

## ***History of the Catholic Sentinel*, The Catholic Sentinel, Portland OR 2010**

### **To serve the Church in the Oregon Territory**

In 1870, Henry Herman and J.F. Atkinson started the Catholic Sentinel because, among other things, a Protestant minister was accusing a Catholic priest of inciting the Whitman Massacre, in which a small band of Cayuse murdered 10 Protestant missionaries. Over the years, the Catholic bashing has continued and the Sentinel keeps up the fight.

Eight hundred copies were printed in the first run of the Catholic Sentinel. A year's subscription cost \$4, and from the very beginning the newspaper's managers had trouble collecting payments. In 2010, circulation was about 8,000, and Oregon Catholic Press — the tail that became the dog — continued to fund the Sentinel's ongoing deficit.

In 2010, the distribution model changed significantly, with 20,000 papers being placed each two weeks in western Oregon parishes to be taken for free. Archbishop John Vlazny urged all Catholics to read it as part of fueling the church's evangelizing mission.

For 140 years, the Sentinel has fought a war on two fronts, defending the Church and struggling to pay the bills.

It was a rugged frontier when Herman the grocer teamed up with Atkinson the printer to publish the four-page broadsheet. In 1847, the Whitman Massacre occurred at Walla Walla, Wash. Father John Baptist Brouillet, who happened to be passing by, aided the survivors and helped bury the victims. He later warned another Methodist missionary, the Rev. Henry Spalding, that he, too, might be in danger. Spalding never forgave the kindness. He began a war of words against the Catholics that continued to rage into the 20th century.

Spalding later wrote that Father Brouillet had incited the massacre. Spalding's version of the disaster was printed and reprinted, sometimes at taxpayer expense, for the next half-century. It was finally discredited by a Yale University historian in 1901.

### **Defending the Faith**

The Spalding-Brouillet flap inflamed nagging controversies left over from the Reformation and Counter-Reformation in Europe, fanned by the differences between the cultures of the predominantly Irish, French and German Catholics and the predominantly English and "American" Protestants.

Around 1870, Spalding had his tale about Catholics' culpability in the Whitman Massacre, printed at taxpayers' expense by the Government Printing Office. Herman was livid. In a typically long editorial he called Spalding a "traducer of his betters," and said, "He succeeded as far as to have his slanderous complaints and false statements printed at the expense of the U.S. Government, thus compelling them, whom he traduces and vilifies, to pay for being thus maligned."

### **The 'Whore of Babylon' Again**

The tone of debate, if it can be called "debate," was different then. In 1883 the Christian Herald newspaper trotted out the old "whore of Babylon" routine, adding that the Catholic Church is the "Church whose purpose it is to rule the world by temporal power, who opposes American liberty, and seeks to overcome our common school system." These accusations -- political Catholicism, un-Americanism and hostility to public schools — recur to this day.

In 1894, when the Tillamook Advocate attacked Pope Leo XIII, then-Sentinel editor Charles Haydn responded: "The Tillamook Advocate has been beating the bottom of an empty ink can with a lye brush and thinks it has been saying something. The Advocate is not alone in such hallucinations. They are common among folks who have read but little and have no access to a good library."

The Klan Rides in Oregon

By the turn of the century, much of the mainstream press had developed a more tolerant attitude toward Catholics, but the Portland Oregonian's editor at the time, Harvey Whitefield Scott, took occasional swipes at

such Catholic doctrines as the Virgin Birth. John O'Hara, by that time editor of the Sentinel, replied, "Catholics are not here to have burning insults thrown into their faces with impunity."

Still, the first 20 or so years of the 20th century saw the rise of the Ku Klux Klan in Oregon, along with other groups with different names but the same members.

In 1913, the Silverton Journal sent a spy into the Benedictine Sisters' convent at Mount Angel, hoping to get a steamy exposé. When the spy couldn't find any scandal to report, the Journal's editor, J.E. Hosmer, undaunted, made something up. His pamphlet, "The Escaped Nun from Mount Angel Convent," or "The Last Stand of Desperate Despotism," eventually got him a libel conviction, for which he spent 100 days in jail. He recanted and apologized on his deathbed.

One day the Sentinel's John O'Hara arrived at the newspaper office to find copies of the bogus "Oath of the Knights of Columbus" plastered on his door. (It cited as its source the Congressional Record, but the congressional committee that later examined it said, "This Committee cannot condemn too h4ly the false and libelous article referred to as the spurious Knights of Columbus Oath.") O'Hara couldn't have known then that events were developing for the fight of his life --- the Oregon School Bill --- but he knew outrage when he saw it.

### **The Battle of Words Heats Up**

"Are we Portland Catholics," the paper shouted in all capital letters "satisfied to apologize for our religion or will we fight? The 'Guardians of Infamy' have insulted and maligned us; so far we have taken no united action. Our own weak-kneed attitude is largely responsible for the disgraceful injection of anti-Catholic and un-American prejudice into secular affairs."

The "Guardians of Infamy" --- they called themselves the "Guardians of Liberty" --- that O'Hara referred to were just one head of the monster. Others were the Knights of the Sun, or Meridians, the American Protective Association, the Klan, the Federation of Patriotic Societies, the Masons, Protestants and Other Americans United for the Separation of Church and State and, most recently, Heralds of Truth. After the death of the American Protective Association, Archbishop William Gross said, "They will appear again. They will not assume the name of the A.P.A. That name is buried under a mountain of public contempt. . . . Let us wait a few years, and see what other name they will take."

The Sentinel has reported on these groups throughout Oregon's history. Most appealed to the illiterate and barely literate frontiersmen; but in the 1950s and '60s, the Protestants and Others United for the Separation of Church and State boasted a Methodist bishop from New York, a Harvard president, and a graduate of Harvard and Columbia universities whose anti-Catholic diatribes were published by Beacon Press of Boston. When Paul Blanshard, the author, spoke in Salem in 1952, Benedictine Father Matt Berger invited him to Mount Angel Seminary, to see what a Catholic academy is like.

### **Riots Recalled**

Some of the anti-Catholic groups caused murderous riots. When the Rev. Roland Grant of the American Protective Association arrived in Portland in August 1895, Sentinel editor Haydn reported, "He succeeded, by a week's circus-style advertising, in attracting a large crowd to the First Baptist Church Saturday night to hear his discourse and cavort about the A.P.A. riot in Boston on the 4th of July." In that riot, Haydn said, "The only people who were armed were the 'patriots'; a Catholic was killed; and an A.P.A. soldier, slashing about promiscuously with his sword, cut off the nose of another A.P.A."

Some of the groups have littered the landscape with their publications and billboards, like the anti-Catholic billboards funded by SDA Remnant Ministry in the early- and mid-1990s. Others have worked through the political process to curtail the rights of Catholics - and anyone else who happened to get caught in that net, most successfully through the Oregon School Bill.

### **The '60s**

In the 1960 campaign against John Kennedy for president, the Scottish-Rite Masons in Oregon restated the case against Catholics that had been made by the Know-Nothings, the Klan, and the alphabet soup societies: "The Roman Catholic priesthood seek political power in America: By election of a Roman Catholic president; By

abolishing Separation of Church and State and freedom of conscience and religion and opinion; By changing Constitution and Statistics and Court decisions, so as to reform public education and divert public school funds to parochial schools."

### **More than a Century of 'Defending the Faith'**

Stephen McCormick answered for the Sentinel in 1879: "The need of a vigorous defender of the Faith in the Northwest is apparent to every Catholic who notices the numerous calumnies and slanders the Sentinel is called on to refute in the course of a single year. We have to defend the truth against all attacks; to explain honest misconstructions; to correct wilful misrepresentations; expose false assertions, refute sophistical arguments, and above all to advocate effectively, correctly and positively the Faith that is in us and which is the bond of Christian unity that unites us to our readers."

He went on to boast that "we never yet permitted a single slander against the religion of God to go unrefuted." McCormick, whose editorials could have singed his readers' moustaches, was true to his word on that.

### **Paying the Bills -- Lay-Owned Publication**

The Sentinel has kept the faith and fought the good fight through its history. The first editors offered club rates --- discounts on subscriptions for five or more and 10; they offered premiums such as the Catholic Illustrated Almanac or Father Burke's Lectures.

Nevertheless, they had such a hard time getting subscribers to pay that Father John Francis Fierens, an influential pastor and Sentinel booster who had come to Oregon in 1860, wrote a letter to the priests of the archdiocese: "I am requested by his Grace, our Archbishop, to lay before the Reverend Clergy of this Province the critical condition of our CATHOLIC SENTINEL, so that by understanding its precarious state they may use every effort and all their influence to prevent its disastrous death . . . So, if all subscriptions were paid up promptly, it would, besides its expenses, leave a balance to pay and reward decently our able manager or editor for his good work, and encourage him in his noble career . . . There is due to him for these four last years very near two thousand dollars. Now, as you see, that is too bad, and it is a shame that so many of our people have so little honor and conscience as to ask and receive for a year, and even two years, a man's labor and goods, and then neglect to liquidate their just debts."

### **Job Printer**

Nevertheless, an 1871 ad shows the Sentinel offering job printing, "In the Neatest Style of Art." And the Sentinel Publishing Company printed books by Archbishop Francis Blanchet. One, serialized in the Sentinel during 1878 was Historical Sketches of the Catholic Church in Oregon; it was printed in book form the same year. Another book that came off the Sentinel's press in 1871 was Letters of the Most Rev. F.N. Blanchet, D.D., Archbishop of Oregon City. On the Catholic Indian Missions of the State of Oregon and Territories of Washington, Idaho and Montana, together with the Reply of the Secretary of the Interior. These and other works by Oregon's first archbishop are a historical gold mine now.

The Sentinel hung on as a lay-owned, lay-edited journal for 14 years, wearing away the finances and energy of its editors. In 1884 it suspended publication for four months and was reopened by Father Patrick Gibney, Father Louis Verhaag and Joseph ("Captain") Wiley. Its reopening announcement contained the following in large, bold letters: "TERMS --- CASH STRICTLY IN ADVANCE."

### **The Archbishop Buys a Paper**

In 1885, Archbishop Gross bought the Sentinel for the Archdiocese of Portland. "Rev. Dear Sir," the archbishop wrote. "It has occurred to me that it might be well if the proprietorship of the Sentinel were invested in the Ordinary of the Diocese . . . Consequently I would be much pleased if you will present this to your co-partners in the Sentinel. See if they will be willing to give their shares to the Ordinary and on what terms. You will oblige me by letting me have an early answer." It wasn't exactly an offer they couldn't refuse, but they didn't refuse it.

In the Sentinel, Captain Wiley announced his departure: "Nearly one year has elapsed since the new management resumed the publication of the Catholic Sentinel. The difficulties under which we had to labor in the resuscitation of our Catholic organ were great and numerous. . . . With this issue, then, we take our leave of Our

Catholic Sentinel."

### **New Ideas, No Money**

The next several editors and managers worked hard to bolster the newspaper's financial condition. Then, when Michael Munly left, his replacements were William McGarry and Francis Maguire, two young men with a lot of ideas and not much horse sense. McGarry promised to bring in "some of the brightest literary minds for contributions to these columns." His writing style was closer to modern newspapers than his contemporaries', stripped of some of the flowery verbiage that climbs like choking kudzu vines all through 19th-century newspaper writing. He used new typefaces and a lot of illustrations. His paper had little controversy, few "defenses of the faith." Even in his banner, "Catholic" was absent, and only "Sentinel" remained. In 10 months, McGarry and Maguire had milked the paper dry.

For the next four years, two priests and a layman edited the Sentinel, unnamed, and too busy or unconcerned even to save copies. There are nine known copies from early 1892 to mid 1894, and four of them are fragments.

### **Back into the Fray**

In 1894, Archbishop Gross brought in Charles Haydn from Georgia, and the paper began to get back the old fighting spirit. Just in time, too, for the American Protective Association was bringing its antagonistic rhetoric and sometimes violent behavior to Oregon.

Still, it was difficult to collect for subscriptions, and Haydn ran his own job printing shop to help make ends meet. By the time he left, circulation was at 4,000, with only about 900 paid.

In 1897 editors Father Bertram Orth and Henry Reed reduced the price of subscriptions to \$1.50 per year, less than 3 cents a copy and less than half the subscription price when the paper started up nearly 30 years before.

The archdiocese continued to operate the Sentinel until 1922. Then, faced with the Ku Klux Klan threat, the passage of the Oregon School Bill, and the general need for Catholic education and evangelism, seven priests --- with the blessing of Archbishop Christie --- initiated the Catholic Truth Society.

### **The Catholic Truth Society**

The Catholic Truth Society focused on "educating the general public as to what the Catholic Church really is and is not," wrote Father (later Msgr.) Charles Smith, who would be a force in the Sentinel for the next 30 years. The Catholic Truth Society bought print advertisements and distributed literature, rented lecture halls, bought radio time and, a big investment, purchased a Chapel Car in which priests could transport the Mass to outlying areas where there were no priests or Catholic churches.

In 1928 the Catholic Truth Society bought the Sentinel, acquiring \$14,000 in debt. John O'Hara, brother of Bishop Edwin O'Hara, sold out his interest after 25 years. Broken from years of fighting the Klan and its ilk and from taking on almost single-handedly the Oregon School Bill, he left the Portland area for a time, still officially editor of the Sentinel, but his only contributions during the next few months were dispatches from Santa Fe, El Paso, San Antonio and New Orleans. Upon his return, he was still "editor," but Father Charles Smith had become the decision-maker. In the early 1930s O'Hara bought a bookstore and left the Sentinel to its owners.

### **Surviving the Great Depression**

For the next 10 years, through the Depression, the Catholic Truth Society, and thus the Sentinel, hovered at the edge of bankruptcy. It was hard to bail out of debt during the Great Depression, as people all over the world were finding out. Nevertheless, by cutting expenses and by using the printing press Father Smith had bought with his own money, the debt was gradually whittled down.

In 1931, the society bought a lot at 549 Sixth Street in downtown Portland, and with the building they constructed on it, the society found itself about \$21,000 in debt at year-end. The Archdiocese of Portland placed its administrative offices there, paying rent of \$50 per month.

### **The Pamphlet Missal**

In 1934, the Catholic Truth Society brought out a pamphlet missal. Father Smith believed that the missal would help those who pass the time during Mass "doing nothing" and who lose interest and stop going. It was a long way from today's millions subscriptions to Oregon Catholic Press' Today's Missal sent to 18,000 U.S. parishes, but it was a step on the road.

By 1946, the society had assets of nearly \$37,000. Sentinel subscriptions had increased by 60 percent in preceding years, to 10,000. Father Smith credited the increase to Father Willis Whelan, who had gone to parishes on Sundays to speak on behalf of the paper.

### **Post-War Boom**

It was time to buy some new press equipment and a new print shop. Post-war construction permits were difficult to obtain, and Father Smith had a frustrating few months trying to get one. But the Sentinel moved to its new plant at 2067 S.W. Sixth in June 1947. It sold the former building, where the Chancery was housed, to the archdiocese for \$25,000.

In these post-war years, many changes taking place were innovations pointing to what would be accepted as normal in the future. In a liturgical conference in 1947, held at the Neighbors of Woodcraft Hall, Archbishop Edward Howard was the first American bishop to preside at a public Mass facing the people. In 1951, Father Smith arranged to have back issues of the Sentinel recorded on microfilm.

In the early 1960s, the new Foothills Freeway wiped out both the Chancery and the Sentinel offices. In 1963 they moved into shared quarters at the present Archdiocesan Pastoral Center in the 2800 block of East Burnside St.

### **Oregon Catholic Press**

In a move that turned out to be inspired, the Catholic Truth Society started incorporating music into its liturgical publications during the 1970s. The '70s were a difficult time for the society, and it faced bankruptcy for a time. Recovering from its debts, in 1980 the society changed its name to Oregon Catholic Press, and today it is the largest-selling missal publisher in the world.

The Catholic Sentinel today is published using state-of-the-art equipment. Its editorial staff of four write and edit stories and lay out pages digitally, importing digital images for photographs. The computer files go over a network to Oregon Catholic Press' prepress department, where they are output directly to film, from which printing plates are made.

Now, the news goes on the website daily, where readers can access it and reporters can update it at any moment.

### **The Editors Look On**

On a wall in the newsroom hang photographs of the Sentinel's 125 years of editors. They've had ink under their fingernails; they've worked with recalcitrant typesetters who refused to make corrections. They've argued with bankers and bureaucrats and yelled bloody thunder at their enemies. They've handled the challenges with aplomb or fire. The faces looking over the newsroom offer the challenge of a proud past.

- Jan Bear

Information for this story came from *Defender of the Faith*, by Jesuit Father Wilfred Schoenberg.