



THE CATHOLIC HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED BY THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN WEST TEXAS

By John Michael Harter

1975



The rapid development of West Texas brought about an ever increasing demand for the attention of the bishops of Dallas and San Antonio. These men, as overall pastors of their dioceses, were responsible for the ordination of priests, the implementation of the policies of the Holy See, and the development of Catholic life within their territories. The bishops had the mandate to build churches, schools, hospitals, and other ecclesiastical institutions, and they carried the duty to send priests among the faithful to say the Mass, baptize, hear confessions, perform marriages, minister to the dying, and conduct funerals. They committed the priests to instruct their congregations in Catholic doctrine and stand as leaders of their parish communities, and

from time to time the bishops went on tour in order to meet the people, consult with the clergy, and administer the sacrament of confirmation.

Texas was a growing land, and since the hierarchy already consumed its energies with administrative matters closer to home, the rapid development of far-off West Texas brought additional burdens to the beleaguered bishops. Distance was always a major obstacle, and

Texas bishops hardly bothered with the isolated settlements of West Texas until the railroads eased the problem. However, with the passage of time, the episcopal offices realized the necessity of gathering more and more men and funds for the west at a time when they needed them near to the See city of the diocese.

Development of the Church in West Texas turned out to be a difficult task. Catholics who moved into the region frequently encountered strong distrust from the Protestant majority and they felt out of place in many settlements since their faith often seemed to exclude them from the mainstream of community life. The priests themselves found West Texas to be a hard and lonely assignment. Catholics were few; more and more of these were

Mexican immigrants; and most of the priests could not speak Spanish. Bishops in missionary dioceses had to take what priests they could get, and they ended up depending on just about anybody who was willing to work. The staff of clergy included a large percentage of foreign priests and occasionally bishops who needed more men, accepted priests who had been in trouble in other places. In more than one case, the Dallas bishop exiled to West Texas priests who had been in trouble in other parts of his own see. Sometimes these men performed well in West Texas; sometimes they did not. The West Texas assignment drove more than one man to drink and drove some out of the priesthood altogether. Nevertheless, the church expanded into West Texas, and the work continued despite the distances, despite anti-Catholic feeling, despite the lack of resources, and despite human frailty. The bishops did not neglect the region, but the area continued to be a growing management problem until the creation of a new diocese provided a measure of relief.

West Texas was, in effect, a distant “outback” for the sees of Dallas and San Antonio. Big spring,

The West Texas assignment drove more than one man to drink...

for example, grew up 315 miles from Antonio; San Angelo was ninety miles closer, but no direct rail connection ever existed from San Antonio to these areas. Amarillo did have a direct rail connection with its See city, Dallas but the line approached 400 miles in length. Lubbock lay some 320 miles straight west of Dallas but had no direct rail connection. The automobile promised great benefit, but even by 1926, roads in West Texas were of poor quality.



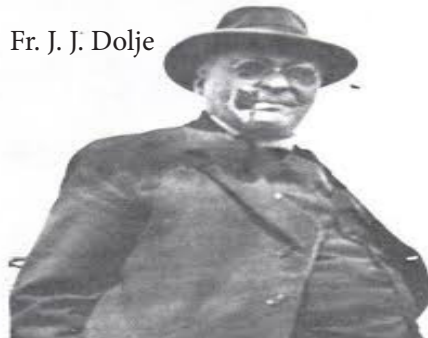
Bishop Brennan of Dallas

The bishops paid few visits to west Texas. Bishop Brennan of Dallas visited Tascosa in 1892; Bishop Shaw of San Antonio came to Stratton in 1917; and Bishop Drossarerts journeyed twice to West Texas in the ten years that followed. Dallas bishops came to the Panhandle more frequently. Bishop Dunne visited five times in his eighteen-year episcopate, and Bishop Lynch came up the Fort Worth and Denver line every other year beginning in 1912. Coverage of large territories became a routine matter for parish priests who had to attend a growing list of missions and stations while waiting for help to arrive. The pastors adopted the circuit riding methods of their brother ministers in order to contact their scattered flocks, and by 1920 the heaviest assignment fell upon the pastor of

Sacred Heart Church in San Angelo. The Catholic Directory of that year shows that Rev. H. M. J. Wirtz went out from his parish to missions in Knickerbocker and Carlsbad, but in addition, he attended a list of stations which included Arden and Mertzon in Irion County; Barnhart, Big Lake, and Stiles in Reagon County; Ozona in Crockett County; Sonora in Sutton County; Paint Rock in Concho County; Sterling City in Sterling County; Eldorado in Schleicher County, Hurdle in Upton County; Cristobal, Water Valley, and Tankersly in Tom Green county; Juno in Val Verde County; Tennyson in Coke County; and many ranches with quite large Mexican population.

Such assignments as these bore heavily upon the pastors and they did not always greet their new orders with the greatest fervor. The Diocese of Dallas assigned Rev. Jon J. Dolje to the large mission territory of the parish at Umbarger, but Dolje, at the age of fifty-seven was weary from years of mission work. His response to the vicar-general of Dallas expressed the anguish that many of his brother priests must have felt over the enormity of their assignments:

Fr. J. J. Dolje



I ought to thank you for the great work you give me—but I don't know whether I am able to do much in these missions. They are too far apart to be served by one priest: e.g. Happy is about 90 miles from Bovina—Umbarger is

18 miles from Hereford—and a school with sisters in either place, at least if I succeed in getting sisters—Canyon is 11 miles from Umbarger—and all have been used to Mass on one Sunday a. month—Do you think a man of nearly 60 years can do justice to this work—Well, I'll do what I can but it won't be long before you'll get complaints.

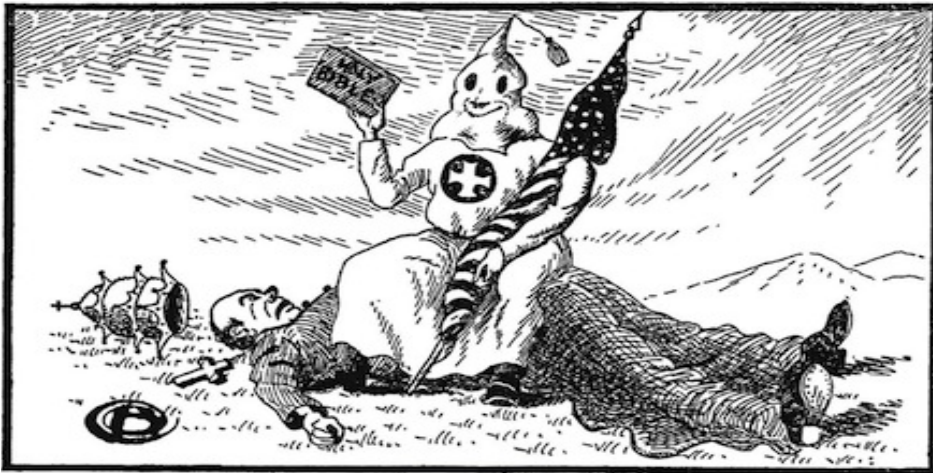
Building up the Church in over such a wide area required outside capital, and this venture reflected the larger experience of the church in the United States. The American Church was the offspring of Europe and for more than a century depended almost wholly upon European charity for its growth and development. The chief benefactor for the American church had been the Society for the Propagation of the Faith, an organization which originated in Lyons, France, to help funnel contributions to American bishops. By the end of the nineteenth century, American Catholic resources had begun to develop, and gradually the society removed the older dioceses from its rolls. Propagation of the Faith dropped Dallas in 1901 and San Antonio in 1918

Panhandle-Plains Catholics offered only meager support for the fledgling church. the Mexican immigrants were dreadfully poor, and the Anglo farmers still labored to get beyond the subsistence level. Parish priests took great care to save every penny, and some parishes progressed without outside help, thanks to the sacrifices and labor of the parishioners. The parish at Slaton for example, built a school without help from elsewhere, but the farmers had virtually to "... starve their children to pay for the school." Generally, the bishops of Dallas and San Antonio had to find other sources of capi

Old memories and “black legends” of inquisitions, religious wars, and Jesuit intrigue...

tal such as the Extension Society. In the early Twentieth Century, the development of the Catholic Church in the South and West came to depend upon the charity of Catholics in the East and Midwest.

Not only were the bishops short of funds, but they also faced a shortage of priests, nuns, and other workers. Besides his other duties, a bishop constantly had to recruit priests and seminarians to meet the needs of his diocese. Families of West Texas Catholics did not send any of their sons to the seminary until after the Diocese of Amarillo appeared. Therefore, the bishop often went to seminaries to talk to the students or petition missionary societies or ask other bishops for help. Sometimes other bishops sent priests out “on loan” to missionary dioceses, and occasionally, they even allowed some of their men to incardinate, or transfer permanently, into these dioceses. Religious orders such as Franciscans, Benedictines, or Vincentians provided other sources of help, and the bishops sought out their superiors in hopes that some of their men could cover the growing number of parish assignments. Mexican priests fled into Texas during this period, and many of them worked for the Texas bishops. However, by 1926, West Texas had only two of them working among the immigrants.



The quantitative problems could be solved by administrative diligence, but the matter of anti-Catholicism in West Texas presented the church with another dimension that was much more difficult to deal with. As the twentieth century entered its third decade, anti-Catholic feeling in the American South and West appeared to be on the rise. This sentiment had not been uncommon, but by 1922 these prejudices had taken a new ominous turn toward violence. The Protestants were frequently suspicious of Catholics but generally tolerated them. In the frontier days Catholics and Protestants often collaborated, and settlers had a habit of going to any and every religious service that came to town. Protestant groups let Catholics use certain facilities for Mass, and in many communities they even contributed funds for the building of a Catholic Church. Protestants sometimes sent their children to Catholic schools; the girls school at Stanton, for example, enrolled the daughters of a number of Protestant ranchers, but in spite of happy collaboration, anti-Catholic feeling persisted strongly in some quarters and continued the tradition of fear and mistrust which had lingered in America since its beginnings.

The Catholic Church presented America and the American frontier with something quite foreign to previous tradition, practice, and outlook. The Catholic institution appeared as a divine-right monarchy to a people imbued with democracy. Old memories and “black legends” of inquisitions, religious wars, and Jesuit intrigue presented a specter of a conspiracy-church bent on subjecting a free people to the whim of the pope. In the latter nineteenth century, the reactionary pontificate

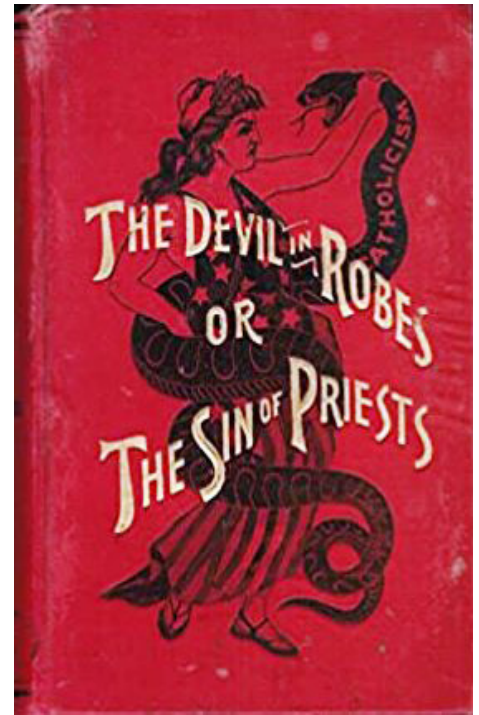


Pope Pius IX

of Pius IX only helped confirm the suspicion that the Catholic Church was the enemy of democracy.

Since the Church placed such great emphasis on the importance of tradition and authority in matters of dogma, some Protestants deduced that Catholics did not believe in the Scriptures, and this mistaken notion rankled the evangelized settler whose sole source of religion was the Bible. Catholic life displayed a whole host of laws, traditions.

practices, and beliefs which the outsider found utterly strange. In a land shorn of titles, Catholic bishops ruled in the mystique of European aristocracy. One addressed his bishop as “Your Excellency” and knelt to kiss his ring as a greeting. Church structure was authoritarian, and Church rituals were mysterious, combining a dead language with incense, holy water, and weird chants. Its priests and nuns swore never to marry and its authorities obliged the faithful to reveal their sins to the clergy at least once per year. Pastors commanded their charges to avoid Protestant churches, and Protestants could not marry a Catholic without enduring a plethora of ecclesiastical red tape. All these things tended to shroud the Church in mystery, and mystery is the mother of misinformation. Outsiders often regarded Catholics as people who meddled in idolatry, addicted themselves to ritual, and allowed themselves to be dominated by a foreign autocrat. In West Texas, a more condescending viewpoint accepted Anglo-Catholics as “good people but just a little silly for believing in something that a Mexican believed in.”



Itinerant preachers in the South and West sometimes based their message in attacks upon the Roman church, and West Texas attracted its share of these men. One, a Reverend L. Tomme, a Baptist minister from Clarendon, continually preached on this theme. He eventually incurred the wrath of the *Sothern Messenger* after he published an article in *Industrial West* entitled “*The Devil in Robes or the Sin of Priests.*” Tomme accused the Catholic clergy of various and sundry crimes but made the special claim that priests were masters of the black art of wife-stealing. *The Southern Messenger* dismissed Tome as an idiot.

Catholics moving into West Texas met occasional hostile responses from their Protestant neighbors. At Nazareth, the Protestants moved out when the Catholics moved in. At Umbarger, Pius Friemel’s neighbors threatened him with a hatchet because they wanted no Catholics around. When the Incarnate Word sisters came to St. Anthony’s Sanitarium in Amarillo, they encountered a great deal of distrust from the townspeople. Frequently, the

KNOW NOTHING PARTY

- **Nativists** = Americans who opposed immigration
- **Know-Nothing Party** = nativists who supported immigration restrictions to protect jobs and culture of native-born Americans
- Wanted to keep Catholics out of political offices and wanted immigrants to live in the U.S. for 21 years before becoming citizens



Catholics did not settle in the United States in large numbers until the great waves of immigration in the nineteenth century brought in thousands from Ireland, Germany, Poland, and Italy. The anti-immigrant feeling that grew up during this period thus carried with it a strong dose of anti-Catholicism. First came the Know-Nothings in the mid-nineteenth century, warning that the Vatican intended to subvert America. Later, the American Protective Association made outlandish accusations and caused much bitterness before it expired about the time of the Spanish-American War. In the South, the church made the black-list of the Ku Klux Klan, and opposition to Catholics became so well organized that state legislatures began to feel the pressure. The Klan’s legal efforts against the Church reached a peak in 1916 when the Georgia legislature passed the disgraceful Veasey Convent Inspection Bill.



The American Protective Association

nuns found themselves the subject of caustic remarks. Not all the stores in town were willing to sell their goods to the sisters, and those that did refused credit and demanded cash. Two months passed before the Sisters received their first patient, and he turned out to be a county case alcoholic. When father Dunn moved St. Mary's to Amarillo, he received several messages warning him that school would be burned. On several occasions he or his friends had to watch the school at night. About 1924, the Ku Klux Klan threatened to burn the school, but this time a Lutheran named Walter Irvin stood night guard with two loaded six-shooters to protect the school.

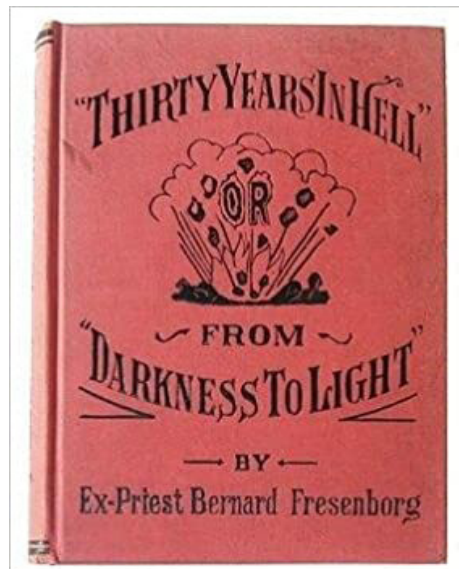
From time to time, hate sheets such as *The Menace* or the *Yellow Jacket* circulated through West Texas along with the anti-Catholic evangelists. These slanders continued to inflame a spirit of prejudice against the Church, and one priest, Rev. J. A. Campbell, decided to take the offensive against them. Campbell had been a railroad worker in Canada and did not receive Holy Orders until he was thirty-five. He was a controversial character; Bishop Dunne was unsatisfied with his orthodoxy and sent him back to the seminary for a review of theology. While he was stationed at Corsicana he got into serious trouble and left for Idaho. In 1910, after a seven-year absence, he returned against the wishes of Bishop Lynch, and Lynch promptly exiled him to Umbarger.

Campbell soon took interest in Hereford and purchased the Old Deaf Smith county court house which he turned into a church. On the second floor he set up an office and began publication of a small monthly magazine, *The Antidote*, designed to counter

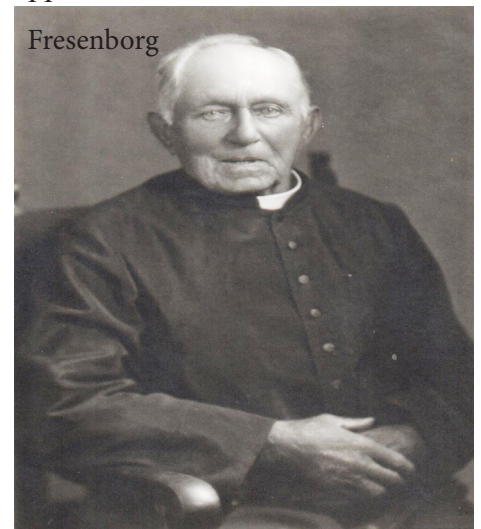
act the influence of *The Menace*. Campbell refused to be frightened away, but his adversaries, including men who claimed to be ex-priests, kept up their work.

In those places where it only ignorance that you have to fight it would be an easy matter; but you also have numberless anti-Catholic books to overcome and some "ex-priests" like J. B. Daly, for instance, who is paid a fat salary by the Baptists who go to such places as I have described to insult Catholics and force them, into the Baptist Church if he can. There is "Sheenan" and there was Delaney, etc. Poor Delaney went on until he died without a priest, in a corner of Oklahoma. He passed through the Panhandle and made charges so vile that we could not repeat them. I followed in his tracks and was met by organized opposition.

Campbell received a transfer to Sweetwater where, among his building tasks in the missions, he commenced a new publication entitled *Let Us Get Together*. The new paper did not have the belligerent tone of *The Antidote*, but rather Campbell's writings tried to show that good Catholics were good Americans. Evidently, he wanted to counteract the nativist hysteria of the Red Scare era which followed World War I.



The "ex-priests" that Campbell mentioned were often fakes, but one for real was Rev. Bernard Fresenborg, a German priest, whose name appeared as the author of an anti-Catholic testimonial book entitled *Thirty Years in Hell*. Fresenborg came newly ordained to Alton, Illinois in 1879, and his superiors took careful note of his ability to work with colonies of German immigrants. In due time they put him to work as a clerical trouble-shooter among the Germans in the Midwest. However, by the time he reached the age of 55 in 1902, his health had declined, and he had become convinced that his superiors were apathetic about the difficult work he had done. At that point, Fresenborg not only left the Church, but he also allowed his name to be used on what was described as "one of the vilest products of the Church's defamers." *Thirty Years in Hell* circulated all over the Midwest and first appeared in West Texas in 1905.



Fresenborg, meanwhile, drifted from place to place until he settled by himself on a small farm at Booker, Oklahoma. Catholics avoided him and Protestants remained suspicious. Eventually, Bishop Gerken of Amarillo made contact with him, and Fresenborg came back into the Church

Fresenborg came to live in a caretaker's house behind St. Mary's Academy and lived out the remainder of his days until his death in 1933. He made a notarized statement disavowing the book and swearing that he was not the real author. The statement is located in the Amarillo Diocese Archives as is a copy of the book.

The Bogus Oath of the Fourth Degree Knights of Columbus

Another slanderous document in circulation was the Bogus Oath of the Fourth Degree Knights of Columbus. The Bogus Oath first appeared in the Congressional Record, February 15, 1913, presented as evidence in a dispute Pennsylvania election. The oath presented the Knights as a secret organization bent on the extirpation of Protestantism in America.

It reads as follows:

...I do further promise and declare that I will, when opportunity presents, make and wage relentless wars, secretly and openly, against all heretics, Protestants, and Masons as I am directed to do, to extirpate them from the face of the earth, and that I will spare neither age, sex, or condition, and that I will burn, hang, waste, boil, flay, strangle, and bury alive these infamous heretics, rip up the stomachs and wombs of women and crush their infants' heads against the walls, in order to annihilate their execrable race. That when this cannot be done openly I will secretly use the poisonous cup, the strangulation cord, the steel of poniard, or the leaden bullet, regardless of the honor, rank, dignity, or authority of the person, whatever their condition in life, whether public or private, as I at any time may be directed so to do by an agent of the Pope or superior of the brotherhood of the Holy Father of the Society of Jesus.

The Bogus oath received much publicity around the whole country. To counteract the effects, the Supreme Council of the Knights submitted its secret rituals to the scrutiny of a Masonic committee, which, in 1914, published a report labeling the oath as a complete falsehood. Nevertheless, the matter was far from finished. Enemies of the Church continued to pass the oath around; The Ku Klux Klan especially made great use of it in the twenties. The oath made the rounds among the gullible in West Texas, and as late as March 19, 1948, it appeared in *The Ralls Banner* under the title "You Didn't Read This in your Newspaper!" It was suggested reading for those who followed the editor's regular column, "Who are the Un-American?"

The threat and slanders, the fear and suspicion were small symptoms of a general malaise that infected the American people, and the anxiety finally came to a head in the violent period that followed the First World War. In the south, unrest gave birth to special wrath against Negroes, Jews, foreigners, Catholics, labor unions, "Bolsheviks," intellectuals, and bums. Membership, fervor, and aggressiveness of the Ku Klux Klan skyrocketed, and the era became a time of lynching, beatings, burning crosses, threats, and rule by vigilante violence for that year, and by 1922, Texas Klan membership rose to an estimated 80,000.

During the nadir of American race relations, the Ku Klux Klan promoted a conspiracy theory claiming that Fourth Degree Knights swore an oath to exterminate Freemasons and Protestants. The Knights began suing distributors for libel in an effort to stop this, and the KKK ended its publication of the false oath.



Fr. Keller found himself facing six masked men brandishing pistols.

Fr. Keller on the front porch of his rectory.



In this climate of lawlessness, vigilante gangs in 1922 committed outrages against two West Texas priests. Catholics around the state reacted to these incidents as attacks upon the Church itself, but a closer look reveals that other circumstances complicated these matters beyond the blunt charge of religious prejudice. The first victim was Rev. Joseph M. Keller of Slaton who had initially come from Aachen, Germany, to work among German Catholics in the Diocese of Dallas. He arrived in America just before the First World War began, and Bishop Lynch placed him briefly at Hermleigh before moving him to Slaton to help the dying pioneer priest, Father Joseph Reisdorff.

At Slaton, Keller' life entered a web of personality conflicts and confusion. By this time, the First World War raged in Europe, the editor of the Slaton newspaper began to denounce the Germans as barbarians and "Hun". Keller had strong feelings about the war and confronted the editor with an angry retort. A few weeks later, the rumor spread around Slaton that the Kaiser had appointed several hundred priests to do spy work in the United States, and soon the jaundiced eyes of Slaton citizens turned toward Father Keller. To make matters worse, he placed a picture of the Kaiser above his study and did not remove it until his parishioners forced him to.

When the United States entered the war, Father Keller turned an about face and attempted to make a patriotic gesture at a rally by signing up to buy war bonds. However, at the next rally a week later, the speaker publicly denounced him because he was the only one who had failed to pay his share. Regardless of what he did, the people of Slaton thought Keller to be disloyal, and the small town rumor mill began to grind out a long line of stories which, among other things, accused him of lechery and adultery, said that he had syphilis, and claimed that he broke the seal of confession.. The congregation divided sharply over its pastor. In 1918, some of the Slaton parishioners sent a petition to Bishop Lynch asking him to remove Father Keller, but Lynch rejected the petition and ordered the petitioners to grant Keller the respect due him as a priest. Resentment against Keller persisted, and when he attempted to become an American citizen in 1921. Federal Judge James Wilson of Amarillo refused to allow it because of the harsh testimony of two Slatonites against him.

On the night of March 4, 1922, Keller got up from his reading to answer a knock at the door and found himself facing six masked men brandishing pistols. Firing a shot at the ceiling, the attackers burst across the threshold and seized the startled priest. In the presence of his horrified housekeeper, the men quickly bound him and dragged him away to a waiting car. Keller's assailants stuffed him down into the back seat and sped away past the safety of city lights out into the dreadful darkness of the country night. They drove out on a lonely road to a place several miles north of town, and when they stopped the terrified Keller rose up to see fifteen or twenty more men waiting for him. They snatched him from the car, and he wailed for mercy, but his tormentors tore all his clothes off and began to lash him with a leather belt. The scourging ended after about twenty strokes, but the ordeal continued as the vigilantes proceeded to cover him with a coat of heated tar. Someone produced a pillow and after ripped open, the group gleefully scattered feathers all over him.

As Keller lay there in anguish members of the mob lectured him and berated him or his “crimes”. They demanded that he leave the area and then departed on a chilling note: “What you got today is only a break-fast-spell for you” they warned, “We are five-hundred red blooded Americans of Lubbock and Slaton who are watching you.” After the vigilantes left, Keller slowly made his way back to town and sought out the help of a local physician. On the following day he boarded a train for Amarillo and after a brief stay at St. Anthony’s hospital he left for Dallas and a conference with Bishop Lynch.

No Catholics were among the ones who attacked Keller that evening, but the next day, the leading citizens of the town gathered for a mass meeting, and seven of the fifty-four who signed a statement endorsing the action were Keller’s parishioners. The incident provoked angry Catholics, and several chapters of the Knights of Columbus sent letters of protest to the city of Slaton. The National Catholic Welfare Council offered a \$2,500 reward for information leading to the arrest and conviction of the guilty parties. Meanwhile, Bishop Lynch watched and waited. For a time he considered placing Slaton under interdict, but soon realized that the damage was done and the Church would have to go on about its business. The Sisters of Mercy, however, decided to leave the school for a time until matters settled down. Father Keller suffered a nervous breakdown and spent a year recovering

The marauders flogged Fr. Meiser repeatedly for thirty minutes...

The outrage against Father Keller was still on the minds of many when another attack occurred against a West Texas priest. This time the victim was Rev. Joseph Meiser, a German who came up in 1921 from Schulenburg to serve at Olfen. At his new assignment, Father Meiser soon built a school for his parishioners, but the withdrawal of catholic students brought about the closing of the public school nearby. The closing of a school which received state aid caused a furor in Runnels County, and suspicion fell upon Father Meiser that he was bent on the undoing of the public schools in the county. In the meantime, documents came from an unknown source to the American Legion in Ballinger requesting that Meiser be watched.

In the eerie light of dusk on September 3, Meiser’s housekeeper peered out to see four strangers approaching the rectory. She quickly warned the priest, and as they knocked on the door, he placed a loaded revolver in his pocket. When he opened the door, the men immediately charged into the room and as he tried to draw his gun they struck him in the face with a rifle butt. Meiser’s assailants covered his bleeding face and whisked him away to an isolate site about three miles away where four more men waited. The marauders flogged him repeatedly for about thirty minutes, and in between beatings, they charged him with disloyalty to the American government and accused him of advocating the teaching of German. They denounced him further for trying to break up the public school system and, leaving him bleeding on the ground, the vigilantes warned Meiser that he was to leave the state or face the direst consequences. Father Meiser took a long look at the license numbers of the cars, but when he made his painful way back to helpful hands, the sheriff told him that the numbers were useless because they were from another county. The Runnels County Grand Jury declined to investigate the matter for lack of evidence. Fearing further violence, Meiser and the nuns left Olfen, and the small Catholic school closed. Meiser disappeared from sight and did not reappear again until 1925 when he took the pastorate at Willow, North Dakota, in the Diocese of Bismarck.

Southern Messenger. April 4, 1922. The tone of this article about the incident falls in line with other articles concerning anti Catholic bigotry in Texas. Only in one sentence does it suggest that other circumstances may have played a part.

Regardless of the reasons for these attacks, Catholics often interpreted these occasions as further evidence of Protestant hatred, but the fear of violence began to subside by 1925. Although West Texas, like much of the American South, remained a place where many people regarded Catholics with suspicion, prejudice eased with the passage of time. West Texas Catholic found ways to reconcile a rigid Catholicism with a Protestant environment, and the Church learned to be more careful with her public relations.



Bishop Lynch of Dallas

Anti-Catholicism sometimes brought pressure to bear on diocesan chanceries, but the maintenance of discipline within the fold was a matter that required constant diligence. Along with the honor of his office, a bishop received a mandate to deal with and decide upon a magnitude of major and minor problems requiring the exertion of his authority. Among his other afflictions, Bishop Lynch of Dallas had to face two peculiar challenges to his authority which came from his West Texas jurisdiction. One of these involved a strange quarrel among the Polish parishioners at White deer, and the other stemmed from Lynch's attempt to discipline the pastor at Canadian.

On the surface, the dispute at White Deer seemed inconsequential and almost laughable, but behind it was the threat that a large segment of the congregation would join a schismatic church. The original settlers came from Panna Maria, Texas, where some of their number had been a rather disagreeable element in the parish. The remainder came from the Midwest, and discord between the two groups soon occurred over the practice of seating in church. In the old country and in the Polish communities of Texas, the men occupied the pews on the right side, and the women

took the left. The people from the Midwest refused to abide by this practice, and Rev. William Bender, who visited White Deer from St. Francis, could not deal with the two bullheaded factions. Bender realized that the seating question was but a symptom of something more troublesome and wrote to Bishop Lynch for help.

Speaking of the Midwesterners he said:

These are the readers of a Polish paper similar to the "Menace," always criticizing the priests and everything pertaining to the authority of bishops and priests. One of these guys is reported to have told the rest that they had been fools to turn over to you the deed of church and property, for otherwise they could hire any Polish priest they could get a hold of and dictate to him what to do and preach. The paper mentioned above is the same about which Archbishop Messmer had so much trouble. I publicly denounce this paper and told them to get rid of it and especially not to scatter it and try to influence others. Then they wanted me to retract my words which of course I did not. They are still subscribing to it.

Some of the parishioners had already sought the services of a Polish priest. The name of the paper which Father Bender denounced was *Dziennik Polski*, the newspaper of the Polish National Catholic church, a schismatic group founded about 1910 by Father Hodor. Some of the parishioners wanted to affiliate with this schismatic religious body, but Bishop Lynch wrote back demanding harmony in the community and ordering the congregation to follow the old Polish custom of opposite seating. However, when Father Bender read the proclama-

tion, one of the parishioners immediately arose, and waking across the church, he took a place beside his wife. Everyone saw, but no one raised an objection, and soon the rest of the parish followed suit. Bender threw up his hands, and Lynch was exasperated, but strangely the matter died at that point. The dissenting parishioners never again talked of joining the schismatic group, and the influence of *Dziennik Polski* died.



E. J. Cussen

The White Deer problem was a minor irritation compared to the dispute between Bishop Lynch and Rev. E. J. Cussen of Canadian. Cussen was a brilliant man who had a drinking problem, and Lynch found it necessary to discipline him on a number of occasions. When the bishop finally attempted to remove him from the parish at Canadian, Cussen decide to fight back. Before the matter finished, Lynch suspended Cussen; Cussen illegally retained possession of the Canadian church, the bishop and priest took their cases before civil and ecclesiastical courts; and, after eight years, Cussen left the priesthood altogether. E. J. Cussen was born in Windsor, Vermont, in 1883, and the facts and

and legends of his seventy-five years tell the story of one of the most interesting figures ever to set foot in West Texas. At the age of fifteen, he somehow got into the army and went off to fight in the Spanish American War, but upon its completion he crossed the Atlantic and entered British service for the Boer War. When he returned from South Africa, he chose to acquire an education in England. He attended Oxford and the University of London before crossing the Channel to earn a doctorate from the Sorbonne. When World War I broke out, he enlisted as a chaplain in the French foreign Legion but soon sustained a bayonet wound at the front and had to return to the United States.

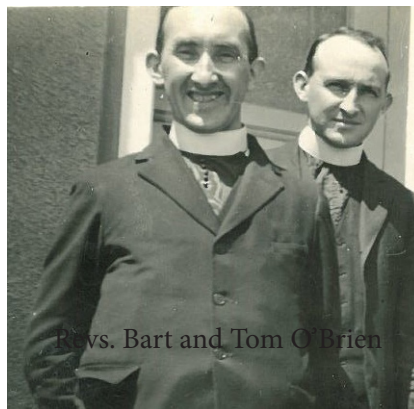
Cussen joined an unknown religious order and received ordination to the priesthood in 1908. Evidently, he got into some kind of trouble and left the order to incardinate with Diocese of Dallas, but he soon gained the reputation of a notorious drinker, and Lynch had to pack him off to dry out in a monastery on several occasions. Lynch wanted to get him away from the Dallas area and thus sent Father Cussen far away to Canadian in 1916, but Cussen's conduct continued to be an embarrassment. At Canadian, Cussen became the town scandal. The Catholics found him undependable, but far worse, the whole town was shocked by his penchant for drinking and gambling with his friends at the church rectory. At last Bishop Lynch decided to remove Cussen from his scandalous pastorate:

On December 23, 1915, you were placed under formal canonical precept, whereby, among other things, you were directed to practice sobriety, and you were warned that a violation of this precept would result in your suspension and in you

incurring other canonical penance to be designated at the option of the ordinary. From the information, properly gathered, it appears that you have violated this precept frequently and that, at various times, over a period of years.

Bishop Lynch suspended Cussen on June 11, 1921, and ordered him to go the Trappist monastery at Gethsemane, Kentucky to make his penance. Cussen refused to move, and when his angry bishop again ordered him to leave, he responded by sending an appeal to the Apostolic Delegate of the United States, Giovanni Cardinal Bonzano. Cardinal Bonzano allowed Cussen's case to be aired before him on September 22, 1921. Cussen maintained that he had the rights of an irremovable pastor and protested against Lynch's attempt to eject him. Although Cussen built a clever case, Bonzano rejected his plea, but the undaunted priest returned to Canadian and again refused to depart.

The frustrated Lynch then turned to the civil courts to force Cussen off of the property legally deeded to the bishop, but the county sheriff considered it a laughing matter and refused to act.



Turning to his last recourse, Bishop Lynch summoned two young Irish priests, Fathers Tom and Bart O'Brien, to physically throw Cussen out of the Canadian church. Bart O'Brien, however, arrived in Cana-

dian ahead of his brother, and finding the rectory empty, he simply moved in. Cussen returned to his quarters later in the day, and witnesses said they saw his brandishing a pitchfork and chasing Bart O'Brien down the Santa Fe tracks. Father Tom O'Brien wisely decided to leave Cussen alone and resort to the more patient world of diplomacy.

Cussen kept the Canadian church "in captivity" until 1929. Meanwhile, he passed the Texas Bar examination in 1923 and associated with the Hoover Law Firm of Canadian. When he finally abandoned the parish, he married Jessica Bradley, a former army nurse from Chicago, and in due time, he became a respected citizen of the community. By defending several Murderers, E. J. Cussen gradually built a reputation as a criminal lawyer, but his most famous case involved litigation over a half blind mare that had torn up a man's garden. The case of "Harrison Guthrie and his one-eyed mare" proved so amusing to the participants that Cussen and the judge argued the case in verse. Over the years Cussen and the O'Briens had maintained a reserved contact with each other, and through the mediation of Msgr. Tom O'Brien, Cussen finally made his peace with the church shortly before his death in 1958. The Cussen affair and other difficulties of the West Texas Church often became worse because of the distances involved. Many problems such as these could have dissolved with quicker handling by a bishop who was located nearby, but the bishops were too far away to be very effective. West Texas was but an appendage of the diocese of Dallas and San Antonio, an arrangement of advantage to no one. West Texas needed a bishop, and the bishops needed to get rid of West Texas. end.

Harter named Texas Outstanding American History Teacher

Mike Harter is the author of the story you just read and of other stories that have been in the newsletters.

A childhood bout with polio led Mike Harter to his life's calling.

Harter, who was teaching eight-grade U.S. History at Stephen F. Austin Middle School, discovered his fascination with American history at age 9 while growing up in Lubbock. Harter had undergone surgery on his legs to repair damage from the disease that had plagued him since the age of 4.

"I was in a wheelchair with casts on my legs," Harter recalled. "I must have been driving my mother crazy, because she wheeled me out to the garage, where there were all these Life magazines."

Harter said he spent countless hours combing through the stacks of magazines, which detailed in words and pictures the events of World War II.

From that point on, I was bitten by the muse of history," he said.

Harter's lifelong efforts to share his fascination with students earned him the 1997 Texas Outstanding American History teacher award from the Texas society of the National Daughters of the American Revolution.

He was honored in March during the DAR's State Conference in San Antonio, where he received a cash award, a certificate of recognition and a "State Winner NSDAR Outstanding Teacher of American History" pin, according to information from the local Esther McCrory Chapter of the DAR, which nominated him for the honor.

Harter regrets that he never kept his parent's collection of magazines, which eventually were discarded.

"That (collection) was my gold mine," he said. "I really wish I had kept that."

Harter's approach to teaching entails making history come alive through theatrical presentations to recreate moments in history. He sometimes lays across his desk to demonstrate the position of guillotine victims during the French Revolution, as part of a discussion about contrasts between the French and American revolutions.

During his days as a Latin instructor, Harter donned a laurel wreath around his head and sat in a chair placed atop his desk to recreate the atmosphere of Roman gladiator games. He would hold his thumb up or down like a Roman emperor determining the fate of a defeated fighter.

Harter played the role of explorer Coronado during performances by the Columbus Quintet, a group that donned historical costumes and toured elementary schools to announce the coming year's Columbus Quincentennial, marking the 500th anniversary of Christopher Columbus' discovery of America.

Harter has served in a variety of volunteer capacities, including a seat on the board of trustees for Panhandle-Plains Historical Museum, the Strategic Planning committee for the Amarillo Independent School district and the board of directors for the West Texas Historical Association.

He was named Teacher of the Year for the 1995-96 school year by his fellow teachers at Austin. "I've come to the conclusion that a history teacher is to this society what an old man around the campfire is to other cultures," Harter said. "(History) is where you get your bearings. It's how you learn where you came from."

Harter said his challenge remains to impress upon students that a broad knowledge of human history is just as important, if not more important, than knowledge of math, science and computer technology.

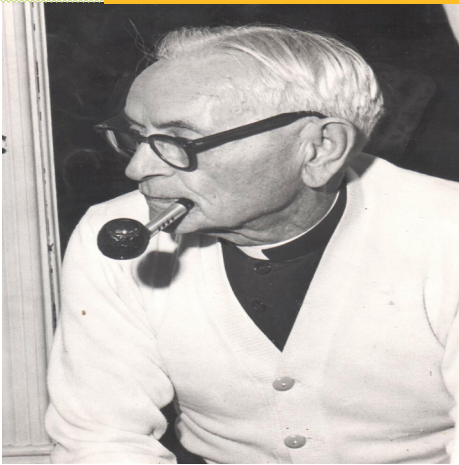
My feeling is that the study of history is going to give a person the big picture," he said. "I think concentrated studies in math and science are very important, but to conceive a philosophy or an ethic about (the things) we do requires kids to see the big picture."

Harter cited an example.

"It's one thing to build a bomb," he said. "It's another thing to decide to use it."

Harter said the same principle applies to all of the humanities, including art and literature, which inspire reflection and spiritual vision to guide humankind through its technological advances.

"Math and science can carry us just so far," he said. "Beyond that, we're on our own. We've got to get beyond (science) to get where (Thomas) Jefferson got. The great accomplishments in human history are accomplishments of the spirit. The establishment of human freedoms, the concept of justice, these accomplishments of the spirit."



Father Andrew Quante died as he had lived, quietly. Pictures in our files show him as a seven - year - old boy in the year 1890; as a First Communicant in 1895, at the age of 12. First Communion was delayed until that age then, and there didn't have to be any arguments about which should come first, Confession or Communion. It was taken for granted that 12- year - olds needed to go to Confession); and as a tuba player in the band at Subiaco Seminary in 1912, when he was 29 and a priest.

The pictures of Father Quante have a remarkable sameness about them, from age seven to the last picture we have taken in 1961, when he observed his 78th birthday; His eyes are open, honest, clear, and his face is mellow, with just the hint of a smile, as if he knew some secret about life that we don't.

It wasn't that Father Quante did not know anything about violence. At Subiaco Academy in Arkansas he was a boxer and a basketball player. He lived in a lean-to rectory in Borger during the sandstorms of the 1930's and during his rock-hunting days while pastor of Wellington did rattlesnakes in with a .22 rifle. But violence is a strange word to associate with Father Quante. Gentle is much better, for that is what he was. Gentle with

flowers; gentle with the doo-dads he made out of English walnuts and peanut shells; gentle with the rock shrines he built; gentle as he puffed his pipe. And gentle most of all with people. Gentle with the children and grownups alike. At 69 he was still pitching softball for both sides of children' teams at old St. Mary's school in Groom. With the grownups he played pinochle and domino games. Above all he took care of their spiritual needs, faithful beyond the ordinary to his duties as a pastor. "He was a perfect priest ... an inspiration ... a swell fellow ... one the best priests we've ever had... A tidy person ... never complained ... a wonderful priest and after all these years ... still the best." -comments from parishioner when Father Quante celebrated the golden jubilee of his priesthood. What a marvelous world this world would be if we could genuinely imitate this gentle man, to live and die as he did and, having learned the secret, to teach it to all the world. What was his secret? Father Norbert Kuehler, who had him as his pastor as he was growing up and later followed him into the priesthood, gave the secret away in this simple sentence, "Father taught us to accept inconvenience and to live with it."

There is a world of profound theology in that statement. It's deceptively simple. But neither Christ nor the saints' nor Father Quante ever pretended that Christianity was complicated.

Christ put it in many different ways: The grain of wheat must die before it can live; if you want to be MY disciple, that is, if you want to have peace, personal and lasting peace, you must take up your cross

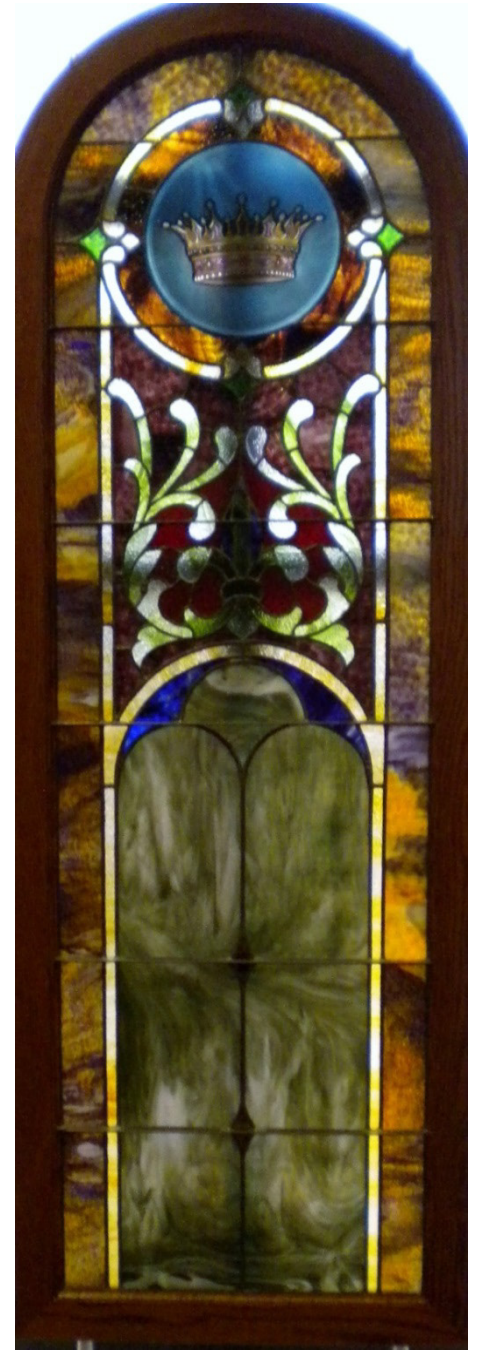
and follow Me; lose your life and you will find it; lay it down willing and you will live. Francis of Assisi, to single out one of the saints, made Christianity so simple that he made it believable for millions of people after him. He really loved poverty, the stigmata he bore, the rags he wore, the murderous wolf of Gubbio, even death itself for him, Sister death. Father Quante, made pastor of Wellington in 1939, after the dust bowl days, reacted in simple fashion. "I saw weeds, dust, and desolation all around me", he said, "and as I started this flower hobby.

First I gathered rocks to build a grotto, and then I planted flowers." He planted more than flowers. He planted his own heart and in the hearts of those who knew him a deep and abiding love of life. He accepted its inconveniences and lived with them, not as a stoic, grimly bearing what cannot be changed, but as a follower of Christ, believing that the unbearable can be born, the unchangeable changed, the intolerable tolerated, death turned into Life. He laid down his life as gently as he had lived it, willingly, freely, with just the hint of a smile on his face. He accepted death, the ultimate inconvenience of the human condition and in so doing taught us his last priestly lesson. 1972

Thank you for
your continued
generosity!



This window and the items on the right were salvaged by Msgr. Francis Smyer before Sacred Heart Cathedral was demolished. They now grace the current Cathedral, St. Marys.



This is a painting of the above window painted by Randy Friemel and it is in the chapel area of the museum.



St. Mary's Catholic Academy Fifth Graders Visit Museum



Trying on vintage vestments



The girls are standing in front of a display of hundred year old artifacts from their school, St. Marys.

After the fifth graders visit to the museum we asked the kids to write an essay about what they like best in the museum. Below is the winning essay by Gavin Shilling. He received a certificate from the Catholic Historical Society for his wonderful essay and \$25.00.



What I liked The Most about the Diocesan Museum

By Gavin Shilling

Some of my favorite things about the Diocesan museum were discovering and, finding out what they did back then. To be specific about my favorite things were like when Justin tried on all the old priest clothes and what he used each piece of cloth for (They even had a sweat rag for back then when they had no AC and would get really hot). Really liked to see all the old chalices and what it looked like in an old church. It was cool to see how the diocese of Amarillo grew throughout the years. It was awesome to know that the bishop's office was there at that beautiful place. I liked going through the bishops' area and seeing all the clothes and funky old shoes he used to wear.

All the different relics were really cool. My favorite one was the relic of the true cross of Jesus. It even had a certificate for it to show that it is real. A little while back for lent mass, they used a wood hammer thing during the raising and blessing of the host and, it didn't sound like a bell, the meaning was to respect Jesus and the forty days in the desert.

More of the bishops' area I liked how even though they are a bishop or priest doesn't mean they can't do their hobbies like for instance a lot of them liked playing baseball. I had liked the room with the old uniforms of St. Mary's back then. I liked to know that St. Marys' was the only girls' school at a time and, there was an only boys catholic school. I liked the picture of Msgr Michal having mass in the woods at angel fire. It was weird going by the St. Blaise candle blessed and the story about what happened to him. I really liked the museum about the Catholic Diocese of Amarillo. Maybe someday, you will get to go if you have never been. It was definitely worth my time.



This Blessed Virgin statue in the museum is holding a one hundred and eighteen year old rosary.

Feb. 19, 2020 to May 13, 2020

CONTRIBUTIONS

Amarillo Diocesan Council of Catholic Women	200
Joanne Adams	25
Don & Judy Allen	100
Jim & Marge Arend	100
Joe & Nadine Berg	50
Msgr. Norbert Kuehler	500
M/M James J. Brandt	20
J. Thomas Campbell	25
Marlene Cassanta	50
Cathleen Dresser	100
Edward M. dunigan	100
Bill Homer	25
Gracie Lineman	25
Mrs. Edmund V. Macha	50
Lois Malleck	50
Katherine Monceballez	25
Donald R. White	200
Dnc John & Laveta Peters	25
Jerry & Janice Poirot	25
Dnc arnold & Mrs. Schwertner	50
Bishop John W. Yanta	75
Total	1820

MEMBERSHIP

Sharon Moylan	25
Total	1845

The upkeep and enhancement of the Diocesan Museum is made possible solely by your monetary donations. Thank you for your prayers, continued support and generosity to your Diocesan Museum wher the past is truly present.



Catholic History Society Board Members

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- Deborah Summers
- Don White



You may stop by daily (Monday through Friday) to view the museum, for a guided tour it is recommended that you make an appointment.. The museum is open by appointment for church and school groups. This includes evenings and weekends.

Susan: 383-2243 Ext. 120 or even better: sgarner@dioama.org

Thank you for your continued generosity!