

Introduction

THOMAS H. O'CONNOR



The two hundredth anniversary of the Archdiocese of Boston is a truly historic occasion that is deserving of serious reflection as well as joyous celebration. As a scholarly gesture of congratulation to Cardinal Seán P. O'Malley, archbishop of Boston, on the occasion of this bicentennial event, Rev. William P. Leahy, S.J., president of Boston College, authorized the Office of the University Historian to undertake the compilation of a series of essays focusing upon the various influences the Catholic Church has had upon Boston over the course of the past two hundred years. An advisory committee of twelve prominent faculty members from a variety of academic fields of study at Boston College selected a number of recognized scholars in the Greater Boston area who would be capable of elaborating on the variety of influences that Catholicism has produced on the life and society of Massachusetts.

“Sometimes we rhapsodize about the past, glamorize history, and remember only what is pleasant,” said Cardinal O'Malley in the course of his homily on December 2, 2007, during the Mass at the Cathedral of the Holy Cross inaugurating the archdiocesan bicentennial year. “As a Catholic community in New England,” he continued, “we should know that our beginnings as a local Church were fraught with hardship and hostility, and with enormous sacrifices.” It is precisely those hardships and hostilities that made the early years of Catholicism in New England so precarious, but also made its subsequent achievements so remarkable.

Although a great many Roman Catholics made their way from Ireland to different parts of North America during the 1700s, few of them came to Massachusetts, where they knew they would find themselves in an openly hostile environment. The English Puritans who founded the Massachusetts Bay Colony were especially opposed to Catholicism. They had rooted out all traces of “Papism” in their own religious practices, forbade the presence of Catholic priests under pain of death, and refused to accept anyone who did not follow the Congregational form of worship.

It was not until after the American Revolution, and the subsequent alliances with France, that a number of French and Irish Catholics came out of hiding and formed a small congregation that depended on French naval chaplains and transient priests for their religious services until Bishop John Carroll sent Father François Matignon to Boston, followed several years later by a younger priest named Jean-Louis Lefebvre de Cheverus.

Drawing upon his affection for Boston as well as his own academic background, François Gauthier describes in his chapter the fascinating odyssey of the twenty-four-year-old Cheverus, who would be named the first bishop of Boston in 1808. Despite what might well have been a disastrous collision of opposing religious cultures in the Puritan town, the Cheverus years provided a surprisingly tolerant interlude during which the early Catholic Church was able to establish its roots in the rocky soil of New England. His ability to engage in civil dialogue about religious differences without being offensive earned him the respect of his Protestant neighbors, who admired his charitable errands of mercy not only on behalf of his parishioners in Boston, but also among the Native American peoples of northern Maine who were still loyal to the faith brought to them earlier by the French Jesuits from Canada. Long after Cheverus had returned to France, as Gauthier points out, the arrival of the "Quebecois" and the subsequent establishment of numerous French-speaking parishes throughout the Archdiocese of Boston carried his spiritual legacy well into the future.

The tolerance of the Cheverus episcopacy proved all too brief, however. By the time Benedict Fenwick replaced Cheverus as second bishop of Boston in 1825, the number of Irish Catholic immigrants had grown from a few hundred to more than five thousand, rekindling old fears about the threat of Papism to American democratic institutions.

Lacking any semblance of political influence, Boston's Catholics were powerless to protect themselves against either verbal assaults or physical harassment. In chapter 2 Thomas H. O'Connor describes how, during the 1840s and 1850s, Bishop John Fitzpatrick avoided violence by convincing the Irish to refrain from retaliation, while persuading his Brahmin friends to observe the constitutional rights of immigrant Americans. During the last half of the nineteenth century, Archbishop John Williams continued the same kind of cautious standoff between Catholics and Protestants in order to maintain the peace and assure a steady measure of progress.

The opening of the twentieth century brought changes in the political status quo. By 1910 Catholics not only constituted more than half the population of the Greater Boston area, but were also moving into positions of social and political influence. Convinced that "the day of the Puritan has passed," the new archbishop, William Henry O'Connell, was not at all hesitant about using the power of his position to ensure that public policies were consistent with Catholic beliefs. As time went on, the size of the Catholic electorate and the popularity of Cardinal Richard Cushing virtually guaranteed a close relationship between church and state. After the 1960s, however, financial difficulties, demographic changes, liturgical controversies, and clerical sexual scandals badly damaged the social and political structure upon which the church had depended for nearly a century and created serious challenges for the future.

Even as early Boston Catholics struggled to secure some measure of political expression, church leaders also sought ways of meeting the pressing needs of their impoverished people. Justice and charity, writes Father Bryan

People of Faith, People of Color

Two Hundred Years of Diversity in the Archdiocese of Boston

WILLIAM C. LEONARD



On any given weekend in the Archdiocese of Boston, Mass is celebrated in over fifteen different languages in dozens of churches. Parishes are home to Haitians, Brazilians, Dominicans, Cape Verdeans, Vietnamese, and Nigerians to name only a few of the different ethnic and racial groups found in the archdiocese today. They are a testament to its growing diversity and a reflection of the archdiocese's past. As the archdiocese celebrates its bicentennial and looks to the future, it is important to remember that Catholics from different parts of the world have made the church what it is today, and they will be a crucial component of its future. It is estimated that in a few years a majority of the nation's Catholics will be Hispanics and that white Catholics, descendants of various European ethnic groups, will be a minority.¹ While this fact is not as pronounced in Boston compared to other areas of the country, there is no mistaking the city's Catholic population is now less white than it ever has been.

In 2000 the National Conference of Catholic Bishops estimated that Hispanics accounted for over 71 percent of the growth of the church in the United States in the last forty years and that they are the fastest-growing ethnic group in the country.² This is true for Boston as well. Immigration is the driving force behind this shift. This is similar to what happened in the United States in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when people from many predominately Catholic countries like Ireland, Italy, parts of Germany, and eastern Europe arrived. In 1924 the United States severely curtailed immigration from southern and eastern Europe. At the same time migration from Central and South America and the Caribbean increased. Since the 1950s, emigration from these regions has intensified. By the 1980s and the 1990s legal emigration from heavily Catholic Mexico and Central and South American countries greatly increased the nation's overall Catholic population. Likewise, emigration from the Philippines, Vietnam, Cambodia, and parts of Africa have also been on the rise, contributing to the growing cultural, ethnic, and racial diversity of the American church, both here in the archdiocese and around the country.³

Mass in Creole at 1:00 p.m. on Sundays. Part of the weekly bulletin is in Creole as well.¹²⁷

Conclusions

While it is true that the Irish and other European Americans have been the dominant presence in the archdiocese over the last two hundred years, that reality obscures the fact that racial minorities have been an important part of this history. More importantly they will be a significant presence into the foreseeable future, particularly in urban areas. African Americans in the archdiocese have served as a mirror that reflects the church's troubled and complex past with people of color. As the church in Boston becomes even more racially and culturally diverse, these challenges will only increase. How the institutional church and the laity of all backgrounds respond will affect the overall growth, vibrancy, and relevancy of Catholics in the Greater Boston area. Issues such as the clergy shortage will have a major impact on the institutional church's ability to reach out to some of the oldest and newest Catholics. The Boston archdiocese has always been an immigrant church. How native-born Catholics have treated these newcomers has been at times disappointing at best. Periodic attempts to deal with the increasing diversity have had mixed results. Overall, European Catholics of different ethnic backgrounds have become American Catholics. Our understanding of that term will have to change due to the demographic shift under way in Boston and across the country. The continued racial diversity coming from Central and South America, Asia, the Caribbean, and Africa has challenged the church in even more complex ways. It will require more effort on the part of all Catholics in the archdiocese if these groups are to be fully welcomed, retained, and integrated within the church.

As Cardinal O'Malley stated in December 2003 to priests assembled at Boston College, "Special regard must be given to the new immigrants who have cultural needs, linguistic and otherwise."¹²⁸ How the parish reconfiguration will ultimately affect immigrants is still to be seen. A number of the closed or merged parishes have sizable immigrant populations and are concentrated in urban areas, the very same areas that have been hardest hit by the reconfiguration. The archdiocese's immigrant population has needs beyond language. The many cultural complexities within all of the communities must be addressed by clergy and laity alike, particularly in newly blended parishes. In some parishes, Mass is offered in two or three different languages to different nationalities. The level of interaction between native-born and recent arrivals varies from parish to parish. As some immigrants leave urban areas they will encounter less diverse parishes in the suburbs. Truly integrated parishes remain more a hope than a reality. This along with their enculturation will be an ongoing struggle, as it has always been. New immigrants bring their vibrancy, hope, and faith with them, as they always have. It will be up to everyone to make sure their faith can be maintained.

The Role of Women in the Archdiocese of Boston, 1808–2008

CAROL HURD GREEN



Imagine a collage of photographs and line drawings: a young Irish woman, traveling alone, tired and cold, disembarking in the port of Boston; four sisters, called to New England to teach, facing the hostility of anti-Catholic crowds; rows of women in starched cornettes arrayed in Cathedral pews under the eye of the cardinal on his throne; girls in white dresses as far as the photographer's eye can see along an East Boston street on a May morning; young women of the Young Ladies Charitable Association visiting the aged sick poor; Italian and Portuguese immigrant women bent over their sewing in a North End room; Mary Dahill Cushing, softly pleased, comfortable in her neat print dress, holding a picture of her son; a group of sisters, their habits covered by white cloths, caring for those ill with cholera; nursing sisters under the tents on the Carney hospital lawn, caring for the war wounded; tired mothers coming from early Mass in a struggling mill town; Boston-born Mary Josephine Rogers sending new Maryknoll sisters to China; African American Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament with the St. Richard's Drum and Bugle Corps; middle-class women behind their tables of fine work in Mechanics Hall at an orphans' fair; the O'Neil family, ten daughters, in the Easter Parade; young women in caps and gowns carrying a daisy chain; Corita Kent's gas tank mural on the Southeast Expressway; Catholic Interracial Council members, women and men, black and white, marching in South Boston on St. Patrick's Day 1965; women, guests, and volunteers at Rosie's Place; over four hundred women gathered at Boston College in 2004, "Envisioning the Church Women Want"; further hundreds of women gathered in a diocesan convention to explore their faith. . . .

These are a very small fragment of the images that tumble from the stories of two hundred years of Catholic women's lives in the Diocese of Boston. Not chronological, they represent an attempt to suggest the breadth of Catholic women's work and vocations, the significant presence of women religious, the development of an apostolate of hospitality, and the ongoing commitment to justice and to the poor. For many reasons—the anonymity of most women's lives, the traditional position of women within a hierarchical church, and the vocational decision by women religious to subdue the

individual within the collective mission of serving and saving souls — there are many gaps here, important or interesting stories that remain untold.

To find the names and deeds of women in the histories and repositories of the Catholic Church in Boston, one reads between the lines and searches footnotes and indexes, hoping for a woman's name. A few representative (and remarkable) figures do appear with some frequency: among them, Sister Ann Alexis, “the servant of the poor,” who founded and guided both St. Vincent's Orphan Asylum and Carney Hospital; Katherine E. Conway, the first woman editor of the *Pilot*; Martha Moore Avery, convert from socialism and cofounder and street corner orator for the Catholic Truth Society; and, in a different idiom, the iconic twentieth-century figure of Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy. But the stories of most Catholic women are subsumed in the collectivity of institutions and organizations, domestic lives and parishes.¹

With the significant development of women's scholarship in the 1970s, the paradigm of invisibility began to shift. Important new scholarship since then — especially for Boston Catholic women's history the work of Mary Oates, C.S.J. — uses women's work and life histories as the starting point for understanding the Catholic experience. Oates documents the wide-ranging work that women, religious and lay, have done to develop and sustain the church in Boston; she also documents the massive debt the church owes to the “free help” of sisters in the schools and in the practice of charity.² Oates's work and that of scholars such as James Kenneally, Karen Kennelly, and Paula Kane also allows us to see significant thematic continuities in the lives of Catholic women — religious and lay — in both their daily labors and as voices of wisdom, offering thoughtful reflection and important writing on matters of spirituality, theology, and social justice.³

Women Lay and Religious: The Catholic Laywoman

The phrase “Catholic laywoman” is imprecise, suggesting more what she was not (a vowed woman) than the many things she is. But it provides an umbrella under which to gather the many roles of women who were baptized into and lived the Catholic faith outside of a religious order. The documents of Vatican II defined women religious as members of the laity, a change important in the consciousness of religious women. Until the post-Vatican II years, however, the lives of religious and laywomen ran typically on separate lines, and class issues sometimes led to differing interpretations of poverty and responsibility. The transformative incidents of the 1960s and the 1970s brought laywomen and religious women in closer contact, as they worked together for peace and justice. The conventional division of religious and lay remains useful for historical understanding, however.

There are occasional tantalizing glimpses of individual laywomen in pre-nineteenth-century Boston. The first to gain public attention was Goodwife Ann (Goody) Glover, an “elderly Irish widow” who was hanged as a witch

Changing Patterns of Parish Life

WILLIAM T. SCHMIDT



Growing up in Boston during the 1950s and 1960s, if someone asked you where you came from, you might readily respond "I'm from Gatey" or "I'm from St. Col's" or "I'm from M.P.B." Invariably the questioner would understand that you were from the neighborhood of Gate of Heaven parish, South Boston, or St. Columbkille parish, Brighton, or Most Precious Blood parish, Hyde Park. Catholic parishes defined the Boston neighborhoods and even non-Catholics were apt to identify their neighborhoods by reference to the Catholic church at the center of that particular neighborhood. My father grew up in South Boston. When he spoke of his teenage years as a member of the "Rosary Gang," it sounded remarkably pious to me until I learned that his group of friends hung out in the general vicinity of the former Holy Rosary Church on West Sixth Street. The parish was not only the center of the spiritual lives of Boston Catholics of that generation; it was also the center of their intellectual, philanthropic, and social lives.

The parish was the place where Catholics went dutifully to line up for Confession on Saturday afternoon in preparation for reception of Holy Communion at Sunday Mass. The parish was the place where Catholics went to celebrate the defining moments of their lives: baptisms, weddings, and funerals. The parish was the place where a family could go to get help with the fuel bill so that an empty oil tank could be filled in time for winter. Lay parishioners who were members of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul would respond readily and unobtrusively to the plight of any family in need. The parish was also the place where Catholics went for Scout meetings, CYO dances, adult socials, and parish bazaars. Roman Catholics are part of a Universal Church, but they experience church directly at the level of the parish. From generation to generation, Catholics have considered their parish to be a natural extension of their home and family.

For Roman Catholics, a particular church headed by a bishop is called a "diocese," but because a diocese is ordinarily quite large, a diocese consists of smaller units called "parishes." A diocese is actually a communion of parishes.¹ The term "parish" comes from the Greek word *parokein*, which describes "those living near or beside one another." A parish was seen as a community of Christians living in the same neighborhood. The Greek term had a secondary meaning of resident aliens or settled foreigners, which denotes the parish as the place where Christians related daily to those they

of parishes may be the key to a successful inauguration of the next century of Boston Catholic history.

Conclusion

"There is always something fascinating about the history of a Catholic parish," wrote the late Archbishop Joseph Rummell of New Orleans in 1948. "Usually modest and humble in its beginnings, it grows larger, more dignified, more efficient with the years. It is almost human in its development, and quite understandably so, for it is composed of vibrant human beings."⁵⁹ Parishes are composed of human beings and are subject to all the faults and foibles of those human beings. The history of two hundred years of parish life in Boston is certainly reflective of that premise. There have been times when the inconsistency and insecurity of human beings has impeded the growth of parishes as communities where the faith is received from earlier generations, lived on a daily basis, and then passed on to succeeding generations. The parishes of Boston have been peopled sometimes by saints, sometimes by sinners, and most times by ordinary men and women who tried their best to fulfill their daily commitments.

There are 295 parishes that constituted the Archdiocese of Boston in 2008. As the archdiocese marks its bicentennial, however, it celebrates the history of more than four hundred parishes where people have lived their Catholic faith over the past two hundred years. Each of these parishes takes pride in its unique history, social context, personality, and achievements. Each of these parishes has played an important role in the two-hundred-year history of the Archdiocese of Boston.

The parishes of the Archdiocese of Boston are facing extraordinary struggles, disappointments, and challenges at the beginning of Boston's third centenary. Sunday Mass attendance on the part of Boston Catholics has dropped precipitously from more than 70 percent of baptized Catholics during the halcyon days of the 1940s and 1950s to less than 25 percent today. This depleted participation at Sunday Mass is certainly reflective of continuing anger over the clergy sex abuse scandal. It is also reflective of some deep distress with the closure of parishes. It would be inaccurate, however, to attribute the depleted numbers at Sunday Mass to these issues alone. There has indeed been a steady erosion of Sunday Mass attendance since the 1970s that is reflective of sweeping changes within the church and society.

The liturgical reforms that followed Vatican II left some Catholics wondering what had happened to the familiar traditions and consoling rituals that generations of Catholics had experienced as the fixed-point in their turbulent lives during the immigration period, the Depression, and two World Wars. Virulent demonstrations against an unpopular war in Vietnam, coupled with the Watergate crisis, contributed to a societal distrust of institutional authority that carried over into Catholic life. Widespread disappointment with the Catholic Church's reaffirmation of its traditional

Boston's Catholics and Their Bishops

A Comparative View

JAMES M. O'TOOLE



Leadership is critical in any organization. The organization's survival, its ability to accomplish its mission and to thrive through time, depends to no small degree on the individuals who assume the responsibility for overseeing it. They are not alone, of course. In large and complex organizations, many other people also contribute to the effort, and broad support and participation are no less essential than direction from the top. What might be called "followership" is just as important, and cooperation between leaders and those who are led will determine success or failure. But leaders have a special responsibility, and the decisions they make will therefore determine the character and the work of the larger whole. For this reason, the history of any organization can be understood by studying the succession of leaders and their relationship to those below.

Such a historical viewpoint may be particularly useful in studying the history of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Boston on the occasion of its bicentennial. As an institution, the Catholic Church is organized hierarchically, with clear lines of authority that have developed over centuries. The personalities and abilities of the popes have determined the direction of the worldwide church at every historical turning point. Closer to home, the bishops and archbishops who have led the church in the greater Boston area have had an enduring impact. Not only did they make critical decisions concerning the parishes, schools, and social service agencies of the church, but most of them also served in their office for extended terms. In contrast to many other dioceses, Boston's bishops have generally had very long tenures. The result has been an administrative and historical continuity for the local church more seamless than that of other places and institutions. In the two centuries since the first one was appointed in 1808, there have been just nine bishops and archbishops of Boston. During that same span of two hundred years, there have been forty-one presidents of the United States and fifteen popes; France has had an empire, a restored monarchy, two revolutions, and five republics. In America, other Catholic dioceses have seen a swifter turnover in their leadership. The Archdioceses of New York, Philadelphia, and Louisville (originally Bardstown, Kentucky), all created along with Boston in 1808, have seen twelve, twelve, and ten bishops, respectively. Thus,

in Boston the leadership styles and administrative emphases of each bishop, once in place, have generally remained so for an extended period, sometimes for decades. For this reason, studying the history of the men who have led the Boston church is a particularly useful way of framing two centuries of historical experience.

From one perspective, the bishops and archbishops of Boston are a homogeneous group. All were white males; all were celibate Catholic priests. Allowing for their particular circumstances, they had all had a similar religious education and training, and their early priestly careers gave them many of the same experiences in serving the spiritual and other needs of Catholic lay people. Even so, each prelate had his own personality, his own strengths and weaknesses, and had to meet challenges that were peculiar to his own era. Each had his own administrative and pastoral style and his own conception of what the job of a Catholic bishop ought to be. Looking at each one on his own terms opens the way to understanding each of them, but it also contributes to the formation of a collective view. The experiences of each may describe the past, but they also mark out a path to the future, as the church of Boston faces new challenges in its third century.

John Cheverus

Jean Louis Anne Madeleine Lefebvre de Cheverus arrived in Boston during the first week of October 1796, and he almost immediately anglicized his name to the simpler "John Cheverus." He had been born twenty-eight years before at the home of his family in the town of Mayenne, in northwestern France, and he decided early to pursue a career in the priesthood. His decision was firm, but his timing was poor. He was ordained a priest right before Christmas 1790, just as the French Revolution, a year old by then, was about to turn in a violently anticlerical direction. Two months later, all priests in France were required to swear their primary loyalty to the state rather than the church, and like many of his fellow pastors Cheverus refused. Jailed for standing on principle, he managed to escape to England, where he picked up the language while working as a teacher and serving as a priest for the French émigré community in and around London. One of his former seminary professors, Father François Antoine Matignon, had already left for America, and he invited his pupil to join him there, so Cheverus secured passage to the new world, where Boston would be his home for the next three decades.¹

The Catholic population of Boston in these years immediately after the American Revolution was small, and it seemed destined to remain so. The Puritans who founded the Massachusetts Bay Colony almost two hundred years before had been relentlessly hostile to anything or anyone connected to the "popery" of the church of Rome. They had even passed laws declaring all Catholic priests to be, by definition, "incendiaries and disturbers of the public peace," and such attitudes persisted for a long time. "Many here,