

Serving Two Masters:  
Roman Catholic Chaplains in the Armies of the Confederate States of America

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**Dedication**

In dedication to those who inspired me and helped to sustain my efforts, most especially C.G., my mother, Dr. John Daly, Dr. Paul Moyer, and Dr. Carl Davilla. I am indebted to these individuals for their perpetual encouragement, affirmation, and sincerity.

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## **Abstract**

During the American Civil War, Roman Catholic priests and bishops found themselves on opposite sides of a great political debate. Immigrants and the sons of immigrants, they responded to the crises of their time while still striving to honor their vows and to minister to those most in need. French, German, Irish, and American-born, these men endeavored to win social legitimacy in the United States. However, despite the moral deficiencies of the Confederate cause, several Catholic priests served as chaplains to the armies of the South. The willingness of these men to subscribe to a cause which denied liberty and equality to all men clearly demonstrates the “confederatization” of Southern Catholics during the Civil War. Some among these military chaplains sought merely to minister to those most in need around them. Others joined the Confederate armies, driven not by their zeal for God and the Church, but by their political inclinations and social expediency. Secession and slavery presented Southern Catholics with an opportunity to affirm their patriotism, and to be recognized as something other than an outsider. While these men remained true to their sacerdotal vows throughout their ministry, they also subverted the fundamental elements of Christian belief. Fidelity to their priestly charisms of ecclesial obedience, chastity, and poverty (for some) stood separate from their fidelity to the moral teachings of the Church. By denying enslaved men and women their humanity, preaching against emancipation, and taking up arms against the United States, Confederate chaplains earned the trust and respect of their respective secessionist communities. In so doing, though, they bent their knees to temporal approbation.

While not all of these individuals overtly exhibited racist ideology, the majority did. Even those men who ministered to freed persons of color still, ultimately, served a government whose existential bedrock was racial subjugation and oppression. Personal bravery, pious devotion, and

dutiful ministry do not excuse such behaviour. They do, however, place it into the broader context of American Catholicism in the mid-19th Century. Evangelical zeal led Catholics of the South even deeper into the prevailing tide of racism. However, far more commonly and pragmatically, “evangelization” was a gilded vestment veiling unorthodox Christian beliefs, thoughts, and practices. The ministerial service provided by these men to Southern armies certainly addressed the practical spiritual needs of the men in gray. However, it often devolved into evangelism, not of the Gospel, but of radical Confederate ideology. This adulteration of these priests’ priestly duties betrays the broader inclinations of Southern Catholics to embrace politics and social attitudes incongruous with the teachings of their faith. As pastors, teachers, and preachers, these men exerted their influence to justify the Confederate cause under the guise of piety and devotion.

## Introduction

On the eve of the American Civil War, Roman Catholics were a distinct minority. In terms of population, influence, and prestige, Catholics found themselves as second-class citizens in a de facto Protestant nation. Often the victims of suspicion and repression, Know-Nothingism ostracized and excluded these men and women from an authentic participation in American politics. Moreover, with the outbreak of hostilities in 1861, Catholics found themselves divided as to how to proceed in a manner that would demonstrate their patriotism and endear themselves to their countrymen. As the Confederate and United States governments called for volunteers, Catholics responded with alacrity. Catholics in the South were roused by the call to defend their homes and livelihoods. Catholics in the North responded to the need to uphold the Constitution. Underpinning the rhetoric on both sides, however, was the momentous issue of slavery. While Protestant denominations had splintered or equivocated on the issue, Catholics found themselves in a difficult position. Decades before, the Pope had unequivocally denounced the slave trade and the subjugation of people of color. However, this dogmatic pronouncement had little effect on the hearts and minds of American Catholics given the profound “otherness” they experienced in the social sphere.

Catholic clergy in the South felt more compelled to follow their neighbors into combat and to give ecclesial credence to the Confederate cause than to consider clearly-pronounced Church teaching. Likewise in the North, only a handful of Catholic priests openly denounced slavery and racial inequality. While, as in all things, there are exceptions to the rule, it becomes clear that Southern Catholics embraced the rhetoric and social practices pursuant to an independent, slave-owning South. The partisan split between North and South is mirrored in the clergy of the Catholic Church, who largely embraced the ideology of their home state and

defended it from the pulpit, at the altar, and on the battlefield. The partisanship of Southern priests and bishops clearly demonstrates the general shift in demeanor of Southerners, Catholics included. Though these men came from many and disparate nations, backgrounds, and religious orders, they pledged fealty to the Confederate government. Oftentimes, they did so with unrepentant zeal. By examining the lives and preaching, writings, and lives of several notable Southern priests, it becomes clear that Southern Catholics became some of the greatest proponents of the Lost Cause, during the War and after it. It is for this reason that Confederate Catholic chaplains illuminate a broader “confederatization” of Southern Catholics.

By “confederatization,” it is to be understood that hitherto apolitical men evolved into standard bearers for the South. Against the backdrop of Protestant-Catholic conflict in the United States, the Civil War offered these priests a vehicle to prove their dedication to American ideals, albeit tainted by Southern racism and secessionism. These ideals would be grossly misinterpreted by Southerners espousing secession and racial inequality. Catholics were therefore presented an opportunity to prove their loyalty to their fabricated Country by their defense of Confederate tenets. Confederatization is the social conversion of an individual or a group of individuals away from support of the Union and towards the defense of Southern institutions. Even if in this confederatization these Catholic priests never spoke words of contempt towards people of color, they willingly participated in subjugating them. Their actions embody that ancient maxim of English law, *qui tacet consentire videtur*, “he who is silent is taken to agree.” And so, silent or vociferous, Confederate Catholic clergy consented to the basic inequality of the races.

To demonstrate this, this study first turns to an examination of American Catholicism during the years leading up to the opening of hostilities. In order to understand the motivations of these chaplains, it is important to consider the political and social environment in which they



lived. Following this, the author examines the hierarchy of the Catholic Church in the United (and Confederate) States for evidence pertaining to clerical opinions on the matters of the day. While American bishops were reticent to address slavery before the war began, within the first year of combat, America's prelates had drawn their own dogmatic battlelines. Ordained in the decades preceding the Civil War, these men had spent much of their episcopal ministry striving for cohesion, both among their flocks and between themselves and the rest of the Nation. Once the bishops' respective sees either seceded from the Union or remained loyal to it, the bishops quickly discarded such efforts. Only after considering these factors, this study then turns its attention to the lives and ministries of the Confederate Catholic chaplains themselves. The author categorizes these men, inasmuch as possible, by the degree of their radicalization for the Confederate cause. Some of these priests sought only the welfare of the soldiers they encountered, even if they were the enemy. Others gleefully supported the South during the War, only to distance themselves from it after defeat. Additional priests became stalwart evangelists for the Southern cause, remaining staunchly Confederate in word and in deed even after the War had ended.

Catholic Confederates, let alone priests and bishops, are a substratum in the study of the American Civil War. While much scholarship and many popular works have been produced examining the role of religion in the war, the greater part of the field focuses on Protestant chaplains, camp revivals, and the various immigrant groups who came to the United States immediately preceding the conflict. Comparatively, much less comprehensive analysis has been undertaken to understand the Catholic experience of the Civil War. Given that Catholics were a minority throughout the nation, and even more so in the South, historians have had to rely on a narrow collection of memoirs, diaries, and Catholic periodicals from the period. However, by

piecing together the independent accounts of priests who served in the Confederate armed forces, a broader picture of Catholicism in the Civil War era South emerges.

This picture, however, is often tainted by the predominance of “Lost Cause” literature. Many of the few books written on the subject gloss over the painful realities which confronted these men. In recent years, some historians have begun to remove the veneer of glorification generations of Southerners have applied to these men’s reputations. The true impact of the Civil War on Southern Catholicism and the reciprocal effect of Catholics on the war begin to emerge through *honest* readings and assessment of primary resources. The research offered in this work seeks to blend the insights of contemporary historians, the memoirs and letters of Confederate Catholic chaplains, and the records of Catholic institutions and individuals for the purpose of understanding how and why Southern Catholic clergy acted the way they did. Social pressures, religious paradigm shifts, and cultural conflict coalesced around these men in a unique way, and reveals how good men can be tainted and swayed by subversive ideologies.

While many Catholic chaplains who served the Southern armies have lapsed into obscurity, personal memoirs, Church records, and recent publications serve to illuminate what has hitherto been obscured. Numbers and demographics serve as helpful background information. However, the surviving accounts of Catholic chaplains serving the Confederacy provide a much clearer image of their personal motivations and incentives. The nature of faith is, by its definition, abstract and intangible. Therefore, to assess at length this intersection of faith and duty is to attempt to understand the innermost thoughts of these Confederate priests. Were they racist? Were they loyal to the Church or to their tainted states? Did they seek to serve their God, or did they seek to serve the mammon of the Confederate government? The priests and bishops examined in this study fall in various places on the spectrum of racism. While every

chaplain administered the sacraments, often in the heat of battle, they exhibited a dual loyalty to both Church and the Confederacy. Their pastoral and political witnesses demonstrate an interior conflict for these priests, one which cleaved either more closely to God and His Church or to Jefferson Davis and his government. Only after the defeat of the Confederacy did these men commit clearly, one way or the other.

## **Chapter 1**

### Antebellum American Catholicism and the Secession Crisis

*“Unless the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it.  
Unless the Lord keep the city, he watcheth in vain that keepeth it.” Psalm CXXVI:i*

Throughout the decades preceding the Civil War, Roman Catholics were a distinct minority, set apart from their neighbors by social, political, and theological differences. Mostly immigrants, and residing in a few urban centers around the country, these men and women were far from influential. However, this Catholic minority was a quickly-growing one. Between 1770 and 1790, the number of Catholic churches rose from fifty to sixty-five, remaining the smallest Christian denomination in the United States.<sup>1</sup> This changed radically over the coming years, with Catholic parishes numbering 2,550 by 1860, a multiple of growth of 51. The only denominations which grew faster between the founding of the Nation and the Civil War were Baptists, who claimed 12,150 places of worship in 1860 and Methodists, whose expansion dwarfed all other denominations with a multiple of growth of 994.1. Indeed, the Methodists had only twenty houses of worship in 1770 compared to 19,883 in 1860.<sup>2</sup> And so, while American Catholics could claim significant expansion of their faith, they still remained distinctly “other.” The growth

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<sup>1</sup> Mark Noll, *America’s God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 166.

<sup>2</sup> Mark Noll, *America’s God*, p. 166.

of the Catholic population mirrored the overall growth of the Nation as a whole. In 1830, there were 318,000 Roman Catholics living in the United States. By 1860 this number had swelled to 3,103,000 members, which was still considerably less than the population of enslaved people.<sup>3</sup>

American Catholics were under perpetual and unrelenting suspicion. Throughout the first half of the 19th Century, nativist groups and the Whig Party singled out Catholics and immigrants as a whole for being intrinsically un-American.<sup>4</sup> Facing constant suspicion and contempt, the Catholic Church sought to plant itself in the middle ground of American politics, neither condemning nor condoning the slave trade or the institution of slavery as it existed in the Southern states. Bishops in their fledgling dioceses exhorted the faithful to thank God for the blessings of the Constitution which guaranteed, in principle, their right to practice their faith without interference or fear. However, as Michael Gannon notes, the political pressures facing the American Catholic Church were not the only stressors for the institution. With so many disparate immigrant communities establishing themselves in the United States, American prelates were confronted with the need to assimilate these groups *ecclesiastically* within the broader context of cultural assimilation.<sup>5</sup> If America's Catholics could hope for greater influence and acceptance, they would first have to come together as one entity. The Germans and Irish found themselves culturally dissimilar, not only among their fellow immigrants, but among other Catholic communities founded by the French and Spanish over a century before.

The Irish are arguably the most notable and commonly-discussed Catholics present in the United States in the 1860s. Historian David T. Gleeson notes that, according to the 1860 census, approximately 85,000 Irish-born individuals lived in the eleven states that would constitute the

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<sup>3</sup> Michael Gannon, *Rebel Bishop: Augustin Verot, Florida's Civil War Prelate*, (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 1997) p. 56.

<sup>4</sup> Michael Gannon, *Rebel Bishop*, p. 57.

<sup>5</sup> Michael Gannon, *Rebel Bishop*, p. 57.

Confederacy. A further 95,000 resided in the border states of Missouri, Kentucky, and Maryland. These 180,000 men and women constituted only eleven percent of the United States' Irish population.<sup>6</sup> In the South, as well as the North, Irish immigrants converged in the major cities. In Savannah alone, more than twenty percent of the white population were Irish-born individuals.<sup>7</sup> Despite being a minority, the Irish throughout the Southern states achieved a greater degree of social acceptance than did many of their northern brethren. Indeed, Irish Southerners viewed the institution of slavery as a means to economic and social success.<sup>8</sup> Throughout the years leading up to the secession crisis, the non-slaveholding Irish, both North and South, often resented labor competition with African Americans, free or enslaved.

The institutionalized racism inherent throughout the nation helped the Irish to claim an identity more in keeping with that of white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant Americans. However, Irish immigrants were slow to support secession, loyally supporting Stephen Douglas and the Democrats in the 1860 election.<sup>9</sup> Rather than support the polarizing Republican candidate, Abraham Lincoln, or staunchly pro-slavery Stephen C. Breckenridge on the split Democratic ticket, the Irish forged a middle way.<sup>10</sup> This attempt to maintain the Union while still upholding slavery betokens the prevailing trends of the Irish throughout the Civil War. With the election of Abraham Lincoln, and the secession of South Carolina, the Irish, like many other immigrant groups throughout the South, supported their home states rather than lend obeissance to the new, anti-slavery Republican government. This support for the fledgling Confederacy began grudgingly. However, in order to maintain their social status over that of African Americans,

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<sup>6</sup> David T. Gleeson, *The Green and the Gray*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2013) p. 7.

<sup>7</sup> David T. Gleeson, *The Green and the Gray*, p. 7.

<sup>8</sup> David T. Gleeson, *The Green and the Gray*, p. 17.

<sup>9</sup> David T. Gleeson, *The Green and the Gray*, p. 30.

<sup>10</sup> David T. Gleeson, *The Green and the Gray*, pp. 30-31.

Southern Irish men and women yielded to pressure. Whatever advancement they had achieved over the previous decades was threatened, in their eyes, by the abolition of slavery and their *de facto* relegation back to being non-native “others.”

This example of the Irish speaks to the broader experience of Catholics before the Civil War. Distrust and exclusion of Catholics was not solely caused by their non-native roots. The theological differences between Catholics and Protestants persisted over centuries, through the earliest colonization of the New World into the 1860s and beyond. While Catholics, like Protestants, generally embraced the political norms of the regions they lived in, they were able to appeal to an overarching authority in matters of faith and morals.<sup>11</sup> Unlike several Protestant denominations which fragmented over the issues of slavery and states’ rights, the Catholic Church in America never splintered *officially* along sectarian or regional fault lines. Tradition and authority proved to be mediating factors for Catholics who, in contrast to their Protestant neighbors, did not rely solely on Scripture, let alone a literal interpretation of it. This phenomenon was noted in the January 1861 issue of *Civiltà Cattolica*, wherein the author noted that in America, “both parties use biblical arguments to defend their rights.”<sup>12</sup> Authority, the article argued, was what separated Catholics from their fellow Americans. This separation, in turn, enabled Catholics to side-step the *sola scriptura* approach of Protestants and assess critically the problems of the day.

The disintegration of Protestant denominations, most notably the Baptists and Methodists, disconcerted Henry Clay, who considered it a dangerous indication of the hatred and bloodshed ahead. He stated the following in an interview in 1852: “I tell you, this sundering of the religious ties which have hitherto bound our people together, I consider the greatest source of

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<sup>11</sup> Mark Noll, *America’s God*, p. 407.

<sup>12</sup> “La Disunione Negli Stati Uniti,” *Civiltà Cattolica* 4 (January 23, 1861): 317-318.

danger to our country. If our religious men cannot live together in peace, what can be expected of us politicians?”<sup>13</sup> American religion was fracturing along political lines, but Catholics’ higher temporal authority prevented their meeting a similar fate. Herein, the greatest paradox of American Catholicism presents itself. In spite of their numerous differences, Catholics remained firmly *Catholic*. While priests and laity alike would ultimately choose their sides, there neither emerged a Federal Catholic Church nor a Confederate Catholic Church. Tradition and authority prevented Catholics from fragmenting. It did not, however, guarantee unity of belief or action.

Pope Gregory XVI addressed the issue of slavery directly and with all possible authority. In 1839, His Holiness issued his papal bull “*In Supremo Apostolatus*,” in which he unambiguously condemned the slave trade.

In the process of time, the fog of pagan superstition being more completely dissipated and the manners of barbarous people having been softened, thanks to Faith operating by Charity, it at last comes about that, since several centuries, there are no more slaves in the greater number of Christian nations. But – We say with profound sorrow – there were to be found afterwards among the Faithful men who, shamefully blinded by the desire of sordid gain, in lonely and distant countries, did not hesitate to reduce to slavery Indians, negroes and other wretched peoples, or else, by instituting or developing the trade in those who had been made slaves by others, to favour their unworthy practice.<sup>14</sup>

Such condemnation, however, did not result in Catholic activism against this “unworthy practice.” While the Church’s teaching on slavery had been refined and clarified over many centuries, this papal bull did little more than provide American Catholics with an exercise in rhetoric. Despite the clear papal prohibition against subjugating peoples for personal gain, the critical and pragmatic minds of American Catholics were not unified by His Holiness’ authority.

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<sup>13</sup> Henry Clay, letter to William Booth, April 7, 1845, in *The Works of Henry Clay*, ed. Calvin Colvin, 6 vols., (New York: 1857).

<sup>14</sup> Pope Gregory XVI, “*In Supremo Apostolatus*.” Rome, Papal States, 1839.

Most American bishops continued to avoid condemnation of slavery, wishing to avoid further contention on the subject. Such equivocation was the norm.

However, noted Catholic convert and publisher Orestes Brownson emerged as a critical anti-slavery proponent. Formerly a Universalist preacher, Brownson embraced Catholicism because of its claims of (and recourse to) authority. Throughout the 1850s, he stood as a counterpoint to his contemporary William Lloyd Garrison, arguing that Protestant abolitionists did little to address the core problems of slavery, let alone seek a rational solution to these problems. Though both men were devout Christians in their own ways, Garrison's extremism contrasted sharply with Brownson's moderate approach. The intellectual flexibility of Catholicism held little appeal to most Americans, and those in the North who favored abolition would eventually rally behind the likes of Garrison, John Brown, men who never equivocated in their disdain for slavery. While the two diverged when it came to the justification of violence to topple slavery, their inflammatory rhetoric stands in stark contrast to that of Brownson. Garrison addressed a crowd at Faneuil Hall in Boston with these words: "The spirit of southern slavery is a spirit of extermination against all those who represent it as a dishonour to our country, rebellion against God and treason to the liberties of mankind."<sup>15</sup> In contrast to such polarizing rhetoric, Brownson refrained from publishing a Catholic acceptance of abolition until the Southern states had begun to secede. Indeed, Brownson notes in "Slavery and the War" that the greater part of his countrymen, North and South, would likely continue to shrink from the notion of abolition, given the inflamed tensions within the country. He wrote, "The bare suggestion of the abolition of slavery may shock, perhaps, enrage them; but events march, and men who mean to be

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<sup>15</sup> The Boston Mob of "Gentlemen of Property and Standing": Proceedings of the Anti-slavery Meeting Held in Stacy Hall, Boston, on the Twentieth Anniversary of the Mob of October 21, 1835, (Boston: R.F. Walcutt, 1855), p. 12.



successful, or not to be left behind, must march with them.”<sup>16</sup> But America’s bishops did not heed Brownson’s interpretation of his Church’s teachings.

Antebellum America, North and South, was becoming mired in paranoia as the Civil War approached. Northern abolitionists feared that the “Slave Power” would seek to subjugate the entire Nation. Southern slaveholders feared that Northern agitators would seek to instigate widespread slave insurrections. Historian Thomas Fleming notes, “Slave Power preachers told their followers that the South had fallen behind the North in wealth - the exact opposite of the truth.”<sup>17</sup> While Fleming is referring primarily to the Methodist, Baptist, and Presbyterian clergy of the South, certain Roman Catholic bishops in the South certainly fall into the category of pro-slavery preachers. More telling, however, is that no Southern bishop condemned the institution of slavery itself. Within the eleven states which would eventually secede from the Union, there existed eleven roughly-corresponding dioceses. Of these eleven dioceses, only three were shepherded by American-born prelates. Four additional dioceses were led by French immigrants, with the balance of episcopal sees being administered by Irish-born bishops.

Three of these eleven men in particular emerge as quintessential Confederate Catholics. Their Eminences Patrick Lynch of Charleston, John McGill of Richmond, and Augustin Verot each proved instrumental, not only in supporting Confederate chaplaincy, but in supporting the Confederacy itself. Bishop Lynch hailed from a proud Irish family, recently arrived from their mother country. Bishop McGill of Richmond was born and grew up in Philadelphia, but was of Irish lineage. The last of these bishops, Augustin Verot, was a native of France. Each of them enthusiastically supported secession, defended and defined slavery’s place in America, and

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<sup>16</sup> Orestes Brownson, *The Works of Orestes Brownson, Vol. XVII*, (Detroit: Throldike Nourse, 1885) p. 145.

<sup>17</sup> Thomas Fleming, *A Disease in the Public Mind: A New Understanding of Why We Fought the Civil War*, (New York: Da Capo Press, 2013) p. 179.

actively strove for the defeat of the United States Government. However, they remained silent on political matters until secession became a reality.<sup>18</sup>

Bishop Patrick Lynch was appointed as Bishop of Charleston in 1857. His family had immigrated to the United States from Ireland in 1819 and swiftly embraced the culture and politics of their new home in South Carolina. The family, though proud of its Irish heritage, sought to elevate itself in South Carolinian society, and quickly became one of the most affluent Catholic families in the State.<sup>19</sup> Aware of the political ramifications of addressing the issue of slavery in any capacity, Lynch remained silent on the matter until South Carolina seceded from the Union, at which point he made his views painfully clear. He asserted publicly and privately that he was in complete agreement with Pope Gregory XVI's aforementioned papal bull. The Church, he argued, very clearly condemned the buying and selling of slaves, but it did not condemn the practice of *owning* slaves. Indeed, it was his firm belief that slavery was sanctioned by God for the betterment of mankind.<sup>20</sup> This personal position and interpretation of Church teaching likely unburdened Bishop Lynch of any moral baggage he himself carried. Upon his elevation to the episcopacy in Charleston, he personally owned more than one hundred enslaved people.<sup>21</sup>

The Confederatization of Bishop Lynch occurred quickly and unreservedly. In the days following South Carolina's secession from the Union, the editor of Charleston's *The Catholic Miscellany* newspaper penned an article vehemently supporting the recent treason, defending the institution of slavery, and exhorting fellow Southern Catholics to pray fervently for the

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<sup>18</sup> Michael Gannon, *Rebel Bishop*, pp. 57-58.

<sup>19</sup> Robert Emmett Curran, *For Church and Confederacy: The Lynches of South Carolina*, (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2019) p. 21.

<sup>20</sup> David C.R. Heisser, *Bishop Lynch's Civil War Pamphlet on Slavery*, *The Catholic Historical Review* Vol. 84, No. 4 (Oct., 1998), p. 687.

<sup>21</sup> Robert Emmett Curran, *For Church and Confederacy*, p. xiii.

dissolution of the United States. Dr. Corcoran's writings were shared with Archbishop John Hughes of New York, who, like Bishop Lynch, was an Irish immigrant. Hughes was incredulous as to Lynch's personal support of the emergent Confederacy, writing him in late December to express his personal shock at the rhetoric emerging from Southern Catholic institutions. Bishop Lynch responded to Hughes on January 6, 1861, stating that Dr. Corcoran "has said nothing 'contra fidem et mores.'" <sup>22</sup> That is to say, the explicit defense of secession and slavery was entirely in keeping with the faith and morals of the Catholic Church. Lynch elaborated, citing the inflammatory rhetoric of Northern senators and abolitionists who, "in violation of the letter and spirit of the compact of the Constitution," had agitated enslaved people to rebellion and sought to impose Yankee domination over the South. <sup>23</sup> In a telling phrase, Bishop Lynch makes it clear that the United States should cease to be united, writing, "let this Union be broken." <sup>24</sup> Lynch closes his response to his brother bishop by unequivocally stating again that he is no supporter of the Union, and that the newly-born Confederacy offers far greater hope and promise to him and his flock than any other Earthly government. <sup>25</sup>

Bishop John McGill of the Diocese of Richmond, Virginia shared Lynch's sentiments. Born and educated in Philadelphia, McGill was ordained bishop in 1850 for the recently-established see based in Richmond. <sup>26</sup> Known for his masterful command of language, he earned the respect of Catholics throughout the Nation during the 1850s for his condemnation of the Know Nothing movement. Writing in the *Richmond Whig*, Bishop McGill succinctly neutered the anti-Catholic hound barking at his chancery door: "When knownothingism has

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<sup>22</sup> Robert Emmett Curran, *For Church and Confederacy*, p. 123.

<sup>23</sup> Robert Emmett Curran, *For Church and Confederacy*, p. 125.

<sup>24</sup> Robert Emmett Curran, *For Church and Confederacy*, p. 125.

<sup>25</sup> Robert Emmett Curran, *For Church and Confederacy*, p. 126.

<sup>26</sup> Joseph Magri, *Catholicity in Virginia during the Episcopate of Bishop McGill (1850-1872)*, *The Catholic Historical Review*, Vol. 2, No. 4 (Jan., 1917), p. 416.

become in history a name, as it did once before in the days of Lactantius, the Church, which you would destroy, will still rest immovable upon the Eternal Rock where it was planted and is sustained by the hand of God.”<sup>27</sup> The editor of the *Richmond Whig* later noted that “no party ever died so early and so scandalous a death.”<sup>28</sup> The much-loved Bishop opposed any attack against the Church, and with similar clarity of purpose, also avoided any mention of slavery. His primary concern was the wellbeing of Catholic institutions.

It should come as no great surprise, then, that Bishop McGill remained silent on the great matters of the day until his own State of Virginia seceded from the Union. At a peace conference in Washington, DC on February 4, 1861, Bishop McGill still refrained from entering the political fray. Virginia, having not yet seceded, found itself in the forefront of national attention. Bishop McGill, its preeminent bishop, addressed the conference stating that “the fortunes and fate of our beloved country are now trembling in the scales.”<sup>29</sup> He urged all those gathered, regardless of religious or political affiliations, to pray for peace and entrust the entire Nation to God’s providence. It was not until President Lincoln’s call for 75,000 volunteers in May to suppress the rebellion that McGill publicly aligned himself with the Confederacy. There is, however, a glimmer of the Bishop’s personal preferences regarding secession. In April, one month before Lincoln’s call for troops, the Bishop wrote to Bishop Lynch regarding the episcopal vacancy in the Diocese of Savannah. He suggested that the name of Fr. James O’Connor be put forward to the Vatican for consideration. In his letter, he notes of Fr. O’Connor, “He was spoken of for Pittsburgh, and might be acceptable to the clergy of Savannah, unless he be too Northern in his views and feelings.”<sup>30</sup> While Bishop McGill had a duty to recommend a replacement that would

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<sup>27</sup> Joseph Magri, *Catholicity in Virginia*, p. 420.

<sup>28</sup> Joseph Magri, *Catholicity in Virginia*, p. 420.

<sup>29</sup> Joseph Magri, *Catholicity in Virginia*, p. 422.

<sup>30</sup> Bishop John McGill, *letter to Bishop Patrick Lynch of Charleston*, April 25, 1861.

be effective in ministry, he gave equal weight and importance to finding a man who would be effective *politically*.

Virginia seceded on May 23, 1861. In a letter dated May 15 of that year, McGill again wrote to his friend Bishop Lynch. In it, McGill clearly embraced the pro-Confederate views many of his clergy and brother bishops had already adopted. While he stated that anything written to Lynch was to stay “entre nous,” his Southern sympathies cannot be denied. Almost prayerfully and rhetorically, McGill asked, “Is not justice on the side of the South? Is not the party in power organized on principles unconstitutional; and can a person, without sin formal or material, volunteer into the army called out by Mr. Lincoln?”<sup>31</sup> His third question to Lynch considers whether or not Catholic bishops of the South were obligated to permit Northern Catholic chaplains the faculties necessary to perform the sacraments. While McGill was clearly concerned about the morality of the nascent war, he supposed automatically that justice and right were on the side of the Confederacy.

While McGill was not as rabidly Confederatized as Bishop Lynch, the Bishop of Richmond had no reservations in offering prayers for the success of the Confederate experiment. Between the secession of Virginia and the First Battle of Manassas, Bishop McGill personally wrote and published a prayer book entitled, “The Angel of Prayer.” One of only a handful of such manuals dispersed among the Southern armies, this work contained many prayers and devotions familiar to American Catholics. The Order of the Mass, reflections on the mysteries of the Rosary, prayers to the most popular patron saints of the day, and psalms to be recited at Lauds and Vespers are all found within the pages of this prayer book. However, also contained within Bishop McGill’s work are several prayers for continued Providential guidance of the Confederate Government, for President Jefferson Davis specifically, and for the “conversion of

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<sup>31</sup> Bishop John McGill, *letter to Bishop Patrick Lynch of Charleston*, May 15, 1861.

infidels.”<sup>32</sup> Most telling of all is the prayer found outside of the main text of the book, located on the front inside cover. The prayer is explicitly Confederate, conflating the Southern cause with God’s blessing and favor.

Almighty God, the Sovereign disposer of events, it hath pleased thee to protect and defend the Confederate States, hitherto in their conflict with their enemies, and be unto them a shield. With grateful thanks we recognize Thy hand, and acknowledge that not unto us, but unto Thee belongeth the victory, and in humble dependence upon Thy almighty strength, and trusting in the justness of our cause; we appeal to Thee, that it may please Thee to set at naught the efforts of all our enemies, and put them to confusion and shame.<sup>33</sup>

The triumvirate of confederatized bishops considered here is rounded out by the man who would assume the vacancy in the Diocese of Savannah. On September 15, 1861, Augustin Verot took possession of that see.<sup>34</sup> Bishop Verot had been the Bishop of St. Augustine Florida for three years when he took on the additional responsibility of the Diocese of Savannah. His Dioceses now included the entire state of Florida as well as coastal regions of Georgia. Savannah had been without a bishop for two years following the death of Bishop John Barry in 1859, and Verot proved a logical choice. When Verot arrived in Savannah, he was heartened to find the Savannah Daily Morning News “praying against the aggressive invasion of Northern barbarians.”<sup>35</sup> Indeed, Verot had been voicing Southern sympathies for years as the Bishop of St. Augustine.

In his preaching and writing, Bishop Verot had often sought to address the issue of slavery, something very few of his brother bishops had done to this point. Verot proved to be an effective evangelist for the enslavement of men and women, often noting that the American model of slavery, though not inherent in natural law, was a moral institution. He firmly believed

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<sup>32</sup> Bishop John McGill, *The Angel of Prayer*, (Richmond: 1861), p. 22.

<sup>33</sup> Bishop John McGill, *The Angel of Prayer*, p. i.

<sup>34</sup> Michael Gannon, *Rebel Bishop*, p. 64.

<sup>35</sup> *Savannah Daily Morning News*, June 11, 1861.

that slaves in the Southern States were far more secure in their livelihoods and welfare than were the “wage-slaves” of the industrialized North.<sup>36</sup> Whether Verot was misled by those around him, or if he simply willed slavery to be benign, he noted that “it is truly remarkable how gay, cheerful, and sprightly are the slaves of the South. I do not hesitate to say that they seem to be better contented than their masters; assuredly more so than the sullen and gloomy population found in the workshops and factories of large cities.”<sup>37</sup> While Verot ardently professed that the slave trade was, next to murder, one of the foulest sins man could commit, he never condemned ownership of human beings. He elaborated on his belief that the possession of slaves was guaranteed, not only by the Constitution of the United States but by both the Old and New Testaments as well.<sup>38</sup>

Verot’s literary output was significant, published in both secular and public journals and newspapers. Moreover, his beliefs and his tone before secession and after it are nearly identical. Bishop Verot was clearly sympathetic to the South and its chattel slavery system even before either Georgia or Florida pursued secession. In a compilation of his writings taken from between 1858 and 1865, Bishop Verot republished many of his personal favorite sermons, articles, and tracts. Among them can be found the following excerpt:

In the United States, it will be properly and clearly religion and bigotry that will have destroyed the beautiful fabric of Washington and the other great men who wished so much to keep the government and religion separate from each other. The Catholics of America have scrupulously adhered to those constitutional provisions, and have interfered only by praying for the republic. Protestant clergy, with, of course, honourable exceptions, have brought about this deplorable state of things, in which the South is arrayed against the North, and in which war, bloodshed, and all the atrocities of civil discord may yet have their sad exhibition. Protestant intolerance and bigotry (toward the

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<sup>36</sup> Michael Gannon, *Rebel Bishop*, p. 40.

<sup>37</sup> Michael Gannon, *Rebel Bishop*, p. 41.

<sup>38</sup> *Augusta (GA) Daily Constitutionalist*, December 17, 1860.

South) have demolished this beautiful edifice, which wisdom, moderation, and prudence have reared to political liberty.

Verot firmly believed that there was no greater guarantor of liberty to America than the Catholic Church. The Protestant clergy he mentions above was, in Verot's mind, one in the same with the abolitionist movement and its existential threat to the Southern way of life.

Southern Catholicism, along with great swaths of the greater Southern population, found itself mobilized for war. Defending slavery, upholding the constitutionality of secession, and admonishing Catholics to defend their native states all indicate a radicalized clergy. With the growing political involvement of Southern bishops, it is no small wonder that parish priests, monks, and missionaries would answer this call and respond with zeal to minister to the Confederate armies. Their motivations were the same as many who volunteered to defend the Confederate States of America, but their methods were wholly unique. For in addition to defending their way of life and the flawed institutions therein, they were bound by their faith to administer the sacraments and preach the Gospel. Their ministries, directed by their bishops and their secessionist government, are indicators of confederatization of Catholic clergy at the deepest and most lamentable levels.

## **Chapter 2**

“The Angel of Andersonville”

*“If I shall walk in the midst of tribulation, Thou wilt quicken me: and Thou hast stretched forth Thy hand against the wrath of my enemies: and Thy right hand hath saved me.”*

*Psalm CXXXVII.vii*

*Fr. Peter Whelan*

While many Catholic clergy demonstrated their zeal for the Confederate cause, others showed equal if not surpassing ardor in the practice of their faith. Fr. Peter Whelan of the



Diocese of Savannah is preeminent among Confederate chaplains who demonstrated a commitment to the salvation of souls. Born in Ireland in 1802, Whelan's primary activities before the War consisted in missionary travels in North Carolina and a pastorate in Georgia.<sup>39</sup> Living the humble life of a parish priest, few records remain of his life or ministry, let alone political inclinations, until 1861, when his name appears on the staff of the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist in Savannah.<sup>40</sup> At this point, serving under rabid secessionist Bishop Verot, Fr. Whelan earned a reputation as a supporter of the Confederate cause. One visiting priest to Savannah even noted that Whelan joked with him, stating that if the visitor did not support secession, he would likely be tarred and feathered.<sup>41</sup> When Federal forces began arriving along the Georgia and Florida coastline, Bishop Verot asked for one of his priests to volunteer to serve as the chaplain to the Irish troops manning Ft. Pulaski, just outside of Savannah. Fr. Whelan answered the call, and took up the post concurrent with his duties at the Cathedral.

The rigors of his chaplaincy were exacerbated on April 10, 1862, when Federal forces began a bombardment of Ft. Pulaski. For three days, the Confederate troops of the Montgomery Guard, a primarily Irish unit, came under constant fire from the Union fleet anchored off the coast.<sup>42</sup> At the end of the third day, Ft. Pulaski surrendered, and Fr. Whelan found himself a prisoner of war. He was brought with the other members of the Montgomery Guard to Governors' Island in New York Harbor. It was here that the Confederate chaplain's ministry evolved far beyond what he had anticipated. Indeed, despite his age (he was sixty), he successfully petitioned the administration of the prison to become its internal chaplain.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Peter J. Meaney, *The Prison Ministry of Father Peter Whelan, Georgia Priest and Confederate Chaplain*, *The Georgia Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 71, No. 1 (Spring, 1987), pp. 1-2.

<sup>40</sup> Michael Gannon, *Rebel Bishop*, p. 92.

<sup>41</sup> Peter J. Meaney, *The Prison Ministry of Father Peter Whelan*, p. 4.

<sup>42</sup> Peter J. Meaney, *The Prison Ministry of Father Peter Whelan*, p. 6.

<sup>43</sup> Peter J. Meaney, *The Prison Ministry of Father Peter Whelan*, p. 8.

However, local New York clergy had become concerned for Whelan's long-term welfare in the prison and petitioned for his release on parole. The authorities granted the request, and released Whelan on his own recognizance. However, the chaplain decided to stay with the men who remained in custody, seldom leaving the prison except to procure additional rations for the men of his former unit. Noting that the chaplain's only suit of clothing was becoming unsuitable to wear, the Union officers at the prison bought him a fine, new clerical suit befitting his office. After just a few days, however, Whelan was seen wearing his original clothing in lieu of the gift. Demonstrating his personal faith and integrity, Whelan had given the new suit to a prisoner whose own clothes were in an even worse state. When asked why he had parted with his impeccably-tailored suit, Whelan responded, "When I give for Christ's sake, I give the best."<sup>44</sup>

In August of 1862, Whelan and the other paroled men of his unit were permitted to return home, via Richmond. Honoring the terms of his parole, Whelan refrained from any form of military service, returning instead to the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist. Bishop Verot, who had received accounts of the priest's selflessness while in prison, named him the Vicar General of the Diocese of Savannah. However, in the Spring of 1864, with an influx of Confederate troops arriving to defend against Sherman's offensive, Whelan found himself called upon to minister in their camps. He declined being an official chaplain to the Southern troops, instead treating his visits there as missionary activity, reminiscent of his missionary days in North Carolina thirty years prior. It was during this time that Bishop Verot became aware of the inhuman conditions in Andersonville Prison. Verot requested that Fr. Whelan visit the prison with regularity to minister to the Union prisoners, many of whom were on the verge of death. Whelan, instead, voluntarily

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<sup>44</sup> Lilla M. Hawes, *The Memoirs of Charles H. Olmstead*, (Savannah: Georgia Historical Society, 1964) p. 190.

resided at Andersonville Prison for four months, attending daily to the needs, not only of the Catholic prisoners, but every man who asked for his aid.

Whelan himself left no record of his thoughts and experiences at Andersonville.

However, Bishop Verot and other priests in the area documented their impressions upon visiting the *de facto* death camp. His recollections were included in a subsequent history of the Diocese of Savannah:

Most (prisoners) were without clothes, and a good number were entirely naked. It was necessary to receive the confessions of the sick in the middle of the crowd; but the imminence of death left no place for respect. The continuous sight of death finally dulled all human feelings. What was most painful was the horrible stench which spewed from this huge agglomeration in so small a space.<sup>45</sup>

It was only after the War that Whelan spoke publicly of his four months there. He shared with the Savannah-based *Daily News Herald* a letter he had written to a Fr. Townsend. Through this letter, it becomes clear that Whelan felt the compunction to minister to anyone in need, regardless of political affiliation. He ceased to view men as “Yankee” or “Southern,” recognizing in them instead their common humanity. His authentic priestly fervor was demonstrated when he wrote, “No amount of salary could induce me to stay at Andersonville for one week, not all the gold in the treasury. It was (simply) to allay misery, and gain souls to God.”<sup>46</sup> Whelan’s priority in his wartime service was ministry, not continuing to defend secession and slavery.

As General Sherman’s forces penetrated deeper into Georgia, Confederate authorities relocated many of the prisoners at Andersonville to prison camps in Savannah and Charleston. This was not before a particularly difficult experience for Fr. Whelan in his ministry. As the approximately 40,000 prisoners within the stockade began to suffer even more acutely from

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<sup>45</sup> *Annales de le Propogation de la Foi, Report of the Diocese of Savannah*, vol 37, (Savannah: 1893) p. 400.

<sup>46</sup> *Savannah Daily News Herald*, June 4, 1866.

privation, organized bands of prisoner marauders started to terrorize their fellow inmates. After a spate of robberies and murders, camp commandant Henry Wirz authorized the prisoners to arrest, put to trial, and, if expedient, execute the perpetrators. And this they did. Among the six accused, five were Catholics to whom Fr. Whelan had personally administered the sacraments. Given the severity of deprivation which existed in the camp, Fr. Whelan appealed for their pardon. Wirz informed the priest that the matter was out of his hands.<sup>47</sup> Even as the men were marched to the gallows within the stockade, Whelan again appealed to the Confederate officers supervising the execution. When this attempt at clemency also failed, he addressed the Union prisoners themselves, beseeching them to have mercy as they would have mercy shown to them. His pleas were in vain, and the six men were promptly hanged.<sup>48</sup>

After four months of work among the prisoners of Andersonville, Fr. Whelan felt that the period of crisis at Andersonville was ending. The Confederate administration continued to relocate Union prisoners, and there were rumors of imminent prisoner exchanges. However, Whelan did not simply return to his post at the Cathedral in Savannah. Before his departure, he borrowed \$16,000 from a local businessman in order to procure ten thousand bushels of flour. He directed that Major Wirz use this flour to provide the prisoners under his care with bread, in order to relieve them of hunger for one or two days. While Whelan did not return to Andersonville after this act of mercy, it was later verified at the trial of Major Wirz that the flour was, indeed, utilized for the benefit of the prisoners. Prison physician Dr. John C. Bates would testify that the prisoners were grateful beyond words for what they called “Father Whelan’s bread.”<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Michael Gannon, *Rebel Bishop*, p. 100.

<sup>48</sup> U.S. Congress, *Trial Transcript of Henry Wirz*, p. 429.

<sup>49</sup> U.S. Congress, *Trial Transcript of Henry Wirz*, p. 662.

After the war, the United States arrested Major Wirz and put him on trial for multiple crimes allegedly committed by him and those under his command at Andersonville. Among the charges were allegations of murder, willful neglect, and brutality incommensurate with his duties as commandant.<sup>50</sup> By the time of this trial in the autumn of 1865, Fr. Whelan had earned the nickname “the Angel of Andersonville.” The defense subpoenaed this “angel” to testify in the trial. While he was unable or unwilling to offer evidence of Wirz’s alleged crimes, Whelan had no qualms in detailing the horrors that had afflicted the Union men imprisoned in Andersonville. He specifically mentioned that only he and one other priest of the Diocese of Savannah were there for any length of time, and that he himself performed the Last Rites on no fewer than fifteen-hundred men.<sup>51</sup> The year after the trial, Fr. Whelan was interviewed by the *Savannah Daily News Herald* regarding his experiences at Andersonville and his defense of Major Wirz. Whelan wrote, “Had men in authority had pity and mercy for prisoners of war, their parole would have gone on and not stopped. As a consequence, the many thousands who fell victim to prison life, North and South, would be living and enjoying their family and friends. Upon whom is their blood?”<sup>52</sup> For all of his mercy and ministerial zeal, Fr. Whelan’s Southern sympathies still opted to place ultimate blame on Generals Grant and Sherman, who had halted prisoner exchanges in the last year of the War. Moreover, the priest demonstrated some lingering fidelity to the Lost Cause when he visited President Jefferson Davis in prison at the behest of the latter’s family in Savannah.<sup>53</sup>

The final chapter in Fr. Whelan’s Andersonville saga came in the form of correspondence with Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton in the latter half of 1865. Suffering from a severe

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<sup>50</sup> United States Congressional serial set, *Trail of Henry Wirz*, Issue 3794, p. 785.

<sup>51</sup> U.S. Congress, *Trial Transcript of Henry Wirz*, p. 431.

<sup>52</sup> *Savannah Daily News Herald*, June 4, 1866.

<sup>53</sup> Letter from Varinna Davis to Fr. Whelan, February 1866, on display at Confederate Memorial Hall, New Orleans, LA.

respiratory ailment, Whelan found himself in financial need. The debt he owed to the Macon businessman who had provided flour to the Andersonville prisoners was still outstanding. Additionally, he found himself increasingly unable to afford his own medical bills. Hearing that the War Department was repaying war debts accrued by citizens in the service of the Union, Whelan wrote to Stanton in order to recover the sum he owed. Stanton indicated that restitution would only be granted if bills of sale and receipts could be provided and verified to the Federal government. Fr. Whelan wrote back to the Secretary of War stating, “I have not the health, nor strength, nor money to run all over Georgia to hunt up vouchers and bills of purchase. Some worthless spy is honored and rewarded while this Catholic priest, the true benefactor of the prisoner, is ignored, and perhaps cast off as if he were a noted swindler.”<sup>54</sup> Fr. Whelan never received his restitution.

### Chapter 3

Two Redemptorists, a “Martyr-Monk,” and a Jesuit Spy

*“They will stumble repeatedly; they will fall over each other. They will say, ‘Get up, let us go back to our own people and our native lands, away from the sword of the oppressor.’”*

*Jeremiah 46:16*

*Fr. James Sheeran, C.S.S.R*

A combination of both local, diocesan clergy as well as various religious orders served the small number of Roman Catholics in the South. Indeed, the United States was still a mission territory for the Catholic Church, with Jesuits, Redemptorists, and Benedictines all establishing parishes, schools, and universities to serve the growing Catholic community. While these three orders are not the only religious communities to have had a presence in the United States, they

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<sup>54</sup> *Savannah Daily News Herald*, June 4, 1866.

represent a significant number of the clergy who would ultimately serve as chaplains in the Confederate Army. The lives of four men, in particular, are pertinent to this consideration of religious orders in the Southern States. These men were immigrants and had ministered to communities across the nation, not merely in slave-holding states. But, when secession led to the inauguration of hostilities, they willingly sided with the Confederacy. Many Confederate chaplains would achieve far more notoriety for their support of the “Lost Cause,” but these four men were relatively ordinary priests who found themselves enmeshed in extraordinary circumstances.

Among the Redemptorist priests who served the Confederate forces were Frs. Aegidius Smulders and James Sheeran. The former was Dutch, having been born in Eindhoven in 1815. Upon his ordination in 1843, he volunteered to join his order’s missionary efforts in the United States.<sup>55</sup> After his arrival, he joined the Remptorists in Baltimore, serving in various parishes and schools until 1860. It was in that year that Smulders began his political metamorphosis. As secessionist sentiments grew steadily through that year, the superiors of his order dispatched him to oversee the community in New Orleans. The priests of the Redemptorist parishes in that city found themselves split along political lines, some clamoring for Louisiana’s secession and others urging a less temporal focus for their vocations. Fr. Smulders’ superiors noticed him as a diligent priest in Baltimore, one who could, they hoped, unify the fractured religious community in New Orleans and restore clarity of purpose to the factionalized priests.<sup>56</sup>

Fr. Smulders remained in his role as superior of the New Orleans community for less than a year. When Louisiana seceded on January 26, 1861, Smulders immediately offered his services to the nascent Louisiana regiments. While he did not record his wartime experiences, others of

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<sup>55</sup> Carl Hoegerl, *Two Redemptorist Accounts During the American Civil War*, Redemptorist North American Historical Bulletin, Issue 19 (June, 2003), p. 8.

<sup>56</sup> Carl Hoegerl, *Two Redemptorist Accounts During the American Civil War*, p. 8.

his order did, including Fr. James Sheeran, whose nearly day-by-day diary entries often reference Smulders. However, one extant letter sent in September 1865 by Fr. Smulders to the Provincial Father of the Redemptorists illuminates the Dutch priest's motivations for his service. In it, he observed, "Louisiana, by a fair vote of all her people, for good reasons seceded from the Union. A universal, patriotic enthusiasm pervaded the whole of the Southern States, in which even the Negroes took a lively part."<sup>57</sup> The hoped-for voice of moderation proved vociferous, not in its apolitical propagation of the faith, but in defense of the Southern cause. Smulder's partisan bias emerges in his assertion that the people of Louisiana, even people of color, supported that state's secession. He makes no mention in his letter to the political divisions in his religious community in New Orleans, let alone the political and social divisions within Louisiana as a whole.

This letter offers little further insight regarding Fr. Smulders' degree of confederatization. However, he makes further note that "many a fervent prayer arose from the hearts of the Catholic slave that God may not allow Lincoln to deprive them of the masters they loved and the homes of their childhood."<sup>58</sup> It is clear that Smulders was in contact with enslaved people, interacting with them in the course of his missionary activities in Baltimore and New Orleans alike. What is also painfully evident is the tacit approval of slavery, and his willingness to presume that even enslaved men and women would pray for the success of the Confederate cause. Though this letter provides fair insights into Fr. Smulders' political and social opinions, it also demonstrates that these were not the primary concerns weighing on the priest's mind. Indeed, the greater part of this letter chronicles his illnesses suffered throughout his ministry in the Confederate armies, addressing his chronic diarrhea at more length than the campaigns in which he participated or the enslaved people he encountered.

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<sup>57</sup> Aegidius Smulders, *Letter to Baltimore Provincial Father of the Redemptorists*, p. 1.

<sup>58</sup> Aegidius Smulders, *Letter to Baltimore Provincial Father of the Redemptorists*, pp. 1-2.



Smulders, like many of his fellow Catholic chaplains in the South, was thoroughly convinced of the righteousness of his cause. One aspect of Southern Catholic chaplaincy, which even the reticent Fr. Smulders addressed, was the duty of Catholic clergy to stand apart from Protestant ministers, affirming their own authentic American patriotism in so doing. In the conclusion of his letter, he recorded that even Protestants admired his ministry, as well as that of his confrere Fr. James Sheeran. Moreover, “even the Protestant chaplains treated us with the utmost deference.”<sup>59</sup> While most Catholic chaplains of the South retained their clerical dress, Protestant chaplains donned officers’ uniforms, a practice which Smulders in particular condemned in this same missive. By abandoning distinct religious vesture, chaplains became less Christ-like and thus less effective in their ministry. Smulders believed that a man of the cloth ought to be very clearly a man of the *cloth*, and not a man of the *sword*. The melding of Catholic and Confederate identity endeared priests such as Smulders to men and women who had hitherto been hostile or, at best, indifferent to Catholicism. Catholic priests, men whose bravery and devotion disproved accusations of cultural subversion, undermined the pervasive Know-nothingism of the preceding decade. For Southern clergy, simultaneously preaching the Gospel and defending the institution of slavery neutered many of their neighbors’ anxieties. Fr. Aegidius Smulders, though not one to have boasted of his wartime ministry, offers evidence that confederatization was a path to social acceptance of Southern Catholics. Embracing secession and slavery as willingly as they embraced the Cross, these men were baptized into the cult of cotton.

Fr. Smulders was not the only Redemptorist priest who devoted himself to the Confederacy. Indeed, at the urging of the Father Provincial of the Order, Fr. James Sheeran embarked on his mission of military chaplaincy at the same time as Smulders. Sheeran, an Irish

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<sup>59</sup> Aegidius Smulders, *Letter to Baltimore Provincial Father of the Redemptorists*, p. 4.

immigrant to the United States, originally settled in Monroe, Michigan with his wife and children. After the death of his wife, Sheeran entered the Redemptorist order, in whose school in Monroe he had taught as a layman.<sup>60</sup> Eventually sent to the Redemptorist community in New Orleans, the same one at which Fr. Aegidius Smulders was the superior, he was active in parish and teaching ministry. However, by September of 1862, he had been accepted as a chaplain in the Army of Northern Virginia, attached to the 14th Louisiana. The same Father Provincial of the Redemptorists who had sought the internal conciliation of the New Orleans community was the same man who actively called upon his priests to volunteer their services to the Confederate Government. The internal divisions within the Redemptorist order reflect the political and social divisions of Catholics and, indeed, most Americans. Location in and proximity to slave states determined the prevailing trend of support among Catholic clergy for the Confederacy.

Unlike his friend and fellow priest Fr. Smulders, Sheeran maintained an extensive record of his service with the Army of Northern Virginia. His war diary serves to illuminate his motivations and personal convictions. While what emerges in the pages of his writing demonstrates his personal bravery and fidelity to his ministry, it also becomes apparent that Sheeran was proudly Confederatized. This war diary is also invaluable in its tremendous detail, serving to fill in the blanks left in the sparse narratives of other Southern chaplains.

On October 22, 1862, Sheeran noted the kindness shown to him by a Unionist family living near Centreville, Virginia. While grateful for the provisions offered to him, he was stymied by the gesture. This Irish immigrant Michigan, and only lately the South, writes, “I was the more surprised as they were Unionists, and I am so strongly Southern.”<sup>61</sup> Sheeran’s brief two-year

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<sup>60</sup> Joseph T. Durkin, SJ, *Confederate Chaplain: A War Journal*, (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1960) p. ix.

<sup>61</sup> James Sheeran, C.S.S.R., *Civil War Diary*, (Washington, DC: Catholic University Press, 2016) p. 105.

residency in New Orleans, under the direction and supervision of Fr. Smulders, had transformed him. Having settled and taught in Michigan for over a decade seems not to have made as much of an impact on Sheeran as simply being in the South when the great matters of the day came to a head. Fr. Smulders' influence resulted in the nearly-instantaneous confederatization of Fr. Sheeran. This relationship demonstrates the considerable sway that highly-placed Catholic clergy had over their subordinates, leading them to embrace and defend the Southern cause as a matter of faith.

Sheeran's conversion was not, however, merely a case of yielding to the signs of the times. It was thorough and profound. In the entry for Sunday, October 26, 1862, Fr. Sheeran recounted a conversation he had that day with an Irishman identified only as "Pennyman." In his lengthy recollection, Sheeran presents an almost catechetical lesson as to why the South was justified in secession, sanctified by its war, and favored by God and history to prevail in both. Indeed, Sheeran's tone reflects his order's emphasis on dynamic preaching, critical thought, and effective evangelization. Again, however, this evangelization is not *pure*; it is political and not undertaken objectively for the sake of the Gospel. Echoing the methodology of Thomas Aquinas, Sheeran presents "Pennyman" with several premises which are objectively true. "Pennyman," a "dyed in the wool" Union man, had been endeavoring to inform his fellow Irishman that Northern victory was guaranteed, if not by anything else, than by sheer numbers and industrial might.<sup>62</sup> Sheeran's derision for Pennyman's argument is undeniable.

Speaking with clerical authority, Sheeran began his argument by posing questions to Pennyman. He inquired of the Irishman, "Do you understand, sir, the conditions on which the U.S. Government was established? Was it not the creature, or 'agent,' of the different states,

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<sup>62</sup> James Sheeran, C.S.S.R., *Civil War Diary*, p. 106.

established by them for particular and specific purposes?”<sup>63</sup> The rhetoric of his line of inquiry resembles 19th Century catechism lessons, wherein the student would be asked a string of questions and expected to answer them with wrote formulas. The argument Sheeran presents could just as easily have been given by Jefferson Davis, Alexander Stephens, or General Thomas Jackson. His overarching point in establishing Southern justification is that the U.S. Government was the result of independent states’ consent, and that authority and dominion are powers that flow to the Federal Government, not *from* it. The argument continues that if either party of a contract ceases to uphold their part of it, the contract is null and void. Those who willingly entered it, then, can willingly and morally leave it. The instigator of the War, in Sheeran’s mind, was President Lincoln. He cites the Personal Liberty Bill, “setting at defiance the laws of Congress passed for the protection of the South, thus violating their (the United States Government) public contract and thereby liberating the people of the South from their obligations.”<sup>64</sup> Sheeran then leveled an ad hominem attack against Pennyman. “But you, an Irish man! You would wish to force the people of the South into a union with their Northern enemies! Thousands of our countrymen would this day buckle on their armor and willingly meet the dangers of the battlefield for the purpose of destroying the Union of Ireland with England.”<sup>65</sup> The comparison of the Southern struggle against the North and the Irish struggle for independence from Britain would become a recurring theme in the moral justification of Southern clergy.

Fr. Sheeran’s zealous defense of the Confederate cause was not restricted merely to its moral justification. His Confederatization permeated so deeply as to enshrine racial prejudice in his daily interactions. Sheeran did not shrink from portraying people of color, enslaved or free, as ignorant, devious, and subhuman. One particular example of racist ideology in Sheeran’s

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<sup>63</sup> James Sheeran, C.S.S.R., *Civil War Diary*, p. 106.

<sup>64</sup> James Sheeran, C.S.S.R., *Civil War Diary*, p. 107.

<sup>65</sup> James Sheeran, C.S.S.R., *Civil War Diary*, pp. 107-108.

ministry presents itself in his entry for Friday, May 27, 1864. Together with Fr. Smulders, Sheeran endeavored to find adequate shelter during a troop redeployment. His choice, rather than making use of his government-issued tent or bivouacking with Protestant chaplains, was to commandeer a “Nigger cabin.” The pair freely partook of the peach trees adjacent to it.<sup>66</sup> Moreover, the two Redemptorists took great pleasure in teasing and verbally and emotionally abusing the “old colored woman” whose cabin they occupied. While conceding that the woman was “somewhat intelligent,” Sheeran proceeded to quiz the woman on her personal religious beliefs. Persistently referring to the woman as “Auntie,” Sheeran asked her to explain the Nature of God, something even Doctors of the Church would struggle to attempt. Subsequently, Sheeran asked if “Auntie” has been baptized. “No, Massa, but Ise like to be. My old Massa promised to let me be baptized, but the war done come on.”<sup>67</sup> Rather than offer to administer that particular sacrament, Sheeran explained to the woman that those who aren’t baptized are wicked, and will go to “a bad place.” He further elaborated that, given her advanced age and laborious station in life, she should not risk her immortal soul, lest she be resigned to the flames of Hell.

Such behaviour demonstrates that the racist cornerstone of Southern ideology was alive and well in Sheeran’s heart. Throughout this exchange, neither he nor Fr. Smulders offered any pastoral care. Sheeran exhorted her to say the Lord’s Prayer often, but beyond that gave little indication that he was a clergyman capable of baptizing the woman. Compounding the probable spiritual trauma they had inflicted, the two priests then decided to ask the woman if there were any Catholics in the vicinity. Her response was that she was unaware of any Catholics, nor had she ever even met a Catholic priest. Mocking her unfamiliarity with Catholic clergy, Sheeran quipped, “Well, don’t you know, Auntie? They wear horns!”<sup>68</sup> Sheeran elaborated saying that

<sup>66</sup> James Sheeran, C.S.S.R., *Civil War Diary*, p. 370.

<sup>67</sup> James Sheeran, C.S.S.R., *Civil War Diary*, p. 371.

<sup>68</sup> James Sheeran, C.S.S.R., *Civil War Diary*, p. 371.

priests are “a queer kind of people, have very big feet, and are very dangerous.”<sup>69</sup> Only at this point did they inform the elderly woman that he and Smulders were, in fact, Catholic priests. He recounted that a mighty laugh was had at her expense, but that she had continued her forced hospitality throughout the duration of the evening. “The poor lady was very kind to us,” he noted, ignoring the embarrassment and manipulation to which they had just subjected her.

The previous January, Fr. Sheeran had traveled to Wilmington, North Carolina, where he recorded another incident of racist behaviour. Upon arriving at the City Hotel, Sheeran encountered a Protestant chaplain whose personal belongings had just been stolen. Fearing for the safety of his own possessions and Mass kit, Sheeran entrusted them to the care of a “colored boy.” After sharing a meal with local Catholics, Sheeran returned to the hotel, only to discover that his belongings had met the same fate as the Protestant chaplain’s. He instantly suspected that the thief was likely the young man to whom he had handed his haversack hours before. The boy was found, and brought before the priest who enquired of him where his personal items might be found. When aggressively pressed by Sheeran, the boy stated, “Why, Massa, I left it in dar. In dat room what you was.” Sheeran continued his interrogation, writing, “I put on a rather stormy appearance and let loose upon him, saying, ‘you black rascal, if you don’t get me my sack and that very soon, I will have you.’”<sup>70</sup> The young man succeeded in finding the mislaid items, eliciting no comment of gratitude from the Irish cleric. Offering no glimmer of interior guilt for his treatment of the boy, Sheeran concluded his entry of that day with an account of a fine dinner with local Catholics, enjoying several pious songs performed for his pleasure in the family’s parlor.

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<sup>69</sup> James Sheeran, C.S.S.R., *Civil War Diary*, p. 371.

<sup>70</sup> James Sheeran, C.S.S.R., *Civil War Diary*, p. 300.

*Fr. Emmeran Bliemel, OSB*

Sheeran's secessionist apologetics and racist behaviour were not the only instances of his Confederatization. Throughout his diary, there are references to several other Catholic chaplains in whose company he thoroughly enjoyed himself. The character and disposition of these other men speak to Sheeran's own character, that of an ardent Confederate. Men such as Frs. Darius Hubert, Emmeran Bliemel, Louis-Hippolyte Gache, and Joseph Bixio were, it appears, even more radicalized than Fr. Sheeran. Fr. Hubert will be addressed at length in the following chapter. However, Frs. Bliemel, Gache, and Bixio stand together as friends of Fr. Sheeran.

Like Fr. Sheeran, Fr. Emmeran Bliemel was an immigrant. Born in Bavaria in 1831, Bliemel immigrated to the United States at the age of nineteen in order to join the Novitiate of St. Vincent, a recently-founded Benedictine community in Latrobe, Pennsylvania.<sup>71</sup> After his ordination, Fr. Bliemel ministered throughout Pennsylvania, focusing his labors on the small and scattered German farming populations around Latrobe. He continued in his labors until 1860, when Bishop Whalen of the Diocese of Nashville issued a general request for missionary priests in his Diocese. Emmeran sought and received the permission of his superior to relocate to Tennessee, and promptly began a pastorate at the Parish of the Assumption in Nashville. However, shortly after his arrival from Pennsylvania, the issues of slavery and secession came to dominate the hearts and minds of his new flock, with the greater part of the men of his congregation leaving to enlist in the Army of Tennessee by the end of 1862. This, combined with the fall of Fort Donelson in February of that year, threatened Fr. Bliemel in his role of pastor of Assumption. With the church becoming financially unsustainable, given the scattering and absence of the congregation, Bliemel began to harbor personal animus towards the North.

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<sup>71</sup> Peter J. Meaney, *Valiant Chaplain of the Bloody Tenth*, Tennessee Historical Quarterly Vol. 41, No. 1 (Spring, 1982), p. 38.

Growing evermore vocal in his criticism, Fr. Bliemel quickly began to garner a reputation as an ardent supporter of the Confederate cause.<sup>72</sup>

Bliemel's time in Pennsylvania, much like Sheeran's years in the North, proved to be of little import as he clung more and more to his Southern sympathies. By March of 1862, Union forces occupied Nashville, much to the German monk's displeasure. The combined military occupation and economic disruption of Nashville (and, indeed, all of Tennessee) placed enormous burdens on both the occupiers and the occupied. General Rosecrans, himself a devout Roman Catholic, placed severe limitations on the population of Nashville, in order to prevent the flow of contraband goods and military intelligence to his Confederate adversaries south of the city. Bliemel, motivated by both his Confederatized inclinations and his desire to render pastoral service to those in need, began to engage in illegal black market activities, procuring medicine and provisions which he sent to the beleaguered Southern forces of General Braxton Bragg. Historian Peter Meaney notes that on December 11, 1862, a citizen of Nashville reported to Union forces that a man "genteely dressed and wearing specks" was seen purchasing medical supplies in a deserted back-alley.<sup>73</sup> Matching this description, and having been seen previously in the area, United States military police arrested Bliemel. Once in custody, the troops brought Bliemel before General Rosecrans to answer for his actions. He stated, "I bought this for an investment. I have never taken an active part in this rebellion. I am a conservative Union man. I would prefer the old Union as it was, but believe that the South had been deprived of rights which justified them in this rebellion." Rosecrans then released Fr. Bliemel without any further molestation.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Peter J. Meaney, *Valiant Chaplain of the Bloody Tenth*, p. 40.

<sup>73</sup> Peter J. Meaney, *Valiant Chaplain of the Bloody Tenth*, p. 40.

<sup>74</sup> Peter J. Meaney, *Valiant Chaplain of the Bloody Tenth*, p. 41.



Bristling under the prospect of Yankee occupation, and hearing news of the Battle of Chickamauga, Fr. Bliemel received permission from Bishop Whelan to enter the Confederate chaplaincy. By the time of the Battle of Missionary Ridge on November 25th, 1862, the cleric had successfully ridden through Union lines and taken up his chaplaincy with the 10th Tennessee, many of whose men were former congregants of his own Assumption Parish in Nashville.<sup>75</sup> Bliemel never kept a record of his experiences during the War, nor do any of his sermons exist. However, Fr. Sheeran makes note of the German monk several times in his own diary. Indeed, on December 11, 1863, exactly one year after Bliemel's arrest, Sheeran records an interaction with a "Colonel Brent " in which he defends his confrere. Somewhat amusingly, the colonel in question based his negative assessment on the Bliemel's dress and demeanor, paralleling the tip which led to Bliemel's interrogation the year before. "Well, Father Sheeran, I must confess that the impression made on my mind by Father Bliemel was unfavorable. There are several Catholics of us on the staff, and we have to associate a good deal with Protestants. We would just like to have a priest whose manners and appearance would represent our religion in a favorable light." Sheeran admonished the officer, stating that Bliemel's personal conduct and bravery should count more in the eyes of God and of men than how well he vested himself in his habit.<sup>76</sup>

On August 31, 1864, Fr. Bliemel was present with the 10th Tennessee at the Battle of Jonesboro, Georgia. During the Confederate assault, General Hardee's Corps, to which the 10th Tennessee belonged, mounted a failed assault on Union lines, resulting in approximately 1,500 casualties. Many of these men were members of the Tennessee regiments which fell under the purview of Fr. Bliemel's chaplaincy. As Confederate forces began to fall back, the monk noticed

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<sup>75</sup> Peter J. Meaney, *Valiant Chaplain of the Bloody Tenth*, p. 43.

<sup>76</sup> James Sheeran, C.S.S.R., *Civil War Diary*, p. 278.

his regiment's leader, Colonel William Grace, fallen and grievously wounded. Accompanied by two stretcher-bearers, Fr. Bliemel knelt beside the dying officer and began to hear his confession. While pronouncing the words of absolution over Col. Grace, a Union artillery shell exploded nearby, decapitating the Confederate chaplain, who fell lifeless over the body of his commanding officer.<sup>77</sup> Later that evening, when survivors of the day's action returned to bury the dead, they discovered the bodies of both Fr. Bliemel and Col. Grace. The men were placed in a makeshift grave. Bliemel's extraordinary courage under fire, as well as his fierce devotion to the men under his spiritual care, are a testament that, despite radicalization, some few Confederate chaplains served with distinction in the eyes of the Church and its members. Indeed, Fr. Bliemel enjoys the distinction of being the first Catholic chaplain killed in combat in any American war and was the only Catholic chaplain killed in action on either side during the Civil War. Of all the chaplains of every denomination in the Southern armies, a total of forty-one died during the course of the War. Of these, only nine men were slain in battle. And of these, Fr. Bliemel was the only Catholic.<sup>78</sup> This being said, Emmeran Bliemel courted his potential martyrdom for the cause of Southern independence. He advocated on behalf of the Confederate government, preached in its defense, and traded on the black market for its armies' sustenance.

*Fr. Louis-Hippolyte Gache, SJ*

Although his wartime letters focus more on the mundane than on the dramatic or political aspects of the Civil War, Fr. Louis-Hippolyte Gache's writings reflect the *de facto* Confederatization of Catholic clergy in the South. Far from being an apostle of disunion, Fr. Gache was still a servant of secession. Born in Beaulieu, France in 1817, Louis-Hippolyte Gache

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<sup>77</sup> Peter J. Meaney, *Valiant Chaplain of the Bloody Tenth*, p. 45.

<sup>78</sup> John Wesley Brinsfield Jr., *The Spirit Divided: Memoirs of Civil War Chaplains*, (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 2005) p. 99.

was the son of land-owning peasants in an agricultural region.<sup>79</sup> Rising far above his lowly station in life, Gache entered the Society of Jesus in 1840, eventually earning renown for his erudition and scholarly achievements. Involved in the founding of several Jesuit schools and institutions throughout Louisiana and Alabama, Gache found his American pupils far less disciplined than those he had taught in France and Italy throughout the 1840's and 50's. Regardless, he persisted in parish and school ministry until Alabama seceded from the Union on January 11, 1861. Immediately upon his adopted state's call for volunteers, Gache arrived in Pensacola, Florida along with thousands of other men, keen on defending the fledgling Confederacy.

Fr. Gache's priorities in his chaplaincy were unwaveringly-rooted in Christian charity, mirroring the personal devotion of Fr. Whelan, "the Angel of Andersonville." Although this French cleric served in his capacity as chaplain for the entire duration of the War, his confederatization was of a decidedly less radical vein than that of many of his contemporaries. Certainly, he volunteered to serve the men in gray, but his motivations lay more in recognizing the pastoral needs of the soldiers in his care than in being an apologist for slavery. Indeed, his was a tacit shift, prompted more than anything else by happenstance and proximity. The predominant themes in his surviving letters are far more concerned with inter-religious dialogue and cooperation than deifying King Cotton.

While deploying to the area around Yorktown, Virginia during the 1862 Peninsular Campaign, Fr. Gache noted the difficulty he and his unit had in finding adequate nourishment. Foraging and relying on the hospitality of native Virginians was especially challenging for the 10th Louisiana, given the poor reputation the Creoles had outside of Louisiana. Well aware of

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<sup>79</sup> Cornelius M. Buckley, SJ, *Frenchman, Chaplain, Rebel: The Civil War Letters of Pere Louis-Hippolyte Gache, SJ, 10th Louisiana Infantry*, (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1981) p. 8.

local displeasure towards his wartime flock, he wrote, “We didn’t dare ask for hospitality at a private home, as the Louisiana soldiers have gained such a reputation for pilfering and general loutishness that as soon as anyone sees them coming, they bolt the doors and windows.”<sup>80</sup>

Accompanied by a “Fr. Cornette,” Gache staked his hopes on a slave cabin he noticed just along the bank of the York River. The rhetoric Gache employed in describing the scene stands in stark contrast to Fr. Sheeran’s experience. Rather than presume a welcome and emotionally bully the inhabitants of the cottage, Fr. Gache asked for food with unquestionable humility. The elderly African American gentleman who opened the door made a distinct impression on the French Jesuit. Seemingly in awe of the hospitality offered to him, Gache recalled, “Thanks to the diligence of the venerable Baucis,<sup>81</sup> whose skinny form seemed to cheat old age of its sluggishness, the dinner was served in five minutes.” Moreover, rather than use the common and weaponized rhetoric of “boy” or other such slurs, Gache refers to the elderly man as “the Black Patriarch of the Marsh.”<sup>82</sup> Naturally, an enslaved person would not be at liberty to refuse a meal to Confederate officers if asked. However, the tone used by Fr. Gache is not one of rabid racism.

*Fr. Joseph Bixio, SJ, and Fr. James Sheeran, C.S.S.R. (Revisited)*

In both Fr. Gache’s correspondence and Fr. Sheeran’s diary, the two men made repeated references to another Jesuit priest, Fr. Joseph Bixio. Born in Genoa, Italy, in 1819, the Jesuit came from a family that distinguished itself in various European upheavals throughout the mid-19th Century. Indeed, his older brother Alesandro, born in 1808, would eventually find himself in France, where, during the June Days uprising of 1848, he was wounded fighting with

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<sup>80</sup> Louis-Hippolyte Gache, SJ, *Frenchman, Chaplain, Rebel*, p. 43.

<sup>81</sup> Baucis was the spouse of Philemon in Greek mythology. The couple was noted by Ovid for their profound charity and hospitality, even in spite of their meager wealth.

<sup>82</sup> Louis-Hippolyte Gache, SJ, *Frenchman, Chaplain, Rebel*, p. 44.

workers against the forces of the Second Republic. The triumph of liberal-minded working-class Frenchmen saw Alessandro appointed Minister of Agriculture by the newly-elected Louis-Napoleon.<sup>83</sup> Similarly, Fr. Bixio's younger brother Nino would achieve notoriety in the fight for Italian unification. Fr. Buckley notes that Nino Bixio enjoyed great renown due to his tenacity and propensity for self-advancement. Nino eventually became one Garibaldi's most trusted compatriots in the wars of Italian Unification.<sup>84</sup>

These two Bixio brothers were not the only members of this family to find themselves (or, more appropriately, *place* themselves) in the midst of political upheaval. Joseph Bixio, after having been sent by the Jesuits to teach in California, decided of his own volition to travel to Virginia in 1860, serving as a missionary priest along the Maryland and Virginia border. Officially, Bixio had informed his superiors that the weather in that region was far more agreeable to his health. Given that he had already found a parish in that area, the superior of the Maryland Province of the Society of Jesus had no real choice but to grant him faculties.<sup>85</sup>

Surviving records never named the doctors who allegedly advised the Italian Jesuit to leave California. Moreover, during his eastward journey in August of 1860, Bixio wrote a letter to his former superior in California, explaining that he felt personally injured and attacked by the man's behaviour and leadership. Historian Cornelius Buckley quotes a letter from a brother Jesuit, Fr. Ponte in the California community, regarding Bixio's puzzling actions. Ponte wrote, "To a great extent, I blame the weather there (California) for Fr. Bixio's bizarre behaviour." Ponte, rather tongue-in-cheek, elaborates that the same "brain sickness" has afflicted many in the

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<sup>83</sup> Cornelius Michael Buckley, *Joseph Bixio, Furtive Founder of the University of San Francisco*, California History Vol. 78, No. 1 (Spring, 1999), p. 16.

<sup>84</sup> Cornelius Michael Buckley, *Joseph Bixio, Furtive Founder*, p. 17.

<sup>85</sup> Cornelius Michael Buckley, *Joseph Bixio, Furtive Founder*, p. 19.

Society of Jesus, and they had, by their actions, effectively become Protestant.<sup>86</sup> Fr. Bixio stands as the lone example of a Confederate Catholic chaplain disregarding the general will of his religious superiors. While formally given permission to leave the California community, he did so in bad faith. This is the first indication of Fr. Bixio's cunning and deceitful character.

Both Frs. Sheeran and Gache referred to Bixio with admiration, shedding light on the Jesuit priest's dedication to the Southern cause. The familial habit of the Bixios to seek out anti-government rebellions is cemented in the anecdotes offered pertaining to the priest in question. Bixio, having deliberately placed himself in a politically-fraught region, found his parish boundaries split evenly between Virginia and Maryland. Fr. Gache wrote, "when the war broke out, Father Bixio had been pastor of a parish that lay on both sides of the Virginia-Maryland border. During the Battle of Manassas, he happened to be in the Virginia part of his parish, and ever since then, he hasn't been able to return to the Maryland side."<sup>87</sup> For a parish priest to have his flock divided by political, geographical, and military boundaries would be objectively painful. However, Gache noted that "this hasn't bothered him a bit. He has simply volunteered as a Confederate chaplain."<sup>88</sup> Gache mentions also that Fr. Bixio was not perturbed by this inconvenience, given that he had several friends and connections on the Virginia side of the border, many of whom he had been acquainted with for at least ten years. It becomes clearer through Gache's letter of January 17, 1862 that Fr. Bixio had long fostered Southern sympathies, even before secession and before he had left his assignment in California.

Further evidence of Bixio's Confederatization is contained in the memoirs of Fr. Sheeran. In the Autumn of 1864, Fr. Sheeran found himself in the Shenandoah Valley. In his diary entry

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<sup>86</sup> Cornelius Michael Buckley, *Joseph Bixio, Furtive Founder of the University of San Francisco*, p. 19.

<sup>87</sup> Louis-Hippolyte Gache, SJ, *Frenchman, Chaplain, Rebel*, p. 92.

<sup>88</sup> Louis-Hippolyte Gache, SJ, *Frenchman, Chaplain, Rebel*, p. 92.

for September 19, Sheeran chronicles the Third Battle of Winchester. The vastly-outnumbered forces under General Early suffered a profound defeat, although Sheeran remarked that “had our cavalry held their position for fifteen minutes longer, this day would have been one of the most brilliant for the Confederate cause.”<sup>89</sup> The Confederate cavalry did not hold, resulting in several thousand Confederate soldiers being wounded or taken prisoner. After falling back from Winchester, General Sheridan trounced the remaining Confederates in a flanking assault, resulting in even more men being captured. While Sheeran was not present on the field that day, he learned that most of the wounded men under Early’s command had been captured and brought to Winchester, behind enemy lines. Keen to provide the sacraments for the Catholics among these men, Sheeran decided to ride into enemy lines and procure a pass from General Sheridan which would enable the Redemptorist priest to achieve his mission of mercy.<sup>90</sup>

Setting off for Winchester on the morning of the 25th, Sheeran braved danger as Union patrols repeatedly intercepted him. Ever the confident Irishman, Sheeran never denied his allegiance. When questioned by Federal cavalymen as to whether he was with the “Rebel army,” Sheeran’s response was sharp. “No, sir, I belong to the Confederate Army. And I am a Catholic priest and wish you to bring me to General Sheridan.”<sup>91</sup> The priest was, indeed, brought to the nearest Union general, Horatio Wright, commanding the Sixth Corps of the Army of the Shenandoah. Wright recalled having met Fr. Sheeran at the previous Battle of Kernstown, and proceeded to thank the priest for his ministry to the wounded of both sides. Wright’s adjutant produced a pass for Sheeran, who promptly left the camp on his way to Winchester. The next day, Sheeran rode into Winchester, visiting numerous hospitals in an attempt to ascertain where the Confederate wounded were being kept. It was during his search in Winchester that Sheeran

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<sup>89</sup> James Sheeran, C.S.S.R., *Civil War Diary*, p. 464.

<sup>90</sup> James Sheeran, C.S.S.R., *Civil War Diary*, p. 465.

<sup>91</sup> James Sheeran, C.S.S.R., *Civil War Diary*, p. 466.

happened upon his old friend Fr. Joseph Bixio. However, the Confederate Jesuit was not ministering in his religious habit, nor was he wearing a Confederate officer's uniform. He was wearing, instead, a Union chaplain's outfit. Sheeran writes, "I found Fr. Bixio, who is now playing Yankee chaplain at Mr. Hassett's home, in company with several Yankee officers."<sup>92</sup> Bixio's ministry had certainly evolved substantially from parish priest to Confederate chaplain to Confederate spy.

Fr. Sheeran expanded on the work of Fr. Bixio, filling in many of the gaps in the narrative supplied by Fr. Gache. The events which took place between Gache's pertinent letter in 1862 and the Autumn of 1864 present a much more complete image of the devious Jesuit. Sheeran noted that, after the Second Battle of Manassas, Bixio made several substantial purchases, intending to deliver them to Confederate forces around Harpers Ferry. Perhaps not wanting to incriminate a brother priest, Sheeran wrote that these purchases were made "for purposes best known to himself."<sup>93</sup> Circumstances rendered the Jesuit's planned delivery impossible, as he somehow found himself behind Union lines and without any ability to rejoin the Confederate forces. In an act which can be labeled "jesuitical" in every sense of the word, Bixio found an ailing and disheartened Union chaplain in a military hospital, and convinced him to give up his uniform, Mass kit, credentials, and other personal belongings which would serve to bolster Bixio's stolen identity. This was, in Sheeran's words, "a circumstance which the shrewd Fr. Bixio turned to his advantage, that is, if a few boxes of goods are worth more than a priest's character."<sup>94</sup> The priest whom Bixio charmed was another Italian, Fr. Leo Rizza da Saracena, OFM, chaplain of the 9th Connecticut Regiment. With the perpetual chaos and restructuring of forces in the Shenandoah Valley, Bixio was able to blend in with the Federal troops, drawing

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<sup>92</sup> James Sheeran, C.S.S.R., *Civil War Diary*, p. 468.

<sup>93</sup> James Sheeran, C.S.S.R., *Civil War Diary*, p. 468.

<sup>94</sup> James Sheeran, C.S.S.R., *Civil War Diary*, p. 469.



Union rations and shuttling Union military goods and information to Confederate forces nearby. Sheeran was, admittedly, rather shocked to encounter his old friend in such circumstances, but recognized the logic of the situation. “He (Bixio) displays a willingness to sacrifice his reputation for interest, to be the associate of Sheridan’s robbers and house burners, for the sake of getting himself and his merchandise to Staunton.”<sup>95</sup> Similarly, the Redemptorist posits that Bixio remained undiscovered due to Sheridan’s happiness at having a Catholic chaplain, “in order to give a show of religion and justice to his diabolical acts.”<sup>96</sup> Sheeran concludes his entry for September 26, 1864 by stating that he disapproved of Bixio’s deceit, but decided not to give his secret away. Mr. Hassett, however, the owner of the house, was able to deduce that Bixio was not the noble Union man he pretended to be. Threatened by Mr. Hassett, and in the presence of Union officers no less, Bixio decided to leave Winchester and begin his clandestine sojourn back to Confederate lines.<sup>97</sup>

Fr. Bixio’s role in the war was not finished with his absconding from Winchester. Indeed, both he and Fr. Sheeran would demonstrate their mutual confederatization in one final circumstance. Although bearing a pass from General Wright, Sheeran was informed that he was to be imprisoned at the behest of General Sheridan, Wright’s superior. Naturally, the priest protested that his pass was valid, and that the Federals had no right to detain a Catholic priest, regardless of which side he served. His protests went unheeded, and Sheeran was incarcerated at Fort McHenry in Baltimore. Upon arriving at the prison, Sheeran addressed one of the guards, demanding treatment befitting his sacerdotal office. He tersely admonished the soldier, saying “If respect for religion and your own self respect prompt you to treat me differently, at least gratitude for what I have done for your wounded and dying, give me a right to different

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<sup>95</sup> James Sheeran, C.S.S.R., *Civil War Diary*, p. 469.

<sup>96</sup> James Sheeran, C.S.S.R., *Civil War Diary*, p. 469.

<sup>97</sup> James Sheeran, C.S.S.R., *Civil War Diary*, p. 469.

treatment.”<sup>98</sup> The guard’s response cut through the priest’s alleged gallantries, his words identifying Sheeran’s deep-seated confederatization. “I respect your offices, sir, but I do not respect your labors among the Rebels.”<sup>99</sup> The Irishman insinuated that the guard’s treatment of him was due to the soldier’s Yankee Protestantism. However, the ensuing interviews with General Sheridan would clarify the actual motives for such firmness in these dealings.

Immediately preceding his first of two meetings with General Sheridan, the provost of the prison interrogated Fr. Sheeran. Even under the physical and emotional duress of imprisonment, Sheeran adhered to the Confederate cause as unwaveringly as the other priests so warmly referenced in the pages of his diary. He defended himself, stating, “As a Catholic priest, I know of no ‘parties,’ but as a citizen, I belong to the Southern Confederacy. And my sympathies, feelings, and connections are with her cause, believing it to be just. And I trust it will succeed.”<sup>100</sup> Compounding his contempt for the Union, Sheeran wrote a letter chronicling his sufferings to the New York based *Freemen’s Journal*, a noted pro-Southern publication. The editor, a Mr. McMaster, published an article condemning General Sheridan and all of Yankeedom for stooping so low as to incarcerate a Catholic priest. Publishing his account of the situation, McMaster asserted that, “The imprisonment of Fr. Sheeran is an outrage on the laws of war. It was an outrage of religion. It was an outrage on common decency.”<sup>101</sup> However, as Sheeran would soon discover, the actual outrage against common decency was his collusion with Fr. Joseph Bixio, whose crimes had recently been exposed.

On December 30, 1864, General Sheridan summoned Fr. Sheeran for a meeting. Greatly agitated by Sheeran’s apparent complicity in Fr. Bixio’s deceit, Sheridan was all the more

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<sup>98</sup> James Sheeran, C.S.S.R., *Civil War Diary*, p. 502.

<sup>99</sup> James Sheeran, C.S.S.R., *Civil War Diary*, p. 503.

<sup>100</sup> James Sheeran, C.S.S.R., *Civil War Diary*, p. 507.

<sup>101</sup> “A Great and Cruel Wrong: Arrest and Imprisonment of a Confederate Catholic Chaplain,” *New York Freeman’s Journal*, November 12, 1864.

outraged by Sheeran's shameless pandering in the press via the article in the *New York Freeman's Journal*. After several protestations from the priest, Sheridan addressed the Bixio matter outright: "Father Bixio has acted in a manner unworthy of a Catholic priest. He has deceived me and acted meanly."<sup>102</sup> Sheridan admonished Sheeran for his association with Bixio and his reticence in exposing his potential espionage. Amid numerous assurances from Father Sheeran that he personally disapproved of such deceit, the Irishman also assured General Sheridan that he would never renounce his loyalty to the Confederacy, nor would he silence himself regarding what he considered inhumane and irreligious treatment. In a second meeting between the two men on December 31, Sheridan again reviewed Bixio's crimes. Moreover, he interrogated Sheeran so as to ascertain any mutual complicity in them. Worn down by Sheeran's unyielding Confederate fervor, and believing that the Redemptorist did not *actively* participate in Bixio's enterprise, Sheridan deigned to release him. Far from expressing gratitude for this magnanimity, Sheeran wrote, "in parting with him I had to dirty my hand by shaking his, stained as it is with blood, rapine and every species of injustice."<sup>103</sup> Returning South through Virginia and the Shenandoah Valley a week later, Sheeran boasted in his diary that not only did he pretend to disapprove of Bixio's duplicity, he revelled in the fact that every Southern Catholic in that region knew the true nature of Bixio's devotion to God and the Confederate cause.<sup>104</sup>

In the cases of these men, all linked together through their common faith and Confederate sympathies, varying degrees of Confederatization present themselves. Fr. Louis-Hippolyte Gache was, by all extant accounts, a learned man who primarily sought spiritual welfare for anyone in his care, whether they were his original Alabama and Louisiana congregants or wounded and dying men of either side. Fr. Sheeran, too, rendered pastoral care unflinchingly to anyone in

<sup>102</sup> James Sheeran, C.S.S.R., *Civil War Diary*, p. 546.

<sup>103</sup> James Sheeran, C.S.S.R., *Civil War Diary*, p. 549.

<sup>104</sup> James Sheeran, C.S.S.R., *Civil War Diary*, p. 552.

need. However, his constant self-identification as a proud Confederate and his occasional racism prove that he was far more radicalised than Fr. Gache. Fr. Bliemel, the smart-dressing, Southern-sympathizing Benedictine monk, lost his life while administering the Last Rites of the Church. Notwithstanding such an otherwise valiant end, Bliemel's defense of the Southern cause and its racist ideology ensured his place in history. Lastly, the Italian Jesuit Fr. Joseph Bixio gleefully deceived Union soldiers, impersonated a brother priest for his own agenda, and placed himself through willful disobedience into the heart of the Confederacy, physically and emotionally. Each of these men, though playing a part in the tragedy of secession, pale in comparison to those priests whose radicalized ideology would enshrine them as chaplains of the Lost Cause.

#### **Chapter 4**

##### Chaplains of the Lost Cause

*"It is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil."  
Psalm CXXVI.ii*

The majority of Catholic clergy in the South held the Confederate cause as sacrosanct, spiritually and politically. Outliers to this rule are widely unknown. Priests who favored union and emancipation were glossed over by their outspoken Confederate colleagues. The Lost Cause mentality effectively canonized men such as Fr. Emmeran Bliemel, who died a martyr's death in a glorious war. However, this reactionary mindset was embodied far more by the living than the dead. While all Catholic Confederate chaplains adhered, by their very presence, to an ideology of hate and racial injustice, several men are notable for their zealous efforts to sanctify the Lost Cause, during and after the War. These chaplains were revered throughout the South for their unwavering dedication and untarnished fidelity, not so much to the Catholic Church, but to the Confederate States of America. Frs. Darius Hubert, SJ, Abram Ryan, and John Bannon, SJ,

nourished the “natural symbiosis between Southernism and Catholicism,”<sup>105</sup> reconciling for many Confederates their faith, their racism, and their eventual defeat.

*Fr. Darius Hubert, SJ, “First Chaplain of the Confederacy”*

Fr. Darius Hubert, SJ, was born in Toulon, France in 1823. Ordained as a Jesuit priest in Toulouse in 1843, Hubert left France on the eve of the June Days Revolution in 1848, answering the call of Bishop Antoine Blanc of New Orleans. He served as a missionary to the Creole population of Louisiana, charged with aiding in the evangelization, building of schools, and organization of parishes throughout the state.<sup>106</sup> His first assignment, in Grand Couteau, Louisiana, was also his first exposure to slavery. The fledgling Jesuit community there had purchased several enslaved people previously owned by the Jesuit community in Maryland.<sup>107</sup> The Jesuits operating Georgetown had offered these men and women for sale in an effort to raise money for their college, as well as to provide invaluable labor potential to the smaller, less established Jesuit communities throughout the Deep South.

In the years preceding the Civil War, Fr. Hubert was noted neither for pro-slavery rhetoric nor any political sentiments for that matter. Indeed, he was primarily known as a more liberal, free-thinking priest, associated as he was with the opening and running of several free schools for people of color, free or enslaved.<sup>108</sup> On one notable occasion, Fr. Hubert and his confrere Fr. Joseph Lavay, SJ, were attacked for their involvement with these efforts. In December of 1857, a gunman opened fire on them as they dined in the rectory of their Jesuit parish. Both priests were

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<sup>105</sup> Gracjan Kraszewski, *Catholic Confederates: Faith and Duty in the Civil War South*, (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2020) p. xxii.

<sup>106</sup> Katherine Bentley Jeffrey, *First Chaplain of the Confederacy: Fr. Darius Hubert, SJ*, (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2020) p. 11.

<sup>107</sup> Katherine Bentley Jeffrey, *First Chaplain of the Confederacy*, p. 16.

<sup>108</sup> Katherine Bentley Jeffrey, *First Chaplain of the Confederacy*, p. 30.

wounded in the affair, with Hubert suffering severe facial lacerations from broken glass and Lavay living the rest of his life with a bullet lodged in his wrist.<sup>109</sup> Fr. Lavay abandoned this particular mission, leaving care of the free schools to Fr. Hubert, who persisted in their running until April of 1861.

It is at this point in Fr. Hubert's life that a remarkable paradox emerges. Though having earned a reputation for dutiful ministrations among *all* inhabitants of Grand Couteau and Baton Rouge, Fr. Hubert departed Louisiana with the men of the First Regiment of volunteers from that state. In one of his letters, Fr. Louis-Hippolyte Gache, another Louisiana-based Jesuit, referred to the men of the First Louisiana as "composed solely of gentlemen."<sup>110</sup> However, this was not the case. Historian Katherine Jeffrey writes that the unit was comprised of a mix of native Louisianans, born and bred in the bayous, with another third coming from other neighboring states, and the remainder being immigrants from Ireland, Germany, and France.<sup>111</sup> This motley assortment of men needed a chaplain, and Fr. Hubert felt duty-bound to accompany them on what would surely be a brief sojourn north in defense of their new Nation.

Fr. Hubert, on arriving in Virginia with the First Louisiana, applied for and was given his chaplain's credentials. He became the first official chaplain in the Confederate armies, even being given the honorific "First Chaplain of the Confederacy" by President Jefferson Davis himself.<sup>112</sup> Moreover, Fr. Hubert deviated from the normal practice of Catholic chaplains of the South, forsaking his Jesuit cassock for a splendid Confederate officer's uniform, replete with gold embroidery and glistening buttons. Fr. Gache, who noted in his letters that he himself never forsake his Jesuit habit, recalled seeing Fr. Hubert in the Spring of 1861. He wrote, "Imagine, if

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<sup>109</sup> Katherine Bentley Jeffrey, *First Chaplain of the Confederacy*, p. 31.

<sup>110</sup> Louis-Hippolyte Gache, SJ, *Frenchman, Chaplain, Rebel*, p. 138.

<sup>111</sup> Katherine Bentley Jeffrey, *First Chaplain of the Confederacy*, p. 42.

<sup>112</sup> *New Orleans Times-Democrat*, June 18, 1893, p. 2.

you will, a young dandy, gold-festooned upon his blue kepi and embroidered upon the sleeves of his high-collared frock coat, the golden buttons of his waistcoat emblazoned with the Louisiana pelican.”<sup>113</sup> The abandonment of his clerical garb in favor of a Confederate uniform is a clear outward sign of his inward Confederatization. Even Fr. Joseph Bixio, in his impersonation of a Northern chaplain, never abandoned the symbols of his clerical state. Fr. Gache was mortified that Fr. Hubert would so brazenly embrace the uniform of their shared army to the neglect of the traditional Ignatian habit. Aghast at this display, Gache commented, “I regard it as only natural that Protestant ministers should disguise themselves in such a get-up, but that a Jesuit should do it - well, I have a hard time believing it, much less approving of it.”<sup>114</sup> Hubert was, without any doubt, a proud Confederate. And while still present among the troops in his capacity as a Catholic priest, his outward demeanor betrayed his enthusiasm for a militarized Southern ideology.

Throughout his ministry among the troops of who would become the Army of Northern Virginia, Fr. Hubert found himself intertwined with momentous occasions in history. Stationed near Hampton Roads in April of 1862, the men of the First Louisiana were granted a prime position from which to view the onslaught of the CSS Virginia, formerly the USS Merrimack and reconfigured into the world’s first ironclad warship. After the first day of battle on April 8, 1862, Fr. Hubert met with the Virginia’s wounded captain, insisting on coming aboard to tend to the wounded and the dying. He was that day given formal chaplaincy on the CSS Virginia, concurrent with his duties with the First Louisiana.<sup>115</sup> Hubert requested that he remain onboard the ship for the next day’s battle, even after the captain of the Virginia explained the precariousness of their situation. With the imminent threat of the Union ironclad USS Monitor,

<sup>113</sup> Louis-Hippolyte Gache, SJ, *Frenchman, Chaplain, Rebel*, pp. 60-61.

<sup>114</sup> Louis-Hippolyte Gache, SJ, *Frenchman, Chaplain, Rebel*, p. 62.

<sup>115</sup> Katherine Bentley Jeffrey, *First Chaplain of the Confederacy*, p. 47.

and the impossibility of leaving the estuary where the battle would occur, the captain informed the Jesuit that scuttling the vessel was the likely outcome. Accounts differ as to whether or not Fr. Hubert stayed aboard until the battle of the 9th of April or if he disembarked sometime during the night. What is certain, however, is that Fr. Hubert acted on a synthesis of Christian charity and Confederate pride in his brief ministry aboard the CSS Virginia.

In Spring of the following year, Fr. Hubert joined the march to Chancellorsville, where a notable aspect of his ministry emerged. Two priests with whom he fraternized regularly, the previously-mentioned Frs. Sheeran and Gache, often noted their disdain or indifference to Protestant chaplains. During the Battle of Chancellorsville, Fr. Sheeran wrote in his diary of the “horde of Protestant chaplains...poor deluding and deluded creatures!”<sup>116</sup> Fr. Gache often remarked on the comfort provided by Protestant chaplains, but stopped short of calling them messengers of the Gospel, firmly espousing the traditional belief *extra ecclesiam nula salus*, “outside the (Catholic) Church, there is no salvation.” Hubert, however, fostered amiable working relationships with many Protestant chaplains, working with them for the spiritual benefit of Confederate troops. In an obituary for Fr. Hubert published in June 1893, ex-Catholic Protestant chaplain Rev. Thomas Markham noted, “A Catholic by faith, rearing, and conviction, he yet gave the right hand of fellowship, his heart in his hand, to men born and bred in other communions.”<sup>117</sup> The liberality with which Hubert had ministered to people of color in Louisiana remained, but had shifted away from noble altruism. The cooperation with Protestant chaplains Hubert undertook was liberality for the sake of rousing Confederate spirits and morale. The Jesuit who was once almost slain for his kindness towards people of color had shifted his spiritual grandiosity away from pure faith, turning now towards a broader Confederate religion.

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<sup>116</sup> James Sheeran, C.S.S.R., *Civil War Diary*, p. 162.

<sup>117</sup> *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, June 24, 1893, p. 12.



Fr. Hubert was subsequently present at the Battle of Gettysburg in July 1863. His regiment, now ragged and depleted both in terms of men and war-making ability, comprised a portion of a consolidated brigade. Arriving on the field during the night of July 1, it was under the command of Lt. Colonel Michael Nolan, an Irish Catholic. It was not until the next afternoon that Nolan's men moved to assault the right flank of the Union Army of the Potomac, anchored on Culp's Hill. Within minutes of the opening of the assault, Lt. Col. Nolan was killed when Union grapeshot disemboweled him on the slope of that hill.<sup>118</sup> In a prefiguration of future reverential care for Confederate dead, Fr. Hubert helped soldiers of the Louisiana Brigade recover what remained of the body of their slain commander. Buried in a temporary grave, Fr. Hubert later arranged for his body to be disinterred and laid to rest in nearby Hanover, Pennsylvania at the Jesuit Conewago Chapel of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.<sup>119</sup> This undertaking highlights the sacred reverence Hubert had for fallen Confederate soldiers. Moreover, his dedication becomes all the more significant when considering that he himself was wounded in action during the struggle on Culp's Hill.<sup>120</sup>

After the tremendous losses at Gettysburg, military and personally, Fr. Hubert withdrew somewhat from his active chaplaincy. Spending the Christmas season of 1863 with the Semmes, a well-to-do Southern family in Richmond, Virginia, Fr. Hubert's health began to decline.<sup>121</sup> Rather than returning to the front with his Louisiana brigade, Hubert began ministering to the wounded in the numerous military hospitals throughout Richmond and the surrounding areas. He continued in these labors until April of 1865, when Richmond and Petersburg surrendered to Union forces. As fate would have it, Frs. Sheeran and Gache were also in Richmond at the time,

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<sup>118</sup> Katherine Buckley Jeffrey, *First Chaplain of the Confederacy*, p. 73.

<sup>119</sup> Katherine Buckley Jeffrey, *First Chaplain of the Confederacy*, p. 73.

<sup>120</sup> Katherine Buckley Jeffrey, *First Chaplain of the Confederacy*, p. 75.

<sup>121</sup> Katherine Buckley Jeffrey, *First Chaplain of the Confederacy*, p. 79.

and urged Fr. Hubert to leave the city with them, either to return home to Louisiana as Sheeran hoped to do, or to head North, away from the possibility of further conflict. Hubert refused to leave the wounded Confederate soldiers in the fallen capital, prompting Fr. Gache, his brother Jesuit to remark, “he has been seriously sick. The change of climate, the food and the rest would most assuredly have done him good.”<sup>122</sup> Hubert, however, had other priorities.

Fr. Hubert’s parole of honor was acknowledged on April 14, 1865, on the presumption that he would return home to Louisiana. The Jesuit would, instead, linger in the former Confederate capital for several months, during which time he visited and rallied the spirits of many notable ex-Confederates straggling home after four years of bloodshed. His first act of Lost Cause veneration for the fallen involved a second disinterment of Lt. Col. Nolan, slain two years previously at Gettysburg. Although it took over a year for the Colonel’s remains to be located and shipped South, Hubert refused to leave Richmond until the process had formally begun.<sup>123</sup> Only then did the Jesuit make plans to return southward. He did not embark on this journey, however, until he paid homage to General Robert E. Lee, then residing in Richmond. At the end of June, 1865, Hubert called upon General Lee with fellow Jesuits who had also found themselves in the city. Hubert recalled, “I could not leave Richmond without visiting for the last time our great chief, General Robert E. Lee, who had always treated me with so much consideration.”<sup>124</sup> After the visit, Hubert inquired of his Jesuit brothers what they had thought of General Lee, most of them having never before met the man. He recorded the event, noting that, “Speaking in the name of all, Fr. O’Hagan remarked, ‘had you not introduced us to him, we would have taken that gentleman for one of our grand bishops of the Catholic Church. We would

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<sup>122</sup> Louis-Hippolyte Gache, SJ, *Frenchman, Chaplain, Rebel*, p. 222.

<sup>123</sup> Katherine Buckley Jeffrey, *First Chaplain of the Confederacy*, p. 87.

<sup>124</sup> Darius Hubert, SJ, “My Last Visit to General Robert E. Lee,” as published in the *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, August 4, 1901, p. 18.

have fallen upon our knees and asked him to impart his blessing.”<sup>125</sup> Even in the ruins and ashes of the Confederate capital, Hubert delighted in the exaltation of “our great chief,” making a point of recording the emotional impulse of his brother Jesuits to view the ex-Confederate general as a noble prelate. By the time Fr. Hubert finally returned home to New Orleans in July of 1865, he became the last Confederate chaplain of any denomination to return to his peacetime residence.<sup>126</sup>

In the waning years of Hubert’s life, the Jesuit priest never relinquished his confederatization. On Monday, July 30, 1866, racist mobs attacked the Louisiana Native Guard, comprised of former soldiers of the United States Colored Troops. The massacre occurred less than one block from Fr. Hubert’s residence and school. By the time the fighting had subsided, bodies of murdered African Americans lay upon the steps of the Jesuit college at the corner of Baronne and Common Streets.<sup>127</sup> Fr. Hubert, despite his immediate proximity to such violent, racially-motivated murder, never commented publicly on the crime, neither did he preach on it nor acknowledge it in private letters. Silence, in this case, confirms him as an entrenched Confederate. It was this same silence which antebellum bishops had embraced and practiced, enabling Southern Catholics to inform their own consciences regarding equality and slavery. Fr. Hubert broke his silence occasionally, often attending reunions of Confederate veterans and offering benedictions which were noted for their piety and patriotism. On the occasion of a memorial service for Stonewall Jackson on May 10, 1881, Fr. Hubert’s “patriotism” was on full display. He prayed, “Thou knowest, O Lord, that when Thou didst decide that the Confederacy should not succeed, Thou hadst first to remove Thy servant, Stonewall Jackson.”<sup>128</sup> Fully

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<sup>125</sup> Darius Hubert, SJ, “My Last Visit to General Robert E. Lee,” p. 18.

<sup>126</sup> Katherine Buckley Jeffrey, *First Chaplain of the Confederacy*, p. 88.

<sup>127</sup> Katherine Buckley Jeffrey, *First Chaplain of the Confederacy*, p. 108.

<sup>128</sup> *Dedication of the Tomb of the Association of the Army of Northern Virginia, Metairie Cemetery, New Orleans, May 10, 1881*, pp. 7-8.

eighteen years after the death of such an avowed Confederate as General Thomas Jackson, Fr. Hubert effectively canonized him, labeling Stonewall a faithful servant. Fr. Darius Hubert's clear and lasting confederatization truly earned him the shameful honorific with which Jefferson Davis first graced him in 1861: "the First Chaplain of the Confederacy."

*Fr. John B. Bannon, SJ, Confederate Agent to the Vatican*

Fr. John Bannon arrived in the United States from Ireland in 1853, desiring to minister to the Irish immigrants in and around St. Louis Missouri.<sup>129</sup> Like most Catholic priests, especially immigrant and missionary priests, Fr. Bannon made no public statements regarding slavery or secession in the years leading up to the Civil War. His primary focus was on the welfare of the Irish community in St. Louis, enthusiastically raising funds to construct St. John the Apostle and Evangelist Church in that city.<sup>130</sup> One of his peacetime ministries, however, would prove to be the gateway to his confederatization. Concurrent with his missionary activities throughout the region, Fr. Bannon was also the chaplain of one of the units in the Missouri State Guard. Even before the secession crisis in 1860, Missouri was divided in its sentiments regarding slavery. Two immigrant groups in particular swelled the population of the state and fueled tensions throughout the 1850s. Germans had settled in rural areas for the most part, and tended to be "Free Soilers," men and women who, having sought German unification at home, desired to preserve their adopted Country's union. The Irish, to whom Bannon ministered, tended to integrate more easily into urban life in St. Louis and leaned Democrat in their politics.<sup>131</sup> It was these Irishmen who comprised the greater part of the Missouri State Guard unit of which Bannon was the chaplain.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> William Barnaby Faherty, SJ, *Exile in Erin: A Confederate Chaplain's Story*, (St. Louis, MO: Missouri Historical Society Press, 2002) p. 6.

<sup>130</sup> William Barnaby Faherty, SJ, *Exile in Erin*, p. 18.

<sup>131</sup> William Barnaby Faherty, SJ, *Exile in Erin*, pp. 28-29.

<sup>132</sup> William Barnaby Faherty, SJ, *Exile in Erin*, p. 29.

As tensions grew in Missouri between pro-slavery and Free Soil factions, the Archbishop of Missouri, Archbishop Kenrick admonished his priests and the faithful alike to avoid any situation which could lead to bloodshed or an escalation of political tension. The Archbishop publicly preached, “Beloved Brethren: In the present disturbed state of the public mind, we feel it is our duty to recommend to you to obey the laws, to respect the rights of all citizens, and not to endanger the public tranquility.”<sup>133</sup> Peace prevailed for a short while, but after Southern states began to secede and form the Confederacy, Missouri found itself hopelessly divided. The population of St. Louis, in particular, began to choose its sides. Many of the Irishmen in Fr. Bannon’s State Guard started to slip South to join with Confederate forces mustering just outside state lines. Bannon discerned that his position as chaplain compelled him to leave. Rather than seeking permission to abandon his pastorate in St. Louis, Bannon merely left a letter for Archbishop Kenrick informing the prelate of his decision to leave. When informed that Bannon had left to join with Confederate forces and that a letter was left for him, the Archbishop stoically replied, “Keep the letter. The message was never delivered.”<sup>134</sup> At no point during the War did Kenrick endorse either the North or the South. When Union troops exhorted him to raise the United States flag over his cathedral, Kenrick refused on the grounds that the Church is not political, and that no nation’s flag would ever fly over his own, be it Union or Confederate.<sup>135</sup>

The mostly-Irish contingent which would comprise the 1st Missouri Regiment gratefully received Fr. Bannon. While Bannon was quickly accepted as the formal chaplain of the new unit in mid-1861, he encountered many problems that any Confederate chaplain would encounter during the War. Officially, chaplains possessed no rank or military authority, nor did the

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<sup>133</sup> Walter B. Stevens, *Centennial History of Missouri*, Vol. 1 (St. Louis, MO: S.J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1921) p. 706.

<sup>134</sup> William B. Faherty, SJ, *Exile in Erin*, p. 39.

<sup>135</sup> William B. Faherty, SJ, *Exile in Erin*, p. 39.

Confederate government furnish any means of transportation. Apparently well-prepared for this eventuality, Bannon had arrived in camp with his own horse and ample clerical clothing to denote his status among the men.<sup>136</sup> In addition to this, since the Confederate government did not define the official duties of a chaplain, Bannon expressed a willingness to “preach on Sunday and target Yankees during the week.”<sup>137</sup> The Irishman’s confederatization, while just as swift as many of his contemporaries, took on a unique and problematic militancy. His willingness to fight, as well as to administer the Sacraments, was well received by the men. Additionally, his engaging oratory and imposing stature quickly earned the admiration of even the Protestants in the unit.<sup>138</sup>

The first year of the War was not a particularly challenging one for Fr. Bannon or the men of his unit. A few minor skirmishes had seen equally minor failures and triumphs, and Arkansas was still firmly in the South’s grasp. The Battle of Pea Ridge introduced the men of the 1st Missouri to what the war would be for them over the ensuing three years. On March 8, 1862, General Earl Van Dorn’s Confederate forces suffered a defeat near the Missouri-Arkansas border, resulting in a distinct shift in Southern fortunes in that theatre. Southern forces then split up, effectively abandoning Missouri and Arkansas in favor of pressuring Union forces in Tennessee and Kentucky. Throughout the coming months, Fr. Bannon was present at every major engagement in which the Confederate Army of Tennessee participated. In every engagement, Bannon was noted for his bravery, ministering on the front lines in his religious garb, a cassock and surplice with a violet stole. Captain Joseph Boyce would later recall that Fr. Bannon would often be summoned to a rear-area field hospital before a major battle. Bannon would often protest, and stated on one occasion, “I can attend there later. I must now attend to those who are

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<sup>136</sup> William Barnaby Faherty, SJ, *Exile in Erin*, p. 47.

<sup>137</sup> William Barnaby Faherty, SJ, *Exile in Erin*, p. 47.

<sup>138</sup> William Barnaby Faherty, SJ, *Exile in Erin*, pp. 48-49.

not able to be removed from the field.”<sup>139</sup>Time and again, when asked if he was afraid of death or injury, Bannon would respond that he was not, and that a man should have no fear when doing God’s work.

By July of 1863, Fr. Bannon found himself under siege in Vicksburg, Mississippi. By all accounts of those present, his ministry among the soldiers and civilians of that city was profoundly moving. On two occasions, Northern artillery fire came within feet of Bannon, who went about his work undeterred, confident in his God and his cause. Ultimately, on July 4, 1863, the City of Vicksburg and its fifteen thousand Confederate defenders surrendered to General Ulysses S. Grant. The United States army lacked the capacity to transport the vast number of Confederate prisoners to secure prisoner of war facilities, and many of the men were exchanged by September of the same year.<sup>140</sup> Fr. Bannon, however, would not return to the battlefield alongside the men of the 1st Missouri. At this point in his service, Fr. Bannon’s hitherto moderate confederatization became significantly more radical. Shortly after the fall of Vicksburgh, President Davis summoned him for a new mission. Confederate Secretary of State, Judah P. Benjamin, wrote Bannon a four page letter explaining the government’s new assignment for the Irish-born cleric. Bannon was to report to the Bishop of Richmond, John McGill, who would further aid the priest in his forthcoming endeavor. By this point in the War, the Confederacy was beginning to grow desperate, seeking ever bolder opportunities to balance the scales of the War. Fr. Bannon, at the order of President Davis, was to present the Southern cause to His Holiness Pope Pius IX, with a subsequent “missionary journey” to Ireland.<sup>141</sup> The Confederate government earnestly hoped that if the Catholic Church publicly aligned itself with their cause, the seemingly endless stream of Irish immigrants flooding Northern ports and armies

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<sup>139</sup> *St. Louis Republic*, August 1, 1913, quoted in *Confederate Veterans* Vol. 21, No. 9, p. 451.

<sup>140</sup> William Barnaby Faherty, SJ, *Exile in Erin*, p. 115.

<sup>141</sup> William Barnaby Faherty, SJ, *Exile in Erin*, p. 129.

would be cut off. This, in turn, would embolden Catholic immigrants to throw down their arms rather than fight in defense of the United States Government.

The spring of 1864 found Fr. Bannon in Rome, ready and willing to plead the South's case with the Holy Father. Upon being presented to the Pope, Bannon knelt, kissed the Pontiff's ring, then stood up to his naturally-imposing height and stature. Pius IX asked his attendants to step back, so "that I might better see this magnificent man."<sup>142</sup> While His Holiness was impressed by Bannon's dominating physique, he was less impressed with his defense of the Southern government. No papal support came for the Confederacy. With the prospect of victory ever-shrinking, and with no possibility of returning to the South and running the Union naval blockade, Bannon had no options left. His evangelism of the Southern cause would end in 1865 on the docks of Ireland. Still regarded as an excellent preacher, potential Irish immigrants were often moved by his insistence that the United States would treat them as poorly as the English. For a year, Bannon argued that the North reduced immigrants to a status and condition worse than that of Southern slaves. Historian William Faherty notes that Bannon toured the entire island of Ireland four times, preaching the Gospel of the (soon-to-be Lost) Southern Cause. Bannon himself wrote to Judah P. Benjamin noting his success among the people of Ireland. He quoted an Irishman in his letter as having said, "we who were all praying for the North at the opening of the war, would now willingly fight for the South if only we could get there."<sup>143</sup> Bannon's efforts proved to be far too little and far too late to save the South and its slave economy.

Resigned to the fact that return to the Confederacy was impossible, and that ultimate victory was improbable, Bannon decided to remain in Ireland. On January 9, 1865, Bannon

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<sup>142</sup> William Barnaby Faherty, SJ, *Exile in Erin*, p. 139.

<sup>143</sup> John B. Bannon, *Letter to Confederate Secretary of State Judah P. Benjamin*, March 9, 1864.



shaved off his signature black beard and decided to enter the Jesuit novitiate in Dublin.<sup>144</sup> The Confederate chaplain-turned-diplomat found any return to America too profoundly painful, and opted to spend the remainder of his life in Ireland as a Jesuit. Fr. Bannon's initial motivation was to follow the men of his parish into the Confederate Army to render spiritual comfort and direction in perilous times. Almost instantly, he expressed a willingness to kill "Yankees," often finding himself on the frontlines and in a position to do so if he had desired. After his surrender at Vicksburg, rather than returning to the men he enlisted to serve, he represented the Confederate government in an official capacity. While no evidence has emerged as to his views on racial equality, it can be reasonably assumed that Fr. Bannon was just as radically confederatized as so many of his brother chaplains.

*Fr. Abram Ryan, Poet Laureate of the South*

Until recently, Fr. Ryan's early life and wartime ministry was obscured by popular lore and a lack of records. Much of what was known about his chaplaincy came from ideologically-tainted accounts from his own postwar publications. However, historians Donald Beagle and Bryan Giemza compiled significant research on Fr. Ryan, research which paints the man, not just as a devoted chaplain, but an even more devoted Son of the South. Next to Fr. Bannon, Fr. Ryan stands as a singular example of the confederatization of Southern Catholics and their deformation of the Faith which they professed. It comes as no surprise, then, that Fr. Ryan's likeness is enshrined in stained glass at Confederate Memorial Hall in New Orleans, seemingly presiding over some sort of quasi-liturgical celebration of secession and subjugation.

Fr. Abram Ryan left no lengthy memoirs, few extant personal letters, but adherents of the Lost Cause quoted him for a century. Unlike the vast majority of his fellow Confederate Catholic

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<sup>144</sup> William Barnaby Faherty, SJ, *Exile in Erin*, p. 145.

chaplains, Fr. Ryan was born in the United States, not abroad. His official service in the Confederate armies garners little more than a footnote in records and transcripts of the War, but his poetry and prose written during and after the South's defeat earned him the unofficial title "poet laureate of the South." Even Fr. Darius Hubert was disinclined to affiliate with Ryan after the War, given the latter's full-throated and un-nuanced defense of the South and its ideology of white supremacy. Indeed, rather than abandoning his confederatization after the War, Ryan continued to perpetuate a glorified version of the South's failed crusade. Historian Katherine Jeffrey notes in her biography of Fr. Darius Hubert that Ryan was well-known to all, including the Jesuit priest. Ryan's presence in New Orleans, concurrent with Hubert's, was due to his role as a publisher, in addition to his errant missionary activities throughout the South.<sup>145</sup> However, Fr. Abram Ryan's fame would come primarily through other avenues. His religious zeal was unquestionable, but his equally-ferocious defense of the Confederacy grew quickly and irreversibly within years of his ordination.

Abraham Ryan was born on February 5, 1838, likely in Hagerstown, Maryland. The fourth child of Irish immigrants. Although the Irish Catholic Ryans found a hospitable religious climate in Maryland, they were of humble stock. According to census records, Abraham's father likely worked as an overseer on a nearby plantation.<sup>146</sup> In a narrative piece detailing the lives of enslaved people in that region, J. Vance Lewis noted that the Irish often appeared in managerial positions on plantations, but that in Maryland society, "an Irishman is only a Negro turned inside out."<sup>147</sup> When Ryan was only two years old, his family relocated to Missouri, where a distinctly Catholic culture was emerging in and around St. Louis. It was here that Ryan entered formation

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<sup>145</sup> Katherine Buckley Jeffrey, *First Chaplain of the Confederacy*, p. 109.

<sup>146</sup> Donald Robert Beagle, *Poet of the Lost Cause: A Life of Father Ryan*, (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2008) p. 10.

<sup>147</sup> J. Vance Lewis, *Out of the Ditch. A True Story of an Ex-Slave*, (Houston: Rein & Sons Co., Printers, 1910), p. 16.

for the priesthood at the tender age of just thirteen. Many years later while reflecting on that time in his life, Ryan wrote that he had not fully committed himself to the notion of a priestly vocation until three years later. Reflecting on the moment of his spiritual awakening, Ryan wrote, “It was so sudden. At Benediction of the Holy Sacrament, the resolve came like a flash from Heaven to my heart.”<sup>148</sup> This resolve was tested the following summer, though, when Abraham fell in love with a woman only ever identified as “Ethel.” However, the young seminarian and his love interest both committed themselves to the Church, with Ryan persevering to ordination and “Ethel” entering a religious community of women in St. Louis.<sup>149</sup>

Ryan’s time in Missouri was formative in more ways than theology and love. It was here that the young priest began to express political convictions that would only grow stronger through his life. While Missouri was a cultural safe-haven for immigrants overall, and Roman Catholics more specifically, politics and violence were beginning to pull its citizens in different directions. Writing frequently to friends and family regarding his fears of “guerillas and bushwhackers,” Ryan came to believe that Missouri’s place in the Union was tenuous at best, unsustainable at worst. The political debate over slavery led to a physical manifestation of violence in the state which would foreshadow the bloodshed of the 1860s. Secession was, for Fr. Ryan, the best and most proper way out of Missouri’s chaos.

But the tumult over secession was not merely a philosophical one for the young priest. It was emotional. It was upon the election of Abraham Lincoln that Abraham Ryan began to style himself Abram, in an attempt to distance himself from any association with abolitionism or Republicanism.<sup>150</sup> It pained Fr. Ryan greatly that Missouri, a slave-holding state, had not followed the example of South Carolina in leading the secession movement. He was further

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<sup>148</sup> Abram Ryan, letter to Sr. Mary Margaret Dominic O’Brien, November 21, 1883.

<sup>149</sup> Donald Beagle, *Poet of the Lost Cause*, p. 25.

<sup>150</sup> Donald Beagle, *Poet of the Lost Cause*, p. 27.

vexed by Missouri's inaction when other slave-holding states joined the fledgling Confederacy. On March 4, 1861, Fr. Ryan travelled to Montgomery, Alabama to participate in the flag-raising there. As historian Donald Beagle notes, the ceremony surrounding the Confederate "Stars and Bars" was both political theater and quasi-religious ritual.<sup>151</sup> Eyewitness Thomas Cooper De Leon noted Ryan's presence there that day amidst the rapturous crowds. In his work *Four Years in Rebel Capitals*, De Leon writes that Fr. Ryan "spoke a solemn benediction on the people, their flag, and their cause."<sup>152</sup> Thus began Fr. Ryan's unrelenting march toward radical confederatization.

For the first two years of the Civil War, Fr. Ryan remained occupied with pastoral duties in various parishes and missions. During this time, his growing contempt for the North manifested itself in various ways, not the least of which was his poetry. In May of 1861, Ryan penned a poem in the "Record of Events" for St. Mary's Seminary in Perryville, Missouri. Its town is overtly militaristic, and effectively threatens President Lincoln with violence, defeat and humiliation: "Abe Lincoln, Abe Lincoln, beware of the day/ When Southerners shall meet in the battle array/ For a field of the dead rushes red on my sight."<sup>153</sup> The priest's anger and frustration are evident in this hastily-scribbled poem and reflect Ryan's resentment at not being engaged in a more direct form of support for the Confederacy. It is likely that for the first couple years of the War, Fr. Ryan acted as a "freelance chaplain" for Confederate troops in the area, a practice supported by several Southern bishops. Among these were Archbishop John Odin of New Orleans and Bishop Quinlan of Mobile.<sup>154</sup> Fr. Ryan's religious order, the Vincentians, maintained

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<sup>151</sup> Donald Beagle, *Poet of the Lost Cause*, p. 34.

<sup>152</sup> T.C. De Leon, *Four Years in Rebel Capitals: an Inside View of Life in the Southern Confederacy, from Birth to Death*, (Mobile, AL: Gossip Printing Company, 1890) p. 24.

<sup>153</sup> Abram Ryan, poem on the entry for May 29, 1861, *Record of Events, St. Mary's Seminary, Perrville, MO*.

<sup>154</sup> Donald Beagle, *Poet of the Lost Cause*, p. 46.

a strict non-partisan policy during the War. However, while teaching at a number of schools and seminaries under their pastoral guidance, Ryan encouraged some pro-Confederate students and seminarians to flee southward to New Orleans, Mobile, Natchez, and St. Augustine where they might better serve the cause.<sup>155</sup>

Fr. Ryan's shadowy support for the South became overt upon the death of his brother David in April of 1863. It is unclear if David Ryan was slain in battle or succumbed to the pervasive "brain fever" afflicting Confederate troops. However, what is absolutely clear is that Fr. Ryan channeled his profound grief into deliberate action in support of his and his brother's cause. In a poem from this time, entitled simply "Lines," Fr. Ryan notes that "the death of men is not the death/ Of rights that urged them into the fray."<sup>156</sup> Between April and June of 1863, Fr. Ryan disappears from all records, both those of his order and those of friends, family, and brother priests. Donald Beagle posits that this absence was likely due to Fr. Ryan's departure for Kentucky to search for his brother's unmarked grave, an endeavor which met with no success.<sup>157</sup> Ryan would eventually return to his primary pastoral charge, serving as pastor for several parishes in and around Peoria, Illinois. At least two more times, Fr. Ryan's prolonged absence was noted in parish registers with various reasons for his disappearance. Among them were poor health, continued efforts to find his brother's grave, or no explanation at all, merely omission.

Ryan left Illinois for good in November of 1863, following a confused and slanderous series of articles published in a Chicago newspaper. Both the *Chicago Tribune* and the *Daily Transcript* published stories of an Irish priest named "Ryan" who, concurrent with his ecclesial work, had been caught consorting with a prostitute. Moreover, both papers alleged that this

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<sup>155</sup> Donald Beagle, *Poet of the Lost Cause*, pp.46-48.

<sup>156</sup> Abram Ryan, *Father Ryan's Poems*, (Mobile: Jonathan L. Rapier & Co., Publishers, 1879) p. 194.

<sup>157</sup> Donald Beagle, *Poet of the Lost Cause*, p. 73.

clergyman was also a captain in the Confederate armed forces, using his priestly duties as a mask for clandestine activities. In the December 7, 1863 edition of the *Daily Transcript*, the disgraced “Fr. Ryan” was said to have been defrocked and sent to Canada by Church officials.<sup>158</sup> Fr. Ryan himself was taken aback by such stories, especially given the added detail that the priest in question was stationed primarily in Peoria. However, the timeline given in these newspaper accounts seems to cast doubt on the veracity of the claims. November 15 was the supposed date of the priest’s defrocking and departure. Fr. Ryan, on the same day, was publicly seen in the company of Bishop James Duggan, bishop of the Diocese of Chicago. Indeed, the two had departed rather publicly on the aforementioned date in order to rededicate a recently-renovated parish in the city. The varying accounts of “Fr. Ryan” which flooded Illinois homes were ultimately found to be untrue, but this did not come as a relief to the actual Fr. Ryan. Humiliated and under suspicion, Abram Ryan left Illinois and travelled South, beginning the next phase of his confederatization. It is worth noting that this incident in Chicago may well have been incited by staunch Unionists who had become aware of Ryan’s political and social leanings. The slanderous stories published in the Chicago papers came concurrently with the disastrous Chickamauga Campaign, in which General Rosecrans’ forces were routed and pushed out of northern Georgia. Donald Beagle asserts that, given the timing of this scandal, growing anti-Irish sentiment in Chicago, and Fr. Ryan’s overt support for the Confederacy, Bishop Duggan himself may have facilitated Ryan’s departure from the Diocese.<sup>159</sup> In any event, Fr. Ryan left the North, traveling to Nashville and away from the slanders and politics of Illinois.

When Fr. Ryan arrived in Nashville, he arrived in a city under Union occupation. Early in 1864, the firebrand priest came to the attention of the occupying forces and the provisional

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<sup>158</sup> Donald Beagle, *Poet of the Lost Cause*, p. 76.

<sup>159</sup> Donald Beagle, *Poet of the Lost Cause*, p. 77.

government. Ryan noted, “I was almost arrested in Nashville the other day because the soldiers were angered by a Rebel sermon I preached. They came the following week to Edgefield to arrest me, but I was in Clarksville. They threatened to burn the church in Nashville. Some urged flight. I would not. I shall outlive this war.”<sup>160</sup> As intimated by Ryan’s mention of various cities in Tennessee, the priest was tireless in his missionary efforts in that state. No longer tethered by an assignment at a particular parish, school, or college, Ryan traveled the entire region, ministering to fledgling Catholic communities. He was not, however, the only cleric engaging in such work. When informed that there were German and French priests on the same missionary circuit, Ryan quipped, “You know German priests. Very stubborn. And priests, wrong or right, will try to have their way. I do wish we had a first-class American or Irish priest, who would understand the people and be able to give dignity to religion.”<sup>161</sup> This inter-immigrant xenophobia exhibited by Ryan led to his meeting and befriending of Fr. John Bannon, who would soon become an unofficial ambassador of the Confederacy to the Holy See. Bannon, another Irishman, was as fervent a believer in the Southern cause as was Ryan.

As 1864 wore on, Fr. Ryan found himself heading south into Georgia, in order to minister to the troops under the command of General John Bell Hood. Hood was an aggressive commander whose strategic plan was to mount a counter-offensive in order to defend Atlanta. This movement north, away from Atlanta and towards Nashville, brought Fr. Ryan the opportunity he so desired to join with the Confederate Army. In a letter to his family, Ryan asks, “whenever priests ask about me, just tell them that I am *South*, nothing more.”<sup>162</sup> His instructions were vague, but, given the poet-priest’s command of words and rhetoric, denote his real

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<sup>160</sup> Robert Edward Freidel, “An Intimate Study of the Poet-Priest Abram Joseph Ryan,” (Nashville: M.A. George Peabody College for Teachers, 1928) p. 44.

<sup>161</sup> Donald Beagle, *Poet of the Lost Cause*, p. 89.

<sup>162</sup> Abram Ryan, *Letter to Mary Coughlin Ryan and Eliza Ryan*, September 19, 1864.

meaning. Not only was Fr. Ryan physically in the South, he was emotionally, politically, and socially “South” as well.

Caught up in General Hood’s fiasco at the Battle of Nashville, Fr. Ryan’s simmering anger towards the North and its cause began to boil over. Already greatly distressed by the death of his brother the year before and the slanders hurled at him by Illinois newspapers, Ryan’s experience at Nashville’s St. Mary’s orphanage propelled him to entirely new levels of radicalization. The Congregation of St. Cecilia’s Dominican academy and the adjacent orphanage were situated on what became the frontline of the battle. United States artillery chose the location to anchor their position, leading to an intense concentration of fire from Southern guns. While Ryan notes in a subsequent letter that the two institutions were successfully evacuated to Nashville’s cathedral, the ruins of these Catholic establishments became the “prime exhibit” of Northern godlessness and brutality.<sup>163</sup> The divinely-ordained Confederacy was, in Ryan’s view, beset by Satan himself in the persons of General Grant and President Lincoln. Overcome by the scenes of brutality and destruction at the Battle of Nashville and the preceding Battle of Franklin, Fr. Ryan resigned himself to ministering to the wounded of both armies in and around Tennessee, as well as serving at the cathedral during Holy Week of 1865.<sup>164</sup>

It was during this most solemn and sacred of times that Fr. Ryan’s devotion to the Southern cause was tested most severely. Boarding with a Catholic family in Clarksville, Tennessee, Fr. Ryan learned of the surrender of General Lee at Appomattox in Virginia. Hannah Conroy, a member of his host family, recounted the priest’s profound grief at having received the news. She wrote, “He could not bear any thought but that the great struggle for states’ rights was

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<sup>163</sup> Donald Beagle, *The Poet of the Lost Cause*, p. 101.

<sup>164</sup> Donald Beagle, *The Poet of the Lost Cause*, p. 103.



most holy, and his hopes for the supremacy of the Confederacy could not be shaken.”<sup>165</sup> She remarked that the poet-priest, lost in his sorrows, conducted himself with his characteristic Christian fortitude, consigning his words on the matter to a prayer chanting of the Dies Irae. The Dies Irae, the Catholic liturgical *sequentia* found in the Requiem Mass, begins with words which, to Fr. Ryan, would have seemed most appropriate. “O day of wrath, O day of mourning, when Earth and Heaven are reduced to ashes, as the prophets David and Sybil foretold.” Fr. Ryan, through a string of tragedies, personal and social, became the most radically confederatized chaplain from this point onward. Though his ministry amongst Southern troops was itinerant and clandestine, his preaching and writings became bold and unrepentant.

From 1865 onward, Fr. Ryan focused on his poems, sermons, and lecture circuits throughout the vanquished South. Winning for himself a loyal following for his fiery homiletics and orations detailing his (often-exaggerated) experiences of the War, Ryan appealed to emotionally-charged images to win over audiences. One of his preferred vignettes was the destruction of the Dominican school and orphanage in Nashville. As with several of his fellow Confederate chaplains, Ryan often conflated true religion with the faith of the Lost Cause. In 1866, he was invited back to the scene of this destruction in an effort to raise funds and rebuild the still-ruined campus. He addressed the assembled crowd, saying, “Had victory been ours, had our cause been crowned with triumph, the soldier’s orphan would have been the People’s child. Our great land is now the land of orphans.”<sup>166</sup> While remaining in Tennessee that year, Ryan reflected privately on the growing influx of Northerners in the early days of Reconstruction.

“This Country is deluged with Yankees. They are pouring in. I suppose, however, it is the same

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<sup>165</sup> Hannah Conroy, “From One Who Knew Him,” *Nashville Daily American* Section 5, June 26, 1910.

<sup>166</sup> Abram Ryan, “Oration delivered to St. Mary’s Orphan Association,” Nashville, Tennessee, July 4, 1866.

all over the South. You see that my feelings towards these people have undergone no change. I can't bear them - 'tis no use trying."<sup>167</sup> Soon, this disdain for the Union inspired him to cooperate in founding *The Banner of the South*.

Even fifteen years after the War had ended, this paper gained notoriety for its unfaltering contempt of the North. In 1874, following ex-Confederate General Pierre Gustav Toutant Beauregard's "pragmatic support" for civil rights, Ryan accused the Confederate Catholic hero of being a carpetbagger, implying moreover that he was a traitor to his race and people.<sup>168</sup> Also in 1874, Fr. Ryan addressed a crowd in New Orleans on behalf of the White League, stating "if there ever comes up a question in the world as between race and race, common human interest tells me, and as religion does not prohibit me, I stand by the white race."<sup>169</sup> Whereas Fr. Hubert had accepted the defeat of the South, even if canonizing its fallen heroes, Fr. Ryan actively stoked the fire of hatred and dissension. Similarly, an 1869 editorial in the *Banner of the South* quoted a lecture by Ryan, in which he stated unequivocally that "it is the right of the white man to alone rule this country."<sup>170</sup> However, his post-War speeches and publications were not the only contributions to his reputation as a Confederate apologist.

Throughout the War, Ryan wrote numerous poems which he published in an anthology in 1879. *Father Ryan's Poems* became a best seller, and enjoyed widespread readership even through the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. No other poem so encapsulates his unrepentant confederatization as "The Conquered Banner." In it, he admits that the War is lost and over. However, like Fr. Hubert, he sanctified the Lost Cause and in so doing elevated it to a pseudo-religion with the authority and reputation of his own: "Furl that Banner, softly, slowly!

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<sup>167</sup> Donald Beagle, *Poet of the Lost Cause*, p. 130.

<sup>168</sup> Katherine Buckley Jeffrey, *First Chaplain of the Confederacy*, p. 109.

<sup>169</sup> Katherine Buckley Jeffrey, "The Contrasting Legacies of Confederate Priests Abram Ryan and Darius Hubert, SJ," *U.S. Catholic Historian* 37.1 (Winter, 2019), p. 2.

<sup>170</sup> *Banner of the South*, April 4, 1869, p. 2.

Treat it gently - it is holy.”<sup>171</sup> In this line, Ryan abandons Catholic orthodoxy, discarding it for the sake of the Lost Cause and the exaltation of a failed rebellion. In orthodox Christianity, God alone is holy, and “things” only sanctified by His grace and favor. This one word encapsulates Fr. Ryan’s most seditious disregard of his priestly identity. Elsewhere in the poem, Ryan asserted that the Confederate banner will live on, even in its untimely defeat: “Twill live on in song and story, though its folds are in the dust!”<sup>172</sup> Moreover, the ex-Confederate chaplain beseeched God to pardon those who tread upon and tore this “holy” banner, echoing Jesus Christ’s lament from the Cross, “Father, forgive them, they know not what they do.”

Another of Ryan’s poems, entitled simply “C.S.A.,” continues this theme of sanctification of the defeated South. The soldiers who gave their lives for the Confederacy are given the rank of “martyr” in this work, a sentiment that is also seen in Fr. Hubert’s eulogy for General Thomas Jackson. Ryan referred to the slain Confederates as “the Martyr-band that hallowed our land,”<sup>173</sup> enrobing bloody defeat in the glory of spiritual triumph. Continuing later in the poem, Fr. Ryan wrote that the glory won for the people of the South by these men and their sacrifice “shall not wane for us.”<sup>174</sup> Both this poem and “The Conquered Banner” present a false piety that, although beautiful in its prose, disguises the ugly realities of the confederatization of society, even after the War had ended. By intertwining faith and politics, exalting the defeated armies of the South as Christian warriors, Fr. Ryan and his poems fanned the smoldering embers of the Lost Cause.

### **Conclusion**

*Judge me, O God, and distinguish my cause from the nation that is not holy: deliver me from the unjust and deceitful man. Psalm XLII.i*

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<sup>171</sup> Abram Ryan, *Father Ryan’s Poems*, p. 151.

<sup>172</sup> Abram Ryan, *Father Ryan’s Poems*, p. 150.

<sup>173</sup> Abram Ryan, *Father Ryan’s Poems*, p. 213.

<sup>174</sup> Abram Ryan, *Father Ryan’s Poems*, p. 214.

Over the course of four bloody years, Southern Catholics grappled with how to reconcile their faith and the politics of their “country.” The bishops of the South and the chaplains who served in the Confederate armies each set aside the teachings of the Church for the sake of social and cultural acceptance. The anti-Catholic fervor of the 1850s had been temporarily set aside, and Catholics North and South faced an opportunity to prove their loyalty to their Nation, whether it was the United or Confederate States of America. The confederatization of the men chronicled here demonstrates that Southern Catholics followed the trends in their respective states, rather than aligning themselves with the United States Government in Washington. Some of the priests who served in the Confederate forces exhibited the best aspects of religion, offering hope and aid to anyone in need. Others lost themselves in the clamor of politics and war, returning to normative and restrained parish life after 1865. Others still remained loyal and adherent to the Lost Cause, long after Generals Lee and Johnston surrendered.

However, regardless of the degree to which these men embraced the racism and violence of Southern ideology, they all became stewards of a contrived god. The Catholic Church had condemned the slave trade and the institution of slavery for decades. And yet, with scarcely any outliers, Southern clergy followed their Protestant brethren in justifying slavery, defending secession, and ascribing God’s favor to the Confederate cause. With Southern Catholicism discredited after the War, the priests who served the Confederacy faced the same difficulties they had experienced before the War. They were, once again, the immigrants and outsiders. The questions pertaining to race relations became even more difficult in the wake of so many sermons and exhortations relegating people of color to an inferior place in society. The slavery tracts of Southern bishops could not be unpublished. Historian Gracjan Kraszewski notes that the only response for Southern Catholics in the wake of military and social defeat was to return to

basics. They needed to continue the evangelism they had started before the War, particularly among freed slaves. The ever-growing immigrant population also demanded pastoral attention. And, finally, continued efforts at proving Catholic loyalty in the eyes of Protestants were absolutely imperative.<sup>175</sup>

Defeat compelled these ex-Confederate chaplains to examine their confederatization, as well as that of their parishes and communities as a whole. The speed with which ex-Confederate Catholic chaplains joined together in supporting the Southern Cause stands in stark contrast to their disavowing it. But the primary motivation which led them to join the Armies of the South would prove instrumental in taking the first steps in coming to terms with confederatization. The priests who followed their congregants into battle now found themselves back in their parishes, picking up the shattered remnants of antebellum Catholicism. The only way to achieve the goals of postwar acceptance was to return focus, again, to the men and women in their parishes, schools, and mission churches. Now, however, Southern Catholics would have the added burden of divorcing racial ideology from Christian orthodoxy. Indeed, the prayer on every ex-Confederate chaplains' lips was Psalm 42, recited at the beginning of every Mass in every corner of the world. It would have made them pause and examine why they served the Confederacy in the way they did. Did they prove themselves loyal to God or to the false gods of slavery and King Cotton? Psalm 42 begins with these words: "Judge me, O God, and distinguish my cause from the nation that is not holy: deliver me from the unjust and deceitful man. For thou art God my strength. Why hast Thou cast me off? And why do I go sorrowful whilst the enemy afflicteth me?"

God and the comfort of their faith were the only balm for ex-Confederate Catholic clergy. These priests, while remaining true to their priestly vows and devoted to the Catholic Church and

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<sup>175</sup> Gracjan Kraszewski, *Catholic Confederates*, p. 138.

its sacraments, had permitted and enabled racism, sectionalism, and xenophobia to taint their faith. Confederatization was not merely a syndrome for Catholic priests and bishops, but for all Southern Catholics in varying degrees. As previously mentioned, there was never a formal schism of the Catholic Church during the Civil War. Rather, the only schism Catholics endured was the one in their hearts and minds. The pulpit had become an extension of the battlefield, and politics, whether overt or subtle, came to sway men away from purity of religion to an adulterated quasi-religion. Not every Catholic Confederate chaplain committed himself wholly to the Lost Cause. However, many priests and bishops quickly radicalized, and remained so until their deaths. The striving for social acceptance and influence fueled the confederatization of Catholic priests. They sought to ensure the well-being and growth of their Church, something that could only be achieved if they achieved cultural homogeneity with their neighbors. Acceptance into a society, any society, would allow the Gospel to be spread more effectively, and for Catholics to achieve greater success in the public sphere. This utilitarian reasoning for allying with secession and slavery does not, however, excuse these men from, ultimately, making a decision which ran entirely counter to the tenets of their Faith. The degree of this radicalization varied between each of the men here discussed. And, while each of them served the Confederate armies, defended the Confederate Government, and prayed for the Confederate cause, not all of them bent the knee to the clay-footed idol of King Cotton.

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