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Religion in Iowa—the Catholics

By CHARLES BLANCHARD

It was the Jesuit missionaries that pioneered the way for the Catholic church in Iowa, as elsewhere and everywhere here in the great west and northwest. Marquette the missionary, and Joliet the trader, discoverer and explorer, were the first to visit the territory that afterwards became Iowa. This was on June 25, 1673, as they were on their trip down the Mississippi River, and their landing was at an Indian village near the mouth of the Des Moines River.

Tradition says that a band of Trappist Monks established a mission in the bend of the Des Moines River near where Keosauqua now is located, and the name of the river is said by some to be derived from *Moines de la Trappe*, the "River of the Monks." This was back in the later years of the eighteenth century.

Julien Dubuque is regarded as the first pioneer in Iowa, having come to the lead mines across the river from Galena, Illinois, with a party of French-Canadians in 1788. He obtained concessions from the Indians to work the mines, which he called the Mines of Spain, and later sought to establish a claim to a strip of land 80 miles in length, up and down the river, including the whole of Dubuque and surrounding farms. This matter was in litigation for 48 years and was finally decided by the United States Supreme Court in 1853 in favor of the then owners of the land.

The first Catholic priest to visit Iowa was Father Stephen Vincent Badin, who came to Galena and the neighboring region in 1828.

In 1831 Father Lutz was sent to minister to the workers in the lead mines. Rev. P. P. Lefevre, a celebrated priest, visited numerous points in southern Iowa and northern Missouri in 1832-34, where he is said to have found several French and American families at the foot of the rapids, in what was known as Half-Breed Tract.

Rev. John McMahan was one of the early priests in the Galena and Dubuque region, and said mass in Dubuque as early as 1833. He was followed by Rev. C. P. Fitz-Maurice in

1834, who fell a victim to the cholera soon after his arrival.

The priest who was responsible for the permanent establishing of the Catholic church in Dubuque, and largely responsible in all that region up and down the Mississippi, was Father Samuel Mazzuchelli, who came to Dubuque in 1835. Services were held in the cabin of Patrick Quigley until the dedication of the first Catholic church in 1836. This was the formal opening of the building, a Fourth of July celebration having been held in the incompleting building. The Catholic population in Dubuque and vicinity in 1834 was estimated at over 200; in 1836 at about 600; and in 1837 at 800.

Father Mazzuchelli visited Davenport in 1837, where he found 40 families, and laid the foundation for the first Catholic church in Davenport, which was completed in 1838, built of the first brick manufactured in that place. There were but three Catholic churches in the territory of Iowa in 1838—Dubuque, Davenport, and St. James, at Sugar Creek, Lee county—and Father Mazzuchelli was the only resident priest.

Rev. Mathias Loras was the first bishop of Dubuque, where he was installed April 21, 1839. He was a man of choice spirit, and to him and Father Mazzuchelli, his co-worker in every way, was largely due the remarkable progress of the Catholic church in Iowa. Both were men and ministers with the true missionary and public spirit; both were interested in temperance and whatever had to do with the advancement of good morals, education, and the cause of righteousness and good citizenship. He died February 19, 1858. His memory will live among the inhabitants of Iowa—for he was in truth one of the determining factors in the pioneer history of our state.

Rev. J. A. M. Pelamourgues, who was vicar-general of the Diocese of Dubuque, was the founder of the first educational institution under the Catholic church in Iowa. He conducted the first school in Davenport, which was open to any and all who desired to attend. His school was the center not only of Catholic activities but the building was used by the public generally and the school bell was the town signal in case of fire or of any public need. He was one of the recognized leaders in the community and was in a peculiar sense the servant of all. The Academy of the Immaculate Conception, a Sisters' parochial school, was established by him in Daven-

port in 1846. For many years he was the only priest in all that region and as vicar-general he traveled extensively, visiting Muscatine, Burlington, Iowa City, DeWitt, Lyons, and as far west as Agency City. He was the pastor of St. Anthony's Church, Davenport, for 30 years from his installation on April 21, 1839.

Father Philip Laurent, associated with Bishop Mathias Loras, Samuel Mazzuchelli and J. A. M. Pelamourgues, was one of the pioneers in the formative period of the church, having come to Muscatine in 1851, where he remained for 50 years, becoming one of the best known and loved priests; equally loved and respected by Catholics and Protestants, educators and professional men. He was one of the foremost missionary priests of the Catholic church in Iowa. Of him and his life-work, John Mahin, long-time editor of the *Muscatine Journal*, and his life-long personal friend, said at the time of his death, December 3, 1902: "To have thus given one church and community fifty years of devoted service is something deserving of recognition and honor, . . . which permits the name of no sect or creed to lessen its esteem or the cordiality of its appreciation." (*History of Muscatine County*, Vol. I, pp. 327-329)

From one priest in 1838 the number had increased to 26 in 1854, and the number of churches in the whole diocese to 31, with 18 other stations, and the number of Catholics in Iowa had increased from 800 to 15,000. Bishop Loras was especially active in establishing parochial schools and also Sunday Schools. He established a girls' school at Dubuque, in 1843, and founded the seminary at St. Barnard, near Dubuque, in 1850. Under the supervision of the five Marys—Mother Mary Frances Clark, Sister Mary Margaret Mann, Sister Mary Catherine Byrne, Sister Mary Rose O'Toole and Sister Mary Eliza Kelly—he opened schools at Dubuque, Davenport, Muscatine, Burlington, Iowa City, Des Moines, Fort Dodge, besides an academy at Keokuk and later at Ottumwa. What the Catholics owe to these devoted Sisters, and others that followed them, who can tell? It is a story of devotion and consecration and self-denial rarely found.

There was a remarkable development of the Catholic church from 1854 to 1857, due largely to the wave of immigra-

tion that swept over Iowa. The number of priests increased from 24 to 48, the churches from 31 to 60, the missions from 20 to 40, and the membership from 15,000 to 54,000. And here it is worthy to note that it was largely the influence of Bishop Loras, through his pastoral letter issued in 1855, on the prohibition issue of that period, that the prohibition law was enacted. He was a life-long advocate of temperance and total abstinence, having organized a Total Abstinence Society in Dubuque in 1839.

Rev. Clement Smyth succeeded Bishop Loras, on his death, February 19, 1858. He reports 59,156 members of the church in Iowa in 1860—an increase from 11,000 in 11 years. Under his administration the number of churches increased to 80, with 20 stations, 48 priests and 90,000 members at the time of his death, September 23, 1885.

Bishop John Hennessy was consecrated to succeed Bishop Smyth, September 30, 1866, and became archbishop in 1893, when Dubuque became a metropolitan see, including Dubuque, Davenport, Omaha, Lincoln and Cheyenne. He was called the Great Apostle of the American parochial school, and was especially distinguished for his work in establishing hospitals and schools. He was the founder of Mercy Hospital at Davenport, on property secured by Father Pelamourgues. At the time of his death, March 4, 1900, there were 401 priests—281 belonging to Dubuque and the rest to the neighboring see of Davenport—an increase from 38 in 1886. The number of churches had increased from 90 to 397 of which 259 belonged to Dubuque. The number of parochial schools had increased to 167, of which 125 were in the Dubuque diocese.

John Joseph Keane succeeded Archbishop Hennessy, and was invested with the pallium at the cathedral in Dubuque, April 18, 1901, Archbishop John Ireland, of St. Paul, delivering the address. For 18 years he devoted himself to the promotion of the church and to the cause of education and temperance, standing for the highest ideals of American citizenship and for devotion and loyalty to American standards, asserting his freedom from the domination of authority of any foreign power. He was of the highest type of Catholic leaders in America. Few men have left a more lasting or ennobling influence in the history of the commonwealth. James J. Keane,

who had been his co-adjutor since 1911, succeeded to the high office on the death of Archbishop John Joseph Keane, June 22, 1918. He was especially noted as a scholar and orator and was in great demand as a lecturer. When James J. Keane came to Dubuque in 1911 there were 101,012 members in the diocese, 223 priests, and 158 churches. In 1927 there were 115,763 members, 278 priests, and 184 churches, within the bounds of his archdiocese. This does not indicate any phenomenal growth but it shows a steady gain, the result, as the archbishop himself declared, of the faithfulness of the priests and people and their love and loyalty, which made possible his achievements in both spiritual and material progress.

In any brief history of the Catholic church in Iowa it is possible to mention only a few of the outstanding leaders—and unfortunately no mention can be made of the hundreds of humble, devoted priests and consecrated laymen who have made the achievements of the leaders possible. In an organization directed as this is by officials and ecclesiastical authority, the archbishops and the bishops necessarily become the prominent factors, though not always the most vital elements in the prosperity of the churches.

There were three Lenehans or Lenihans that became prominent leaders in the Catholic church in Iowa: Right Rev. Mgr. B. C. Lenehan was for 30 years one of the moving spirits in the whole northwest region. He was known as the "teacher with the silver tongue." He was loved by his own people and by Protestants alike, who admired him for his eloquence and his affability. He led his people in appreciation of the higher ideals and nobler aspirations. He was the missionary teacher of half a diocese; pastor at Sioux City from 1872 to 1886; at Boone from 1886 to 1904; and at Fort Dodge until he became domestic prelate of the Pope, and vicar-general of the Sioux City diocese in 1905, which position he occupied until his death, September 22, 1909. "A generously gifted intellect, a vast fund of deep and varied knowledge, practical piety and devotion to duty, made Father Lenehan an ornament to the church and a power among his people." (*Sioux City Journal*, Sept. 22, 1909, under caption, "Beloved Churchman Is No More")

Two other Lenihans, cousins of B. C. Lenehan (but spelling their names differently) became bishops. Mathias Clement Lenihan was born in Dubuque and christened "Mathias" by Bishop Loras. He was confirmed by Bishop Clement Smyth—hence the name Mathias Clement. He did his great work at Marshalltown, Iowa, where for seventeen years he was especially active in the work of education, and founding St. Thomas Hospital, completing and equipping it at a cost of between \$40,000 and \$50,000—"an ornament to the city and a monument to the sacrificial labors of Father Lenihan." He was appointed bishop of Montana by Pope Pius X, in 1904, and assigned to the diocese of Great Falls. His brother, Thomas M. Lenihan, was for many years one of the most active missionary priests in northwestern Iowa, serving as pastor of Corpus Christi Church, Fort Dodge, from 1870 to 1890, building the church at a cost of nearly \$100,000 and also having under way a large seminary at that place, when he was appointed bishop of Cheyenne, Wyoming, in 1890. He was one of the truly representative men in northwestern Iowa for 20 years, and was held in high esteem by acquaintances of all denominations. He was actively interested in all religious and charitable movements and in the business life and politics of Fort Dodge and of that whole region. His death occurred at the home of his brother, Rev. Mathias Clement Lenihan, in Marshalltown, Iowa, December 15, 1901. (*See Annals of Iowa*, Vol. V, p. 316; files of the *Evening Times-Republican*, Marshalltown, December 15, 1901, p. 7, col. 2.)

The Flavin family has been long famous in the Catholic church in Ireland and in America. Two brothers became prominent priests in Iowa and another brother became a priest in his native Ireland. Two sisters became Sisters of Charity, and three nephews became priests. Maurice Flavin died in Davenport, after serving St. Anthony's parish for many years. Michael Flavin was for twenty-seven years one of the outstanding religious factors in Des Moines, succeeding Father Brazil at St. Ambrose in 1885. He was invested with the title of protonotary prelate of the Papal Household at St. Ambrose Church, October 20, 1907, by Bishop James Davis of Davenport. "He was a man well informed on all important

subjects; kind and generous in disposition, courteous and pleasing in manners; he was an optimist with large hopes; and while a zealous churchman, he was truly catholic in spirit. The public esteem he won demonstrated his ability and worth." (L. F. Andrews, in *Register and Leader*, Des Moines, March 18, 1913, p. 8.) He built St. Ambrose Cathedral, Mercy Hospital, St. Catherine's Home and St. Joseph's Academy, in Des Moines.

A new see, with Des Moines as headquarters, was created in 1912 by the division of the Davenport diocese. The installation of Bishop Austin Dowling was a notable event. It was largely his friendship with Archbishop James J. Keane, and his wide experience as teacher, editor and author, that won for him the appointment to the new see. It was through Bishop Dowling's interest in education that the diocesan college was founded in Des Moines, the first subscription of \$5,000 being made by him. The priests of the diocese subscribed \$38,000 and the rest of the \$100,000 was secured by popular subscription. In February, 1919, he became the successor of Archbishop John Ireland at St. Paul, Minnesota. Few men in America ranked with Archbishop Ireland in ability, true catholicity of spirit and life, and to be called to succeed such a man was a recognition of pre-eminent character and fitness. "Bishop Dowling typified everything that is best in the ideals of American churchmen. His splendid qualities as a citizen and as a churchman deeply impressed the middle west. He was a finished scholar, an eloquent orator, and a fine administrator of broad catholicity, moved by the highest ideals. His administration of the new diocese of Des Moines brought distinction to himself and to Catholicism." (*Des Moines Register*, Feb. 2, 1919, p. 10).

Rev. Thomas W. Drumm, of Cedar Rapids, was appointed by Pope Benedict to succeed Bishop Dowling, and is the present incumbent. He was one of the Dubuque Apostolic Band, associated with Rev. E. J. Dougherty and Rev. J. J. Lenihan in conducting missions throughout the Northwest, from 1907 to 1915, when he became pastor of St. Patrick's Church, Cedar Rapids, where he remained until he was made bishop of Des Moines, May 22, 1919. In his administration he

had been especially active in social welfare work, in connection with the coordinated organizations of Catholic women—the Ladies' Auxiliary of the Ancient Order of Hibernians; the Women's Catholic Order of Foresters and the Daughters of Isabella—three national organizations which represent large Catholic charities, while emphasizing social and fraternal features. The Catholic Woman's League, organized from the different parishes in Des Moines, united to promote the teaching of Christian doctrine and to further literary and educational interests, and foster charitable work and a friendly spirit among the members. This work is carried on through a diocesan committee, or council, working in connection with the welfare organizations of the city, including the juvenile court, Travelers' Aid and other organizations for the safeguarding of boys and girls. The bishop, as the head of the diocese, is the head of all the Catholic charities.

The activities of the Knights of Columbus during the World War brought this organization into great prominence in Des Moines and at Camp Dodge—as indeed everywhere. They worked in perfect accord with the Red Cross, the Young Men's Christian Association, the Salvation Army and the Jewish Welfare Association. Their slogan at Camp Dodge was, "Everybody welcome and everything free!" The soldiers dubbed them "Caseys." Their success at Camp Dodge was due chiefly to the whole-hearted patriotism and devotion of a few individuals—George J. Plantz, the first of the Knights of Columbus secretaries at Camp Dodge, who began his work September 4, 1917; Raymond H. Wright, Grand Knight of the Des Moines Knights of Columbus; and the committee consisting of E. J. Kelly, E. J. Donahue and Edward Marxer. J. Vincent Mooney, the assistant secretary, was invaluable and is credited with doing more than any other individual in increasing the popularity of the Knight of Columbus, his name "Mooney," becoming almost a synonym for the K. C.'s. The summary of the activities of the K. C.'s reveals an amazing record of service—the stationery distributed reaching the astonishing figure of four million noteheads; and including envelopes, over five million pieces. Thousands of letters were written for the sick and dying.

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