

**THE ROSS-YORKE CONTROVERSY:
ANTI-CATHOLIC SENTIMENT IN GILDED AGE SAN FRANCISCO**

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Abstract: Through a careful examination of an argument between two men; Donald Ross of the American Protective Association and Roman Catholic priest, Fr. Peter Yorke, which was reported in great detail in the daily newspaper, *The Call*, we see how prevalent these debates about religion and American identity were in civil society during the late nineteenth century. This episode illustrates the conflicts between religious freedom and American patriotism, the social and political upheaval caused by immigration and those resistant to welcoming the stranger, and the challenges of religious pluralism in cosmopolitan, Gilded Age San Francisco.

Evaluation: I believe that the best qualities of this essay are the descriptive narrative provided about the argument between these two men, the careful research conducted to uncover the biases inherent in the argument and the how this story brings to light the questions of the day about whether certain people can be truly American if they are not Anglo Saxon Protestants. These questions have lasting implications in American society, some of which are still unresolved. Researching this topic helped me understand how intrinsically linked issues of immigration, religion, identity and discrimination are in our nation and that, at least in my experience of U.S. History survey courses, religion, as a motivating factor for peoples' actions, is often omitted from teaching. This realization inspired me to "put religion" back into the story of our nations' development in my capstone project.

Introduction

The mid-nineteenth century was an especially turbulent time the United States: Civil War, territorial expansion to the Pacific coast, and an influx of immigrants, radically changed the America established following the Revolution. Despite the protections enshrined in the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution in 1791 which protected the free exercise of religion, Roman Catholics experienced religious discrimination and bigotry. The Protestant majority maintained the myth that the United States had been established as a homogeneous Protestant country. Recent immigrants from Europe and those incorporated as American citizens through the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in the Southwest and West challenged this homogeneity. The influx of newly arrived immigrants, who brought with them different cultural and religious

expressions, clashed with native-born white Protestant Americans which resulted in new tensions and controversies, first on the East coast, then later, in the West.

Prior to the Civil War, strong anti-Catholic sentiment had found expression in the Northeast but had faded into the background by 1860. Early conflicts generally involved three issues; education, immigration and electoral politics. For example, during the 1830s, in Boston, a confrontation between Protestants and Catholics resulted in the burning of a convent by a Protestant mob.¹ Riots over the role of religion in public schools took place in Philadelphia in 1844 following Bishop Kenrick's petition to the Philadelphia School Board to allow Catholic students to use the Douay-Rheims Catholic bible instead of the Protestant King James version.² Rioters set fire to St. Michael and St. Augustine Churches, many houses and the fire station, in the predominantly Irish neighborhood of Kensington which resulted in loss of life and several dozen injuries.³ In 1854, the nativist movement established a new political party; the American (known colloquially as the 'Know Nothings') Party. During a local election, nearly one hundred Catholics were shot, and several houses were burned to the ground following an effort by the party to prevent Catholics from voting in Louisville, Kentucky in an event that became known as "Bloody Monday."⁴

Despite these religiously motivated conflicts, both Catholics and Protestants answered Lincoln's call for volunteers to fight the war between the states. As a new enemy became the focus, religious conflicts subsided during the Civil War.⁵ The Know Nothings, as a political

¹ John Corrigan and Lynn S. Neal, editors, *Religious Intolerance in America: A Documentary History* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 50.

² Jon Gjerde, *Catholicism and the Shaping of Nineteenth-Century America*, ed. S. Deborah Kang (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 4.

³ Corrigan and Neal, editors, *Religious Intolerance in America*, 50.

⁴ Rev. P.C. Yorke, *The Ghosts of Bigotry: Six Lectures by Rev. P.C. Yorke, D.D.*, (San Francisco: The Text Book Publishing Co., 1913), 319.

⁵ Yorke, *The Ghosts of Bigotry*, 319.

party, faded from the scene and effectively died out in the North. Longstanding prejudices against Catholic immigrants reemerged despite the demonstration of patriotism made by the shedding of blood during the war.⁶ This episode, played out in the pages of the *San Francisco Call* newspaper in Gilded Age San Francisco between Presbyterian minister Donald Ross, a member of the anti-Catholic American Protective Association, and Roman Catholic priest, Peter York, illustrates that role of Catholicism in education, electoral politics and immigration reemerged as contentious issues in the West.

Amid a national economic downturn and partisan elections, a group of Protestant businessmen who were called “lunatic fringe” by historian and Jesuit priest, Joseph Brusher in a 1951 article, formed a new anti-Catholic, xenophobic organization in 1887.⁷ Called the American Protective Association (A.P.A.), the organization grew out of a small Midwestern town in rural Iowa to become quite influential, boasting an estimated 500,000 members at its height. It formed chapters in cities in the Midwest and West and was noteworthy in San Francisco in the 1890s.⁸ Basing its private oath and public principles on anti-Catholic stereotypes, rumors and deep seeded prejudices, the A.P.A.’s membership was firmly rooted in ‘No Popery’ campaigns, whose origins may be found in the Reformation. Taking a page from xenophobic and nativist groups, it sought to limit Catholic immigration, political influence in public schools and local government. In cosmopolitan, Gilded Age San Francisco, this organization would play a major role in the Ross-Yorke controversy, the focus of this essay.

⁶ Jon Gjerde, *Catholicism and the Shaping of Nineteenth-Century America*, 18.

⁷ Joseph S. Brusher, “Peter C. Yorke and the A.P.A. in San Francisco,” *The Catholic Historical Review*, Vol. 37, No. 2 (Jul., 1951): 129.

⁸ Brusher, “Peter C. Yorke and the A.P.A. in San Francisco,” 129.

Part 1: The Ross – Yorke Controversy

On the twenty-first day of November in 1895, *The San Francisco Call* reported that Catholic priest and Chancellor of the Archdiocese of San Francisco, Father Peter C. Yorke, delivered a speech at the Metropolitan Temple, under the auspices of the Young Men’s Christian Union (Y.M.C.U.). A few days prior, five different Protestant ministers had leveled accusations against the Catholic church.⁹ One of them, Rev. Donald M. Ross, secretary of the California chapter of the A.P.A., alleged that Catholics were disloyal to the government of the United States and claimed that, “the Roman church has the right to exercise its authority without any limit set to it by the civil powers.” And that, “the Pope and priests ought to have dominion over temporal affairs.”¹⁰ In his role as defender of the faith, Father Yorke responded quickly and vehemently to these charges and challenged Rev. Ross to prove his claims. In a letter to the editor of *The Call*, Yorke wrote, “I will pay one hundred dollars in gold coin of the United States to any charity named by Rev. Donald M. Ross if he can prove to the satisfaction of three non-Catholic lawyers that the above statement, or substance of them, occur in any Roman Catholic publication as statements of Roman Catholic teaching.”¹¹ Claiming moral high ground, Ross refused the challenge. However, manager and secretary of the Patriot Publishing Company, a fellow member of the A.P.A., G.A. Hubbell, accepted the bet on behalf of Rev. Ross and put up the gold coin to

⁹ *The San Francisco call*. (San Francisco [Calif.]), 21 Nov. 1895. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress. <<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85066387/1895-11-21/ed-1/seq-11/>>

¹⁰ *The San Francisco call*. (San Francisco [Calif.]), 2 Dec. 1895. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress. <<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85066387/1895-12-02/ed-1/seq-8/>>

¹¹ *The San Francisco call*. (San Francisco [Calif.]), 2 Dec. 1895. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress. <<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85066387/1895-12-02/ed-1/seq-8/>>

back his man.¹² So, the controversy commenced, and Rev. Ross went to work compiling and organizing his source material to prepare for his presentation.

Born in 1862 in Ontario, Canada and trained as a lawyer at Manitoba College and University, Rev. Donald M. Ross lived in Zanesville, Ohio before making his way to San Francisco. In 1891, he graduated from the San Francisco Theological Seminary of the Presbyterian Church in San Anselmo and was appointed pastor, first in Vacaville, where he was touted for his evangelizing efforts where he “received about 500 into the Church on examination...through his evangelization efforts.”¹³ During the years of the controversy, he served as Pastor at the Lebanon Church in San Francisco. Because few written records were kept of A.P.A. meetings or initiatives, his length of service and duties within the organization are not known, but his arguments against the Catholic church are well documented in this controversy.

Peter C. Yorke was born in Galway, Ireland in 1864. Educated for the priesthood in Ireland, he was ordained in 1887. San Francisco’s Archbishop Riordan had identified Yorke as a “bright and talented priest, possibly one with a future in the American hierarchy” and enrolled him in the newly established Catholic University of America in Washington D.C.¹⁴ Following reception of his doctorate, Riordan appointed Yorke as his secretary and chancellor of the Archdiocese of San Francisco. Once Riordan abandoned the quiet reservation which had characterized the Church’s response to the bigotry of the A.P.A., he unleashed “the eager young cleric on local bigots collectively identified as American Protective Association enthusiasts.”¹⁵

¹² *The San Francisco call*. (San Francisco [Calif.], 25 Feb. 1896. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress. <<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85066387/1896-02-25/ed-1/seq-10/>>

¹³ James Curry, D.D., *History of the San Francisco Theological Seminary of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. and Its Alumni Association* (Vacaville: Reporter Publishing Company, 1907), 151.

¹⁴ James P. Walsh, ed., *The San Francisco Irish, 1850-1976* (San Francisco: The Irish and Historical Society, 1978), 46.

¹⁵ Walsh, *The San Francisco Irish*, 47.

Fr. Yorke eagerly took on this new assignment becoming a well-known outspoken advocated for the Catholic church in and around San Francisco.

The “Ross-Yorke controversy” dominated the pages of *The Call* for the next several months. Reporters attended speaking events and editors printed letters in the daily paper. Yorke’s speech, “Rome’s Red Schoolhouse”, responded to charges made against the church concerning education. He said, “men who know nothing about history have accused the church of favoring ignorance” and reminded readers that it was the church that “saved learning when the barbarians extinguished the old Roman civilizations.”¹⁶ Contrary to the claims made by certain Protestant ministers that Catholics were uneducated and anti-Enlightenment, Yorke advocated for public school education for children. However, he was opposed to religious education in a public-school setting, because, he said:

Religion is good, but if all religions were allowed to enter the public schools, it would soon be bedlam. Therefore, religion should be kept out, not because Americans are opposed to religions, but because we have too many of them. The Catholic church believes in teaching religion. To do so, it establishes its own schools and pays for them out of their own pocket. It does not try to bring the catechism into the public institutions, but where it is able to it teaches the catechism and pays for the teacher.¹⁷

Father Yorke’s respect for religious pluralism and his advocacy for upholding the separation of church and state established by the Constitution would fall on deaf ears. Just a few days later, another A.P.A. enthusiast and Methodist pastor, Rev. W.W. Case in the pages of *The Call*, charged that the United States was in danger from “atheism, Mormonism and Roman Catholicism,” and that the Catholic hierarchy is “seeking to gain control of the country,” and

¹⁶ *The San Francisco call*. (San Francisco [Calif.]), 21 Nov. 1895. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress. <<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85066387/1895-11-21/ed-1/seq-11/>>

¹⁷ *The San Francisco call*. (San Francisco [Calif.]), 21 Nov. 1895. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress. <<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85066387/1895-11-21/ed-1/seq-11/>>

encroaching upon the public-school system.¹⁸ Charges of Catholic political supremacy and influence over schools would ring throughout the controversy. The public-school system was perceived to be the vehicle upon which Protestant values, American patriotism, and loyal citizenship would be taught to children, both native born and immigrant. Furthermore, it was thought that enrollment in parochial schools would insulate children from the patriotism that was valued by the A.P.A. and would result in loyalty being firmly set with the Pope, rather than democratic principles.

Throughout the controversy, attempts were made by the A.P.A. to publicly distance itself from its anti-Catholic sentiments and present itself as a purely political organization. In the pages of *The Call*, Rev. Ross said, “the A.P.A. was called into existence as the Old Whig or Republican party was called into existence, simply to take sides in purely National issues, not to contest any religion or religious belief.” His next statement countered this argument, “...righteous laws can [not] be enforced in a nation where a religious sect has control.” And, to prevent Catholics from becoming too populous and too enmeshed in the politics of the country, Ross opined, “I believe that immigration should be restricted.”¹⁹ Despite his protestations to the contrary, the A.P.A. was not merely a political organization, but one that was anti-Catholic *and* anti-immigrant. A.P.A. members regularly supported candidates and political positions that sought to restrict immigration, public funding for Catholic schools, and the political and economic influence of Catholics.

¹⁸ *The San Francisco call*. (San Francisco [Calif.]), 25 Nov. 1895. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress. <<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85066387/1895-11-25/ed-1/seq-5/>>

¹⁹ *The San Francisco call*. (San Francisco [Calif.]), 25 Nov. 1895. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress. <<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85066387/1895-11-25/ed-1/seq-5/>>

Other A.P.A. members shared their views in the pages of *The Call* in the lead up to the culmination of the controversy. Attempting to situate the A.P.A. as anti-clerical and not wholly anti-Catholic, local A.P.A. chapter Chairman, H.W. Quitzow opened a meeting with the following statement, “the enemy are now under the searchlight of the A.P.A.,” apparently referring to Catholic clergy and specifically, to Fr. Yorke. Rev. W.W. Case furthered his argument, saying, “I myself am not here to berate or traduce the large class of citizens among the Roman Catholic citizens, who make up the laity of that church. I pity those thousands of people who are now in superstition and paganism, because they were trained in countries where there were no schools.”²⁰ This veiled reference, directed at Irish Catholics, is indicative of the A.P.A.’s main tenants, pro-public-education, and anti-immigration (especially of Irish Catholics) with the express goal of limiting Catholic involvement in politics.

A few days later, *The Call* reported that the challenge made by the “eloquent champion of the Catholics” was accepted by a “silver tongued orator of the American Protective Association.”²¹ In his letter to the editor, Yorke challenged Ross to prove to the satisfaction of three non-Catholic lawyers that his four propositions; 1) *The Roman church has the right to exercise its authority without any limit set to it by the civil powers;* 2) *the Pope and priests ought to have dominion over temporal affairs;* 3) *the Roman church and her ecclesiastics have a right to immunity from civil law;* and 4) *in case of conflict between ecclesiastical and civil powers the*

²⁰ *The San Francisco call*. (San Francisco [Calif.]), 09 Dec. 1895. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress. <<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85066387/1895-12-09/ed-1/seq-12/>>

²¹ *The San Francisco call*. (San Francisco [Calif.]), 02 Dec. 1895. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress. <<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85066387/1895-12-02/ed-1/seq-8/>>

ecclesiastical ought to prevail; were official church teaching.²² Yorke set the conditions to ensure that the judgement would be rendered by non-biased parties. Ross and Yorke were each to choose a non-Catholic lawyer, and those two lawyers were to choose a third. Ross countered with his terms again in the pages of *The Call*, "...I choose six evenings between the 1st and 28th of February 1896. I am to open my argument each evening for one hour, then you reply one hour; I reply for ten minutes, you have ten minutes, and I close with five minutes."²³ Yorke would later refute that he had accepted to participate in a public debate as proposed by Ross.

Father Yorke acted first and chose an acquaintance, Episcopalian lawyer from Oakland, Mr. W.W. Foote to represent him in the controversy. Foote agreed to review the materials provided by Ross, but not listen to or participate in a public debate.²⁴ A few days later, prominent anti-Catholic figure, Chairman H. W. Quitzow was appointed by Rev. Ross.²⁵ Mr. Foote, in a letter to the editor, noted that Mr. Quitzow was associated with the A.P.A. (he was the Chairman of the local chapter) and reserved the right to "reconsider my consent to act on the committee."²⁶ Quitzow eventually dropped out of the contest amid claims of his lack of impartiality. Ross' next appointment was no better. Major Edwin A. Sherman, well-known as an anti-Catholic bigot and lawyer, was "more devoted to Masonic work than to the bar."²⁷ A third

²² *The San Francisco call*. (San Francisco [Calif.]), 25 Feb. 1896. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress. <<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85066387/1896-02-25/ed-1/seq-10/>>

²³ *The San Francisco call*. (San Francisco [Calif.]), 02 Dec. 1895. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress. <<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85066387/1895-12-02/ed-1/seq-8/>>

²⁴ *The San Francisco call*. (San Francisco [Calif.]), 09 Dec. 1895. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress. <<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85066387/1895-12-09/ed-1/seq-12/>>

²⁵ Brusher, "Peter C. Yorke and the A.P.A. in San Francisco": 139.

²⁶ *The San Francisco call*. (San Francisco [Calif.]), 12 Dec. 1895. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress. <<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85066387/1895-12-12/ed-1/seq-16/>>

²⁷ Brusher, "Peter C. Yorke and the A.P.A. in San Francisco": 140.

lawyer was never chosen. Amid doubts expressed by Mr. Foote concerning the lack of impartiality of this episode, and the plans laid forth by Rev. Ross to hold a public debate, Yorke wrote in a letter to the editor that this “so-called debate is a humbug,” a deceptive or false trick to be played on the people of San Francisco. Yorke emphatically stated that he had no intention of *debating* Ross. Further, Yorke condemned Ross’ efforts and wrote, “I do not intend to meet D. Ross.”²⁸

Ross ignored Yorke’s response and proceeded to rent the Metropolitan Hall, printed handbills and sold tickets to the event scheduled for four nights, from February 24-28, 1896. Instead of an impartial meeting between two professional men, it became a publicity stunt orchestrated by the A.P.A. designed to further denigrate the Roman Catholic Church and garner support to advance their cause. During the first night, Ross denied that he had even made the four propositions which had begun this controversy. However, following that denial, those very same propositions were the subject of the speeches given over the four nights. On the fourth night, Ross was declared the victor by his representative, Major Sherman. As noted, neither Yorke, nor his attorney Foote, attended the proceedings. However, Yorke had an “inside man” present who reported all that Ross had claimed. This, and the extensive coverage offered by *The Call*, provided all the material Yorke needed to publicly refute Ross’ arguments over the next few weeks. Ross claimed to have researched from his “extensive library of Catholic sources.” However, Yorke reported that upon careful examination of Ross’ sources, fifteen authors were quoted and only two contained the *imprimatur* or official approval of the church.²⁹ The most

²⁸ *The San Francisco call*. (San Francisco [Calif.]), 24 Feb. 1896. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress. <<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85066387/1896-02-24/ed-1/seq-8/>>

²⁹ *The San Francisco call*. (San Francisco [Calif.]), 03 March 1896. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress. <<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85066387/1896-03-03/ed-1/seq-11/>>

plausible evidence for Ross' arguments came from the *Syllabus of Errors* of Pope Pius IX, however, Yorke found them to be misinterpreted, muddled and misrepresented by Ross.³⁰

In the first lecture by Ross, his fourth proposition was addressed; "*in case of conflict between the ecclesiastical and civil powers the ecclesiastical ought to prevail.*" In Yorke's response, he noted that Ross never attempted to "produce the proposition as it stands" nor did he succeed in proving the substance of his claim. Yorke reasoned that this misquote by Ross originated from the forty-second clause of the *Syllabus of Errors* which read, "In the conflict between the laws of the two powers, the civil law prevails."³¹ Yorke explained in a letter to the editor which was printed verbatim that this proposition is a universal affirmative and as such is not true:

*The American constitution recognizes cases where the civil law does not prevail against the ecclesiastical. Indeed, the aim of the constitution is to remove from the domain of the civil law matters which might cause a conflict. Thus, for instance, our civil law does not prevail in spiritual affairs, it does not regulate the service in our churches, the salaries of our ministers. The proposition condemned by the Pope is also condemned by our American system.*³²

Ross' claim implied that Church authority is supreme over civil authority, but Yorke clarified that church authority is separate and distinct from civil authority. He said, "What we do advocate is her [Church] supremacy as the teacher and guardian of the law of God as the supreme court, which must be recognized and submitted to as such by the state, and whose

³⁰ Brusher, "Peter C. Yorke and the A.P.A. in San Francisco": 141.

³¹ *The San Francisco call*. (San Francisco [Calif.]), 25 Feb. 1896. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress. <<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85066387/1896-02-25/ed-1/seq-10/>>

³² *The San Francisco call*. (San Francisco [Calif.]), 26 Feb. 1896. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress. <<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85066387/1896-02-26/ed-1/seq-9/>>

decisions cannot be disregarded, whose prerogatives cannot be abridged or usurped by any power on earth without rebellion against the divine majesty and robbing man of his rights.” In other words, moral law is higher than civil law because it comes from God, which is above the state. “The state does not make it and is not the judge of it.”³³ Ross made the assertion that “when politics and the church come into conflict it is the duty of the church to remain firm and to heed not the State laws that come in conflict with it.”³⁴ Yorke replied that Ross used that quotation to “impress upon the minds of his hearers the idea that the Catholic Church was interfering in politics, and that when she said such a course was the right course, the politicians had nothing to do but obey.” Ross is attempting to elevate Catholic teaching above civil laws to suggest that civil laws that come in conflict with Catholicism are not to be obeyed by Catholics because supreme authority rests in the hands of the Pope, not civic or federal governments.

During the second lecture, Ross treated the second proposition; “*The Pope and the priests ought to have dominion over temporal affairs.*”³⁵ Yorke pointed out Ross’ misrepresentation of Church teaching. His claim originated in the twenty-seventh clause of the *Syllabus of Errors* which read, “The sacred ministers of the church and the Roman Pontiff should be entirely excluded from all administration and ownership of temporal things.”³⁶ Yorke’s response is telling and indicative of his exasperation with Ross,

The Catholic teaching about dominion over temporal affairs I have explained time and time again. The church and state are two separate societies. One deals with spiritual affairs; the other with temporal affairs. The dominion over

³³ *The San Francisco call.* (San Francisco [Calif.]), 04 March 1896. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers.* Lib. of Congress. <<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85066387/1896-03-04/ed-1/seq-11/>>

³⁴ *The San Francisco call.* (San Francisco [Calif.]), 05 March 1896. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers.* Lib. of Congress. <<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85066387/1896-03-05/ed-1/seq-5/>>

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ “Pope Pius IX, SYLLABUS OF ERRORS (1864),” cuny.edu, <http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/history/dfg/amrl/syl-err.htm>, accessed Feb 26, 2017.

*temporal affairs belongs to the civil authority, not to the Pope or the priests. This is Catholic doctrine. It is also American doctrine.*³⁷

Yorke further reasoned that every sect in the United States claimed the right to teach the doctrines which it holds true. He pointed out that the Constitution guarantees this right in the First Amendment and as long as the teachings of a church do not offend public morality, they are free to teach what they see fit. Because of this claim Yorke said, “D. Ross declares that the Pope and the priests claim temporal dominion.”³⁸

In another letter to the editor, Yorke further clarified that the Pope only has *indirect* temporal power by using this example, “For instance, if he [the Pope] thinks that the liquor traffic is a menace to good morals he might forbid the liquor traffic. But his prohibition would only be by spiritual authority and would be efficacious only for those who recognize that spiritual authority.”³⁹ Yorke concluded, “no wonder Ross was afraid to face three lawyers who would not be deceived by the spurious and irrelevant matter which he inflicts upon those who pay two bits to be humbugged. No wonder he preferred to engage in a debate instead of producing his proofs.”⁴⁰

³⁷ *The San Francisco call*. (San Francisco [Calif.]), 26 Feb. 1896. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress. <<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85066387/1896-02-26/ed-1/seq-9/>>

³⁸ *The San Francisco call*. (San Francisco [Calif.]), 05 March 1896. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress. <<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85066387/1896-03-05/ed-1/seq-5/>>

³⁹ *The San Francisco call*. (San Francisco [Calif.]), 06 March 1896. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress. <<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85066387/1896-03-06/ed-1/seq-11/>>

⁴⁰ *The San Francisco call*. (San Francisco [Calif.]), 25 Feb. 1896. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress. <<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85066387/1896-02-25/ed-1/seq-10/>>

Part 2: The Origins of Anti-Catholicism from Across the Pond

Anti-Catholic sentiments originated in the years following the Protestant Reformation. Although religiously based discrimination played out differently in the United States, the attitudes, biases and bigotry exhibited were inherited from previous generations. The influx of Catholic immigrants resulted in a resurgence of Protestant apprehension about rising Catholic political and economic power in the United States. Former editor of Catholic publishing group, *Our Sunday Visitor*, Robert P. Lockwood, identified seven general anti-Catholic assumptions which can be correlated to the rhetoric used by the A.P.A. First, Catholics, by their very nature are anti-Enlightenment thinkers and steeped in superstition and ritual. Because of this, they are natural enemies of contemporary thought, opposed to science and reason. Second, Catholics are intent on destroying personal freedoms and are anti-Democratic because loyalty lies with the Pope, rather than the federal or local governments or democratic principles. Third, the Catholic hierarchy was keen to destroy or take over the public-school system which was the vehicle by which good Protestant American citizens were to be formed. Fourth, Catholics, because of their national origins were identified as peoples of inferior race. This stereotype is tied with nativism and xenophobia and directed at the immigrant population. Fifth, closely linked with the previous bias, the religion itself is a “foreign presence within the colonies and within the United States.”⁴¹ Sixth, since Henry VIII, the relationship between sexuality and Catholicism has been the foundation of anti-Catholic assumptions. One view is that due to priestly celibacy, the faith promotes sexual repression and prudery. The contrary view, due to the large size of some

⁴¹ Robert P. Lockwood, *Anti-Catholicism in American Culture* (Huntington: Our Sunday Visitor Publishing Division, 2000), 23.

Catholic families is that women were “unthinking breeders.”⁴² Seventh, Catholics have “long been portrayed as ignorant dupes marching in lockstep at the behest of their hierarchical masters.” And, contradictorily, as believers who pick and choose which doctrines to follow.⁴³

In the United States of the nineteenth-century, these seven assumptions found expression in anti-Catholic organizations. In a series of lectures compiled and published as, *Ghosts of Bigotry*, Father Peter Yorke made the analogy that, like these prejudices, ghosts are entities that are invisible, but still cause fear and apprehension amongst those who encounter them. He called these “ghosts,” “spontaneous productions of disordered imaginations and hereditary ignorance.”⁴⁴ Tracing these prejudices back to Henry VIII’s divorce and subsequent excommunication, then astutely following the thread of history through the era of King James, synonymous with persecution of Catholics and the lack of religious freedom, he concluded that these current prejudices are products of this history. Yorke illustrated that in England,

*Let Papist be a name of reproach; let Mary, the Catholic, be ‘Bloody Mary;’ let Elizabeth, the Protestant, be ‘Good Queen Bess;’ let Jesuitical mean dishonorable and tricky; let monk stand for bigot; let Catholic be another name for superstitious and reactionary, and let the great Church which civilized the world be the mother of abominations.*⁴⁵

Prejudices, like those above, imported to America, became core in anti-Catholic rhetoric and were passed down from generation to generation, shared in Sunday school, from the pulpit and in the public school. Popular literature in colonial America and early nineteenth century took up the cause of Catholicism as something “strange, suspicious and disloyal.”⁴⁶ Out of this environment, the American Protective Association was formed.

⁴² Lockwood, *Anti-Catholicism in American Culture*, 25.

⁴³ Lockwood, *Anti-Catholicism in American Culture*, 26.

⁴⁴ Yorke, *The Ghosts of Bigotry*, 34.

⁴⁵ Yorke, *The Ghosts of Bigotry*, 44.

⁴⁶ Yorke, *The Ghosts of Bigotry*, 45.

Part 3: Origins of the APA

The American Protective Association (A.P.A.) was founded in Clinton, Iowa in 1887 by Henry Francis Bowers, lawyer and businessman. He, along with other influential businessmen launched the A.P.A. on the heels of a failed local election. Bowers served as the “Supreme President”, and under his leadership, the A.P.A. opened chapters throughout the Midwest and Western United States. At its height, with a membership of up to half a million members, this highly secretive organization coordinated a variety of “patriotic” groups which “militantly opposed the perceived influence of the Roman Catholic Church in the United States.”⁴⁷ Bowers claimed personal experience with religious discrimination during his childhood in Maryland in the 1850s. In a late interview, he claimed to have been denied a formal education following pressure exerted on the state legislature by the Catholic church to close public schools. However, historian JoAnn Manfra was unable to find any “record that such a thing actually happened in antebellum Maryland.”⁴⁸ Most likely, this was used as a justification by Bowers to achieve “Council No. 1’s agenda” attempt to limit Irish electoral influence by limiting immigration and discriminating against Roman Catholics.

This resurgence of anti-Catholic sentiment and animosities manifest in the A.P.A. was not isolated. Historian Donald L. Kinzer noted in his comparison of the A.P.A. to other anti-Catholic organizations of the nineteenth century, that there were similarities and differences, “like previous anti-Catholic political organizations in the history of this country, the A.P.A. was nationalistic and patriotic; unlike them, it did not limit membership to the native-born. Like

⁴⁷ Jo Ann Manfra, "Hometown Politics and the American Protective Association, 1887-1890", *The Annals of Iowa* 55 (1996): 138.

⁴⁸ Manfra, "Hometown Politics and the American Protective Association, 1887-1890": 149.

them, the A.P.A. engaged in politics; unlike them, it utilized existing political parties rather than seeking to create a new party.”⁴⁹ It’s expressed goal was to “protect America” from the corruption they perceived would result from “political Romanism,” a growth in the political influence of Roman Catholics.⁵⁰

Personally, Bowers was friendly with Catholics in Clinton, and evidence shows that he helped with fundraising efforts at the local Catholic parish. However, Bowers and all the other men involved in the foundation of the A.P.A. were Protestant and the organization’s stated goal was a promotion of Protestant values and control of government. The organization was established to appeal to a broad range of people, all who opposed, what they called “Romanism.” It was established as a political organization but instead of establishing a new party, would work within the Republican Party to push its agenda.⁵¹

The A.P.A. had two faces, one based on a private oath and the other on publicly stated principles. The private purpose of the organization was a promotion of and defense of Protestantism. According to their membership oath, members pledged to exclude Catholics from employment opportunities whenever a Protestant was available, to withhold aid in building or maintaining Catholic buildings or institutions, and to never vote for a Catholic candidate for political office.⁵² Attitudes expressed in the private oath were masked by the public principles expressed by Bowers, “The A.P.A. does not exist for small and selfish purposes. It lays no plans against individuals, or trade or commerce. It orders no strikes or boycotts. It stands on the broad

⁴⁹ Donald L. Kinzer, *An Episode in Anti-Catholicism: The American Protective Association* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1964), v.

⁵⁰ Donald L. Kinzer, *An Episode in Anti-Catholicism: The American Protective Association* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1964), 41.

⁵¹ Kinzer, *An Episode in Anti-Catholicism: The American Protective Association*, 41.

⁵² “Protestant Paranoia: The American Protective Association,” *historymatters.gmu.edu*, <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5351/>.

principles of Protestantism. Let it be observed that the A.P.A. is not arrayed against the rank and file of the Catholic people as a whole.”⁵³ Attempts like this were repeatedly made by the organization to deny that they stood in opposition to Catholics, but the oath encapsulates the discriminatory attitudes held by its members and their charter.

Following the death of founder Henry Bowers and on the heels of internal dissent, the organization disintegrated in 1911. Shortly following the demise of the A.P.A., a sketch of its history was published by Humphrey J. Desmond. This history is the best approximation to “an official record” of the A.P.A. known as it was reviewed and expressly approved by Bowers before his death.⁵⁴ Desmond noted that “constant factors in the anti-Catholic situation” are consistent with Lockwood’s findings and Yorke’s historical analysis. However, Desmond elucidates the pragmatic causes for the perpetuation of these prejudices. Because second generation Catholics achieved better occupations and higher industrial positions, newly arrived Protestants, believing themselves to be more deserving of these positions, “would conspire and relegate them [Catholics] to the positions of hewers of wood and drawers of water, their proper place...in this Protestant land.”⁵⁵ In the political arena, Irish politicians formed cliques and gave favor to their fellow co-religionists. The question of public funding for schools continued to be a contested issue. Protestants believed that a public-school system, which promoted Protestant values, should be supported by public funds. Because of the lack of religious tolerance, Catholics established their own schools supported by its members, independent of public funding. Finally, the perceived show of force engendered by the “occasional Catholic society parade, or

⁵³ Les Wallace, *The Rhetoric of Anti-Catholicism: The American Protective Association, 1877-1911*, ed. Timothy Walch and Edward R. Kantowicz (New York: Garland Publishing, 1990), 72.

⁵⁴ Humphrey J. Desmond, *The A.P.A. Movement: A Sketch by Humphrey J. Desmond*, (Washington: The New Century Press, 1912), 4.

⁵⁵ Desmond, *The A.P.A. Movement*, 10.

demonstration – including helmeted Polish and German knights, bearing drawn swords...” served to alarm bigotry and fear amongst the Protestant population.⁵⁶

The Church’s official response to this discrimination against Catholics was measured and reserved. According to Wallace, “the attitude of the Church toward the movement was one of quiet, reserved dignity.” And, according to a suggestion made by Archbishop John Ireland of St. Paul, Minnesota, “the best and speediest and surest way to kill the A.P.A. is to leave it alone.”⁵⁷ This may have sufficed in the Midwest, but perhaps emboldened by a greater concentration of Catholics in the West, San Francisco’s Archbishop, Patrick Riordan rejected a strategy of quiet reservation and appointed Father Peter Yorke as defender of the faith. Subsequently, Father Yorke used his authority and keen rhetorical skills to take up the call to defend the teachings of the Church against the A.P.A.’s allegations.

Conclusion

During this episode, Fr. Yorke responded to Rev. Ross with sound reasoning and enlightened arguments. Rev. Ross, on the other hand, repeatedly misinterpreted or misrepresented Catholic teaching to his audience in an attempt to increase the divisions already existent between the two faiths. In context of social and political upheaval and changing demographics, Americans have persistent questions about newcomers. A tendency to exclude “*the other*” is a theme which runs throughout our history. Recent arrivals and those perceived to be different become targets of bigotry and discrimination because of fears that newcomers will cling to their own customs, language, and religion. Immigrants are condemned as un-patriotic and anti-American. The challenge that Catholics represented to the notion of a perceived

⁵⁶ Desmond, *The A.P.A. Movement*, 11.

⁵⁷ Wallace, *The Rhetoric of Anti-Catholicism*, 74.

homogeneous Christian (Protestant) nation was the first of many periods in history when normative ideas that constructed the nation were challenged by a religious group.

Protestants appreciated the religious freedom that was enshrined in the Constitution, however, had pinned their hopes that Catholics would give up their superstitious ways and walk into the light of Enlightenment thinking. When this failed, they attempted to use public institutions; first, the public-school system to instruct children in Protestant and patriotic values; second, electoral politics to limit political influence of Roman Catholics; and third, promotion of immigration restriction.

The Ross-Yorke controversy in Gilded Age San Francisco illustrated the A.P.A.'s attempts to limit Catholic immigration and political influence. The A.P.A. held the view that government was established to promote and uphold Protestant values and patriotism. Anything which challenged that, was a threat. As Catholics in America began achieving positions of authority in civic government, factories, schools and professional occupations, these feelings of resentment and deep-seated fears reemerged.

A rejuvenated nativism was almost certainly destined for a lack of popular support in cosmopolitan San Francisco. However, without the benefit of historical hindsight, Father Peter C. Yorke treated these controversies with all seriousness; as if the political, and religious freedom of Catholics would be wiped out without his resistance. A.P.A. meetings were infiltrated by his agents and their claims were published, then promptly discredited by Yorke's reasoned and researched responses.⁵⁸ This episode is illustrative of the grip of discrimination and bigoted behavior in the United States. Father Yorke characterized the origins of anti-Catholicism

⁵⁸ James P. Walsh, ed., *The San Francisco Irish, 1850-1976* (San Francisco: The Irish and Historical Society, 1978), 46.

as “ghosts of bigotry,” apparitions that reappear without warning at various times throughout our history, we can certainly see that these “ghosts” have reemerged in our current political climate. One can easily find parallels between the rhetoric used during this episode of anti-Catholicism and current events. The conflicts between religious freedom and American patriotism have not faded into the past, but have, in fact, reemerged as new ghosts of bigotry in the twenty-first century.

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