customs deemed foreign by Americans. The pressure among the emerging liberal Irish leadership of the Catholic Church in America favored conformity to American democratic norms and customs. By liberal was meant a willingness to embrace the separation of church and state and even exalt it. Liberal bishops expressed more willingness to

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<sup>43</sup> Daniel J. Tichenor, *Dividing Lines: The Politics of Immigration Control in America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 72; Edward Cuddy, "Pro-Germanism and American Catholicism, 1914-1917," *Catholic Historical Review* LIV (October 1968): 427; Moloney, *American Catholic Lay Groups*, 1-11.

<sup>44</sup> Cuddy, "Pro-Germanism and American Catholicism," 444-54.

cooperate with the public school system and embrace American ideals. Liberal bishops would be readier to permit mixed marriages—those of a Catholic to someone outside the faith—and to allow membership in secret societies traditionally forbidden by the Church. Conservative bishops saw liberals as too quick to trade away the essentials of doctrine and practice for the sake of acceptance as Americans. They rejected secret societies as godless and did not readily grant dispensations in matters of church discipline.<sup>45</sup>

In the country at large, Catholics felt the need to express their patriotism, over against the more or less overt insinuations of many of their non-Catholic neighbors that Catholic allegiance to the pope compromised their civic integrity. Catholic bishops, priests, and laity insisted that Catholics were good Americans. This American Catholic compulsion to conform to American ideals grated on the nerves of some Catholics. Bishop Thomas Sebastian Byrne of Nashville wrote of the politically savvy James Cardinal Gibbons, Archbishop of Baltimore, and the preeminent Catholic cleric in the U.S., “it looks as if he [Gibbons] overdoes the profession of Catholic loyalty. His protestation that the Church and the Constitution are so harmonious as to be almost identical or, to use his own phrase ‘fit into each other as naturally as two links in the same chain,’ is . . . to use a form of expression that is dangerously near being extreme.” Byrne wrote of Gibbons’s seeming obsession with democracy:

Why should Catholics, more than any other Religious Body be constantly asserting and protesting their loyalty? It leaves the impression that our position needs defense and that the Catholic Church and her attitude towards civil liberty require apology. Have we done anything that we must be continually vindicating ourselves and begging the public not to be suspicious of us?<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Byrne to P.W. Schwels, C.S.Sp., September 14, 1896, Byrne Papers, ADN; Moloney, *American Catholic Lay Groups*, 18-21; Hennessey, *American Catholics*, 184-89.

<sup>46</sup> Byrne to William H. Elder, January 26, 1897, Byrne Papers, ADN.

Byrne deemed himself a patriotic American and encouraged his flock to be such, but he resisted what he saw as a compromise of religious principles for the sake of civic acceptance.

European liberals championed American ideals and vaunted the separation of church and state as well as American activism. In a way that threatened the traditional approach to the Christian life by preferring natural to supernatural virtue and granting a higher place to the active life than the contemplative life, these thinkers emphasized what they saw as admirable in the American way. They gave the impression of trying to bring converts to Catholicism by suppressing those aspects of Catholic dogma and morality deemed unpalatable to the citizens of a modern democratic society. Their approach, which captured something more extreme than the thought of most liberal American bishops, became known as the heresy of Americanism, one iteration of an amorphous heresy that would be dubbed Modernism. Modernism encompassed an array of positions deemed erroneous by the Catholic Church, many of them gleaned from liberal Protestant theology and modern philosophy. Modernists tended to see dogma as fluid and questioned the Church's claim to be instituted by Christ and to teach with Christ's authority.<sup>47</sup>

Difficulties between the American bishops on various questions, from the use of German language to the relationship between public and Catholic schools, drew the attention of the Holy See. American bishops wanted a Cardinal to represent them in the Curia, to help the Holy See to understand various questions peculiar to the U.S. and to give context for the difficulties the Holy See could be called on to arbitrate. What they got was a Vatican representative in the U.S. Both camps of American bishops attempted to win the papal representative to their viewpoint, especially on questions regarding education. Bishops traveled to Rome or corresponded with

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<sup>47</sup> William L. Portier, *Divided Friends: Portraits of the Roman Catholic Modernist Crisis in the United States* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2013), 6-12, 97-114; Leo XIII, *Testem Benevolentiae*, <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/leo13/113teste.htm> (accessed March 2, 2019).

agents there to try to influence by diplomacy the decisions the Holy Father might make regarding America. The diplomatic efforts of the liberal faction failed, and Pope Leo XIII, who associated the name of Americanism with that faction, condemned Americanism in his 1899 letter to Gibbons, *Testem Benevolentiae*. While it is ironic that most Americanists were European, it is undeniable that strains of Modernism and Americanism influenced the thought of an influential circle of liberal U.S. bishops. *Testem Benevolentiae* came as a deeply mortifying disappointment to some, forcing them to decide whether to recommit to the Church or go the way of Modernist thought. The effects of this internal crisis concerning engagement with Americanism and Modernism came to bear on the Church's outreach to African Americans in the person of Josephite Father John R. Slattery.<sup>48</sup>

### **The Josephite Fathers and Black Missions**

One can hardly overestimate the influence of the Josephites on the Catholic approach to missionary work in the American South. Arriving in America as the Mill Hill Fathers in 1871, the community was the first European society to respond to Archbishop Spalding's plea for religious priests to serve in the African American "missions." The first missionaries met daunting cultural and financial challenges and found little support from bishops, priests, or lay white Catholics.

#### **The Josephite Fathers and Black Missions: Father John R. Slattery**

Young, American-born John R. Slattery brought new energy and vision to the demoralized community when Herbert Vaughan, the founder and superior of Mill Hill, made him

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<sup>48</sup> Gerald P. Fogarty, "The Catholic Hierarchy in the United States Between the Third Plenary Council and the Condemnation of Americanism," *U.S. Catholic Historian*, 11 (3): 19-35; Portier, *Divided Friends*, 61-198.

provincial in 1878.<sup>49</sup> Slattery had grown up in New York with Paulist priests as his mentors in faith. The Paulists were an American congregation founded to preach the Gospel in order to bring non-Catholic Americans to a better understanding of Catholicism. As a young man, Slattery felt called to serve black Americans, and the Paulist Fathers helped connect him to the Mill Hill community, which he entered as a seminarian. Slattery completed his seminary studies in England and was ordained a priest in 1877. He insisted on returning to the floundering missions in the U.S., where he was soon designated provincial. As provincial, Slattery won the confidence of James Cardinal Gibbons of Baltimore.<sup>50</sup>

Slattery moved in elite, liberal Catholic circles, striving to gain ecclesiastical and financial support for the Mill Hill missionaries' work in Southern dioceses. His old friends the Paulist Fathers welcomed his use of their publication the *Catholic World* to broadcast his ideas. Slattery became the voice and pen of white liberal Catholics regarding race, advocating the conversion of Southern blacks to Catholicism as the solution to the "Negro question." Slattery promoted the ordination of black men to the priesthood as absolutely essential to bringing about widespread black conversion to Catholicism.<sup>51</sup>

Never docile to authority himself, Slattery proved a difficult superior despite his gifts. His brothers in the American province voted him out as provincial, in part because they objected

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<sup>49</sup> Provincial is the title given the superior who governs a segment within a far-flung religious society or order. The provincial is the major superior for his or her province, but still owes obedience to the superior general. A provincial may be appointed or elected according to the norms of the religious congregation. In the case of Slattery, it seems that at the outset Vaughan appointed him, but subsequently Vaughan gave the priests in the province the privilege of electing their provincial.

<sup>50</sup> Ochs, *Desegregating the Altar*, 51-54; Portier, *Divided Friends*, 66-77.

<sup>51</sup> Ochs, *Desegregating the Altar*, 51-54; The American Catholic Tribune, *Three Catholic Afro-American Congresses* (1893, repr. New York: Arno Press, 1978), 45-47; Rev. J. R. Slattery, "Some Aspects of the Negro Problem," *The Catholic World* 38: 227 (February 1884): 604-13; William L. Portier, "John R. Slattery's Vision for the Evangelization of American Blacks," *U.S. Catholic Historian* 5, no. 1 (1986): 19-44.

to his high-handed treatment of the Oblates of Divine Providence, a community of black women religious who had been serving in Baltimore for decades before the Mill Hill Fathers arrived. Slattery brought in English Franciscan Sisters, marginalizing the Oblate Sisters, and the men rebelled. The new superior assigned Slattery to Richmond. In these formative Richmond years, he rekindled friendships with Bishop John Keane and Father Denis O'Connell. In his studies and correspondence, Slattery was deeply drawn into streams of thought that could be called Modernist or Americanist.<sup>52</sup>

Convinced of the need for black clergy, Slattery advocated permission to start a seminary in Baltimore to form white and black men together for the priesthood. Slattery regained leadership in the province and negotiated a separation from Mill Hill that would set the American province, now the Society of St. Joseph of the Sacred Heart, or Josephite Fathers, apart as an independent body under the jurisdiction of Cardinal Gibbons. Slattery gained the financial support of major benefactors, including Louise Drexel Morrell, who had control of the income on several million dollars. Morrell would later draw the attention of her sister Katharine to the Josephites' mission.<sup>53</sup>

As, initially and for some decades, the foremost religious society that had responded to the call for European missionaries for the African American missions, the Josephites ended up as the acknowledged experts in African American evangelization.<sup>54</sup> The bishops appear to have been happy to surrender responsibility for this effort to the priests of the society, and the strong-

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<sup>52</sup> Morrow, "'Undoubtedly A Bad State,'" 267-84; Portier, *Divided Friends*, 66-77.

<sup>53</sup> Ochs, *Desegregating the Altar*, 54-85.

<sup>54</sup> The Spiritan Fathers or the Congregation of the Holy Ghost, coming to the U.S. in 1872, undertook to serve African Americans, but they made a slow start. Mark Newman, *Desegregating Dixie: The Catholic Church in the South and Desegregation, 1945-1992* (Jackson: Univ. Press of Mississippi, 2018), 6.

mindful, self-assured Slattery gained their confidence. He preached and wrote voluminously, promoting the Josephite project. He had the trust of the American bishops on the race question, and even conservative bishops seem to have overlooked the Americanist leanings of Slattery and his new seminary, in their eagerness to get the matter of African American evangelization off their hands. Slattery influenced the discussions of the Third Plenary Council through the interventions of his friend Bishop John Keane and was pleased with the establishment of an annual collection for Indian and black Missions.<sup>55</sup>

Even as the Josephites separated from Mill Hill, however, the fruit of Slattery's dreams had begun to sour. Though he championed their rights in the Church and dedicated himself to their service, Slattery's manner towards African Americans smacked of paternalism. When his community was given spiritual charge of the Oblates Sisters of Divine Providence, Slattery showed little appreciation or sympathy for the Sisters and added to their financial burdens by charging for his services as chaplain. Slattery seems to have resented his inability to manipulate the first black Josephite priest, Father Charles R. Uncles. Slattery was continually at loggerheads with Uncles, who resisted Slattery's efforts to put him on display and insisted that he be allowed to support his parents financially. Slattery developed caution from his bad experiences with the first black priests and his growing experience that American bishops and priests did not welcome black clergy. Slattery often met not just lack of support, but outright opposition from within the Church, as did the other Josephite priests, black and white. Slattery still publicly upheld the need for a black clergy and preached passionately on the subject, but by the mid-1890s he and the Josephites were already retreating from the training and ordination of black men. They still upheld the theoretical value of black clergy, but privately, they imposed more rigorous

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<sup>55</sup> Ochs, *Desegregating the Altar*, 62-63.

requirements on black candidates than white, gradually making it almost impossible for black men to reach ordination.<sup>56</sup>

African American ministry was not Slattery's sole preoccupation. With the advent of the seminary, his study to prepare lectures for his seminarians drew him deeper into the currents of Modernist thought he had engaged with as a young priest. He remained friends with liberal Bishops John Keane and Denis O'Connell, and he became closely involved in the ecclesio-political discussions of the Americanist leaders. In 1899, when leading American liberal clerics met informally in Rome, Slattery was among them. As his disgust with the racism of American Catholics mounted, his confidence in the authority of the Catholic Church had simultaneously been eroded by Modernist conviction. Slattery's own loss of supernatural vision as his faith slowly collapsed may have been a decisive factor in slowing the ordinations of black men to a trickle and eventually halting it. Slattery was not exactly the champion he appeared to be. By 1904, Slattery had abandoned his priesthood, left the Josephites, and renounced the Catholic Church.<sup>57</sup>

### **The Josephite Fathers and Black Missions: The Josephite Approach**

From the outset, the Josephites worked to establish or maintain separate black churches, often opening separate schools as well. In so doing, they followed the course already determined for the Baltimore Province by Archbishop Spalding and his suffragan bishops when they met in their Tenth Provincial Council in 1869. At first the Josephites remained on the East Coast, accepting churches in areas with significant numbers of black Catholics, but in the late 1890s, as more men joined them and the community of priests became more stable, the superiors sent men

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<sup>56</sup> Morrow, "“Undoubtedly A Bad State,”” 267-84; Ochs, *Desegregating the Altar*, 86-125.

<sup>57</sup> Portier, *Divided Friends*, 86-90; Morrow, "“Undoubtedly A Bad State,”” 284.

also to dioceses in the Deep South, with few Catholics, large black populations, and very few black Catholics. Here the goal was evangelization and the building up of a black Catholic nucleus from which the faith could spread.<sup>58</sup>

At Slattery's impetus, the Josephites began operating a college and seminary to train men for service on the "negro missions." Men came to the Josephites with a sense of having been called specifically for work with African Americans, though some of them would become discouraged when they realized just how despised this work would make them. Josephite priests would not only serve in a specific parish, they would travel, sometimes a hundred miles, to surrounding communities to offer Mass monthly or to bring the sacraments. They and their institutions faced dire poverty, sometimes lacking food and clothing for themselves and their students and money or supplies to repair dilapidated buildings. Still, the number of white candidates to become Josephite priests continued increasing, while the Josephites themselves acted to curb the enrollment of black candidates.<sup>59</sup>

Faced with the difficulty of the work, and reluctant to ordain black men, the Josephites considered the possibility of training black catechists to aid in the spread of the faith. Catechists are lay people who, though they do not receive ordination, yet have sufficient understanding of the tenets of the faith to instruct others in it. Catechists serve in a quasi-official capacity, but only in terms of instruction; they exercise no sacramental role. In 1900, the Josephites opened St. Joseph's College for Negro Catechists near Montgomery, Alabama. Father Slattery hoped that the catechists would create the impression of black leadership in black Catholic institutions,

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<sup>58</sup> Davis, *Black Catholics*, 122.

<sup>59</sup> Thomas J. Plunkett to J.R. Slattery, February 11, 1889, 9-D-1 JOS; Ochs, *Desegregating the Altar*, 86-125.

given the dearth of black clergy, while also effectively inculcating the doctrines of the faith. Slattery pointed to the Protestant sects and the exercise of black leadership in those churches and sought to imitate that model by the widespread use of black catechists. It seems that the Josephites, moving away from the model of an integrated seminary, intended to shift seminary training for any black candidates who were allowed to pursue the priesthood to this all-black school. Probably due to difficulties within the Josephite leadership, the catechist's college did not ultimately flourish. Nevertheless, lay black Catholics continued to play a significant role in maintaining faith in their communities and teaching it to others.<sup>60</sup>

In 1888, the Josephites began publishing *The Colored Harvest*, a periodical that informed readers about the work of their society. Subscriptions went to support the education of the young men in the Josephite seminary, but the periodical also became a means of popularizing the Josephite approach to mission work. It became a quarterly publication in English and German with an annual subscription fee of twenty-five cents and a circulation, in the late 1890s, of about four thousand copies. For some occasions, the Fathers would make ten thousand copies for special distribution in Northern cities. Along with Slattery's frequent articles in *The Catholic World*, the pieces published in *The Colored Harvest*, including "Letters from the Foreign Missions," helped to cement the place of the Josephites as the accepted experts in all things related to black Catholicism.<sup>61</sup>

Unique among Josephite deep South missions were those in Louisiana, where, beginning in 1898, the Josephites served a large existing black Catholic population with missions first in rural areas and eventually in the city of New Orleans. In New Orleans, the multiple levels of

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<sup>60</sup> Ochs, *Desegregating the Altar*, 106-18; Drexel, "Tour of the South," 8.

<sup>61</sup> Ochs, *Desegregating the Altar*, 471; *The Official Catholic Directory for 1905*, 674, 682.

caste existing among Catholics of African descent in a historically Catholic area with a long history of integrated worship fostered resistance to the introduction of separate churches for black Catholics. Perhaps more normal was the mission in Nashville, Tennessee, where the Josephites sent a priest to serve in 1900. There black Catholics numbered in the dozens at most, and the priest, Father Thomas Plunkett started from nothing. In addition to the catechist's college and the Nashville mission, several new Josephite missions began between 1898 and 1902. The Josephites were expanding their apostolic reach when Father Slattery's leadership collapsed.<sup>62</sup>

There is no way to determine the effect on the African American missions in the U.S. of Slattery's apostasy. To have the most prominent white Catholic champion of black mission work in the U.S. shamelessly embrace Modernism likely shed suspicion on the entire project of black evangelization in some quarters. By 1905, bishops began welcoming other missionary congregations into their dioceses to evangelize and serve African Americans. The Josephites continued, but they became even more cautious about pushing the edge on racial issues. Nevertheless, the Josephites had stamped the missions by the approach they took that became normative: the establishment of separate churches and schools run by white Catholics for black people, the preference for urban missions that could serve as nuclei for wider mission work, and the separate training of a special corps of white religious priests for "Negro work" had become the accepted way of proceeding in the U.S.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Dolores Egger Labbé, *Jim Crow Comes to Church: The Establishment of Segregated Catholic Parishes in South Louisiana* (1971, repr. New York: Arno Press, 1978); Ochs, *Desegregating the Altar*, 104.

<sup>63</sup> Morrow, "'Undoubtedly A Bad State,'" 284; Cressler, *Authentically Black and Truly Catholic*, 12-13.

**Black Catholic Americans' Attitudes and Aspirations: Colored Catholic Congresses,  
1889-1894**

If Catholic parents who failed to send their children to Catholic school were denied absolution, what of the souls of black Catholic parents, who, though willing to follow the norm to place their children in Catholic schools, found the Catholic schools' doors closed against their children because of race?<sup>64</sup>

In aspiring to Catholic education for his children, Eugene Bunn, who wrote to Bishop Byrne in 1898, may have been one of only a few black Catholic Nashvillians, but he was far from alone among the nation's black Catholics in seeking the expansion of Catholic education to include black people. Many black Americans hoped education would be a path that would lead not only to increased financial security and socio-economic status within their own segregated communities, but also to eventual recognition of the inherent equality of all races and erosion of the structures that guarded white supremacy. Beginning in 1889, black Catholics leaders gathered for a series of annual Colored Catholic Congresses. They discussed, argued, and planned, attempting, though without much success, to enlist the Catholic bishops and priests of the U.S. to put the weight of the Roman Catholic Church behind the Congresses' clearly articulated goals.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> According to Catholic teaching, if a particular action constitutes grave matter, those who knowingly and willingly do that action commit mortal sin and are therefore unworthy to receive Holy Communion. Catholics in mortal sin can be restored to grace by a good confession, the priest administering absolution for the remission of the sins confessed. In this case, priests were forbidden to absolve the parents until the situation had been rectified—ordinarily by the children being enrolled in a Catholic school or the parents being officially dispensed from this norm by the bishop.

<sup>65</sup> Suzanne Krebsbach, "James Spencer and the Colored Catholic Congress Movement," *U.S. Catholic Historian* 35, no.1 (Winter 2017): 8-20.

Overwhelmingly, these black Catholics were laymen, as Catholic leaders in the U.S. had generally barred the way for black candidates for the priesthood. These men proposed to convert their fellow African Americans by the power of the Catholic Church's teaching of the equality of human beings before God. Though the teaching was clear, practices that contravened it, such as segregated seating in Catholic churches, exclusion of black students from Catholic schools, and failing to promote black men for the priesthood, obfuscated the matter for all concerned. In 1886, Augustus Tolton, a black man who had been born a slave in Missouri, received ordination in Rome and returned to Illinois to serve. Cardinal Gibbons publicly ordained a second black man, Josephite Charles R. Uncles, in Baltimore in 1891. The Episcopal Church had ordained eighty-six black men in the U.S. between 1866 and 1900, while the Catholic Church ordained only five, three of whom passed for white. Nevertheless, these ordinations filled black Catholics with hope.<sup>66</sup>

With cautious support from the hierarchy, the members of the Colored Congresses encouraged one another, discussed issues of concern to black Catholics, and articulated not only their pride in the Church's defense of human equality in her teaching, but also their dissatisfaction with the way that was put into practice in the Catholic churches of the United States. The experience of Fathers Tolton and Uncles and a handful of black men ordained after them would illustrate that many Catholics themselves, bishops, priests, religious, and lay faithful, evinced hostility to a black presence in the Church and especially in the priesthood and

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<sup>66</sup> Ochs, *Desegregating the Altar*, 37-39. The known exception regarding black ordination is the Healy family. Born of an Irish father and a slave mother, three Healy brothers pursued vocations in the Church, achieving remarkable success. James ended as Bishop of Portland, Maine, Patrick as president of Georgetown University, and Sherwood as rector of the cathedral in Boston. Three Healy sisters entered religious life, and of the two who persevered, one became superior of her community. The Healy siblings passed for white, though some evinced physical characteristics that demonstrated their mother's African heritage. See O'Toole's *Passing for White*.

episcopacy, even though these attitudes ran counter to the theology of the Roman Catholic Church.<sup>67</sup>

Black Catholics in the 1880s and 1890s expressed three chief concerns: their children's lack of access to Catholic schools, disjuncture between doctrine and practice regarding racial equality in Catholic churches, and the need to evangelize their fellow black Americans. They vigorously opposed the inequality of Catholic education. Incisively, they exposed the dilemma they faced when bishops who insisted on Catholic schools for the children of Catholic parents failed to make provision for the education of black Catholic children and young people. Over five years, from 1889 until they ceased meeting in 1894, the Colored Catholic Congresses made increasingly strong demands that the bishops rectify situations of injustice within the Church. Few Catholic bishops, however, were prepared to countenance any program that would upset the status quo or draw popular opprobrium on their already suspect church.<sup>68</sup>

The Colored Catholic Congress movement illustrates the confidence black Catholics had during the late 1880s and early 1890s that change was possible. They believed that the Catholic Church taught the truth, and they expected their bishops to respond to their pleas. They couched their comments about the Church's history carefully, emphasizing what was positive in Catholic history, and vaunting that as truly Catholic. Black Catholics like Daniel Rudd, editor of Cincinnati's black Catholic paper, *American Catholic Tribune*, and primary organizer of the Colored Catholic Congresses, wrote "We believe there are some bad Catholics, who bring about

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<sup>67</sup> Davis, *Black Catholics*, 172-94.

<sup>68</sup> *American Catholic Tribune*, *Three Afro-American Congresses*; Gary B. Agee, *A Cry for Justice: Daniel Rudd and His Life in Black Catholicism, Journalism, and Activism, 1854-1933* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2011), 141-166; David Spalding, "The Negro Catholic Congresses, 1889-1894," *The Catholic Historical Review* 55, no. 3 (1969): 344-351; Paul David Nelson, *Fredrick L. McGhee: A Life on the Color Line, 1861-1912* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2002), 42-49.

a misunderstanding by their willful disobedience of Catholic teachings, but the Church does not approve their work.”<sup>69</sup> In his address to the first Colored Catholic Congress, Rudd said:

The Catholic Church . . . began the first universal crusade against human slavery. . . . [The] Church . . . in the moral and mental elevation of mankind . . . must of necessity lift the Colored race. . . . Even today when the shadows . . . cloud the pathway of man the Catholic clergy with their faith and learning shine like a very sun . . . This ability . . . is devoted to the interests of the Colored people, along with other branches of the human family. The fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man are enunciated by the Church in no doubtful terms.<sup>70</sup>

Rudd saw the Colored Congress not as challenging Church teaching, but as taking practical measures to improve opportunities for black employment and education. Rudd believed his aspirations for racial uplift, typical of the black middle class at the turn of the century, to be supported by the full weight of the universal church. Rudd himself was a newspaper operator and an advocate of industrial education for black youths, to teach them to excel in fields like his own. Like many others, Rudd saw potential Catholic industrial schools not as a means to cut off higher education, but as a means to “elevate” those black children who otherwise would be limited to unskilled manual labor. Visions of a Catholic Tuskegee figured in the dreams of some black Catholics as they did in those of some white Catholics.<sup>71</sup>

From at least 1866 on, most Catholic bishops in the U.S. seem to have presumed that if black Americans were to be brought to the Catholic faith, it must be done in separate institutions

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<sup>69</sup> *American Catholic Tribune*, September 14, 1888, microfilm reel 1, Scholarly Resources, Inc., Vanderbilt Divinity Library.

<sup>70</sup> *American Catholic Tribune*, *Three Catholic Afro-American Congresses*, 74-82.

<sup>71</sup> *American Catholic Tribune*, *Three Catholic Afro-American Congresses*, 74-82; Agee, *A Cry for Justice*, 74-82. The Tuskegee Institute was founded in Tuskegee, Alabama, as an industrial school for African Americans. Cyprian Davis, “The Holy See and American Black Catholics: A Forgotten Chapter in the History of the American Church,” *U.S. Catholic Historian* 7, no. 2/3 (1988): 161-62; John Burke to Byrne, June 16, 1910, Byrne Papers, ADN.

such as black churches, schools, and communities of religious women. There were repeated proposals for a prefect apostolic appointed by Rome to exercise quasi-episcopal authority over black Catholics in the U.S.<sup>72</sup> Rudd and others connected with the Colored Congress movement expressed ambivalence about the proposed establishment of more black parishes and schools. While these institutions offered black students an education and the opportunity to participate more fully in parish life and activities—from which they were often excluded in predominantly white parishes—separation also hardened racial lines. Bishops and black Catholics alike debated solutions, just as Americans, white and black, differed over whether to exclude, segregate, or integrate in every aspect of social life as they grappled with the social tumult following slavery’s abolition.

The Colored Catholic Congress movement petered out due to division among delegates regarding strategic means and apparent hesitation on the part of the bishops to countenance the more aggressive demands for equality advanced by the later Congresses. The most vocal bishop in favor of total integration, Archbishop John Ireland, became heavily embroiled in the schools controversy and other ecclesio-political questions in the 1890s, and appears to have backed away from significant advocacy on racial issues, though he continued to accept black seminarians and was perhaps the only Catholic bishop in the U.S. to ordain a black man as a diocesan priest in the first decade of the twentieth century.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Ochs, *Desegregating the Altar*, 39.

<sup>73</sup> Agee, *A Cry for Justice*, 74-82; Nelson, *Frederick L. McGhee*, 42-49; O’Connell, *John Ireland*, 268-69, Ochs, *Desegregating the Altar*, 163.

## **Black Catholic Americans' Attitudes and Aspirations: The Question of Catholic Schools for Black Children**

The members of the Colored Congresses explicitly explored the question of racially integrated Catholic schooling. Fredrick McGhee, a black lawyer from St. Paul, Minnesota, who had joined the Catholic Church because of the Catholic teaching that all human beings were equal before God, argued that separate schools constituted a major obstacle to equality, whereas mixed schools not only boasted better equipment but also accustomed black children to hold their own amongst their white peers. Other Congress members argued that separate schools were a necessary measure, even if a temporary one, to ensure that black children had at least some access to education. Separate schools were not considered in a vacuum. In some cases, as in St. Paul, leaders could conceive of mixed schools. In other contexts, including Nashville, the choice seems to have been not between separation or integration, but between a separate school or no Catholic school for black children at all. In the South, where black people constituted a much higher percentage of the population, but also faced tighter racial constraints, black Catholic men advocated putting resources towards Catholic schools for black students. Though concerned that separate schools would foster even more racial distinctions among Catholics, they were more concerned with meeting a present need for Catholic schools in a currently feasible way.<sup>74</sup>

South Carolina layman James Spencer addressed the topic of black parishes and schools at the Fourth Colored Catholic Congress, which met during the World's Fair in Chicago in 1893. Spencer saw black parishes within the same framework as "special churches for the welfare and

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<sup>74</sup> Joseph H. Lackner, "Dan A. Rudd, Editor of the 'American Catholic Tribune,' from Bardstown to Cincinnati," *The Catholic Historical Review* 80, no. 2 (1994): 269-70, <http://www.jstor.org.proxy.lib.utk.edu:90/stable/25024257>; Nelson, *Frederick L. McGhee*, 42-49, James A. Spencer, "Catholic Colored Churches," *St. Joseph's Advocate* 12 (1894), 630-34.

encouragement of those of her [the Church's] children of the various nationalities." These "national" parishes abounded as immigrants flooded Northern cities. There were parishes for Germans, for Poles, for Italians, and for various other groups, often served by priests and religious of the same language and culture as the people. Establishing a special parish for black people should not, he added "be a signal for a special or an absolute colored congregation . . . any more than the establishment of a Polish . . . church should be looked upon as a white Catholic Church, as [the Church] recognizes no special color among her children." A black church, Spencer contended, should be like any other ethnic church.<sup>75</sup>

In practice though, Spencer argued, black churches were different because people did draw a color line. Spencer argued that special parishes for blacks endangered the Church's universality precisely because people sometimes used a designation that was intended to encourage a particular group as a pretext for segregation or discrimination regarding the distribution of the sacraments. The risk, therefore, outweighed the benefit. Spencer argued that efforts and resources that had been earmarked for starting black Catholic churches should instead go to establishing as many black Catholic schools as possible.<sup>76</sup>

Black Catholics continued to suffer racial discrimination in the Church, and the bishops were no more able to find a quick resolution to America's race question than any other clergy, reformers, or influential Americans, black or white. In Catholic parishes, white Catholics, even clerics, often marginalized or excluded black people. Such abuses flew in the face of Church teaching, and resisted orders to the U.S. bishops from the Holy See; nevertheless, they abounded and passed without rebuke under the very noses of the bishops, including the preeminent James

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<sup>75</sup> Spencer, "Catholic Colored Churches," 630-34.

<sup>76</sup> Spencer, "Catholic Colored Churches," 630-34; Krebsbach, "James Spencer and the Colored Catholic Congress Movement," 1-21.

Cardinal Gibbons of Baltimore, whose own cathedral had segregated seating. Still, for some time, a perception remained, among some black Catholics like Rudd and even among some black non-Catholics, that the Catholic Church teaching regarding race was cause for hope. The Colored Catholic Congresses grew more vocal in pleading with the bishops about these abuses with each year, until the movement's leadership split after the fifth Congress. Though the Congress movement ended in 1894, the efforts of black Catholics to rectify the injustices black Catholics suffered did not.<sup>77</sup>

### **Progressive Reform**

Progressive era reforms in the U.S. are most closely associated with liberal Protestant reformers, many of whom embraced the Social Gospel, pursuing humanitarian reform in an ecumenical spirit. These reformers went beyond the bounds of their own churches to bring moral discipline to the unconverted, effecting what they saw as a better ordering of this world. They were not just bringing the Gospel of Christ, but reforms aimed at elevating the poor by means of social welfare policies. They enlisted legislation as a means for moral reform. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Catholics ran hospitals and orphanages, settlement houses, colonization and immigrant aid societies, schools, and homes for unwed mothers, but they kept these apostolates within the Catholic framework. Some Catholics experienced a tension between a certain emulation of Protestant reform work and maintenance of a Catholic approach. Catholic efforts remained distinct, neither collaborating with Protestant churches in these efforts nor seeking to draw the hand of government into their charitable endeavors, though they did seek

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<sup>77</sup> Ochs, *Desegregating the Altar*, 140-41, "Mere Mention," *The Colored American*, July 21, 1900, Readex: African American Newspapers; Krebsbach, "James Spencer and the Colored Catholic Congress Movement," 1-21.

to bring converts to the Catholic Church. The salvation of souls, not social order in this world remained the goal.<sup>78</sup>

### **Vatican Pressure**

In the U.S. in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, many white Catholics who subscribed in principle to the Catholic doctrine of universal human dignity and equality would in practice draw a color line, accepting distinctions between black people and white people that subordinated black people. That such attitudes existed, not only in the culture surrounding the Church and in its congregations but within its very hierarchy, explains why those black and white Catholics who dedicated themselves to work for black evangelization encountered so much opposition and sometimes abandoned any hope they may have had of changing the social fabric of the South or of the Catholic Church in the United States. Often even those Catholics most dedicated to working with African Americans did not accept the radical social ramifications of full human equality. Few white Catholics were strong and clear-sighted enough to act on the doctrine of universal human dignity, and when they did, they faced hostility and opposition.

In the first years of the twentieth century, another group of voices joined those of black Catholics in insisting that the American bishops correct abuses in the Church's treatment of African Americans. Direct pressure from the Vatican to rectify the situation in the U.S. intensified in 1904, with a letter to the Apostolic Delegate in the U.S., Archbishop Diomedeo Falconio, from the prefect of the Congregation of the Propaganda, Girolamo Maria Cardinal Gotti. The Congregation of the Propaganda oversaw the Church in the U.S., which was still

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<sup>78</sup> Don Doyle, *Nashville in the New South 1880-1930* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1985), 123-24; Moloney, *American Catholic Lay Groups*, 1-42; Kathleen Sprows Cummings, *New Women of the Old Faith: Gender and American Catholicism in the Progressive Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 13-14.

mission territory. Gotti had served as Leo XIII's representative in Brazil, and so was no stranger to the disconnect between Catholic teaching and practice concerning race.<sup>79</sup> Gotti wrote, "It has been referred to this Sacred Congregation that in some of the dioceses of the United States the condition of the Catholic negroes, not only in respect to the other faithful but also in respect to their pastors and bishops, is very humiliating and entirely different from that of the whites."<sup>80</sup> He advised Falconio, "this is not in conformity with the spirit of Christianity," and he directed Falconio to bring the matter to Cardinal Gibbons's attention, that Gibbons might see that the "diversity of treatment" be "little by little entirely removed."<sup>81</sup> Like black Catholics, the Holy See called attention to the truth and begged the bishops to rectify the situation. Though, like black Catholics, they met with little success, the officials of the Propaganda continued to advocate greater justice.

Hoping to demonstrate to the Holy See that they were doing something, the archbishops turned to Bishop Thomas Sebastian Byrne of Nashville. Byrne's efforts on behalf of black Nashvillians—perhaps in part prompted by Eugene Bunn's plea for education for his children—had drawn episcopal attention to his leadership potential in this area. Rather than gradually eradicate segregation in the Catholic Church's institutions in the U.S. as Gotti ordered, the bishops, in 1906, put Byrne in charge of establishing a board to increase efforts to raise funds for more separate churches and schools for black Americans.<sup>82</sup> More schools for black Catholic

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<sup>79</sup> Cyprian Davis, "The Holy See and American Black Catholics," 170-72.

<sup>80</sup> Giralomo Maria Gotti to Diomedede Falconio, January 18, 1904, quoted in Cyprian Davis, "The Holy See and American Black Catholics," 171.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>82</sup> Archbishop P.J. Ryan to Byrne, May 18, 1906, Byrne Papers, ADN.

children were established, but there was little opportunity for higher education, and the hopes the Holy See and black Catholics shared for removal of “diversity of treatment” failed of fruition.

## CHAPTER TWO

### NASHVILLE: THE DIOCESE, THE CITY, AND THE BISHOP

At his appointment in 1894, four years before he received Eugene Bunn's letter regarding the Bunn children's education, the Catholic bishop of Nashville, Tennessee, Bishop Thomas Sebastian Byrne, had already been asking what could be done for the "colored brethren," the people of African descent in his diocese.<sup>83</sup> The question prompted in Byrne a sense of vocation and responsibility for souls along with an acute awareness of his limited resources. He had yet to arrive at an answer when, in June 1898, Eugene Bunn's letter confronted him with the problem once more. It was not just that Byrne lacked money to build and personnel to staff another parish where one was needed—it was also the tangled question of race that intruded into Byrne's Catholic world, where, in his judgment, it had no place yet, in some ways, dominated the landscape.

Byrne himself was an Ohioan of Irish lineage, a scholar, but above all a Catholic. Though himself deeply interested in the formation of priests, Byrne came to see the issues surrounding Catholic education and those regarding race as the most crucial problems facing the Church in his time.<sup>84</sup> These issues intersected in the question regarding the education of the Bunn children, indeed any black Catholic children, bringing to the fore the importance of Catholic education to the bishop and the Church, while highlighting the inequity that existed because of racial prejudice that Byrne considered both un-Catholic and ineradicable. Byrne's attempts to resolve the question of education for black Catholic children did not take place in a vacuum, but rather in

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<sup>83</sup> Thomas Sebastian Byrne to John R. Slattery, June 13, 1894, 11-H-34, JOS.

<sup>84</sup> Byrne to E.R. Dyer, November 20, 1904, 10-DY-52, JOS.

the Roman Catholic Diocese of Nashville and in the city of Nashville, both of which played their own parts in the unfolding drama.

### **Origin and Growth of the Diocese of Nashville: The Miles Administration**

The Holy See carved the Roman Catholic Diocese of Nashville out of the existing Diocese of Bardstown, Kentucky in 1837. The first four bishops of Nashville were Pius Miles (1838-1860), James Whelan (1860-1863), Patrick Feehan (1865-1880), and Joseph Rademacher (1883-1893). In 1894, Thomas Sebastian Byrne was ordained the fifth Bishop of Nashville; Byrne governed the diocese for twenty-nine years until his death in 1923.

The new diocese, named for the state capitol where its cathedral would sit, shared boundaries with the state of Tennessee. In 1838, the Dominican Richard Pius Miles arrived in Tennessee as not only its first bishop, but also its only assigned Catholic priest and the pastor of its solitary church building—a small church built by Irish laborers in the Nashville area. Miles traversed his diocese on horseback to assess the number and the needs of his small and scattered flock. In the whole state of Tennessee, he found three to four hundred Catholics of mostly French, Irish, and African descent, generally in pockets of fewer than ten, with perhaps one hundred Catholics concentrated in the Nashville area and two other concentrations only “on the public works.” While most of Tennessee’s few Catholics were poor, their number included some few French and Irish families who had established significant holdings in the late eighteenth century and owned numerous slaves. The French Demonbreuns of Nashville and the Irish Rogans of Sumner County owned slaves, at least some of whom were also Catholics. Rogan

children and the children of their human property alike appeared in the baptismal rolls of the new diocese.<sup>85</sup>

Headquartering in Nashville, Miles began the work of nourishing the sheep that belonged to his flock and of evangelizing those others who might be converted to his fold. The task of caring for existing Catholics and winning new souls to the faith was more than a one-man job; thus, a major task for the new bishop was to recruit priests to his diocese to bring the sacraments to its diverse and far-flung Catholics. Bishop Miles enlisted fellow Dominicans and other priests to serve in Tennessee. By 1844, the diocese had six priests, including Father Lewis Hoste, who took spiritual care of Nashville's French Catholics while sharing care of "colored" Catholics with Dominican Father Joseph Alemany. Among them, the priests and bishop attended to three churches, three chapels, and forty mission stations. In Nashville, they ran a seminary and an academy for young men, while the Sisters of Charity, whom Miles had invited to Nashville, ran an academy for young women. Fathers Hoste and Alemany also conducted in Nashville a Sunday school for "colored people of every age, where reading, writing, singing and catechism are taught." This last school was listed prominently in the Catholic Almanac, which seems to indicate that it held some significance to the diocese.<sup>86</sup>

### **Weathering War and Disease: the Whelan and Feehan Administrations**

The population of Tennessee increased steadily through the decades, and ethnic demographics changed. By 1860, the Catholic Almanac no longer listed a priest designated for

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<sup>85</sup> *The Metropolitan Catholic Almanac and Laity's Directory* (Baltimore: F. Lucas, 1838), 133, <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/005921937>; Lewis Hoste, *Baptismal and Matrimonial Records Clarksville, Gallatin and Cedar Hill, 1844-1873*, 26, Parish Records, ADN.

<sup>86</sup> Christopher P. Murray, "The Catholic Church Among the Negroes in Middle Tennessee 1837-1880" (master's dissertation, St. Mary's University, Baltimore, 1927), 4-6; *The Metropolitan Catholic Almanac and Laity's Directory for the Year of our Lord 1844* (Baltimore: Fielding Lucas, Jr., 1844), 145, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=nyp.33433068299233;view=1up;seq=155>.

spiritual care of Catholics of French and African descent, but in Nashville and in Memphis, priests had been designated to attend to German Catholics. In the absence of a designated priest to serve them, some pockets of black Catholics continued to practice the faith. On the brink of the Civil War, the diocese boasted twelve thousand Catholics, roughly one percent of the total population of the state. Slaves constituted roughly twenty five percent of the state population. It seems impossible to determine what percentage of these slaves were Catholics. Probably, in 1860, some slaves and free black persons were among those served by the thirteen priests under Miles's direction at the fifty churches, chapels, and mission stations throughout the state. It seems likely that these people worshipped in mixed congregations whenever a priest visited their area to say Mass.<sup>87</sup>

As the existence of a Sunday school for black people indicates, Bishop Miles made a point of educating and evangelizing African Americans and ministering to those, slave and free, who were already Catholic. In 1859 James Whelan, a fellow Dominican, was ordained as Miles's coadjutor—a bishop appointed to assist an aging or infirm bishop and usually succeed him. No evidence indicates any challenge by Nashville's priests or bishop to slavery itself, in fact, it appears that the at the time of the outbreak of the war, the diocese (or Whelan) owned four slaves. Nashville's bishop, it seems, like so many other Catholics, somehow reconciled in his conscience his concern for the conversion and literacy of African Americans with their

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<sup>87</sup> *Metropolitan Catholic Almanac and Laity's Directory for the United States* (Baltimore: John Murphy and Co., 1860), 200-01; Lewis Hoste, *Baptismal and Matrimonial Records*, 26; Thomas J. Plunkett to Slattery, December 23, 1901, 19-N-23, JOS; Slattery to Plunkett, January 9, 1902, 19-N-2, JOS; Secretary of the Interior, *Statistics of the United States in 1860; Compiled from the Original Returns and being the Final Exhibit of the Eighth Census* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1866), <https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/decennial/1860/population/1860a-33.pdf?#>.

ownership as if they were chattel goods. Miles died in early 1860 and Bishop Whelan succeeded. Then came war.<sup>88</sup>

Union troops occupied Nashville beginning in February 1862. Bishop Whelan fell under suspicion by Confederates of passing intelligence to the Union forces, and under strain from the chaos afflicting his diocese, resigned in 1863 and removed to the North. In 1865, St. Louis priest Patrick Feehan agreed to accept the vacant see, inheriting a diocese in disorder. The zealous new bishop, who would become archbishop of Chicago in 1880, undertook to rebuild and reorganize Catholic institutions in Tennessee. In 1866, he attended the Second Plenary Council of Baltimore, but like most of his confreres, seems to have done little in response to that Council's urging for efforts to bring freedpeople to the Catholic faith in Southern dioceses like his own.<sup>89</sup>

Many African Americans left the Church in the years after emancipation while very few freedpeople converted to Catholicism. Catholic clergy blamed this leakage on the toll that war and disease took on the lives and resources of Tennessee Catholics, omitting to acknowledge violence against African Americans as a possible factor in alienating black Tennesseans from the Church. In Memphis in May 1866, three days of racially motivated violence raged. Many of those responsible for the murder of more than forty black people were Irish and, presumably, Catholic. The brutal violence of Irish Catholics towards African Americans in the Memphis race riot could hardly have encouraged black Tennesseans to remain in or to convert to the Catholic faith. Another factor that white clergy did not acknowledge, or perhaps even perceive, was the less palpable but more continual discrimination on the part of white lay people and priests, some of whom had been slaveholders and who rarely, if ever, welcomed black people on equal terms.

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<sup>88</sup> *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Tennessee, Catholic Church in," (Detroit: Thomson/Gale, 2003), 822.

<sup>89</sup> Cornelius J. Kirkfleet, *The Life of Patrick Augustine Feehan* (Chicago: Matre & Company, 1922), 34-43.

Many African Americans sought churches with black leadership and openness to full participation by black members. Nevertheless, in Tennessee, South Carolina, and Alabama, later missionaries would find “little knots of Negro Catholics” who had “held firm under the greatest discouragements.” While these black Catholics may have been few in number, their existence indicates a continuity in black Catholicism that is easily overlooked when treating of white Catholic efforts to win black converts.<sup>90</sup>

Tennesseans, already ravaged by war, soon faced disease, and Catholics were particularly hard hit. When first cholera and then yellow fever struck Nashville and Memphis in the late 1860s and 1870s, Bishop Feehan allowed some priests and religious women and men serving in the diocese to minister to the afflicted. In 1872, twenty-three priests, including religious and diocesan priests, were serving in the entire diocese. In Memphis, from 1873-1879, yellow fever claimed the lives of twenty priests who ministered to the stricken. Eight of these were Feehan’s own diocesan clergy; the others included Dominican and Franciscan priests serving in the diocese. The Catholic population of Memphis died in disproportionately higher numbers than non-Catholics. By 1880, at the end of Feehan’s tenure, twenty-seven priests were active in the diocese. Feehan had succeeded in filling the places of the priests who died, but the losses had certainly hobbled the diocese’s potential dynamism, as had the deaths of dozens of women religious, many of them teachers, who died while serving as nurses during the epidemics. These

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<sup>90</sup> David W. Southern, *John Lafarge and the Limits of Catholic Interracialism, 1911—1963* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1996), 67; Joseph Rademacher, “A Series of Questions to be Answered by Applicants for Aid from the Commission for the Catholic Mission Among the Colored People and the Indians,” August 18, 1891, 157-DY-6, JOS; Stephen V. Ash, *A Massacre in Memphis: the Race Riot That Shook the Nation One Year after the Civil War* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2013), 3-8; Plunkett to Slattery, December 23, 1901, 19-N-23, JOS; Slattery to Plunkett, January 9, 1902, 19-N-2, JOS.

losses forced communities of religious women to reconfigure their placement in schools, perhaps prompting the closing of schools for the poor.<sup>91</sup>

Despite the paucity of funds and the crisis of personnel, a few efforts to convert African Americans did persist during the Feehan era. Into the early 1870s, the Nashville Cathedral's black Sunday school for Catholics and prospective Catholics continued to meet. The school, once taught by priests, passed first to a lay woman and then to a Sister of Mercy, eventually petering out due to low attendance. In East Nashville, Father Joseph Jarboe taught freedpeople and brought some of them into the Catholic Church. The Sisters and priests who made these efforts met with criticism. Mother Berchmans, a Sister of Mercy, recalled, "People became enflamed and declared that the Negro was not fit to be Christian. This brought forth a sermon from the Reverend James Kean on the fact that the Negro's soul entitled him to all the respect of a human being and a Christian." According to Mother Berchmans, "Father Jarboe and Father Kean are the only two priests remembered [in Nashville] as actively interested in the colored people." In the Feehan years, some priests and Sisters made efforts to reach out to African Americans, but most, with their people, were more concerned about the building or rebuilding of their parishes and institutions in the aftermath of war and disease.<sup>92</sup>

### **The Rademacher Administration**

In 1880, Bishop Feehan was appointed to Chicago, and in 1883, Joseph Rademacher was appointed to fill the vacant see of Nashville, serving the diocese until 1893. Bishop

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<sup>91</sup> *Sadlier's Catholic Directory, Almanac, and Ordo for the Year of Our Lord 1872* (New York: D. & J. Sadlier & Company, 1872), 233, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=wu.89064466774;view=1up;seq=15>; John Vidmar, *Fr. Fenwick's "Little American Province:" 200 Years of the Dominican Friars in the United States* (Dominican Province of St. Joseph, 2005), 48-53; *Sadlier's Catholic Directory, Almanac, and Ordo for the Year of Our Lord 1880* (New York: D. & J. Sadlier & Company, 1880), 316; Paschala Noonan, *Signadou: History of the Kentucky Dominicans* (Manhasset: Brookville Books, 1997), 103-04.

<sup>92</sup> Murray, "Catholic Church Among the Negroes," 14, Appendix B.

Rademacher's appointment raised some priests' hopes that more could be done to reach African Americans than had been done in the past. Monsignor William Walsh wrote from St. Brigid's Parish in Memphis to Bishop Herbert Vaughan, the superior of the English Mill Hill Fathers, soon after Rademacher's appointment. His appeal to Vaughan gives a window into the situation of the diocese vis-à-vis African Americans at Rademacher's installation. Walsh wrote to the head of the missionary group,

Could you—and how soon—send at least one priest here to labor for the conversion of the colored population—about 20,000 in number? . . . They have been almost entirely neglected. I feel that our new Bishop would applaud, and assist, any reasonable and properly directed [effort] tending to the conversion and education of our colored race here. I have thought much about this matter during the last ten years. Having, however, my hands full, in the management of my own congregation, I could not well or prudently undertake to give attention to the necessities of the negroes. I have, from time to time, baptized some, and find all most kindly disposed.<sup>93</sup>

Walsh had not entirely neglected care of African American souls. His heroic efforts during the yellow fever outbreaks in Memphis included the establishment and administration of Camp Mathew, a camp where hundreds of black and white Memphians moved to escape the unsanitary conditions of the city. Walsh also raised thousands of dollars to aid sufferers and their families. His generosity extended to both black and white, Protestant and Catholic. Like Walsh, who baptized some African Americans, other priests in the diocese administered the sacraments to black Catholics when they encountered them, recording the baptisms, marriages, and deaths in the parish records. Still, Walsh was typical in that he saw outreach to African Americans as a separate work—different from caring for his own congregation. As his letter to Vaughan

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<sup>93</sup> William Walsh to Herbert Vaughan, October 24, 1883, 28-MH-21, JOS.

indicates, Walsh believed that more intentional, focused efforts on behalf of African Americans were needed.<sup>94</sup>

Bishop Rademacher's openness to efforts on behalf of African Americans of which Walsh expressed hope may have increased with his attendance at the 1884 Third Plenary Council of Baltimore. The Third Plenary Council called for increased outreach to African Americans and made some money available through the establishment of the Commission for the Catholic Missions among the Colored People and the Indians, funded by an annual collection in every parish in the U.S. on the First Sunday of Lent. By 1888, Rademacher had begun regularly to apply for this funding for schools his priests and religious established for black children in Memphis and in Dayton and to ask for more to start a school in Nashville.<sup>95</sup>

Rademacher wrote to Father E.R. Dyer of the Commission for the Catholic Missions among the Colored People and the Indians, explaining his vision, his diocese's need, and the potential obstacles. Rademacher's pleas for funding reveal an attitude towards African Americans that so often accompanied and almost certainly undermined evangelization efforts. He wrote in 1890 of potential African American converts, "their natural fickleness of character and the anti-Catholic atmosphere in which they generally have to live bid us be slow in admitting them to the Church—and then only after a thorough course of instruction and a satisfactory test

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<sup>94</sup> P.J. Gleeson to E.R. Dyer, May 4, 1889, on reverse of "A Series of Questions to be Answered by Applicants for Aid from the Commission for the Catholic Mission Among the Colored People and the Indians," 157-DY-2, JOS; Denis Alphonsus Quinn, *Heroes and Heroines of Memphis: Or Reminiscences of the Yellow Fever Epidemics that Afflicted the City of Memphis During the Autumn Months of 1873, 1878 and 1879* (Memphis: E.L. Freeman & son, 1887), 30-32.

<sup>95</sup> Rademacher, "A Series of Questions to be Answered by Applicants for Aid from the Commission for the Catholic Mission Among the Colored People and the Indians," June 26, 1888, 157-DY-1, JOS.

of their dispositions.”<sup>96</sup> He explained to Dyer the diocesan situation more thoroughly the following year,

The very small number of Colored Catholics in the diocese of Nashville can be easily accounted for if we bear in mind that before the civil war there were very few Catholics in the whole State of Tennessee. These, as a rule, owned no slaves and thus were not in a condition to exert any influence whatever on the colored race. A few months after the close of the war the Rt. Rev. Bishop Feehan was appointed and he found, on entering his administration that he must first turn his attention to the healing of the war wounds, which that terrible struggle had inflicted especially upon the state of Tennessee. He had to reorganize . . . found schools, provide for the Orphans. Then another scourge struck . . . the “Yellow Fever” of 1867, 1873, 1878, and 1879. This terrible plague carried off hundreds of the people, many religious, and over twenty priests, secular and regular fell victims of their zeal and charity. We feel this loss even to the present day. In endeavoring to repair them, we have not been able to make any special efforts for the conversion of the colored people. In the meantime, they have drifted away from us into different Protestant sects, which have succeeded only too well in filling their minds with prejudices against the Catholic Church. Very many are members of secret societies which they cannot leave without losing caste. If to these formidable obstacles we add the natural fickleness of the negro character, the ease with which they change their habitations, at least in the cities, it is evident that the work of conversion will necessarily be very slow. May God hasten it, by the power of His Grace.<sup>97</sup>

Bishop Rademacher acknowledged the Church’s failure to reach out to black Catholics and win over black non-Catholics. Though he excused it based on other priorities and in part blamed black people themselves, he still wanted to reverse the trend away from the Catholic Church. He intended, as soon as money and personnel would allow, to open a school and a church for black Catholics in Memphis and in Nashville. Rademacher wished to designate certain white priests exclusively for this work, targeting urban areas with significant black populations.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Rademacher, “A Series of Questions to be Answered by Applicants for Aid from the Commission for the Catholic Mission Among the Colored People and the Indians,” August 30, 1890, 157-DY-5, JOS; Rademacher to Dyer, July 16, 1888, 97-DY-1, JOS.

<sup>97</sup> Rademacher, “A Series of Questions,” 1891.

<sup>98</sup> Rademacher, “A Series of Questions,” 1888, Rademacher, “A Series of Questions,” 1891; Rademacher to Dyer, July 16, 1888, 97-DY-1, JOS; Rademacher to Slattery, September 30, 1892, 9-H-2, JOS.

In Memphis, the Dominicans launched St. Peter's Colored School, a Catholic grade school for black children, in the late 1880s. The school remained operative, with fluctuating enrollment, into the mid-1890s. Correspondence between diocesan officials and the Commission for the Catholic Missions among the Colored People and the Indians described a hopeful beginning threatened by upheaval caused by racially motivated violence in Memphis and the exodus of several of the school's families to Oklahoma in the early 1890s.<sup>99</sup> In 1888, Rademacher wrote, regarding the evangelization of black Tennesseans, "Our only hope is in the education of the youth. The beginning in Memphis has been very promising." He expected the Memphis school and a similar proposed school in Nashville each to be a "nucleus around which colored congregations will gradually grow up and be firmly established."<sup>100</sup> This would not be easily accomplished.

Oddly enough, the diocese's other fleeting success in operating a school for black children in the Rademacher years was achieved during a boom in the small East Tennessee mining town of Dayton. In the early 1890s, on land from the Dayton Coal and Iron Company, Father John Larkin of St. Genevieve's Catholic Church opened two schools, one for black children alongside one for white children, probably at the instigation of George Jamme, a Catholic and the General Manager for the company, which had hundreds of men, black and white, employed in the mines and furnaces. Larkin himself taught the black pupils until Sisters could be secured for the work. Rademacher encouraged Larkin but provided no financial

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<sup>99</sup> Rademacher, "A Series of Questions," 1891; Rademacher, "A Series of Questions to be Answered by Applicants for Aid from the Commission for the Catholic Mission Among the Colored People and the Indians," September 2, 1892, 157-DY-3, JOS; Rademacher, "A Series of Questions," 1888; Patricia A. Schechter, *Ida B. Wells-Barnett and American Reform, 1880-1930* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 75-78.

<sup>100</sup> Rademacher, "A Series of Questions," 1888.

assistance. He recommended that Larkin appeal to a Pennsylvania philanthropist, Mother Mary Katharine Drexel, who responded with a donation for school furniture.<sup>101</sup>

In 1893 when Rademacher was transferred to Fort Wayne, Indiana, the Diocese of Nashville, including all of Tennessee, contained twenty-two parochial schools and four academies, educating just under three thousand children. The city of Nashville contained five Catholic parochial schools, two girls' academies, and an orphanage, all for white children. Nearly all these schools were in the care of religious Sisters. The Memphis and Dayton schools for black children show the reality Rademacher faced. While open to and even hopeful of converting African Americans, he depended on outside money and the local efforts of priests and Sisters for any real developments. These beginnings constituted part of the diocese that Bishop Byrne would inherit, and though they were not in the city of Nashville, they passed to Byrne and became the subject of his first decisions regarding black institutions in his diocese. As such, they certainly influenced Byrne's priorities and the way future work would unfold in Nashville.<sup>102</sup>

### **The City of Nashville**

Arriving in Nashville in 1894, Byrne came to a city in the throes of a three-year economic depression sparked by the Panic of 1893. In the longer view, he came to a place marked by decades of dynamic urban change spurred by long-term commercial and industrial growth. Nashville was well-situated, with commercial access via both the navigable Cumberland River and increasingly extensive railroad transportation. In the decades before the 1893 panic,

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<sup>101</sup> Sister Agnes Geraldine McGann, archivist, Nazareth Archival Center, Nazareth, Kentucky to Tony Spence, Feb 21, 1983, Holy Family Church and School History Folder, ADN; Rademacher to John Larkin, November 23, 1892, Folder H10B 47 f 1, SBS; Rademacher to Larkin, February 19, 1893, Folder H10B 47 f 1, SBS.

<sup>102</sup> *Hoffman's Catholic Directory Almanac and Clergy List for the Year of Our Lord 1893* (Milwaukee: M. H. Wiltzius Co., 1893), 389-91, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=umn.31951p00682980r;view=1up;seq=7> (accessed February 19, 2019); Byrne to Louis Deppen, August 4, 1898, Byrne Papers, ADN; Byrne to Mother Mary Katharine Drexel, June 2, 1904, Folder H 10b Qb b21, SBS.

businessmen turned the profits from commerce and emerging industry into capital investments for further ventures. The population of the city expanded dramatically in the 1870s and 1880s, and while growth slowed in the 1890s, it did continue, accelerating as the city pulled out of financial crisis in the late 1890s. Nashville became a center for manufacturing, banking, insurance companies, religious publishing, and education, in addition to commerce. Businessmen took interest in the growth and government of the city. They wanted a businesslike government that would favor Nashville's continued commercial and industrial flourishing.<sup>103</sup>

The Panic of 1893 slowed Nashville's expansion, both in business and in population growth. Bank runs strained the financial institutions of the city, but while some collapsed and all had to restrict or delay payments, many were able to recover. The strongest of Nashville's banks, and the one most able to weather the panic, was the Fourth National Bank, under the leadership of Samuel J. Keith. Keith's bank was "the most powerful in the city and one of the leading banks in the South, with deposits totaling over two million dollars by 1892."<sup>104</sup> The city had three other national banks and several smaller state-chartered banks and savings companies. Emerging from the crisis, Nashville remained a strong financial center, and the Fourth National continued as the city's largest bank.<sup>105</sup>

Many rural people, black and white, migrated to the city during these decades, leaving behind those ordinary networks of security and interdependence built on family and religious bonds. These bonds could not easily be replaced in an urban setting where wage labor was the norm for the poor. Gone too, for many was the paternalistic protection and support from that

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<sup>103</sup> Don Doyle, *Nashville in the New South: 1880-1930* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1985), 19-20, 82.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 52-53.

class of white people who had been slave owners and who still maintained a protective stance towards those people on whose labor they depended. Needing some form of security, city dwellers turned to fraternal organizations such as secret societies and eventually to the growing insurance companies. Secret societies became an especially important support for African Americans in the urban setting.<sup>106</sup>

The African American population of Nashville increased significantly in the decade following the Civil War, and black people constituted over one third of Nashville's population by 1870. Many white Nashvillians felt threatened by the growing black population. Not only did their presence increase competition for jobs, but it also could increase black voters' political clout. Especially as the suburban trend began, black residents became more concentrated in neighborhoods, increasing their influence in ward politics. Black men served on the city council, and black city councilman James C. Napier successfully advocated a black fire company, other city positions for African Americans, and improvements for black schools. Some white Nashvillians also saw black neighborhoods as a public health threat, blaming the diseases due to poverty and poor sanitation on racial factors.<sup>107</sup>

Several schools for black students bolstered Nashville's reputation as the "Athens of the South." Among these were Fisk University, Roger Williams University, and Meharry Medical College. The state mandated segregated schools beginning in 1866. Using what influence the black vote could muster, Napier won the battle to get black teachers for the black schools in Nashville, though these teachers did not receive the same pay as their white counterparts. The

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<sup>106</sup> Doyle, *Nashville*, 55; Gabriel Briggs, *The New Negro in the Old South* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2015), 46; Allison Dorsey, *To Build Our Lives Together: Community Formation in Black Atlanta, 1875-1906* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004), 101-102.

<sup>107</sup> Briggs, *The New Negro*, 36; Doyle, *Nashville*, 107-15, 138-42.

state funding for education went disproportionately to the support of white schools.<sup>108</sup> Tennessee began opening public high schools for white students soon after the Civil War ended, and by the 1880s, Nashville had three public high schools for white students, but none for black students. Napier objected to the fact that black students seeking a high school education had no such school provided at public expense as white students did. His suggestion that the city pay for the secondary education of black youths at one of the city's private schools received no support. Eventually, the Nashville Board of Education provided for a two-year secondary course for black students.<sup>109</sup>

Finally, in 1898, a four-year high school for black students opened. The discrepancy in government funding per pupil was striking—for a black high school student, the school fund spent \$10.45 per year, for a white high school student, \$32.16 per year. Salaries for teachers and administrators and the state of school facilities similarly reflected the reluctance of white Southerners to make the separate education of black students equal.<sup>110</sup> In Nashville, where in 1901 black people constituted more than 37 percent of the population, they made up fewer than 28 percent of the public-school students. Though school access for African Americans was far greater in Nashville than in the rural parts of Tennessee or throughout many other Southern states, very few black students, even in Nashville, were able to pursue a secondary education.<sup>111</sup>

Nashville's African Americans developed a substantial professional sector, generally serving other African Americans as lawyers, physicians, dentists, educators, and even bankers.

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<sup>108</sup> Briggs, *The New Negro*, 36-38; Doyle, *Nashville*, 107-15, 138-39; Sonya Ramsey, *Reading Writing, and Segregation: A Century of Black Women Teachers in Nashville* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 2008), 5-6.

<sup>109</sup> Ramsey, *Reading Writing, and Segregation*, 7-9; Doyle, *Nashville*, 139.

<sup>110</sup> Ramsey, *Reading Writing, and Segregation*, 7-9; Doyle, *Nashville*, 139.

<sup>111</sup> Ramsey, *Reading Writing, and Segregation*, 9, 26.

Given its combination of educational institutions and opportunities for professional and skilled artisanal work for African Americans, Nashville developed as a city where many black people acquired education, means, and professional standing, though the vast majority remained laborers. The National Baptist Publishing Board established headquarters in Nashville in 1898 under the leadership of Richard H. Boyd, who would later lead in the establishment of Nashville's black newspaper, the *Nashville Globe*. African Americans had a significant presence in some service fields, such as barbershops and restaurants. Black leaders opened the One Cent Savings and Loan in 1904. Nashville's several dozen black churches were served by black ministers, some with advanced degrees, others with little education or training.<sup>112</sup>

A spate of electoral changes in the late 1880s seriously undermined the political power of black Nashvillians. Poll taxes and ballots requiring literacy compromised the black vote, and a new charter that made election of council positions general rather than by ward combined not only to restrict black voting, but also to reduce radically the chances that a black man would be elected. These strategies resulted in the breaking not only of black political power in city politics, but of that of their usual ally, the Republicans. The reduction of black voting turned many Nashville Republicans "Lily-white," or unwilling to include black men, as they lost their political incentive for such inclusion. While political processes were being altered to exclude black men from participation, a trend to suburbanization was leaving behind sharper lines of segregation in physical spaces as well.<sup>113</sup>

Before the advent of the streetcar, Nashville's residential, commercial, and industrial spaces tended to overlap, as did the city's black and white residences, and the areas occupied by

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<sup>112</sup> Briggs, *The New Negro*, 34-54.

<sup>113</sup> Briggs, *The New Negro*, 36; Doyle, *Nashville*, 107-15, 138-42.

the wealthy and the indigent. Businessmen and workers alike walked to their places of employment. The mule-drawn streetcar prompted the development of the city's first suburbs, but at first, few could afford the price of commuting. The adoption of the electric streetcar by Nashville companies in the 1890s, and their consolidation in 1902 drove the price of commuting down, and the relative ease and affordability of the electric streetcar led to the rapid migration of many middle-class and wealthy Nashvillians to newly developed suburban residential neighborhoods just after the turn of the century.<sup>114</sup>

Nashville historian Don Doyle describes the process that emptied downtown Nashville of all but businesses and its poorest residents as driven by a combination of push and pull factors. The noise and stench of manufacturing and meat processing were push factors, as was the downtown resident's proximity to growing slums, where poverty, frequent flooding, and poor sanitation fostered disease, which white Nashvillians often associated with black people. Pulling potential migrants was the promise of more healthful surroundings, peace, quiet, and an opportunity for social climbing. This exodus transformed the city's core into a business district surrounded by very poor, often black, neighborhoods, themselves bounded by the factories, mills, and transportation facilities for which the slum-dwellers served as a labor supply. The earliest suburbs to develop, those closest to the old city, also declined as the railroads and industries and slums expanded.<sup>115</sup>

The city of Nashville had a substantial population of Catholics by 1890. Most of these six thousand Catholics were Irish and German immigrants who had arrived mid-century, and their descendants, who, especially the Irish, generally married within the ethnic group. Irish Catholics

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<sup>114</sup> Doyle, *Nashville*, 87-90.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 63-92.

settled in Edgefield at St. John's and later St. Columba's Parish. In Nashville proper, St. Joseph's, St. Patrick's, and St. Mary's Parishes were heavily Irish. The Germans, a more religiously diverse ethnic group than the almost exclusively Catholic Irish, were not so poor as the Irish. Catholic Germans became concentrated in Germantown with Assumption Parish as their spiritual center. While Germantown kept its ethnic concentration until the first World War, many of the Irish joined the migration to the suburbs.<sup>116</sup>

In the decades after 1890, the Catholic population in Nashville decreased while the overall population of the city increased. In 1890, six thousand Catholics made up roughly twenty percent of the Judeo-Christian population of Nashville. By 1906, the actual Catholic population had shrunken slightly, while the overall population had risen; Catholics made up thirteen percent of those persons who claimed the Jewish or Christian faith. By 1916, the total Catholic population constituted less than ten percent of the more than sixty thousand Christians and Jews in Nashville. Whereas in 1880 eleven percent of the city's economic leaders were Catholics, by 1911 that percentage dropped to four. From 1880 to 1906, the city's Baptist population increased from just over twenty percent of the total Judeo-Christian population to twenty-six percent, including nearly 6,500 black Baptists. By 1916, Baptists made up thirty-three percent of the city's Christians and Jews. Over these same years, the percentage of Methodists in the population dropped slightly, but throughout these decades, Baptists and Methodists together constituted nearly fifty percent of Christians in Nashville. Nashville became a center for religious publishing of various Christian denominations, both black and white.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Doyle, *Nashville*, 101-04, Thomas Stritch, *The Catholic Church in Tennessee: The Sesquicentennial Story* (Nashville: The Catholic Center, 1987), 277-79.

<sup>117</sup> Doyle, *Nashville*, 123, 65, 50; Briggs, *The New Negro*, 41.

Although anti-Catholic and anti-foreign sentiment was strong in many quarters, Catholics were able to gain a foothold in city politics because, like black people, they formed a considerable voting bloc in some city wards. Politicians in these wards needed Catholic votes and were willing to reward votes with appointments to offices in various departments. In the mid-1890s, Irish Catholics held such coveted positions as police and fire chief. The American Protective Association (A.P.A.), a secret organization committed to keeping Catholics out of government, waxed strong in Nashville in the mid-1890s. In 1895, the A.P.A. had eight lodges in Nashville. The A.P.A. was not itself a party but in Nashville constituted a reforming faction within the larger Democratic party, calling for prohibition of alcohol and immigration restrictions. Principally, though, the A.P.A. was an anti-Catholic body. The A.P.A. tried to attract black votes by promising them offices, presumably those vacated by ousted Catholics. Regular Democrats supported one ticket and the A.P.A. Democrats another. The A.P.A.-supported “good government” ticket swept the 1895 city election, winning the mayoralty and the council seats. Despite this victory, the A.P.A. politicians never accomplished their intended reforms, and they were in large part defeated by the regular Democrats in the 1897 city election. Two A.P.A. planks that would survive the organization’s defeat and keep a strong hold in Nashville were anti-Catholic animus and support for prohibition.<sup>118</sup>

The city of Nashville hosted Tennessee’s centennial with a grand exposition in 1897. The celebration came a year after the actual anniversary, as the city was just beginning to recover from the depression following the Panic of 1893. The Nashville Centennial Exposition showed Nashville to be a city whose growth was the keen concern of its business leaders. The city was a

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<sup>118</sup> William Waller, *Nashville in the 1890s* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1970), 87-94; Doyle, *Nashville*, 103.

center for commercial and industrial activity. Many city leaders brought religious values to government, hoping to bring about moral reform, particularly temperance. For black people, business and government leaders emphasized the importance of collaboration, of mutual benefit from industrial growth, and industrial education as a means to uplift their race. The Negro Building at the Exposition featured displays of black industrial skills which “promised a prosperous if subservient role for blacks in the New South.”<sup>119</sup> Many business and political leaders in Nashville, keen for the city’s continued growth, hoped to build that growth on a subordinate class of workers, whom they intended to provide with just enough education to keep them useful in an industrial economy, but not enough to allow them to be economic competitors or social equals.<sup>120</sup>

The two major non-sectarian Nashville newspapers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century were the Republican *Nashville Banner* and the Democratic *Nashville American*. Both were well-established dailies, the *Banner* as an evening paper, the *American* as a morning paper. Beginning in 1906, the black-owned *Nashville Globe* was published weekly in the city. Various Christian denominations also published papers in Nashville.

### **Thomas Sebastian Byrne, Fifth Catholic Bishop of Nashville: Background**

Thomas Sebastian Byrne received ordination as the fifth Bishop of Nashville on July 25, 1894. Byrne’s family had immigrated from Ireland and settled in Hamilton, Ohio, where he was born in 1841. After his father’s death in Byrne’s infancy, the family’s circumstances were straitened. Too poor to remain in school, Byrne took work as a machinist at age eleven. He developed the skills of an artisan, especially in building. At the same time, he developed a fierce

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<sup>119</sup> Doyle, *Nashville*, 151 (caption).

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 149-54.

appreciation for education. When Byrne had saved enough to pay for his schooling, Archbishop John Purcell accepted him as a seminarian for the Archdiocese of Cincinnati. At eighteen Byrne started in a preparatory seminary in Kentucky, then moved on to Mt. St. Mary's of the West in Cincinnati during the Civil War years. In 1865, Purcell sent him to finish his studies at the new American College in Rome.<sup>121</sup>

Byrne earned such a reputation as a scholar that, on his early return from Rome in 1868 due to illness, his archbishop made him a professor at Mt. St. Mary's of the West even before ordination. After his 1869 ordination, Byrne taught at the seminary and worked on a German translation project. For nearly a decade he combined academic work with service as a chaplain to the Sisters of Charity in Cincinnati. Due to a diocesan financial crisis, Archbishop Purcell closed the seminary in 1879, and Byrne moved to a residence at the convent of the Sisters of Charity.<sup>122</sup>

In 1884 Archbishop William Henry Elder, who had succeeded Purcell in Cincinnati, enlisted Byrne as his theologian for the Third Plenary Council of Baltimore. There Byrne was party to the discussions and debates among the bishops on the various issues facing the Catholic Church in the U.S., including the question of outreach to African Americans and, more prominently, the promotion of Catholic education, from parochial school through graduate theological study.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Michael Kelly and James Kirwin, *History of Mount St. Mary's of the West, Cincinnati, Ohio* (Cincinnati: Keating, 1894), 405-06.

<sup>122</sup> "Bishop Byrne: The Learned Rector of Mt. St. Mary's Called to Nashville's See," *Columbian*, April 21, 1894, Thomas Sebastian Byrne Album, FP; "Biographical Sketch of Rt. Rev. Thos. Sebastian Byrne," *Facts*, Chattanooga, August 18, 1894, clipping in FP; Kelly and Kirwin, *History of Mount St. Mary's*, 405-06.

<sup>123</sup> *Memorial Volume: A History of the Third Plenary Council* (Baltimore: Baltimore Publishing Company, 1885), 75.

The bishops discussed the merits of a plan to operate a principal seminary in the United States—what would become the Catholic University of America—to educate properly the diocesan clergy of the United States, without having to send them to Europe. The plan met opposition from some ecclesiastics who claimed Catholic higher education as the exclusive niche of religious orders. During the proceedings, Byrne defended the plan for the new university in a speech that he himself later admitted was as vitriolic as it was effective in carrying his point. Byrne credited his intervention with keeping the Catholic University plan afloat. While Byrne made his substantive contribution to the Council on the matter of the university, by his presence he also gained insight into the U.S. bishops' conflicted position vis-à-vis their obligation to serve and seek the conversion of Americans of African descent.<sup>124</sup>

Byrne served as pastor of Cincinnati's cathedral parish from 1886 until the seminary reopened in 1887. Amidst his other duties, Byrne oversaw the initial building and the rebuilding after fire of the Motherhouse of the Sisters of Charity and the construction of the Springer Institute—the Catholic Cathedral School for Cincinnati. While his scholarly reputation likely won him the appointment as rector of the reopened Mt. St. Mary's of the West in 1887, Byrne there proved himself not only a scholar but an able administrator and a forward-thinking builder. Before his 1894 appointment to the see of Nashville, Byrne oversaw the building of a new seminary building with all the modern amenities. His tenure as first rector of the newly reopened Mt. St. Mary's of the West cemented its existence as an enduring institution.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> Byrne to Sister Mary Agnes McCann, December 3, 1917 quoted in John Tracy Ellis, *The Formative Year of the Catholic University of America* (Washington D.C.: American Catholic Historical Association, 1946), 103-07; Byrne to Thomas Shahan, August 4, 1918, Byrne Papers, ADN.

<sup>125</sup> "Bishop Byrne: The Learned Rector of Mt. St. Mary's Called to Nashville's See," *Columbian* April 21, 1894, FP; "Biographical Sketch of Rt. Rev. Thos. Sebastian Byrne," *Facts*, Chattanooga, August 18, 1894, clipping in FP.

By 1890, Byrne had emerged among American Catholic clerics as a noteworthy figure. His academic work encompassed several volumes of translation from German, French, and Italian sources, including a Church History text, which, by its popularity, familiarized American Catholic clerics with Byrne's name. His name began to appear on short lists of potential bishops, and in 1891, he was first on the list of candidates submitted to Rome for the open see of Cleveland. The fully-expected appointment went to someone else. Byrne's renown meanwhile increased with his presentation of a paper at the Parliament of Religions held during the 1893 Chicago World's Fair. In 1894, when Bishop Joseph Rademacher was moved from Nashville to Fort Wayne, Byrne received an episcopal appointment, succeeding Rademacher in Nashville.<sup>126</sup>

With the congratulations from other prelates and clergy that deluged Byrne's office in the days following the announcement of his appointment came a forthright reminder that his flock would include both black and white members. In a congratulatory note, Father John Slattery of the Josephite Fathers wrote "I wish you many years of service in the South. May Our Lord enable you to do good work also for the Colored Brethren. Tennessee has its share of them; while in Nashville itself is one of the best Negro (Prot.) schools in the country." Byrne's response indicated his openness; he asked Slattery to provide guidance for approaching ministry to African Americans once Byrne got to know his new diocese and its people.<sup>127</sup>

### **Possible Influences on Byrne's Racial Attitudes**

Byrne's archbishop in his years as a seminarian and young priest, John Purcell of Cincinnati, was one of the only Catholic bishops to advocate immediate emancipation for slaves

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<sup>126</sup> "Bishop Byrne: The Learned Rector of Mt. St. Mary's Called to Nashville's See," *Columbian*, April 21, 1894, FP; Peter F. Collier to Byrne, November 13, 1891, P.F. Collier and Family Box, Files on Lay Persons Collection, ADN; Kate Collier to Byrne, December 26, 1891, P.F. Collier and Family Box, Files on Lay Persons Collection, ADN.

<sup>127</sup> Slattery to Byrne, April 29, 1894, Byrne Papers, ADN; Byrne to Slattery, June 13, 1894, 11-H-34 JOS.

even before the preliminary announcement of Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation. For various reasons, even in the North, most Catholics viewed abolitionists with suspicion; many prelates feared that immediate emancipation would bring about social upheaval. There is no knowing what impact his bishop's stance regarding emancipation had on the young Byrne, but Purcell's controversial position certainly put the question of African Americans and their status squarely on the seminarian's mind.<sup>128</sup>

Other churchmen likely influenced Byrne's attitudes towards people of African descent. Teaching at Cincinnati's seminary during Byrne's student years was Father Sylvester Rosecrans, who became auxiliary Bishop of Cincinnati, and later Bishop of Columbus. Rosecrans had studied in Rome and often reminded his students that he had been ordained side-by-side with an African man. The seminarians recognized that their professor deliberately put great value on this as evidence of the Church's universality. Rosecrans, like Purcell, saw emancipation as the most Catholic solution to the problem of slavery. When Byrne went himself to Rome as a student to the American College in December 1865, he, like his mentor, had the experience of studying with African seminarians. Byrne's three years in Rome further shaped his understanding and experience of the universal Church.<sup>129</sup>

Another influential figure in Byrne's life as a young priest on his return to the U.S. was fellow seminary professor Father Francis Joseph Pabisch, with whom Byrne collaborated for several years as the two men translated a Church History text from German to English. Pabisch

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<sup>128</sup> Carl C. Creason, "United Yet Divided: An Analysis of Bishops Martin John Spalding and John Baptist Purcell during the Civil War Era," *American Catholic Studies* 125, no. 2 (Spring 2013): 66.

<sup>129</sup> Kelly and Kirwin, *History of Mount St. Mary's*, 235; Byrne to Eugene Bunn, June 26, 1898, Byrne Papers, ADN; Stritch, *Catholic Church in Tennessee*, 239-40; "Biographical Sketch of Rt. Rev. Thos. Sebastian Byrne," *Facts*, Chattanooga, August 18, 1894, clipping in Byrne, T.S. Bish. Nash. 1894-1923 Folder, FP.

had surrendered his dream of serving in the African missions when he came to the U.S. for seminary work, but his zeal for Africans' conversion remained strong. Association with Pabisch may have motivated Byrne to assume his mentor's zeal and make real efforts on behalf of these more local "African missions."<sup>130</sup>

While Cincinnati's population did not boast a large percentage of African Americans, it had a strong presence of black Catholics. As long-time professor and rector of the seminary and a prominent cleric in Cincinnati, Byrne would necessarily have been aware of St. Ann's Parish, one of the earliest black Catholic parishes in the U.S. Opened in 1866, St. Ann's Church and its school became the center of black Catholic life in Cincinnati. In 1877, Archbishop Purcell ordered a diocesan-wide collection to be taken up for black Catholics in the Cincinnati Archdiocese. The Cincinnati collection likely became the model for the universal annual Lenten collection mandated by the 1884 Plenary Council. From 1886 to 1893, black Catholic editor Daniel Rudd headquartered his *American Catholic Tribune* in the city of Cincinnati. The newspaper enjoyed a circulation of 10,000 copies at its zenith in 1892. It is impossible to determine to what extent Rudd and Byrne were acquainted, but when reporting Byrne's appointment to Nashville, Rudd described him as "one of the most distinguished priests of the West."<sup>131</sup> Byrne's proximity to St. Ann's and to Daniel Rudd likely familiarized him with faithful black Catholics.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> Kelly and Kirwin, *History of Mount St. Mary's*, 343-45; J. Bruls, "From Missions to 'Young Churches,' in *The Church in a Secularised Society*, ed. Roger Aubert (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), 393-97.

<sup>131</sup> *American Catholic Tribune*, April 26, 1894, microfilm reel 2, Scholarly Resources, Inc., Vanderbilt Divinity Library.

<sup>132</sup> Joseph H. Lackner, "The Foundation of St. Ann's Parish, 1866-1870: The African-American Experience in Cincinnati," *U.S. Catholic Historian* 14, no. 2 (1996): 13-36, <http://www.jstor.org.proxy.lib.utk.edu:90/stable/25154551>; Joseph H. Lackner, "St. Ann's Colored Church and School, Cincinnati, the Indian and Negro Collection for the United States, and Reverend Francis Xavier Weninger, S.J.," *U.S. Catholic Historian* 7, no. 2/3 (1988): 151, <http://www.jstor.org.proxy.lib.utk.edu:90/stable/25153826>;

Byrne's experience as a seminarian and priest rendered him sympathetic to African Americans, and even relatively motivated to provide for their pastoral care. He knew that black people not only could, but did, make good Catholics and even good priests. His experience in Europe had provided him with experience of the universality of the Catholic Church and with prolonged and regular interaction with black men that was closer to social equality than any experience he was likely to have had in America. Not without paternalism but with deep moral conviction, as Bishop of Nashville, Byrne would stand out among bishops in the U.S. as being far more committed than most to the interests of black Catholics and black evangelization, although for Byrne this remained one priority among many.<sup>133</sup>

### **Byrne in Nashville**

Byrne came to Nashville with a variety of goals, some more attainable than others. The new bishop was a punctilious administrator with a strong sense of ecclesiastical position. He insisted on the proper formalities in diocesan affairs. Even as he stood on his dignity as bishop, however, Byrne embraced a supernatural vision for his diocese. He worked himself and drove his priests to work for the establishment of strong Catholic institutions for the sake of the salvation of souls. Byrne's episcopacy was marked by a combination of ecclesiastical skirmishing, vigorous administration focused on winning souls and building the kingdom of God, and practical, hands-on construction and problem solving.<sup>134</sup>

Though he valued courtesy and proper etiquette, the new bishop had a well-earned reputation for a direct frankness that sometimes bordered on harshness. John B. Morris, who

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Gary B. Agee, *A Cry for Justice: Daniel Rudd and His Life in Black Catholicism, Journalism, and Activism, 1854-1933* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2011), 167-69; *American Catholic Tribune*, April 26, 1894.

<sup>133</sup> Dyer to Angelo Falconio, September 16, 1904, 30-DY-27, JOS.

<sup>134</sup> Stritch, *Catholic Church in Tennessee*, 239-80.

served as Byrne's Vicar General before himself becoming Bishop of Little Rock, preached Byrne's funeral sermon. He captured Byrne's style as follows:

In any issue he hewed straight to the mark; in a statement of what he called the truth, he used no diplomacy and made no offering to expediency. During his long lifetime, doubtless many disputed issues arose and it was not his character to confine himself within the limits of common consent to gain applause...those who have done the greatest things for religion and for the church of Christ were men who gave little thought to what the flattering world might think. Bishop Byrne was of this type.<sup>135</sup>

### **Cathedral Conflict**

Among Byrne's first priorities on his arrival in Nashville was to obtain a more suitable cathedral. St. Mary's Cathedral was too small for the dignitaries who would throng the sanctuary for Byrne's episcopal ordination, so the ceremony was moved to the larger St. Joseph's Church. Byrne, who prized liturgical display, set his heart on making St. Joseph's his cathedral church. The pastor of St. Joseph's, Father P.J. Gleeson, was not ready to surrender his parish to Byrne. Gleeson fought the move locally and in Rome, and the controversy put a strain on the first few years of Byrne's episcopacy. It put Byrne at enmity, not only with Gleeson, but with Gleeson's close friend Monsignor William Walsh. Byrne tried to play it off with humor, writing to a friend in 1897 that Walsh had a case against him with the Apostolic Delegate, the pope's diplomatic representative in the U.S. He added: "I may be hung up any day; if I am, pray for the departed." Nevertheless, the opposition concerned him.<sup>136</sup>

In 1900, Byrne wrote to the Apostolic Delegate, "For five years I have borne up under what has been practically a living martyrdom." Byrne described the activity of these priests as a

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<sup>135</sup> "Last Sad Rites for Bishop Byrne," clipping in Newspaper Accounts of the Last Sad Rites of Rt. Rev. Thomas Byrne, D.D., Bishop of Nashville, Tenn. Folder, FP.

<sup>136</sup> Stritch, *Catholic Church in Tennessee*, 221-22; Byrne to Mother Baptista, June 7, 1897, Ursuline Convent Folder, Byrne Papers, ADN.

“conspiracy to ruin me.”<sup>137</sup> Rome ultimately decided the matter against the bishop, and Father Gleeson remained pastor. Devastated by what he interpreted as the loss of the approbation of his superiors, Byrne begged to be transferred to another diocese.<sup>138</sup> Failing that, Byrne tried to reclaim money the diocese had contributed to the building of St. Joseph’s Church under Bishop Rademacher’s administration. Byrne explained to the Apostolic Delegate that the diocese needed to recover the money donated if the bishop could not have the church building, for the diocese was “so heavily in debt, so badly in need of funds, and with little or no revenue.”<sup>139</sup> Byrne remained Bishop of Nashville for twenty-nine years; when circumstances allowed, he built a suitable cathedral, dedicating it in 1914. The new cathedral parish necessitated the redrawing of parish lines, and St. Joseph’s lost many parishioners to the Cathedral of the Incarnation Parish.<sup>140</sup>

### **Financial Challenges**

Byrne inherited a diocese that had long struggled to meet its financial obligations, and the widespread financial crisis of 1893 had not improved matters.<sup>141</sup> Byrne declined an 1896 appeal from the African missions to his diocese, writing, “We are . . . so loaded down with debt in the various Parishes that we can scarcely obtain from the people during these hard times sufficient to pay the current expenses and interest. They are already . . . harassed by appeals for money to pay

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<sup>137</sup> Byrne to Martinelli, March 12, 1900, Byrne Papers, ADN.

<sup>138</sup> Byrne to Martinelli, June 4, 1901, Byrne Papers, ADN.

<sup>139</sup> Byrne to Martinelli, November 15, 1901, Byrne Papers, ADN.

<sup>140</sup> Stritch, *Catholic Church in Tennessee*, 245-46.

<sup>141</sup> Rademacher to Byrne, February 8, 1889, Byrne Papers, ADN.

for what they themselves owe and for what is necessary for their spiritual needs.”<sup>142</sup> Meanwhile, Byrne himself began appealing to European groups to aid his own diocese.<sup>143</sup>

Byrne’s application to the Association for the Propagation of the Faith for financial support gives a window into the challenges the Nashville Diocese faced in 1898. He wrote:

I am sure that the Diocese was at no time more in need of funds than at the present. There are several missions within the limits of Tennessee that cannot be properly attended for the reason that sufficient provision cannot be made for the maintenance of Priests. There are Priests now attending missions who do not receive \$10.00 a month and are obliged to pay their railroad fare in some cases out of this. They receive their board from the charity of other Parishes and to this the Pastors sometimes strenuously object. I am sure there is no Diocese in the whole of the United States where more good could be done with some of the funds for the Propagation of the Faith than in this.<sup>144</sup>

It is easy to imagine the hardships of the priests who served the far-flung missions in rural Tennessee. Father Emmanuel Callahan became a legend in East Tennessee for the circuit of Catholic missions and stations that he reached on horseback, traversing the Smoky and Cumberland Mountains to offer the sacraments to Catholics in isolated hamlets. In other parts of Tennessee, railroad crossings often became Mass stations.<sup>145</sup>

Byrne would perennially cite lack of men and means as the chief obstacles to realizing his plans. The bishop had to concern himself not only with the cities, but also with rural missions, where, even could he recruit more priests, no one could support them. He wrote:

I confess at times I do not know what to do. On the one hand, I see souls perishing for the want of spiritual ministrations, and on the other I see two or three of my priests now almost destitute working on missions where the people are entirely too poor to provide for their support. In other Diocese [*sic*]. . . there is property which brings in a steady and considerable revenue, whereas in this Diocese there is nothing of the sort and we are

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<sup>142</sup> Byrne to Monsignor Joseph Pied, October 9, 1896, Byrne Papers, ADN.

<sup>143</sup> Byrne to Rev. F. Granjon, March 8, 1898, Byrne Papers, ADN.

<sup>144</sup> Byrne to Granjon, March 8, 1898.

<sup>145</sup> Stritch, *Catholic Church in Tennessee*, 248-49.

obliged to depend on the contributions of the faithful who are few in number and heavily taxed to support schools orphanages and other Religious Institutions. There is certainly a fine field in Tennessee for the conversion of souls and for the preservation of the faith in those who already belong to the Church and who are scattered all over the state in isolated places but not in sufficient numbers to form a congregation or support a priest.<sup>146</sup>

These isolated Catholics could very easily fall away from the Catholic faith merely for want of encouragement and opportunity for its practice. Also neglected were African Americans of whom Byrne elsewhere wrote:

There are in the State of Tennessee close upon half a million of Negros. For these no provision of any sort has been made by the Catholic Church,—first because very few of them are Catholic, not above one hundred in the whole Diocese, if that many, next, because of lack of money to undertake the work, the Catholics of this Diocese being few, not above (25,000) twenty-five thousand in the whole State, and for the most part poor. They have had quite a struggle to buil [*sic*] up their churches and provide schools for their children. These are the chief reasons why no interest has been heretofore taken in the conversion of the Negros, whose lot is certainly deplorable. From the time that I came to the Diocese the work has been constantly before me, but I have been unable to undertake it for various reasons.<sup>147</sup>

With African Americans of course, the obstacles were not only financial, but also racial. They had not been attended because white Catholics had enough to do with maintaining their own churches, and African Americans were viewed as a separate concern. Byrne overstated the case in claiming that nothing had been done—attempts had been made, but none had endured.

### **Bigotry**

Not all challenges to Catholic growth came from within the parishes or diocese. A significant challenge from without came from what Bishop Byrne called bigotry. By it he meant anti-Catholic prejudice, a pervasive hostility that could speed the process of already isolated Catholics falling away from the Catholic faith and could slow the progress of efforts to evangelize non-Catholics, be they black or white.

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<sup>146</sup> Byrne to Granjon, March 8, 1898.

<sup>147</sup> Byrne to Drexel, November 18, 1900, Byrne Papers, ADN.

Byrne explained his difficulty in a letter begging for funding from the Association for the Propagation of the Faith. He wrote:

Here in Tennessee those outside the Church of all denominations are amply supplied with money and most energetic and aggressive in their efforts to propagate their tenets. They receive money in abundance to keep preachers and other propagandis [*sic*] in all quarters of the State and they leave nothing undone to pervert Catholics and create a prejudice against the Catholic name. We are literally living in the midst of an enemy camp, of an enemy too who fights us at every turn and with every sort of weapon while we are almost helpless and are unable to support men who might go among them and at least diminish their prejudice if not disabuse them of their errors and convert them to the faith. There is no state in the country where Protestantism is more active and where the Church is contending at greater odds, and I doubt if there is any place in the world where it is more necessary or would be more beneficial to ... preach the Gospel and explain the principles of our faith.<sup>148</sup>

No doubt in this particular letter Byrne painted the case dramatically in hopes of gaining a larger grant from the potential benefactors of his diocese, but awareness of bigotry formed a frequent theme in his correspondence.

Byrne wrote to Father George Deshon, the Paulist Superior General, hoping to draw the Paulist Fathers to his diocese as missionaries. The Paulists were an American congregation of priests founded with the goal to bring non-Catholic Americans to a better understanding of Catholicism. Byrne saw them as a perfect match for his diocese. He described Tennesseans thus: “The people down here may be heretical and bigoted if you like but all are religious, all with few exceptions. There are no atheists or non-believers. Quite to the contrary, they are the greatest church-going people I have any knowledge of and they are always ready to listen to a sermon.” He explained that they were taught from infancy to be hostile to the Church, but that most lacked confidence in their own churches. Byrne believed that once ignorance was dispelled, many would convert to the Catholic faith. He added “much can also be done with the Negro, but this will be a

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<sup>148</sup> Byrne to Granjon, March 8, 1898.

question for further along.” The Paulists responded by opening a house in Winchester, Tennessee in 1900.<sup>149</sup>

Byrne expressed himself more bluntly in a personal letter to a close friend, from whom he sought nothing more than sympathy. “They are a motley crowd, particularly these Southern Americans, uncouth, grossly ignorant and frightfully bigoted.”<sup>150</sup> Again, Byrne wrote to a Catholic lecturer scheduled for a Nashville engagement, “You will have I am sure quite a large and intelligent audience. Whils the people here who attend lectures are rather a cultured class, or think they are, they are just as bigoted as they are cultured and possibly more so.”<sup>151</sup> Byrne’s disdain for bigotry matched their disdain for Catholicism; nevertheless, he went to some lengths to avoid giving them grist for anti-Catholic propaganda.

Byrne’s acute consciousness of bigotry directly influenced his recruitment of priests for the diocese. He tried to get clergy who would not unnecessarily give offense in a Southern context. To one applicant, Byrne wrote with characteristic bluntness, “you would be practically useless in this diocese, where priests of talent and education are much more necessary...because here Catholics are few and educated Protestants numerous.”<sup>152</sup> His policies for young priests took into account the practices of Catholics’ evangelical Christian neighbors, who had a “prejudice against drinking clergy,” and from whose censure Byrne wished to keep his priests. Byrne required that his priests abstain from drink for the first five years after ordination, both

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<sup>149</sup> Byrne to George Deshon, CSP, November 17, 1899, Byrne Papers, ADN.

<sup>150</sup> Byrne to Kate J. Collier, September 10, 1897, P.F. Collier and Family Box, Files on Lay Persons Collection, ADN.

<sup>151</sup> Byrne to D.J. Stafford, January 13, 1898, Byrne Papers, ADN.

<sup>152</sup> Byrne to John F. Reilly, March 3, 1900, Byrne Papers, ADN.

because tippling priests could occasion scandal and because of local religious sentiment regarding drink; prohibition of alcohol had become a serious point of political contention in Tennessee.<sup>153</sup> Byrne also repeatedly insisted on finding American-born priests. He wrote “People down here are sensitive on the point of nationality. They are Americans through and through, and are rather impatient in listening to one with a foreign accent. This may be one form of Americanism, but I think it is a very excusable one and one which I share myself.”<sup>154</sup> This preference for Americans may also have been honed by Byrne’s feuding with some of the foreign-born Irish among his priests.<sup>155</sup> Finding young men adequate to the challenge of hard missionary labor, yet intellectually strong and well-educated enough to defend the Catholic faith in an overwhelmingly Protestant context, remained a challenge throughout Byrne’s episcopacy. At particularly acute times, he begged his episcopal colleagues in the Northeast to let him borrow priests from their dioceses.<sup>156</sup> He likewise appealed to religious communities to send priests or Sisters, insisting that he needed the best men, and that they be “thoroughly American,” this in Byrne’s view being very important in the South and especially Nashville.<sup>157</sup>

Bigotry was not isolated to the educated white elite, but permeated race and class lines in both rural and urban settings. Byrne dubbed his diocese “A.P.A. country”, and in the 1890s, at

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<sup>153</sup> Byrne to J.L. Soentgrath, February 24, 1900, Byrne Papers, ADN; Doyle, *Nashville*, 131-35.

<sup>154</sup> Byrne to Deshon, November 17, 1899.

<sup>155</sup> Byrne to Henry Moeller, August 12, 1899, Byrne Papers, ADN; Byrne to Deshon, November 17, 1899.

<sup>156</sup> Byrne to Granjon, March 3, 1898; Byrne to Patrick J. Ryan, April 25, 1902, Byrne Papers, ADN; Byrne to John Farley, March 11, 1917, copy from microfilm in the Archives of the Archdiocese of New York, Yonkers, New York, Byrne Papers, ADN; Byrne to Cardinal William O’Connell, June 24, 1917, Byrne Papers, ADN.

<sup>157</sup> Byrne to Father Hugh O’Gallagher, May 20, 1905, Byrne Papers, ADN.

least, it was.<sup>158</sup> Nashville's municipal government included some A.P.A. members, by Byrne's account, until 1898; and even when the faction lost control of the city government, some of their ideas still held influence.<sup>159</sup> Byrne repeatedly cited the opposition of black Protestants, especially their ministers, as obstacles to the conversion of black people. Byrne took for granted that potential black converts were coming out of an anti-Catholic milieu.<sup>160</sup> Early in his episcopacy, he reported to Father Dyer, "Very little progress is being made [in the black apostolate] owing to ignorance and prejudice on the part of the colored people. This prejudice is encouraged to a certain extent by the ministers of other denominations."<sup>161</sup> Later, when Byrne had a priest assigned to work exclusively for black Nashvillians, Byrne complained of "the opposition met with from a fair sized army of negro preachers against our individual priest."<sup>162</sup> Byrne and his priests were quick to place the blame for Southerners' anti-Catholicism on their preachers.<sup>163</sup>

Anti-Catholic prejudice not only affected the prospects for making converts, it also could slow progress on more practical levels. When the diocese tried to buy a church for use by the black Catholics of Nashville, the priest in charge of the acquisition complained, "there were many difficulties to be overcome, prejudice against Catholics getting it, especially to use it for the negro has by no means been the least."<sup>164</sup> Again, in attempting to acquire land for a school,

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<sup>158</sup> Byrne to Farley, March 11, 1917; Doyle, *Nashville*, 103.

<sup>159</sup> Byrne to J.B. Morris, October 4, 1898, Byrne Papers, ADN.

<sup>160</sup> Byrne, "Notes Regarding the Board," 1906, Byrne Papers, ADN.

<sup>161</sup> Byrne, "A Series of Questions to be Answered by Applicants for Aid from the Commission for the Catholic Mission Among the Colored People and the Indians," October 10, 1895, 88-DY-3, JOS.

<sup>162</sup> Byrne, "A Series of Questions to be Answered by Applicants for Aid from the Commission for the Catholic Mission Among the Colored People and the Indians," August 8, 1903, 157-DY-13, JOS.

<sup>163</sup> Plunkett to Father Kellogg, March 27, 1900, published in *The Josephite* II, no. 5 (May 1900), in Folder A/ Nashville/ Holy Family/#2 Parish History, JOS.

<sup>164</sup> Plunkett to Slattery, February 20, 1902, 19-P-2, JOS.

Byrne himself cited the intense bigotry of the property owner, explaining that “if he computed that the Catholics wanted it, no money could buy it.” Bigotry of this kind made starting new initiatives extra challenging for Catholics.<sup>165</sup>

Fear of prejudice could also influence practical decisions such as the placement and naming of buildings. Religious Sisters feared that if a priest’s house was situated too close to the convent, it would become an excuse for slanderous gossip. Mother Mary Katharine Drexel, who built a convent as well as a priest’s house in Nashville, wrote to the priest:

I am afraid to have the priest’s lot from off our property. I fear, Father, it may occasion talk of a very unpleasant nature surrounded as we are in that neighborhood with protestant enemies. Even the majority of the pupils are protestants and I am convinced that they too might hear the talk and not understand why the house of the priest should be so near ours. I remember in Virginia that there were some of the neighbors there who thought we had a secret underground passage to the Brothers. . . . I know, Father, you . . . would be as pained as we were the neighbors and people to talk about us on a subject which ought to be most dear to us, and we should use every precaution not to give rise to such talk.<sup>166</sup>

Catholics feared salacious rumors about convents as grist for perennial anti-Catholic polemic. Widespread misrepresentation of Catholic veneration of Mary, the mother of Jesus, prompted caution as well. When naming a new school to be opened in Nashville, Mother Mary Katharine Drexel wrote to Byrne, “we shall be glad to change [the proposed name of the school], especially if you think the name 'the Immaculate Mother' will be misunderstood by Protestants and subject the name to disrespect.” Such rumors and difficulties of anti-Catholic talk did not have to materialize in Nashville in order to influence Catholic decision-making. Just the fear of potential slander kept them on the defensive.<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> Byrne to Drexel, December 4, 1904, Drexel Box, ADN.

<sup>166</sup> Drexel to Plunkett, March 5, 1906, Drexel Box, ADN.

<sup>167</sup> Drexel to Byrne, March 19, 1905, Drexel Box, ADN.

## The Question of Education

Byrne attributed anti-Catholic bigotry to ignorance, and he saw education as the principal means by which evangelization would be carried out in his diocese. Byrne adamantly sought the enforcement of the decrees of the Third Plenary Council of 1884 that required Catholic parents to provide for the Catholic education of their children. Soon after his 1894 ordination, Byrne became aware that the faithful of his diocese lacked clarity about the Council's mandates on Catholic schools. In 1896, Byrne penned a pastoral letter to the clergy and laity of his diocese in which he explicitly restated the decrees of the Third Plenary Council and other relevant norms regarding Catholic schools. The bishop stated the conditions for exceptions to the norms and warned his clergy and Catholic parents alike that violation of these norms constituted grave matter, for which absolution<sup>168</sup> should be denied until the parents complied. Byrne reissued the same letter in 1904. In fact, Byrne's letters merely promulgated and made more explicit what had, *de jure*, been universal disciplinary norms for Catholics throughout the U.S. since 1884.<sup>169</sup>

Bishop Bernard McQuaid of Rochester, New York, an old soldier in the schools controversy, wrote to Byrne commending his 1896 letter. Byrne responded that he had only repeated what Rome said. He confided to McQuaid, "I was prepared for an onslaught, and prepared also to resist it, had it come."<sup>170</sup> But there was little backlash in 1896. The *Nashville American*, one of the city's daily papers, merely reported that Byrne would likely tighten the

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<sup>168</sup> According to Catholic teaching, if a particular action constitutes grave matter, then those who knowingly and willingly do that action commit mortal sin and are therefore unworthy to receive Holy Communion. Catholics in mortal sin can be restored to grace by a good confession, the priest administering absolution for the remission of the sins confessed. In this case, priests were forbidden to absolve the parents until the situation had been rectified—ordinarily by the children being enrolled in a Catholic school.

<sup>169</sup> "Catholic Parents Must Not Send Children to Secular Schools the Order," *Nashville American*, September 12, 1904, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>170</sup> Byrne to Bernard J. McQuaid, February 10, 1897, Byrne Papers, ADN.

enforcement of the existing Catholic norms regarding Catholic children attending Catholic schools, speculating that this might affect public school enrollment.<sup>171</sup> Byrne insisted to McQuaid, “If this course had been pursued from the beginning and maintained . . . we would now be in a strong position and making advances instead of trying to regain lost ground from the enemy, and teach Catholics themselves the most elementary of duties.”<sup>172</sup> For Byrne, Catholic education was essential to the passing on of the faith, and he staunchly defended it. Byrne’s 1896 letter appears to have had little real effect on school enrollment in the city of Nashville.<sup>173</sup>

The attack Byrne had braced himself against in 1896 materialized when, in 1904, he reissued his pastoral letter on schools, admonishing his priests to read it to the faithful and to abide by its instructions. Despite the paper’s 1896 coverage of the same pastoral letter, the *American* this time treated the norms of Byrne’s letter as if they were new, speculating that Byrne’s decrees could result in the withdrawal of thousands of Catholic students from public schools, necessitating the reduction of public-school teachers in the city of Nashville. In this event, one editor suggested, it would seem just to single out Catholic teachers, who constituted some ten percent of all teachers in the public schools, for elimination. If cuts were made necessary by Catholic policies, Catholics should be the ones to lose their jobs. Of course, such a

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<sup>171</sup> “Children of Catholics: Parents Must Send Them to Sectarian Schools,” *Nashville American*, November 30, 1896, 5, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>172</sup> Byrne to McQuaid, February 10, 1897.

<sup>173</sup> *Hoffman’s Catholic Directory, Almanac and Clergy List for the Year of Our Lord 1896* (Milwaukee: M.H. Wiltzius Co., 1896), 389-91, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=umn.31951p00682979c;view=1up;seq=80> (accessed February 19, 2019); *Hoffman’s Catholic Directory, Almanac and Clergy List for the Year of Our Lord 1897* (Milwaukee: M.H. Wiltzius Co., 1897), 346-49, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=umn.31951p00682978e;view=1up;seq=21> (accessed February 19, 2019).

course would be illegal, but the tenor of the article indicates the resentment Byrne's letter stirred among non-Catholics. Nashville's other paper, the *Banner*, took a similar tone.<sup>174</sup>

The matter recalled to some newspaper contributors the nineteenth-century dispute over school funds and stirred up suspicion against Catholics like that which had been advanced by the American Protective Association (A.P.A.), which had gained a foothold in Nashville politics in the preceding decade. County Trustee and custodian of the school fund, Major John J. McCann, commented in a *Banner* interview that Catholic schools could expect no public monies and added:

I regard the step taken by the Catholics as an exceedingly unfortunate one. . . It will be most far-reaching in its effect—far more so than has been imagined. I have always been a friend of the Catholics, and I hope Bishop Byrne will retract that order he has issued. It will be unfortunate if he does not. . . I was against the A.P.A., but it strikes me that the Catholics are confirming what the A.P.A.'s charged them with—the union of church and state. The move they have made is the biggest lever ever given the A.P.A. here. It will probably start a fire, too. It may even extend further than the schools. It may indirectly concern the police force and other departments.<sup>175</sup>

Byrne countered that the criticisms leveled against his policies were divisive and showed unfair animus against Catholics. The matter died down when the school term commenced, and pupil rolls showed an increase in public school enrollment, allaying fears of lost teaching positions.<sup>176</sup>

That Byrne issued and reissued these norms, even though he fully expected misunderstanding and attack, demonstrates his conviction that Catholic education was essential

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<sup>174</sup> "Catholic Parents," *Nashville American*, September 12, 1904; "Bishop's Pastoral Regarding School Children Creates Great Interest," *Nashville American*, September 13, 1904, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; "Position of Bishop Byrne," *Nashville Banner*, September 24, 1904, clipping in Byrne, Bishop T.S. Folder, FP.

<sup>175</sup> "Position of Bishop Byrne," *Nashville Banner*, September 4, 1904.

<sup>176</sup> "Bishop Byrne's Card," *Nashville American*, September 15, 1904, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; "School Enrollment," *Nashville American*, September 23, 1904, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

in preserving Catholic youths from dangers to faith and morals that he believed to be present in the public schools. Byrne manifested a certain fearlessness in this matter, knowing the move might prove unpopular, but willing to risk popular censure for following Church norms. It seems that Byrne's admonitions had some effect, as the total enrollment in the city's five parochial schools increased by nearly one hundred and twenty students between 1904 and 1905.<sup>177</sup>

While Byrne was concerned to shepherd all Catholic elementary school students into parish schools or private Catholic academies, he was also concerned with providing means of higher education. He pressured the existing academies to increase their excellence, and he attempted to start a boys' Catholic college in Nashville.<sup>178</sup> Byrne wrote to one religious superior after another, trying to find a community of religious men to undertake the opening of a college. He wrote of Nashville to Augustinian Father Hugh O'Gallagher; explaining Nashville's proximity to other important cities, Byrne added:

It is really the key to the whole South and South West, with ample railway facilities in every direction. There is no Catholic College of importance in this whole territory. The future is promising for a great Catholic College that may some day develop into a splendid University of the South. The climate is as fine as any in the world and the country remarkably beautiful and healthy.<sup>179</sup>

To another prospective community, Byrne unfolded a plan for a commercial and classical college, citing Nashville's rapid growth as a strong draw. Byrne never succeeded in getting his plan for a young men's academy or college off the ground, but not for lack of effort.<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> *Catholic Directory, Almanac and Clergy List for the Year of Our Lord 1904* (Milwaukee: M.H. Wiltzius Co., 1904), 433-36, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=umn.31951p00735760d;view=1up;seq=87> (accessed February 19, 2019); *Catholic Directory, Almanac and Clergy List for the Year of Our Lord 1905*, (Milwaukee: M.H. Wiltzius Co., 1905), 481-85, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=umn.31951p00735767z;view=1up;seq=15>, (accessed February 19, 2019).

<sup>178</sup> Drexel, "Notes from Tour of the South," *Writings* no. 2950, 1904, SBS.

<sup>179</sup> Byrne to Hugh O'Gallagher, O.S.A., May 20, 1905, Byrne Papers, ADN.

<sup>180</sup> Byrne to John E. [Ennis], July 8, 1905, Byrne Papers, ADN.

Byrne's zeal for education extended beyond the borders of his own diocese. With other American bishops, he became deeply concerned when the European superiors of the Christian Brothers, a religious order that conducted schools for boys in several countries including the U.S., withdrew permission for their Brothers to teach the classical languages as they had been doing in the U.S. Christian Brothers schools, the superiors insisted, were not meant to be classical academies, and it had been a mistake to allow the Brothers to teach Latin in their American schools. Byrne and his fellow bishops saw the issue as one of adaptation by the Christian Brothers to meet a need peculiar to Catholics in America. The change would render the Christian Brothers' schools inadequate as preparatory schools for young men entering seminaries. The bishops entreated the Vatican to side with the American Brothers in favor of teaching Latin, sending Byrne to press their case. Byrne spent six months in 1898 and 1899 in Rome trying to exert influence in the matter, but without success. Catholic education would remain one of Byrne's principal concerns throughout his life.<sup>181</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Byrne's concern for evangelization and his concern for education constituted two facets of the same overarching zeal for the salvation of souls. That zeal extended to all souls, regardless of race, and Byrne knew that he could not, if he valued his own soul, ignore the black members of his diocese. His predecessors in the Diocese of Nashville had not succeeded in providing in any lasting way for the evangelization and education of African Americans, and Byrne meant to remedy that shortfall, taking Rademacher's vision of black parishes and schools as urban nuclei to draw souls to the faith in Nashville, Memphis, and other urban centers. Byrne was determined

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<sup>181</sup> Ronald Eugene Isetti, "The Latin Question: A Conflict in Catholic Higher Education between Jesuits and Christian Brothers in Late Nineteenth-Century America," *The Catholic Historical Review* 76, no. 3 (July 1990): 536-42; Byrne to William Cardinal O'Connell, September 8, 1919, Byrne Papers, ADN.

that future black Catholic institutions in Tennessee would be founded to last. His own cathedral city of Nashville, hotbed of urban industrialization, “Athens of the South”, A.P.A. turf, and home to a large group of black professionals, would be his starting place.

## CHAPTER THREE

### A CATHOLIC “MISSION” IN NASHVILLE

From the time he received his appointment as Nashville’s bishop in the spring of 1894, Thomas Sebastian Byrne had given thought to the large number of African Americans in his diocese, and particularly to those in the cities. Byrne hoped to bring many black people—both Protestant Christians and non-Christians—to the Roman Catholic faith. As he got to know his new diocese, Byrne found it difficult not to lose ground, let alone to make progress with putting into place the people and institutions he saw as necessary to the project of black evangelization in Tennessee. The bishop’s commitment to evangelizing African Americans in his diocese finally took concrete form when he welcomed Josephite Father Thomas J. Plunkett to begin work in the diocese in 1900, and with the establishment of Holy Family Church for African Americans in the city of Nashville in 1902.<sup>182</sup>

#### **Challenges: Existing Schools Closed**

When Byrne arrived in Nashville in 1894, the diocese, which covered the entire state of Tennessee, had two schools for black children in operation. These schools, one in Memphis and the other in Dayton, closed within four years of Byrne’s arrival. The school closure in Dayton followed disastrous mine collapses and was accompanied by the closings of both the white Catholic school and St. Genevieve’s Church. The closure of St. Peter’s Colored School in Memphis is harder to explain. It seems to have been tied with financial and personnel difficulties. In Memphis, the parish school for white children and the church continued; only the school for black children closed. The religious women serving in the schools for black children

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<sup>182</sup> Thomas Sebastian Byrne to John R. Slattery, April 29, 1894, Byrne Papers, ADN; Byrne to Slattery, June 13, 1894, 11-H-34, JOS.

sometimes did not receive their stipends or received them late. Community superiors might, for this or other reasons, have decided to give white children's schools priority in the placement of the Sisters. It appears that the Kentucky superiors of the Dominican Sisters of St. Catharine's reconfigured their placement of Sisters in Memphis schools, withdrawing them from St. Peter's Colored School and placing more Sisters at the white St. Agnes Academy. It is hard to determine whether this was a cause of or a response to the black school's demise, as correspondence on the subject does not seem to have survived. It seems important to note, however, that in a subsequent personnel crisis Bishop Byrne expressed the opinion that there was no point in operating Catholic schools without Sisters to teach in them.<sup>183</sup>

While the swift closure of both black schools might seem to indicate that the bishop was not in sympathy with black education, earlier correspondence regarding the school in Dayton gives evidence to the contrary. In 1894, the Sisters of Charity who served St. Genevieve's School had given Byrne short notice that the Sisters would not return for the new school year. Byrne responded to the Mother Superior, pleading with her to keep her Sisters there, and offering arguments why the mission was worthwhile. He wrote:

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<sup>183</sup> Joseph Rademacher, "A Series of Questions to be Answered by Applicants for Aid from the Commission for the Catholic Mission Among the Colored People and the Indians," June 26, 1888, 157-DY-1, JOS; Rademacher, "A Series of Questions to be Answered by Applicants for Aid from the Commission for the Catholic Mission Among the Colored People and the Indians," August 18, 1891, 157-DY-6, JOS; Rademacher, "A Series of Questions to be Answered by Applicants for Aid from the Commission for the Catholic Mission Among the Colored People and the Indians," September 2, 1892, 157-DY-3, JOS; Byrne, "Series of Questions to be Answered by Applicants for Aid from the Commission for the Catholic Missions among the Colored People and the Indians," October 17, 1894, 88-DY-1, JOS; Byrne to Mother Helena, SCN, August 15, 1894, Byrne Papers, ADN; Byrne to E.R. Dyer, November 3, 1894, 10-DY-43, JOS; Anna C. Minogue, *Pages from A Hundred Years of Dominican History: The Story of the Congregation of Saint Catharine of Sienna* (New York: Frederick Pustet & Co., 1921), 138-39; Paschala Noonan, *Signadou: History of the Kentucky Dominican Sisters* (Manhasset: Brookeville Books, 1997), 104, 107 n. 42; Sr. Hyacintha Peters, "School for Colored Children, 1888-1895," St. Catharine Archives, Springfield, Kentucky, emailed to the author by Donna Medley, archivist; V. F. O' Daniel, *The Dominican Province of Saint Joseph: Historico-biographical Studies* (New York: National Headquarters of the Holy Name Society, 1942), 388; Byrne to Louis Pastorelli, November 12, 1918, Byrne Papers, ADN.

[t]he Colored School is seemingly a success. Six were baptized . . . more are taking instruction, and there is hope that others will follow their example—What a glorious work this is—more than has been accomplished elsewhere and I hope that you will consult with your conscience before giving it up. The opportunity may not come again and are you willing to take the responsibility of throwing it away now that it is in your hands? At least go on another year until I can get other Sisters, but don't throw away the work and its opportunities and deprive these souls.<sup>184</sup>

Further, Byrne pressed the importance of the school for parish life, writing, “The parish is built up about the school and the school is the heart of the parish, and if the school goes, the parish will not last long.”<sup>185</sup> At this point, Byrne rested his hope for a future robust black Catholic community on the schools. He wrote in 1894, “the only hope of conversion here is through the schools we have established. Our negroes, like our white neighbors have imbibed prejudices which education alone can dispel. With our schools closed, our case is humanly speaking hopeless.”<sup>186</sup> Byrne hoped that in spite of anti-Catholic prejudice, “by educating them we shall in time bring many into the Church.”<sup>187</sup> Prejudice, Byrne held, was the result of ignorance, and Catholic schools, in educating, would eradicate ignorance and thus remove the principal obstacle to conversion. Despite the closures, Byrne wanted black Catholic schools.

### **Challenges: Black Nashvillians Aspiring to the Priesthood**

A serious question among those Catholics concerned with making black converts was the question of ordaining black men to the priesthood. Some argued against it, contending that black people themselves preferred white priests, but others countered that black Catholics took great pride in having black men serve at the altar. When black Josephite priest Father J.H. Dorsey

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<sup>184</sup> Byrne to Mother Helena, August 15, 1894.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid.

<sup>186</sup> Byrne, “Series of Questions,” October 17, 1894.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid.

visited Tennessee, African Americans crowded the church to see him at the altar.<sup>188</sup> While Byrne believed that black men could and should be ordained to the priesthood, he believed it was not opportune for them to become diocesan priests. Rather, he assumed that black priests would serve black congregations and that they should do so as members of and with the support of a religious community—not necessarily itself segregated—that ministered to black Catholics. Byrne explained to a young black man aspiring to the Catholic priesthood that if he wanted to serve his people efficiently and do them lasting good, his goals

could not well be accomplished if you should work singly, at least not yet, inasmuch as the Missions among the Colored people in the South are just beginning. They are poor, isolated and precarious, and require for their permanent establishment and future success the united efforts of a body of men living a common life and wholly devoted to this apostolate. Among these men you will find a welcome, and when ordained a priest, abundant opportunity for your zeal and toil in behalf of the colored people.<sup>189</sup>

Byrne continued to recommend black men for seminary studies, not realizing that the Josephite Fathers, the ostensibly integrated religious society to whom he at least twice sent black candidates, had quietly retreated from the promotion of black men for ordination. Some Josephite priests resented the Southern bishops who sent black men to them to be ordained rather than ordaining them to be diocesan priests. Both Byrne and the Josephites subscribed in theory to the ordination of black men, but neither was eager to undertake the difficulties that necessarily followed such a move. Few were willing to take responsibility for a priest who was likely to be shunned by bishops and fellow priests because of his race.<sup>190</sup>

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<sup>188</sup> William A. Crosthwait to Mother Mary Katharine Drexel, March 7, 1906, Folder H10B 15 f 24, SBS; Byrne to Drexel, February 26, 1914, Folder H10BQ6f23, SBS.

<sup>189</sup> Byrne to S. L. Theobald, June 22, 1905, Byrne Papers, ADN.

<sup>190</sup> Stephen J. Ochs, *Desegregating the Altar: The Josephites and the Struggle for Black Priests, 1871-1960* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990), 100.

In 1896, Byrne recommended black convert and Fisk University student Richard Middleton as a candidate for the Josephites. In 1905, a young black man, Stephen Theobald, was inspired by Byrne's preaching to pursue a priestly vocation; Byrne again recommended the Josephites. The Josephites did not welcome these young men, however. Middleton, having been put off and treated patronizingly by the Josephite superiors, left the Catholic Church to be ordained in the Episcopal Church, while Theobald eventually applied to Archbishop John Ireland, who ordained him for the Catholic Archdiocese of St. Paul, Minnesota. To the end of his life, Byrne would continue to favor the ordination of black men, but only as members of religious communities. The religious communities proved unwilling to accept them. For decades the numbers of black priests serving in the U.S. would number fewer than twenty. Catholic outreach to African Americans almost entirely lacked the presence of black clergy. One may surmise that this negatively affected evangelization efforts, both because they lacked the appeal of black priests and because the absence of black priests may have signaled a failure to welcome black men as equals.<sup>191</sup>

### **Challenges: The Need for a School**

Despite the hope he placed in education, Byrne had not a school for black students in his diocese in 1898, when Eugene Bunn, black Catholic Nashvillian artisan and father of four, wrote to ask what to do about the education of his children, whose mother not only was not Catholic, but refused to consider conversion as long as her children were denied the education white Catholic children received. Bunn brought the issue of the need for a Catholic school for his

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<sup>191</sup> J.B. Morris to Slattery, December 11, 1905, 11-N-8, JOS; Byrne to Slattery, January 3, 1896, 11-H-36, JOS; Slattery to John DeRuyter, January 5, 1896, LPB-2-333, JOS; Slattery to Byrne, January 7, 1896, LPB-2-334, JOS; Byrne to Slattery, January 11, 1896, 11-H-37, JOS, Slattery to Byrne, January 20, 1896, LPB-2-340, JOS, Byrne to Theobald, June 22, 1905; Byrne to Theobald, September 1, 1905, Byrne Papers, ADN; *Journal of the Seventy Second Annual Session of the Diocese of Louisiana* (New Orleans: Palfrey, Rodd, Pursell Co., Ltd., 1910): 10; Ochs, *Desegregating the Altar*, 163, 394; Byrne to John Burke, August 23, 1920, Byrne Papers, ADN.

children to Byrne's attention and begged for Byrne's advice. It was not just about the children, as Bunn made clear. Failure to provide equal opportunity for black children to receive a Catholic education was standing in the way of conversion for people like Bunn's wife, who said she would rather perish eternally than accept the unequal treatment accorded her family by the Catholic Church. Byrne was a bishop who refused Holy Communion to parents who were remiss about sending their children to Catholic schools, and a letter such as Bunn's could not go unaddressed. To meet the need, Byrne would either have to integrate his parochial schools or establish a separate school for black children. To meet this need for black Catholic education would give Catholics additional credibility not only with Catholic parents and children, but with a whole array of potential converts.<sup>192</sup>

Converting to the Catholic faith soon after Byrne's first letter to his priests and people on the necessity of Catholic parents sending their children to Catholic schools, Bunn had heard Bishop Byrne's ultimatum to his flock regarding Catholic education from the bishop's own mouth. Nashville's five Catholic parochial schools and two private Catholic academies, however, did not admit black pupils. In bringing his case to Byrne, Bunn focused on the spiritual stakes—how could he, Bunn, avoid spiritual condemnation for not sending his children to Catholic school? Bunn used his non-Catholic wife as a shield for his demonstration that the lack of a Catholic school for his children not only jeopardized their father's salvation, it also endangered the children themselves, who were not being taught the faith. Further, the unjust distinction between black and white children was a stumbling block to Mrs. Bunn's conversion. Had Bunn merely been concerned for his own salvation, he could have asked Byrne for a dispensation to

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<sup>192</sup> Byrne to the Clergy and Laity of this Diocese [Nashville, TN], November 16, 1896, Byrne Papers, ADN; Eugene W. Bunn to Byrne, June 20, 1898, Holy Family Church and School History Folder, ADN.

send his children to public school. Instead, he threw the challenge of providing a school for them onto Byrne.<sup>193</sup>

At the time of Bunn's appeal, Nashville had no separate black Catholic parish. Bunn belonged to the Cathedral parish, Saint Mary's. Before and even after the establishment of Holy Family Church, black people were not outright excluded from the Catholic churches of Nashville. Black people not only attended missions and occasional events at the churches, they could be communicating members, as Bunn was at the Cathedral. Nevertheless, they did not enjoy equal treatment. In predominantly white parishes, black people were typically barred from serving Mass, singing in the choir, and other aspects of parish life. Their presence was tolerated, it seems, so long as they were few and kept to the periphery. It seems, however, that while they were admitted to churches, black people had been entirely excluded from Nashville's Catholic parochial schools from the start.<sup>194</sup>

### **Byrne's Conundrum: A Color Line Where None Should Exist**

E. W. Bunn's letter to Byrne forced Byrne to grapple with the juxtaposition of the Church's teaching that all human beings are of equal dignity before God, and the practical reality of black exclusion. Byrne's immediate response was a letter to Bunn that reveals his views.

Byrne wrote to Bunn,

I am just in receipt of your letter . . . which was forwarded to me . . . and when I return to Nashville, I shall enquire into your case, and see what provision can be made for your children's education in the Catholic faith. Be assured . . . that I very deeply sympathize with you in your difficulties, and I shall leave no stone unturned to find a means by which your children shall receive a Christian education despite their nativity. The Catholic

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<sup>193</sup> Bunn to Byrne, June 20, 1898; *Hoffman's Catholic Directory, Almanac and Clergy List for the Year of Our Lord 1898* (Milwaukee: M.H. Wiltzius Co., 1898), 361-64, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=umn.31951p00682977g;view=1up;seq=36> (accessed February 19, 2019).

<sup>194</sup> Plunkett to Frank Kelly, October 27, 1900, 19-M-11, JOS; Wedding Notice, *Facts*, Chattanooga, September 17, 1892, clipping in Negro Work Folder, FP; Bunn to Byrne, June 20, 1898; Drexel, "Notes from Tour of the South," *Writings* no. 2950, 1904, SBS; Plunkett to Slattery, November 7, 1901, 19-N-19, JOS.

Church makes no distinction among her children, but, as you know, social distinctions exist in the South, which the Church cannot at once remove. These social distinctions are so strong that even Catholics are influenced by them, but this is not the intention nor is it the disposition of the Church. I myself, when a student, sat on the same benches in the City of Rome with colored men from Senegambia, Africa, and neither I nor the hundreds of students that were with me thought it any degradation to do so. In the Catholic Church where we are surrounded by entirely Catholic influence, there is no such distinction. But, as I say, these distinctions are social and not religious. When I return to Nashville I shall make inquiry . . . in the meantime I beg you to be firm and hopeful and [I] recommend both yourself and family to Almighty God in prayer.<sup>195</sup>

Byrne's letter to Bunn reveals his perspective not only as a non-Southerner, but also as a member of the universal church, who had lived outside of the American context. Byrne made no attempt to justify racial distinctions on religious grounds but put the entire weight of such distinctions on the Southern milieu. He carefully distinguished the attitudes of Catholics who might be influenced by the social distinctions from the "disposition of the Church."<sup>196</sup>

Byrne recognized that the Church ought to be above the social distinctions that had no basis in Catholic teaching, but he considered the social distinctions to be too strong to be eradicated. Many Tennessee Catholics themselves subscribed to them—a fact that repeatedly drew Byrne's astonishment.<sup>197</sup> He wrote to a potential benefactor about his hopes for a black church and school, "For years—ever since I came to this diocese—this work has been constantly before my mind but I could see no way to make a start. It is a work that is not popular in this state, even with Catholics, strange to say, who have the old time prejudices against the Negro. When they see the colored people under the influence of the church it may be different."<sup>198</sup> Byrne did not think combatting social distinctions a realistically achievable goal, and instead

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<sup>195</sup> Byrne to Bunn, June 26, 1898.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid.

<sup>197</sup> Byrne to Drexel, December 14, 1900, Folder H 10b Qb b21, SBS.

<sup>198</sup> Byrne to Drexel, December 14, 1900; Byrne to Bunn, June 26, 1898.

opted to find a way within the Southern social system to meet Bunn's request. Byrne combined paternalism—the assumption that African Americans needed to be uplifted by white assistance—with acquiescence to the social status quo, but he also distanced himself from these Southern social norms and identified them as not Catholic. Byrne's origins and education set him apart from Catholics too immersed in the Southern social milieu to recognize the contradictions.

In 1904, over the protests of his Vicar General, Father John B. Morris, Byrne dined in his home with Father John Henry Dorsey, a black Josephite priest, who was visiting Nashville. The nation had not yet recovered from the shock caused when President Theodore Roosevelt hosted Booker T. Washington for a meal in 1901. Black and white men dining together seemed to be an expression of social equality and raised fears of miscegenation, generating hostile reactions from many white Americans. Byrne nevertheless gave Dorsey hospitality, sharing his house and table with the black priest. Dorsey preached a number of successful missions in the diocese over the next two decades. In 1917, when the Josephites assigned Dorsey to Nashville, however, Byrne first requested his transfer to Memphis and then his removal from the diocese. Byrne did not specify his reasons for refusing Dorsey, even in his correspondence with his own Vicar General, so it is impossible to know whether his objection to Dorsey was tied to race, or whether other factors rendered Dorsey unsuitable in Byrne's eyes.<sup>199</sup>

Byrne appears to have begun in earnest to pursue the establishment of black Catholic institutions in Nashville after receiving Bunn's June 1898 letter. Whether the letter itself was the impetus to Byrne's action is impossible to determine. The bishop was much away from his

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<sup>199</sup> Ochs, *Desegregating the Altar*, 150; Sister Marion to Drexel, n.d., Folder H40 B2, Box 1, Folder 3, SBS; Byrne to Drexel, February 26, 1914, Folder H10BQ6f23, SBS; Justin McCarthy to Byrne, September 15, 1917, Byrne Papers, ADN; Byrne to McCarthy, September 17, 1917, Byrne Papers, ADN; Byrne to Denis Murphy November 30, 1917, Byrne Papers, ADN; Byrne to McCarthy, December 4, 1917, Byrne Papers, ADN; Byrne to John Burke, August 23, 1920, Byrne Papers, ADN.

diocese in 1898 and 1899, but he still began to work out a means for educating black Catholic children. Connections made while away from Nashville in Kentucky and Rome encouraged him in his plans.

While in Kentucky, Byrne had occasion to discuss his hopes for the apostolate to African Americans with Father Louis Deppen of the Louisville Diocese. The conversation left a deep impression on Deppen, who later wrote to Byrne:

I am sure you will be surprised to learn that our words concerning the poor negro have, under Divine Providence, assumed quite serious proportions, so much so, that I have tendered the Right Rev. Bishop my resignation ... begging him ... to permit me to devote my remaining years to the care of colored people ... perhaps Nashville would be a better place for me to ... inaugurate the work than would an interior small town in Kentucky be.<sup>200</sup>

Deppen was so fired by conversation with Byrne as to plan to drop his relatively prestigious positions as secretary to the Bishop of Louisville and Chancellor of the Diocese. While he and Byrne were corresponding over a possible beginning for his work in Nashville, Deppen was dismayed by a Louisville's *Evening Times* article which announced Deppen's bold plans as if they were definite. Deppen's hope for a black apostolate never reached fruition.<sup>201</sup>

Byrne's response to Deppen reveals the Nashville bishop's perceptions of the challenges standing in the way and his priorities in approaching the work. Among the difficulties, Byrne listed three: "there are no negro Catholics here possibly two or three, but not more ... we have no church which could be made a place of worship for these people ... we have no money." Byrne seems to have exaggerated the scarcity of black Catholics, perhaps thinking it only fair to Deppen to paint the bleakest picture possible. These difficulties Byrne deemed surmountable,

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<sup>200</sup> Louis Deppen to Byrne, August 3, 1898, Byrne Papers, ADN.

<sup>201</sup> "His Life's Work Will Be Among the Lowly Negroes: Father Louis Deppen Resigns His Charge to Spread the Gospel in a Larger Field," *Louisville Evening Times*, n.d., clipping in Byrne Papers, ADN.

assuring Deppen, “it must be borne in mind that all such works start from small beginnings, and the more unpromising they seem at first, the more successful they are in the end, God seeming to bless our efforts when we rely entirely on Him.” Ever the careful builder, Byrne insisted that if Father Deppen were to come and begin his mission in Nashville, Deppen must agree to pursue the mission for at least five years, giving Byrne adequate time to ensure its continuance at the end of those years. Deppen ultimately remained in diocesan work in Kentucky. Nevertheless, his exchange with Byrne gives some indication of the seriousness and urgency with which the two men had discussed Byrne’s vision and hints at the contagious quality of Byrne’s zeal for the black apostolate.<sup>202</sup>

Byrne concluded his business in Kentucky only to be sent to Rome to represent the U.S. bishops on the matter of the Christian Brothers. In Byrne’s absence, a Father Andrew Schonart, who must have been in Nashville for a short time, wrote to Father E. R. Dyer at the Commission for the Catholic Missions among the Colored People and the Indians to ask for funding for work with African Americans in Nashville. Dyer responded that requests for funding had to come from the bishop. This letter is the only evidence discovered that priestly efforts were being made on this front in Byrne’s absence, but it is unclear whether Schonart had Byrne’s authority for the work. It seems unlikely, as Byrne asked a five-year commitment from Deppen, and Schonart seems to have left the diocese. During his six-month stint in Rome, Byrne saw Father John Slattery, the superior of the Josephite Fathers, and began planning with him for a future Josephite

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<sup>202</sup> Byrne to Deppen, August 4, 1898, Holy Family Church and School History Folder, ADN.

presence in Nashville. These plans became more definite when Deppen's mission did not materialize. Slattery visited Nashville in 1899.<sup>203</sup>

### **Father Plunkett and the Establishment of Holy Family Church**

Byrne and Slattery agreed to begin a Josephite mission in Nashville with the Josephites providing one priest, whose work was to be exclusively among the city's African Americans. Byrne's vision was "to get the few Negroes we can together for the nucleus of the congregation and start a distinctively Negro congregation, even if we have to rent a place for that purpose."<sup>204</sup> The priest assigned would endeavor to establish a church and school as soon as possible. Slattery assigned Father Thomas Plunkett to Nashville, and in early October 1900, Plunkett arrived to begin his mission with no church, no money, and very few faithful. Byrne gave Plunkett a room in his house, and the priest set to work to assess his mission field and to determine how to go about building a parish.

Father Plunkett brought an eagerness to serve African Americans and a winning personality that attracted others to him. In 1889, Plunkett, an Irish-born Ohioan, had contacted Slattery, assuring him, "it is my most sincere [*sic*] desire to serve God in the cause of the poor despised negroes [*sic*]."<sup>205</sup> He was eager to be accepted and begin preparation for the life's work he believed God had called him to do. After finishing seminary and being ordained, Plunkett quickly learned to navigate carefully the dangerous waters of ministering to African Americans

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<sup>203</sup> Andrew Schonart to Dyer, February 28, 1899, 103-DY-2, JOS; Ronald Eugene Isetti, "The Latin Question: A Conflict in Catholic Higher Education between Jesuits and Christian Brothers in Late Nineteenth-Century America," *The Catholic Historical Review* 76, no. 3 (July 1990): 526-48; William L. Portier, *Divided Friends: Portraits of the Roman Catholic Modernist Crisis in the United States* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2013), 86; Slattery to Byrne, November 19, 1899, Byrne Papers, ADN; Byrne to Slattery, November 23, 1899, Byrne Papers, ADN.

<sup>204</sup> Byrne to Slattery, June 11, 1900, Byrne Papers, ADN.

<sup>205</sup> Plunkett to Slattery, February 11, 1889, 9-D-1, JOS.

in the South. He was, on one occasion, run out of a town where a lynch mob, hot for the blood of black men accused of murder, objected to his ministry to the town's African American population. In Pine Bluff, Arkansas, his first assignment, Plunkett managed during his two years there to stay on good terms with both the pastor of the white church and the Creole religious Sisters who served at the industrial school. In Nashville, Plunkett's ability to get along with other priests as well as the people he served would make him a popular and beloved priest, whom Byrne came to see as absolutely indispensable.<sup>206</sup>

Less than a month into his new assignment, Plunkett described his work in Nashville to a friend. "That the work is going to be an uphill one can easily be realized," he wrote. "After a three weeks' search and canvass of the city, I have succeeded in locating about ten baptized [black] Catholics out of a population of 40,000." Plunkett had no wherewithal to begin assembling these potential parishioners. He explained that they had "no Church, no school, no altar, nor one [person] overburdened with the mammon of iniquity but let us hope not wanting in God's friendship and grace." Plunkett had already begun working to try to acquire the necessary items for Mass. He needed an altar, vestments, a chalice, and all the accoutrements essential for the liturgical ceremonies of the Church. Even more pressing was his need of a space that could serve as a church.<sup>207</sup>

Claims of just how many Catholics were in Nashville at Plunkett's arrival vary. In 1898, Byrne had written Deppen that there were two or three black Catholics in the city. Byrne reported to Mother Drexel in 1900 that Plunkett had found in Nashville "thirty Catholics and

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<sup>206</sup> Plunkett to Slattery, August 12, 1889, 9-D-2, JOS; James Nally to Plunkett, June 13, 1901, 19-N-9, JOS; J.M. Lucey to Byrne, October 3, 1900, Holy Family Church and School History Folder, ADN; Plunkett to Slattery, August 31, 1898, 19-K-8, JOS; Byrne to Slattery, January 19, 1902, Byrne Papers, ADN.

<sup>207</sup> Plunkett to Kelly, October 27, 1900.

many others well-disposed.” The count Plunkett gives here, in a friendly, newsy letter seems the most trustworthy. Plunkett likely began with a potential congregation of approximately ten black Catholics. The congregation was potential because those ten could continue to worship where they were rather than join Plunkett’s congregation.<sup>208</sup>

While Plunkett had to accept the delay in starting to celebrate Mass for black Catholics until he had a place for it, he did not wait to begin his ministry. Plunkett did not shrink in the face of the challenge before him. He wrote:

I am far from discouraged, but feel confident that a bright and glorious future awaits the Nashville mission, if we are but faithful to our duty. . . . While the Catholics are but few, yet they are some of the finest specimens [*sic*] of the race. The good will to be met with among them is all that can be desired. The tendency is towards the Church, due in all probability to the fact that nothing has ever been done, therefore not spoiled or driven from the Church.<sup>209</sup>

Since he had no church, he sent interested black Nashvillians to attend a mission<sup>210</sup> that the Paulist Fathers were giving at the Cathedral, and by Plunkett’s account, those who attended appreciated the sermons. Plunkett also immediately made plans for a choir that would be under the direction of a young African American woman. He begged a friend to provide the music book for the choir director.<sup>211</sup>

Despite Plunkett’s sanguine attitude, it proved difficult to find a suitable location for the church, and the priest and his small but growing congregation suffered through a series of temporary arrangements. Plunkett wrote to Slattery:

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<sup>208</sup> Byrne to Deppen, August 4, 1898, Byrne Papers, ADN; Byrne to Drexel, November 18, 1900, Folder H10b Qb b21, SBS; Plunkett to Kelly, October 27, 1900.

<sup>209</sup> Plunkett to Kelly, October 27, 1900.

<sup>210</sup> A mission in this sense of the word is a series of sermons offered over the course of a few days or evenings and intended either to bring people to the faith or reignite their fervor.

<sup>211</sup> Plunkett to Kelly, October 27, 1900.

I have put in a few busy days, traveling from one corner of the city to the other in search of a hall in which to start work. I have succeeded in securing one in a desirable quarter, right in the heart of the colored district—the enemy’s country if ever there was one. I have the Mason’s lodge on one side, and the “Immaculates,” a colored secret society on the other.<sup>212</sup>

Even as they decorated this uncomfortably situated hall to make it adequate for the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, Plunkett and Byrne deemed the site unsuitable for their long-term goals, and they continued to search for a better building.<sup>213</sup>

From the outset, Byrne envisioned the establishment of both a church and a school, but he needed funds either to build on a purchased site or to buy an existing building. By November Byrne and Plunkett had selected a building—formerly the Second Presbyterian Church—that they thought could serve as church, school, and residence for the Sisters who would teach in the school. Byrne inquired with Slattery about finding financial resources outside the diocese to fund Plunkett’s work, particularly the church purchase.<sup>214</sup>

Slattery contributed to the new mission significantly, though he did not pay for the church as Father Plunkett initially hoped. Slattery used his connections to obtain needed items for the nascent mission and eventually sent a contribution for part of the cost of the church.<sup>215</sup> Slattery also wrote to Father Dyer, who disbursed the funds for the Commission for the Catholic Missions among the Colored People and the Indians, asking Dyer to favor Byrne’s application for funds. He wrote:

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<sup>212</sup> Plunkett to Slattery, October 13, 1900, 19-M-8, JOS.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid.

<sup>214</sup> Byrne to Drexel, November 18, 1900, Byrne Papers, ADN; Slattery to Byrne, October 10, 1900, Byrne Papers, ADN.

<sup>215</sup> Plunkett to Kelly, October 27, 1900; Slattery to Plunkett, October 22, 1900, 19-M-9, JOS; Slattery to Plunkett, May 21, 1902, 19-P-11, JOS; Slattery to Plunkett, September 16, 1901, 19-N-17, JOS.

Bishop Byrne of Nashville will make his first appeal this year. In starting there we are over thirty years behind time for the Capital of Tennessee is the home of Fisk University, the great [*sic*] school that the Negro race know. It is very important that the priests starting in there will be in a good position. The Negroes of that town because of their great school our [*sic*] pretty well equipped and we should be able to hold our head up to their best efforts.<sup>216</sup>

Slattery's intervention with Dyer did not produce a large grant, but Nashville did receive five hundred dollars. No doubt Slattery's most significant contributions were to place Plunkett in Nashville and to connect Bishop Byrne to Mother Mary Katharine Drexel, a Northeastern philanthropist and religious Sister dedicated to the service of African Americans.<sup>217</sup>

### **Mother Mary Katharine Drexel**

Mother Mary Katharine Drexel began advocating for Catholic outreach to black Americans and financing such efforts beginning in the late 1880s. Drexel's influence stemmed from the rare combination of her vast personal fortune, her elite but devout upbringing, and her personal witness as a religious foundress. For many decades, Drexel contributed nearly her entire income to the Catholic education of Native American and black children and related projects.

Heiress to her father, Philadelphia banker Francis Drexel, Katharine Drexel became a religious Sister and began her own order, the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament for Indians and Colored People. Katharine Drexel was born in 1858, the second of three children, Elizabeth, Katharine, and Louise. Francis Drexel, with his brother and leading partner Anthony, had staked J.P. Morgan's start in finance, and the Drexels' vast banking concern gained them tremendous wealth. Elizabeth and Katharine's mother, Hannah Langstroth Drexel, died shortly after Katharine's birth. Louise's mother, Emma Bouvier Drexel, died in 1883. At his death in 1885,

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<sup>216</sup> Slattery to Dyer, June 14, 1900, 12-R-18, JOS.

<sup>217</sup> Byrne to Drexel, November 18, 1900, Byrne Papers, ADN.

Francis Drexel left his daughters a vast inheritance—some fourteen million dollars between them—as a trust. He used the trust to protect them from unscrupulous opportunists who might marry them only to gain access to their fortunes. Each of the Drexel daughters could spend her third of the annual income from their inheritance, but the principal would pass to their heirs, or, should they die childless, to the charitable causes named in Francis’s will.<sup>218</sup>

Using their considerable income, Katharine and her sisters embraced the charitable generosity they had learned from the devout Emma. The Drexel sisters read Helen Hunt Jackson’s *A Century of Dishonor*, which chronicled the systematic injustices to Indians perpetrated by the U.S. government. Deeply moved by the plight of the Indians and requests for aid from Western bishops, they traveled to visit reservations and observe for themselves conditions among the Indians, many of whom were already Catholic. The sisters became regular and generous contributors to Catholic missions on the reservations, but they remained convinced that more efforts were needed. According to one account, when the Drexel sisters visited Rome in 1886 and 1887, Katharine in a private audience begged Pope Leo XIII to send missionaries to work among the Indians in America. The pope countered by challenging Katharine herself to go as a missionary to the American West.<sup>219</sup>

Even before her encounter with Leo XIII, Katharine had begun to consider the possibility of a religious vocation. She came to desire the life of a religious Sister and planned to enter an existing order. Her spiritual director encouraged her instead to take advantage of her unique position and found a new order for the cause she so ardently wanted to support financially. After

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<sup>218</sup> Cheryl C.D. Hughes, *Katharine Drexel: The Riches to Rags Story of an American Catholic Saint* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2014), 17-50; Consuela Marie Duffy, *Katharine Drexel: A Biography* (Bensalem: Mother Katharine Drexel Guild, 1966), 73-75.

<sup>219</sup> Anne M. Butler, *Across God’s Frontiers: Catholic Sisters in the American West, 1850-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 193-200; Duffy, *Katharine Drexel*, 77-93, 100.

consideration, she entered a Pennsylvania community in 1889 to receive novitiate training before founding her own order. The novitiate is a time of focused formation in the principles of the spiritual life and guidance in living the religious life. Meanwhile, Drexel's sister Louise had widened Katharine's focus, once exclusively set on Native American schools, to include those for African Americans as well. Thus, Katharine's western concentration expanded to include the South, and her community's apostolate encompassed both. She would name her community the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament for Indians and Colored People.<sup>220</sup>

Katharine Drexel was no ordinary aspirant to religious life. Drexel's choice drew public attention; an account of the ceremony for her entry into the novitiate appeared on the front page of the *New York Times*. Her father had given her charge of his household staff when she was a girl, and she could skillfully manage both people and money. Though not the first heiress to enter the convent—her own cousins had preceded her in the novitiate of the Mercy Sisters—Drexel was peculiar in that she kept the administration of her finances. Ordinarily, religious aspirants give up control of their property; but because of the special nature of her call, even in religious life Drexel retained the power to dispose of the income from her inheritance, which she used to support her community's work and other endeavors that shared its aims. She worked closely with the Archbishop of Philadelphia, Patrick J. Ryan, who oversaw her work. The Archbishop judged that Drexel, already in her thirties, and with a clear mission in view, could best serve the needs of the Church by administering rather than renouncing her fortune. Ryan saw Drexel's vocation as an opportunity for white Americans in general and white Catholics in particular to make reparation for the ruthless oppression of both Indian and black people. Drexel emerged from her novitiate ready to begin work as the superior of a new religious congregation. Fourteen young

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<sup>220</sup> Butler, *Across God's Frontiers*, 203-10.

women had already joined her in the novitiate, and with Drexel, now called Mother Mary Katharine, as superior, they began their distinct community life in 1891. The young community grew quickly, doubling in size by the year's end.<sup>221</sup>

Drexel dealt carefully with the many requests for funding, maintaining the financial savvy that had built her family's fortune. Drexel's community sent funds to emerging or already existing missions for Indians and black people, but they also built and staffed their own schools in the west and south. Each time Drexel favored a request for financial support, she would obtain Ryan's approval, then negotiate with the potential recipient. Drexel made her donations contingent on a contract signed by the recipient, guaranteeing that the gift would be used strictly for the purpose she intended. Dolores Egger Labbé argues that Drexel's policy of restricting her gifts to be used only for African Americans had the unintended effect of hardening the lines of segregation in the Catholic institutions that relied on her support. Labbé bases this argument on the development of all-black parishes in New Orleans, where large numbers of black and Creole Catholics pre-existed the missions Drexel funded. Because Drexel ear-marked the money exclusively for use for African American institutions, Catholic racial lines in some areas became more defined than they had been, as mixed congregations were not eligible for funds. It is not obvious that this pattern that emerged in New Orleans would be the case everywhere in the South, as in many areas black people had had little or no presence in Catholic institutions before the efforts Drexel helped to fund were underway.<sup>222</sup>

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<sup>221</sup> "Took the White Veil: Miss Drexel Enters the Convent of the Sisters of Mercy," *New York Times*, November 8, 1889, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; "May Buy Ursuline," *Pittsburg Dispatch*, May 9, 1889, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*; Dana Lee Robert, *American Women in Mission: A Social History of Their Thought and Practice* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1996), 333-34; Butler, *Across God's Frontiers*, 207-09; Duffy, *Katharine Drexel*, 170-71.

<sup>222</sup> Dolores Egger Labbé, *Jim Crow Comes to Church: The Establishment of Segregated Catholic Parishes in South Louisiana* (1971, repr. New York: Arno Press, 1978), 4-86.

Drexel's situation as a foundress and religious superior who controlled the disbursing of the income on an immense fortune put her in an unusual position vis-à-vis ecclesial leaders. Her relative independence financially and as a foundress with the sympathetic backing of her archbishop gave Drexel great liberty to speak her mind regarding how best to approach evangelization of Indians and African Americans and increased her chances of getting her way. It is worth noting, however, that Drexel, though she held the position of superior in the order, did not exercise total autonomy. Archbishop Ryan had to approve her expenditures, and, in accord with the norms of her institute and of canon law, Mother Drexel had to submit certain decisions to the deliberative vote of her council. She could not act unilaterally. She discovered this to her chagrin the very first time she promised to send Sisters to a mission, only to meet Archbishop Ryan's veto. When Father Slattery gave Mother Drexel's name to Byrne as a potential benefactor, he recommended that Byrne write to the Archbishop as well, to ensure Ryan's sanction.<sup>223</sup>

Scholars have criticized Drexel's unwillingness to obliterate her own color line by integrating her order and to acknowledge in practice and in fact the social and spiritual equality of persons of all races. Drexel's community voted in 1893 not to permit African American members, and the community kept this policy until 1949. This policy of exclusion may have seemed justifiable to the Sisters who faced opposition in some Southern areas because they were white teachers of black pupils. The reaction to integrated convents would likely have been even more hostile. Probably, though, it was not only the fear of hostility from without that prevented the Sisters from admitting black candidates. While many Sisters were recruited in Ireland, most

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<sup>223</sup> Duffy, *Katharine Drexel*, 176-77; John B. Alberts, "Black Catholic Schools: The Josephite Parishes During the Jim Crow Era," *U.S. Catholic Historian* 12, no.1 (Winter 1994): 77-99; Slattery to Byrne, Holy Family Church and School History Folder, ADN.

were American-born. Many no doubt shared the prejudices of many of their lay counterparts, and many of them explicitly or implicitly accepted the idea of white superiority and would have resisted living on equal terms with black women. Drexel and her Sisters directed black aspirants to black communities such as the Oblates of Divine Providence rather than accepting them as Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament for Indians and Colored People.<sup>224</sup>

While the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament excluded black aspirants, Drexel defended black women's right to make religious vows. This position brought her into a disagreement with Father Slattery of the Josephites. Slattery early championed the ordination of black men to the priesthood, but in a letter to Drexel, he suggested that black women should be permitted to live as religious, to do the domestic work of the house, but not be admitted to vows. Drexel hotly objected, and though Slattery dismissed her letter as "a mere quibble," the exchange demonstrates that Drexel took seriously the spiritual well-being of African American women who might join the religious life—to Drexel, they, like white religious women, needed the spiritual protection of the vows.<sup>225</sup>

### **Nashville Appeals to Drexel**

When Byrne sought his advice about finding benefactors, Slattery, doubtless concerned for his penniless priest, connected Bishop Byrne to Mother Mary Katharine Drexel and a few others as potential donors for Father Plunkett's new mission. He told Byrne to "Have a poor

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<sup>224</sup> Shannen Dee Williams, "'You Could Do the Irish Jig, But Anything African was Taboo': Black Nuns, Contested Memories, and the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Struggle to Desegregate U.S. Catholic Religious Life," *Journal of African American History* 102, no. 2 (April 2017): 142-44, 154 n. 93.

<sup>225</sup> Slattery to Drexel, November 22, 1898, 14-E-6, JOS; Drexel to Slattery, December 12, 1898, 14-E-8, JOS.

mouth and ask for three times what is needed.”<sup>226</sup> He advised Byrne to get Archbishop Ryan of Philadelphia to advocate his cause with Drexel. Byrne took this advice, writing both to Ryan and to Drexel.<sup>227</sup> In his letter asking Mother Drexel’s help, Byrne laid the situation out as he saw it several weeks after Plunkett’s arrival. He explained why the diocese was only just making a beginning with founding a black parish and that Slattery had sent a priest to be its pastor. Father Plunkett, he explained, had been “here six weeks and has found thirty Catholics and others well-disposed. . . . [T]he difficulty is to provide money for a place of worship for them and a school for their children.” Byrne explained to Drexel that they had found a church they wanted to buy that could combine church, school, and Sisters’ residence. The church, he believed, could be bought for eight thousand dollars, the first one third in cash and the rest in easy payments. Byrne explained that he had only received five hundred dollars from the Commission Fund, and that he himself could afford little. He appealed to her:

Knowing the interest you take in missions of this kind, and particularly in the conversion of the Negroes, I take the liberty of asking you if you would not give me some help in starting this mission. It is really sad to see the Negroes of this city . . . close to 40,000 . . . being brought up with no notion of religion at all and no notion of responsibility, in fact without any sort of moral conscience, and I have felt it my duty to make some sort of provision for them.<sup>228</sup>

Byrne based his appeal on the assumption that African Americans needed to be uplifted by white assistance. He painted a dire picture for Drexel, assuring her that the work he and Plunkett were undertaking was “in the strictest sense a work for the salvation of souls.” He

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<sup>226</sup> Byrne to Slattery, October 10, 1900, Byrne Papers, ADN; Slattery to Byrne, October 10, 1900, Byrne Papers, ADN; Slattery to Byrne, Byrne Papers, ADN.

<sup>227</sup> Byrne to Patrick Ryan, November 17, 1900, Byrne Papers, ADN; Byrne to Drexel, November 18, 1900, Byrne Papers, ADN.

<sup>228</sup> Byrne to Drexel, November 18, 1900.

begged for a prompt response with “any encouragement you may be pleased to give for the salvation of the Negros.”<sup>229</sup>

Drexel sent a prompt and encouraging response, promising to cover one third of the cost of the church if Byrne would agree to her conditions for the gift—the usual stipulation that the building be used exclusively for African Americans, and that the gift would otherwise revert to the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament. Byrne signed the agreement and a check for \$2,667 soon arrived. Even with this donation in hand, acquiring the proposed building entailed several false starts over the course of the next year and a half.<sup>230</sup>

Father Slattery had missioned Father Plunkett to Nashville to work exclusively for African Americans. Byrne, however, could not resist the temptation to employ Plunkett occasionally to fill in for priests in the diocese when illness or death left him short a man. When Byrne sent Plunkett to a white parish in Memphis, they could at least represent it as an opportunity to study the possibilities there and plan for a future African American mission, but when he assigned Plunkett to cover Father Emmanuel Callahan’s far-flung missions in rural East Tennessee, he could not even pretend to be serving black Catholics. African American outreach was important to Byrne, but it was neither his only nor his first priority.<sup>231</sup>

Byrne recognized in Plunkett a man of many gifts and welcomed his society. Plunkett lived with Byrne and the priests assigned to the Cathedral Parish for his first few years in Nashville. The Josephite’s talents for architecture and building made him an ideal collaborator

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<sup>229</sup> Byrne to Drexel, November 18, 1900.

<sup>230</sup> Drexel to Byrne, December 12, 1900, Drexel Box, ADN; Drexel to Byrne, December 23, 1900, Drexel Box, ADN.

<sup>231</sup> Byrne to Slattery, March 26, 1901, Byrne Papers, ADN; Plunkett to Slattery, December 21, 1900, 19-M-14, JOS.

for the similarly gifted Byrne, and over their years together in the diocese, Byrne would pull Plunkett into many a building project that diverted his energies from the African American people of Nashville. Nevertheless, though Byrne's attention to Plunkett's mission was divided and he sometimes diverted Plunkett from it, he continued to give it critical support.<sup>232</sup>

Plunkett's early assignments outside of Nashville necessarily distracted him from the immediate goal of getting a church. Plunkett's first stopgap assignment was in December of 1900, just two months after his arrival. He went to East Tennessee to fill in for Father Callahan, whose horseback mission circuit was the stuff of legend. In March 1901, Byrne sent Plunkett to fill in in Memphis for a time.<sup>233</sup> As the successful purchase of the Second Presbyterian Church—their original object—was by no means certain, Byrne continued, during Plunkett's absences and after his return, to explore other options. He had an eye on a property close to the new railroad passenger station, and he wrote to the owner, James Francis O'Shaughnessy, in February 1901 to ask if O'Shaughnessy would give or sell it to the diocese. Byrne explained:

since coming to Nashville as Bishop I have been much troubled by the condition of the Negro in this city and State and I have been sincerely anxious to do something for their spiritual good—something towards bringing them into the Church and under the influence of the Catholic religion. But the plain truth is that the Catholics are few in this Diocese, as you likely know, and not well to do. Beside [*sic*] for their number they have many charities to support. But just now I see an opening... What is wanted immediately is a site for Church and school and a place where Negro Sisters could live and open a training school for children.<sup>234</sup>

Byrne's intention to get black Sisters to teach may have been inspired by Plunkett's experience in his previous mission at Pine Bluff, where the Sisters of the Holy Family, a

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<sup>232</sup> Sister Mary John Allen to Father A.J. Emerick, December 27, 1907, Folder H60C, SBS; Peter J. Kenney, "Father Thomas Plunkett, S.S.J.," *Josephite News and Views* (Spring 1996): 1-2, JOS.

<sup>233</sup> Byrne to Father Thomas Tobin, December 9, 1900, Byrne Papers, ADN; Byrne to Slattery, March 26, 1901, Byrne Papers, ADN.

<sup>234</sup> Byrne to James Francis O'Shaughnessy, February 7, 1901, Byrne Papers, ADN.

congregation of mostly Creole Sisters served. Byrne pointed out that for years O'Shaughnessy had done nothing to improve the property. While O'Shaughnessy did not respond to the request, he did begin to improve the property, and Byrne and Plunkett soon despaired of obtaining it. They continued to explore other options, Byrne meanwhile gradually increasing the amount he was willing to pay for the Presbyterian church.<sup>235</sup>

Father Plunkett began to make converts long before he had a permanent church. Among his first converts was a black man convicted of murder, who was awaiting execution. Plunkett appealed for and received a stay of execution for the man and the other who shared his sentence for the crime. Originally slated to be hanged in May, the men were not executed until July.<sup>236</sup> Plunkett saw the event not only as the saving of the soul of the converted man, but also as a helpful public relations moment with his prospective flock. He wrote to Slattery:

This was the day assigned for the execution of that faithful disciple of mine, whom we visited in the gaol. I succeeded in getting a forty days reprieff [*sic*] for him . . . he is outspoken in his praise of boath [*sic*] Church and priest. The papers have given it considerable notice, it will do us a world of good among the colored people all over the state.<sup>237</sup>

Counting converts was a way of demonstrating the value of the black missions and that they merited financial support. Conversion counts could be helpful in convincing Catholics that the missionaries to non-Catholics in the U.S. should include African Americans as potential converts. Catholic clerics from all over the U.S. gathered at the new Paulist Fathers' house in

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<sup>235</sup> Plunkett to Slattery, May 11, 1901, 19-N-17, JOS; Plunkett to Slattery, July 8, 1901, 19-N-13, JOS; Plunkett to Slattery, September 20, 1901, 19-N-18, JOS; Plunkett to Slattery, November 7, 1901, 19-N-19, JOS; Plunkett to Slattery, December 15, 1901, 19-N-21, JOS.

<sup>236</sup> "Murderers Will Not Hang Today," *Nashville American*, May 7, 1901, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; "Hanged: Are the Three Negro Murderers," *Nashville American*, July 19, 1901, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; "Bodies Interred," *Nashville American*, July 20, 1901, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>237</sup> Plunkett to Slattery, May 7, 1901, 19-N-5, JOS.

Winchester, Tennessee to discuss evangelization opportunities and challenges at the 1901 Congress of Missionaries to Non-Catholics. The Josephite Fathers declined their invitation, and it was Bishop Byrne who spoke at length and with conviction, citing Plunkett's experience in Nashville to bring to the attention of all in attendance that Catholic evangelization in the American context included bringing black converts to the faith, and that success could be achieved. The proof was in Plunkett's convert count, less than a year into his mission.<sup>238</sup>

Nearly a year into his ministry in Nashville, the number of baptized black Catholics in the city had tripled from Plunkett's original census. Plunkett had baptized twenty-one persons, twelve of them adults, and had another dozen adults under instruction in preparation to receive the sacraments. Plunkett explained his success in convert-making to a friend:

A more generous spirit of cooperation, and good-will could not be desired than is found here among the better class of the colored people. They fully realize that the Church is the medium through which their salvation, both material and spiritual, must be worked out. They instinctively recognize in her the firm friend of true liberty and of human brotherhood. These facts once established, the work of their conversion is half done.<sup>239</sup>

Plunkett continued his instructions but found that the chief obstacle lay not with the potential converts, but with the drawing of the color line. Black Nashvillians were in Plunkett's view ready for conversion. He found them "naturally religious, generous, and kind. That they have been so long deprived of the blessings and advantages of the true faith is no fault of theirs." He wrote to a friend in his religious community that he heard the black people of Nashville asking him to

Teach us a religion that will make us better, make us to know, revere, and serve the great God that made us, make us conscious of our accountability to God, to our conscience,

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<sup>238</sup> Plunkett to Slattery, September 20, 1901, 19-N-18, JOS; Slattery to Byrne, January 7, 1902, Byrne Papers, ADN, Slattery dated his letter January 7, 1901, but it was certainly written after September 1901; it is likely that Slattery had not adjusted to the new year when he penned this letter.

<sup>239</sup> Plunkett to Thomas Donovan, September 1901, in *The Josephite* IV, no. 2 (October 1901).

and to our fellow man for our acts. In a word we want you to give us that religion that will make us men in the fullest and noblest sense of the word, honest, truthful, conscientious, reliable, industrious, and thrifty.<sup>240</sup>

Plunkett commented, “Such a man is the noblest type of God’s creation, even though he lives in a humble cottage, wears course clothes, and has not the manner of a Chesterfield.”<sup>241</sup> Plunkett’s words indicate his view of his work as that of uplift, and while they contain the freight of paternalism that typically marked white efforts vis-à-vis black people in this period, they also reflect the sense of mission that has marked Christian evangelization since St. Paul sailed for Macedonia.<sup>242</sup>

Despite the good will and perspicacity of his converts, Plunkett began deliberately to delay baptizing more people until he could be sure they would have a church in which to worship. In August 1901, Plunkett wrote to Father Dyer about his work, explaining that he was “still in the field and delighted with the prospects of a glorious future.” He reported:

Day after day, we go from house to house, in the negro quarters of the city, whereat the conditions are favourable, we call a meeting, then preach, and pray as best we know. The result is all that could be desired, and accounts for the number under instructions, the colored line however is drawn so close, that it would be imprudent to baptize so many until such time as we have a Church of their own. May I ask you then to represent to the Commission our urgent necessity, our spiritual condition is both prosperous and encouraging, materially, there can be non [*sic*] more needy.<sup>243</sup>

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<sup>240</sup> Plunkett to Donovan, September 1901.

<sup>241</sup> Plunkett to Donovan, September 1901. Having “the manner of a Chesterfield” meant “possessed of proper manners and etiquette.” *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “Chesterfieldian,” (accessed February 20, 2019), <http://www.oed.com.proxy.lib.utk.edu:90/view/Entry/31410?redirectedFrom=chesterfieldian#eid>.

<sup>242</sup> Jacqueline M. Moore, *Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. DuBois, and the Struggle for Racial Uplift* (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources, Inc., 2003), xv-xviii; Clayton M. Brooks, *The Uplift Generation: Cooperation Across the Color Line in Early Twentieth-Century Virginia* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2017), 2-28.

<sup>243</sup> Plunkett to Dyer, August 6, 1901, 95-DY-9, JOS.

The tactful Plunkett did not want to overstep the bounds of what he thought would be accepted by Nashville's white Catholics. He told Slattery that he deemed it imprudent to baptize any more adults until a church building had been secured. Plunkett's fear of white resistance to his newly baptized converts was probably in part influenced by opposition from Father John B. Morris, who was Byrne's Vicar General and the rector of the Cathedral. Morris, Plunkett reported, did not want them to purchase the Presbyterian Church because he did not want the new black church so close to the Cathedral.<sup>244</sup>

Resolved to baptize no more adults until he had a church building, Plunkett was not expecting a sudden influx of already baptized adult Catholics. A small community of black Catholics had existed in Lebanon, Tennessee since antebellum days. Every year they had walked the approximately thirty-four miles to Nashville to make their Easter duty,<sup>245</sup> and since his arrival, Plunkett had visited them monthly to provide the sacraments.<sup>246</sup> In December 1901, the group suddenly moved to Nashville. Plunkett explained to Slattery:

the Lebanon Colony pulled up stakes a week ago today and 19 of them came to town to live. Knew nothing about it till they showed up at the Bishop's house. When I inquired the cause of the Exodus, I was told they wanted to be near me. My heart gave way, I could not reprove them. I set about to provide shelter, food, and clothing."<sup>247</sup>

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<sup>244</sup> Plunkett to Slattery, November 7, 1901, 19-N-19, JOS.

<sup>245</sup> At a minimum, Catholics are required to receive Holy Communion once a year, during the Easter Season. This is commonly referred to as making one's Easter duty.

<sup>246</sup> Plunkett, "A Letter from the South," *Colored Harvest* 3 no. 3 (June 1901), ADN.

<sup>247</sup> Plunkett to Slattery, December 23, 1901, 19-N-23, JOS.

Plunkett, already concerned about the color line causing trouble for his people, had nearly doubled the size of his flock overnight. When their church was dedicated in June 1902, the congregation numbered around one hundred and twenty-five persons.<sup>248</sup>

Byrne finally purchased the Second Presbyterian Church building in April 1902, and the building was intended to house not only a black Catholic congregation, but also an industrial school.<sup>249</sup> The church—Holy Family—was established with dispatch, hosting a Mass of dedication in late June. The *Banner*, which gave Holy Family Church’s dedication Mass significant coverage, expressed satisfaction that the basement of the church, formerly a library, reading room, and meeting space, was slated to become “a manual training school.” The writer observed, “This [manual training] it is realized is the only education that in the end will benefit the colored race.”<sup>250</sup> The school did not materialize, however. Byrne cited his perennial deficiencies for the delay in opening an industrial school—“men and means.”<sup>251</sup> Probably Byrne’s delay in beginning also reflected his unwillingness to begin something he was not sure he could see through to the end, and his reluctance to open a school that was not at least on par with Protestant schools.<sup>252</sup>

The preaching at the Mass for the dedication of Holy Family Church appears to have reflected the concerns and attitudes of some white clergy, or perhaps what they saw as the

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<sup>248</sup> “First Colored Catholic Church: Dedicated Sunday with Impressive Ceremonies” June 30, 1902, *Nashville American*, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>249</sup> “New Catholic Orphanage and Other Church Enterprises,” *Nashville Banner*, April 22, 1902, clipping, 19-P-9b, JOS.

<sup>250</sup> “Colored Catholic Church Will Be Opened Tomorrow: It is the First Catholic Church to Be Established in the State of Tennessee,” *Nashville Banner*, June 28, 1902, clipping in Byrne Album, FP.

<sup>251</sup> Byrne, “A Series of Questions to be Answered by Applicants for Aid from the Commission for the Catholic Mission Among the Colored People and the Indians,” August 8, 1903, 157-DY-13, JOS.

<sup>252</sup> Byrne to Drexel, June 2, 1904, Folder H 10b Qb b21, SBS.

concerns of the large number of white people who attended the Mass. Father John Marks Handly, a Paulist priest and Nashville native, preached the sermon. According to the news accounts, Father Handly preached on the dangers of trying to solve the race problem and of speaking too much of racial injustice, which could cause despondency, complaining, and the contemplation of violence among black people discontented with current conditions. He suggested that the solution to the problem was for individuals each to pursue their own affairs, exercising patience with injustices that could not be ended overnight. Thus, they would be happy, each working for his or her own perfection in the image of the creator, forgetting those unhappy circumstances that they had not the power to change. Rather than fomenting social change, Handly maintained, the church teaches one how to meet hardship and calamity. The black church of Nashville was now like Zaccheus of the Gospel, whose house Jesus visited. "The church is ready to share the hardships of the colored race, in order that the colored race may share the victories of the Church." Handly's remarks probably eased the minds of any white critics who feared that the Catholic Church's efforts for African American evangelization were a move for social equality.<sup>253</sup>

Though it is impossible to gauge the black response to Handly's sermon, it seems likely that Bishop Byrne's remarks at the close of Mass were more agreeable to the black members of the congregation. According to the *Banner*, Byrne called the dedication Mass of Holy Family Church the happiest day of his eight years in Nashville, the fulfillment of a "long-cherished hope." Byrne commented on the "negro's progress since the Civil War." The paper reported that Byrne mentioned that he had faced "considerable opposition from people who did not believe the

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<sup>253</sup> "For Colored Catholics," *Nashville Banner*, June 30, 1902, clipping in Byrne album, FP; "First Colored Catholic Church: Dedicated Sunday with Impressive Ceremonies," June 30, 1902, *Nashville American*, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

negro could be trained to the severe morality of the Catholic Church. He said if this was so, it was all the more reason why the Church should go out to them. But it was not, he declared, and it will be seen that they will make good Catholics.”<sup>254</sup>

Byrne had already sharply admonished his white Catholics regarding their duty to support evangelization of African Americans. Byrne had penned and annually re-promulgated a circular letter encouraging financial support for the annual Lenten collection mandated by the Third Plenary Council. This letter, “The Negro and Indian,” reminded Byrne’s priests and laity that people marginalized by society are “the poor, for whom Christ died and to whom he went.” Reminding them of the Gospel mandate and its application to their treatment of African and Native Americans, Byrne went on to consider the matter from the point of view of their own self-interest:

we also as a nation owe a debt of justice and gratitude to the Negro and the Indian, a debt which it may be will call down upon us, as all sins of injustice must do, the curse and vengeance of God. Let us make then what reparation we can by obtaining for them spiritual comforts and blessings and thus stay the hand of God lifted in anger to smite a heartless and cruel people.<sup>255</sup>

If Jesus’ example did not suffice to inspire his people, perhaps fear of God’s punishment would. Byrne’s letter was intended to prompt generous donations, but its urgent tone on a racial issue hardly mirrored the patient bearing with present evils preached at the dedication by the cautious Father Handly. Perhaps Handly recognized that the white Catholics, who in 1904 would

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<sup>254</sup> “For Colored Catholics.”

<sup>255</sup> Byrne to the Clergy and Laity of this Diocese, February 11, 1903, Negroes Folder, FP. This is an extant copy of what appears to have been an annual appeal that Byrne updated each year regarding diocesan specifics, while keeping the letter substantively the same otherwise.

donate less than one tenth of one cent per capita to the collection in response to Byrne's letter, were not ready for such a challenging message.<sup>256</sup>

As Plunkett's efforts in Nashville began to bear fruit, Byrne began taking a more visible role in promoting such efforts across the South. In November 1903, fifty black adult Catholics received the Sacrament of Confirmation. With a church secured for his congregation, Plunkett saw his way clear to baptize and confirm greater numbers of people. In 1903, Byrne agreed to pen for publication by the Commission for the Catholic Missions among the Colored People and the Indians a plea to American Catholics to be generous in supporting these missions financially. This circular, published early in 1904, impressed many with Byrne's commitment to the evangelization of African Americans.<sup>257</sup>

So, with pomp, solemnity, conciliatory preaching, and little or no real opposition from white Nashvillians, the first church for black Catholics in the Diocese of Nashville was established. But Eugene Bunn, the black Catholic stove repairer and father of four, who had written Bishop Byrne in 1898 had not written to convince Byrne of the need for a church for black Catholics, but of a school. The church had been successfully established, but black Catholic children still had no Catholic school to attend in Nashville. Nevertheless, black Catholics' predicament regarding the education of their children and the salvation of their souls had made an impression on Byrne. Byrne put the first money toward a church rather than a school, but in the bishop's mind, the two were ultimately inseparable. Nashville's few black

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<sup>256</sup> "For Colored Catholics;" Morris to Dyer, July 25, 1904, 88-DY-17, JOS.

<sup>257</sup> "Colored Catholics Will Receive Sacrament of Confirmation Today," *Nashville American*, November 29, 1903, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; Byrne to Dyer, December 23, 1903, 10-DY-50, JOS.

Catholics, their numbers increasing, continued to press their pastor, Father Plunkett, and their bishop for a school.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### PLANNING FOR A BLACK CATHOLIC SCHOOL: DEBATING THE MODEL FOR BLACK EDUCATION

As Bishop Byrne envisioned the growth of black Catholic communities in Tennessee, he expected schools along with churches such as the new Holy Family Church in Nashville to play a key role in advancing the spread of the faith and the development of parish life. In the schools, the young would learn Catholic doctrine and, Byrne hoped, convert to the Catholic faith. Their conversions might draw their families to the Catholic Church as well. Church and school together could become a pivot for the cultural and social development that fostered the practice and passing on of the Catholic faith. Catholic schools might play a strategic role in creating urban black Catholic cultural centers that could win converts and then send them out to expand the Catholic presence in the cities. Though Byrne wanted schools for religious ends, given the context, other factors would also come to bear on what type of education black students received in the Catholic schools Byrne envisioned.<sup>258</sup>

Black education could not be taken for granted in the American South at the turn of the twentieth century. Many white Southerners saw the education of a black child as the ruination of a good field hand.<sup>259</sup> Others wanted to tailor black education in order to limit students' training to the necessary skills for occupations that would keep them economically disadvantaged vis-à-vis white workers, but still useful to white employers. Many black people saw the benefit of such an industrial education—one wherein the student learned a trade or artisanal skill—for

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<sup>258</sup> Thomas Sebastian Byrne to Louis Pastorelli, November 12, 1918, Byrne Papers, ADN.

<sup>259</sup> This was the view of James Vardaman, Mississippi's Democratic Governor from 1904-08 and later Senator who gained popularity by flagrant race-baiting. Kimberley Johnson, *Reforming Jim Crow: Southern Politics and State in the Age Before Brown* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 8, 118.

themselves or their children, as by it they could acquire skills that they could use to greater economic advantage than their confreres who had no training at all. Some, however, still saw value in offering a liberal education to black students, making possible higher education at least for a gifted top tier. Catholic schools might be preparing souls for salvation, but they were also preparing students for a future in this world, and Catholic educators, like everyone else concerned with black education, had to consider what model for schooling if any, would best advance their goals.<sup>260</sup>

### **Models of Black Education**

The question of black education was not a new one in 1904, when Bishop Byrne began hammering out details regarding a proposed school in Nashville, but it was a contentious one. In the decades after the Civil War, Northern missionaries, often funded by denominational missionary societies, motivated primarily by religious zeal, undertook to found or to teach in schools for black Southerners. While Northern missionaries generally demonstrated a certain paternalism, their schools were often conducted on the assumption that black and white people would one day operate on equal footing. They typically imitated the New England ideal of what an education should be—including “religious instruction, geography, history, and sometimes literature, in addition to the ‘three R’s.’”<sup>261</sup> They tried to prepare the student for higher study, for the mastery of Greek and Latin and the pursuit of academic learning, which, while not of immediate practical utility, was dubbed liberal because such “useless” knowledge freed the mind. Black leader Frederick Douglass had reminded his readers that slaveholders forbade such

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<sup>260</sup> Lester C. Lamon, “Black Public Education in the South, 1861-1920: By Whom, For Whom, and Under Whose Control?,” *Journal of Thought* 18, no. 3 (Fall 1983): 82-87. W.E.B. DuBois, “Talented Tenth” in *The Negro Problem: A Series of Articles by Representative American Negroes of Today*, ed. Booker T. Washington (New York: James Pott & Company, 1903), 33-75.

<sup>261</sup> Lamon, “Black Public Education,” 83.

an education because it rendered slaves unfit for servitude. One possessed of a liberal education would no longer submit to the indignity of slavery. Those who, though slavery had been abolished, still sought to keep African Americans subservient, resented the provision of ordinary liberal education for black children. Many black people, however, continued to pursue liberal learning for themselves and for their children.<sup>262</sup>

Many denominationally funded and missionary-taught schools did not long outlast Reconstruction. The state of Tennessee mandated in 1866 that black children be included in the provisions made for public education, and local school boards determined the means for this. Nashville's Board of Education agreed to begin allotting resources for black schools in 1867. Many Southern white people feared that having outsiders teach black children would encourage the children to question the racial inequalities that were built into Southern life. School boards, typically all-white, tried to discourage the Yankee school mistresses from remaining in the schools. They largely succeeded in pushing the Northern missionaries out. Missionary associations focused their efforts on more advanced education such as colleges and universities. These surviving private schools tended to employ white teachers to teach black students. The missionaries turned most of their primary schools over to local officials.<sup>263</sup>

Northern Christian missionary associations such as the American Missionary Association were responsible for the operation of many of the major black colleges and universities that

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<sup>262</sup> Adam Fairclough, "'Being in the Field of Education and also Being a Negro. . . Seems Tragic': Black Teachers in the Jim Crow South," *The Journal of American History* 87, no.1 (Jun, 2000): 81-82; Sonya Ramsey, *Reading Writing, and Segregation: A Century of Black Women Teachers in Nashville* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 2008), 3-4; Adam Fairclough, *A Class of Their Own: Black Teachers in the Segregated South* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2007), 20-21, 148-52.

<sup>263</sup> Howard N. Rabinowitz, "Half a Loaf: The Shift from White to Black Teachers in the Negro Schools of the Urban South, 1865-1890," *The Journal of Southern History* 40, no. 4 (November 1974): 569-76; Fairclough, *A Class of Their Own*, 14.

made higher education a possibility for African Americans in the South. While some of these schools—most outstandingly Atlanta University and Fisk University, but others too—offered an advanced curriculum, many accepted students who were not yet ready for such a course. African American colleges typically included courses that would bring students up to the level needed to do the advanced academic work expected of a college. The approximately twenty black liberal colleges in the South aspired to provide a classical education for students. Students were steeped in Latin, Greek, and ancient history. These educators presumed that black minds were as capable as white minds of acquiring a liberal education. Hundreds of graduates of Fisk and Atlanta went on to teach thousands of black children in primary and secondary schools and to take up other respected professions. Many white Southerners objected strongly to the classical education of black students, and in time, financial pressure brought to bear by either Northern philanthropists or state funding and other means would reduce some colleges to high school curricula and bring others to adopt manual or industrial elements in their curricula.<sup>264</sup>

As for the public primary schools, typically all-white school boards and those they represented preferred to have Southern white people teaching in the black schools. Southern white teachers, however, preferred to teach in white schools, and as Northern missionary teachers departed, the black schools got the dregs of the white teachers in the South.<sup>265</sup> In Nashville, where for a time black voters held a strong sway in some wards, black people lobbied to have black teachers in their children's schools. Frequent complaints from black parents in the 1870s and 80s and the work of black Nashville politician James C. Napier and others resulted in

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<sup>264</sup> Fairclough, *A Class of Their Own*, 148-53; A.A. Taylor, "Fisk University and the Nashville Community, 1866-1900," *The Journal of Negro History* 39, no. 2 (April 1954): 122-24.

<sup>265</sup> Howard N. Rabinowitz, "Half a Loaf: The Shift from White to Black Teachers in the Negro Schools of the Urban South, 1865-1890," *The Journal of Southern History*, Vol. 40, No. 4 (Nov 1974): 566-76.

the adoption of black faculties in some Nashville schools by the late 1880s. Other cities experienced similar action, and black teachers and administrators eventually became the norm for black public schools, not only in Nashville but throughout the South.<sup>266</sup>

Southern boards of education routinely short-changed black pupils, providing a fraction of the resources dedicated to white students' education. Black schools often met in rickety buildings, for fewer months per year, with lower-paid teachers and administrators and a lower per student expenditure than white schools. The move to black staffing in black schools only exacerbated the inequities, as school boards could then keep the pay for the entire school staff lower than that for white schools. Over the decade between 1895 and 1905, these gaps became more pronounced. While only a tiny fraction of the black population would attend universities for classical education, black teachers, sorely disadvantaged, continued to attempt to lay the foundation for higher learning for those few able to pursue it, and for most, simply to provide a primary education in hopes that, by it, the next generation of black Southerners might fare better than they.<sup>267</sup>

While many missionary schools had been founded on the model of New England school houses, where reading, writing, arithmetic, morality, and foundations in Latin and Greek received attention, some Northern educators coming south to aid in the "uplift" of the freedpeople believed their greater need to be practical moral and manual training. Industrial schools aimed to meet this perceived need. Many white people classed black people on the whole as morally deficient and in need of civilization. Founders, administrators, and teachers in

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<sup>266</sup> Rabinowitz, "Half a Loaf," 578-87; Ramsey, *Reading Writing, and Segregation*, 1, 5-9.

<sup>267</sup> Fairclough, *A Class of Their Own*, 9; Ramsey, *Reading, Writing, and Segregation*, 1; Rabinowitz, "Half a Loaf," 585; Louis R. Harlan, *Separate and Unequal: Public School Campaigns and Racism in the Southern Seaboard States, 1901-1915* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1958), 106.

industrial schools such as Hampton Institute in Virginia focused on good hygiene and morals, on instilling a work ethic, and on training students to master manual skills. By this means the educators, black or white, hoped to give their black students a leg up economically. Booker T. Washington, the renowned leader of Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, argued that if African Americans could acquire skills for necessary work, they could make themselves economically indispensable to their white neighbors. Washington, who had himself been born a slave, had graduated from Hampton Institute. He believed in education for practical action, and Tuskegee had a strong industrial focus. He and his many supporters believed that if black people could achieve economic success, they would then be able to gain ground politically and socially. Some black Southerners, like Nashville's James Napier, pressed harder publicly for political rights for African Americans than Washington did, but most of Washington's contemporaries, including Napier, recognized that Washington was walking a fine line, advancing black education in a hostile environment while trying to keep enough white good will for his own survival and that of his school.<sup>268</sup>

Despite their well-advertised practical focus, most of these industrial schools, including Tuskegee, did not stop short at manual training. Though their students generally labored on the building and maintenance of the schools and took required courses that prepared them for manual work, many industrial schools were primarily normal schools—schools specifically intended to prepare future teachers. Most of their graduates gained enough education in the academic subjects to become teachers themselves. At some schools, classical education was downplayed and even future teachers sometimes received only the basics necessary to teach

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<sup>268</sup> Norrell, *Up from History*, 65, 70, 200; Herbert L. Clark, "James Carroll Napier: National Negro Leader," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 49, no. 4 (Winter 1990): 246.

primary school. Purveyors of industrial education were not necessarily denying the possibility or even the desirability of having black students attain a higher education or pursue professions such as law and medicine. Some simply deemed industrial education the most practical and accessible step upward for the masses for whom they judged a liberal or classical education to be impractical. At Tuskegee, for example, many of the professors were graduates of Fisk University. They themselves had gained a liberal education, and were ready to pass it on, even in the circumscribed industrial school context.<sup>269</sup>

Many white Southerners reacted even against industrial education for black people, for fear that teaching black people trades or manual skills might give them an edge over white competitors for jobs, that it siphoned resources from the education of white students, and that even basic literacy for black people raised the problem of widening black political participation that they had just tried to curb by widespread disfranchisement. New legislation requiring literacy tests and poll taxes effectively excluded most black people from voting. White fears aside, in reality most Southern black youths went without an education, industrial, classical, or otherwise.<sup>270</sup>

Booker T. Washington and other black educators who championed industrial education have been seen as accommodationists who sought economic gain at the cost of social, political, and civil rights. This accusation was tendered by their contemporaries, black Northern intellectuals who resented the program of industrial schools, seeing such education as short-changing black students and demeaning the race. Washington's chief opponent, W.E.B. DuBois, though a Fisk graduate and a professor at Atlanta University, had grown up in the Northeast. In

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<sup>269</sup> Norrell, *Up from History*, 171-200, 279-81, 13-56; A. T. Ballantine, "Fisk Graduates at Tuskegee," *Nashville American*, October 20, 1900, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>270</sup> Fairclough, *A Class of Their Own*, 22-23.

fact, DuBois and Washington shared many of the same goals, but took different approaches to accomplishing them. DuBois was far more outspoken in demanding political and social equality for black people, and in condemning white racism. DuBois championed higher learning for black people and painted Washington as being opposed to any but industrial education.<sup>271</sup>

The 1890s had been a decade of disfranchisement, and Southern Black people had reason to fear that their exclusion from the polls might be followed by exclusion from public education. Some white politicians argued that having successfully disfranchised the race, it would be foolish to now regrant them by educating them. Education was a quasi-political matter in a situation where illiteracy barred one from the ballot box. Some white politicians made efforts to ensure the failure of black schools by dividing the school funds so that money paid by white taxpayers would educate only white children and money paid by the few property-owning black people would educate black children. While these proposals failed, their existence confirmed that black education, such as it was, was indeed in jeopardy. Rather than asking how black people ought to be educated, many were asking whether black people ought to be educated at all. And by 1904, those who answered in the negative were gaining public office.<sup>272</sup>

### **Industrial Education the Limit?**

Another wave of Northern philanthropic involvement in Southern education, coming in the first decades of the twentieth century, was motivated by business interests. Northern millionaires such as Robert Ogden, interested in reform and in maximizing Southern industrial potential, tried to use their philanthropic largess to steer black education down industrial

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<sup>271</sup> Donald Spivey, *Schooling for the New Slavery: Black Industrial Education, 1868-1915* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1978), 45; Norrell, *Up from History*, 13-16, 224-33, 281-93.

<sup>272</sup> Norrell, *Up from History*, 115-19, 142; Fairclough, "Being in the Field of Education," 74; Harlan, *Separate and Unequal*, 106; Fairclough, *A Class of Their Own*, 144-45.

channels. These proponents of industrial education differed from Booker T. Washington and his type of industrial educator in that the latter saw industrial education as a step up a ladder that black people would continue to climb as they gained economic standing and success in trade. The Northern donors, influenced by Southern white input and fearful of Southern white opposition, formed a group named the Southern Education Board but known as the Ogden Movement. The same group of men influenced other philanthropic boards including John D. Rockefeller's General Education Board. They operated under the assumption not only that social segregation would endure, but that certain low-rung employment niches would permanently be occupied by black workers. They saw Southern white education as a higher priority than black education. Industrial education would not be a way to ensure black progress, but a way to ensure that white employers could continue to profit from black labor. Their contributions supported schools for black students geared more towards manual and industrial training, to the deliberate neglect of black liberal arts education. By financing only their favorite institutions, they made survival for other black liberal colleges more difficult. The word training replaced the word education in conversations about black schools. Though these donors steered black education towards industrial training, they did not necessarily succeed in eradicating all liberal elements from the curricula of the receiving institutions. The schools desperately needed the funding, and they changed as they had to do to get it, but they clung to what liberal elements they could maintain. Many teachers in black schools maintained their belief in racial equality and in some ways managed to keep working for black advancement.<sup>273</sup>

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<sup>273</sup> Lamon, "Black Public Education in the South," 85-87; Spivey, *Schooling for the New Slavery*, 78-89; Harlan, *Separate and Unequal*, 94-98; Fairclough, *A Class of Their Own*, 121-22, 173-74; Norrell, *Up from History*, 194-97.

Industrial education was not exclusively the niche of black schools, as white industrial schools also existed. Neither was industrial education necessarily the antithesis of higher learning. The late nineteenth century saw a widespread shift in academic focus even at the leading white universities away from the standard classical curriculum, and towards a more practical, hands-on approach to learning. Universities began to offer many electives and allow students to tailor their education. The desire for skills-training in public high schools both black and white was evident by 1900, but there was a distinction made. According to the State Superintendent of Public Instruction in Tennessee in 1901, “Industrial education, manual training or practical instruction under whatever name it may be known, is the requirement of our times, and will do much for the great student body of our state.” In discussing “Negro Education” the Superintendent added:

I find . . . that only a small percentage of the colored children of the state have accomplished much in school beyond the subjects of reading, writing, and arithmetic, and a slight knowledge of history and geography. All that has been said . . . concerning industrial education for white children is doubly true of the negro. His greatest endowments are along the lines of industrial and manual subjects. He ought to be taught that work is honorable and that he who expects to earn a livelihood in that race must work, and work with his hands. They will find their greatest contentment and prosperity in the field, on the farm, in the work shop, in the factory and the mine; and their training should be of this character.<sup>274</sup>

White schools, educational leaders believed, could be enhanced by offering a manual course. black students, these leaders contended, were fit for little more. For many black students, even in liberal schools, their education was accompanied by manual labor and the acquisition of practical skills, and many saw the utility of this. Many black students continued to pursue the

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<sup>274</sup> “Training Heads and Hands,” *Nashville American*, June 27, 1906, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; “Public Schools of State in a Flourishing Condition: Annual Report of Supt. Fitzpatrick Shows a Gratifying Improvement Along Several Lines,” *Nashville American*, December 9, 1901, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

liberal education that was more generally their object in continuing at school and resented efforts to cut off the paths to anything more than manual training.<sup>275</sup>

### **Black Education in Nashville**

While black education was in a tenuous position throughout the South in the early years of the twentieth century, it was certainly stronger in urban than in rural areas, and perhaps strongest of all in Nashville, Tennessee, hailed as the “Athens of the South.” The specific circumstances of Nashville inspired Byrne’s caution regarding the foundation of a Catholic school for African Americans. Nashville boasted some of the nation’s leading black educational institutions, including Fisk University, Walden University and Meharry Medical College, and Roger Williams University. These schools had been established by and continued to operate at the behest of Northern Protestant denominations. For Byrne, the fact that Fisk University and other acclaimed schools were in Nashville gave “the sects” an advantage in the field of attracting African Americans to their denominations. He wanted to be sure that any Catholic school he founded was of a caliber to hold its own in a field already occupied by religiously-affiliated schools for black people.<sup>276</sup>

While black education was notably better in Nashville than elsewhere in the South, there was no surfeit of black schools in the city. Black public education in Nashville was far from adequate. Those black students who went to school rarely stayed beyond eighth grade. By the 1880s there were three white high schools in the city, and black Nashvillians had begun advocating for a black high school. The city’s black public high school was begun by adding

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<sup>275</sup> Norrell, *Up from History*, 154, Fairclough, *A Class of Their Own*, 140-42, 149-52, 173.

<sup>276</sup> Fairclough, *A Class of Their Own*, 437-38, n. 69.

grades to the already overcrowded grammar school. Black public schools in Nashville were overcrowded and underfunded by comparison with the schools for white children.<sup>277</sup>

Booker T. Washington had tried to bring the attention of Northern editors to the inequities of Southern education but could not bring them to take interest. He found that they wanted to do exposés on lynching or peonage, but not on the systematic injustice of Southern schooling. As conditions grew worse, black Nashvillians raised their voices in the local papers and in meetings with city officials. In 1903, Howard Congregational Church's black pastor, James Bond, wrote a long letter to the editor of Nashville's Democratic daily, the *American*, protesting against comments by a city councilman who remarked that education for black children ought to end at eighth grade because education rendered black people insolent, because black people did not pay enough taxes to make the expenditure for their education proportionate, and because all black people needed was a grammar school education to make good servants. Bond pointed out that slums like Black Bottom in Nashville were the result of ignorance, whereas educated black men had built the notable buildings, Napier Court and the Boyd Building, which housed black businesses and professional offices. All of Nashville would be better, Bond argued, if poor children, black or white, were educated.<sup>278</sup>

Again and again, black leaders protested the shortage of seats in the black public schools and their inadequate and even dangerous facilities. For a time, a lottery determined which black children would attend school as there was not room for all. Later, teachers taught students the

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<sup>277</sup> Bobby L. Lovett, *The African-American History of Nashville, Tennessee, 1780-1930: Elites and Dilemmas* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1999), 134-43; Ramsey, *Reading, Writing, and Segregation*, 1-9; Rabinowitz, "Half a Loaf," 590.

<sup>278</sup> Norrell, *Up from History*, 271; James Bond, "Education of the Negroes," *Nashville American*, January 4, 1903, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

basic subjects in two shifts, because there were neither teachers nor school facilities to accommodate the number of children to be educated. In October 1903, a delegation of black men headed by James C. Napier brought to the attention of the Board of Education the need for a school for black children in West Nashville. It was not their first attempt.<sup>279</sup> The following July, James Bond, pastor of Howard Congregational Church, wrote another letter to the editor of the *American*, making known the situation in the black public schools of the city. He wrote that “leading colored citizens have for three or four years petitioned the Board of Education for additional buildings.”<sup>280</sup> The city provided seats for only 3,500 of 12,000 school-age black children and some children lived across town from their school. The need was widely recognized even among white leaders, Bond explained, but having built two new white schools, the board had decided there was not enough money for a new black school, however necessary. Bond wrote again in August, appealing for two new school buildings for black students, one in North Nashville and another in West Nashville.<sup>281</sup>

In September 1904, Bond wrote again to the Editor of the *American*, this time to thank the paper for an editorial asking the Board of Education to provide a report of the conditions in black schools and to ensure that every child had the opportunity to go to school. Bond took the opportunity to again describe the situation as he saw it:

I again affirm that the colored schools of this city are in a deplorable condition. At the beginning of every school year hundreds are turned away for lack of room. Out of 12,000 negro children of school age the city provides seats for only 3,500. Some of these to get seats at all must walk six or seven miles a day or ride the street cars. The arrangement

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<sup>279</sup> Lovett, *African American History of Nashville*, 134-43; “Board of Education,” *Nashville American*, October 27, 1903, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>280</sup> James Bond, “Letters from the People: More Schools for Negroes Advocated,” *Nashville American*, July 24, 1904, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>281</sup> Bond, “More Schools for Negroes;” James Bond, “Letters from the People: A Warning and an Appeal,” *Nashville American*, August 26, 1904, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

adopted by the Board instituting two daily sessions at the Napier School does injustice both to teacher and pupil and is entirely inadequate to meet the needs of the children in other portions of the city. No denials have been made of these charges by the proper authorities. What they have said has only confirmed the statements I have made. And now additional difficulties confront us. The Knowles School has been condemned. We have been informed that it was condemned last spring when a windstorm blew away a portion of the building. I do not mean to be impertinent when I ask why the Superintendent of Schools, Z.H. Brown, has allowed the matter to rest until within a few weeks of the opening of the fall term. The building inspector, Mr. Miller, and Chief Rozetta still affirm that that the building is unsafe; that since last spring the walls have leaned six inches more. In spite of the judgment of these men, the Board of Education will prop it up. But it will be difficult to persuade the parents that their children will be safe there. Is that not natural? I put the question to you Mr. Editor. Would you, under the circumstances be willing to send your children there, were it a white school? My children go to Knowles. But under the circumstances I cannot send them there. I shall probably have to send them to a private school and pay for their tuition, although I can ill afford to do so.<sup>282</sup>

Further, Bond criticized the suggested plan of saving the money to build black elementary schools by closing the black high school. Calling attention to Nashville's reputation for education, Bond appealed to the good will of white leaders in Nashville. In closing he pleaded, "We ask . . . that we not be expected to send our children to an old building often condemned and now being repaired against the advice of the building inspector and chief of the fire department. We warn the city and shall hold it responsible if a frightful accident should occur." This letter laid bare the difficulty of seeking an education as a black person, when white people had control of the educational system.<sup>283</sup>

Theodore Roosevelt's 1904 presidential campaign and victory seem to have stoked the already smoldering fire of some white Southerners' opposition to black education. The Republican victory evoked hand-wringing and nostalgia for the Lost Cause in some white Southerners, but others insisted that, Republican president or no, and though slavery was no

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<sup>282</sup> James Bond, "The Colored Schools," *Nashville American*, September 3, 1904, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>283</sup> *Ibid.*; Lamon, "Black Public Education in the South," 86.

more, black labor should still be exploited for white profit. In a mid-November letter to the editor of the *American*, E.P. Thompson of Nashville suggested that rather than despond over the recent election outcome, white Southerners should take advantage of the black presence in the South by employing black workers in industrial labor. In his view, industrial work could render black people more valuable to the South than they ever were as slaves.<sup>284</sup>

In Nashville, the issue of schooling for black students became more pointed when city Councilman A.B. Anderson announced in late November 1904 that the majority of the council considered the black high school a financial waste and favored closing it. Anderson insisted that the measure was not because of ill will towards the race, but “because he was opposed to expending thousands of dollars annually for maintaining a valueless institution.” Anderson intended to consult the Board of Education and determine whether such a move would even be legal. If the money had to be spent for black education, Anderson argued, it should be used “for a manual training school, where they [black students] could become skilled in the use of tools.” Anderson called the high school a “nuisance.”<sup>285</sup>

The news account of the City Council’s deliberations regarding the black high school sparked some response from black readers. J.A. Bryant wrote to support Anderson’s idea of using the money that would be saved by closing the high school to operate an industrial school. Bryant advocated a “purely industrial” education for black students in Tennessee. He argued that higher education made girls unwilling to work and more likely to “seek low opportunities to gain

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<sup>284</sup> "Clubs in Session," *Nashville American*, November 4, 1904, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; "Rally in Marshal." *Nashville American*, October 28, 1904, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; N. P. Thompson, "No Need for the South to be Despondent," *Nashville American*, November 14, 1904, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; "Highways and Byways of the South," *Nashville American*, November 28, 1904, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>285</sup> "Negro High School: Strong Sentiment in Favor of Abolishing It," *Nashville American*, November 30, 1904, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

money without work.” Bryant emphasized that white Southerners were “doing all they can to help our race.” It was for black people, then, to learn the trades that would make them useful. Boys and girls should be taught skills such as carpentry and masonry, cooking and sick nursing, for which white employers provided a demand.<sup>286</sup> Another contributor, James T. Gilmore, disagreed with Bryant, arguing that Anderson’s plan would be a step backward, not only for “negro progress,” but also for Nashville’s reputation as the Athens of the South. The best black citizens and workers, Gilmore argued, were well educated. While college might be out of reach for most black students, city or county high schools could give black students a chance at a more complete education. He explained, “I am highly in favor of industrial education for the negro . . . but first give him a good English education and then train him along industrial lines.”<sup>287</sup> Another Bryant letter appeared with Gilmore’s on December 7, reiterating his deep commitment to industrial education. His efforts to ingratiate himself to white readers by a servile attitude may have been directed at getting as much funding as possible for black industrial schooling in Tennessee.<sup>288</sup>

The hot topic of closing the black city high school—Pearl High School—seems to have blown over quickly, and it is not clear that the city council took any action on the matter. No manual training program had been put in place as of June 1906. The 1906 Pearl High School Commencement Address by black principal F.G. Smith included an appeal to the President of the Board of Education. Smith pointed out that the Pearl curriculum had not changed since the high

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<sup>286</sup> Rev. J. A. Bryant, “Councilman Anderson’s Suggestions,” *Nashville American*, December 1, 1904, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>287</sup> James T. Gilmore, “Suggested Abolition of Colored High School,” *Nashville American*, December 7, 1904, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>288</sup> Rev. J. A. Bryant, “Sound Advice to Negroes,” *Nashville American*, December 7, 1904, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

school was begun eighteen years before. Other high schools, he pointed out, had adopted “manual training, domestic science, stenography, typewriting, Spanish, French and German.” Pearl had had no such adjustments to fit the times, and it was due for some effort in that direction. Smith specified:

I suggest, Mr. President, that you start with manual training. I recommend that this useful branch of practical education be made a part of the high school curriculum. I also recommend that it be introduced as soon as practicable, not to displace or supersede anything that we now have but that it be supplementary and elective, so that any child who has not the mental brightness to grasp the higher branches of learning, or who may prefer to fit herself for domestic work may find opportunity to prepare herself for that service.<sup>289</sup>

What is striking in Smith’s address is that a course in manual training is seen as desirable from the perspective of a black educator in a highly respected black high school. Clearly Smith would not have favored the city council’s notion to close the high school, but that did not mean he was opposed to industrial education. Also striking is Smith’s choice of a feminine pronoun, which makes it clear that industrial or manual training was aimed not only at male, but also at female students, though in very different lines of work. Industrial training as an option clearly differed from industrial training as the only course. The black educators at Pearl wanted their students to have access to both higher education and industrial training as options.<sup>290</sup>

### **Planning a Black Catholic School**

That Nashville needed a Catholic school for black students was not, and never had been, in question for Bishop Byrne. It was a matter of priorities and timing. From the outset of his episcopacy, Byrne felt the shadow of Fisk University and the other denominational missionary schools for black students in the “Athens of the South.” For Byrne, the establishment of a

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<sup>289</sup> “Pearl High School Commencement,” *Nashville American*, June 8, 1906, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>290</sup> *Ibid.*

Catholic school for black students was inherently a competition with established Protestant schools, and he was unwilling to proceed until he was certain the Catholics could begin with an excellent school that could hold its own in their company. With the establishment of the Holy Family Church, the establishment of a school became both more feasible and more necessary.

Byrne had specific ideas about what would make Catholic evangelical efforts successful among black people. Aspects of this are evident in Byrne's correspondence and his repeated appeals for the Lenten Collection.<sup>291</sup> He most clearly articulated his vision in 1906, when he compiled his advice about how to proceed in establishing missions for African Americans. Byrne noted:

Now the Church should be a good one, one into which the colored man will not be ashamed to enter, and in which he will take an honest pride; for it must be borne in mind that the colored man has a great deal of self-respect, or vanity, if you will, and is greatly influenced by public opinion—his traditions [his exemplars, and those among whom] he lives are all anti-Catholic, and there are scarcely any Catholic Negroes to encourage and strengthen him.

Having but recently emerged from servitude the shadow of the past rests upon his mind he has not self assertion or that robustness of character that make him willing to defy public opinion

Faith of itself and all the spiritual blessings he will gain by entering the Church are a great deal, but if experience of them is needed to appreciate them, and if the Negro has to seek them in a poor building in a neglected quarter of the City, he will not seek them at all. It is all the more important to have a fine church in cities like this, where their brethren of other faiths possess many handsome ones. Many of the Negroes are getting money and rising in the social scale; many of them are well educated, some as lawyers, others physicians, others are master workman and a larger number mechanics. Some ... have fine homes, and all who can dress well. Considering then the character of the colored man, his past, his present surrounding, the prejudice existing [against] him and the Catholic faith, his growing importance and rapid advancement in every walk of life, I should say that a fine Church will be a great influence in attracting him and holding him once he is converted.

What has been said of the Church is equally true of the school—that too should be a handsome building and the teachers should be first class. . . the teachers to be sent to

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<sup>291</sup> Each year before the collection for the Commission for the Catholic Missions among the Colored People and the Indians, which took place early in the penitential season of Lent, Byrne would issue a letter to his priest and people admonishing them to support the collection generously.

them should be equal to those teaching in non-Catholic schools, and if possible, superior.<sup>292</sup>

While Byrne's assessment was shot through with paternalism, it was also undergirded by a certain respect for the self-respect of the African Americans he described. Byrne recognized the upward mobility of black professionals and others without fear or condemnation, but with a practical readiness to accommodate high expectations. He wanted black converts, and if getting them required setting a high standard, Byrne saw that as the reasonable course.

The need for a school for black children combined Byrne's self-professed top priorities by 1904. He wrote to Father E.R. Dyer, who dispersed the funds for the Commission for the Catholic Missions among the Colored People and the Indians, "[if] Catholics in the North only appreciated the vital importance of converting the Negro they would be more generous...this and the school question are the supreme issues and the future of the Church depends much on their solutions."<sup>293</sup> Byrne found the "Negro question" and the "school question" united in the push for a school for Holy Family Church. Byrne wanted to do his part in what he saw as a long overdue effort to meet these pressing needs.<sup>294</sup> He worked with passion on both fronts—the schools and the "colored" missions—but in this project saw them united.

Byrne most often expressed his hopes for a school in terms of the salvation of souls, but he occasionally dropped the vision from the supernatural to the natural level, expressing it in terms of the perceived need for social control of black people by white people. Though these excerpts are the exception rather than the norm, they indicate that like many of his contemporaries, Byrne saw the "Negro Problem" in connection with black immorality. Whereas

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<sup>292</sup> Byrne, "Notes Regarding the Board," 1906, Byrne Papers, ADN.

<sup>293</sup> Byrne to E.R. Dyer, November 20, 1904, 10-DY-52, JOS.

<sup>294</sup> Byrne to Mother Mary Katharine Drexel, July 14, 1905, Folder H 10b Qb b21, SBS.

many progressives hoped to remedy the “problem” by legislation and municipal programs, Byrne saw grace, available through the Catholic sacraments, as the means not only to salvation, but to uplift.<sup>295</sup> He wrote to Father Dyer, of the Commission for the Catholic Missions among the Colored People and the Indians, “there is danger ahead unless he [the Negro] is brought under an influence that can control him.” Catholic black people would be more virtuous and more amenable to law than black people at large.<sup>296</sup>

While in the early years of his episcopacy Byrne had planned from his own conviction that education was the way to win converts in the “Negro mission,” his tone shifted after his encounters with Eugene Bunn and other black Catholics who became the nucleus of Holy Family’s congregation. His call for a school became theirs, a demand to meet their practical needs, rather than solely a theoretical step for making potential converts. The newly dedicated Church of the Holy Family and the work and preaching of Father Plunkett resulted in a rapid influx of converts to the Catholic Church among black Nashvillians, and the need of a school became ever more pressing. In 1904 in his annual report to Father Dyer, Byrne reported that Holy Family Church had “an edifying congregation of over one hundred and fifty devout negro Catholics.” He continued, “These people now entreat us to provide for them a school upon which so much depends in the bringing up and preservation of their children.” When Byrne was faced with an actually thriving black parish, a school became imperative—not just as a means to making black converts, but in order to provide for the education of Catholic children as the Church itself mandated. It is not surprising that black Catholics were pleading for a school in

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<sup>295</sup> Clayton M. Brooks, *The Uplift Generation: Cooperation Across the Color Line in Early Twentieth-Century Virginia* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2017), 2-28; Byrne to Dyer, November 20, 1904.

<sup>296</sup> Byrne to Dyer, November 20, 1904; Byrne to Drexel, March 25, 1906, Folder H10B Q6 f22, SBS.

1904 after Byrne reissued his pastoral letter on education. The letter reminded priests and people that Catholics were obliged under pain of sin to provide their children with a Catholic education. Every Catholic pastor in Tennessee was preaching that parents' salvation was at stake in the Catholic education of their children; black parents had cause to press for a Catholic school.<sup>297</sup>

To acknowledge the need for a school was one step, but to plan one for black students in Nashville in the first decade of the twentieth century meant facing a further question. What type of education should the school provide? Left on their own, it seems that Bishop Byrne and Father Plunkett would have established an industrial school, as had been rumored since the dedication of Holy Family in 1902. Their plan to do so was derailed, however, by their chief potential donor, Mother Mary Katharine Drexel, in 1904. While Northern philanthropists of her millionaire class were working through the Southern Education Board to establish and advance industrial training schools for African Americans, Drexel insisted that higher education not be ruled out.<sup>298</sup>

Until 1904, Drexel's connection with the Diocese of Nashville had been tenuous. In 1893 she had sent one hundred dollars to help Father Larkin buy desks for his black students at the short-lived St. Genevieve's School in Dayton, Tennessee, and in 1900 she had sent Byrne \$2,667—the down payment—towards the Holy Family Church purchase. An early 1904 visit to

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<sup>297</sup> Byrne, "A Series of Questions to be Answered by Applicants for Aid from the Commission for the Catholic Mission Among the Colored People and the Indians," August 8, 1904, 157-DY-14, JOS.

<sup>298</sup> "First Colored Catholic Church: Dedicated Sunday with Impressive Ceremonies," *Nashville American*, June 30, 1902, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; Byrne, "A Series of Questions to be Answered by Applicants for Aid from the Commission for the Catholic Mission Among the Colored People and the Indians," 1902, 157-DY-12, JOS.

Holy Family Church in Nashville, however, awakened Drexel's deep interest in the Diocese of Nashville and the efforts of Byrne and Plunkett for black evangelization.<sup>299</sup>

By 1904, Drexel had sent funds to dozens of Catholic institutions throughout the South, trying to invigorate what had always been woefully underfunded and understaffed efforts to convert black people to Catholicism and to serve black Catholics. Interested in learning firsthand about the conditions, needs, and opportunities in these various dioceses and institutions, Drexel set out, early in 1904, to tour the South. She visited Catholic institutions from Virginia to Savannah to Louisiana and up through Alabama to Tennessee, observing treatment of African Americans in these areas. Along the way, she recorded incisive comments about the circumstances specific to each place and made notes on her recommendations for future improvements. In some places she recommended the establishment of segregated arrangements as an improvement over total exclusion of black people from Catholic churches and schools. In Nashville, towards the end of this trip, Mother Mary Katharine and Bishop Byrne met for the first time.<sup>300</sup>

In Drexel and Byrne met two highly motivated, deeply religious, and action-oriented leaders. Drexel's immediate impression of Byrne was that he was energetic and aggressive—she dubbed him a “hustler.” Drexel noted conditions in Nashville and Memphis and discussed with the bishop his plans for both cities, and specifically for a school for girls in Nashville. Drexel reported that, “The bishop wishes dressmaking sewing and cooking besides schooling and I think he would not object to the highest Normal.” Already, before Drexel had become actively involved with Byrne's proposed school, she showed an interest in influencing the type of school

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<sup>299</sup> Joseph Rademacher to John Larkin, February 19, 1893, Folder H10B 47 f 1, SBS; Drexel to Byrne, December 12, 1900, Drexel Box, ADN.

<sup>300</sup> Drexel, “Notes from Tour of the South,” *Writings* no. 2950, 1904, SBS.

it would become. It seems that at this point Drexel was unwilling to commit her Sisters to teach in Nashville, but that she hoped for some involvement seems evident from her final note regarding Tennessee: “Bishop B. likes to get deeds in his own hands. BEWARE!!!” Drexel might well be wary of Byrne, who was as punctilious as she in matters of real estate, and as eager to maintain control. Drexel recognized Byrne as a hustler, but she was not far behind him, and in some ways outmatched him, so that she significantly influenced his vision for the school. The two were well-suited for the mutual encouragement their subsequent collaboration would entail.<sup>301</sup>

Byrne’s correspondence with Drexel and with other superiors of religious communities of women demonstrates the extent to which bishops in the U.S. depended on religious superiors to provide Sisters to staff the Catholic schools that had become integral to American Catholic parish life. This typical reliance was heightened in the case of Byrne and Drexel by his need not only for Sisters, but also for Drexel’s financial support. As they worked together, Byrne came also to appreciate Drexel’s friendship and advice.<sup>302</sup>

Drexel recognized in Byrne an important ally. Byrne annually made in his diocese an appeal for the Lenten collection that benefitted the Commission for the Catholic Missions among the Colored People and the Indians mandated by the Third Plenary Council. In 1904, Father Plunkett sent Drexel a copy of the text, and Drexel requested permission to have it published.<sup>303</sup> Drexel saw Byrne as a powerful voice for the cause that was her passion and hoped that his letter

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<sup>301</sup> Drexel, “Tour of the South.”

<sup>302</sup> Byrne to Drexel June 2, 1904, Byrne Papers, ADN; Byrne to Mother Helena, August 15, 1894, Byrne Papers, ADN.

<sup>303</sup> Byrne to Dyer, February 10, 1904, 10-DY-51, JOS.

and his preaching would draw many vocations to her order and inspire other priests and religious to dedicate themselves to the same goals. Nevertheless, Drexel resisted Byrne's proposal to have her Sisters staff the school, that it be strictly an industrial school, and that it exclude non-Catholics.<sup>304</sup>

On returning from her trip South, Drexel wrote to Byrne that her community could not spare the Sisters to staff a new school, but she was willing to contribute three thousand dollars to start one if he could find other Sisters to staff it. She suggested a community in Nashville that might be able to take on the work, encouraging Byrne to respond promptly so that he could open the school in September 1904 if possible. She wrote, "the field seems to be such a vast one that delay is almost intolerable. Would to God that both Nashville and Memphis were in operation! What a harvest of souls! . . . I am deeply interested in these two Colored centres." In her zeal, Drexel did not realize how cautiously Byrne meant to proceed.<sup>305</sup>

Despite Drexel's urgency, Byrne decided to delay definite decisions regarding the school. He warned her, "Haste is sometimes a good way to delay an important undertaking and possibly ruin it."<sup>306</sup> Byrne wanted Drexel's Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament to teach in the Nashville school because he wanted to be able to count on the excellence of the instruction. Byrne was afraid to trust a community of religious Sisters that served primarily in white schools. The community Drexel had suggested not only lacked sufficient personnel for the work, but Byrne also feared that they would not put their heart into work for black students. They would be likely, he judged, to send to teach black pupils those Sisters who had proven unsuccessful in other work.

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<sup>304</sup> Drexel to Byrne, n.d., Drexel Box, ADN; Drexel to Byrne, December 7, 1904, Drexel Box, ADN.

<sup>305</sup> Drexel to Byrne, May 29, 1904, Drexel Box, ADN.

<sup>306</sup> Ibid.

In short, Byrne opined, they would doom his school to failure, and he might never get a chance to start again. Instead, he wanted Drexel's Sisters; if he could not get them or some other community "willing and qualified to take up the work wholeheartedly," he would prefer to delay the school's opening. He wrote,

I do not wish to open a school until I can have one nearly, if not quite as good as those into which the sects [Protestant denominations] invite the colored children, and since we intend upon this work, they [the sects] are daily making greater efforts and offering more tempting inducements to gain them. It would be difficult to get a central site and the children whom we can control, besides not being numerous, live in all quarters of the city and distant from the church.<sup>307</sup>

In Byrne's mind, the church-school plan for Nashville never existed apart from his similar hopes for Memphis, and he was ready to move forward first in whichever city offered a surer next step. Dubious about the hopes for success with the Nashville school, Byrne and Plunkett preferred to put resources towards a church in Memphis, which they were confident would succeed. They would wait on the school until "there will be no chance of failure."<sup>308</sup>

Drexel accepted Byrne's assessment that haste might undermine their efforts; plans for the school seemed dormant when a chance meeting in St. Louis in early October 1904 brought Byrne and Drexel together. They discovered that both were headed to Santa Fe, and they met again there, this time by design. This reunion seems not only to have brought Byrne and Drexel from mutual respect to friendship and trust, but also to have revived their hopes to move forward with the school in Nashville. For Byrne, the renewed connection with Drexel and his tour of the

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<sup>307</sup> Byrne to Drexel, June 2, 1904, Byrne Papers, ADN.

<sup>308</sup> Ibid.

Blessed Sacrament Sisters' New Mexico school made him more determined to get her Sisters to Nashville to staff his proposed school.<sup>309</sup>

Byrne had been searching for a suitable property for a school for African Americans at least since 1900. He tried, unsuccessfully, to convince James Francis O'Shaughnessy of Nashville to donate land and a building for the cause.<sup>310</sup> A number of false starts made Byrne the more determined to succeed. Finally, in 1904, he set his heart on locating the school at Mile End, the mansion of Samuel J. Keith, president of Nashville's Fourth National Bank and the wealthiest banker in the city. Byrne wrote about the Keith property to Drexel in October 1904:

There is a beautiful property in a desirable part of the city, just in the opposite direction from the present Church of the Holy Family, and within a short distance of a large negro settlement, containing possibly some three or four acres and a splendid house, that could be had on easy terms and at a moderate price, say \$18,000. It would make an admirable place for an industrial school and a second mission for the Negroes of that quarter of the city.<sup>311</sup>

There was a serious difficulty with Byrne's plan. Keith and his family still lived in the house, and it was not for sale, though Keith had purchased land in the quickly-developing elite neighborhood on West End. Byrne recognized the trend that was moving Keith's class west, and probably counted on Keith's following the trend. Byrne realized that the situation required prudent handling. He explained to Father Dyer, whose Commission for the Catholic Missions among the Colored People and the Indians regularly contributed support to Byrne's initiatives for African Americans:

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<sup>309</sup> "The Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament, Nashville, Tennessee," 1937, copy in ADN; Drexel to Byrne October 14, 1904, Drexel Box, ADN; Byrne to Drexel, October 18, 1904, Folder H 10b Qb b21, SBS.

<sup>310</sup> Byrne to James Francis O'Shaughnessy, February 7, 1901, Byrne Papers, ADN; Byrne to Drexel, November 18, 1900, Folder H 10b Qb b21, SBS.

<sup>311</sup> Byrne to Drexel, October 18, 1904 Folder H 10b Qb b21, SBS.

The place in view is well situated, in the heart of the City, on the confines of a large Negro quarter, is the mansion of the president of one of our banks, contains about 5 acres and has a large residence, old style, and many outhouses. We hope to get it for about \$18 or 20,000.00 and Mother Katharine promises to help us. But as everything is not yet settled, it may be as well to say nothing of it for the present.<sup>312</sup>

Byrne afterwards bracketed the above passage with a marginal warning to Dyer, "Ought not to be published." The banker was as yet unaware that he would be selling his house, and Byrne did not want premature news of his designs on the Keith place to reach Nashville and upset Byrne's carefully laid plans.<sup>313</sup>

Byrne explained his plan to Dyer, laying out the obstacles, including lack of funds and a heavy debt, and begging for a generous grant from the Commission to help with the school. Dyer sent \$1,500.00, a relatively generous allowance. After years of seeking for a suitable site, Byrne was determined to land this one, even for a much higher price than he anticipated. His renewed hope for the school spurred Byrne to employ an agent to pursue the Keith property, even as another agent sought a suitable property for a church and school in Memphis.<sup>314</sup>

Byrne now hoped to be able to move forward on both the Nashville and Memphis fronts, but he still needed Sisters to staff the Nashville school, and he wanted it to be Drexel's Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament. Drexel had given ground on this question so far as to put the matter of the community staffing the school before her council. On December 7, Drexel wrote to inform Byrne that she and her council had voted to take the Nashville school.<sup>315</sup>

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<sup>312</sup> Byrne to Dyer, November 20, 1904, 10-DY-52, JOS.

<sup>313</sup> Ibid.

<sup>314</sup> Byrne, "A Series of Questions," August 8, 1904; Byrne to Dyer, November 20, 1904; Byrne to Drexel, December 4, 1904, Drexel Box, ADN.

<sup>315</sup> Byrne to Dyer, November 20, 1904; Drexel to Byrne, December 7, 1904.

While Drexel and her Sisters voted to staff the Nashville school, they reserved the right to insist on certain points—points on which, initially, they were at odds with Byrne’s expressed views. First, they insisted that the school must accept non-Catholic students as well as Catholics—how else could the Sisters meet their missionary mandate? Next, religious instruction must be required for all students, for in places where this was omitted, few converts were made. The last point of contention concerned the type of schooling to be offered. Already on her trip South, Drexel had written that while the bishop wanted industrial and manual skills to be taught, she thought he might be open to “the highest Normal.” They had not yet discussed the matter, but it could no longer be put off.<sup>316</sup>

In a December 4, 1904, letter, Byrne had written to Drexel about the school plans, and he mentioned the debate in Nashville at the time regarding the appropriate model for educating African American students. He wrote, “There is a great deal of talk here just now about combining industrial with common school education for the Negro. The City Council is considering a motion to abolish the Negro High School and substitute an industrial school instead. So they are coming around to our way of thinking.” Byrne went on to inform Drexel that he was in contact with the superior of the Divine Word Fathers, who successfully operated an industrial school for white boys outside of Chicago and were interested in beginning a similar institution for black boys in Tennessee. Byrne commented, “This is possibly what is wanted here. So you see, my dear Mother Katharine, things look hopeful.” Drexel, however, did not share Byrne’s view regarding industrial education.<sup>317</sup>

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<sup>316</sup> Drexel, “Tour of the South.”

<sup>317</sup> Byrne to Drexel, December 4, 1904.

With her council in agreement that they should take the Nashville school, Mother Mary Katharine needed to be clear with Byrne under what conditions they would be willing to operate. In particular, Drexel seemed bothered by the assumption of Byrne and others that closing the high school in favor of an industrial school would be a good plan. Like Byrne, Drexel felt the pressure of competing with “the sects.” She likely saw this as a good arguing point in any case, knowing that Byrne was very concerned to match or outdo the Protestants. She wrote:

The measure which you speak of, which is now under consideration by the City Council, namely, that of abolishing the High school education and substituting the Common School and Industrial education for the Negro may be the best thing for the greater number, but I must confess I cannot share these views with regard to the education of the Race, for I feel that if amongst our Colored People, we find individuals gifted with capabilities with those sterling qualities which constitute character, . . . the Church, who fosters and develops the intellect only that it may give God more glory and be of benefit to others, should also concede this privilege to the Negro—this higher education.

Somehow, I feel that if the representatives of the Catholic Church . . . advocate for the Negro, common school and industrial education alone, without the hope of a higher education, such as is found among the sects in their Institutions and Universities, a great deal of unpopularity would be aroused by such sentiments, and their ultimate conversion less hopeful perhaps, than if the same opportunities and facilities had been afforded them amongst the Catholics, as elsewhere.

May I ask what your Lordship would desire should our sisters take up the mission? It could be a day school and I presume to be conducted on ordinary common school or Grammar School methods. A Grammar School education is what I honestly believe to be necessary for the greater number, for if this be thoroughly accomplished they are fitted for ordinary walks of life, and should be ready at the conclusion of such a course to be what we desire them to be, self-sustaining men and women. It seems but wise to prepare for this, and if these are your desires, we shall be prepared to follow your wishes and try to lay the foundation solidly. If brilliancy be found and is to be developed fully, let us hope Our Holy Mother Church will have solved the solutions to the problem by that time, and will have some opening for the higher fields of education, which will equal, if not exceed, the Protestant Institutions.<sup>318</sup>

This correspondence between Byrne and Drexel about how to educate their potential students was going on during the very weeks that Councilman Anderson suggested closing Pearl High School and at least two black ministers wrote the *American* on the best means to educate

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<sup>318</sup> Drexel to Byrne, December 7, 1904.

African Americans. Drexel's letter to Byrne insisting on a solid grammar school education at the minimum and openness to the possibility of higher education took a stronger stance for black higher education than either of the two ministers. Drexel anticipated that black people would resent being limited in their educational opportunities. While Pastor Bryant wrote that black boys and girls were spoiled for real work by higher education, Drexel worried that they would be spoiled for conversion to Catholicism by too limited an education under Catholic auspices. As far as Drexel was concerned, ability, not race, should determine one's educational course, and her suggestion to Byrne for what was needed in Nashville did not include manual training.

Byrne's response to Drexel's ideas about the school indicated his eagerness to adjust plans for the school to accommodate whatever she and her community preferred—while still including industrial training. Byrne blamed Father Plunkett for suggesting that only Catholic students should be admitted, then moved to the thornier question of curriculum. He wrote:

I quite agree with what you say of the character of the education and industrial training to be given to the Colored children. The child should be in a day school with the usual Common Grammar School grades equal to other schools of similar class. If there should be found among the pupils those who are especially bright and ambitious, or those who are socially prominent who would benefit by a higher education by all means give it to them. These are details for which provision can be made as time goes on. Now arrangements are being made for the greater number, but the plans while being definite should be so elastic as to be capable of being adjusted to new conditions as they arise. This is the method of the Church and the absence of this spirit has stood in the way of much good that might have been done and was not by many of her children.<sup>319</sup>

What seems to emerge from this exchange of letters is a mutual compromise. Drexel pushed Byrne to accept higher education, or at least the foundations for it, while Byrne managed to hang on to industrial training as part of the education. Not only that, but Byrne was willing to extend Drexel's vision beyond just the school where her Sisters would serve. He added, "If the

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<sup>319</sup> Byrne to Drexel, December 19, 1904, Folder H 10b Qb b21, SBS.

Fathers and Brothers of the Divine Word come here, I shall [try] to infuse into them the same Spirit and I do not expect any opposition on their part.” Drexel was no foe of industrial education; in fact, her sister Louise and Louise’s husband had founded an industrial school for black boys in Virginia in 1895 and in 1899 Drexel’s community established a similar boarding school for black girls nearby. Drexel objected, rather, to limiting African Americans to no more than an industrial education and this under Catholic auspices. Byrne was not hard to convince. He wanted to keep the industrial piece, but he too had an intense appreciation of higher education and was willing to take Drexel’s lead to allow flexibility in preparing black students for it.<sup>320</sup>

Drexel and Byrne seem to have taken for granted that their school in Nashville would be an academy for girls staffed by religious Sisters. As early as 1894, Father Slattery had encouraged Drexel to move in the direction of higher education for girls. He wrote,

It seems to me that you should [undertake higher education of colored girls]. In fact this must be your main work. . . . [R]eserve your daughters for that higher, academic, normal, and industrial development which no other Catholic body seems willing to undertake. Your very aim is to evangelize and civilize the Negro race; surely the best prospects for this is to educate and train their women, not the outcasts, waifs, or strays, but those who have some knowledge of home life. . . . Abroad among the Colored race is a feeling that the Catholic Church sound as her principles are, does nothing for them. An institute for higher education under the care of the Blessed Sacrament Sisters would work a mighty change in this sentiment. . . . [G]irls...who have had good homes and ...better education will thus be fitted for school work or other positions where they will exert a marked influence on their Black Sisters.<sup>321</sup>

Slattery’s advice carries in it a strategy to convert larger numbers by teaching those who would wield the most influence—future teachers and mothers. In his view the most efficient way

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<sup>320</sup> Byrne to Drexel, December 19, 1904.

<sup>321</sup> Slattery to Drexel, March 10, 1894, 14-D-1, JOS.

to speed this process of evangelization with civilization was to reach the most potentially influential black women. Drexel's community had made its first move into the South by establishing an industrial and normal school for black girls in Rock Castle, Virginia.<sup>322</sup> Writing to Drexel in December 1900 about his hope of purchasing a church in Nashville for Father Plunkett's congregation, Byrne explained, "We hope to start a training school for girls shortly after we get possession."<sup>323</sup> In 1901, Byrne still planned on having black Sisters staff the school.<sup>324</sup>

A number of factors may have influenced the decision to start with a girls' school. It may have been assumed that a girls' academy would be more readily accepted by the wider public than any other because of the existing relative abundance of Catholic women's academies, which at times outnumbered Catholic schools for boys in the U.S. two to one. It was typical in the nineteenth century U.S. for a girls' school to precede a boys' school in a given parish or area, sometimes by more than ten years.<sup>325</sup> It may also have sprung from the common assumption, implicit in Slattery's advice, that women exerted more religious influence than men and "that mothers played a key role in nurturing the faith of future generations."<sup>326</sup> By this time, too, most black teachers were women. Yet another factor was the reluctance of superiors of women's religious communities to staff schools for young men. Many communities were prohibited by

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<sup>322</sup> Drexel to Byrne, December 20, 1900, Drexel Box, ADN.

<sup>323</sup> Byrne to Drexel, December 23, 1900, Folder H 10b Qb b21, SBS; Byrne to O'Shaughnessy, February 7, 1901.

<sup>324</sup> Byrne to O'Shaughnessy, February 7, 1901.

<sup>325</sup> Hasia R. Diner, *Erin's Daughters in America: Irish Immigrant Women in the Nineteenth Century* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983), 132.

<sup>326</sup> Mary J. Oates, "Catholic Female Academies on the Frontier," *U.S. Catholic Historian* 12:4 (1994): 121-22, 131.

their constitutions from teaching boys over the age of seven. The Sisters might teach in co-educational primary schools, but generally did not teach older boys. Teaching religious Sisters outnumbered teaching religious Brothers in the first decade of the twentieth century by an estimated twenty-five to one.<sup>327</sup>

In the first decade of the twentieth century, with lynching commonplace, disfranchisement of black citizens all but complete, and lines of segregation being drawn or tightened, black education was also under threat. Many white Southerners rallied behind candidates who opposed black education altogether, and had black schools not already existed as an established reality and with at least a modicum of legal protection, there would have been little hope for black schooling. Not all white Southerners shared these views, however, and many, white and black, favored industrial schooling. Among proponents of industrial education, one can generally distinguish between those who favored industrial schooling as a means to give black people an economic assist and those who saw industrial training as the only schooling black people were fit for. The distinction is an important one, as figures like Booker T. Washington, remembered in history for his industrial institute at Tuskegee, also supported higher education for African Americans where that was practicable. The epistolary conversation between Bishop Byrne and Mother Mary Katharine Drexel on the subject is significant in that it places them firmly in the camp of those who would offer an industrial education which might genuinely be a help for many students, while also making possible higher education. Though perhaps it oversimplifies the situation, one might boil the distinction down to one question: is it

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<sup>327</sup> Mary Ellen Pethel and Sarah Wilkerson Freeman, "Lift Every Female Voice: Education and Activism in Nashville's African American Community, 1870–1940," in *Tennessee Women: Their Lives and Times*, ed. Beverly Greene Bond and Sarah Wilkerson Freeman (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2015), 249; Kathleen Sprows Cummings, *New Women of the Old Faith: Gender and American Catholicism in the Progressive Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 122-23.

good to teach black students Latin—that is to prepare them for, or even provide them with, that most useless and yet most valuable of acquirements, a liberal education? For Byrne and Drexel, the answer, by Christmas of 1904, was affirmative.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### THE KEITH AFFAIR: WHITE NASHVILLE AND IMMACULATE MOTHER ACADEMY

Bishop Byrne and Mother Mary Katharine Drexel hoped to purchase the mansion of Nashville's richest banker and convert it into a day school—academic and industrial—for black girls. They began to execute their plan in early 1905. Byrne and Drexel acted cautiously, keeping their plans secret. Their caution and the negative reactions of many white Nashvillians that followed their purchase of the property give a window into the complex intersection of religious and racial issues and of segregation efforts and demographic change in rapidly changing Nashville in 1905. The growth of railroads and the extension of streetcar lines were swiftly altering the residential dynamics of Nashville, and the conflict that ensued over the location of the black Catholic school highlights ways in which the desire for white control and increasing racial segregation affected the city. Though many white Nashvillians attempted to veil racial issues behind concerns such as property value, their reaction to news that the former Keith home would house a school for black girls exposed the virulence, and even the lurking violence of race prejudice among Nashville's white elite. Racial discrimination, woven seemingly inextricably into the fabric of Southern urban life, shaped the thinking of white Nashvillians and seems to have warranted a higher place than it received in Byrne's calculations as he planned the Keith property purchase. Keith's apparent avarice and anti-Catholic bigotry justified clandestine action—his racial prejudice made it indispensable.<sup>328</sup>

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<sup>328</sup> William Waller, ed., *Nashville, 1900-1910* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1972); Don Doyle, *Nashville in the New South: 1880-1930* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1985), 78-114; James Summerville, "The City and the Slum: 'Black Bottom' in the Development of South Nashville," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 40, no. 2 (July 1981): 187-89; Benjamin Walter, "Ethnicity and Residential Succession: Nashville, 1850 to 1920," in *Growing Metropolis: Aspects of Development in Nashville*, ed. James F. Blumstein and Benjamin Walter (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press 1975), 22-28; Samuel J. Keith to Thomas Sebastian Byrne,

## Obtaining the Keith Property

By late autumn of 1904, Bishop Thomas Sebastian Byrne had set his heart on a fine residential lot in South Nashville as the site for his proposed academy and industrial school for black girls. Byrne judged the property to be perfect in every way for the purpose he intended.<sup>329</sup> The house and its spacious, beautiful grounds were centrally located in the city, close to many black residences, and not too far from Holy Family Church. Mother Mary Katharine Drexel was willing to pay for it. The bishop foresaw just one problem—getting ownership. The owner of the desired land and the lovely mansion situated on it happened to be the city’s most powerful banker, Samuel J. Keith. Keith did not have his house on the market, but Byrne hoped to get him to consider selling. Byrne confided to Drexel his apprehensions about dealing with Keith:

He must be dealt with cautiously, because, first, he is a very rich man and almost sordidly avaricious, and if he hoped that another dollar more than he asks could be got for the property he would hold out for that dollar, and next, he is intensely bigoted, and if he computed that the Catholics wanted it, no money could buy it.<sup>330</sup>

Concluding that Drexel could only successfully purchase the property anonymously, through a third party, Byrne employed an agent to obtain from Keith, in writing, his lowest asking price and a thirty-day option. Byrne advised Drexel, “A little patience is necessary and a

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February 15, 1905, Drexel Box, ADN; “Fate of the Keith Home,” *Nashville American*, February 19, 1905, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; Mrs. M. J. McKee, Mrs. J. H. Jenkins, et al. to Mother Mary Katharine Drexel, June 17, 1905, photocopy from SBS in the author’s possession; “Keith Property Transaction,” *Nashville Banner*, July 1, 1905, *Nashville Banner* microfilm Roll #175; Byrne to Drexel, December 4, 1904, Drexel Box, ADN; Byrne to Eugene Bunn, June 26, 1898, Byrne Papers, ADN; Byrne to Drexel, December 14, 1900, Folder H 10b Qb b21, SBS.

<sup>329</sup> Byrne to E.R. Dyer, November 20, 1904, 10-DY-52, JOS.

<sup>330</sup> Byrne to Drexel, December 4, 1904.

little prayer.”<sup>331</sup> Drexel in turn expressed her hope that “the pious prayers of about fifty or sixty nuns will defeat the avarice of the old gentleman.”<sup>332</sup>

Byrne solicited the Sisters’ prayers because he perceived Keith to be an avaricious bigot. In Byrne’s lexicon, a bigot signified someone prejudiced against Roman Catholics. Byrne feared that Keith might never name a price low enough to make the purchase feasible, especially if he knew the famously wealthy Drexel was the potential purchaser. Not only that, but he might refuse to sell his property to Catholic Sisters at any price. Care must be taken, Byrne judged, to keep Keith unaware of the identity of his potential buyer. An agent would take care of all negotiations.

Byrne described the Keith place as “well situated, in the heart of the City, on the confines of a large Negro quarter, . . . about 5 acres and has a large residence, old style, and many outhouses.”<sup>333</sup> The *Nashville Banner*, the local Republican daily newspaper, described the Keith place as follows:

This property occupies about a block of territory, the grounds being beautifully laid off, containing shade trees, blue grass, large lawn, etc. It is the largest residence lot centrally located in the city. The residence is an old Southern spacious brick mansion of about twenty large rooms, and the residence is situated in the center of the lot. . . This old home has been a center of social life.<sup>334</sup>

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<sup>331</sup> Byrne to Drexel, December 4, 1904.

<sup>332</sup> Drexel to Byrne, December 7, 1904, Drexel Box, ADN.

<sup>333</sup> Byrne to Dyer, November 20, 1904.

<sup>334</sup> “Sale of the Keith Home: T.J. Tyne Buys for Third Party for Cash,” *Nashville Banner*, February 11, 1905, *Nashville Banner* microfilm Roll #172.

Byrne hoped to purchase the Keith mansion and grounds for eighteen or twenty thousand dollars. Keith understood the merits of his place, however, and would sell it for no less than twenty-five thousand dollars.<sup>335</sup>

Byrne's circumspection in keeping secret his interest and his purpose in the purchase paid off; the agent, W.P. Ready, successfully negotiated a price with Keith. The price was higher than Byrne had anticipated, but he had set his heart on the site as ideal for the new school. Ever the shrewd businesswoman, Mother Mary Katharine personally looked the place over before allowing Ready to conclude the sale. She traveled from Philadelphia, arriving in Nashville January 31, 1905, and drove out the next day with Byrne for a covert evaluation of the property.<sup>336</sup> Finding the house and its situation satisfactory for their purpose, Drexel agreed to finalize the deal. Ready would have Keith sell the property to Byrne's lawyer and friend Thomas Tyne for twenty-five thousand dollars. Byrne had advised Drexel to have the bank send the check, "to protect us from any possible reluctance on the part of the seller, should he know the true purchaser."<sup>337</sup> To avoid suspicion, the check would be drawn on Drexel and Company, a bank so large that no one would associate it with Mother Drexel unless they somehow knew she was involved in the exchange. The ruse succeeded; the *Banner* reporter casually stated that the twenty-five thousand dollars in cash was paid with a "draft on a prominent New York banking

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<sup>335</sup> Byrne to Drexel, October 18, 1904, Folder H 10b Qb b21, SBS; Byrne to Dyer, November 20, 1904; "To Revoke the Deed: Samuel J. Keith Makes Offer to Catholic Order," *Nashville American*, February 18, 1905, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>336</sup> Drexel to Byrne, December 7, 1904; Drexel to Byrne, telegram, January 31, 1905.

<sup>337</sup> Byrne to Drexel, February 3, 1905, Folder H 10b Qb b21, SBS.

establishment.”<sup>338</sup> Tyne would immediately transfer the deed to Drexel and her Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament. Nothing would be announced until Tyne securely transferred the deed.<sup>339</sup>

The *Banner* of February 11 informed readers that the Keith property had been sold to attorney Thomas J. Tyne—Byrne’s third party—and described “the beautiful home of Mr. Keith, known as ‘Mile End.’” While new railroads and changing demographics had rendered the Stevenson Avenue neighborhood less desirable to elite white people for residences, and extended streetcar lines made neighborhoods further from the center of the city more attractive, the Keith property still excited general admiration, and its purchase, shrouded in secrecy, still sparked curiosity. Though pressed for information, Thomas Tyne refused to divulge his plans. The *Banner* had to leave its readers in suspense about the future of Mile End.<sup>340</sup>

Wary of spooking Keith, yet excited that their efforts were finally coming to fruition, Drexel and Byrne proceeded with cautious exhilaration. The bishop wrote, “I have been very happy since the future of the colored people has been in a large measure secured by this correspondence.”<sup>341</sup> Certainly sanguine in his hopes for the school’s impact on Nashville’s African Americans, Byrne, looking back on ten years of hopes and promises about a Catholic school for black children, rejoiced in its near accomplishment. Sharing his excitement, but earnest about the need to protect the deal by minding the practical details, Drexel pressed Byrne to secure the deed, first in Tyne’s name, and then in the name of the Sisters of the Blessed

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<sup>338</sup> “Sale of the Keith Home.”

<sup>339</sup> “To Revoke the Deed;” Drexel to Byrne, February 12, 1904, Drexel Box, ADN; Drexel to Byrne, February 13, 1905, telegram, Drexel Box, ADN.

<sup>340</sup> Don Doyle, *Nashville in the New South: 1880-1930* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1985), 63-87; “Sale of the Keith Home.”

<sup>341</sup> Byrne to Drexel, February 3, 1905.

Sacrament. Byrne received the Drexel and Co. check, and, confident that all was now safe, responded the same day, writing to Drexel about his hopes for the new school.<sup>342</sup>

This February 12 letter gives insight into Byrne's priorities, motivations, and expectations. Byrne and Drexel shared not only zeal for spiritual goals such as the salvation of souls, but also careful and practical handling of the matters of this world. Both acknowledged the need for clear legal parameters for their shared work—they had to delineate the respective rights and obligations of the Diocese of Nashville and of the Blessed Sacrament Sisters as they cooperated for the running of the school. Byrne asked Drexel to specify the conditions under which her Sisters would work in the diocese. At the same time, Byrne assured her of his good will, writing, "let us now work together in this great enterprise of harvesting souls for Him [Christ]. . . I shall try honestly and in all simplicity of heart to do my share." While they put the practical pieces in place for the long-term cooperation of the diocese and the religious community, they kept their end goal for the school in mind—the conversion of black individuals and families to the Catholic Church.<sup>343</sup>

Byrne included with his letter some newspaper clippings of an unrelated debate regarding the Catholic Church from the *Banner*. The exchange, ostensibly between the editor and Byrne's Vicar General, Father J.B. Morris, concerned derisive remarks about Catholicism that had appeared in the paper's pages. Byrne proudly acknowledged to Drexel that he himself had penned Morris's defense. On the eve of his announcement regarding the Keith property, Byrne

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<sup>342</sup> Byrne to Drexel, February 12, 1905, Folder H 10b Qb b21, SBS.

<sup>343</sup> Byrne to Drexel, February 12, 1905.

sent these clippings of one debate with no foreboding of the more heated controversy that impended.<sup>344</sup>

### **School Announcement Provokes Objections**

Byrne believed that, having secured the property, they had overcome the chief obstacles to the school's foundation. He had debated whether to accompany the archbishop of New York to the Bahamas on a trip that would keep him away from Nashville until mid-March.<sup>345</sup> Confident that all was in order, Byrne addressed Drexel again on February 13, informing her that he would make the trip. He would leave early on February 14 for Cincinnati. He instructed Drexel that, should any difficulty regarding the new academy arise in his absence, she should contact the Vicar General or Father Plunkett. Byrne himself would, on the evening of February 13, release to the newspapers his plans for the newly purchased property. He commented, "Everyone to whom I have let out the purpose of the new property are simply exultant—but the colored people will lose their heads."<sup>346</sup> Byrne, it appears, expected popular approbation to follow his announcement. Had he anticipated serious opposition, he might not have risked a prolonged absence from his diocese at such a time.

The February 13 evening edition of the *Nashville Banner* and the February 14 issue of the *Nashville American* carried an announcement of Byrne and Drexel's purpose in purchasing the

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<sup>344</sup> Drexel to Byrne, February 7, 1905, Drexel Box, ADN; Drexel to Byrne, n.d., Drexel Box, ADN; Drexel to Byrne, telegram, February 13, 1905; Byrne to Drexel, February 12, 1905, Folder H 10b Qb b21, SBS.

<sup>345</sup> At this time, the Archbishop of New York, John M. Farley had jurisdiction over the Bahamas, and efforts were underway for the conversion of Black Bahamians to Catholicism. This trip, in the interest of converting people of African descent, was in Byrne's mind not unrelated to his own efforts in Nashville. Byrne went to meet Farley via Cincinnati, where Byrne's long-time friend Henry Moeller was invested as Archbishop of Cincinnati on February 15. Byrne's attendance at the ceremony in the Cincinnati Cathedral was noted: "Magnificent were the Ceremonies Attending the Investment of Archbishop Moeller," *Kentucky Irish-American*, February 18, 1905, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*.

<sup>346</sup> Byrne to Drexel, February 13, 1905.

Keith property. The *Banner* praised Byrne's foresight in choosing so admirable a site for the proposed school. These articles were the first indication Keith and his South Nashville neighbors had that the property he had unwittingly sold now belonged to the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament and would be used to advance their mission. "For Colored Girls: Roman Catholic Academy Will Be Founded Here: Keith Home is Purchased", the *American* announced. The article focused on Drexel and her work, the property exchange, and the plans for the academy.

The institution will not be a free one in any sense. There will be an industrial department for the teaching of housewifery, in which tuition may be gratuitous, but the other regular courses will be charged for, just the same as at any other academy. Music, fine arts, literature, science, and all the studies which go to make up the curriculum of any college or university for white girls will be embraced in the course at this negro' girls academy.<sup>347</sup>

Byrne had communicated Drexel's vision for the new school's academic focus to reporters with clarity. He did not attempt to disguise the academic curriculum offered at the school. The *American* further commented on the exemplary education Drexel's Blessed Sacrament Sisters had received to fit them for their work. Excellently educated, Northern, white Catholic women would set to work providing an academic education to the daughters of Nashville's black elite. Perhaps surprisingly, neither paper tinged the breaking story with controversy; each article appeared with the run of news, well into the paper.<sup>348</sup>

However mild Byrne's statement and the papers' report of it, the announcement nevertheless proved the catalyst for a local explosion. Samuel J. Keith was no one to be trifled with, and his racial prejudices proved far more virulent than the anti-Catholic bigotry about

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<sup>347</sup> "For Colored Girls: Roman Catholic Academy Will Be Founded Here," *Nashville American*, February 14, 1905, 5, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>348</sup> "School for Colored Girls," *Nashville Banner*, February 13, 1905, *Nashville Banner* microfilm Roll #172; "For Colored Girls: Roman Catholic Academy Will Be Founded Here," *Nashville American*, February 14, 1905, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; "To Revoke the Deed."

which Byrne had cautioned Drexel or the avarice that Byrne had identified as the banker's central trait. The Keith property reportedly sold for the largest amount any South Nashville residence had ever brought, but nothing, Keith declared, would have induced him to sell his home to be used as a school for black children. Not only did the purpose offend the sentiments of Keith and his neighbors, he informed Byrne, but it also compromised their property value. Though, from Byrne's perspective, the quality of Keith's neighborhood had already been compromised by the proximity of the railroad, and black families lived within a few blocks of Mile End, Keith nevertheless took the repurposing of his former home as a personal and public affront and refused to countenance the property's suitability to house such a school. Keith acted immediately to try to rescind the sale and publicly declared his innocence of any complicity in the plan.<sup>349</sup>

Having been duped in the transaction, Keith did all he could to nullify it and, failing that, to derail Byrne and Drexel's plans. Samuel J. Keith wielded considerable social and economic influence in Nashville as the president of the Fourth National Bank, a trustee at Vanderbilt University, a leading member of McKendree Methodist Church, and a member of elite social circles. The Fourth National Bank was a financial force in Nashville. Under Keith's leadership, it was the only bank in the city to remain open throughout the bank runs of the Panic of 1893, and it only grew stronger in the ensuing decade.<sup>350</sup> The 1898 *National Cyclopaedia of American Biography* described Keith as a

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<sup>349</sup> Keith to Byrne, February 15, 1905; Byrne to Keith, March 19, 1905, Byrne Papers, ADN; "To Revoke the Deed;" "Sale of the Keith Home."

<sup>350</sup> Keith to Byrne, February 15, 1905; "Fate of Keith Home;" Don Doyle, *Nashville*, 51-53; John Sloan, "Business and Finance," in *Nashville: 1900-1910*, ed. William Waller (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1972), 105, 108; "Death of Two Members of the Board of Trust" *Vanderbilt University Quarterly* 9 (Nashville: Vanderbilt University, 1909), 235.

public spirited citizen, contributing liberally to enterprises for advancing the general prosperity of Nashville, to whose people he is deeply attached, and in whose future he has implicit faith. He was a member of the executive committee, and chairman of the finance committee for the Tennessee centennial exposition of 1897 and was an important factor in its organization and successful management.<sup>351</sup>

Keith also served as president of the Tennessee Bankers' Association. Keith's daughters had been leading Nashville debutantes, and his wife belonged to the Vanderbilt Women's Club. The Keiths' Stevenson Avenue home, known as "Mile End," ranked as one of "Nashville's Old-Time Mansions" and a hub of white elite social life.<sup>352</sup>

Keith had secured a desirable property on West End Avenue for his new home before he sold the old one, but he was not prepared to accept the news that the home he was vacating would house a school for black students. Out of his own indignation and in response to outcry from his white neighbors, Keith, as soon as he read the news account explaining the purpose for which his home had been purchased, immediately wrote to Tyne, then to Byrne and to Drexel, begging to retract the sale. Swallowing his pride as well as his alleged avarice and religious bigotry, Keith attempted to reason with Byrne. Byrne always had several irons in the fire, and it was known that he planned to open a home for the elderly in Nashville. Keith attempted to divert the plan for Mile End to that purpose. He wrote:

The prospect of having a school for this purpose located there, has aroused a sentiment of great dissatisfaction among many persons living in that vicinity, who feel that their property will be thereby greatly injured, and their homes rendered undesirable. I write to say that had I known the purpose . . . I should not have made the sale at any price. . . . I would not have been willing upon any conditions, to see it used for that purpose . . . I am willing to pay back the entire consideration, losing the agent's commission . . . if you will have the property deeded back to me. I would not object to the property being used for

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<sup>351</sup> George Derby and James T. White, *The National Cyclopaedia of American Biography* 8 (New York: J.T. White, 1898), 277.

<sup>352</sup> "Directors Chosen," *Nashville American*, January 15, 1896; "Must Soon be Belles," *Nashville American*, August 16, 1896; "Society," *Nashville American*, March 14, 1900; "Protestant Orphan Asylum," *Nashville American*, February 5, 1896; "Nashville Old-Time Mansions," *Nashville American*, January 31, 1904.

other purposes of your church. . . . I heard that the property would probably be used by the “Little Sisters of the Poor”, as an Old People’s Home. If you will have it used for that purpose, instead of a negro school, I will donate Twenty Five Hundred Dollars to help the work . . . I will sell it on easy terms, instead of for cash, and will refund the cash price that has been paid. I earnestly ask your co-operation to the end either that the sale be rescinded entirely, or that the property be put to some other use that is not objectionable.<sup>353</sup>

Keith’s plea makes it clear that ultimately only one issue was at stake—race. Money was not the concern—he was willing to spend thousands to rectify the situation. The Catholic faith was not the concern—under the circumstances, any Catholic mission besides that to African Americans would be welcomed and supported. Byrne was not on hand to receive Keith’s distressed letter or to weigh his offer. Though Keith believed Byrne to be in Cincinnati, Byrne had headed to Nassau, and would not even read Keith’s distressed plea for over a month.<sup>354</sup>

Keith could not wait so long to exonerate himself publicly from complicity in Drexel and Byrne’s scheme. On February 18, the papers reported in detail his appeals to Drexel and Byrne; the account gained front page coverage in the *American* for two straight days. Determined to demonstrate that he was unaware of the true buyer and the purpose for which his home was purchased, Keith spelled out for his fellow Nashvillians each stage that led to the sale of his property. Keith advertised his repugnance at the thought of his former home being used to educate black students and made clear his reluctance to see his neighbors’ and his own remaining Stevenson Avenue property lose value. Keith recapitulated for all of Nashville the main points of the entreaty he had sent Bishop Byrne.<sup>355</sup>

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<sup>353</sup> Keith to Byrne, February 15, 1905.

<sup>354</sup> “To Revoke the Deed;” Keith to Byrne, February 15, 1905; Drexel to Byrne, February 21, 1905, Drexel Box, ADN.

<sup>355</sup> “To Revoke the Deed;” “Fate of Keith Home.”

## Neighborhood Changes

Keith and his neighbors wanted to blame the school for neighborhood changes that had been underway long before the Drexel purchase. Keith's frantic efforts to undo the damage of his home's sale indicate the pressure wealthy white South Nashvillians felt as their neighborhood changed around them. The matter of the school simply put a point on already existing issues that bore on the desirability of South Nashville property for residential use. Keith's recently sold residence on Stevenson Avenue constituted part of a once elegant neighborhood that was already declining. In an analysis of Nashville's residential patterns, historian Blanche Henry Clark Weaver assesses the situation in South Nashville at the time of the Keith affair. She writes:

Among the many contributing factors which caused the decline of South Nashville as a residential area several can be pinpointed. In the first place it had always been a spotted area. On Rutledge and College Hills were beautiful homes; and Stevenson Avenue (a continuation of South Vine), College (Third), and Summer (Fifth) were good addresses. But on the intervening streets were very modest homes. In the second place, between Broad Street and Howard Street sprawled Black Bottom, a Negro section.<sup>356</sup>

To these factors Weaver adds the railroad proximity and the increasing railroad traffic. The Stevenson Avenue neighborhood around Mile End was just two blocks from the railyards, and the growth of industry in the city, along with the commerce fostered by the railroads, rendered the neighborhood less desirable for residents. Nashville's new train station, Union Station, had been opened in 1900, and railroad traffic had increased. With the advent of the electric streetcar, the tracks in Nashville expanded rapidly. In 1902, Nashville's electric streetcar companies were consolidated, and fares dropped, facilitating further expansion. Growth in other areas of the city, such as that around Vanderbilt University, acted as a magnet to pull residents from South Nashville to more desirable locations. In 1902, Keith had already purchased property

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<sup>356</sup> Blanche Henry Clark Weaver, "Shifting Residential Patterns of Nashville," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 18, no. 1 (March 1959): 29.

on West End Avenue, in the growing elite residential suburb made popular by the extension of the streetcar tracks, though he did not actually move until 1905, a few months after the sale of Mile End.<sup>357</sup>

Byrne and Drexel saw these external factors and concluded that few people could object to the Stevenson Avenue property as a school site. To reach South Nashville from Byrne's downtown residence, one had to pass through Black Bottom, one of the city's more unsavory slums.<sup>358</sup> No doubt Byrne and Drexel traversed this section as they rode to explore the Keith mansion's possibilities. Outsiders, they saw the proximity of black residents to the Keith place, but perhaps failed to observe the invisible boundaries which, reified in the minds of the remaining white residents of the once desirable neighborhoods of South Nashville, separated them from the black people nearby. Historian James Summerville explains that the placement of a black school at Mile End violated these boundaries. "To the affluent white residents of the area, a black school [on Vine Street] threatened to crack the invisible but implacable wall separating their neighborhood from Nashville's black and poor, who ebbed and flowed around it." White residents of the area attempted to stem the changes in the area. One white man purchased forty homes close to a white school to ensure that none would be inhabited by black people. According to Summerville, "With each passing year, however, the pressure upon Rutledge Hill and central South Nashville had grown more intense as Black Bottom's population began to exceed the available dwellings there and to spill over into adjacent neighborhoods." In the minds

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<sup>357</sup> Weaver, "Shifting Patterns," 29-32; "Real Estate Transaction," *Nashville American*, February 16, 1902, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; Doyle, *Nashville*, 87-90.

<sup>358</sup> While Black Bottom had become an area with a concentrated black population, it was originally settled by poor Irish immigrants. The name Black Bottom derived from the color of the mud that frequent flooding deposited on all in its path. cf. Summerville, "City and the Slum," 182-83.

of affluent white people, black residence was equated with neighborhood decline, and while they would tolerate it on back streets and lesser properties, though not without a slowly mounting tension, the repurposing of the finest home in the area as a black school posed an abrupt and acute threat to their already frighteningly fluid status quo.<sup>359</sup>

Keith's move to West End coincided with a new business venture in that area. Keith and several business partners incorporated as the Richland Realty Company in 1905, investing in the company to develop suburban property on the West End. Never slow to respond when opportunity knocked, Keith was ready to make a profit from the rapid growth as the city's suburbs rode the streetcar extensions west.<sup>360</sup>

As West End grew into residential suburbs for Nashville's white elite, real estate companies began to eye the campus of Roger Williams University with desire. A college for black students, operated by the northern American Baptist Home Missionary Society, Roger Williams occupied thirty acres of now prime real estate along the Hillsboro Pike. The area around the school was being developed by realtors for suburban residences and by Vanderbilt University. As the suburbs expanded, the black school drew purchase offers from white neighbors and real estate companies. By 1905, the university president had received "magnificent offers for the property." The Missionary Society at first gave the offers little consideration.<sup>361</sup>

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<sup>359</sup> Summerville, "City and the Slum," 187.

<sup>360</sup> "Will Acquire Land: Richland Realty Company Applies for Charter," *Nashville American*, March 4, 1905, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>361</sup> "Building Question," *Nashville American*, May 8, 1905, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; "Disastrous Fire: Main Building of Roger Williams Goes up in Smoke," *Nashville American*, January 25, 1905, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

In 1905, two fires rendered the university inoperable, changing the future of the Roger Williams campus. A January fire destroyed the four-story main building, including classrooms and the boys' dormitory, sparing only the wing that housed the girls' dormitory. A second fire, in May, gutted the remaining wing. While many suspected arson, no definite conclusions could be drawn. Meanwhile, Nashville boosters waited eagerly to see if the American Baptist Home Missionary Society would decide to sell the property. The *American* reported popular anticipation that a decision to move the black school would triple area property values. The subsequent development would be devised to permit only desirable residents for the new neighborhoods. To that end, frame buildings and structures costing less than \$3,000 would be prohibited.<sup>362</sup>

One cannot ascertain the cause of the Roger Williams fires, but their effect was the removal of a black college from an area that was becoming an elite white neighborhood. The Missionary Society sold the property. Exclusively white neighborhoods and the all-white George Peabody College for Teachers that would eventually become part of Vanderbilt University replaced Roger Williams University on the old campus. Roger Williams attempted to rebuild "in a negro neighborhood," close to Fisk University.<sup>363</sup>

### **Perseverance Despite Protest**

In the days after Keith's strident public apology, the *American* emphasized the uncertainty of South Nashville residents as they waited to hear how Byrne and Drexel would

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<sup>362</sup> "Roger Williams Has Another Big Fire Loss," *Nashville American*, May 23, 1905, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; "University Fire: Suspicious Circumstances Attending College Blaze," *Nashville American*, May 24, 1905, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; "Current Comment: Roger Williams University Grounds," *Nashville American*, March 11, 1906, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; "Roger Williams' Future," *Nashville American*, May 3, 1906, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>363</sup> "Roger Williams Site," *Nashville American*, May 10, 1906, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

respond to Keith's offer. Speculation remained rife for days. An unnamed Catholic insider told a reporter, "Bishop Byrne has had this plan in view for more than five years . . . The place has been carefully considered and is regarded as suitable in every way. Bishop Byrne is a man who does things when he sets his head that way, and if he wanted to, he would buy the White House." Those who knew Byrne's tenacity in general and his commitment to this cause in particular expected no alteration of his plans. Keith's white neighbors maintained hope, however, that Byrne would change course.<sup>364</sup>

In the meanwhile, white South Nashvillians told reporters that if Byrne failed to see the light, they were prepared to seek the destruction of Mile End. They threatened to pursue a Civil War era street grant that would, if the city council ordered it, extend Central Street right through the mansion itself. Orville Ewing, Sr., former owner of Mile End and a relative of Keith, had, four decades earlier as a war-time exigency, agreed that should the city ever deem it necessary, it could extend Central Street through his property.<sup>365</sup> The *American* reported that the neighbors were waiting to see if such action would be necessary. An unnamed citizen commented:

It is sincerely to be hoped that the offer will be accepted by Mother Catherine, and thereby avoid the animosity which would necessarily result against the order [the Blessed Sacrament Sisters] if the negro school were established in the building proposed. I think that Bishop Byrne will look at the matter in the proper spirit and that the negotiations will come to happy end . . . but if the residence is to be used for such an objectionable purpose . . . the opening of the street will be demanded by everybody in South Nashville. . . The citizens out in this neighborhood don't intend to have the negro school, and while I am opposed to anything unlawful, I fear there would be . . . violence if efforts are made to establish the school as planned.<sup>366</sup>

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<sup>364</sup> "Citizens Up in Arms," *Nashville American*, February 17, 1905, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; "Fate of Keith Home."

<sup>365</sup> Steven Hoskins, "A Restless Landscape: Building Nashville History and Seventh and Drexel" (PhD diss., Middle Tennessee State University, 2009), 52-53, <http://digital.mtsu.edu/cdm/ref/collection/p15838coll2/id/9286>.

<sup>366</sup> "Fate of Keith Home."

The confidence this citizen maintained that Bishop Byrne would prove malleable in the matter reveals just how divergent his perspective was from Byrne's. The contributor could not conceive that Byrne might really insist on implementing the proposed measure in the face of popular white hostility to it. In white South Nashville, opposition, tinged with the threat of violence should legal means fail, was brewing in the unfathomable event that Byrne hold to his course.

Communication between Byrne and Drexel in the month or so between his departure from Nashville and his return gives a window into their motivations and attitudes before they knew that their plan was under fire. Oblivious to the storm in Nashville, Drexel and Byrne continued their correspondence between Philadelphia and Nassau, encouraging one another and strengthening their mutual resolve for the work they had just begun. Drexel expressed gratitude to have “a representative of the Apostles take such thorough interest in the work.”<sup>367</sup> Not many bishops had committed as deeply as Byrne to the apostolate to African Americans. Drexel hoped to inspire him to continue and deepen that commitment. Praising his interest in the work, she challenged him to remember the value Christ placed on every soul, “be it in black, red or white body.” Still unaware of the backlash in Nashville, she wrote:

If we remember as you say that ‘all belongs to Him [Christ]’ even the hearts of men, then there is nothing to fear, only that we do not His will, for if we do it, He has all power to help.—Honestly, I believe that is the only thing really to be feared—the not doing God’s will as He wills. When it comes to the salvation of as many souls as possible, can we doubt He wills this?<sup>368</sup>

These lines make it sound as though she knew trouble was on the horizon, but perhaps the fear she sought to allay was that of the usual hardships and disappointments that worthwhile

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<sup>367</sup> Drexel to Byrne, n.d., Drexel Box, ADN. Catholics understand their bishops to be successors to the original twelve apostles through apostolic succession.

<sup>368</sup> Ibid.

endeavors generally entail. Byrne responded to her letter, reiterating his determination to work for the souls of African Americans and confiding to Drexel, “Day by day it seems the importance of the work is opening upon me and that I have been mysteriously led to take it up.”<sup>369</sup> Drexel and Byrne were united in their resolve for purity of intention in the new endeavor—to act for the glory of God and the salvation of souls. They continually reminded one another why they were undertaking this work. Their confidence in one another’s genuine and spiritually motivated commitment and their common faith in the providence of God would encourage both to hold the course despite the opposition.<sup>370</sup>

It was well that Drexel had resolved to fear nothing except not pleasing God, for she was immediately the brunt of Keith’s ire. Receiving no response to his letter to Byrne, Keith focused attention on his correspondence with Drexel, to whom he had sent the same offers about revoking the sale or using the building to some other purpose. Mother Mary Katharine penned a cordial but firm response to Keith. Sympathizing with Keith’s nostalgia for his home, she gently challenged him to remember that the only real home for a Christian was awaiting him in eternity. She expressed confidence that the white religious Sisters and black day students would cause no disturbance to the neighborhood. Attempting to appeal to Keith as a Southern gentleman, she assured him of her confidence that Southern hospitality would win the day over this initial hostility.<sup>371</sup>

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<sup>369</sup> Drexel to Byrne, n.d., Drexel Box, ADN; Byrne to Drexel, February 28, 1905, Folder H 10b Qb b21, SBS.

<sup>370</sup> Byrne to Drexel, June 2, 1904, Folder H 10b Qb b21, SBS; Byrne to Drexel, February 12, 1905, Folder H 10b Qb b21, SBS; Drexel to Byrne, n.d., Drexel Box, ADN.

<sup>371</sup> “Mother Katharine: Replies to Proposition Regarding Keith Residence,” *Nashville American*, February 26, 1905, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

Drexel understood that race was at the crux of Keith's objections, and she was unwilling to cede that his concerns had any defensible grounding. She wrote as follows:

I am just in receipt of your letter . . . I hasten to answer it and to express to you my regret that you and your neighbors should feel as you do concerning the purchase of the property. I think there is some misapprehension on the part of you and your neighbors which [I] should like to remove. The Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament who have purchased the property are religious, who are the same race as yourself, and we shall always endeavor in every way to be neighborly to any white neighbors in our vicinity, and we have every reason to hope we may receive from our white neighbors the cordial courtesy for which the Southern people are so justly noted.

It is true we intend to open an Industrial School and Academy for Colored girls, but the girls who come there will be only day scholars, and in coming to the Academy and returning to their homes, I am confident they will be orderly and cause no annoyance.

I observed very carefully when in Nashville that the property which we purchased was within a very few blocks of numerous houses occupied by colored families, and, therefore, even were the property to be the residence of colored teachers, which it is not, I think no just exception could be taken to the locality selected.

I think I can fully realize how you feel about your old and revered home, around which so many attachments of the past—the sweet relations of home life—hover. I acknowledge I feel the same regard to mine, and confess that some time ago, when passing it in the trolley cars, when I saw a bill of sale on it, a whole crowd of recollections of father and mother and sisters, etc. came vividly to my imagination. Then I more than ever realized how all things temporal pass away, and there is but one home, strictly speaking, that eternal home, where we all hope to meet our own, and where there will be no separation any more. And so, temporal things, after all, are only to be valued inasmuch as they bring us and many others—as many as possible—to the same eternal joys for which we were all created.<sup>372</sup>

Drexel hoped to reason with Keith and reconcile him to the property purchase. It seems that she also hoped to discomfit him into acting in a gentlemanly and Christian manner, but her very expression of sympathy and understanding—her account of her own home-nostalgia—indicates that she either did not comprehend the nature of Keith's antipathy for the potential students, or, perhaps more likely, that she chose to feign ignorance in hopes of elevating his conduct. Drexel could, without hypocrisy, remind Keith that a Christian's wealth should be used

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<sup>372</sup> "Mother Katharine: Replies."

to extend the kingdom and that the eternal joys of heaven were meant for all— black and white alike.

Keith proved less than susceptible to Drexel’s mild remonstrances and invitation to a more civil approach. Eager to show all Nashville that he had made every effort to redress the situation and to demonstrate that Drexel was obdurate, Keith violated a basic point of etiquette by publishing Drexel’s response in the newspaper without her permission. As the newspaper would not print the letter as news, Keith submitted it as a paid advertisement in the *American*, with a full explanation of his own conduct and expressing hope that “if his [Bishop Byrne’s] influence could be secured in behalf of rescinding the sale, that such a course would be taken.” As he publicly pushed the blame for the property purchase onto Drexel, Keith hung his hopes on Byrne’s cooperation when he would finally return to Nashville.<sup>373</sup>

Returning to Nashville in mid-March, Bishop Byrne met a barrage of letters, including Keith’s and one from Drexel regarding Keith’s appeal.<sup>374</sup> Drexel assured Byrne that it was “providential that you were not home until the little storm which arose after the purchase had subsided.” She wrote, “Don’t you think a firm holding onto the property with words of conciliatory mildness are for the A.M.D.G. [*ad majorem Dei gloriam*, greater honor and glory of God] in the case of the proposed Industrial School and Academy?”<sup>375</sup> White South Nashvillians had hoped that they could influence Byrne to convince Drexel to revoke the sale. They not only underestimated Byrne’s commitment to evangelizing African Americans in what he judged to be

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<sup>373</sup> “To Revoke the Deed;” “Fate of Keith Home;” “Mother Katharine: Replies.”

<sup>374</sup> Keith to Byrne, February 15, 1905, Drexel Box, ADN.

<sup>375</sup> Drexel to Byrne, n.d., Drexel Box, ADN.

a fitting way, but they also underestimated the degree to which Drexel and Byrne were united regarding the school.

Byrne, convinced that he and Drexel stood in the right, heeded Drexel's advice to stand firm, and he did his best to do so with "words of conciliatory mildness." In his March 19 reply to Keith, Byrne tried to let his month-long absence convince Keith to forget his grievances. Byrne apparently wished to smooth over the conflict, yet the letter he penned to Keith enraged Keith and his companions even further. Byrne wrote:

Your esteemed favour of February 15<sup>th</sup>, 1905 was on my desk when I got back home Friday last. Possibly now that the little storm has blown over there is hardly a call for an answer and I shall do little more than acknowledge it. The apprehension of yourself and your friends, because of the purpose for which your homestead is to be used, are I beg to submit more fanciful than real.<sup>376</sup>

Considering the case closed, Byrne tried to assuage Keith's "apprehension." He assured Keith of the Blessed Sacrament Sisters' refinement, and that

the children who are committed to their care . . . will in conduct and the proprieties of life all things considered compare favourably with the young girls of any institution in Nashville . . . the training and education they will receive will make them useful and self-respecting women . . . alive to the responsibilities of whatever position in life they may occupy. One would think that a school . . . combining the grammar, the industrial and the academic features under teachers so competent and for children needing the beneficent influence of their example would be welcomed by the citizens of Nashville as a distinct good and a social blessing.<sup>377</sup>

Here Byrne employed the language of the contemporary urban progressive, calculated to appeal to Keith and his associates as responsible protectors of the community. Byrne's words of reassurance to Keith, meant to conciliate him, instead heaped burning coals on Keith's head.

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<sup>376</sup> Byrne to Keith, March 19, 1905, Byrne Papers, ADN.

<sup>377</sup> Ibid.

Byrne's letter resembled Drexel's in that both seem to have been trying by their tone to show Keith that his position was unreasonable and beneath his dignity.

Given Byrne's nearly legendary determination, it is unlikely that knowing he would meet opposition would have deterred him from his course. It also seems unlikely, however, that he would deliberately have further stirred up Keith and his neighbors by insulting them and their families. It appears rather that Byrne's words were indeed intended as conciliation, and not to twit Keith. Thus, Byrne's inveterately Yankee understanding prevented him from realizing that his words, meant to pacify, would enrage. It is possible however, that Byrne spoke frankly the truth he saw, and let the chips fall where they may. If Keith and his neighbors took offense, it was only because of their failure to recognize the equal humanity of the black pupils who would attend Drexel's school and the white pupils at other schools in Nashville. Byrne enjoyed a lively public controversy when one served his ends, but it seems in this case that he deliberately adopted a courteous, restrained tone. He let fly his characteristic invective privately, exclaiming to Drexel after some further interaction with Keith, "[Keith's] conduct is rude and vulgar and none but a churlish plebeian could be guilty of it." Publicly, Byrne refrained from insults, opting for a quiet but resolute stance.<sup>378</sup>

As Drexel had done, Byrne reminded Keith that the neighborhood's demographics rendered the Keith property quite suitable to their purposes. In this, he implicitly accepted the presumption that a black school should be in a black neighborhood and should be in a neighborhood that was already compromised. He wrote:

[T]his site was selected precisely because I was convinced that, unless the Colored people in securing educational advantages are to be entirely excluded from the limits of the City

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<sup>378</sup> Drexel to Byrne, n.d., 1905, Drexel Box, ADN. On Byrne's tendency to speak the truth without sugar-coating, see J.B. Morris's funeral homily for Bishop Byrne, quoted in "Last Sad Rites for Bishop Byrne," clipping in Newspaper Accounts of the Last Sad Rites of Rt. Rev. Thomas Byrne, D.D., Bishop of Nashville, Tenn. Folder, FP.

no other could be less open to reasonable objection. It is in the very heart of a large Colored settlement . . . and there are comparatively few white people in the neighborhood—a neighborhood which it is claimed has already been injured by the proximity of the railways. These considerations and the further fact that the property is large, central, and accessible, and admirably adapted for the purpose for which it is to be used, were the motives which induced me to advise Mother Katherine Drexel, and after long argument persuaded her, to pay for it a price which I felt and still feel is far beyond its real value. The excessive price was paid mainly because I thought the placing of the school on this site would conciliate the good will and invite the encouragement and cooperation of the citizens of Nashville in the undertaking.<sup>379</sup>

Hoping that mildness and reason would mollify Keith and his neighbors, Byrne held to the same ground Drexel had defended in her earlier reply to Keith. As far as he was concerned, the matter was settled. Byrne's very mildness, his dismissal of their concerns, and worst of all, his comparison of the black girls who would attend the new school with the girls at Nashville's white institutions, however, further outraged Keith's supporters.<sup>380</sup>

Keith meanwhile resorted to various strategies to foil the goals of Byrne and Drexel. He used his influence in the Nashville business community to hinder Drexel's efforts to obtain insurance for the property. Local ordinances required that the policy be written locally, and Drexel reported to Byrne, "two companies agreed to write the business but have called for cancellation of policies after they were written . . . 'on account of certain local prejudice' [they] refused to write the risk." Drexel asked Byrne to use his local influence to get a Nashville agent to insure the property. Byrne made inquiries and learned that Keith was indeed behind the policy cancellations. W.P. Ready, who finally landed an insurance policy for Byrne, quizzed the agent from one of the companies that had cancelled on Drexel. Ready reported that the agent, a Mr. Fite, "stated that the negro school is in the right location and he thought Mr. Keith was making a

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<sup>379</sup> Byrne to Keith, March 19, 1905.

<sup>380</sup> Drexel to Byrne, n.d.; "Mother Katharine: Replies;" Byrne to Keith, March 19, 1905; Registry slip for a letter from Byrne to Keith, March 20, 1905, Drexel Box, ADN.

grandstand play—but after his company had cancelled a policy he could not reinstate it.”<sup>381</sup>

Perhaps even had Keith lacked such sway, the threats of violence and the all too real possibility of arson might have discouraged insurance companies from underwriting what appeared to be a likely target.<sup>382</sup>

The unavoidable interactions between Drexel and Byrne and the Keith family regarding the property after its sale reflected the tension over the place’s future. The Keiths continued to reside at Mile End, paying rent until they vacated the house June 1. Drexel intended to oversee the renovations to the house during the summer and open the school in September 1905. Hoping to evaluate the interior of the Keith home so that she might plan the necessary changes, Drexel asked Byrne to arrange with Keith for a spring visit during which she could combine visiting Fisk and Nashville’s other black educational institutions with inspecting the mansion. Byrne wrote to Keith, asking permission for Drexel to view the house. Receiving no response, Byrne wrote again, this time registering his letter. Keith eventually consented to Drexel’s visit, but, uncomfortable with his attitude, Drexel postponed her trip to Nashville until the Keith family had vacated the house.<sup>383</sup>

While Drexel and Byrne worked to obtain insurance for the school, Keith and his neighbors undertook other means to stymie their plans. As soon as the intended purpose for the property had been announced in February, talk had arisen of reviving the possibility of extending

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<sup>381</sup> W. P. Ready to Byrne, April 3, 1905, Drexel Box, ADN.

<sup>382</sup> Drexel to Byrne, March 23, 1905, Drexel Box, ADN; Drexel to Byrne, March 31, 1905, Drexel Box, ADN; W.P. Ready to Byrne, April 3, 1905, Drexel Box, ADN; Drexel to Byrne, April 6, 1905, Drexel Box, ADN; Drexel to Byrne, May 21, 1905, Drexel Box, ADN.

<sup>383</sup> Byrne to Drexel, February 12, 1905; Drexel to Byrne, March 19, 1905, Drexel Box, ADN; Byrne to Keith, March 23, 1905, Byrne Papers, ADN; Byrne to Keith, April 1, 1905, Byrne Papers, ADN.

Central Street through the property, as Orville Ewing had offered during the war. In late May, Keith and about five hundred supporters petitioned Nashville's mayor and the city council to take up the old Ewing street grant and put the street through, so condemning the Keith house. The *American* published their petition with its attached signatures.<sup>384</sup>

The petitioners cited trumped-up reasons for needing the thoroughfare and pointed to the long-standing plan for it, but their true purpose in this sudden revival of a decades-old scheme was hardly veiled. They wanted the street, "Because there is an undying and irreconcilable hostility on the part of your petitioners and hundreds of others to having this property right in their midst, devoted to this purpose [the school], and this feeling is sure to breed acts of disorder which you can wisely avert." The petitioners further cited the depreciation of property values and consequently tax assessments if the city did not act to destroy the house. They explained that Central Street could prove a boon for white mechanics who would be able to buy and improve the lots if the city granted the petition and extended the street. The school for black girls, they maintained, could be relocated "on the city's outskirts."<sup>385</sup> That Keith's neighbors would prefer to see his beautiful estate divided up into lots for white mechanics' homes rather than remaining whole and unspoiled as a campus for black girls again reflects the priority many white Southerners placed on race. They would prefer to see the Keith place broken up for inexpensive white housing than to endure to have it tarnished by the presence of black school girls.

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<sup>384</sup> Hoskins, "A Restless Landscape," 52-53; "To the Mayor and the City Council," *Nashville American*, May 27, 1905, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>385</sup> "Petition Council: Neighbors Want Central Street Opened Through Keith Land," *Nashville American*, May 26, 1905, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; "Mayor and City Council," *Annals of the Convent of the Blessed Sacrament of The Immaculate Mother*, 6, H40B2 Box 1, Folder 1 TN Nashville Immaculate Mother Annals 1905-1953, SBS.

Continual efforts, some more vitally threatening than others, to halt or delay the plans for the school put the Sisters on alert. When the first group of Sisters arrived, less than a week after the publishing of the Central Street petition, they deemed the threats of violence credible enough that they employed a watchman night and day. The Sisters' caution may well have been warranted. Twice already in 1905 mysterious fires had destroyed buildings at Roger Williams University, an all-black school on the western side of the city, and arson was suspected.<sup>386</sup> Racially motivated violence continued to be normal throughout the South, and given the veiled threats that appeared in the newspapers, the Sisters had reason to expect that their newly acquired property might be a target for arson.<sup>387</sup>

In June, thirty-three white women from the Keith neighborhood addressed a petition to Mother Mary Katharine herself, begging her to reconsider Keith's offer. They wrote as elite white women to one of their own, imploring Drexel to consider the damage to their property value that her school would cause and implying that her move to open the school would leave them financially destitute. Further, they appealed to her as a peacemaker. Surely, they reasoned, a Christian woman would not want to be responsible for stirring up racial strife in a once peaceful neighborhood. The use Drexel intended for the property, they argued

arouses racial antagonism. Already the citizens of South Nashville are forming Protective Organizations against negro settlements in their midst. We are not responsible for the fact that the location of negro residences, institutions, or settlements is the ruin of real estate in every community, North, South, East, or West.<sup>388</sup>

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<sup>386</sup> "Disastrous Fire;" "Roger Williams Fire Loss;" "University Fire: Suspicious Circumstances."

<sup>387</sup> "Petition Council;" "Mayor and City Council;" *Annals*, 6.

<sup>388</sup> Mrs. M. J. McKee, Mrs. J. H. Jenkins, et al. to Drexel, June 17, 1905.

They suggested that Drexel undertake her praiseworthy enterprise elsewhere, where their property would not be harmed, and racial hostility could remain dormant. These women painted themselves as victims of injustice if Drexel held to her course. The irony of their position, especially in addressing such a plea to Drexel, appears to have escaped them.<sup>389</sup>

Again, white elite efforts to sway Drexel failed. Drexel's approach to her own immense wealth was to spend more than ninety percent of it annually for the education of Native Americans and African Americans. She lived in personal poverty and simplicity, using pencils down to their stubs, and making a single pair of shoes last ten years. As a wealthy woman who had embraced voluntary poverty as a path to union with God, Drexel could hardly have reckoned decreasing property value among the chief evils with which one could be afflicted. She thought that the principal value of material goods was that they might be used to gain souls for the Kingdom of God. Drexel responded to the women, gently but firmly holding the position she had taken with Keith. She could not see how a day school in an area already populated by many African Americans could depreciate property values, and, in any case, she remained firm in her purpose to open the school. She wrote: "The green lawn and shade trees on our property would seem rather to enhance the valuation of surrounding property, giving as it does an outlook of pleasing green on which to rest the eye." Assuring the women of her good will, Drexel expressed her "sincere hope that your present fears may not be realized and that God may bless your homes ever more and more."<sup>390</sup>

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<sup>389</sup> Mrs. M. J. McKee, Mrs. J. H. Jenkins, et al. to Drexel, June 17, 1905.

<sup>390</sup> Drexel to the Ladies of Stevenson avenue, Lea avenue and Fern street, Nashville, Tenn., published in "Keith Property Transaction," *Nashville Banner*, July 1, 1905, *Nashville Banner* microfilm Roll #175; "Mother Katharine: Replies."

In the July 1 *Banner*, the women’s letter to Drexel appeared, followed by the text of Drexel’s brief and mild but determined response. Following Drexel’s letter, which was once again published without her knowledge or permission, came an epistolary castigation of Drexel and Byrne. Signed by “Patrick Henry,” the piece reminded readers that the “ladies who signed this petition to Drexel are the grand-daughters of our revolutionary fathers . . . They are the offspring of the men who gave us a white man’s government under a constitution that guarantees the protection of our property rights.” Henry then made a plea to his fellow citizens. “We have petitioned, we have remonstrated, we have supplicated, but we have been spurned with contempt . . . Are the men of South Nashville going to stand with hands folded and allow this outrage to be perpetrated on these thirty-three helpless women—that’s the question.” The language of outrage visited on helpless white women was language used to stir up lynch mobs in cases of alleged rape of white women by black men. The language seems incongruous to the actual situation in the Keith affair, but nevertheless demonstrates the author’s intention to stir up citizen opposition and goad men to action against the Blessed Sacrament Sisters and Byrne.<sup>391</sup>

“Patrick Henry” verbally attacked Byrne, painting him as a malicious persecutor of the innocent and righteous. He excoriated Byrne for his under-handed approach to the property transaction. Because of it, this “vicious enterprise”—the proposed school—was already destroying the neighborhood. The man complained, “[L]etters are written by these high church officials [Byrne and Drexel] in utter contempt of the sentiment and property interests of the white citizens of Nashville.” But while Byrne’s alleged contempt for white property interests

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<sup>391</sup> “Keith Property Transaction.”

took the rhetorical foreground of the letter, the parallel and more deeply offensive contempt for the “sentiment” of the white citizens of Nashville undergirded the attack.<sup>392</sup>

Perhaps unforgivable by Henry and his ilk was Byrne’s comparison of the potential students of Immaculate Mother Academy with the students of other Nashville schools. Byrne’s letter to Keith, excerpted above, included the offending line, “the children. . . will . . . compare favourably with the young girls of any institution in Nashville.”<sup>393</sup> The writer spelled out Byrne’s meaning with a sarcasm that illustrated how alien Byrne’s approach was to white Nashvillian “sentiment.” He highlighted Byrne’s offense by naming the elite white girls’ academies of Nashville, presumably hoping thus to heighten his readers’ outrage:

However, we are graciously soothed with the assumption that the negro to be educated in this school will compare with the white girls of Ward Seminary, Belmont College, . . . and St. Cecilia: therefore the people of Nashville should, “welcome such an institution as a distinct good and social blessing.” With a patronizing rebuke of our want of appreciation of this negro enterprise in our midst, we are squarely affronted with the Bishop’s uncompromising disregard of our protests: his letter to Mr. Keith is a direct insult to every white citizen in Nashville.<sup>394</sup>

Thus the writer painted Byrne as utterly out of tune—perhaps even stubbornly and maliciously so—with white Nashvillians and their concerns. Continuing, he referred to Byrne as “a Bishop whose motto seems to be that might makes right, and who does not hesitate to resort to vicious methods of encroaching on the rights of others.” It was not the white residents’ fault that “racial and social barriers” prevented “domestic equality and indiscriminate settlement among each other.” Byrne was to blame for not accepting “a fact, not a theory or a sentiment, which prevails throughout the whole civilized world.” Byrne, in short, should join the rest of the human

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<sup>392</sup> “Keith Property Transaction.”

<sup>393</sup> Byrne to Keith, March 19, 1905.

<sup>394</sup> “Keith Property Transaction.”

race in realizing that white citizens had no choice but to marginalize and discriminate against their black neighbors. This white property owner loudly proclaimed himself and his white fellows the disfranchised victims of grievous injustice at Byrne's hands.<sup>395</sup>

While Keith and his white neighbors fretted about their property values, their white ministers worried about the inroads Catholics could be making with African American Nashvillians, many of whom belonged to all-black Protestant churches. On his return from the Bahamas, Byrne wrote, "The Episcopalians are taking on new life. Bishop Gaylor . . . went to the little stone church . . . near the school and persuaded the property owning whites to sell it to the colored because the bishop was afraid the Catholics would buy it as a colored chapel."<sup>396</sup> In April, Byrne reported, "Since we got so active, all, or very many of the white ministers of the city are giving Sunday talks at the most aristocratic Colored Church a thing whereof before any which would have been visited with social ostracism."<sup>397</sup> From Byrne's perspective, the Catholic approach had upset the status quo in Nashville, forcing white Protestant clergy to be more mindful of African Americans.

### **Property Value and "Sentiment"**

There was a type of race prejudice to which Bishop Byrne would not bend. Even before Byrne arrived in Nashville after his appointment as bishop, he noted that efforts to evangelize African Americans would be among his episcopal priorities. When he arrived, however, and became acquainted with his diocese, he noted with dismay that white Catholics typically shared the caste prejudice of their fellow Tennesseans. While Byrne himself was not without a

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<sup>395</sup> "Keith Property Transaction."

<sup>396</sup> Byrne to Drexel, March 23, 1905.

<sup>397</sup> Byrne to Drexel, April 13, 1905, Folder H 10b Qb b21, SBS.

paternalistic attitude towards black people, he did not share a particularly Southern brand of racial prejudice—in fact, he excoriated it as antithetical to the Catholic faith, and deserving of the wrath of God.<sup>398</sup>

Two themes emerge from the letters of outraged white Nashvillians written to or about Drexel and Byrne: concern for property value and the violation of a “sentiment” that mandated separation and marked inequality between white and black people. These writers emphasized property value concerns, but a parallel and perhaps more powerful undercurrent was a sense that having black girls in one’s former home, in one’s neighborhood, violated an important, even sacred norm. Drexel and Byrne, in their responses, dismissed the property value argument as unreasonable because the neighborhood in question had already been compromised. The corresponding issue, that of “sentiment,” they refused to admit as reasonable. In fact, they resisted such arguments in ways that deeply offended their white Southern antagonists.

Byrne and Drexel may have proceeded as if this racial “sentiment” did not exist as a way to rebuke Keith and his neighbors or they may not have realized its depth or tenor. Their refusal to give quarter to the feelings of the elite white Nashvillians who objected to their project aroused further antagonism towards them and their work from that group, even as it rallied the support of others—including the proposed clientele of their school. The very public nature of these exchanges regarding race brought free publicity to the new school. Whether Byrne and Drexel foresaw or sought such an outcome is impossible to determine. It seems worth noting,

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<sup>398</sup> Byrne to Slattery, June 13, 1894, 11-H-34, JOS; Byrne to George Deshon, CSP, November 17, 1899, Byrne Papers, AND; Byrne to Drexel, December 14, 1900, Folder H 10b Qb b21, SBS; Eugene W. Bunn to Byrne, June 20, 1898, Holy Family Church and School History Folder, ADN; Byrne to Clergy and Laity of the Diocese on the Negro and the Indian, February 11, 1903, Negroes Folder, FP; Fay Botham, *Almighty God Created the Races: Christianity, Interracial Marriage, and American Law* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 111-14.

however, that in listing their concerns regarding Keith at the outset, they named anti-Catholicism and avarice as the chief obstacles, with no mention of the type of work Drexel was known for undertaking.<sup>399</sup>

Keith wrote to Byrne of his home that he would “not have been willing to sell it for a purpose that would be either offensive to the sentiments of my neighbors, or damaging of their property.”<sup>400</sup> These sentiments included aspects of what historian Robert J. Norrell dubs white nationalist ideology. Norrell argues that in the decades following the defeat of the Confederacy, many white Southerners adopted white nationalism. After the Civil War, ignoring the diversity of their own origins, white Southerners defined themselves as Anglo-Saxons, building a distinctive identity on the myths of the Lost Cause of the Confederacy, the evils of Reconstruction, and the perceived perfidy of African Americans, whose presence, white nationalists believed, continued to make the South vulnerable to Northern oppression. This distinctive ideology, Norrell argues, set white Southerners apart from other Americans and shaped the way they viewed the African Americans with whom they lived.<sup>401</sup>

White Southern attitudes regarding race baffled Ohioan Bishop Byrne, and he may at first have failed to recognize just how objectionable his plans for the black girls’ school appeared to Keith and his white neighbors. Once he gained further insight, he still refused to acquiesce. Norrell maintains that while white Americans in general saw themselves as superior to African Americans, “White nationalists felt more than just an aversion to a people whom they believed to

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<sup>399</sup> Byrne to Drexel, December 4, 1904.

<sup>400</sup> Keith to Byrne, February 15, 1905, Drexel Box, ADN

<sup>401</sup> Robert J. Norrell, *Up from History: The Life of Booker T. Washington* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 48-49.

be physically different and culturally inferior; they also viewed blacks as rivals for power and status.” For white nationalists, life pitted black and white Southerners in a zero-sum game; “Any improvement in blacks’ position in society meant a decline of their own status.”<sup>402</sup> This white nationalist ideology, for which Byrne had neither understanding nor sympathy, may have shaped Samuel Keith’s fierce objection to the plans for his former home. To have black people frequenting the finest property in South Nashville was not just a promising opportunity for black students; in a white nationalist view, it degraded Keith and every white resident of a lesser property in the area.

Drexel’s response to Keith shows that she too refused to bend to the racial attitudes of Keith and his kind. Drexel was a Northerner, a Philadelphian born with a silver spoon in her mouth, raised in a deeply religious home. She was wary of the anti-Catholic prejudices of many Southerners, but her work among Southerners at the time of the foundation of the Nashville school had been limited. She had established a school for black students in the Philadelphia area, and two such schools in Virginia. In 1904, however, Drexel had taken a tour through the South, including Nashville, observing the mores throughout the region as she visited the various schools and churches her congregation had helped to fund. Drexel had noted the grossly unjust inequality even in Catholic institutions, and she could not have been entirely naïve of the assumptions undergirding Keith’s words. On the other hand, Drexel was an outsider, a Northerner, who, while not without racial prejudices of her own, may not have recognized the full tenor of the ideology.

Other outsiders shared Byrne and Drexel’s surprise at the backlash against their project. Bishop Byrne received a letter from his friend Father Chrysostom, a Minnesotan Benedictine serving in the Bahamas. He had seen Byrne in March but wrote in April because he had read a

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<sup>402</sup> Norrell, *Up from History*, 49.

news account about the new school and the tempest it generated. Mother Drexel received a sympathetic note from a Sister in Montana who was sorry to hear about her trouble founding a school at Nashville. Her friend, Sister Mary Rose, wrote, “Is it not queer that people live as though there were no eternity? . . . A soul set in dark or white setting is a gem more priceless than the universe.” This Sister’s comment, in its simplicity and other-worldliness, resembles Drexel’s response to Keith. These women religious believed that in eternity, race would not have bearing. Friends of God, they reasoned, ought to give it no consequence in this world. No doubt inured to manifestations of race prejudice as they occurred in the Northeast, even in their own religious communities, they were shocked by Drexel’s reception in Nashville.<sup>403</sup>

Perhaps Byrne and Drexel were able to undertake the school project on the Keith property and to carry it through because they were from outside the region, with a certain naiveté—real or pretended—of white nationalist sentiment. That naiveté, stubbornly maintained, coupled with boldness inspired by conviction that they were doing God’s will, powered the Catholic leaders through the wave of racially motivated opposition.<sup>404</sup>

### **A Strategy of Silence and Delay**

Byrne and Drexel, by contrast with their attacker’s loud denunciation, determined to remain silent. Byrne wrote to Drexel, commenting on the Patrick Henry letter, that his way was the quiet way, “not to advertise but to accomplish the work.” He reiterated the importance of the mission to evangelize African Americans and his conviction that it was God’s will for him to

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<sup>403</sup> Brother Chrysostom, O.S.B. to Byrne, April 14, 1905, Byrne Papers, ADN; Sr. Mary Rose, O.S.U. to Drexel, August 2, 1905, Folder H10B47 f 32, SBS.

<sup>404</sup> Robert J. Norrell, *The House I Live In: Race in the American Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 73.

persevere in it. Finding no reasonable foundation for the author's fears and complaints, Byrne and Drexel chose to ignore this latest stir and carry on with their plans.<sup>405</sup>

Drexel's comments to Byrne about the letter reveal both her practical prudence and spiritual insight. She regretted her letter's publication, and she expressed to Byrne her determination not to give the press further grist. Her strategy would be not to answer any more letters, for "it seems but prudence to protect our cause by being very quiet since there seems to be a certain prejudice which I hope will blow over by quietly minding our preservation of the good we have undertaken without any aggressiveness." Shifting from practical temporal strategy to a supernatural perspective, Drexel reflected:

It is certainly encouraging to meet some opposition . . . it is so appropriate . . . to have the people of the City have no room for our Precious Charge. They say 'there is another place on the city's outskirts' for our educational work. How truly was the Cave of Bethlehem the great educator of the whole world! That was indeed the School of the Immaculate Mother. . . My God! How much light can be wasted when the darkness does not comprehend it.<sup>406</sup>

Though frustrated by the attitudes they had encountered, Drexel drew hope from the parallel she saw between Christ's rejection at his birth and the rejection the black people of Nashville, and she and Byrne by extension, were experiencing. Jesus taught his followers to expect to be treated as he was. In Drexel's view, she and Byrne needed to remember that they were not the first educators to find their efforts rejected. Such a perspective, she believed, would purify their intentions and ready them to continue in hope no matter what the opposition.

The petition to extend Central Street through Mile End, filed with the city council in late May, remained a threat well into the summer. Uncertain of the future, Drexel took practical action to prepare for the worst. She enlisted the help of Nashville's St. Cecilia Dominican

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<sup>405</sup> Byrne to Drexel, July 14, 1905, Folder H 10b Qb b21, SBS.

<sup>406</sup> Drexel to Byrne, n.d., July 1905, Drexel Box, ADN.

Mother Superior to determine whether it was worth a court battle to keep their hold on the Keith property. The two women determined that it was indeed worth trying to preserve, and Drexel wrote to her council to get their permission to pursue the matter in court, should the city council condemn the house. Explaining to her councilors the situation of house, retaining wall, and sidewalks, she added, “all this to explain that it is best to go to law, I think, if the decision is to run the street through. Please write your decision soon as I shall be in suspense. I must know it by Thurs. afternoon.” Drexel was certainly in earnest about the threat.<sup>407</sup>

Byrne and Drexel employed silence in the face of abrasive and threatening letters as a strategy to forestall further action against the Keith property. Byrne advised Drexel to ignore the “vulgar and malicious” publication of her letter because the whole point of their adversaries was to incite “controversy the aim of which was to rouse prejudice and create a public feeling against both us and the school and thus influence the city council.” Byrne’s friend, Catholic lawyer and city politician Thomas Tyne, planned to prevent the matter of Central Street from going to a vote in council until after the school had been established and public interest had died down. “Anyhow,” Byrne assured Drexel, “the better class are with us. This these biggots [*sic*] know and hence their appeal to the prejudice of the low and vulgar and their haste to take action.” The best course was to delay and to avoid being drawn into a fight. Should a fight become necessary, however, both Byrne and Drexel intended to persevere.<sup>408</sup>

The tense summer of 1905 gave way to autumn and the new school, Immaculate Mother Academy and Industrial School, opened its doors to welcome dozens of Nashville’s black daughters as pupils. The tempest had subsided without the threatened violence ever

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<sup>407</sup> Drexel to Mothers, 1905, *Writings* no. 846, SBS.

<sup>408</sup> Byrne to Drexel, July 14, 1905.

materializing. The city council never approved the Central Street extension, and the best efforts of Keith, his five hundred petitioners, the thirty-three women, and their champion “Patrick Henry” proved unable to stymie the project. In retrospect, their opposition had been, as Drexel termed it in March, a “little storm.” But it only looked small and inconsequential in retrospect because those threatened by it had held steadily to their course, undaunted by threats and impervious to sentiment.

### **Conclusion**

Worried about greed and anti-Catholicism, Byrne and Drexel initially misread the racial tenor of South Nashville. One might say that in their clandestine planning of the Keith property purchase, they took the right precautions for the wrong reasons. The anti-Catholic bigotry that Northern white Catholics Byrne and Drexel anticipated as they planned the school paled by comparison with the racially motivated opposition they encountered as events unfolded. For many elite white people, anti-Catholicism did not run nearly as deep as racial antipathy.<sup>409</sup> Offended sentiment shaped the response of Keith and his associates in ways that Byrne and Drexel as Northern Catholic outsiders did not foresee and could not, when they encountered it, concede to.

Keith’s response highlights the dynamics of demographic shifting as the cityscape of Nashville underwent rapid change. It shows the meaning attached to space and the efforts that were made to control who had access to it. The growth of railroads and industry and the extension of streetcar lines were swiftly altering the residential dynamics of Nashville, and the conflict over the location of the school highlights ways in which the desire for white control and

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<sup>409</sup> Byrne to Drexel, December 4, 1904; Keith to Byrne, February 15, 1905; “Fate of Keith Home;” Mrs. M. J. McKee, Mrs. J. H. Jenkins, et al. to Drexel, June 17, 1905; “Keith Property Transaction.”

increasing racial segregation affected the city.<sup>410</sup> White Nashvillians, vacating the neighborhoods close to the center of the city in favor of the newly fashionable suburbs, sought to exert control over space at both ends of their move. Even as he tried to prohibit black people from moving in where he had moved out, Keith and men of his class also wanted black people to move out where they were moving in. Had Keith and his supporters had their way, black Nashvillians would have found themselves excluded both from the newly desirable suburban neighborhoods and from the areas those migrating outwards had vacated.

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<sup>410</sup> William Waller, ed. *Nashville, 1900-1910* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1972); Don Doyle, *Nashville in the New South: 1880-1930* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1985), 78-114; Summerville, "City and the Slum," 187-89; Walter, "Ethnicity and Residential Succession," 22-28.

## CHAPTER SIX

### “CHECKING THE GROWTH OF THE SPIRIT OF CASTE PREJUDICE”: CATHOLIC EFFORTS THROUGH THE EYES OF BLACK NASHVILLIANS

On the evening of March 20, 1905, approximately thirty black men, among them ministers, lawyers, and physicians, assembled on Cedar Street in downtown Nashville. They crowded into the parlor of Bishop Thomas Sebastian Byrne’s residence to thank Byrne for planning to establish a Catholic academy for black girls in Nashville, to congratulate him on the strong stance he and Mother Mary Katharine Drexel had taken in resisting elite white pressure to abandon their plans to use Samuel Keith’s former property for the school, and to encourage their continued efforts. While the stubborn insistence of Byrne and Drexel on sticking to their plan to open a Catholic academy and industrial school for African American girls in Nashville enraged and alienated many white people, it had the opposite effect on many “elite” black people. Impressed by the Catholic leaders’ conduct in the Keith affair, many leading black men and women expressed support and approbation for the new school, and even became ready to set aside some previously held prejudices against the Catholic Church.<sup>411</sup>

#### Nashville’s Race Leaders

Deeply concerned about racial uplift and the problem of caste prejudice in the city, Nashville’s black professionals and ministers, doctors, lawyers, and educators—men and women who considered themselves the vanguard for their race—were quick to speak and act in what they perceived to be the interest of African American Nashvillians at large. Black leaders,

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<sup>411</sup> William Crosthwait to Thomas Sebastian Byrne, March 22, 1905, Holy Family Church and School History Folder, ADN; W. Crosthwait to Byrne, May 21, 1905, Holy Family Church and School History Folder, ADN; Byrne to Mother Mary Katharine Drexel, March 23, 1905, Folder H 10b Qb b21, SBS; Byrne to Drexel, April 13, 1905, Folder H110 Agreements Tenn-Nashville Rectory 1906, SBS.

including the Honorable James C. Napier and Nettie Langston Napier, the Reverend Sutton Griggs, lawyer William A. Crosthwait, Arvilla A. Crosthwait, school principal Scott Crosthwait, educator Minnie Lou Crosthwait, Doctor R.F. Boyd, and the Reverend Doctor James Bond, among scores of their fellows dealt continually with the dynamic of racial interactions in Nashville. They daily navigated dangerously charged spaces and situations, trying to do what seemed most reasonable and expedient to advance the interests of African Americans and contribute to their self-respect and flourishing—and this while attempting to avoid adding tinder to the ever-smoldering threat of racially motivated violence. Representing Nashville’s black elite, these well-educated professional men and women shared a common social and economic goal of racial uplift, despite their religious and denominational differences.<sup>412</sup>

Accustomed to evaluating white leaders and initiatives through the lens of their own goals and the interests of those they believed they represented, many black leaders, during and after the Keith affair, took keen interest in the new school. Black Nashvillian men and women appreciated that even while it exposed the Catholics involved to hatred, rage, and the threat of violence from Keith’s supporters, they let the tenet of equality of all souls before God made a claim on them. As they praised what Byrne and his collaborators had already accomplished, black leaders used rhetoric that highlighted the highest ideals of Catholic teaching, subtly reminding the Catholic leaders of the creed that should be directing their approach to racial equality. Aware that their voices were not the only ones influencing Byrne, Drexel, and their

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<sup>412</sup> Lester C. Lamon, *Black Tennesseans, 1900-1930* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1977), 3-17, 20-28, 35-36; Gabriel Briggs, *The New Negro in the Old South* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2015), 35-54, 114-33.

white collaborators, black leaders made rhetorical capital of resting their support and their expectations on the doctrine and history of the Roman Catholic Church.<sup>413</sup>

The white elite hostility to Drexel and Byrne's project thus made perhaps unlikely allies of many elite black Protestants and the white Catholic bishop of Nashville. The Keith affair aroused the good will toward the Catholic Church of many of Nashville's black professionals, who self-identified as "intelligent negroes." These black leaders pursued racial uplift, while Byrne spoke of souls and the Catholic idea of education, but they found common ground in the proposed black Catholic school. They arrived at that ground from very different starting points, for black leaders of whatever faith or none had reason to be wary of white initiatives for their alleged benefit. Many black Christians were already aware of the Catholic Church's teaching regarding racial equality. They were perhaps less accustomed to seeing those doctrines make any difference in the practical interaction between Catholic individuals and institutions and black people. Irish American Catholic priest Father John Slattery had written a decade earlier, "Abroad among the Colored race is a feeling that the Catholic Church sound as her principles are, does nothing for them."<sup>414</sup> Even those of African descent who were already Catholics often suffered discriminatory seating in Catholic churches and exclusion from Catholic education. Not only did African Americans have to weigh white Catholics' frequent failure to practice their own church's teaching regarding human equality, they also had to grapple with other potential costs to their own interests of a Catholic initiative, weighing them against the perceived benefits.<sup>415</sup>

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<sup>413</sup> W. Crosthwait to Byrne, March 22, 1905; "Fate of the Keith Home," *Nashville American*, February 19, 1905, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; "Keith Property Transaction," *Nashville Banner*, July 1, 1905, *Nashville Banner* microfilm Roll #175.

<sup>414</sup> John R. Slattery to Byrne, March 10, 1894, 14-D-1, JOS.

<sup>415</sup> W. Crosthwait to Byrne, March 22, 1905; James Bond and Sutton Griggs to Byrne, March 20, 1905, Holy Family Church and School History Folder, ADN; Byrne to Drexel, March 23, 1905; Byrne to Drexel, April 13,

One might expect well-educated and vocal black leaders to resent the establishment of a separate school for black young women by an institution that officially claimed to recognize no color line but excluded black students from its ordinary parochial schools and private academies. That these leaders instead welcomed it had much to do with the context within which the school was founded and the limits of what black leaders themselves and white people of good will towards them perceived as possible in Nashville in 1905. That the marginalization and discrimination black people faced was unjust seemed beyond contest, yet while Catholic priests preached the equality of men before God, they advised black people facing the systematic injustices they endured in Nashville to be patient and discreet. The Catholic position appears in retrospect to have been cautious and conservative, marked by a perhaps characteristically Catholic suspicion of anything smacking of social upheaval. Nevertheless, many black Nashvillians seem to have been attracted by it.<sup>416</sup>

Grappling with the fact that a separate school for black students gained the endorsement of race leaders forces one out of a teleological framework that necessarily culminates in integration as the principal or only hallmark of racial progress. As Howard Rabinowitz has argued, segregated facilities did not always replace a situation of integration, but often one of outright exclusion, and thus black people themselves as well as their white allies often perceived a separate but equal facility as an improvement. In reality, of course, separate rarely was equal.

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1905; Mother Mary Katharine Drexel, *Writings* no. 2950, SBS; Address by A.A. Crosthwait to Mother Drexel, in *Annals of the Convent of the Blessed Sacrament of The Immaculate Mother*, 15, 18, H40B2 Box 1, Folder 1 TN Nashville Immaculate Mother Annals 1905-1953, SBS; Slattery to Drexel, March 10, 1894, 14-D-1, JOS.

<sup>416</sup> Byrne to R.F. Boyd, March 24, 1905, Holy Family Church and School History Folder, ADN; "For Colored Catholics," *Nashville Banner*, June 30, 1902, clipping in Byrne album, FP; "First Colored Catholic Church: Dedicated Sunday with Impressive Ceremonies," June 30, 1902, *Nashville American*, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; W. Crosthwait to Drexel, March 7, 1906, Folder H10B 15 f 24, SBS.

African Americans in the South had to deal with the present circumstances, doing their best to advance their children's education without exciting violent opposition. They strategically adopted a prudence that allowed them to welcome measures that made education more accessible to them, even if separately.<sup>417</sup>

Education for people of African descent and especially by white Northerners raised the suspicions of many white Southerners who questioned the expediency of educating a caste of persons whom they more or less openly sought to dominate. Others objected not to education per se, but education of black students by those teachers, black or white, raised in the North, who might teach black students to question or reject the customs of the South. At a time when the very notion of black education was under attack in the South, the establishment of a school run by Northern white Sisters for black girls in the former Keith home, against the opposition of Keith and five hundred of his privileged white associates was seen by black leaders as a check to the spirit of caste prejudice. At a time when such prejudice was waxing stronger by the day, Byrne and Drexel's refusal to capitulate to it made a clear statement, one which black Nashvillians interpreted for themselves.<sup>418</sup>

In his biography of Booker T. Washington, *Up from History*, Robert Norrell argues that Washington's heroism and the magnitude of his efforts and accomplishments have been obscured by interpretations that fail to account for the context within which Washington lived and the delicate balance he had to strike as he administered Tuskegee Institute in Alabama and promoted black education in the U.S. and particularly in the South. Presentist interpretations of

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<sup>417</sup> Howard Rabinowitz, "From Exclusion to Segregation: Southern Race Relations, 1865-1890," in *Race, Ethnicity, and Urbanization*, ed. Howard Rabinowitz (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1994), 138-63.

<sup>418</sup> Robert J. Norrell, *Up from History: The Life of Booker T. Washington* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 56, 97-115.

Washington depict him as an accommodationist, Norrell argues, because they scrutinize his life and actions looking for the kind of resistance that they—post-Civil Rights era scholars—think should have been there. Searching for the kind of street-protest activism and insistence on integration that marked the leadership of individuals like Martin Luther King, Jr., they miss what was there, namely a continual, often quiet and behind the scenes working for equality of opportunity for black people and the upbuilding of black institutions, all the while walking the knife edge to avoid violent reprisal. Norrell’s rehabilitation of Booker T. Washington can shed light on similar outlooks and actions of black leaders of Nashville. These black leaders were Washington’s contemporaries and shared many of both his challenges and the attitudes with which he met those challenges. Nashvillian leaders James C. Napier and Nettie Langston Napier were close associates and friends of Washington and his wife Margaret. Many, though not all, of Nashville’s black leaders seem to have espoused a vision similar to Washington’s vision of self-improvement and uplift that also prudently took measures, sometimes open, sometimes covert, to challenge injustice and the inequities that stacked the deck of Southern life against black people.<sup>419</sup>

### **Violence, Segregation, and Black Efforts to Improve Matters**

The black leaders of Nashville, like all African Americans in the early twentieth century South, faced the constraints of potential violence that ever attended any threat to white supremacy. During the first decade of the twentieth century, white Southerners lynched roughly

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<sup>419</sup> Norrell, *Up from History*, 13-16, 281; Lamon, *Black Tennesseans*, 5-6; Briggs, *The New Negro*, 148-51; Bobby Lovett, “James Carroll Napier (1845-1940): From Plantation to the City,” in *Southern Elite & Social Change: Essays in Honor of Willard B. Gatewood, Jr.*, ed. Thomas A. DeBlack (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2002), 86-87; Jessie Carney Smith, ed., *Notable Black American Women*, s.v. “Nettie Langston Napier,” (Detroit: Gale Research Inc., 1992), 793-97.

one hundred black persons each year.<sup>420</sup> In 1892, white Tennesseans—mostly out-of-towners—had gathered in a mob to lynch a black man, Ephraim Grizzard, in Nashville itself in broad daylight. Grizzard was accused of having visited a white woman. The lynching became a public spectacle, with a huge crowd of on-lookers. The men hanged Grizzard from “the bridge leading from Cedar Street” in Nashville and after hanging him, shot him at least fifty times. White children gathered souvenirs of Grizzard’s clothing to remember the occasion. Black Nashvillians, including physician and leading educator Scott Crosthwait, witnessed the terrifying spectacle, and events like this burned into their awareness the precarious position of every black American in the South.<sup>421</sup> Not only did African Americans face the terror of extra-legal mob violence, but legal restrictions on black people throughout the South continued to tighten as well. Widespread disfranchisement of black men in the 1890s and 1900s was accompanied by increased segregation of neighborhoods, urban public spaces, and transportation. Nashville was no exception, and 1905 saw the passage of Tennessee legislation mandating the segregation of streetcars.<sup>422</sup>

On July 5, 1905, the state law ordering segregation on streetcars took effect in Nashville. Many African Americans in the city determined to walk rather than submit to the indignity of segregation on the cars. Black ministers and business leaders urged men and women to boycott the segregated cars. The boycott, though led by the black elite, cut across class boundaries to

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<sup>420</sup> Blair L.M. Kelley, *Right to Ride: Streetcar Boycotts and African American Citizenship in the Era of Plessy v. Ferguson* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 9-12; Stewart Tolnay and E.M. Beck, *A Festival of Violence: An Analysis of Southern Lynchings, 1882-1930* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 17-19, 202.

<sup>421</sup> Jessie Carney Smith, ed., *Notable Black American Women, Book 2*, s.v. “Minnie Lou Crosthwaite,” (Detroit: Gale Research Inc., 1996), 156-58.

<sup>422</sup> Lamon, *Black Tennesseans*, 20-25.

include any who could afford streetcar fare. Nashville's streetcar boycott proved the longest lasting of any Southern city. To boycott the cars meant being willing to travel on foot or by horse-drawn equipage. As an alternative, in August 1905, James C. Napier and fifteen other men collaborated to establish a streetcar company of their own. The African American owned and operated Union Transportation Company purchased cars and began to operate a rival company, only to be stymied first when the cars they purchased could not climb Nashville's hills, and then when the white-owned electric company sabotaged the batteries sent them for recharging. The final blow to the Union Transportation Company's finances came when the city began to levy a tax on individual cars. Though they ultimately failed to maintain their streetcar line, black Nashvillians had mounted a solid, collective opposition to the segregation of streetcars. It was in the context of this collective effort mounted by black Nashvillians that the new black Catholic school, Immaculate Mother Academy, opened.<sup>423</sup>

In *The New Negro in the Old South*, Gabriel Briggs points out that Nashville's recognition as "the Athens of the South" rested not only on the city's educational institutions for white people, but also those for black people, and the city boasted a significant and relatively prosperous and well-educated black elite. Briggs argues that "New Negroes"—characterized by "self-help, racial solidarity, urbanization, economic independence, race consciousness, cultural and educational advancement, and agitation for full citizenship rights"<sup>424</sup>—emerged around this time in a Southern urban context and most quintessentially, though neither primarily nor exclusively, in Nashville. Nashville, Briggs contends, boasted a unique combination of black

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<sup>423</sup> Lamon, *Black Tennesseans*, 24-28, 33-35; Briggs, *The New Negro*, 114-33.

<sup>424</sup> Briggs, *The New Negro*, 2.

educational, economic and media opportunities, and so African Americans developed there a “city within a city” that “included educational, religious, financial, intellectual, and social centers that would be the training ground for the growth and development of the New Negro.”<sup>425</sup> Briggs highlights minister and author Sutton Griggs. Griggs’s literary work exposed the brutality of racially motivated violence in the South. Briggs also focuses on the owners and promoters of the Union Transportation Company for their leadership of the 1905 streetcar boycott. Briggs emphasizes the active engagement of elite black Nashvillians with the racial concerns of their city and region.<sup>426</sup>

While black Nashvillians recognized the practical limits placed upon them by Southern caste, they were not without a voice to denounce, even boldly, the injustices they perceived. Under the direction of Richard Boyd of the National Baptist Publishing Board, in 1906 they established a black newspaper, the *Nashville Globe*. In the *Globe* and even in letters to the editors of the *American* and the *Banner*, these people could and did object to racial injustice. Some ministers preached along the same lines, sometimes finding their way into print through news accounts of their sermons. The black leading men and women of Nashville did oppose what they deemed demeaning, and from their perspective, given the circumstances, it seems that the proposed academy was the opposite. They actively encouraged Byrne, Drexel, Father Plunkett, and all those involved in the project. That is not to say that they may not have hoped

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<sup>425</sup> Briggs, *The New Negro*, 5.

<sup>426</sup> *Ibid.*, 79-133.

for better arrangements in the future, nor that they to a man agreed with the Catholic priests' admonitions to be patient in the face of discrimination.<sup>427</sup>

### **Black Nashville and Catholicism before the Keith Affair—Crosthwait's Account**

Many black non-Catholics had viewed the Catholics' first serious efforts at evangelization among them—beginning with Plunkett's arrival in October 1900—with hostility. According to the accounts of black lawyer William A. Crosthwait, most black Nashvillians had not been sympathetic to Catholicism before the Keith affair. Crosthwait, a graduate of Fisk University, was related by marriage to Eugene W. Bunn, who in 1898 had pleaded with Byrne for a Catholic education for his children. His brother, Scott W. Crosthwait, also a Fisk graduate, was a physician and a congregational minister as well as one of the leading black educators in Nashville. William Crosthwait's wife, born Arvilla A. Bryant, and their six children had converted to Catholicism soon after Father Plunkett arrived in Nashville. William Crosthwait would formally join the Catholic Church in the spring of 1906, a year after the Keith affair. While Crosthwait identified closely with the Catholic Church, he also shared with his fellow black professionals a keen concern for the interests of African Americans.<sup>428</sup>

Until the Keith affair, Crosthwait's Catholic sympathies had brought him into conflict with some black ministers. Though it cost him much personally and financially, Crosthwait had

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<sup>427</sup> Lamon, *Black Tennesseans*, 34; "Separation of the Races: Pastor of Howard Congregational Church Discusses Street Car Law," *Nashville Banner*, July 3, 1905, *Nashville Banner* microfilm Roll #175; James Bond, "From the People: A Plea for the Negro," *Nashville American*, August 1, 1905, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>428</sup> "Obituary Notes," January 17, 1899, *Nashville American*, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; "Death of J.N. Bryant," *Nashville American*, January 17, 1899, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; Eugene Bunn to Byrne, June 20, 1898, Holy Family Church and School History Folder, ADN; *Fisk University News* 3, no.1 (January 1912): 3; W. Crosthwait to Drexel, March 7, 1906; "Let Us Have Peace," *Nashville American*, December 24, 1898, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; "Sensible Views of a Colored Lawyer," *Nashville American*, March 13, 1900; ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

defended the Catholic Church against attacks by black ministers when Holy Family Church was established in Nashville in 1902. He admitted to Byrne:

When it became noised abroad that you intended to give us a church, I confess to you that I had much solicitude about the storms such a moment might provoke, on the part of the various sects that have for so long had a spiritual monopoly of our people. When the Baptist preacher Isaac (who by the way is now my client) wrote in *The Baptist Union*: ‘The Catholic Church will make haste slowly among our people because the Negro is fond of Emersion and Emotion,’ I recognized this as the cloud on the horizon. Nearly every Baptist and Methodist preacher preached against the movement; and some went so far as to threaten to exclude any members who visited the Catholic Church.<sup>429</sup>

Still, hundreds of black people attended the dedication of Holy Family Church and the first Confirmation Mass at Holy Family, at which fifty adults were confirmed. On both occasions, Byrne preached, and the many African Americans in the pews listened to his remarks.<sup>430</sup> According to William Crosthwait, Byrne’s words “burned themselves into the hearts of the people, and went far toward frustrating the plan of the little fellows, who had planned a war upon the movement. . . . when the guns of [black preachers] Isaac, Townsend, and Blackahear had been spiked, the people said the Catholics are not so bad after all.” Crosthwait attributed black Nashvillians’ growing sympathy to Catholicism to the way Byrne and his priests treated black people.<sup>431</sup>

Crosthwait’s reflection on his own experience highlights the hostility with which some black ministers viewed the Church. As the attacks on the Church by black preachers became more public and virulent, Crosthwait undertook the role of apologist for the Catholic Church among African Americans. By his own later account to Mother Mary Katharine:

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<sup>429</sup> W. Crosthwait to Byrne, May 21, 1905.

<sup>430</sup> “First Colored Catholic Church;” “Colored Catholics Will Receive Sacrament of Confirmation Today,” *Nashville American*, November 29, 1903, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>431</sup> W. Crosthwait to Byrne, May 21, 1905.

When the Church of the Holy Family was dedicated, the preachers of a number of sects raised a great commotion saying all manner of evil against the Catholic Church. The leaders had the hardihood to ascribe the lynching of Negroes to the Church and they tried to prove it by talking about the Spanish Inquisition. One of them put this in 'the Nashville Clarion'. Father Plunkett said I must reply and refute the charges. I bought space in that paper and undertook the task. After a debate of twelve or fourteen weeks the adversary was driven from the field . . . But I came out of the contest with nervous prostration.<sup>432</sup>

In another letter to Drexel, Crosthwait recounted the same story:

Then Father Plunkett came along and began to gather in souls. He established the Church of the Holy Family, and baptised my wife and six children. . . . Colored preachers began to thunder against the Catholic Church and their editor went on crusade against the little band of souls under Father Plunkett's care. I discovered that the thing to do was to divert their attention from the church to myself. I stood on the outside of the church while my heart was on the inside, and used my pen until the entire crew was put to flight . . . they did my business to death by secretly saying that I had abandoned my people and gone with the 'white folks.'<sup>433</sup>

Issues of the *Nashville Clarion* recording the debate between Crosthwait and the editor, Edward W. D. Isaac, have not survived. If Crosthwait's foes really damaged his business by equating his defense of Catholicism with an abandonment of his race, this seems to indicate that black Nashvillians, Crosthwait's former clients, viewed the Catholic Church as a white church, despite the Catholic claim to universality.

Other William Crosthwait contributions to the local press have survived, and they evince his boldness in expressing his political opinions and his vision for Nashville's flourishing. He was the secretary for the Afro-American League of Tennessee in the 1890s and deeply involved in various efforts to foster greater opportunities for African Americans. Crosthwait was generally critical of the Republican party, believing that they had abandoned the interests of African Americans. He believed that looking to the federal government to alleviate racial injustice was a

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<sup>432</sup> W. Crosthwait to Drexel, January 5, 1906, Folder H10B 15 f 24, SBS.

<sup>433</sup> W. Crosthwait to Drexel, August 31, 1906, Folder H10B 15 f 24, SBS.

dead end. He was eager to conciliate local white Democrats, loudly assuring all that black people wanted nothing that would threaten the social segregation dictated by Southern custom and law. Crosthwait tried to advance black interests without upsetting Southern sensibilities.<sup>434</sup> His defense of the Catholic Church may not have been the only foundation for the black hostility against him; those looking for more immediate opposition to racial prejudice may have resented his political attitudes. For example, he wrote to the *American* in 1898 regarding President William McKinley: “if the President’s trip South should result in teaching the negro to look to the proper source [state and local rather than federal government] for help, the country could well afford to keep the graves of the Confederate dead green and the negro to cut the sodding for the purpose.”<sup>435</sup>

### **Black Leaders Visit Byrne**

The public stir over the Keith property drew Nashville’s attention to the Catholic Church, and while Keith and his sympathizers waited anxiously for Byrne and Drexel to respond to Keith, black leaders likewise watched the conflict, waiting to see if the Catholics would stand firm in the face of powerful opposition and the threat of white violence. When it became clear that Drexel and Byrne would hold their ground, black Catholics and black community leaders reacted with respect and gratitude, using this platform to encourage a full embrace of Catholic tenets, and highlighting the Catholic Church’s history of defending human equality.<sup>436</sup>

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<sup>434</sup> James Mitchell Ashley, *Duplicate Copy of the Souvenir from the Afro American League of Tennessee to Hon. James M. Ashley, of Ohio*, ed. Benjamin William Arnett (Philadelphia: Publishing House of the A.M.E. Church, 1894), 9-10; “Let Us Have Peace,” *Nashville American*, December 24, 1898, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; “Sensible Views of a Colored Lawyer,” *Nashville American*, March 13, 1900; ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>435</sup> “Let Us Have Peace.”

<sup>436</sup> “That School for Negro Girls on the Keith Place,” *Nashville Banner*, February 17, 1905, *Nashville Banner* microfilm Roll #172; Address by A.A. Crosthwait to Mother Drexel in *Annals*, 14-18.

William Crosthwait, having risked his reputation to defend the Catholic Church against accusations of racial discrimination and violence, saw the conflict between Samuel Keith and Byrne and Drexel as an opportunity to build good will among black leaders toward the Catholic Church. He led a group of black leaders who gathered in Bishop Byrne's parlor in mid-March 1905, just hours after Byrne's response to Keith became known. Crosthwait rejoiced at that meeting to hear the group leaders of other denominations describe the Catholic Church as an agency of racial uplift.<sup>437</sup>

The details of the black leaders' visit to Byrne are recorded in two letters from Crosthwait to Byrne and in two of Byrne's letters to Drexel. Crosthwait's first letter was written the day after the meeting, the other two months later. Byrne gave an account of the meeting to Drexel a few days after it took place and mentioned it again some three weeks later. Piecing together the story from these separate but similar accounts, it appears that Crosthwait learned of Byrne's March 19 response to Keith and "at five hours notice" assembled the "most influential men of the city."<sup>438</sup> The men called on Byrne to offer him their gratitude and approbation. They let him know that they welcomed the school initiative and that they understood his refusal to capitulate to Keith's demands as showing his friendliness to black aspirations. Byrne in turn addressed the assembly regarding the Catholic understanding of education. The group responded with approval to Byrne's educational vision and his plans for the school. Byrne, in turn, though gratified by their presence and their vigorous affirmation of his actions, warned them to moderate their excitement. Even in so warm an encounter, the specter of potential further white hostility no doubt haunted Byrne and tempered his speech. Too much black enthusiasm for the

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<sup>437</sup> W. Crosthwait to Byrne, March 22, 1905; James Bond and Sutton Griggs to Byrne, March 20, 1905.

<sup>438</sup> W. Crosthwait, May 21, 1905.

school, Byrne appears to have assumed, might unnecessarily draw further white criticism. Byrne, like the priests who had preached at Holy Family Church's dedication, preached patience and steady self-improvement in the face of systematic injustice.<sup>439</sup>

Accounts of the meeting in Byrne's parlor highlight the approval of the leading black men of Nashville for the establishment of the school and reveal the names of a few of these men. Who the other men were remains a matter of conjecture, but it seems likely that they ranked, professionally and socially, with those whose names emerge from extant accounts of the gathering. Those named were well-educated, established men in Nashville. Dr. James Bond held degrees from Berea College and Oberlin and was pastor of Howard Congregational Church and the only African American trustee of Berea College. Sutton Griggs held degrees from Bishop College in Texas and Richmond Theological Seminary. Griggs was the pastor of First Baptist Church in East Nashville and authored several books, including novels that graphically portrayed lynching and the unjust treatment of African Americans. James C. Napier held a law degree from Howard University and had practiced law, conducted business, held political office, and helped to found and operate Nashville's One-Cent Bank. He was closely allied with Booker T. Washington and took an active role in city, state, and national politics. Of the four men named by William Crosthwait in connection with this meeting, three—Bond, Griggs, and Napier—had reputations that extended well beyond Nashville as African Americans who worked for racial uplift in the first decade of the twentieth century.<sup>440</sup>

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<sup>439</sup> W. Crosthwait to Byrne, March 22, 1905; W. Crosthwait to Byrne, May 21, 1905; Byrne to Drexel, March 23, 1905, Byrne to Drexel, April 13, 1905.

<sup>440</sup> W. Crosthwait to Drexel, March 7, 1906; Lamon, *Black Tennesseans*, 12-14, 140; Bobby Lovett, "James Carroll Napier (1845-1940): From Plantation to the City," in *Southern Elite & Social Change: Essays in Honor of Willard B. Gatewood, Jr.*, ed. Thomas A. DeBlack (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2002), 73-90; W. Crosthwait to Drexel, August 31, 1906. Sutton Griggs became a member of W.E.B. DuBois's Niagara Movement, which opposed Booker T. Washington's leadership of the race. After years of voicing more radical resistance to

Byrne reported to Drexel that the African American delegation consisted of “as many as thirty of the leading colored people of the city among them five or six preachers besides lawyers and physicians.” Their purpose, he told Drexel, was “to express their sense of gratitude and appreciation for what you have done for them and their people, in whose name as well as in their own, they spoke, and how enthusiastically, only those who were present can know.” Byrne found their gratitude “cheering and inspiring,” but, he related to Drexel, “I warned them not to let their enthusiasm get the better of their discretion.” Byrne informed Drexel that he spoke to his visitors of

the Catholic idea of education and the motive that inspires the Church in all she does, namely the saving of souls. . . that the soul of each of them, even the lowliest is as precious in God’s sight as the soul of the greatest on earth and therefore in the sight of his minister, and it was for their souls that the Church was striving in all she did. A lawyer and a banker [J.C. Napier] spoke so enthusiastically that their pastor...thought he went too far in expressing his admiration for the church.<sup>441</sup>

Byrne assured Drexel that she would have been gratified by his interlocutors’ response. This black approbation of their project encouraged Byrne and Drexel to continue in the same vein.

Byrne’s visitors, coming from different perspectives, looked at the school in terms of their own goals. Christians among them of course sought salvation for themselves and their neighbors, but they also looked at the project in terms of how it would benefit or harm them and their families in this world. They had to evaluate its potential effects on their communities and churches and consider the economic and social costs and benefits of embracing and patronizing a school run by white Catholic Northerners. Opposing Keith gave Byrne capital with this group,

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white oppression than most black Americans, Southern or otherwise, were willing to risk, Griggs became disenchanted with his fellow African Americans and embraced the idea of Anglo-Saxon superiority. See Lamon, *Black Tennesseans*, 12-14.

<sup>441</sup> Byrne to Drexel, March 23, 1905.

but they would still be wary as they weighed his words about his motivations and his hopes for the school.

Perhaps the most jubilant member of the assembly in Byrne's parlor that night was William Crosthwait. Pleased to see in his colleagues' positive response to Byrne the convergence of his religious and racial interests, Crosthwait asked writer and First Baptist pastor Sutton Griggs and Howard Congregational pastor James Bond to dictate an address to Byrne. The two men complied, and Crosthwait recorded their words, including them with the letter he sent to Byrne immediately after their collective visit. The address read as follows:

Race prejudice, while quite wide-spread in the world is not one of the qualities of the heart to be cultivated in one's self, nor to be accorded the right of way when found in others. In a section of the country in which a glorification of this trait seems to be the order of the day, it is both a courageous and a highly beneficial act for one to administer a rebuke to it. Such a course carries benefits to circles far beyond those immediately concerned. As victims of those manifestations of race prejudice we feel that you have rendered us a great service. We welcome the Advent of the Catholic Church as an agency of up-lift amongst our people, and see no reason why it should not, along with similar agencies, assist materially in checking the growth of the spirit of caste prejudice.<sup>442</sup>

For Crosthwait this address, coming as it did from black ministers, signaled a new possibility for the Catholic Church to make inroads among African Americans. Crosthwait himself was convinced that the Church's teaching squared entirely with what Nashville's leading black people sought for themselves and their families. The ministers made no mention of the tenets of the Catholic faith, but, at very least, the address placed the ministers outside the ring of those black ministers overtly hostile to the Catholic Church. A rebuke to caste prejudice was a rebuke to caste prejudice, and if it came from Catholics, then the Catholic Church, as the enemy of their enemies, could be their friend.<sup>443</sup>

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<sup>442</sup> James Bond and Sutton Griggs to Byrne, March 21, 1905.

<sup>443</sup> W. Crosthwait to Byrne, March 21, 1905.

Crosthwait intended explicitly to inform Byrne regarding his perceptions of the attitude among black Nashvillians towards Byrne and the Catholic Church. He expressed delight and amusement as he recalled the black leaders' responses. He wrote to Byrne, of the visit, "Mr. Hurt said that he thought 'we ought to know more about your creed.' I guess you were much of his opinion on that score. The speech of Mr. Napier gave offense to his pastor—Mr. Bond of the Congregational Church. You will remember that Mr. Napier said 'he wished there were 5,000 colored Catholics in the city.'" Given the suspicion and hostility with which many Americans, black and white, viewed Catholicism, such public declarations of admiration for Catholics per se were remarkable and could have been expected to stir up some controversy. Of about thirty men present, however, Crosthwait reported, only one objected to Byrne's speech. Crosthwait, himself convinced of the truth of Catholicism, expressed confidence that with the obstacle of unfounded anti-Catholic prejudice diminished by the Keith affair, black souls would be ripe for a Catholic harvest.<sup>444</sup>

Another prominent African American Nashvillian, R.F. Boyd, a physician at Meharry Medical College, wrote separately to Byrne, "Every colored man and woman of standing in this community is thankful for the promised school for our girls in South Nashville and greatly admires the stand which the Church took against prejudice and unchristian warfare." Byrne responded to Boyd, expressing his desire to see the school successful, and a promise of "still more important works in the same field." Byrne's expectation that the black people of Nashville would enthusiastically support the school had been well-founded.<sup>445</sup>

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<sup>444</sup> W. Crosthwait to Byrne, March 21, 1905.

<sup>445</sup> R. F. Boyd to Byrne, March 23, 1905, Holy Family Church and School History Folder, ADN.

The ultimate goal of converting African Americans to Catholicism and ministering to them in the Church remained, as it had been all along, the *telos* of Byrne and Drexel's plans. The salvation of souls, they believed, was best assured by the reception of the sacraments and participation in the life of Christ through the Catholic Church. Knowing the equal value of black people's souls to their common Father, they directed their efforts to reaching those souls whom they believed would otherwise be neglected. They believed they had something to give, without which the souls of others would be lost. No doubt Byrne and Drexel and their white collaborators exhibited an attitude toward the black people they sought to convert that was one of members of a privileged race reaching out to a down-trodden one. Byrne, Drexel, Plunkett and others who helped them displayed paternalistic attitudes, conscious or unconscious. Nevertheless, the African American leaders who addressed Byrne acknowledged that Byrne and Drexel were indeed helping African Americans, and they, as African Americans, did not object to being helped if the help given acknowledged and respected their humanity.<sup>446</sup>

### **The Question of Conversion to Catholicism**

William Crosthwait's hope of a rich harvest of African American souls rested not only on the sudden good odor of the Church in the black community following the Keith affair, but also what he perceived as a long-term failure on the part of black preachers to satisfy the intellectual hunger of their flocks. Crosthwait reported to Byrne that in the black Protestant churches "Spiritual ministration is not growing *pari passu* with intellectual." Because of the preachers' less than scholarly approach, Crosthwait concluded "church attendance was and is falling rapidly." The preachers, Crosthwait reported, spent their hour on Sunday reproaching the people for lukewarmness. By contrast, Crosthwait opined, the Catholic Church offered

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<sup>446</sup> Byrne to W. Crosthwait, May 24, 1905.

intellectual nourishment as well as spiritual, and a challenging moral doctrine of the spiritual equality of men before God.<sup>447</sup>

An intellectually stimulating pulpit was not the only advantage Crosthwait found in the Catholic Church. He reported to Byrne:

The Negro is rapidly becoming conscious of the fact that white Protestant churches are dominated by the color prejudice which is regnant in the country; and this is accentuated by the liberal attitude of the Catholic Church towards us. They are noting with hope and delight the bold stand which the priesthood maintains on the question of human rights.<sup>448</sup>

Black Nashvillians' main window into this position was Byrne's preaching at Holy Family, his letters to his priests and people on the subject, and the sermons of Holy Family's priest, Father Plunkett. Crosthwait drew Byrne's attention to black dissatisfaction with the white Protestant tendency to draw the color line even as he praised the Catholic position. Crosthwait thereby nudged Byrne—if he wanted more black Catholics, Byrne needed to maintain a bold stance on the human rights of black people and resist “color prejudice,” thus continuing to set Catholics apart from other denominations. Crosthwait thus strategically used his position, so useful to Byrne, as a commentator from within the black community.<sup>449</sup>

In another, less encouraging comment to Drexel, Crosthwait noted a major drawback most African Americans faced if they considered conversion to Catholicism—the Catholic Church's opposition to secret societies. Many African Americans were drawn to secret societies by the provision of insurance in times of need. For serious spiritual reasons, the Catholic Church forbade membership in most of the secret societies that many African Americans had come to

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<sup>447</sup> W. Crosthwait to Byrne, May 21, 1905.

<sup>448</sup> Ibid.

<sup>449</sup> Ibid.

depend on. A prospective convert to Catholicism faced a decision between irreconcilable alternatives.<sup>450</sup> For Crosthwait, the choice was clear. Despite his precarious financial situation, he wrote, "I have given up secret societies; because the church says I must."<sup>451</sup> African Americans' decision for Catholicism would be more than a matter of opting for true dogma, superior preaching, and a church that preached no color line. There were social and economic as well as spiritual consequences to such a choice.

While some bishops in the U.S. worked to soften Catholic opposition to secret societies, Bishop Byrne raised his voice against them because he considered them opponents of true religion. He wrote, probably to the Archbishop of Cincinnati, "all such Societies as the Knights of Pythias are simply, solely, and designedly novitiates of Masonry and their officers are all Masons...the society has a ritual which is essentially a religion and nature is its God."<sup>452</sup> To the Apostolic Delegate in the U.S., Byrne wrote, "I do hope and pray this liberalizing of the Church in this country will stop . . . [Secret societies] are the great shadow across the path of the Church in this country"<sup>453</sup> Those convinced of the authority of the Catholic Church could not at the same time remain members of secret societies. They had to choose one or the other.

For black converts there was, then, the reality of losing an important safety net, both social and economic. Secret societies helped the mutual support and self-defense of African

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<sup>450</sup> Leo V. Ryan, "American Protestant and Catholic Social Concerns circa 1890 and The Ely-Ryan Relationship," *Review of Social Economy* 49, no. 4 (1991): 518-20, <http://www.jstor.org.proxy.lib.utk.edu:90/stable/29769579>; Allison Dorsey, *To Build Our Lives Together: Community Formation in Black Atlanta, 1875-1906* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004), 101-102; Byrne to unnamed bishop, June 10, 1905, Byrne Papers, ADN.

<sup>451</sup> W. Crosthwait to Drexel, August 31, 1906.

<sup>452</sup> Byrne to Your Excellency, June 10, 1905.

<sup>453</sup> Byrne to Most Rev. Diomedea Falconio, June 10, 1908, Byrne Papers, ADN.

Americans who were marginalized and put at a serious disadvantage in the wider society.

Crosthwait's experience indicates that converts could be seen as abandoning their black brothers and sisters; his accusers said "I had abandoned my people and gone with the 'white folks.'"<sup>454</sup>

Crosthwait was convinced that being Catholic was more important than keeping the benefits of his membership in a secret society and solidarity with his former ecclesial community. For people like the Crosthwait family, conviction of the truth of the faith was a factor that trumped other very serious considerations.

As William E. Montgomery points out in *Under Their Own Vine and Fig Tree*, church for African Americans in the decades after emancipation encompassed a good deal more than a shared creed or common worship. Church was the nexus for belonging, networking, and politics. Of the church, Montgomery writes, its "presence and influence in Black communities were so overwhelming that Black social organization took on an almost one-dimensional quality."<sup>455</sup> Sacrificing membership in one's church to join the Catholic church could hardly have been a step to undertake lightly.

### **Why Many Black Nashvillians Could Receive Byrne's View**

If, as Crosthwait indicated, black attitudes towards Catholicism were becoming less hostile in Nashville, there must have been a consonance between the Catholic vision of the human person as Byrne articulated it to them, and their own views of human dignity. Byrne's response to Crosthwait's second letter gives insight into how Byrne represented what he envisioned to the very people whose conversion he sought. Byrne wrote:

[W]hat you say is very consoling to me. You will understand that in working for your people I have only one purpose in view and that is the saving of their souls through the

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<sup>454</sup> W. Crosthwait to Drexel, August 31, 1906.

<sup>455</sup> William E. Montgomery, *Under Their Own Vine and Fig Tree: The African-American Church in the South, 1865-1900* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1995), 351.

means Christ has appointed, and, as consequence of this spiritual light and life, to give them higher ideals of manhood and womanhood; to make them appreciate their own dignity as Christians; to cultivate in them delicate conscience and sense of responsibility to God, to their neighbour and to themselves; and to put within their reach through the channels of grace, of which the Church has the ministry and dispensation, the supernatural strength, courage and endurance to accomplish all this.<sup>456</sup>

Here Byrne combined two of the most essential aspects of his understanding of the Catholic Church's apostolate to African Americans. First, he accepted wholeheartedly the equal dignity of every soul before God. Secondly, he expected black people to be perfected by the grace available through the Catholic Church's sacraments. Byrne clearly shared his contemporaries' view that racial uplift was needed, but he believed that for black people as for white the power to live a life transformed in Christ came not primarily by human effort, but by divine grace. No Catholic, black or white, could become authentically themselves without the grace of the sacraments, which, as great equalizers, offered the same transforming power to everyone who approached them.<sup>457</sup>

Byrne saw his efforts to establish black Catholic institutions as rooted in his Catholic faith and his episcopal vocation. Byrne personally held these views regarding human dignity and equality, and he immediately linked them to the Catholic Church's teaching and to Christ's attitude. They allowed him to express solidarity with black Nashvillians, which no doubt colored their reception of his preaching. Byrne did not see the Keith affair merely as Bishop Byrne and Mother Drexel enduring opposition, but as the Catholic Church and Christ—as the very truth itself—opposed. This conviction that the stand they took was not just his own and Drexel's strengthened Byrne's own commitment, and its articulation gave Crosthwait and his associates a

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<sup>456</sup> Byrne to W. Crosthwait, May 24, 1905.

<sup>457</sup> Ibid.

window into Byrne's Catholic worldview. Byrne continued his letter to Crosthwait with a reflection on the role of persecution and suffering in the Christian life—without overt reference to the contemporary racial climate in Nashville—and then concluded by reiterating the basis of his commitment to efforts at Holy Family Church and Immaculate Mother Academy. He wrote:

It is because as a Bishop of the Church I feel all this—feel that the soul of the lowliest and most humble of our Colored brethren is as priceless in God's sight as the soul of the greatest to whom the world pays honors and bows down, that I must spend and be spent for their salvation; otherwise I should not be a Bishop of Christ's Church in which there is no distinction of men, because there is no distinction of souls; Christ having died for all and for each, each is equally dear to Him and equally an object of the solicitous care of His true pastor.<sup>458</sup>

This letter at least hints that Byrne, under attack from some of those “to whom the world pays honors,” felt a degree of solidarity with the African Americans he wished to reach, people who encountered mounting racial hostility in Nashville in 1905. Black Nashvillians seem to have perceived that solidarity and, to some extent, allied with Byrne.<sup>459</sup>

Outside Nashville, as within the city, African Americans expressed satisfaction with the outcome of the Keith affair. The story appeared in at least two black newspapers, *The Wichita Searchlight* and *The Cleveland Gazette*. Both papers ran roughly the same article, in December 1905. The article tends towards hyperbole, doubling the sum Drexel paid for the property, and billing Keith's neighborhood as the best in the city. Nevertheless, the accounts show that black news editors found the story of interest, while the exaggeration seems to indicate a certain pride in the outcome of the event. One editor added to the account a mock expression of sympathy for

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<sup>458</sup> Byrne to W. Crosthwait, May 24, 1905.

<sup>459</sup> Ibid.

Keith and his neighbors that they should suffer so shameful an indignity. Other newspapers likewise spread the story.<sup>460</sup>

If some African Americans already appreciated the efforts of Plunkett and Byrne at Holy Family Church, their appreciation increased when serving African Americans cost the Catholic leaders blatant attacks by the white elite of Nashville. William Crosthwait told Byrne, “You have become a positive and an influential factor in the life of the colored people of this community . . . They were delighted because of your letter to Mr. Keith . . . I have said thus much to reassure you of the fact that you have made no mistake in seeking to save souls among us.”<sup>461</sup> Crosthwait sought to assure Byrne that Catholic efforts really made a difference in the circles Crosthwait frequented. Crosthwait acknowledged Byrne’s motivation—the salvation of souls—and affirmed that he was taking effective measures to reach that goal. Thus Crosthwait encouraged Byrne in May 1905, just days before Byrne would be battered by a fresh wave of public controversy as Keith and hundreds of his neighbors petitioned the city council regarding Central Street.<sup>462</sup>

### **Black Women Address Drexel**

A few weeks after his initial account to Drexel of the African American men’s visit to him, Byrne again recounted the evening’s events to Mother Mary Katharine and further informed her that the leading black women also wished to call on him. He wrote, “now the leading colored ladies, the Four Hundred so to speak, mind to . . . take active steps to make the school a success.”

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<sup>460</sup> “Colored Girls School Stirs Nashville White Folks,” *Wichita Searchlight*, December 30, 1905, African American Newspapers, Series 1; “A School for Our Girls Is Established by a Daughter of a Former Millionaire and Aristocratic,” *Cleveland Gazette*, December 30, 1905, African American Newspapers, Series 1; Brother Chrysostom, O.S.B. to Byrne, April 14, 1905, Byrne Papers, ADN; Sister Mary Rose, O.S.U. to Drexel, August 2, 1905, Folder H10B47 f 32, SBS.

<sup>461</sup> W. Crosthwait to Byrne, May 21, 1905.

<sup>462</sup> “Petition Council: Neighbors Want Central Street Opened Through Keith Land,” *Nashville American*, May 26, 1905, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

Byrne thought that the Sisters would be more effective than he in engaging black women to support the new school. He therefore deflected the women's request to call on him in April, suggesting that they wait until the Sisters arrived. Byrne advised Drexel that her Sisters get "acquainted with them and consult together for the best advantages of the new venture—making them by organization or otherwise a sort of auxiliary to push its interests." He noted the women's energetic support with hope that "much good can be done among them . . . their conversion, or that of some of them, will be an apostolate for the Sisters."<sup>463</sup> To facilitate the building of relationships between these women and the Sisters, Byrne arranged for the women to call on Drexel and the Sisters assigned to the academy when the Sisters should arrive.<sup>464</sup>

The black women who had reached out to Byrne had their opportunity to offer their thanks and promises of support and cooperation when the Blessed Sacrament Sisters arrived in July to begin preparations for the academic year. Their formal address to Mother Mary Katharine and the Sisters gives another window into how black Nashvillians viewed the Keith affair, the Catholic Church in general and Byrne, Drexel, and Nashville Catholic institutions in particular. The record of the address is accompanied by a list of the names of the women who came to deliver it and to welcome Drexel and the Sisters.

As with the meeting of black men with Byrne, the individuals offering support were generally educated themselves, the wives and daughters of professional men, and some of them professionals in their own right. Young future Fisk graduates Hattie and Clara Hodgkins attended with their mother, Mrs. W.H. Hodgkins, whose attorney husband dealt in real estate. Mrs. George Moore, née Ella Shepperd, married to a preacher educated at Fisk and Oberlin, was

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<sup>463</sup> Byrne to Drexel, April 13, 1905.

<sup>464</sup> *Annals*, 14.

herself a Fisk graduate, famed as one of the Fisk Jubilee Singers. Public school teacher Mrs. Ida Sharber came, as did the wife of Pearl High School principal F.G. Smith. The wives of Doctors M.E. Stevens and F.A. Stewart, Mrs. McKissak whose husband became a famed architect, and Mrs. Ellington whose husband was a Baptist pastor and editorial secretary at National Baptist Publishing House, all attended. Mrs. William Silvers, whose Catholic husband was a butcher and a fireman, not a doctor, attorney, pastor, or educator may have been the least educated member of the group.<sup>465</sup>

Arvilla A. Crosthwait, a convert to Catholicism, wife of William Crosthwait, and like her husband a graduate of Fisk University, declaimed the address.<sup>466</sup> In this address, the women situated the Blessed Sacrament Sisters' efforts on behalf of the school within the Catholic tradition as well as within the local controversy. Clearly, the latter helped to crystallize the former in their minds. Arvilla Crosthwait stated:

[A]fter there was so much dissatisfaction and agitation on the part of the dominant class of the local community, the colored people, not knowing the fixed policy of the Church, wondered . . . if you . . . would be influenced by local prejudice. And again the intelligent colored people have wondered why the Catholic Church has been so tardy in establishing

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<sup>465</sup> *Fisk University News* 3, no. 3 (May 1912): 135, 149, <https://books.google.com/books?id=sec2AAAAMAAJ&printsec=frontcover#v=onepage&q&f=false>, (accessed February 28, 2019); *Catalogue of Fisk University, Nashville, Tennessee, 1899-1900* (Nashville: Marshall and Bruce Co., 1900), 69, [https://books.google.com/books?id=GpdGAQAAMAAJ&source=gbs\\_navlinks\\_s](https://books.google.com/books?id=GpdGAQAAMAAJ&source=gbs_navlinks_s), (accessed February 28, 2019); *Report of the Second Annual Convention of the National Negro Business League* (Chicago: R.S. Abbott Publishing, 1901): 44-45, <https://books.google.com/books?id=ubo6AQAAMAAJ&printsec=frontcover#v=onepage&q&f=false>, (accessed February 28, 2019); *Who's Who of the Colored Race: A General Biographical Dictionary of Men and Women of African Descent*, ed. Frank Lincoln Mather (Frank Lincoln Mather: Chicago, 1915), s.v. "Moore, George Washington," 196; *Catalogue of Fisk, 1900*, 86, 116; *Annual Report of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction* (Nashville: McQuiddy Printing Co., 1903), 146, <https://books.google.com/books?id=dhDrpbiuJcC&printsec=frontcover#v=onepage&q&f=false>, (accessed February 28, 2019); "Dr. Stevens, of Texas, in the City," *Nashville Globe*, July 22, 1910, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*; *The Medical Standard* 26 (Chicago: G.P. Engelhard & Company, 1903), 658; "Force That Wins," *Nashville Globe*, March 13, 1908, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*; "Abundance of Hose," *Nashville American*, November 23, 1898, *ProQuest Historical Newspapers*; "Members of Chemical Engine Company No. 3," *Nashville American*, July 9, 1899, *ProQuest Historical Newspapers*.

<sup>466</sup> *Fisk University News* 3, no.1 (January 1912): 3.

churches and schools in the South and very many of us, out of sheer necessity, have been forced to ally ourselves with other sects, notwithstanding our love for the church.

Arvilla Crosthwait drew attention to the disconnection between Catholic doctrine on spiritual equality of all human persons and Southern praxis. She remarked:

Social conditions in the South have rendered the growth of the Catholic Church here among us a slow process. And why? Because the dominant and master class knew that the presence of the Catholic Church was opposed to their ideas of caste . . . Neither can the present idea of superiority based on the whiteness of the skin stand before the idea of spiritual equality as exemplified by the church's insistence upon a common mercy seat and equality of opportunity for all peoples irrespective of race or color.

Taking the Catholics at their word, Crosthwait, herself a recent convert to Catholicism, spoke as if she expected the Church's practice and teaching to line up. That so many Catholics in the U.S., including religious orders, had themselves been slaveholders and had participated in the oppression of black people does not seem to have entered the picture for Crosthwait and the women for whom she spoke. They upheld the teaching, perhaps strategically omitting to mention Catholics' failures in hope of encouraging just action in the present.<sup>467</sup>

Having abstracted from the local situation to the universal norms, Arvilla Crosthwait concluded by refocusing on the local situation that drew the scrutiny of Nashville's black citizens to the Catholic Church. Crosthwait laid bare the crux of the Keith affair from the perspective of a black Nashvillian. She said:

Back of the agitation which is ostensibly based upon the depreciation of property values, lies the deep seated purpose of the repression of the Negro race. And this is why the colored community has been so anxious about the outcome of the contest. But those of us who know the history of the church have at no time feared that there would be any halting or yielding on your part. The church being universal in its love and care for humanity cannot and will not vary its course to accommodate a local prejudice.<sup>468</sup>

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<sup>467</sup> *Annals*, 16.

<sup>468</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

Thus, convinced of the good will of the Catholic Church as represented by their local Catholic bishop, the black elite of Nashville put its support behind the school. A.A. Crosthwait's history of the Church must have been a selective one—the selections colored by her experience with the Catholic bishop and priests she encountered in Nashville or tempered by her hope to influence the future by offering a selective vision of the past. From these black women's vantage point, at least as they expressed it, in resisting Keith's pressure to abandon the black girls' school the Catholics had put their money where their mouth was—this was what it meant to be Catholic.<sup>469</sup>

That in July 1905, when these women addressed Drexel, Nashville's black men and women felt the sting of racial repression comes as no surprise. The streetcar segregation had just gone into effect, and black people were smarting under it, even as they squared their shoulders to resist it.

### **Black Approbation Not a Foregone Conclusion**

That many black leaders of Nashville greeted Catholic efforts to evangelize African Americans with approbation was not to be taken for granted. These leaders by no means welcomed all outreach by white Christians. When they perceived that such efforts proceeded with a caste spirit, they protested and absented themselves from the offending body.

A year after the Keith incident, William Crosthwait related in a letter to Mother Drexel an instance of black Christians objecting to segregation. The Student Volunteer Convention, an interdenominational Protestant Christian convention for the advancement of the foreign missions, including those in Africa, met in Nashville in March 1906. White and black churches alike were invited to send representatives. In 1906, however, for the first time, the Convention

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<sup>469</sup> Drexel, "Tour of the South."

relegated African American delegates and visitors to seats apart from the rest of the attendees. Because of these segregated arrangements, student groups from some schools—Crosthwait named Fisk and Walden Universities—refused to send delegates, while some others, apprehending the situation only when they arrived, refused to enter the convention hall. Crosthwait reported to Drexel that in Nashville, the Student Volunteer Convention’s policy “left the minds of the colored people in a terrible condition.” Of Scott Crosthwait, a physician and a Congregational minister, he wrote, “My brother remarked that ‘It seems to me that this so called missionary work is the white man's scheme to teach the Negro that he is inferior to the white man.’” Even though Catholic efforts in Nashville involved white missionary efforts and a separate church and school, after the Keith affair the Crosthwait brothers and other black leaders in Nashville did not see those efforts as an expression of white supremacy, but rather, as a challenge to caste prejudice. It is notable that the objection to the segregated Christian convention came from some of the same black leaders who encouraged Byrne, Drexel, and Plunkett in their efforts with Immaculate Mother Academy.<sup>470</sup>

Dr. James Bond, pastor of Howard Congregational Church, protested the segregation of the Student Volunteer Convention in a letter to the editor of the *American*. Bond declared:

It should be stated that while the negro looks upon all discrimination based solely upon race or color as contrary to the teachings and spirit of our common Master, he is content, nevertheless, to worship God under his own ‘vine and fig tree,’ and has no desire for the Christian fellowship of his white brother that is not freely offered.<sup>471</sup>

The problem here, Bond contended, was that the Student Volunteer Convention leaders had first invited African Americans to attend, and then singled them out as unfit to participate on equal

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<sup>470</sup> Bond to the editor of the *Nashville American*, “Dr. Bond Protests,” *Nashville American*, March 5, 1906, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; W. Crosthwait to Drexel, March 7, 1906.

<sup>471</sup> Bond to the Editor of the *Nashville American*, March 5, 1906.

footing with others. Black Christians were required to sit in one area and forbidden to sit elsewhere. Rather than accept this humiliation or cause a disturbance by refusing to do so, many black Christians opted not to attend, and so were lost to the missionary efforts and, as Bond pointed out, perhaps to the cause of Christ. Why, he queried, continue missionary work in Africa, if black Christians were unworthy of fellowship? Bond's letter challenged his readers to confront the hypocrisy of seeking to convert to Christianity those whom one refused to recognize as brothers and sisters in Christ.

Bond assessed the impact of the segregated Student Volunteer Convention as damaging to Protestant African Americans and to Protestant churches in general.<sup>472</sup> Bond continued:

The thoughtful negro feels that a man or a woman who would refuse to sit by him in a great religious convention is hardly fit to carry the message of impartial love to his fatherland [Africa], or to carry on a great missionary propaganda. Many negroes of this class, because of the caste spirit rampant everywhere in church and religious gatherings, are turning away from the faith of their fathers, some to disbelief and atheism, others to the Catholic Church. In our own city, within a few years, a Catholic mission has been started, and the appeal the Catholics make, that in the Catholic Church there is no "color line," is attracting many of our best and most thoughtful people. This caste spirit is driving away from the Protestant churches some of the most ardent and faithful disciples of the Master. And while calling for volunteers to win disciples abroad the proscriptive methods and spirit of caste in our churches at home are making infidels, atheists, and Catholics.<sup>473</sup>

Bond's evaluation of the case demonstrates a few things. First, African American leaders in Nashville not only felt sensitivity regarding white Christian discrimination, they at times voiced it publicly. Had they perceived in the initiative for the new school the same tone, they would not have received Catholic efforts so favorably. Secondly, Bond made clear how those he perceived as educated, or "thoughtful," African American Nashvillians perceived Catholics.

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<sup>472</sup> W. Crosthwait to Drexel, March 7, 1906.

<sup>473</sup> Bond to the Editor of the *Nashville American*, March 5, 1906; W. Crosthwait to Byrne, March 22, 1905.

Based on their experience, these saw Catholics as less susceptible to the caste spirit they encountered elsewhere. Bond had, in Byrne's parlor, objected when Napier wished for five thousand colored Catholics in Nashville. Though he might deplore it, Bond had to acknowledge that the Catholic position on race was attractive to many well-educated black people. Black Nashvillians appear to have ignored or minimized the fact that particular Catholic institutions and persons in fact often did draw a color line, perhaps because the Church per se recognized such actions as violations of Catholic teaching. Though he did not intend it to do so, Bond's very lament serves as a kind of backhanded praise for the Catholic position as black Nashvillians perceived it.

Bond's testimony regarding the Catholic mission is invaluable, because it gives a view from outside the Catholic sphere. William Crosthwait's accounts to Byrne and Drexel offer the perspective of an African American, but Crosthwait himself was already deeply convinced of the truth of the Catholic faith. Bond, on the other hand viewed African American conversions to Catholicism as a threat or a loss to the Protestant churches. Nevertheless, he understood the appeal of Catholic teaching for elite black people. In the note he co-authored with Sutton Griggs to Byrne, they acknowledged the Catholic Church as a means to racial uplift and a check to the growth of caste prejudice. As a race leader, Bond was willing to acknowledge the positive contributions Catholics made in Nashville. Nevertheless, as a pastor, Bond grouped Catholics with atheists and infidels as he warned of the dire consequences of Protestant drawing of the color line. He wanted his fellow Christians to be jolted into realizing that their insistence on racial segregation was taking a toll and driving people to the terrible errors of infidelism, atheism, and Catholicism.<sup>474</sup>

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<sup>474</sup> Bond to the editor of the *Nashville American*, March 5, 1906.

According to Crosthwait, the Catholic mission in Nashville drew favorable attention from Bond's own congregation. Crosthwait wrote to Drexel regarding Bond:

Bond is a graduate of Berea College in Ky. and belongs to the board of trustees of that institution. You know about the contest that is being waged over the question of the separation of the races there. He is in the thickest of the fray, and doing what he can for the colored contingent of its students. He is also a graduate of the Theological department of Oberlin College.

His church, until a very recent date, was fostered by the American Missionary Asso. It is now living upon its own resources. The edifice is just across the street from Father Gleeson, whom Mr. Bond holds in very high esteem. Its membership tho not very large are intelligent people—teachers, lawyers, doctors, etc. they read and think about the Declaration of Independence; and insist upon the brotherhood of man, and the Fatherhood of God. They writhe under the lash of race discrimination, especially when it is applied in the name of the Lord.

These people are very kindly dispose [*sic*] toward the Church of the Holy Family. On occasions of unusual moment at our church Mr. Bond 's people attend almost to a man. On one such occasion—I think it was when Father Dorsey was here—he had nobody at his church.<sup>475</sup>

Not only did Bond see the possible defection of his own flock, but also the loss of potential converts. Crosthwait described the latter to Drexel: “Again, there is a large group of people here especially teachers who worship nowhere. These ‘have hung their harps upon the willows and refuse to sing Zion.’ Once in a while they come to hear Father Plunkett and Bishop Byrne.” Bond apparently feared that the Catholics might gain these souls who were so put off by racial discrimination among Protestant denominations. The point is not that Catholics in Nashville necessarily actually treated black and white people equally without discrimination, but that the perception among African Americans was that the Catholic Church taught against the color line, and that white Catholics—at least those that these people encountered—had appeared less susceptible to a caste spirit than their fellow white Christians.<sup>476</sup>

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<sup>475</sup> W. Crosthwait to Drexel, March 7, 1906.

<sup>476</sup> Ibid.

## Breadth of Reception

The black people of Nashville, of course, did not constitute a monolith. The Crosthwaits and Bond, Napier, and their fellows the self-described “intelligent negroes,” represented just a small percentage of Nashville’s black population. They were the best-educated and had professional employment, and they were quick to articulate their response to those events that they saw as impinging on racial uplift in Nashville. It is harder to access the response to Catholicism among the less literate and more humbly employed black people of the city, but a few glimmers can be read between the lines of other texts.

In his attempts to inform Byrne of the overall response to the church among African American Nashvillians, Crosthwait distinguished the leaders from others. He wrote, “you may see what these leaders of the race are thinking . . . But you, I suppose are more concerned about what the people are thinking. They are mellow and are prepared to be gathered in.”<sup>477</sup> In another letter he revealed the viewpoint of common black people as he observed it,

When you spoke at our first confirmation, the people in the restaurants and barber shops said “the Catholics are alright.” Last Sunday after the confirmation I mingled with the people very extensively, to feel the public pulse. Such expressions as these were made: “Isn’t this a great blessing”—“How impressive the exercises were.”<sup>478</sup>

In Crosthwait’s view, approbation of the Catholic work among African American Nashvillians extended from both common and elite black people.

As a private academy, the Immaculate Mother, like other private academies in Nashville, charged tuition of its pupils, so the school itself necessarily appealed to those with greater means. It is hard to know, therefore, whether the non-elite black families of Nashville welcomed the

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<sup>477</sup> W. Crosthwait to Byrne March 22, 1905.

<sup>478</sup> W. Crosthwait to Byrne, May 21, 1905.

school with the same enthusiasm or shared the same goals for their daughters. The Sisters attempted to accommodate those who could not pay the full tuition and welcomed inquiries about the school from non-elite families. One Sister eagerly reported to Mother Drexel that a hospital cook had inquired about sending her daughter to Immaculate Mother.<sup>479</sup>

The elite black people of Nashville collaborated with one another in trying to advance the best interests of black Nashvillians in opposition to racial prejudice. While the vast majority of them had no role in sparking Bishop Byrne's decision to move forward with projects geared towards black evangelization, they did register and evaluate those efforts. Attracted by the Catholic preached message of equality, many black Protestants at the same time looked askance at the Catholic Church, so universally suspected and maligned, and so often preached against in their churches. The controversy surrounding the establishment of Immaculate Mother Academy sparked a commitment on the part of leading black Nashvillians toward accepting the Catholic Church's presence among them and supporting the school.<sup>480</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Though by no means the end of black Protestant opposition to Catholicism in Nashville, the acceptance of the school by influential leaders demonstrates that Byrne and his collaborators successfully communicated something that coincided with that which black leaders envisioned for themselves. The acceptance bade well for the success of Byrne's initiatives—not only for the successful launching of the school itself, but also his ultimate goal of converting African Americans students and their families to Catholicism. The immediate response of black men and women after Byrne's reply to Keith shows that in the perception of African American

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<sup>479</sup> Sister Marion to Drexel, n.d., Folder H40 B2, Box 1, Folder 3, SBS.

<sup>480</sup> Lamon, *Black Tennesseans*, 24-28, 33-35, 176-178, 184-87, 189, 191-93, 197-99; Briggs, *The New Negro*, 35-54, 114-33.

Nashvillians, Immaculate Mother Academy's establishment constituted a positive step for black families. At very least, the men and women who extended encouragement and support to Byrne and Drexel appreciated their refusal to bend to Keith's opposition.

For Byrne, the main goal was the salvation of souls; Catholic education was a means to the end of converting black families to Catholicism and thereby opening for them a path to salvation. Secondly, conversion brought African Americans as it did other Catholics under the sway of rigorous moral precepts. Regardless of their views of Catholic teaching and morality, African Americans saw Catholic action in Nashville as a challenge to the prevailing race prejudice, and at very least appreciated that as a valuable contribution.

The Keith affair appears to have facilitated Catholic efforts to overcome hostility from black Protestant leaders and brought to the support of the new school those Nashvillians whom Gabriel Briggs describes as the prototypical New Negroes. When Father Plunkett marshalled a congregation at his arrival in 1900, the ranks included a fireman, a stove repairer, and a store manager, among others. William Crosthwait appears to have been the most educated sympathizer prior to the Keith affair. The announcement of the school and weathering of white opposition to it brought allies from a broader swath of Nashville's black professionals and ministers, and significantly weakened religious hostility against Catholics among some black Nashvillians. Providentially, the Keith affair stirred up black support for Byrne and Drexel in a way that the Catholics could never have done for themselves.

**CHAPTER SEVEN**  
**IMMACULATE MOTHER ACADEMY AND INDUSTRIAL SCHOOL**  
**UNDERWAY**

In late August of 1905, the clouds of the Keith affair had largely dissipated, and tension of another kind stirred in the former Keith mansion on Stevenson Avenue—the nervous excitement that precedes the beginning of a new and challenging work. Mother Mary Katharine Drexel and eight other Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament were busy readying for the opening of the school year for the brand-new Immaculate Mother Academy and Industrial School. Prospective students took entrance examinations and their parents and other interested parties came to meet the Sisters and to see the school. Drexel wrote, “the sisters were so busy examining pupils and showing the Colored Elite around and entertaining them that I pitied them and blessed God.” The busyness at the advent of the school term boded well for the new academy.<sup>481</sup>

The opening days and subsequent months of the school term proved that Byrne and Drexel had not erred in their judgment that a school for black girls on the Keith property would flourish. As white opposition to the endeavor lost steam, the white neighbors comforted themselves by giving such an account of the school as suited their preferences, while the students attending the school and their families took quite different perspectives. Enrollment increased rapidly and the school soon expanded, building new facilities and expanding its scope and purpose.

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<sup>481</sup> Mother Mary Katharine Drexel to Louise Morrell, n.d., 1905, *Writings* no.1577, SBS; *Annals of the Convent of the Blessed Sacrament of The Immaculate Mother*, 12, 15, 18, H40B2 Box 1, Folder 1 TN Nashville Immaculate Mother Annals 1905-1953, SBS.

## Preparing to Begin

The immediate preparations in late August built on the more remote preparation that had gone on during spring and summer. Arrangements for the new school could not begin in earnest until the Keith family vacated Mile End in early June 1905. Drexel, who had traveled to Nashville, asked Byrne to bless the place immediately while she began to inventory the renovations and other changes that would be necessary to make the house a school and convent. Drexel took a direct and active role in the preparations. After ordering the necessary changes, Drexel departed, returning in July with some of the Sisters who would be staffing Immaculate Mother Academy. A few rooms were set aside to serve as the convent and a little chapel for the Sisters. Drexel personally attended to the outfitting of the chapel. She decorated it using items from her childhood home and cut up clothes her sister Louise had worn in infancy to make them into altar linens. Drexel departed and returned yet again in late August to be present for final preparations, entrance examinations, and the opening of the term. She was deeply and personally invested in this important endeavor.<sup>482</sup>

Not all aspects of preparation were within Drexel's purview. An important element over which she had little control was the calming of opposition and especially the dropping of the efforts to extend Central Street through the Keith property. Byrne's politically connected friend Thomas Tyne hoped that a strategy of delay would dampen the support for the Central Street petition. He promised Byrne that he would try to delay the speech he had to deliver to the relevant committee. Meanwhile, Tyne reasoned, a new council would be elected, the school year

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<sup>482</sup> "Mother Katherine [*sic*]: Head of Order of Blessed Sacrament in Nashville," *Nashville American*, June 1, 1905, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; "It Will Open Sept. 5: Changes and Improvements in Progress at Old Keith Home," *Nashville American*, August 20, 1905, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; Drexel to Morrell, n.d., 1905; "Examinations On: Twenty-Nine Colored Girls Already Have Passed," *Nashville American*, August 30, 1905, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

would get underway, and most people would lose interest. The city council appears to have deferred consideration of the measure indefinitely, perhaps because the anticipated expense of extending Central Street would have taxed the city coffers.<sup>483</sup> Apparently the dropping of opposition called for some excuse, as the *American* explained that “it is not generally understood that the school will be purely for day pupils. No one will board in the house with the sisters. Those who have already passed the examinations represent the best class of intelligent, self-respecting colored people.”<sup>484</sup> An article published the day before the new school opened was more explicit. It read:

Protest of Neighbors  
Prosecution of It Will Be Dropped for  
Present at Least

Residents in the neighborhood of the Keith homestead who protested against the establishment at the homestead of a school for negro girls are not disposed to take any further steps at present to prevent the opening of the school tomorrow. They prefer to wait until the school has been opened, and then, in the event it should prove as objectionable as it was anticipated it would be to make application for a writ of injunction forbidding the operation of the school.

It is improbable that any such an injunction will be asked for. When it was first divulged for what purpose the Keith homestead had been bought, it was apprehended by persons living in the neighborhood that a boarding school would be established there, and the inhabitants in the neighborhood were much relieved on subsequently ascertaining the school would be a day school.<sup>485</sup>

It had become evident that the school would become a reality, and the opposition was adjusting their position, perhaps to save face.

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<sup>483</sup> Thomas Sebastian Byrne to Drexel, July 14, 1905, Folder H 10b Qb b21, SBS.

<sup>484</sup> “Examinations On: Twenty-Nine Colored Girls Already Have Passed,” *Nashville American*, August 30, 1905, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>485</sup> “Ready for Opening: Mother Katherine’s Industrial School for Negro Girls,” *Nashville American*, September 4, 1905, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

Byrne and Drexel, who could not foresee this outcome, kept their pledge to remain quiet and carry on with their plans. Despite a great deal of anger and fierce talk against the school through the spring and summer of 1905, nothing actually intervened to prevent their progress. They had the building renovated, the Sisters arrived, and all was made ready for the start of school.<sup>486</sup> In late August the *American* commented:

so quietly and unostentatiously have her [Drexel's] plans been carried out that one can hardly realize without a visit to the place, the amount of work that has been accomplished in renovating and modernizing the old Keith residence. While its general plan has been left unchanged, doors have been located, windows have been cut, the entire house has been floored with hardwood, the interior has been repainted, and the paper replaced wherever it was needed. New furniture has been installed, handsome rugs cover the reception room floors, and a pretty chapel for the use of the sisters is nearly completed . . . On the second floor, the school rooms, four in number, are located. Handsome oak desks have been placed, blackboards and instructive and beautiful pictures are on the walls, and other pieces of furniture or bric-a-brac will be added from time to time to enhance the attractiveness of the place.<sup>487</sup>

In the end, Samuel Keith and his fellow petitioners were unable to accomplish their designs to destroy the school, and because of Byrne, Drexel, and their collaborators' quiet, steady work through the summer, disregarding the threats and trusting to Tyne's strategy and God's providence, Byrne and the Sisters were poised to accomplish their designs.

Byrne and Drexel corresponded throughout the spring and summer of 1905, hammering out the details of the foundation. They needed to ensure that the Blessed Sacrament Sisters and the Bishop of Nashville might cooperate harmoniously, not only during Byrne's tenure as bishop but into the foreseeable future. They forged agreements to protect the school and the Sisters. They had already begun to discuss the necessity of securing a house nearby for the Josephite priest, Father Thomas Plunkett, and needed to settle where the house would be, how much

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<sup>486</sup> Byrne to Drexel, July 14, 1905.

<sup>487</sup> "Examinations On."

Drexel would contribute, and who would own the house. They needed to come to agreement about the means by which the school would be supported into the future and the details of establishing a convent of Blessed Sacrament Sisters. The most serious point of contention between Drexel and Byrne at this stage was the future financial support of the school.<sup>488</sup>

Byrne wrote Drexel at the time of the February 1905 deed transfer to the Blessed Sacrament Sisters to ask her to specify the particulars of an agreement for her Sisters to serve in the city of Nashville. He received her answer on his return to Nashville, and responded, agreeing to various details such as the dates for Benediction at the convent, but striking out the obligations she had listed for the diocese to support the school.<sup>489</sup> Puzzled by his corrections, Drexel wrote back clarifying for Byrne that she was not endowing the convent or the school but that these would need support from tuition and from fundraising within the diocese. She wrote, “it must be that you do not know that there is not one single Colored Institute which supports itself . . . without donations from outside.”<sup>490</sup> Byrne assured Drexel that he did not seek an endowment from her, and he gave permission for the school to charge tuition and to conduct fundraising in the diocese. He assured her of his support of her Sisters and the school, “as long as I live, the Sisters shall never want, nor shall the work be crippled even if I should give up my last cent to

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<sup>488</sup> Drexel to Thomas J. Plunkett, March 5, 1906, Drexel Box, ADN; Drexel to Byrne, n.d., 1906, Drexel Box, ADN.

<sup>489</sup> Byrne to Drexel, February 12, 1905, Folder H 10b Qb b21, SBS; Drexel to Byrne, n.d., February 1905, Drexel Box, ADN; Byrne to Drexel, March 23, 1905, Folder H 10b Qb b21, SBS. Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, an important aspect of the devotional life of Catholic religious Sisters, requires the presence of a priest, who presides and administers the rite. It was customary for the superiors of religious houses to submit to the bishop the dates on which they requested to have Benediction, with the understanding that by approving the dates, the bishop took responsibility to ensure that a priest would be present to administer the Benediction. This was a routine matter, whereas the information about the financial support of the school was peculiar to Immaculate Mother Academy and Convent.

<sup>490</sup> Drexel to Byrne, March 30, 1905, Drexel Box, ADN.

support and sustain both . . . to make sacrifices for so Godlike a work.”<sup>491</sup> Given their mutual trust and esteem, they quickly came to agreement. Both knew, however, that the amicable relationship between the diocese and the Blessed Sacrament Sisters needed to be established in a way that would survive them both; consequently, the legal papers needed to be in order in case one or the other of them died. Drexel was keenly aware that her vast income would cease by law at her death and she frequently specified arrangements for future financial support with the words “if I live.” Like Byrne, Drexel wanted to see the institutions she founded survive, and that meant they needed to be sustainable without her support.<sup>492</sup>

A minor resurgence of opposition threatened just as the school opened. The *American* reported the rumor that “a colored woman has rented a house just opposite the school, where she proposes to establish a dormitory and to serve meals . . . to accommodate pupils of the school at her house who live at such a distance from the school that it would be inconvenient or impracticable for them to return to their homes every day.” The article continued:

When it becomes known in the neighborhood that a negro woman proposes to open this boarding house . . . it is believed that the antagonism of the white neighbors toward the school, which had recently become more subdued will be revived. It is probable that an injunction will be applied for by neighbors.<sup>493</sup>

The report alarmed Drexel, who was praying hard for the success of the new school. Drexel wrote to the Sisters at Immaculate Mother that she had prayed fifteen decades of the rosary for several intentions related to the school, including that they might draw the children to

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<sup>491</sup> Byrne to Drexel, April 1, 1905, Byrne Papers, ADN.

<sup>492</sup> Drexel to Byrne, n.d., early April 1905, Drexel Box, ADN; Drexel to Byrne, March 19, 1905, Drexel Box, ADN.

<sup>493</sup> “Operations Begin: Fifty Pupils at Opening of Mother Katherine’s School: Negro Boarding House: Been Opened Across the Street from the Institution and May Revive the Bitter Feeling of the Neighborhood Against the Educational Institution,” *Nashville American*, September 6, 1905, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

God, “that the newspaper article may not injure our school,” for good enrollment, and for the school accounts to balance. Drexel added: “If the American published a refutation of Boarding House, please send it to me.” She cautioned her Sisters: “Henceforth you will answer all reporters as Bishop Byrne suggests—‘I have nothing to say.’”<sup>494</sup> The next day’s *American* reported that “Mother Katherine Drexel [*sic*] . . . referring to the report published in the *American* Wednesday . . . stated that she had not previously heard that any colored woman proposed to open a boarding house opposite the school. The statement was also made by Father Plunkett that no such boarding house was in prospect near the school.” Thus the reception of Immaculate Mother Academy by the neighborhood remained somewhat uncertain as the school year began.<sup>495</sup>

### **Affirmation of the Efforts**

While Byrne and Drexel maintained a businesslike correspondence that tended efficiently to the practical details of managing the founding of a school and convent and planning for future growth, their letters also reflect a profound mutual respect and friendship that opened them to one another’s influence. Drexel offered Byrne her spiritual reflections on their work with a candor that shows her certainty that Byrne shared not only her practical, even sharp, business sense, but more centrally, her basic spiritual motivation. As Drexel wrote to Byrne of the Divine Word Fathers Superior, “I think it must be the Holy Spirit who draws the Superior, Revd. P.J. Piel to wish to work for the Colored, for I can’t imagine what human motive he could have.”<sup>496</sup>

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<sup>494</sup> Drexel to Beloved Daughters in the Blessed Sacrament at Immaculate Mother’s, n.d. 1905, *Writings* no. 1021, SBS.

<sup>495</sup> “Want the Editors: Negro Boarding House,” *Nashville American*, September 7, 1905, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>496</sup> Drexel to Byrne, n.d., February 1905, Drexel Box, ADN.

As someone deeply involved in “work for the Colored,” Drexel reveals something of her own experience in this comment. In a letter finalizing plans for their legal agreement, Drexel wrote:

it will be a joy for us to throw ourselves confidently and generously into the work, and we shall really try not to have a single thought of self. God will not let work fail if we are loyal to His cause and unselfish in promoting His honor. We shall try our utmost to be single minded in carrying it forward . . . pray for us that we may be so really and before God Who sees the inmost heart. Pray . . . I beg you . . . that God may have no obstacle in our puny self which spoils and impedes God’s work.<sup>497</sup>

This work that Drexel and Byrne perceived as God’s commission to them involved outreach to human beings whom they recognized as brothers and sisters, children of God their common father, equals in humanity though marginalized because of race.

Drexel’s influence, then, seems to have been something a good deal deeper than that of a mere practical collaborator and major benefactor to Byrne’s diocese. By her spiritual influence, she invited Byrne to a deeper commitment to the black apostolate and greater sympathy for African Americans. In July 1905, around the time that her response to the white women of South Nashville appeared in the press, Drexel sent Bishop Byrne a copy of W.E.B. DuBois’s 1903 book *The Souls of Black Folk*. She followed the book with an encouraging letter, urging Byrne to see the bright side of the opposition they were facing in Nashville. Byrne responded:

I wish to thank you for the copy of ‘The Souls of Black Folk’, part of which I have read and I wish to finish it and tell you about it when you come...this colored question seems a burning and an all-important one and the marvel is that in the providence of God it was not commenced fifty years ago. It is not ours to judge but to do our own work that we may not be judged.<sup>498</sup>

Their discussion of the book was not recorded, but perhaps Byrne’s reading of this book and his ongoing communication with Drexel may have drawn him to even deeper commitment to

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<sup>497</sup> Drexel to Byrne, n.d. early April 1905.

<sup>498</sup> Drexel to Byrne, n.d., July 1905, Drexel Box, ADN; Byrne to Drexel, July 14, 1905.

the work for African Americans, which he considered a moral obligation, long overdue in its execution.

In his collection of essays *The Souls of Black Folk*, DuBois expressed frankly and poignantly his understanding of his own race—what he perceived to be the particular gifts of those of African descent—and their experience in America. He related stories that conveyed the horror of the race hatred that made the lynching of black people and the sexual exploitation of black women common. His tales of his own teaching experience in rural Tennessee exposed aspects of the systematic economic injustice that trapped most black people in grinding poverty. DuBois wrote of the veil of race consciousness that gave him a sense of double identity. On the one hand, he was an American man, but on the other he was a black man; and as black, he, with all others of his marginalized race experienced something akin to living behind an invisible veil that separated them from the rest of American society, relegated to a lower place as though lacking equal humanity. DuBois included criticism of Booker T. Washington and those like him, who, in DuBois's perception, would advance their race by advocating economic opportunity while tolerating the violence and indignity of caste prejudice and continued political and social inequality. DuBois characterized Washington as being opposed to classical liberal education for black people, while DuBois himself argued for a liberal education for those black students who showed great promise, the so-called “talented tenth.”<sup>499</sup>

It is impossible to know what difference it made for their work in Nashville that Drexel and Byrne read DuBois's work, but it is apparent that they read it sympathetically, and it seems fair to conjecture that it confirmed their sense of the importance of what they were doing.

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<sup>499</sup> W.E.B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Dover Publications, 1994); Robert J. Norrell, *Up from History: The Life of Booker T. Washington* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 224-33, 279-80. *The Souls of Black Folk* was originally published in Chicago by A.C. McClurg and Co. in 1903.

DuBois's stories of white peoples' injustice to black people might have helped Byrne and Drexel to see the long-range consequences of attitudes like those of Keith and his supporters, steeling them to continue to resist the logic of white supremacy.

Drexel and Byrne were not finished with planning and discussing the best ways to proceed with Immaculate Mother Academy, nor was the establishment of Immaculate Mother Academy the apex of their aspirations. Rather, the school was one significant piece in a larger plan that for Byrne included further designs for Nashville, Memphis, and perhaps other Tennessee cities. For Drexel the vision extended to every diocese where African Americans dwelt.

DuBois's essays and Drexel's encouragement were not the only influence coming from outside his diocese that affirmed Byrne in the direction he had taken. Sometime in June 1905, the bishop received a letter from Rafael Cardinal Merry del Val, the Cardinal Secretary of State of the Vatican serving the Holy Father Pope Pius X. The letter expressed the Holy Father's gratitude and approbation of the work Byrne was doing for African Americans. Since his days as a seminarian, Byrne had been deeply attuned to Rome, and words of praise from the Holy Father must have encouraged him. Cardinal Merry del Val responded on the Holy Father's behalf to a letter Byrne had addressed to him that mentioned the efforts towards black evangelization in Nashville. The letter congratulated Byrne and encouraged his efforts. Merry del Val wrote:

It is therefore that His Holiness [the pope] meritoriously commends the burning zeal of Your Grace [Byrne], and while thanking God, who is pleased to expand every day the boundaries of his reign, he rejoices with his whole heart with you for these happy results, whence your efforts have been crowned. His Holiness then makes warm expressions of preference towards the work of the Apostolate for the Negroes, worthier of all encouragement and approval than every other endeavor of civil charity, finding generous and numerous helpers, to all of these, as a token of grateful spirit, he imparts from now on the Apostolic Benediction.<sup>500</sup>

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<sup>500</sup> R. Cardinal Merry del Val to Byrne, May 27, 1905, FP.

In communicating the Holy Father's commendation of their outreach to African Americans, Merry del Val gave tremendous encouragement not only to Byrne, to whom the letter was addressed, but also to Drexel and the others associated with them in the work. Drexel made sure that translated excerpts of this letter were published in the Philadelphia *Catholic Standard and Times* and did all she could to spread the word that every person who in any way aided the work to evangelize African Americans would receive this special blessing from the Holy Father. That this work was designated by the pope as the superlative need of civil charity must have confirmed for Drexel and Byrne the justice of their choice to refuse Keith's suggestion to use Mile End as a home for the Little Sisters of the Poor or some other charitable work.<sup>501</sup>

### **Enrollment**

The success of the school was dependent on having students to instruct. Over the summer of 1905, the Sisters issued a prospectus for the new school, announcing to the community the school's offerings and its purpose. The *American* highlighted an excerpt from the prospectus: "The chief object of the institution is . . . industrial and academic education. Its aim is to train the hand as well as the mind and heart: to form women who, by their virtue and noble aspirations as well as by their thrifty and industrious habits will exert a wide-spreading influence for good upon

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*Egli e' perciò che Sua Santità meritamente encomia l'acceso zelo di V.S., e mentre ringrazia Iddio, il quale si piace dilatare ogni giorno i confine del suo regno, si congratula di tutto cuore con lei per i felici risultati, onde sono state coronate le sue fatiche. La Santità Sua fa poi caldi voti perche l'opera dell'Apostolato dei negri, degna d'incoraggiamento e di plauso piu che ogni altra impresa di civile carita, trove generosi e numerosi soccorritori, ai quali tutti, in pegno di grato animo, imparte fino da ora l'Apostolica Benedizione.*

This translation is a combination by the author of two contemporary translations of the Italian: one by Sister Mary Esther Potts, O.P. and the other by Father Michael Hendershott.

<sup>501</sup> Samuel J. Keith to Byrne, February 15, 1905, Drexel Box, ADN; Francis P. Green to Drexel, March 9, 1906, Drexel Box, ADN.

their race in this country and even beyond its borders.”<sup>502</sup> In their academic courses, the Blessed Sacrament Sisters would employ the standards used by the New York State public schools.<sup>503</sup>

Immaculate Mother Academy opened its doors on September 5, 1905, and students came to be enrolled. The school would admit pupils between the ages of eight and eighteen. While none of those initially registering yet qualified for higher academic work, there was more interest in preparatory work for the academic courses than in the industrial courses. The preparatory classes began with the equivalent of fourth and fifth grade work; the academic or higher courses would follow thereon, the equivalent of high school work. Drexel recounted in a letter to Byrne the initial figures for enrollment. According to Drexel, at the outset, thirty-two girls were enrolled in the preparatory classes; eleven girls were enrolled for music; and just one girl enrolled for dressmaking. Four adults were signed up for the cooking course. The *Annals*, a brief contemporary or nearly contemporary record of events kept by the Sisters at Immaculate Mother, reported similar numbers, probably reflecting the enrollment growth in the weeks after initial registration. This record indicates that besides the twenty-eight non-academic students enrolled—twelve in music, six in cooking, and ten in dress-making, fifty-four or fifty-five girls were enrolled in the preparatory or academic courses.<sup>504</sup>

Byrne wrote triumphantly to Fr. Dyer about the new school. He credited Drexel:

all the praise is due her, or most of it, for without her cooperation, little could have been accomplished. She has a beautiful School and Academy and the opening was more than gratifying. The attendance...fifty of the daughters of the best Colored people in the City,

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<sup>502</sup> “It Will Open Sept. 5,” *Nashville American*, August 20, 1905, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>503</sup> “Examinations On: Twenty-Nine Colored Girls Have Already Passed,” *Nashville American*, August 30, 1905, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>504</sup> “School for Colored Girls,” *Nashville Banner*, February 13, 1905, *Nashville Banner* microfilm Roll #172; “Examinations On;” Drexel to Byrne, n.d., September 1905, Drexel Box, ADN; *Annals of the Convent of the Blessed Sacrament of The Immaculate Mother*, 21, H40B2 Box 1, Folder 1 TN Nashville Immaculate Mother Annals 1905-1953, SBS.

and so many the applicants for music that many had to be refused. When it is recollected that this is a pay Academy and that only the better sort can avail themselves of its advantages, the attendance is most promising, . . . it is important to get the better class of children, make converts of them and others will follow.<sup>505</sup>

Convert-making remained Byrne's chief goal in the endeavor. One of the Sisters at Immaculate Mother later observed to Drexel that dressmaking did not bring as many to the faith as did the literary course.<sup>506</sup>

Immaculate Mother Academy's enrollment grew rapidly. By mid-September 1905, the Sisters were turning away music pupils because they had reached capacity. Most of the students' families sought an academic or musical education, or both, for their girls. Drexel, too, clearly wished to see the girls qualify for academic study. By the opening of the following school year, enrollment had increased to eighty pupils, and by the first of October 1906, ninety-five students were enrolled. By this time some students had qualified for the first and second academic levels. By November of the Fall term of 1907 the enrollment had increased to one hundred and ninety-five students. In the Spring of 1906, the Sisters began to offer a free sewing class for poor children. Other aspects of cooking, sewing, and fine needlework were made available to all students. In addition to the doctrine classes held as part of ordinary schooling, in April 1906 Sister Philip Neri began a League of the Sacred Heart, a voluntary organization that encouraged devotional prayers and activities. By June this League had one hundred members. By 1907, the Sisters held regular classes to give formal instruction in the faith and prepare those students interested to receive the sacraments.<sup>507</sup>

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<sup>505</sup> Byrne to E.R. Dyer, September 13, 1905, 10-DY-55, JOS.

<sup>506</sup> Sr. Mary Philip Neri to Drexel, March 11, 1912, H40 B2 Box 1 Folder 3, SBS.

<sup>507</sup> Drexel to Byrne, n.d., September 1905; "Examinations On;" Byrne to Dyer, September 13, 1905, 10-DY-55, JOS; *Annals*, 21, 28, 37-38, 23.

### Continued Growth at Immaculate Mother

Before the end of the first school year, Drexel, Byrne, and Plunkett were planning for the expansion of the facilities at Immaculate Mother. One problem was the priest's residence, which needed to be close enough for convenience, but distant enough to avoid arousing malicious gossip. Drexel provided first five hundred dollars and then one thousand more for a new house for Father Plunkett.<sup>508</sup>

Another matter requiring much more discussion and deliberation was the provision of education for young boys at Immaculate Mother. In March 1906, Drexel prodded Byrne for his vision for the next step for the Nashville mission. Drexel hoped to begin a free primary school for boys and girls, as well as a boys' academy that would mirror for boys what Immaculate Mother Academy offered girls. She offered to provide eight thousand dollars toward a boys' school, but Byrne preferred to begin a parochial school for very young students as opposed to an academy for young men. Drexel suggested renovating the stable and using that building to start with perhaps a hundred students, waiting to see if the new primary school would succeed before building further. Drexel offered Byrne her "mind sketch," pushing him to let her know his mind so that they might pursue a plan for the following school year.<sup>509</sup>

Byrne supported Drexel's desire to expand Immaculate Mother, but he seems to have conflated her two ideas into a single plan, omitting the academy for boys, but using the eight thousand dollars to build a primary school. Byrne and Father Plunkett thought it better to build "a permanent school house." The people served by the school were "sensitive," Byrne explained,

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<sup>508</sup> Drexel to Byrne, n.d., 1906, Drexel Box, ADN.

<sup>509</sup> Ibid.

“as any people who are thrust to the wall will be,” and might be offended by a converted stable serving as a school room. He suggested building anew and making the new school “an annex or feeder” to Immaculate Mother.<sup>510</sup>

Drexel was puzzled by Byrne’s blending of her two plans and sought clarification from the bishop. Did he want a parochial school or an annex and feeder to Immaculate Mother? If the latter, should it really cost eight thousand dollars? Drexel suggested that they build only as needed, with the potential for extension. She also suggested building an entertainment hall as part of the school. Her letter included the usual clarifications and stipulations about ownership and donations that kept the legal lines of obligation between the diocese and the Blessed Sacrament Sisters clear.<sup>511</sup>

Byrne clarified that he wanted the new school to be a co-educational parochial school, not a boys’ school, and to be “kept under the cover of the Immaculate Mother as an improvement thereof.” Byrne explained his reasoning to Drexel, “For if it were known [they] were building a school similar to the public schools for colored children, a hue and cry would at once go up against the project.” Byrne continued to prefer the silent way, quietly moving forward, and avoiding stirring up opposition. Byrne agreed with Drexel, however, that an entertainment hall would appeal to the people they were serving and would benefit their students. Parents would take “honest pride” in performances by their children, while the children would acquire valuable skills, confidence, and manners by preparing for and giving the entertainments. Byrne deemed

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<sup>510</sup> Byrne to Drexel, March 26, 1906, Folder H10B Q6 f22, SBS.

<sup>511</sup> Drexel to Byrne, n.d., April 1906, Drexel Box, ADN.

black people particularly attracted to “show and display,” but he noted that white academies also provided entertainments like those they had in mind.<sup>512</sup>

Drexel again prodded Byrne on two points. First, she queried, was the proposed new annex school to be co-educational? Next, she advised, the annex “ought to be started without delay.”<sup>513</sup> Byrne responded that the school would be for boys and girls and that two graduates of the Blessed Sacrament Sisters’ school in Rock Castle, Virginia could teach under the Sister’s supervision, as Drexel had suggested in an earlier letter. These would be black teachers who were lay women.<sup>514</sup>

Ever punctilious about the details, Drexel clarified matters with Byrne once more. Before they started “to build the Annex (which is as a parochial school where no tuition is to be asked for pupils of the three primary grades),” Drexel asked him to specify how he would provide salaries for the teachers. Since there would be no tuition from pupils, the diocese or parish would have to raise the money. She suggested using either the allotment the diocese received from the annual Lenten Collection for Indian and Negro Missions, or diocesan or parish collections. She reminded him that her community did not have an endowment for paying teaching salaries, but she offered, by way of exception, to pay two teachers for nine months the first year. Further, had the bishop considered the cost of coal, water, and books? Drexel commented that when building an eight-thousand-dollar building, “it would seem wise to inquire first as to the maintenance of

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<sup>512</sup> Byrne to Drexel, April 10, 1906, H10B Q6 f22, SBS.

<sup>513</sup> Drexel to Byrne, June 6, 1906, Drexel Box, ADN.

<sup>514</sup> Byrne to Drexel, June 9, 1906, H10B Q6 f22, SBS; Drexel to Byrne, n.d., 1906, Drexel Box, ADN. It is perhaps of note that it was one of these black lay women, May Byrd, who taught Latin at Immaculate Mother when Drexel visited in 1906. See Drexel to Daughters in the Blessed Sacrament at St. Catharine’s, Christmas, 1906, *Writings* no. 226, SBS.

such a school.” She added that a possible source of revenue could be to “get up two entertainments a year,” with ticket sales to help defray the cost of school operations. Drexel wanted to ensure that, as the annex was to be a free school, it would have adequate support. Lastly, Drexel asked Byrne to let Father Plunkett oversee the building of the annex.<sup>515</sup>

After this exchange of questions and details via letter, Drexel may have determined that matters needed to be settled in person. The *Annals* of the Immaculate Mother Convent note that in late June 1906, Mother Mary Katharine visited Nashville to make arrangements for a co-educational school that would teach grades one through three. The groundbreaking for the annex was held on July 2. Though she left Nashville, Drexel monitored progress on the building, directing her Sisters to talk to Father Plunkett or the architect about details of the plans, necessary corrections, and cost.<sup>516</sup> Byrne, too, took a close interest, as Drexel acknowledged:

this winter I wished to thank you...for your almost daily visits to the new building during its construction. The Sisters at the Immaculate Mother’s appreciated so much your kind interest and often longed to tell you so. If they did not go to welcome you every day you were there, it was only through diffidence and respect, fearing to obtrude themselves.<sup>517</sup>

The three-story building, including classrooms, auditorium, and gymnasium, was scheduled for completion in early 1907. The former Keith home, which had been the cause of such controversy, continued to serve as the convent and housed four classrooms, until it was condemned and razed, probably in 1912. Further improvements followed. In 1912, Drexel petitioned her new archbishop, Edmond Prendergast, for permission to spend five thousand

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<sup>515</sup> Drexel to Byrne, June 19, 1906, Drexel Box, ADN.

<sup>516</sup> *Annals*, 24-25; Drexel to Daughters in the Blessed Sacrament, n.d., *Writings* no. 985, SBS.

<sup>517</sup> Drexel to Byrne, May 20, 1907, Drexel Box, ADN.

dollars to replace the Keith mansion with a new brick structure that included the new convent.<sup>518</sup>

In 1919, a newly built Holy Family Church was completed under Plunkett's supervision, with Drexel's support, on the Immaculate Mother campus. By that time the "annex," which had remained under the cover of Immaculate Mother Academy since 1906, had become a grade school and was renamed Holy Family School. The completion of the church rounded out the physical plant of the mission, which Drexel would describe as "such a complete plant, with Church, school, and Convent, as well as Hall there."<sup>519</sup>

### Commencements

Commencement exercises were an important opportunity for interaction between the members of the Immaculate Mother Academy school community and various others, from parents of students and friends of the school to honored guests, reporters, and potential critics. After the first school year at Immaculate Mother Academy, prizes were awarded to top students, but there was no commencement per se, as no students had completed their degrees. Formal annual commencement ceremonies began on June 12, 1907. Taking advantage of Immaculate Mother's newly built hall, the Sisters planned a full program of closing exercises. They invited the other Catholic religious Sisters of Nashville to attend a dress rehearsal, and the *Annals*, the Blessed Sacrament Sisters' contemporary or nearly contemporary record of events at the convent and school of the Immaculate Mother, reported that the guest Sisters were "surprised at the very creditable performance." The annalist added, "Many declared they expected to hear a little

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<sup>518</sup> Drexel to E. Prendergast, June 5, 1912, *Writings* no. 2354, SBS; "New Building is Underway: Important Improvements at Drexel School," *Nashville American*, November 10, 1906, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; Drexel to Edmund F. Prendergast, June 5, 1912, *Writings* no. 2354, SBS; George Flanigen, *Catholicity in Tennessee: A Sketch of Catholic Activities in the State, 1541-1937* (Nashville: Ambrose Printing Co., 1937), 170. Flanigen's account places the Keith home's destruction in 1909, but Drexel requested approval from her new archbishop, E.F. Prendergast to spend \$5,000 to rebuild because of the Keith house being condemned in 1912.

<sup>519</sup> Drexel to Louis Pastorelli, February 16, 1924, PM4K8, JOS.

singing with some clog dances perhaps.” The reader can sense the pique of the Blessed Sacrament Sister annalist that so little was expected from their students, and her pride that the students broke through the low expectations with an impressive performance. Commencement was a chance to demonstrate the excellence of the school and the capacity of the students to learn. As many theaters in Nashville were closed to black people, this event represented something very important to them. Not only did they have an opportunity to be entertained, they had the pride of seeing their own children demonstrating excellence in various areas.<sup>520</sup>

Byrne, too, saw the commencement as an important celebration. He wrote to Drexel a few days before the 1907 commencement, mentioning that he would speak and remarking, "this will be a great event."<sup>521</sup> Byrne's first commencement address praised Drexel, Plunkett, and the school children. According to the *Annals*, he remarked that the children “would compare favorably with the children of any school in Nashville.” The Sister noted: “this remark uttered once before occasioned no slight feeling of wrath among some of the said schools.” The Sisters viewed the commencement as a success. The annalist wrote that it “proved an immense factor for good in dispelling prejudice against the school and indeed catholicity itself . . . a kindly feeling towards the church was awakened and several of the children who had been long hesitating now came forward expressing a desire to be received as members.”<sup>522</sup>

Byrne continued to make his own attendance at Immaculate Mother's commencements a priority. In 1908, Byrne not only attended himself, but was accompanied by eight other priests

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<sup>520</sup> *Annals*, 22, 32, 35.

<sup>521</sup> Byrne to Drexel, June 8, 1907, H10 Q6 f22, SBS.

<sup>522</sup> *Annals*, 33-34.

from the Nashville area.<sup>523</sup> He wrote to a friend earlier in the day that he would attend the Immaculate Mother commencement in the evening, and "this time all or nearly all of the priests of the city will be there—such a change!"<sup>524</sup> Byrne's enthusiastic support of the Academy no doubt influenced the marked increase in priestly interest. Byrne addressed the audience, thanking the parents and remarking on the advantages of the education the girls were receiving at Immaculate Mother. He "evoked loud applause when he stated that on the preceding day, he had closed a contract for the erection of a similar institution in Memphis, he giving \$5,000 while Rev. Mother [Drexel] defrayed the remainder of the expense." Again, the commencement exercises made an excellent impression on those in attendance.<sup>525</sup> In 1909, according to the Blessed Sacrament Sisters' *Annals*, Immaculate Mother Academy's was the only Catholic school commencement in the city that Byrne attended. Extremely busy with the construction of his new residence and Cathedral school, the bishop declined all other invitations, but accepted Immaculate Mother's, to the great satisfaction of the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament.<sup>526</sup>

Byrne contributed five thousand dollars for the Memphis property, presumably from the accounts of the diocese. This gift marked a shift for Byrne, who, though he enthusiastically supported endeavors for the black apostolate, had previously left them to be funded from outside the diocese. Byrne's financial support for the Memphis project seems to indicate that he saw Holy Family Church and Immaculate Mother Academy as a success—a replicable success.

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<sup>523</sup> *Annals*, 49.

<sup>524</sup> Byrne to John Burke, June 12, 1908, Byrne Papers, ADN.

<sup>525</sup> *Annals*, 50-51.

<sup>526</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

## Immaculate Mother Academy's Image

Immaculate Mother Academy continued to offer industrial, academic, and musical courses. Various people defined the school by one or another aspect of its curriculum, according to their own predispositions. Mother Mary Katharine herself made a quick visit to the school in December of 1906 and in her account of it to the Sisters at another school mentioned both the cooking class and the Latin class.<sup>527</sup> She apparently approved of the work at Immaculate Mother, for she wrote to Archbishop Ryan of Philadelphia in 1909 to ask, "May we open a day school [in Philadelphia] like the one in Nashville?" Drexel explained that with annual tuition of nine dollars for the upper grades and five dollars for the lower grades, and one dollar to matriculate, the school could be described as a select school. She proposed Immaculate Mother as a model for a school to draw "the more influential Colored of Phila."<sup>528</sup>

Byrne also emphasized both the industrial and the higher education offered at Immaculate Mother Academy. Byrne favored the cultivation of the domestic arts for all girls, not just African Americans.<sup>529</sup> He was pleased by the exhibits of student sewing and other useful skills and hoped to see these branches flourish at the school. He commented regarding the commencement exercises that the Immaculate Mother students "conducted themselves more creditably than those of St. Cecilia's Academy." Byrne seems to have been immensely proud of the school.<sup>530</sup>

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<sup>527</sup> Drexel to Daughters in the Blessed Sacrament at St. Catharine's, December 1906, *Writings* no. 226, SBS.

<sup>528</sup> Drexel to P.J. Ryan, July 8, 1909, *Writings* no. 2348, SBS.

<sup>529</sup> Byrne to R.J. Lilley, September 24, 1920, Byrne Papers, ADN.

<sup>530</sup> Byrne to Drexel, June 7, 1911, H40 B2, Box 1, Folder 3; St. Cecilia Academy educated the daughters of many of Nashville's white elite families, Catholic and Protestant, and others from greater distances.

The Sisters perceived that white opposition to the school had died down, and they suspected they knew why. The convent annalist observed:

During this year 1906 our ‘enemies’—as we designated the people of the neighborhood who had signed the petition against us—realized that we were not such a nuisance after all and expressed their approbation of the good work done, this approval came all the more readily when they discovered that the children were instructed in cooking and sewing.<sup>531</sup>

The Sisters’ perception was corroborated by commentary in the *American*. An article on building of the annex at Immaculate Mother remarked of the school, “It teaches the colored girls to be good servants, by training them in cooking, sewing, house-cleaning and household work, while giving them a practical education.” Despite Immaculate Mother’s intentional inclusion of the academic, the former enemies of the school seem to have taken comfort in seeing the school as a place that kept black people in their proper place and under appropriate constraint.<sup>532</sup>

Byrne’s Vicar General, D.J. Murphy shared the sense that animosity against the school had lessened. He reported to Father Dyer in the 1907 application for assistance from the Commission for the Catholic Missions among the Colored People and the Indians:

we have reason to be grateful for the marked success in both Church and School during the past year. The new academy added to the already well-equipped school of the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament was formally opened on Easter Monday and gives promise for a glorious future. Every available seat was engaged the first day altho ample accommodation was thought to have been made for some time. The bitter opposition of a few years ago has almost disappeared.<sup>533</sup>

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<sup>531</sup> *Annals*, 31.

<sup>532</sup> “New Building is Under Way: Important Improvements at Drexel School,” *Nashville American*, November 10, 1906, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>533</sup> Denis J. Murphy on behalf of Byrne, “Application for Aid Presented to the Commission for the Catholic Missions Among the Colored People and the Indians,” August 10, 1907, 157-DY-16, JOS.

While the school's odor among white Nashvillians had improved, it remained in favor with many black Nashvillians as well. Scott Crosthwait, a black physician, minister, and educator, wrote to the editor of the *American* in June 1907 to express hearty approval for Immaculate Mother Academy from "all of the thinking classes" of his race. He expressed gratitude to the "sainted Mother Catherine [sic] Drexel . . . Rev. T.J. Plunkett and the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament" and Bishop Byrne for their generosity, self-sacrifice, and principles.<sup>534</sup> The black-owned and operated *Nashville Globe*, commenting on the 1909 commencement exercises at Immaculate Mother Academy, remarked:

This is the school established by Mother Katharine (Drexel) some years ago for the education of the colored youth. It has so rapidly grown in popular favor with our people that the concert hall is insufficient to accommodate the friends who desire to attend its public exercises. The authorities, therefore, have found it necessary to limit the attendance by invitations so that the parents of the children will not be crowded out. However, the general public is cordially invited to the exhibit of school work on Sunday May 30<sup>th</sup> from 1p.m. to 5 p.m. On this occasion it will be a gratifying treat to our people to witness the progress of the students during this year as evidenced by the exhibits of dressmaking, sewing, domestic science, and class-work.<sup>535</sup>

The black friends of the Academy seem to have welcomed the various branches of education, recognizing all of them as valuable. Academic accomplishments were not so easily displayed as those in the manual realm. Father Plunkett reported to Byrne that the 1908 exhibit drew thousands of visitors. Byrne suspected some exaggeration on Plunkett's part, but certainly the event was well-attended.<sup>536</sup>

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<sup>534</sup> S.W. Crosthwait, "An Appreciation," *Nashville American*, June 16, 1907, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>535</sup> "Commencement at the Academy of the Immaculate Mother," *Nashville Globe*, May 28, 1909, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*.

<sup>536</sup> Byrne to Drexel, June 12, 1908, Folder H10Q6f22, SBS.

By 1908, a sense of the permanence of the new school must have been evident. In that year, Central Street, the street that, had it been extended as Keith and his neighbors petitioned, would have destroyed Mile End mansion, was renamed Drexel Place. The *American* carried the announcement, among a host of other street name changes, that the portion of Central Street from Seventh to Eighth Avenue would now be Drexel Place. Rather than use the street to destroy her project, Nashville ultimately named it in Drexel's honor.<sup>537</sup>

On the occasion of the 1912 opening of the State Normal school, the *Globe* commented on education in Nashville. Mentioning the city's reputation as the "Athens of the South," the writer continued: "Among the hundred or more institutions of learning . . . are included the following excellent schools for the Negro race: Fisk University, Roger Williams University, Walden University, Meharry Medical College, Academy and Industrial School of the Immaculate Mother, Daniel Hand Training School, and the Fireside School." Immaculate Mother's place on a short list of the leading black schools speaks well of its reputation among black Nashvillians.<sup>538</sup>

### **Opening a Path to Higher Education?**

The academic education offered at Immaculate Mother did not include college level work, but it did dispose some students to seek a college education. One outstanding alumna from the first years of the Academy who did so was Hulda Margaret Lyttle. Lyttle provides an example of an Immaculate Mother Academy success story on more than one level. She first

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<sup>537</sup> Steven Hoskins, "A Restless Landscape: Building Nashville History and Seventh and Drexel" (PhD diss., Middle Tennessee State University, 2009), 89, <http://digital.mtsu.edu/cdm/ref/collection/p15838coll2/id/9286>; "Duplications in Names of Streets Eliminated," *Nashville American*, March 3, 1908, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>538</sup> "State Normal Opening: First Session Begins Monday 16<sup>th</sup>," *Nashville Globe*, September 6, 1912, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*.

appears in the pages of the *Annals* as one of the earliest converts to the Catholic faith at the school. On November 4, 1906, Hulda Lyttle was baptized with her sister Martha and another girl. The girls had “by prayers and entreaties wrung an unwilling consent from their parents” and embraced the Catholic faith.<sup>539</sup> Conversions such as these were, in the eyes of its founders, the school’s most basic reason for being. Lyttle excelled academically as well as spiritually, at least twice bringing home top prizes from closing exercises at Immaculate Mother.<sup>540</sup>

Hulda Lyttle went on to study at Hubbard Hospital’s training school for nurses in Nashville, where she earned a degree in 1913, and passed the state nursing exam. Hubbard was the training hospital for Meharry Medical College. Lyttle then received a scholarship to study at Lincoln Hospital School of Nursing in New York, where she also earned certification. Returning to Nashville, she became the head nurse at Hubbard Hospital, instituting several important and effective administrative changes. She continued to advance: she was named Assistant Superintendent of Hubbard Hospital, then director of the School of Nursing, and finally, Superintendent of Hubbard Hospital. She pursued her own ongoing education and encouraged the same for those under her supervision. Lyttle obtained her Bachelor of Science degree in 1938 and continued to pursue further education. When Meharry reorganized its nursing program into a School of Nursing, Lyttle served as Dean. For decades, Lyttle was a leader in nursing and nursing education. In 1946, Meharry Medical College named the nurses’ residence building Hulda Margaret Lyttle Hall.<sup>541</sup>

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<sup>539</sup> *Annals*, 32.

<sup>540</sup> *Annals*, 22, 50.

<sup>541</sup> Linda T. Wynn, “Hulda Margaret Lyttle,” *Notable Black American Women, Book II*, ed. Jessie Carney Smith (Detroit: Gale Research, Inc., 1996), 421-24.

Lyttle's path was extraordinary and, while not the norm for Immaculate Mother graduates, it demonstrates that an Immaculate Mother education could be a stepping stone to further education and a professional career. Though "sick nursing" could be seen as an area of manual training, Lyttle's career shows that for her, it was a profession.<sup>542</sup> In the 1930s, Mrs. F. A. T. Berry, residing in California, wrote to Mother Drexel concerning Hulda Lyttle and her sisters:

I congratulate you upon the merciful and noble work that you are doing, the first to offer our race girls, the aid, to help to elevate them to a nobler and higher life and that has ever been given the chance and opportunity of a christian education, which will solve the problem of a true civilization. I have seen the result of such through the advance of the Lyttle girls, Hulda, Martha and Frances. They have under the tutorage at your schools . . . been given an ambitious impetus. I taught Martha, who has now passed an examination . . . and will be awarded a diploma for such, in her professional work. Hulda is now Secretary and Superintendent of the Meharry Medical Nurses' Department at Nashville. Frances has enrolled with me, preparing for a College Course in the U.C. University here [California]. All this, has aroused in these girls a desire to go forth with renewed aspirations through your work. They all have become imbued with your religious faith, which has proven so practical in the uplift of our race. Nashville is my home, and I know through what trials you went, to help our girls. Yours was an acid test concerning your purpose, which you so nobly and christianly stood. Through that you have won so many of our race to join and work for your church.<sup>543</sup>

Mrs. Berry, encountering the Lyttle girls many years after their time at Immaculate Mother, traced their high aspirations and drive for success to their education there. Berry's letter offers evidence that Hulda Lyttle's sisters also achieved professional success and pursued college education. Other examples could be offered, but Lyttle stands out as one among the very first students at the Academy who made the most of her education there and went on to lead other African American women to strive for academic and professional excellence.

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<sup>542</sup> Rev J. A. Bryant, "Councilman Anderson's Suggestions," *Nashville American*, December 1, 1904, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>543</sup> Mrs. F.A.T. Berry to Drexel, April 2, 1934, H10B3f.32 Correspondence Be-Berry, SBS.

### **Success in Nashville an Impetus to Continued Investment and Broader Efforts**

In early June 1906, Byrne issued a pastoral letter reminding the people of the Diocese of Nashville of their obligation to contribute money to support the Catholic Church's work for the souls of African Americans. He emphasized the need for charity, stressing the truth that Christ shed His blood for each person and that social distinctions had no place with God nor in the Church. Byrne quoted to advantage Merry del Val's letter communicating the Holy Father Pius X's preference for the apostolate to African Americans. In Byrne's translation, such work should be "encouraged and applauded above any work in Christian civilization." While it is hard to know to what degree Byrne's flock were receptive to his message, it seems that the more he did for African American outreach, the more they were willing to do. Nashville's diocesan collection for the Lenten Collection for the Commission for the Catholic Missions among the Colored People and the Indians jumped from \$117.85 in 1904 to \$382.25 in 1905. The 1905 collection took place less than a month after Byrne announced the plans for Immaculate Mother Academy. The March 1905 collection more than tripled the same collection's intake from 1904. In 1906 the diocesan total for the collection was \$400.00, in 1907, \$406.00, and in 1908, \$425.50. The collection was diocesan, so there is no certainty that the increase came due to the changes in the city of Nashville, but it seems likely that the highly publicized efforts for the new school contributed to the increased collection total from 1904 to 1905, and its continued success to the maintenance of higher collection totals.<sup>544</sup>

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<sup>544</sup> Byrne to the Clergy and Laity of this Diocese, in the *Colored Harvest* 4, no.11 (June 1906), copy in Holy Family Church and School History Folder, ADN; J.B. Morris to Dyer, July 25, 1904, 88-DY-17, JOS; Morris to Dyer, August 3, 1905, 88-DY-18, JOS; Morris to Dyer, October 17, 1906, 88-DY-57, JOS; Morris to Dyer, April 18, 1907, 88-DY-58, JOS.

Drexel continued to encourage Byrne to further effort, getting him involved in a national initiative to collect money for Catholic missions to African Americans. She wanted to support existing missions like Holy Family Church and Immaculate Mother Academy, and potential new missions that needed funding to make a start. When Byrne had been asked to travel and solicit contributions for the Commission for the Catholic Missions among the Colored People and the Indians in 1899, he had declined, saying that he could not spare the time; in 1906, he would agree—at Drexel’s urging—to the far more substantial commitment of founding and leading the National Catholic Board of Mission Work Among the Colored People.<sup>545</sup> One of five bishops and archbishops named to the Board, Byrne became its *de facto* leader, even complaining to Drexel at one point, “It looks like we [he, with Drexel’s support] have to fight this battle pretty nearly alone, but that does not matter. We will not give up.”<sup>546</sup> Byrne supplied the founding vision for the Board and would remain deeply involved in its work until his death in 1923.<sup>547</sup>

Byrne’s vision for the new Board entailed two aspects. First, he was concerned with the practical process of establishing missions—with priests, churches, schools, teachers, and fundraising. His notes indicate that here he had in mind universalizing his own experience in Nashville with Father Plunkett, Holy Family Church, Immaculate Mother Academy, and the Blessed Sacrament Sisters. Secondly, Byrne addressed the matter of the Board’s legal incorporation and the means of governance, fundraising, disbursing funds, and other executive

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<sup>545</sup> Byrne to Most Reverend John J. Kain, November 9, 1899, Byrne Papers, ADN.

<sup>546</sup> Byrne to Drexel November 7, 1906, H10B Q6 f22, SBS.

<sup>547</sup> Byrne, “Notes Regarding the Board,” 1906, Byrne Papers, ADN; Byrne, “Suggestions for the Formation of a Board for Work Among Colored People,” 1906, SBS; “By-Laws of the Catholic Board for Work Among Colored People,” copy in ADN made from microfilm records in the Archives of the Archdiocese of New York, Yonkers, New York.

matters. Comparison of the texts of Byrne's handwritten notes with the By-Laws that ultimately governed the Board indicates that Byrne's ideas shaped the approach that became the official policy of this national Board.<sup>548</sup>

A notable strand of Byrne's vision for the Board was his idea that religious communities of men and women should participate in the apostolate to African Americans by sending their members to teach in Catholic schools for African American at the expense of their own congregations. This would be a departure from the norm, where religious congregations make an agreement with the diocesan bishop to send a small group of Sisters, Brothers, or priests to serve in his diocese, living in a convent and operating a school. For this work, they would receive from the diocese or the parish their food, shelter, and a modest stipend. Byrne suggested that the religious congregations of the U.S. should each send one group to serve African American institutions, not at the expense of diocese, parish, or school, but at the expense of the mother community.<sup>549</sup> Byrne thought it appropriate to ask religious communities if they would "do a little charity for Our Lord in the persons of the Negro? Couldn't each community of religious women send four or five Sisters to open schools in cities and towns of the south and support them until they become self-sustaining?" He added, if they have "any gratitude or real zeal for souls and love for Our Lord, I do not see why they can not and should not ... Souls are perishing that they might save." Byrne maintained his conviction that religious communities had a mandate in charity to help in the black apostolate if they possibly could. Though this idea of Byrne's did

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<sup>548</sup> Byrne, "Notes Regarding the Board;" Byrne, "Suggestions;" "By-Laws."

<sup>549</sup> Byrne to Mother Pius, September 13, 1916, Byrne Papers, ADN.

not become normative, it evinced his own conviction that the work done in Nashville was important and worth replicating.<sup>550</sup>

Byrne had begun planning for a mission in Memphis before Father Plunkett had been in Nashville a year. With Plunkett's help, funds from Drexel, his own five-thousand-dollar gift, and another Josephite priest, Father Joseph Dube, St Anthony's Church was opened in Memphis in 1908. In 1909, Byrne asked the Sisters of Charity of Mt. St. Joseph from Cincinnati to serve in the school without remuneration. The Sisters came and opened the school in the fall term of 1909.<sup>551</sup>

The establishment of St. Anthony's in Memphis was relatively smooth, but the opening of St. Joseph's in Jackson proved more difficult. The diocese had owned property in Jackson since 1888, when Denis Donovan had willed his property to Bishop Rademacher and his successors for the purpose of beginning a church for the use of African Americans. Donovan died in 1896, and Byrne and Slattery hoped to sell the land and use the proceeds for the work in Nashville, but the terms of the will prevented them. Josephite priest Father Joseph Kelley finally made a beginning with a very rude church in 1913. The city of Jackson claimed the property for use for a park, and Byrne sold the land to the city for \$8,000 and purchased another property in Jackson. Mother Drexel again contributed repeatedly for church, priest's house, and school. St. Joseph's School in Jackson had a rocky start, opening in 1915 and closing twice before it reopened in 1919. Bishop Byrne prevailed upon the Dominican Sisters of St. Cecilia, who

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<sup>550</sup> Byrne, "Notes Regarding the Board."

<sup>551</sup> George Flanigen, *Catholicity in Tennessee: A Sketch of Catholic Activities in the State, 1541-1937* (Nashville: Ambrose Printing Co., 1937), 89-90; Joel William McGraw, Milton Guthrie, and Josephine King, *Between the Rivers: The Catholic Heritage of West Tennessee* (Memphis: J.J. Sanders and Company, 1996), 77.

already staffed the white school, St. Mary's, in Jackson, to provide Sisters for St. Joseph's School.<sup>552</sup>

Byrne's successor, Bishop Alphonse Smith, collaborated with Drexel and the Josephites to begin a second black parish in Nashville in 1932. St. Vincent de Paul Parish was created to serve those black families who had moved to North Nashville as had many of the city's black institutions of higher learning. The Josephites at the parish not only served St. Vincent DePaul Church and School, but also had an outreach to the students at Fisk University, Meharry Medical College, Hubbard Hospital and other black institutions in the area. The Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament staffed St. Vincent de Paul grade school, and it became a feeder school for Immaculate Mother Academy. In 1940, Immaculate Mother Academy became an accredited four-year co-educational high school.<sup>553</sup>

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<sup>552</sup> McGraw, Guthrie, and King, *Between the Rivers*, 86-87; Denis Donovan, "Will," August 10, 1888, H10B 32 Fr. Kelly, SBS; William Walsh to J.R. Slattery, October 25, 1899, 16-K-33, JOS; Plunkett to Slattery, December 21, 1900, 19-M-14, JOS; Byrne to Drexel, May 3, 1914, H10BQ6f23 SBS; Byrne to Drexel, March 30, 1916, H10BQ6f23, SBS; Drexel to Byrne, January 28, 1917, Drexel Box, ADN; Byrne to Matthew Donahue, November 21, 1918, Byrne Papers, ADN; Byrne to John Burke, June 23, 1919, Byrne Papers, ADN.

<sup>553</sup> Flanigen, *Catholicity in Tennessee*, 70-71; Steven Hoskins, "A Restless Landscape: Building Nashville History and Seventh and Drexel" (PhD diss., Middle Tennessee State University, 2009), 94-95, <http://digital.mtsu.edu/cdm/ref/collection/p15838coll2/id/9286>.

## CONCLUSION

Eugene W. Bunn, the black stove repairer who had written Byrne about his children in 1898, did not live to see the establishment of a black Catholic school in Nashville. He died in September 1902 at age 43. He did see his wife, Mary Elizabeth, and their five children baptized in the Catholic Church. The youngest, DeWitt, born in 1901, died in July 1902, just weeks before his father.<sup>554</sup> A few months after Eugene Bunn's death the *American* reported, "Wm. A. Crosthwait has returned from Louisville whither he went to accompany the two oldest children of the late E.W. Bunn. The Catholics have taken charge of the children and sent them to a school in Virginia to be educated. Mr. Bunn was one of the first Catholics in Nashville."<sup>555</sup>

Two years later, plans for Immaculate Mother Academy were underway, and in 1905 it opened. The 1907 Immaculate Mother Commencement program listed among the student performers Abbie Bunn—very likely Eugene Bunn's daughter. Arvilla Augusta Bunn, probably another daughter, died at age 19 in 1909. She was president of a Catholic devotional society called the Legion of Mary. At her death, her fellow members, led by Immaculate Mother Academy student Alexine Walker, published a resolution in the *Globe* in her memory.<sup>556</sup> Though Bunn did not live to see it, it appears that his child, or perhaps children, benefited from the Catholic school for which he had pled when he wrote to Bishop Byrne years before.<sup>557</sup> Bunn, and eventually, his wife, had taken seriously the obligation Catholic bishops placed on Catholic

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<sup>554</sup> "Death Record," *Nashville American*, September 28, 1902, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; Holy Family Church Sacramental Records, ADN; "Death Record," *Nashville American*, July 12, 1902, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>555</sup> "In Colored Circles," *Nashville American*, February 1, 1903, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>556</sup> "Deaths," *Nashville Globe*, March 12, 1909, Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers; "Resolutions," *Nashville Globe*, March 26, 1909, Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers.

<sup>557</sup> "Commencement Exercises" Program, H40B2 TN: Immaculate Mother Programs Box 1, f 6, SBS Archives.

parents to provide their children a Catholic education. Bishop Byrne, in turn, had provided a Catholic school that admitted black girls and, to a certain age, boys.

Drexel, Byrne, and the Josephite Fathers, through Father Thomas Plunkett and his successors at Holy Family, continued to collaborate regarding Immaculate Mother Academy, even as Byrne saw his dreams of black parishes and schools come to fruition also in Memphis with St. Anthony's Church and School and in Jackson with St. Joseph's Church and School. In both cases, Drexel provided money, while the Josephites sent priests, though not all of them proved to be of Plunkett's caliber. Byrne, for his part, provided the dogged determination to get the institutions started and keep them afloat.

Building the school community and winning converts to Catholicism proceeded in tandem, though converts did not come solely from the school. The largest influx of black baptisms in the first decade in Nashville appears to have come in 1902, the year that the Church of the Holy Family was dedicated. The church records list thirty-five baptisms in 1902, up from five per year in 1900 and 1901, Plunkett's first two years. What complicates these figures, however, is that the Catholic Church does not rebaptize already Christian converts. Many more already baptized converts may have been and almost certainly were received into the Catholic Church and confirmed, as in 1903, when Plunkett baptized only twenty-four people, but Byrne confirmed at least fifty at Holy Family.<sup>558</sup> The school played its part, however, and the Blessed Sacrament Sisters' *Annals* indicate that conversions among students and their families were notable but not uncommon. For example, in October 1907, among the thirty-one people received

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<sup>558</sup> Holy Family Church Sacramental Records, ADN; "Colored Catholics Will Receive Sacrament of Confirmation Today," *Nashville American*, November 29, 1903, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

into the Church at Holy Family, Immaculate Mother students Olivia Rogers, Amanda Carter, and Lavinia McLemore were baptized, along with Olivia's parents.<sup>559</sup>

Adults and children continued to seek baptism and confirmation, and at times, Byrne seemed jubilant in reporting the news. A 1911 Report from the Commission for the Catholic Missions among the Colored People and the Indians quoted the Bishop of Nashville: "Divine Providence has most singularly blessed the work among the people of this Diocese. Success has marked its course from the start. . . . since then over four hundred have been baptized."<sup>560</sup> In 1914, Byrne submitted that sixty-four adults and twelve children had entered the Church in the past year in the black parishes in Nashville and Memphis. Byrne insisted that were it not for a persistent lack of funding, the number would have been two hundred annually.<sup>561</sup>

Despite promising data showing a steady influx of converts, Holy Family Church never reached achieved a full and stable congregation. Mother Mary Katharine Drexel wrote to the Josephite superior in 1924 that she had received complaints about the Josephite priests dealing capriciously with the black people in Nashville. She added: "I regret exceedingly that our work at Nashville seems to bear so little fruit, for it seems to be such a complete plant . . . all of which demanded a considerable outlay of money. It makes me wonder indeed, but perhaps Our Lord sees we do not pray enough for these souls and is expecting from us greater union with Him and greater sacrifices."<sup>562</sup>

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<sup>559</sup> *Annals of the Convent of the Blessed Sacrament of The Immaculate Mother*, 41, H40B2 Box 1, Folder 1 TN Nashville Immaculate Mother Annals 1905-1953, SBS.

<sup>560</sup> *Report of the Mission Work Among the Negroes and the Indians*, 1911, Byrne Papers, ADN.

<sup>561</sup> "Missions and Notes," *Colored Harvest* 7, no. 7 (June 1914), 2-3.

<sup>562</sup> Drexel to Louis Pastorelli, February 16, 1924, PM4K8, JOS.

Dr. E.B. Jefferson, a black dentist and convert to Catholicism, also saw lack of growth as a problem. In 1929 he wrote:

All during Father Plunkets [*sic*] time I was with him also Father Waring I have watched the growth from that time until the present day. I wondered why it was that we could not build up a congregation as other churches. I readily saw that it was due to the ignorance of pastors of protestant [*sic*] who fought this work, almost ignoring those who made an attempt to attend a Catholic Church.<sup>563</sup>

Sociologist and Josephite Father John T. Gillard gave yet another explanation. Reporting on data from the period from 1913 to 1928, Gillard found that black Catholic parishes throughout the South had been decimated by migration of parishioners to “points north”. In Memphis, despite 500 baptisms and only 68 deaths in this fifteen-year period, the congregation numbered 205 in 1928. Holy Family in Nashville reported a net loss of 111 persons, even though continued baptisms outnumbered deaths.<sup>564</sup>

This trend is corroborated by later reports from Holy Family. In a 1943 history of the parish, Josephite Father Charles Brown stated, “on checking over the baptismal records, I find that hundreds have been converted to the Faith. Had the greater majority of those baptized at Holy Family and St. Vincent’s remained in this city, our present edifices could not accommodate them five times on Sunday. . . . Migration to the North unfortunately often negatives the gain made.” In a more hopeful tone, Brown noted that over three hundred students from black institutions of higher learning in Nashville had converted to Catholicism in a twelve-year period.

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<sup>563</sup> E.B. Jefferson to Pastorelli, January 13, 1929, PM6J1, JOS.

<sup>564</sup> John T. Gillard, *The Catholic Church and the American Negro* (1929; repr., New York: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1968), 114-15. Megan Stout Sibbel makes the same point, arguing that the Catholic efforts to evangelize African Americans in Northern cities after the Great Migration were a second-wave. The first wave, evangelization efforts in the South, was disrupted by the migration North of many converts. Megan Stout Sibbel, “Reaping the ‘Colored Harvest’: The Catholic Mission in the American South” (PhD diss. Loyola University, Chicago, 2013), 16-17.

“Surely, then, our work in this diocese has not been in vain. Not only have these students left this city with the ability of taking up their professions in various cities and towns of this country, but they have gone forth spiritually fortified and with a greater responsibility of God and neighbor.”<sup>565</sup>

As demographics continued to shift, the facilities at Immaculate Mother aged, and public schools with better facilities were built, Immaculate Mother Academy and Holy Family School began to decline in enrollment. As ever, the majority of the students were not Catholic. Immaculate Mother had ceased to charge substantial tuition. In 1937 Bishop William Adrian, Bishop of Nashville from 1936 to 1969, wrote to Mother Mary Katharine to ask about the financial situation and whether administrative changes could be made to improve matters with the schools. An exchange of letters between Drexel, Adrian’s chancellor Father George Donovan, and the new Superior of the Blessed Sacrament Sisters, Mother Mary Mercedes O’Connor, reveals a desperate need for funds even for basic upkeep of facilities. Neither the diocese nor the Sisters could afford to pay the bills when the roof needed repair, for example. The diocese began to consider moving the church and school or even closing it, as the property had become highly saleable for commercial use.<sup>566</sup> Drexel provided the new bishop an account of the financial history of the property and buildings. She added:

It was our intention and still is, that the above named Foundations be a permanent fixture in the Diocese, as it was the hope and assurance of the venerable Bishop Byrne during whose administration the parish and school were established, that it should be a monument for the evangelization of the Colored People in Nashville. He gave every assurance that he could, that the work would continue and that his Successors in Office, he knew, would do all in their power for its support and encouragement. (Should Your

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<sup>565</sup> Charles Brown, *A Short History of Holy Family Parish* (unpublished, 1943), 4-5, copy in ADN.

<sup>566</sup> Drexel to Adrian, April 12, 1937, Drexel Box, ADN; George Donovan to Drexel, April 18, 1939, Drexel Box, ADN; Mother Mary Mercedes O’Connor to Donovan, April 26, 1939; Joseph H. Siener to Adrian, April 8, 1954, Holy Family Church and School History Folder, ADN.

Excellency wish to read these letters of Bishop Byrne we shall be very glad to make a copy and send to your Excellency) The deeds for this property were not turned over to the Diocese, but are retained in our Files.<sup>567</sup>

In fact, the Blessed Sacrament Sisters had given the land occupied by the church and priest's residence to the Diocese, and now only owned one-third of the property they had purchased in 1905. Drexel expressed her eagerness to work with the new bishop to do all in their power to foster the progress of Holy Family Church and School and Immaculate Mother Academy and made a few practical suggestions.<sup>568</sup>

In early 1954, Josephite pastor Father John Shea was struggling to make ends meet with the expenses of Holy Family Church, Holy Family School, Immaculate Mother Academy, and the Blessed Sacrament Sisters' convent. Shea complained to Bishop Adrian that he needed help from St. Vincent de Paul Parish to keep up the high school and the convent. He explained that over sixty-five parishioners had recently moved away and added "Our books indicate at least two complete turnovers in Holy Family's congregation."<sup>569</sup> Those who left either moved "North to Chicago and Detroit or to a better neighborhood in Nashville."<sup>570</sup>

In April, the parish leaders held a meeting to discuss their options with church and schools. The possibility of future integration of public schools had become more real, as the *Brown vs. Board of Education* case was pending in the Supreme Court, but to some black Catholics, integrated schools still seemed "far-fetched." The wardens of Holy Family Church

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<sup>567</sup> Drexel to Adrian, April 12, 1937.

<sup>568</sup> Ibid.

<sup>569</sup> John C Shea, S.S.J. to William L. Adrian, March 30, 1954, Holy Family Church and School History Folder, ADN.

<sup>570</sup> Siener to Adrian, April 8, 1954.

wanted to keep their schools open because they feared the lack of morality in the public schools, they believed their schools were superior to the public schools, and many of the families with children in the school wanted the Sisters to teach their children. They resisted plans to move or close.<sup>571</sup>

The cost of running the schools with relatively low enrollment and a majority non-Catholic population had already been a concern to Bishop Adrian. In 1954, the two schools combined had 172 students, of whom 60 were Catholic. Adrian wanted to sell the property, but believed he had an obligation to provide a Catholic education to the Catholic students. In light of the *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision, Adrian decided to confer with his priests locally regarding whether to integrate the Catholic schools. They decided that the diocesan Catholic schools in the city of Nashville would be integrated immediately. Other parts of the diocese, including Memphis and Jackson, decided to delay integrating Catholic schools.<sup>572</sup>

The bishop took the decision in Nashville as an opportunity to close Holy Family grade school and Immaculate Mother Academy under the assumption that the male students could now attend Father Ryan High School and the female students Cathedral High School. Thus, black Catholics would still be able to attend Catholic school. It was typical that integration meant the end of support for the black institutions. Many black students, though opposed to segregation, did not wish to leave their schools for the formerly all-white Catholic schools. Though some did continue in Catholic schools—fifteen male students attended Father Ryan High School in the fall—many went to the public schools. Grade school students could attend the other black grade

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<sup>571</sup> “Minutes of meeting held at Chancery Office April 7, 1954 with the parish directors of Holy Family parish, Nashville,” Holy Family Church and School History Folder, ADN.

<sup>572</sup> William Adrian to Thomas McNamara, June 17, 1954, Holy Family Church and School History Folder; Mark Newman, *Desegregating Dixie: The Catholic Church in the South and Desegregation, 1945-1992* (Jackson: Univ. Press of Mississippi, 2018), 144-45.

school St. Vincent de Paul, one of the formerly white parochial grade schools, or public school. Holy Family Church closed, but St. Vincent DePaul Church and school in North Nashville remained operative. White opposition to the move to desegregate the Catholic schools in Nashville led Adrian to relax the regulation requiring Catholic parents to put their children in Catholic schools. Those Catholic parents fiercely opposed to integration could send their children elsewhere. Public school integration in Nashville lagged behind that of local Catholic schools.<sup>573</sup>

The ongoing correspondence between the Bishop of Nashville and the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament regarding Holy Family School and Immaculate Mother Academy shows that the intersection of issues that included financial needs, the concerns and priorities of the Sisters, the Josephites, the families, and the bishop, and the pressures of demographic and social change endured. It was not merely a matter of getting the schools established; the schools' maintenance and eventual closure involved many of the same complexities.

Father Thomas J. Plunkett remained pastor at Holy Family in Nashville until 1920, overseeing the building of the new church that was completed in 1919. His Josephite superior finally succeeded in prying him away from Bishop Byrne and assigned him to oversee a number of building projects for the Josephites. In 1926, one of Plunkett's former altar boys from the Nashville Cathedral, Samuel Stritch, now Bishop of Toledo, requested that Plunkett be sent to him to begin a black parish and oversee the building of his new cathedral. Plunkett went. After being recalled again by the Josephites for a community building project, Plunkett returned to Stritch and accompanied his former altar boy first to his post as Archbishop of Milwaukee and

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<sup>573</sup> Mark Newman, *Desegregating Dixie: The Catholic Church in the South and Desegregation, 1945-1992* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2018), 144-46, 175-76.

then to that as Archbishop of Chicago. It was never easy to distinguish which of his two works was primary for Plunkett, building or African American ministry. Plunkett continued to assist Archbishop Stritch until Plunkett's health broke. He died in 1941 at age seventy-nine.

Archbishop Stritch, who as a thirteen-year-old boy had served Plunkett's first Mass in Nashville, preached his funeral, commending Plunkett's zeal, and crediting the Josephite priest with inspiring his vocation and guiding him as a spiritual director.<sup>574</sup>

Samuel J. Keith built a house on West End Avenue and lived there until his death at age seventy-eight in 1909.

William A. Crosthwait continued to involve himself in politics, insisting that the key to racial uplift was to ally with the local white Democrats. His daughters attended Immaculate Mother Academy. Eugenia Crosthwait shared top honors with Hulda Lytle at the close of term in 1906. Evelyn graduated as valedictorian with an academic diploma in 1910. Her father gave the commencement address for the Academy the same year. Alberta graduated with honors in 1911. Ruth and Pauline Crosthwait attended the Tennessee Agricultural and Industrial State Normal School after graduation from Immaculate Mother. William Crosthwait's health was weak, and he suffered a prolonged illness in 1913. Afterwards he worked from home. He died in 1915, and was buried from Holy Family Church.<sup>575</sup> His brother Scott Crosthwait, a Nashville physician, educator, and Protestant minister, outlived Bishop Byrne; and at Byrne's death in

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<sup>574</sup> Peter J. Kenney, "Father Thomas Plunkett, S.S.J.," *Josephite News and Views* (Spring 1996): 1-2, JOS.

<sup>575</sup> "Candidate Tillman's Attitude Towards the Negro Race," *Nashville American*, October 27, 1908, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; *Annals*, 22; "Annual Commencement," *Nashville Globe*, June 10, 1910, Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers; "Annual Commencement," *Nashville Globe*, June 16, 1911, Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers; "The Charming Young Misses Enter Normal," *Nashville Globe*, September 28, 1917, Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers; "Lawyer Crosthwait Able to Enter Upon Practice Again," *Nashville Globe*, April 4, 1913, Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers; "Well Known Colored Lawyer Passes Away," *Nashville American*, October 24, 1915, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

1923, Scott Crosthwait was among a group of Protestant ministers who adopted a resolution honoring Byrne as a “worthy exemplar of our Lord and Master who condescended to help those who had no helper. We hold in grateful remembrance the large work which he did in cooperation with Mother Catherine Drexel, Rev. T.J. Plunkett, and others, for the needy among us.”<sup>576</sup>

To his death, Bishop Byrne remained actively interested and supportive of the black churches and schools in his diocese. He continued to serve the national Catholic Board for Mission Work Among the Colored People that he had helped to found. Father John Burke, the priest who served as the Board’s Director General, expressed great confidence in Byrne’s commitment to the cause, but also frustration with the habitually over-committed Byrne’s tendency to miss board meetings. Byrne was acutely busy from 1907 to 1914, when he was acting as his own architect and sometimes even bricklayer in the building of his new residence, cathedral school, pro-cathedral, and cathedral on West End. In 1911, Byrne suffered a breakdown and was hospitalized until he could regain his strength.<sup>577</sup>

Byrne recovered and carried on vigorous work for another decade. His pen remained as sharp as ever when, in 1919, he offered his comments on the meetings held by the U.S. bishops that year. Byrne declined to attend these meetings, complaining that they lacked the judicious order and theological care that a plenary council would have entailed. While he favored efficiency and the elimination of ecclesiastical red-tape, Byrne remained suspicious of efforts at centralization that he believed compromised the authority of local bishops. He continued to favor

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<sup>576</sup> “Resolutions Extol Life of Bishop,” unidentified clipping in Newspaper Accounts of the Last Sad Rites of Rt. Rev. Thomas Byrne, D.D., Bishop of Nashville, Tenn. Folder, FP.

<sup>577</sup> John Burke to Byrne, April 17, 1909, Byrne Papers, ADN; Burke to Byrne, November 20, 1908, Byrne Papers, ADN; Byrne to Burke, December 4, 1908, Byrne Papers, ADN; Burke to Byrne, May 9, 1911, Byrne Papers, ADN; Byrne to Drexel, June 16, 1911, H10BQ6f23, SBS.

the ordination of black men to the priesthood, but only in the context of religious orders. Byrne died in 1923 at age 82. At his death he was remembered as a builder of churches, hospitals, schools, convents, an orphanage and a home for the aged.<sup>578</sup>

Mother Mary Katharine Drexel continued her interest in Nashville, supplying Sisters for the missions in the diocese and sending funds to support their work. She continued to travel and found new schools and build up and support others. She founded a school in New Orleans that would become Xavier University, the first black Catholic university in the U.S. Her expendable income was seriously decreased by federal income taxes in the 1910s, but in 1924 Congress passed the Income Tax Reduction Act, which exempted from the tax anyone who had given ninety percent of their income to charity for ten years. This provision was sometimes called the Philadelphia Nun Loophole.<sup>579</sup> Drexel continued to govern the growing congregation of Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament, its work, and its donations to support apostolates to Indians and African Americans until 1937, when she stepped down from leadership of the community. At the order's fiftieth anniversary in 1941, the community numbered over 500 Sisters serving in 63 schools including Xavier University in New Orleans. The community accepted its first black candidates in 1950.<sup>580</sup> Drexel died in 1955, and with her death, the income to her community from her father's legacy ceased. Drexel was beatified by Pope John Paul II in 1988 and canonized in 2000.

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<sup>578</sup> Byrne to William O'Connell, September 8, 1919, Byrne Papers, ADN; Byrne to Henry Moeller, August 29, 1909, Byrne Papers, ADN; Byrne to John E. Burke, August 23, 1920, Byrne Papers, ADN;

<sup>579</sup> Mary J. Oates, *The Catholic Philanthropic Tradition in America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 69, 192 n. 113-14.

<sup>580</sup> Cheryl C.D. Hughes, *Katharine Drexel: The Riches to Rags Story of an American Catholic Saint* (Grand Rapids: Eerdemans Publishing Co., 2014), 136-39.

At the time of Immaculate Mother Academy's founding, segregation lines were hardening in Nashville as the city's industrial growth, increased railroad traffic, and growing suburbs altered urban demographic patterns. White opposition to the establishment of a black school in South Nashville fit the tenor of Nashville's social dynamics in a way that widespread black support of a Catholic endeavor did not. Ironically, the white opposition to the school's foundation worked in its favor, winning the good will of many black Nashvillians. While Bishop Byrne, Mother Drexel, and Father Plunkett intended the school to bring converts to the Catholic faith, many black families, most of them non-Catholic, who sent their children to the school desired most of all an excellent education. Byrne wrote in 1914, "Colored people are fast recognizing the superiority of the education imparted by the Sisters."<sup>581</sup>

The churches and schools that Byrne and Drexel built to serve African Americans stood for decades. Holy Family Church and Immaculate Mother Academy in Nashville opened in 1902 and 1905 respectively and closed only in 1954. St. Anthony's Church and School in Memphis closed in 1967 and 1968. St. Joseph's School in Jackson operated until 1960 and the church until 1968.<sup>582</sup>

These churches and schools were built at a time when racial prejudice was at its height. Mother Mary Katharine Drexel spent nearly all her income trying to provide education and a path to the Catholic faith for those she saw as most vulnerable in American society. Byrne, too, made churches and schools for black people in his diocese a priority. In the twenty-first century, looking back at a Jim Crow Catholic system, it can be tempting to judge the historical players and fault them for not putting their money and energies into work to challenge racial mores,

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<sup>581</sup> "Missions and Notes," *Colored Harvest* 7, no. 7 (June 1914): 2-3.

<sup>582</sup> McGraw, Guthrie, and King, *Between the Rivers*, 77, 86-87, 301.

instead of building within and perhaps even reinforcing an unjust system. By 1925, W.E.B. DuBois would upbraid the Catholic Church in the U.S. for failing to serve African Americans well, and particularly for excluding black people from Catholic universities. What Mother Drexel had feared when she wrote to Byrne in 1904 about the dangers of not providing an opportunity for higher education in Catholic schools proved true in DuBois's words.<sup>583</sup>

Those families whose children went to Immaculate Mother Academy, though, saw the school in a positive light. It provided a place for Catholic children to receive the requisite Catholic education, but most of the students in the school were not Catholics. The black people who patronized Immaculate Mother Academy saw in the academic and even the industrial education provided there an advantage to their children. Here the tenet of the equality of all human beings before God made a claim on Catholics, and however imperfectly, they tried to serve black Nashvillians and draw them to the faith.

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<sup>583</sup> W.E.B. DuBois, *The Correspondence of W.E.B. DuBois: Selections, 1877-1934*, ed. Herbert Aptheker (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1973), 308-11.

## A NOTE ON SOME ARCHIVAL MATERIAL

The Diocese of Nashville's archives include the uncatalogued papers of Bishop Byrne as well as materials from various institutions in the diocese, including Holy Family Parish and Immaculate Mother Academy. These archives were moved in 2015 from the Diocesan Offices on 21<sup>st</sup> Avenue in the Hillsboro area of Nashville to the new Diocesan headquarters near Opryland in Nashville. I conducted research in both locations.

The Flanigen Papers at Aquinas College include the papers, notes, and assembled sources of the late Monsignor George Flanigen, who served as diocesan historian in Nashville for many years. At the time of my research in 2014 and 2015, Aquinas stored these papers in a back room of the Library, then located in the Aquinas Center. This collection has been reorganized and is now in Special Collections in the relocated Library in Aquinas Main.

When this research was conducted in the summer of 2015, the Archives of the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament were housed at their Motherhouse in Bensalem, Pennsylvania. The Sisters announced their decision to sell the property in 2016 and relocated the archives to the Catholic Historical Research Center of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia in 2017. These carefully catalogued papers include Drexel's correspondence, the *Annals* of the Blessed Sacrament Convent in Nashville, which related major events in the parish and school, and other records and memorabilia.

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